
NEHEMIAH 1: 1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. Now in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace,

In the introduction to the book of Ezra, we have already seen those wonderful interferences of Divine Providence in which Nehemiah bore so large a share. Dr. Prideaux, with his usual perspicuity, has interwoven the whole of the transactions of the mission of Nehemiah with that part of the Persian history with which they are connected; which I shall give, as in the preceding book, in his own words. He connects this book, as it ought to be, with the book of Ezra. See before. "He who succeeded Ezra in the government of Judah and Jerusalem was Nehemiah, a very religious and most excellent man; one that was nothing behind his predecessor, saving his learning and great knowledge in the law of God. He came to Jerusalem in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, about four hundred and forty-five years before Christ; and by a commission from him, superseded that of Ezra, and succeeded him in the government of Judah and Jerusalem. He had in that commission, by an express clause therein inserted, full authority to repair the walls, and set up the gates of Jerusalem; and to fortify it again in that manner as it was before it was dismantled and destroyed by the Babylonians. He was a Jew, whose ancestors had formerly been citizens of Jerusalem; for there, he says, was the place of his fathers' sepulchres: but as to the tribe or family which he was of, no more is said but only that his father's name was Hachaliah, who seems to have been of those Jews who, having gotten good settlements in the land of their captivity, chose rather to abide in them than return into their own country, when leave was granted for it. It is most likely that Hachaliah was an inhabitant of the city of Shushan, and that it was his dwelling there that gave his son an opportunity of gaining an advancement in the king's palace; for he was one of the cup-bearers of King Artaxerxes, which was a place of great honor and advantage in the Persian court, because of the privilege it gave him of being daily in the king's presence, and the opportunity which he had thereby of gaining his favor for the obtaining of any petition which he should make to him; and that, especially, since the times of his attendance always were when the king was making his heart merry with the wine which he served up to him; for this is the best opportunity with all men for the obtaining any boon that shall be desired of them, because they are always then in the best humor for complying: it was at such a time that he asked the government of Judea, and obtained it. And by the like advantages of his place, no doubt it was that he gained those immense riches which enabled him for so many years, out of his own private purse only, to live in his government with that splendor and expense as will be hereafter related, without burdening the people at all for it; and no doubt it was by the favor of Queen Esther, as being of the same nation and people with her, that he attained so honorable and advantageous a preferment in that court. However, neither the honor nor advantage of this place, nor the long settlement of his family out of his country, could make him forget his love for it, or lay aside that zeal which he had for the religion of his forefathers, who had formerly dwelt in it. For though he had been born and bred in a strange land, yet he had a great love for Sion, and a heart thoroughly set for the advancing the prosperity of it, and was in all things a very religious observer of the law of his God; and therefore, when some came from Jerusalem, and told him of the ill state of that city, how the walls of it were still in many places broken down, and the gates of it in the same demolished state as when burnt with fire by the Babylonians, and that, by reason thereof, the remnant of the captivity that dwelt there lay open, not only to the incursions and insults of their enemies, but also to the reproach and contempt of their neighbors, as a mean and despicable people, and that they were in both these respects in great grief and affliction of heart; the good man, being suitably moved with this representation, applied himself in fasting and

