

AN

# E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH

## PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE BOOK OF

## N E H E M I A H.

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THIS book continues the history of the *children of the captivity*; the poor Jews that were lately returned out of Babylon to their own land. At this time, not only the Persian monarchy flourished in great pomp and power, but Greece and Rome began to be very great, and make a figure. Of the affairs of those high and mighty states, we have authentic accounts extant; but the sacred and inspired history takes cognizance only of the state of the Jews, and makes no mention of other nations, but as the Israel of God had dealings with them; for the Lord's portion is his people, they are his peculiar treasure, and, in comparison with them, the rest of the world is but as lumber. In my esteem, Ezra the scribe, and Nehemiah the Tirshatha, though neither of them ever wore a crown, commanded an army, conquered any country, or were famed for philosophy or oratory, yet both of them, being pious praying men, and very serviceable in their day to the church of God and the interests of religion, were really greater men, and more honourable, not only than any of the Roman consuls or dictators, but than Xenophon, or Demosthenes, or Plato himself, who lived at the same time, the bright ornaments of Greece. Nehemiah's agency for the advancing of the settlement of Israel we have a full account of in this book of his own commentaries or memoirs, wherein he records not only the works of his hands, but the workings of his heart, in the management of public affairs; inserting in the story many devout reflections and ejaculations, which discover in his mind a very deep tincture of serious piety, and are peculiar to his writings. Twelve years he was governor of Judea, under Artaxerxes king of Persia, from his twentieth year, (*ch.* 1. 1.) to his thirty-second year, *ch.* 13. 6. Dr. Lightfoot supposes this to be Artaxerxes from whom Ezra had his commission. This book relates,

- I. Nehemiah's concern for Jerusalem, and the commission he had obtained from the king to go thither, *ch.* 1, 2.
- II. His building of the wall of Jerusalem, notwithstanding the opposition he met with, *ch.* 3, 4.
- III. His redressing the grievance of the people, *ch.* 5.
- IV. His finishing the wall, *ch.* 6.
- V. The account he took of the people, *ch.* 7.
- VI. The religious solemnities of reading the law, fasting and praying, and renewing their covenants, which he called the people to, *ch.* 8-10.
- VII. The care he took for the replenishing of the holy city, and the settling of the holy tribe, *ch.* 11, 12.
- VIII. His zeal in reforming divers abuses, *ch.* 13. Some call this *the second book of Ezra*, not because he was the penman of it, but because it is a continuation of the history of the foregoing book, with which it is connected, *v.* 1. This was the last *historical* book that was written, as Malachi the last *prophetical* book, of the Old Testament.

CHAP. I.

Here we first meet with Nehemiah at the Persian court, where we find him, 1. Inquisitive concerning the state of the Jews and Jerusalem, v. 1, 2. II. Informed of their deplorable state, v. 3. III. Fasting and praying, thereupon, (v. 4.) with a particular account of his prayer, v. 5. . . 11. Such is the rise of this great man, by piety, and by policy.

I. THE words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, 2. That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and *certain* men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire. 4. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

What tribe Nehemiah was of, does no where appear; but if it be true, (which we are told by the author of the Maccabees, *Book 2. ch. 1. 18.*) that he offered sacrifice, we must conclude him to be a priest. We are here told that he was in Shushan, the palace, or royal city, of the king of Persia, where the court was ordinarily kept, (v. 1, 11.) that he was the king's cup-bearer. Kings and great men, probably, looked upon it as a piece of state to be attended by those of other nations. By this place at court, 1. He would be the better qualified for the service of his country, in that post for which God had designed him; as Moses was the fitter to govern, for being bred up in Pharaoh's court, and David in Saul's. 2. He would have the fairer opportunity of serving his country by his interest in the king and those about him. Observe, He is not forward to tell us what great preferment he had at court; it is not till the end of the chapter, that he tells us he was the *king's cup-bearer*, (a place of great trust, as well as of honour and profit,) when he could not avoid the mentioning of it, because of the following story; but, at first, he only says, *I was in Shushan the palace*; whence we may learn to be humble and modest, and slow to speak of our own advancements. But in the providences of God concerning him, we may observe, to our comfort, (1.) That when God has work to do, he will never want instruments to do it with. (2.) That those whom God designs to employ in his service, he will find out proper ways both to fit for it, and to call to it. (3.) That God has his remnant in all places; we read of Obadiah in the house of Ahab, saints in Cæsar's household, and a devout Nehemiah in Shushan the palace. (4.) That God can make the courts of princes sometimes nurseries, and sometimes sanctuaries, to the friends and patrons of the church's cause.

Now here we have,

I. Nehemiah's tender and compassionate inquiry concerning the state of the Jews in their own land, v. 2. It happened that a friend and relation of his came to the court with some other company, by whom he had an opportunity of informing himself fully how it went with the children of the captivity, and what posture Jerusalem, the beloved city, was

in. Nehemiah lived at ease, in honour and fullness, himself, but cannot forget that he is an Israelite, nor shake off the thoughts of his brethren in distress, but, in spirit, (like Moses, Acts 7. 23.) *visits them, and looks upon their burthens*. As distance of place did not alienate his affections from them, (though they were out of sight, yet not out of mind,) so neither did, 1. The dignity to which he was advanced. Though he was a great man, and, probably, rising higher, yet he did not think it below him to take cognizance of his brethren that were low and despised, nor was he ashamed to own his relation to them, and concern for them. 2. The diversity of their sentiments from his, and the difference of their practice accordingly. Though he did not go to settle at Jerusalem himself, (as we think he ought to have done, now that liberty was proclaimed,) but conformed to the court, and staid there, yet he did not therefore judge or despise them that were returned, or upbraided them as impolitic, but kindly concerned himself for them, was ready to do them all the good offices he could, and, that he might know which way to do them a kindness, *asked concerning them*. Note, It is lawful and good to inquire, "*What news?*" We should inquire especially concerning the state of the church and religion, and how it fares with the people of God; and the design of our inquiry must be, not, that, like the Athenians, we may have something to talk of, but that we may know how to direct our prayers and praises.