prayer unto the Lord his God, and earnestly supplicated him for his people Israel, and the place which he had chosen for his worship among them. And having thus implored the Divine mercy against this evil, he resolved next to make his application to the king for the redressing of it, trusting in God for the inclining of his heart thereto; and therefore, when his turn came next to wait in his office, the king, observing his countenance to be sad, which at other times used not to be so, and asking the cause thereof, he took this opportunity to lay before him the distressed state of his country; and, owning this to be the cause of great grief to him, prayed the king to send him there to remedy it. And by the favor of Queen Esther he had his petition granted unto him; for it being particularly marked in the sacred text that the queen was sitting with the king when Nehemiah obtained this grant, sufficiently indicates that her favor was assisting to him herein; (See my note on this passage. - A. C.) and accordingly a royal decree was issued out for the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem; and Nehemiah was sent thither with it, as governor of the province of Judea, to put it into execution; and to do him the more honor, the king sent a guard of horse with him, under the command of some of the captains of his army, to conduct him safely to his government. And he wrote letters to all the governors on this side the river Euphrates, to further him in the work on which he was sent; and also gave his orders to Asaph, the keeper of the forests in those parts, to allow him as much timber out of them as should be needed for the finishing of it. However, the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Samaritans, and other neighboring nations round, did all they could to hinder him from proceeding therein; and to this they were excited, not only by the ancient and bitter enmity which those people bore to the whole Jewish nation, because of the different manners and different religions they professed; but most especially at this time because of their lands; for during the time that the Jews were in captivity, these nations, having seized their lands, were forced to restore them on their return; for which reason they did all they could to oppose their settlement, hoping that, if they could be kept low, they might find an opportunity, some time or other, of resuming the prey they had lost. But Nehemiah was not at all discouraged at this; for having, on his arrival at Jerusalem, made known to the people the commission with which he was sent, he took a view of the ruins of the old walls, and immediately set about the repairing of them, dividing the people into several companies, and assigning to each of them the quarter where they were to work, but reserving to himself the superintendence and direction of the whole, in which he labored so effectually that all was finished by the end of the month Elul, within the compass of thirty-two days, notwithstanding all manner of opposition that was made against him, both from within and without; for within several false prophets, and other treacherous persons, endeavored to create obstructions; and from without Sanballat the Horonite, Tobias the Ammonite, Geshem the Arabian, and several others, gave him all the disturbance they were able, not only by underhand dealings, and treacherous tricks and contrivances, but also by open force; so that while part of the people labored in carrying on the building, the other part stood to their arms, to defend themselves against those who had any designs upon them. And all had their arms at hand, even while they worked, to be ready at a signal given to draw together at any part where the enemy should be discovered to be coming upon them: and by this means they secured themselves against the attempts and designs of their enemies till the work was brought to a conclusion. And when they had thus far finished the walls and set up the gates, a public dedication of them was celebrated with great solemnity by the priests and Levites, and all the people. The burden which the people underwent in the carrying on of this work, and the incessant labor which they were forced to undergo to bring it to so speedy a conclusion being very great, and such as made them faint and groan under it; to revive their drooping spirits, and make them the more easy and ready to proceed in that which was farther to be done, care was taken to relieve them from a much greater burden, the oppression of usurers, which they at that time lay under, and had much greater reason to complain of; for the rich, taking advantage of the necessities of the poor, had exacted heavy usury of

them, making them pay the centesimal for all moneys lent them; that is, one per cent. for every month, which amounted to twelve per cent. for the whole year: so that they were forced to mortgage their lands, and sell some of their children into servitude, to have wherewith to buy bread for the support of themselves and families; which being a manifest breach of the law of God, given by Moses, (for that forbids all the race of Israel to take usury of any of their brethren), Nehemiah, on his hearing of this, resolved forthwith to remove so great an iniquity; in order whereto he called a general assembly of all the people, where, having set forth unto them the nature of the offense, how great a breach it was of the Divine law, and how heavy an oppression upon their brethren, and how much it might provoke the wrath of God against them, he caused it to be enacted by the general suffrage of that whole assembly, that all should return to their brethren whatsoever had been exacted of them upon usury, and also release all the lands, vineyards, olive-yards, and houses, which had been taken of them upon mortgage on this account. "And thus Nehemiah, having executed the main of the end for which he obtained the favor of the king to be sent to Jerusalem, appointed Hanani and Hananiah to be governors of the city, and returned again unto him into Persia; for a time had been set him for his return again to court, when he first obtained to be sent from thence on this commission; which, as expressed in the text, plainly imports a short time, and not that of twelve years, after which he again went unto the king, as some interpret it. And his having appointed governors of the city as soon as the walls were built evidently implies that he then went from thence, and was absent for some time; for, had he still continued at Jerusalem, he would not have needed any deputies to govern the place. And farthermore, the building of the walls of Jerusalem being all for which he prayed his first commission; when this was performed, he seems to have needed a new authority before he could go on to other proceedings, which were necessary for the well settling of the affairs of that country. But on his return to the king, and having given him an account how all things stood in that province, and what farther was needful to be done for the well regulating of it, he soon obtained to be sent back again to take care thereof: and the shortness of his absence seems to have been the cause why there is no mention of it in the text, though the particulars I have mentioned seem sufficiently to imply it. "Nehemiah, being returned from the Persian court with a new commission, in the twenty-first year of Artaxerxes, [b.c. 444], forthwith set himself to carry on the reformation of the Church, and the state of the Jews, which Ezra had begun; and took along with him the advice and direction of that learned and holy scribe in all that he attempted in this work. "The first thing that he did was to provide for the security of the city, which he had now fortified, by settling rules for the opening and shutting of the gates, and keeping watch and ward on the towers and walls: but finding Jerusalem to be but thinly inhabited, and that to make this burden more easy there needed more inhabitants to bear their share with them in it, he projected the thorough re-peopling of the place: in order to which he prevailed first with the rulers and great men of the nation to agree to build them houses there, and dwell in them; and then others following their example, offered themselves voluntarily to do the same; and of the rest of the people every tenth man was taken by lot, and obliged to come to Jerusalem, and there build them houses, and settle themselves and their families in them. And when the city was fortified, and all that had their dwellings in it were there well secured by walls and gates against the insults of their enemies, and the incursions of thieves and robbers, who before molested them, all willingly complied; by which means the houses, as well as the walls and gates, being again rebuilt, and fully replenished with inhabitants, it soon after this received its ancient lustre, and became again a city of great note in those parts. "Nehemiah, finding it necessary to have the genealogies of the people well investigated and clearly stated, next examined into that matter; and this he did, not only for the sake of their civil rights, that all knowing of what tribe and family they were, they might be directed where to take their possessions; but more especially for the sake of the sanctuary, that none might be admitted to officiate, even as Levites, who were not of the tribe of Levi; or as priests, that were