II. The melancholy account which is here given him of the present state of the Jews at Jerusalem, v. 3. Hanani, the person he inquired of, has this character given of him, (*ch. 7. 2.*) that he *feared God above many*, and therefore would not only speak truly, but, when he spake of the desolations of Jerusalem, speak tenderly. It is probable that his errand to court, at this time, was, to solicit for some favour, some relief or other, that they stood in need of. Now the account he gives is, 1. That the holy seed was miserably trampled on and abused; in great affliction and reproach insulted upon all occasions by their neighbours, and *filled with the scorning of them that were at ease*. 2. That the holy city was exposed, and in ruins. The wall of Jerusalem was still broken down, and the gates, as the Chaldeans left them, in ruins. This made the condition of the inhabitants both very despicable under the abiding marks of poverty and slavery, and very dangerous, for their enemies might, when they pleased, make an easy prey of them. The temple was built, the government settled, and a work of reformation brought to some head, but here was one good work yet undone; this was still wanting. Every Jerusalem, on this side the heavenly one, will have some defect or other in it, the making up of which it will require the help and service of its friends.

III. The great affliction this gave to Nehemiah, and the deep concern it put him into, v. 4. 1. He *wept and mourned*. It was not only just when he heard the news, that he fell into a passion of weeping, but his sorrow continued certain days. Note, The desolations and distresses of the church ought to be the matter of our grief, how much soever we live at ease. 2. He *fasted and prayed*; not in public, he had no opportunity of doing that, but *before the God of heaven, who sees in secret, and will reward openly*. By his fasting and praying, (1.) He consecrated his sorrows, and directed his tears aright; sorrowed *after a godly sort*, with an eye to God, because his name was reproached in the contempt cast on his people, whose cause therefore he thus commits to him. (2.) He eased his sorrows, and unburthened his spirit, by pouring out his complaint before God, and leaving it with him. (3.) He

took the right method of fetching in relief for his people, and direction for himself in what way to serve them. Let those who are forming any good designs for the service of the public, take God along with them from the first conception of them, and utter all their projects before him; that is the way to prosper in them.

5. And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments; 6. Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. 7. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandest thy servant Moses. 8. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses, saying, *If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:* 9. But *if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.* 10. Now these *are* thy servants, and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. 11. O LORD, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name; and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man: For I was the king's cup-bearer.

We have here Nehemiah's prayer; a prayer that has reference to all the prayers which he had, for some time before, been putting up to God day and night, while he continued his sorrows for the desolations of Jerusalem; and withal to the petition he was now intending to present to the king his master for his favour to Jerusalem.

We may observe in this prayer,

I. His humble and reverent address to God, in which he prostrates himself before him, and gives unto him the glory due unto his name, *v. 5.* It is much the same with that of Daniel, *ch. 9. 4.* It teaches us to draw near to God, 1. With a holy awe of his majesty and glory; remembering that he is the God of heaven, infinitely above us, and sovereign Lord over us, and that he is *the great and terrible God*, infinitely excelling all the principalities and powers, both of the upper and of the lower world, angels and kings; and he is a God to be worshipped with fear by all his people, and whose powerful wrath all his enemies have reason to be afraid of. Even the terrors of the Lord are impropable, for the comfort and encouragement of those that trust in him. 2. With a holy confidence

in his grace and truth, for he *keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him*; not only the mercy that is promised, but even more than he promised: nothing shall be thought too much to be done for them that *love him, and keep his commandments.*

II. His general request for the audience and acceptance of all the prayers and confessions he now made to God, *v. 6.* *Let thine ear be attentive to the prayer*, not which I say, bare saying prayer will not serve, but which I *pray* before thee; then we are like to speed in praying, when we pray in praying; and let *thine eyes be open upon the heart* from which the prayer comes, and the case which is in prayer laid before thee. *God formed the eye, and planted the ear*; and therefore shall he not see clearly? Shall not he hear attentively?

III. His penitent confession of sin; not only Israel has sinned, (it was no great mortification to him to own that,) but *I and my father's house have sinned, v. 6.* Thus does he humble himself, and take shame to himself, in this confession; *We have (I and my family among the rest) dealt very corruptly against thee, v. 7.* In the confession of sin, let these two things be owned as the malignity of it, that it is a corruption of ourselves, and an affront to God; it is *dealing corruptly against God*, setting up the corruptions of our own hearts in opposition to the commands of God.

IV. The pleas he urges for mercy for his people Israel.

1. He pleads what God had of old said to them, the rule he had settled of his proceedings toward them, which might be the rule of their expectations from him, *v. 8, 9.* He had said indeed that, if they brake covenant with him, he would *scatter them among the nations*, and that threatening was fulfilled in their captivity: never was people so widely dispersed as Israel was at this time, though at first so closely incorporated; but he had said withal, that if they *turned to him*, (as now they began to do, having renounced idolatry and kept to the temple-service) he would *gather them again*. This he quotes from Deut. 30. 1-5. and begs leave to put God in mind of it, (though the Eternal Mind needs no remembrancer,) as that which he guided his desires by, and grounded his faith and hope upon, in praying this prayer; *Remember, I beseech thee, that word*; for thou hast said, *Put me in remembrance*. He had owned, (*v. 7.*) *We have not kept the judgments which thou commandest thy servant Moses*; yet he begs, (*v. 8.*) *Lord, remember the word which thou commandest thy servant Moses*; for the covenant is often said to be commanded. If God were not more mindful of his promises, than we are of his precepts, we were undone. Our best pleas therefore, in prayer, are these that are taken from the promise of God, the word on which he has caused us to hope, Ps. 119. 49.