not of the family of Aaron. And therefore, for the true settling of this matter, search was made for the old registers; and, having among them found a register of the genealogies of those who came up at first from Babylon with Zerubbabel and Jeshua, he settled this matter according to it; adding such also as came up, and expunging others whose families were extinct. And this caused the difference that is between the accounts we have of these genealogies in Ezra and Nehemiah: for in the second chapter of Ezra we have the old register made by Zerubbabel; and in the seventh of Nehemiah, from the sixth verse to the end of the chapter, a copy of it as settled by Nehemiah with the alterations I have mentioned. Ezra, having completed his edition of the law of God, and written it out fairly and clearly in the Chaldean character, this year, on the feast of trumpets, publicly read it to the people of Jerusalem. This feast was celebrated on the first of Tisri, the seventh month of the Jews' ecclesiastical year, and the first of their civil year. Their coming out of Egypt having been in the month Nisan, from that time the beginning of the year, in all ecclesiastical matters, was reckoned among them from the beginning of that month, which happened about the time of the vernal equinox; but in all civil matters, such as contracts and bargains, they still continued to go by the old form, and began their year from the first of Tisri which happened about the time of the autumnal equinox, as all other nations of the East then did; and all instruments and writings relating to contracts and bargains, or other civil matters, were dated according to this year, and all their jubilees and Sabbatical years began with it; and, therefore, reckoning it their new-year's-day, they celebrated it with a festival; and this festival being solemnized by the sounding of trumpets, from the morning of that day to the end of it, to proclaim and give notice to all of the beginning of the new year, it was from thence called the feast of trumpets. To celebrate this feast, the people assembled from all parts of Jerusalem; and understanding that Ezra had finished his revisal of the law, and written out a fair copy of it, they called upon him to have it read to them; when a scaffold or large pulpit was erected in the largest street of the city, where most of the people might stand to hear it. Ezra ascended into it, with thirteen other principal elders; and having placed six on his right hand, and seven on his left, he stood up in the midst of them; and having blessed the Lord, the great God, he began to read the law out of the Hebrew text; and while he read it in this language, thirteen other of the Levites, whom he instructed for this purpose, rendered it period by period into Chaldee, which was then the vulgar language of the people, giving them the meaning of every particular part; thus making them understand it: thus the holy scribe, with these assistants, continued from morning till noon, reading and explaining the law of God unto the people in such a manner as suited their low capacities. But it being a festival day, and the dining hour approaching, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the rest that had been assisting, dismissed them to dinner, to eat and drink, and rejoice before the Lord. The remainder of the day, because it was thus consecrated to be kept holy unto Him: but the next morning they assembled again, in the same place; and Ezra and his assistants went on farther to read and to explain the law of God in the same manner as they had done the day before; and when they came to the twenty-third chapter of Leviticus, wherein is written the law of the feast of tabernacles, and had explained to them the obligation they were under to observe it, and that the fifteenth day of that month was the day appointed for the beginning of it, he excited an eager desire in all the people to fulfill the law of God in this particular; and proclamation was therefore made through all Judah, to give notice of the festival, and to warn them all to be present at Jerusalem on that day for the observing of it. Accordingly they went thither at the time prescribed; and, as they were instructed by the law of God, prepared booths, made of the branches of trees, and kept the festival in them, through the whole seven days of its continuance, in so solemn a manner as had not been observed before since the days of Joshua to this time. Ezra, taking the advantage of having the people assembled in so great a number, and so well disposed towards the law of God, went on with his assistants farther to read and explain in the same way as he had done on the two former days; and this he did from the first to the last day of the festival, till they had gone through the whole law;

by which the people, perceiving in how many things they had transgressed the law of God through ignorance, (for till now the law of God had never been read since their return from Babylon), expressed much trouble of heart, being much grieved for their sins, and exceedingly terrified with the fear of God's wrath for the punishment of them. Nehemiah and Ezra, finding them so well disposed, applied themselves to make the best improvement they could of it for the honor of God, and the interests of religion; and, therefore, proclaimed a fast to be held the day but one after the festival was ended, to which having called all the people while the sense of these things was fresh in their minds, excited them to make a solemn confession of their sins before God, and also to enter into a solemn vow and covenant with God to avoid them for the future. The observances which they chiefly obliged themselves to in this covenant were:

Firstly, Not to make intermarriages with the Gentiles, either by giving their daughters to them, or by taking any of their daughters to themselves.

Secondly, To observe the Sabbaths and Sabbatical years.

Thirdly, To pay their annual tribute to the temple for the repairing of it, and finding all the necessaries for the carrying on of the public service in it.

And Fourthly, To pay the tithes and first-fruits to the priests and Levites.