2. He pleads the relation wherein of old they stood to God, "These are *thy servants and thy people*, (*v. 10.*) whom thou hast set apart for thyself, and taken into covenant with thee: wilt thou suffer thy sworn enemies to trample upon and oppress thy sworn servants? If thou wilt not appear for thy people, whom wilt thou appear for?" See Isa. 63. 19. As an evidence of their being God's servants, he gives them this character, (*v. 11.*) "They desire to fear thy name: they are not only called by thy name, but really have a reverence for thy name; they now worship thee, and thee only, according to thy will, and have an awe of all the discoveries thou art pleased to make of thyself; this they have a desire to do;" which denotes, (1.) Their goodwill to it; "It is their constant care and endeavour to be found in the way of their duty, and they aim at it, though in many instances they come short." (2.) Their complacency in it: "They take plea-

sure to fear thy name," so it may be read; "They not only do their duty, but do it with delight." Those shall graciously be accepted of God, that truly desire to fear his name; for those desires are his own work.

3. He pleads the great things God had formerly done for them, (v. 10.) "*Whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power*, in the days of old; thy power is still the same, wilt thou not therefore still redeem them, and perfect their redemption? Let not them be overpowered by the enemy, that have a God of infinite power on their side."

*Lastly*, He concludes with a particular petition, that God would prosper him in his undertaking, and give him favour with the king: *This man*, he calls him, for the greatest of men are but men before God; they must know themselves to be so, (Ps. 9. 20.) and others must know themselves to be so; *Who art thou that thou shouldst be afraid of a man?* *Mercy in the sight of this man*, is what he prays for, meaning not the king's mercy, but mercy from God, in his address to the king. Favour with men is then comfortable, when we can see it springing from the mercy of God.

## CHAP. II.

How Nehemiah wrestled with God and prevailed, we read in the foregoing chapter; now here we are told how, like Jacob, he prevailed with men also, and so found that his prayers were heard and answered. I. He prevailed with the king to send him to Jerusalem with a commission to build a wall about it, and grant him what was necessary for it, v. 1.-8. II. He prevailed against the enemies that would have obstructed him in his journey, (v. 9.-11.) and laughed him out of his undertaking, v. 19, 20. III. He prevailed upon his own people to join with him in this good work, viewing the desolations of the wall, (v. 12.-16.) and then gaining them to lend every one a hand toward the rebuilding of them, v. 17, 18. Thus did God own him in the work to which he called him.

1. **A**ND it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, *that wine was* before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been *before-time* sad in his presence. 2. Wherefore the king said unto me, *Why is thy countenance sad*, seeing thou *art* not sick? *this is* nothing *else* but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid. 3. And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? 4. Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight; that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. 6. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. 7. Moreover, I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me

over, till I come into Judah; 8. And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which *appertained* to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

When Nehemiah had prayed for the relief of his countrymen, and perhaps in David's words, (Ps. 51. 18.) *Build thou the walls of Jerusalem*, he did not sit still, and say, "Let God now do his own work, for I have no more to do;" but set himself to forecast what he could do towards it. Our prayers must be seconded with our serious endeavours, else we mock God. Near four months passed from Chisleu to Nisau, (from November to March,) before Nehemiah made his application to the king for leave to go to Jerusalem; either because the winter was not a proper time for such a journey, and he would not make the motion till he could pursue it, or because it was so long before his month of waiting came, and there was no coming into the king's presence uncalled, Esth. 4. 11. Now that he attended the king's table, he hoped to have his ear; we are not thus limited to certain moments in our addresses to the King of kings, but have liberty of access to him at all times; to the throne of grace we never come unseasonably. Now here is,

I. The occasion which he gave the king to inquire into his cares and griefs, by appearing sad in his presence. Those that speak to such great men, must not fall abruptly upon their business, but fetch a compass. Nehemiah would try whether he was in a good humour, before he ventured to tell him his errand, and this method he took to try him. He took up the wine and gave it to the king when he called for it, expecting that then he would look him in the face. He had not used to be sad in the king's presence, but conformed to the rules of the court, (as courtiers must do,) which would admit no sorrows, Esth. 4. 2. Though he was a stranger, a captive, he was easy and pleasant. Good men should do what they can by their cheerfulness to convince the world of the pleasantness of religious ways, and to roll away the reproach cast upon them as melancholy; but there is a time for all things, Eccl. 3. 4. Nehemiah now saw cause both to be sad, and to *appear* so. The miseries of Jerusalem gave him cause to be sad, and his showing it will give occasion to the king to inquire into the cause: he did not dissemble sadness, for he was really in grief for the afflictions of Joseph, and was not like the hypocrites who *disfigure their faces*; yet he could have concealed his grief if it had been necessary, (the heart knows its own bitterness, and in the midst of laughter is often sad,) but it would now serve his purpose to discover his sadness. Though he had wine before him, and, probably, according to the office of the cup-bearer, did himself drink of it before he gave it the king, yet it would not *make his heart glad*, while God's Israel was in distress.

II. The kind notice which the king took of his sadness, and the inquiry he made into the cause of it, (v. 2.) *Why is thy countenance sad*, seeing that thou *art* not sick? Note, 1. We ought, from a principle of christian sympathy, to concern ourselves in the sorrows and sadness of others, even of our inferiors, and not say, *What is it to us?* Let not masters despise their servants' griefs, but desire to make them easy. The great God is not pleased with the dejections and disquietness of his people, but would have them both *serve him with gladness*, and *eat their bread with joy*. 2. It is not strange if

those that are sick, have sad countenances, because of what is felt, and what is feared; sickness will make those grave, that were most airy and gay; yet a good man, even in sickness, may be of good cheer, if he knows that his sins are forgiven. 3. Freedom from sickness is so great a mercy, that we ought not to be inordinately dejected under any outward burthen; yet sorrow for our own sins, the sins of others, and the calamities of God's church, may well sadden the countenance without sickness.

III. The account which Nehemiah gave the king of the cause of his sadness, which he gives with meekness and fear. 1. With fear; he owns that now (though it appears by the following story that he was a man of courage,) *he was sore afraid*, perhaps of the king's wrath, (for those eastern monarchs assumed an absolute power of life and death, D n. 2. 12, 13.—5. 19.) or of misplacing a word, and losing his request by the mismanagement of it: though he was a wise man, he was jealous of himself, lest he should say any thing imprudently; it becomes us to be so. A good assurance is indeed a good accomplishment, yet a humble self-diffidence is no man's dispraise. 2. With meekness; without reflection upon any man, and with all the respect, deference, and good-will, imaginable to the king his master, he says, "*Let the king live for ever*; he is wise and good, and the fittest man in the world to rule." He modestly asked, "*Why should not my countenance be sad as it is, when* (though I myself am well, and at ease) *the city*" (the king knew what city he meant,) "*the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste?*" Many are melancholy and sad, but can give no good reason for it, cannot tell why or wherefore; such should chide themselves for, and chide themselves out of, their unjust and unreasonable griefs and fears; but Nehemiah could give so good a reason for his sadness, as to appeal to the king himself concerning it. Observe, (1.) He calls Jerusalem *the place of his fathers' sepulchres*, the place where his ancestors were buried: it is good for us to think often of our fathers' sepulchres; we are apt to dwell in our thoughts upon their honours and titles, their houses and estates, but let us also think of their sepulchres, and consider that they who have gone before us in the world, have also gone before us out of the world, and their monuments are mementos to us; there is a great respect owing to the memory of our fathers, that that be not injured. All nations, even those that have had no expectation of the resurrection of the dead, have looked upon the sepulchres of their ancestors as in some degree sacred, and not to be violated. (2.) He justifies himself in his grief: "I do well to be sad. Why should I not be so?" There is a time even for pious and prosperous men to be sad, and to show it. The best men must not think to antedate heaven by banishing all sorrowful thoughts; it is a vale of tears we pass through, and we must submit to the temper of the climate. (3.) He assigns the ruins of Jerusalem as the true cause of his grief. Note, All the grievances of the church, but especially its desolations, are, and ought to be, matter of grief and sadness to all good people, to all that have a concern for God's honour, and that are living members of Christ's mystical body, and are of a public spirit; they favour even Zion's dust, Ps. 102. 14.

IV. The encouragement which the king gave him to tell his mind, and the application he, thereupon, made in his heart to God, v. 4. The king had an affection for him, and was not pleased to see him melancholy; it is also probable that he had a kindness for the Jews' religion; he had discovered it before in the commission he gave to Ezra, who was a churchman, and now again in the power he put Nehemiah into, who was a statesman: want-

ing therefore only to know how he might be serviceable to Jerusalem, he asks this its anxious friend, "*For what dost thou make request?* Something thou wouldest have; what is it?" He was afraid to speak, (v. 2.) but this gave him boldness; much more may the invitation Christ has given us to pray, and to promise that we shall speed, enable us to come boldly to the throne of grace. Nehemiah immediately *prayed to the God of heaven*, that he would give him wisdom to act properly, and incline the king's heart to grant him his request. They that would find favour with kings, must secure the favour of the King of kings. He prayed to the God of heaven, as infinitely above even this mighty monarch. It was not a solemn prayer, (he had not an opportunity for that,) but a secret sudden ejaculation; he lifted up his heart to that God who understands the language of the heart, *Lord give me a mouth and wisdom; Lord, give me favour in the sight of this man*. Note, It is good to be much in pious ejaculations, especially on particular occasions: wherever we are, we have a way open heaven-ward; this will hinder no business, but further it rather, therefore let no business hinder this, but give rise to it rather. Nehemiah had prayed very solemnly with reference to this very occasion; (ch. 1. 12.) yet when it comes to the push, he prays again. Ejaculations and solemn prayers must not jostle out one another, but each have its place.

V. His humble petition to the king; when he had this encouragement, he presents it very modestly, and with submission to the king's wisdom, v. 5. But he is very particular; he asks for a commission to go as governor to Judah, to build the wall of Jerusalem, and to stay there for a certain time, so many months, we may suppose; and then either he had his commission renewed, or he went back, and was sent again, so that he presided there twelve years at least, ch. 5. 14. He also asked for a convey, (v. 7.) and an order upon the governors, not only to permit and suffer him to pass through their respective provinces, but to supply him with what he had occasion for; with another order upon the keeper of the forest of Lebanon to give him timber for the work he designed.