And these particulars being thus named in this covenant shows us that they were the laws of God which they had been neglectful of since their return from the captivity. It being their ignorance which led them into these transgressions, and this ignorance having been occasioned by their not having heard the law of God read to them; to prevent this for the future, they had from this time the most learned of the Levites and scribes that were skilled in the law, to read it to them in every city; which no doubt was at first done by gathering the people together in the most wide street, where all might the better hear it; but the inconvenience of this being soon felt, especially in the winter and stormy seasons of the year, they erected houses or tabernacles to meet in, and these were the original synagogues among them. That they had no synagogues before the Babylonish captivity is plain, not only from the silence of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but also from several passages in them, which evidently prove that there were none in those days; for it is a common saying, among the Jews, that where there is no book kept of the law, there can be no synagogue; for the chief service of the synagogue being the reading of the law to the people, where there was no law, there certainly could be no synagogue. Many texts of Scripture tell us that the book of the law was very rare through all Judah before the Babylonish captivity. When Jehoshaphat sent teachers through all Judah to instruct the people in the law of God, they carried the law with them; which they need not have done if there had been copies of the law in those cities where they went, which there would have been had there been synagogues in them, it being the same absurdity to suppose a synagogue without a book of the law, as to suppose a parish church without a copy of the Bible in it; and therefore as this proves the want of the law through all Judah, so it proves the want of synagogues in them also. And when Hilkiah found the law in the temple, neither he nor the king Josiah would have been surprised at it, had books of the law been common in those times. Their behavior on that occasion sufficiently proves that they had never seen it before, which could not have been the case had there been any copies of it to be found among the people; and if there were no copies of the law at that time among them, there could then be most certainly no synagogues for them to resort to for the hearing of it read. From hence it plainly follows that there could be no synagogues among the Jews till after the Babylonish captivity; and it is most probable that Ezra's reading to them the law, and the necessity which they perceived there was of having it oftener read to them, was the occasion of their erecting them after their captivity in the manner I have related;

and most learned men are of this opinion, and some of the Jews themselves say as much.

"Nehemiah, after having held the government of Judah twelve years, returned to the Persian court, either recalled thither by the king, or else going thither to solicit a new commission after the expiration of the former, [32 Artax. b.c. 433]. During all the time that he had been in the government he managed it with great justice, and supported the dignity of his office, through these whole twelve years, with a very expensive and hospitable magnificence; for there sat at his table every day a hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, besides strangers who came to Jerusalem from among the heathen nations round about them; for when occasion brought them thither, if they were of any quality, they were always invited to the governor's house, and there hospitably and splendidly entertained; so that there were provided for Nehemiah's table every day one ox, six choice sheep, and fowls and kine, with all other things in proportion, which must have been a great expense; yet all this he bore through the whole twelve years, out of his own private purse, without burdening the province at all for it, or taking any part of that allowance which before was raised by other governors to support them in their station; which argues his great generosity, as well as his great love and tenderness to the people of his nation, in thus easing them of this burden; and also his vast wealth, in being able to do so. The office which he had been in at court gave him the opportunity of amassing great riches, and he thought he could no better expend them than in the service of his country, and by doing all he could to promote its true interest in Church and state; and God prospered him in the work, according to the great zeal with which he labored in it. "Nehemiah, on his return to the Persian court, in the thirty-seventh year of Artaxerxes, [b.c. 428], having tarried there about five years in the execution, as it may be supposed, of his former office, at length obtained permission from the king to be sent back to Jerusalem with a new commission. The generality of chronologers as well as commentators on this part of Scripture make his going back there to have been much sooner; but considering the many and great corruptions which he tells us in the thirteenth chapter the Jews had run into during his absence, it cannot be conceived how, in less than five years' time, they could have grown to such a height among them. He had been twelve years in reforming what was amiss among them, and Ezra had been thirteen years doing the same before him; and they had brought their reformation to such a state of stability, that a little time would not have been sufficient to have unhinged it. It is indeed expressed in our English version, that Nehemiah came back from the Persian court to Jerusalem, after certain days; but the Hebrew word יָמִין yamin, which is there rendered days, signifies also years; and is in a great many places of the Hebrew Scriptures so used. About this time lived Malachi the prophet: the greatest of the corruptions he charged the Jews with are the same as those they had run into in the time of Nehemiah's absence; and therefore it is most probable that in this time his prophecies were delivered. It is certain that the temple was all finished, and every thing restored in it, before this time, for there are passages in his prophecies which clearly suppose it; for he does not charge the Jews with not restoring the temple, but their neglect of what pertained to the true worship of God in it. But at what time after the restoration of the temple it was that he wrote his prophecies, is nowhere stated; and therefore we have only conjecture about it, and I know of no conjecture that can place it with more probability than in the time I have mentioned. "Many things having gone wrong among the Jews during the absence of Nehemiah, as soon as he was again settled in the government, he applied himself with his accustomed zeal to correct them. That which he first took notice of was a great profanation which had been introduced into the temple for the sake of Tobiah the Ammonite. This man, though he had made two alliances with the Jews, (for Johanan his son had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah, who was one of the chief managers in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, under the direction of the governor, who himself had married the daughter of Shecaniah the son of Arah, another great man among the Jews), yet being an Ammonite, he bore a national hatred to all who were of the race of Israel; and therefore, envying

their prosperity, did the utmost he could to obstruct Nehemiah in all that he did for the good of that people, and confederated with Sanballat, their greatest enemy, to carry on this purpose. However, by reason of the alliances I have mentioned, he had many correspondents among the Jews, who were favourers of him, and acted insidiously with Nehemiah on this account; but he, being aware of their devices, withstood and baffled them all, so long as he continued in Jerusalem. But when he went from thence to the Persian court, Eliashib the high priest was prevailed upon, being one in the confederacy and alliance with Tobiah, to allow and provide for him lodging within the temple itself. In order for which he removed the meat-offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of corn, the new wine, and the oil, which had been commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the offerings of the priests, out of the chambers where they used to be laid; and to make out of them one large apartment for the reception of this heathen stranger. It is doubted by some whether this Eliashib were Eliashib the high priest, or only another priest of that name; for he is named in the text, where this is related of him, by the title only of priest, and is there said to have the oversight of the chambers in the house of God; from whence it is argued that he was only chamberlain of the temple, and not the high priest, who was above such an office. But the oversight of the chambers of the house of God may import the whole government of the temple, which belonged to the high priest only; and it is not easily to be conceived how any one less than the absolute governor of the whole temple could make such an innovation in it. Besides, Eliashib the high priest has no character in Scripture with which such a procedure can be said to be inconsistent. By what is said in the book of Ezra, Ezr 10:18, it appears that the pontifical family was in his time grown very corrupt; and there is no act of his mentioned, either in Ezra or Nehemiah, except only his assisting in the repairing of the wall of Jerusalem. Had he done any thing else worthy of memory in the reforming of what was amiss, either in Church or state, in the times of Ezra or Nehemiah, it may be presumed mention would have been made of it in the books written by them. The silence of him in both these books, as to any good act done by him, is a sufficient proof that there was none to be recorded; for the high priest being head of the Jewish Church, had he borne any part with those two good men, when they labored so much to reform that Church, it is utterly impossible that it should have been passed over in their writings, where they give an account of what was done in that reformation. What Jeshua his grandfather did, in concurrence with Zerubbabel the governor, and Haggai and Zechariah the prophets, in the resettling of the Church and state of the Jews, after their return from the Babylonish captivity, is all recorded in Scripture; and had Eliashib done any such thing in concurrence with Ezra and Nehemiah, we may be certain it would have been recorded also. "Putting all this together, it appears most likely that it was Eliashib the high priest who was the author of this great profanation of the house of God. What was done, however, the text tells us, Nehemiah immediately withstood, as soon as he returned to Jerusalem; for, overruling what the high priest had ordered to be done by the authority which he had as governor, he commanded all the household stuff of Tobiah to be cast out, and the chambers to be cleansed and restored to their former use. "The reading of the law to the people having been settled by Nehemiah, so as to be constantly carried on at certain stated times ever since it was begun under his government by Ezra, (probably on every Sabbath day), when in the course of their lessons they came to chap. 23 of Deuteronomy, where it is commanded that a Moabite or an Ammonite should not come into the congregation of the Lord even to the tenth generation for ever; Nehemiah, taking advantage of it, separated all the mixed multitude from the rest of the people, that thereby it might be known with whom a true Israelite might lawfully marry; for neither this law, nor any other of the like nature, is to be understood as excluding any, of whatever nation, from entering into the congregation as a proselyte, and becoming a member of their Church. Neither did the Jews so interpret it; for they freely received into their religion all who would embrace it, and on their conversion admitted them to all its rights and privileges, and treated them in all respects as true Israelites, excepting only in the