VI. The king's great favour to him, in asking him *when he would return*, v. 6. He intimated that he would not lose him, nor could be long without him; yet that, in order to gratify him, and do a real office of kindness to his people, he would spare him a while, and let him have what clauses he pleased, inserted in his commission, v. 8. Here was an immediate answer to his prayer, for the seed of Jacob never sought the God of Jacob in vain. In the account he gives of the success of his petition, he takes notice, 1. Of the presence of the queen; she sat by; (v. 6.) which (they say) was not usual in the Persian court, (Esth. 1. 11.) Whether the queen was his adversary, that would have hindered him, and he observes it, to the praise of God's powerful providence, that though she was by, yet he succeeded, or whether she was his true friend, and it is observed to the praise of God's kind providence, that she was present to help forward his request, is not certain. 2. Of the power and grace of God, he gained his point not according to his merit, his interest in the king, or his good management, but *according to the good hand of his God upon him*. Gracious souls take notice of God's hand, his good hand, in all events which turn in favour of them; *This is the Lord's doing*, and therefore doubly acceptable.

9. Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters.

(Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.) 10. When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. 11. So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. 12. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I *any* man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither *was there any* beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. 13. And I went out by night, by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon-well, and to the dung-port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. 14. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but *there was* no place for the beast that *was* under me to pass. 15. Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and *so* returned. 16. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told *it* to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. 17. Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. 18. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for *this* good work. 19. But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard *it*, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What *is* this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? 20. Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

We are here told,

I. How Nehemiah was dismissed by the court he was sent from; the king appointed *captains of the army and horsemen* to go *with him*, (v. 9.) both for his guard, and to show that he was a man whom *the king did delight to honour*, that all the king's servants might respect him accordingly. Whom the King of kings sends, he thus protects, he thus dignifies with a host of angels to attend them.

II. How he was received by the country he was sent to.

1. By the Jews and their friends at Jerusalem, we are told,

(1.) That while he concealed his errand, they took little notice of him; he was at *Jerusalem three days*, (v. 11.) and it does not appear that any of the great men of the city waited on him to congratulate him on his arrival, but he remained unknown: the king sent horsemen to attend him, but the Jews sent none to meet him, he had no beast with him, but that which he himself rode on, v. 12. Wise men, and those who are worthy of double honour, yet covet not to come with observation, to make a show, or make a noise, no not when they come with the greatest blessings. They that shortly are to have the *dominion in the morning*, the world now knows not, but they lie hid, 1 John 3. 1.

(2.) That though they took little notice of him, he took great notice of them and their state. He rose in the night, and viewed the ruins of the walls, probably, by moon-light, (v. 13.) that he might see what was to be done, and in what method they must go about it, whether the old foundation would serve, and what there was in the old materials that would be of use. Note, [1.] Good work is then like to be well done, when it is first well considered. [2.] It is the wisdom of those who are engaged in public business, as much as may be, to *see with their own eyes*, and not to proceed altogether upon the reports and representations of others, and yet, to do this without noise, and, if possible, unobserved. [3.] They that would build up the church's walls, must first take notice of the ruins of those walls. They that would know how to amend, must inquire what is amiss; what needs reformation, and what may serve as it is.

(3.) That when he discovered his design to the rulers and people, they cheerfully concurred with him in it. He did not tell them, at first, what he came about, (v. 16.) because he would not seem to do it for ostentation, and that if he found it impracticable, he might retreat the more honourably: upright humble men will not sound a trumpet before their alms, or any other of their good offices. But when he had viewed and considered the thing, and, probably, felt the pulse of the rulers and people, he told them *what God had put into his heart*, (v. 12.) even to *build up the wall of Jerusalem*, v. 17. Observe, [1.] How fairly he proposed it to them: "*Ye see the distress we are in*, how we lie exposed to the enemies that are round about us, how justly they reproach us, as foolish and despicable, how easily they may make a prey of us whenever they have a mind. *Come therefore and let us build up the wall.*" He does not undertake to do it without them; (it could not be the work of one man;) nor does he charge or command imperiously, though he had the king's commission, but in a friendly brotherly way, exhorts and excites them to join with him in this work. To encourage them hereto, he speaks of the design; *First*, As that which owed its original to the special grace of God. He takes not the praise of it to himself, as a good thought of his own, but acknowledges that God *put it into his heart*, and therefore they all ought to countenance it, (whatever is of God must be promoted,) and might hope to prosper in it, for what God puts men upon, he will own them in. *Secondly*, As that which owed its progress hitherto to the special providence of God. He produced the king's commission, told them how readily it was granted, and how forward the king was to favour his design, in which he saw the hand of his God *good upon him*. It would encourage both him and them to proceed in an undertaking which God had so remarkably smiled upon. Thus he proposed it to them; and, [2.] They presently came to a resolution, one and all, to concur with him; *Let us*

*rise up and build.* They are ashamed that they have sat still so long without so much as attempting this needful work, and now resolve to rise up out of their slothfulness, to bestir themselves, and to stir up one another. "*Let us rise up,*" that is, "*Let us do it with vigour, and diligence, and resolution, as those that are determined to go through with it.*" *So they strengthened their hands, their own and one another's, for this good work.* Note, *First,* Many a good work would find hands enough to be laid to it, if there were but *one good head to lead in it.* They all saw the desolations of Jerusalem, yet none proposed the repair of them. But when Nehemiah proposed it, they all consented to it. It is pity that a good motion should be lost, purely for want of one to move it, and to break the ice in it. *Secondly,* By *stirring up ourselves and one another* to that which is good, we *strengthen ourselves and one another* for it; for the great reason why we are weak in our duty, is because we are cold to it, indifferent and unresolved.

2. Let us now see how Nehemiah was received by those that wished ill to the Jews; whom God and his Israel blessed, they cursed.