case of marriage; and therefore this phrase in the text, of not entering into the congregation even to the tenth generation, must be understood to imply no more than a prohibition not to be married with them till then; and thus all the Jewish doctors expound it. "Among other corruptions that grew up during the absence of Nehemiah, one especially to be noticed was, the neglect of not carrying on the daily service of the house of God in the manner it ought; for the tithes, which were to maintain the ministers of the temple in their offices and stations, either being embezzled by the high priest or other rulers under him, or else subtracted by the laity, and not paid at all; for want of them the Levites and singers were driven from the temple, every one to his own house, there to seek for a subsistence some other way. This abuse the governor, whose piety led him always to attend to the public worship, could not be long without taking notice of, and when he had thoroughly informed himself of the cause, he soon provided very effectually for its remedy; for he again made those dues to be brought into the temple treasuries, and forced every man faithfully and fully to pay them; thus a maintenance being again provided for those who attended the service of the house of God, all was there again restored to its pristine order. And he also took care that the Sabbath should be duly observed, and made many good orders for the preventing of the profanation of it, and caused them all to be put into effectual execution. But though all these things are mentioned in one chapter, they were not all done at one time; but this good man brought them about as opportunities best served for the success of effecting them. In the same year [b.c. 425] in which Nehemiah went again to his government of Judea, from the Persian court, i. e., in the fourth year of the eighty-seventh Olympiad, Plato, the famous Athenian philosopher, was born, who came the nearest to the truth in Divine matters of any of the heathens; for, having in his travels to the East, (whither he went for his improvement in knowledge), conversed with the Jews, and got some insight into the writings of Moses, and their other sacred books, he learned many things from them which the other philosophers could not attain unto, and therefore he is said by Numenius to be none other than Moses speaking Greek; and many of the ancient fathers speak of him to the same purpose." With this book the general historical books of the Old Testament end; and the succeeding accounts of the Jewish people must be sought partly in the Apocryphal books, and in Josephus; but nowhere with so much perspicuity as in the remaining volumes of the industrious and judicious author of The Connected History of the Old and New Testaments, from which the reader has already had such copious extracts.

Account of Nehemiah, Neh 1:1. His inquiry about the Jews that had returned from their captivity, and concerning the state of Jerusalem, of which he receives the most discouraging information, Neh 1:2, Neh 1:3. He is greatly affected; fasts and prays, Neh 1:4. His prayer and confession to God, Neh 1:5-11.

Verse 1

The words of Nehemiah - That this book was compiled out of the journal or memoranda made by Nehemiah himself, there can be no doubt: but that he was not the compiler is evident from several passages in the work it. self. As it is written consecutively as one book with Ezra, many have supposed that this latter was the author: but whoever compares the style of each, in the Hebrew, will soon be convinced that this is not correct; the style is so very different, that they could not possibly be the work of the same person.

It is doubtful even whether the Nehemiah who is mentioned Ezr 2:2, who came to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel, be the same with him who is the reputed author of this book. By the computation of the best chronologists, Zerubbabel came to Jerusalem in A. M. 3468; and Nehemiah, who is here mentioned, did not come before the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes, which falls in with A. M. 3558, ninety years after: and as his account here is carried down to A. M. 3570, nearly twenty

years later, he must at his death have been about a hundred and thirty, allowing him to have been only twenty years old at the time that Zerubbabel went up to Jerusalem. This is by no means likely, as this would make him the king's cupbearer when he was upwards of a hundred years of age! It seems, therefore, evident that the Nehemiah of Ezra cannot be the same with the reputed author of this book, and the cup-bearer of the Persian king.

Son of Hachaliah - Of what tribe or lineage he was, we cannot tell: this is all we know of his parentage. Some suppose he was a priest, and of the house of Aaron, on the authority of 2 Maccabees 1:18, 21; but this is but slender evidence. It is likely he was of a very eminent family, if not of the blood royal of Judah, as only persons of eminence could be placed in the office which he sustained in the Persian court.

The month Chisleu - Answering to a part of our November and December.

Twentieth year - That is, of Artaxerxes, A. M. 3558, b.c. 446.

Shushan the palace - The ancient city of Susa; called in Persian Shuster: the winter residence of the Persian kings.

NEHEMIAH 1: 2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came, he and certain men out of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

Verse 2

I asked them concerning the Jews - Josephus gives a probable account of this business: "Nehemiah, being somewhere out of Susa, seeing some strangers, and hearing them converse in the Hebrew tongue, he went near; and finding they were Jews from Jerusalem, he asked them how matters went with their brethren in that city, and what was their state?" And the answer they gave him is, in substance, that recorded in the text; though with several aggravations in Josephus. - Joseph. Ant. lib. xi., c. 5.

NEHEMIAH 1: 3 They said to me, "The remnant who are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

Verse 3

The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down - This must refer to the walls, which had been rebuilt after the people returned from their captivity: for it could not refer to the walls which were broken down and levelled with the dust by Nebuchadnezzar; for to hear of this could be no news to Nehemiah.

NEHEMIAH 1: 4 When I heard these words, I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days; and I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven,

Verse 4

And mourned certain days - From the month Chisleu to the month Nisan; about four months from the time he received the above information, till the time that Artaxerxes noticed his grief, Neh 2:1. All this time he probably spent in supplication to God; waiting for a favorable opening in the Divine providence. Every good work is not to be undertaken hastily; prayer and watchfulness are necessary to its completion. Many good works have been ruined by making haste.

NEHEMIAH 1: 5 and said, "I beg you, LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and loving kindness with those who love him and keep his commandments:

Verse 5

Lord God of heaven - What was, before the captivity, Jehovah, God of hosts or armies.

Great - Able to do mighty things.

Terrible - able to inflict the heaviest judgments.

NEHEMIAH 1: 6 Let your ear now be attentive, and your eyes open, that you may listen to the prayer of your servant, which I pray before you at this time, day and night, for the children of Israel your servants while I confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Yes, I and my father's house have sinned.

Verse 6

Let thine ear - Hear what we say and confess.

Thine eyes open - see what we suffer.

NEHEMIAH 1: 7 We have dealt very corruptly against you, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances, which you commanded your servant Moses.

Verse 7

Have not kept thy commandments - The moral precepts by which our lives should be regulated.

Statutes - What refers to the rites and ceremonies of thy religion.

Judgments - The precepts of justice relative to our conduct to each other.

NEHEMIAH 1: 8 "Remember, I beg you, the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you trespass, I will scatter you abroad among the peoples;

Verse 8

Thy servant Moses - See the parallel places in Lev 26:33 (note), Deu 4:25-27 (note), Deu 28:64 (note), and the notes there. Though in an enemy's country, and far from the ordinances of God, Nehemiah did not forget the law: he read his Bible well, and quotes correctly.

NEHEMIAH 1: 9 but if you return to me, and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts were in the uttermost part of the heavens, yet will I gather them from there, and will bring them to the place that I have chosen, to cause my name to dwell there.'

NEHEMIAH 1: 10 "Now these are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power, and by your strong hand.

NEHEMIAH 1: 11 Lord, I beg you, let your ear be attentive now to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants, who delight to fear your name; and please prosper your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Now I was cup bearer to the king.

Verse 11

Mercy in the sight of this man - Favour before the king, Ahasuerus. He seems then to have been giving him the cup.

For I was the king's cup-bearer - The king's butler, (the Persians call him saky), which gave him the opportunity of being frequently with the king; and to be in such a place of trust, he must be in the king's confidence. No Eastern potentate would have a cup-bearer with whom he could not trust his life, poison being frequently administered in this way. This verse seems to have been a mental prayer, which Nehemiah now put up as he was delivering the cup into the king's hand.