(1.) When he did but show his face, it vexed them, *v.* 10. Sanballat and Tobiah, two of the Samaritans, but, by birth, the former a Moabite, the latter an Ammonite, when they saw one come armed with a commission from the king to do service to Israel, were *vexed exceedingly*, that all their little paltry arts to weaken Israel were thus baffled and frustrated by a fair, and noble, and generous, project to strengthen them. Nothing is a greater vexation to the enemies of good people, who have misrepresented them to princes as turbulent, and factious, and not fit to live, than to see them stand right in the opinion of their rulers, their innocence cleared, and their reproach rolled away, and that they are thought not only fit to live, but fit to be trusted. When they saw a man come in that manner, who professedly *sought the welfare of the children of Israel*, it vexed them to the heart; *The wicked shall see it, and be grieved.*

(2.) When he began to act, they set themselves to hinder him; but in vain, *v.* 19, 20. [1.] See here with what little reason the enemies discouraged them. They represented the undertaking as a silly thing; they *laughed us to scorn*, and *despised us* as foolish builders, that could not finish what we began. They represented the undertaking also as a wicked thing, no better than treason: *Will ye rebel against the king?* Because this was the old invidious charge, though now they had a commission from the king, and were taken under his protection, yet still they must be called *rebels*. [2.] See also with what good reason they slighted these discouragements. They bear up themselves with this, that they were the *servants of the God of heaven*, the only true and living God, that they were acting for him in what they did, and that therefore he would bear them out, and prosper them, though the heathen raged, *Ps.* 2. 1. They consider also that the reason why these enemies did so malign them, was, because they had no right in Jerusalem, but envied them their right in it. Thus may the impotent menaces of the church's enemies be easily despised by the church's friends.

### CHAP. III.

Saying and doing are often two things; many are ready to say, *Let us rise up and build*, who sit still and do nothing; like that fair-spoken son who said, *I go Sir, but went not*: the undertakers here were none of those. As soon as they had resolved to build the wall about Jerusalem, they lost no time, but set about it presently, as we find in this chapter. Let it never be said that we left the good work to be done to-morrow, which we might as well have done to-day. This chapter gives an account

of two things, 1. The names of the builders, which are recorded here to their honour, for they were such as herein discovered a great zeal for God and their country; both a pious and a public spirit; a great degree both of industry and courage; and what they did, was fit to be thus largely registered, both for their praise, and for the encouragement of others to follow their example. 11. The order of the building, they took it before them, and ended where they began. They repaired, 1. From the *sheep-gate*, to the *fish-gate*, *v.* 1, 2. 2. Thence to the *old-gate*, *v.* 3. 3. Thence to the *valley-gate*, *v.* 6. 4. Thence to the *dung-gate*, *v.* 13. 5. Thence to the *gate of the fountain*, *v.* 14. 6. Thence to the *water-gate*, *v.* 15. 7. Thence by the *horse-gate*, to the *sheep-gate*, again, where they began; (*v.* 27. 32.) and so they brought their work quite round the city.

I. **T**HEN Eliashib the high priest rose up, with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep-gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel. 2. And next unto him builded the men of Jericho. And next to them builded Zaccur the son of Imri. 3. But the fish-gate did the sons of Hassenaah build, who *also* laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. 4. And next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz. And next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabeel. And next unto them repaired Zadok the son of Baana. 5. And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord. 6. Moreover, the old gate repaired Jehoiada the son of Paseah, and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah; they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. 7. And next unto them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, unto the throne of the governor on this side the river. 8. Next unto him repaired Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, of the goldsmiths. Next unto him also repaired Hananiah the son of *one of* the apothecaries, and they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall. 9. And next unto them repaired Rephaiah the son of Hur, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem. 10. And next unto them repaired Jedaiah the son of Harumaph, even over against his house. And next unto him repaired Hattush the son of Hashabniah. 11. Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hashub the son of Pahath-moab, repaired the other piece, and the tower of the furnaces. 12. And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters. 13. The valley-gate repaired Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah; they built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof



and the bars thereof, and a thousand cubits on the wall unto the dung-gate. 14. But the dung-gate repaired Malchiah the son of Rechab, the ruler of part of Beth-haccerem; he built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. 15. But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpah: he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah by the king's garden, and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David. 16. After him repaired Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of the half part of Beth-zur, unto *the place* over against the sepulchres of David, and to the pool that was made, and unto the house of the mighty. 17. After him repaired the Levites, Rehum the son of Bani. Next unto him repaired Hashabiah, the ruler of the half part of Keilah, in his part. 18. After him repaired their brethren, Bavai the son of Henadad, the ruler of the half part of Keilah. 19. And next to him repaired Ezer the son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, another piece over against the going up to the armoury, at the turning *of the wall*. 20. After him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece, from the turning *of the wall* unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21. After him repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, another piece, from the door of the house of Eliashib even to the end of the house of Eliashib. 22. And after him repaired the priests, the men of the plain. 23. After him repaired Benjamin and Hashub, over against their house. After him repaired Azariah the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, by his house. 24. After him repaired Binui the son of Henadad, another piece, from the house of Azariah unto the turning *of the wall*, even unto the corner. 25. Palal the son of Uzai, over against the turning *of the wall*, and the tower which lieth out from the king's high house, that *was* by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh. 26. Moreover, the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel, unto *the place* over against the water-gate toward the east, and the tower that lieth out. 27. After them the Tekoites repaired another piece, over against the great tower that lieth out, even unto the wall of Ophel. 28. From above the horse-gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house. 29. After them repaired Zadok the son of Immer, over against his house. After him repaired also

Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east gate. 30. After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanan the sixth son of Zalaph, another piece. After him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, over against his chamber. 31. After him repaired Malchiah the goldsmith's son, unto the place of the Nethinims, and of the merchants, over against the gate Miphkad, and to the going up of the corner. 32. And between the going up of the corner unto the sheep-gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants.

The best way to know how to divide this chapter, is, to observe how the work was divided among the undertakers, that every one might know what he had to do, and mind it accordingly with a holy emulation, and desire to excel, yet without any contention, animosity, or separate interest. No strife appears among them, but which should do most for the public good.

Several things are observable in the account here given of the building of the wall about Jerusalem.

1. That Eliashib the High Priest, with his brethren the priests, led the van in this troop of builders, *v. 1*. Ministers should be first and foremost in every good work, for their office obliges them to teach and quicken by their example, as well as by their doctrine. If there be labour in it, who so fit as they to work? If danger, who so fit as they to venture? The dignity of the High Priest was very great, and obliged him to signalize himself in this service. The priests repaired the *sheep-gate*, so called, because through it the sheep were brought, that were to be sacrificed in the temple, and therefore the priests undertook the repair of it, whose *inheritance the offerings of the Lord made by fire were*. And of this gate only, it is said that *they sanctified it* with the word and prayer, and perhaps with sacrifices; either, (1.) Because it led to the temple: or, (2.) Because with this the building of the wall began, and it is probable (though they were at work in all parts of the wall at the same time) that was first finished, and therefore at this gate they solemnly committed their city and the walls of it to the divine protection; or, (3.) Because the priests were the builders of it, and it becomes ministers above others, being themselves in a peculiar manner sanctified to God, to sanctify to him all their performances, and to do even their common actions *after a godly sort*.

2. That undertakers were very many, who each took their share, some more and some less, in this work, according as their ability was. Note, What is to be done for the public good, every one should assist in, and further to the utmost of his place and power. United force will conquer that which no individual dares venture on. Many hands will make light work.

3. That many were active in this work, who were not themselves inhabitants of Jerusalem, and therefore consulted purely the public welfare, and not any private interest or advantage of their own. Here are the men of Jericho with the first, (*v. 2*) the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, (*v. 7*.) and Zanoah, *v. 13*. Every Israelite should lend a hand toward the building up of Jerusalem.

4. That several rulers, both of Jerusalem and of other cities, were active in this work, thinking themselves bound in honour to do the utmost that their wealth and power enabled them to do, for the furtherance of this good work. But it is observa-



ble that they are called rulers of *part*, or the *half part*, of their respective cities. One was ruler of the *half part* of Jerusalem, v. 12. Another of part of Beth-hacerem, v. 14. Another of part of Mizpah, v. 15. Another of the *half part* of Beth-zur, v. 16. One was ruler of *one half part*, and another of the *other half part*, at Keilah, v. 17, 18. Perhaps the Persian government would not intrust any one with a strong city, but appointed two to be a watch upon each other. Rome had two consuls.

5. Here is a just reproach fastened upon the nobles of Tekoa, that they *put not their necks to the work of their Lord*, (v. 5.) that is, they would not come under the yoke of an obligation to this service; as if the dignity and liberty of their peerage were their discharge from serving God and doing good, which are indeed the highest honour and the truest freedom. Let not nobles think any thing below them, by which they may advance the interests of their country; for what else is their nobility good for, but that it puts them in a higher and larger sphere of usefulness, than that in which inferior persons move?

6. Two persons joined in repairing the *old gate*, (v. 6.) and so were co-founders, and shared the honour of it between them. The good work which we cannot compass ourselves, we must be thankful to those that will go partners with us. Some think that this is called the *old gate*, because it belonged to the ancient Salem, which was said to be built by Melchizedek.

7. Several good honest tradesmen, as well as priests and rulers, were active in this work, *goldsmiths, apothecaries, merchants*, v. 8. 32. They did not think their callings excused them, nor plead that they could not leave their shops to attend the public business; knowing that what they lost, would certainly be made up to them by the blessing of God upon their callings.

8. Some ladies are spoken of as helping forward this work, *Shallum and his daughters*, (v. 12.) who, though not capable of personal service, yet, having their portions in their own hands, or being rich widows, contributed money for buying materials and paying workmen. St. Paul speaks of some good women that *laboured with him in the gospel*, Phil. 4. 3.

9. Of some it is said, that they repaired *over against their houses*, (v. 10, 23, 28, 29.) and of one who, it is likely, was only a lodger, that he repaired *over against his chamber*, v. 30. When a general good work is to be done, each should apply himself to that part of it, that falls nearest him, and is within his reach. If every one will sweep before his own door, the street will be clean; if every one will mend one, we shall be all mended. If he that has but a chamber, will repair before that, he does his part.

10. Of one it is said, that he *earnestly* repaired that which fell to his share, (v. 20.) he did it with an inflamed zeal; not that others were cold and indifferent, but he was most vigorous of any of them, and made himself remarkable for it. It is good to be thus *zealously affected in a good thing*; and it is probable that this good man's zeal provoked very many to take the more pains, and make the more haste.

11. Of one of these builders it is observed, that he was the *sixth son* of his father, v. 30. His five elder brethren, it seems, laid not their hand to this work, but he did. In doing that which is good, we need not stay to see our elders go before us; if they decline it, it does not therefore follow that we must. Thus the younger brother, if he be the better man, and does God and his generation better service, is indeed the better gentleman; those are most honourable, that are most useful.

12. Some of them that had *first done, helped their fellows*, and undertook another share, where they saw there was most need. Meremoth repaired, (v. 4.) and again v. 21. And the Tekoites, beside the piece they repaired, (v. 5.) undertook another piece, (v. 27.) which is the more remarkable, because their nobles set them a bad example by withdrawing from the service; which instead of serving them for an excuse to sit still, perhaps made them the more forward to double work, that by their zeal they might either shame, or atone for, the covetousness and carelessness of their nobles.

*Lastly*. Here is no mention of any particular share that Nehemiah himself had in this work. A namesake of his is mentioned, v. 16. But did he do nothing? Yes, though he undertook not any particular piece of the wall, yet he did more than any of them, for he had the oversight of them all; half of his servants worked where there was most need, and the other half stood sentinel, as we find after; (*ch.* 4. 16.) while he himself in his own person walked the rounds, directed and encouraged the builders, set his hand to the work where he saw occasion, and kept a watchful eye upon the motions of the enemy, as we shall find in the next chapter. The pilot needs not hale at a rope, it is enough for him to steer.

## CHAP. IV.

We left all hands at work for the building of the wall at Jerusalem. But such good work is not wont to be carried on without opposition; now here we are told what opposition was given to it, and what methods Nehemiah took to forward the work, notwithstanding that opposition. I. Their enemies reproached and ridiculed their undertaking, but their scoffs they answered with prayers, they heeded them not, but went on with their work notwithstanding, v. 1..6. II. They formed a bloody design against them, to hinder them by the force of arms, v. 7, 8, 10..12. To guard against this, Nehemiah prayed, (v. 9.) set guards, (v. 13.) and encouraged them to fight, (v. 14.) by which the design was broken, (v. 15.) and so the work was carried on with all needful precaution against a surprise, v. 16..23. In all this Nehemiah approved himself a man of great conduct and courage, as well as great piety.

1. **B**UT it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. 2. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burnt? 3. Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone-wall. 4. Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity; 5. And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked *thee* to anger before the builders. 6. So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

Here is,

I. The spiteful scornful reflection which Sanballat and Tobiah cast upon the Jews, for their attempt to build the wall about Jerusalem. The country rang of it presently, intelligence was brought of it to Samaria, that nest of enemies to the Jews and their prosperity; and here we are told how they received the tidings. 1. In *heart*, they were very angry at the undertaking, and had *great indignation*, v. 1. It vexed them that Nehemiah came to seek the welfare of the children of Israel; (ch. 2. 10.) but when they heard of this great undertaking for their good, they were out of all patience. They had hitherto pleased themselves with the thought that while Jerusalem was unwall'd, they could swallow it up, and make themselves masters of it when they pleased; but if it be walled, it will not only be fenced against them, but, by degrees, become formidable to them. The strength and safety of the church are the grief and vexation of its enemies. 2. In *word*, they despised it, and made it the subject of their ridicule, in which they did sufficiently display their venom; but good was brought out of it; for, looking upon it as a foolish undertaking that would sink under its own weight, they did not go about to obstruct it till it was too late. Let us see with what pride and malice they set themselves publicly to banter it. (4.) Sanballat speaks with scorn of the workmen, "*These feeble Jews*," (v. 2.) "what will they do for materials? will they revive the stones out of the rubbish?" And what mean they by being so hasty? Do they think to make the walling of a city but one day's work? And to keep the feast of dedication with sacrifice the next day? Poor silly people! See how ridiculous they make themselves!" (2.) Tobiah speaks with no less scorn of the work itself. He has his jest too, and must show his wit, v. 3. Profane scoffers sharpen one another. "Sorry work," says he, "they are like to make of it; they themselves will be ashamed of it; if a fox go up, not with his subtilty, but with his weight, he will break down their stone-wall." Many a good work has been thus looked upon with contempt by the proud and haughty scorers.

II. Nehemiah's humble and devout address to God, when he heard of these reflections. He had notice brought him of what they said; it is probable that they themselves sent him a message to this purport, to discourage him, hoping to jeer him out of his attempt; but he did not answer these fools according to their folly; he did not upbraid them with their weakness, but looked up to God by prayer. 1. He begs of God to take notice of the indignities that were done them, (v. 4.) and in this we are to imitate him; *Hear, O our God, for we are despised*. Note, (1.) God's people have often been a despised people, and loaded with contempt. (2.) God does, and will, hear all the slights that are put upon his people, and it is their comfort that he does so, and a good reason why they should be as though they were deaf, Ps. 38. 13, 14. "Thou art our God to whom we appeal; our cause needs no more than a fair hearing." 2. He begs of God to avenge their cause, and turn the reproach upon the enemies themselves; (v. 4, 5.) and this was spoken rather by a spirit of prophecy than by a spirit of prayer, and is not to be imitated by us who are taught of Christ to *pray for them that despitefully use and persecute us*; Christ himself prayed for those that reproach him, *Father, forgive them*. Nehemiah here prays, *Cover not their iniquity*. Note, (1.) They that cast contempt on God's people, do but prepare everlasting shame for themselves. (2.) It is a sin from which sinners are seldom recovered. Doubtless, Nehemiah had reason to think the hearts of those sinners were despe-

ately hardened, so that they would never repent of it, else he would not have prayed that it might *never be blotted out*. The reason he gives, is, not *They have abused us*, but *They have provoked thee*, and that *before the builders*, to whom, it is likely, they sent a spiteful message. Note, *Therefore* we should be angry at the malice of persecutors, not because it is abusive to us, but because it is offensive to God; and on that we may ground an expectation that God will appear against it, Ps. 74. 18, 22.

II. The vigour of the builders, notwithstanding these reflections, v. 6. They made such good speed, that in a little time they had run up the wall to half its height, *for the people had a mind to work*, their hearts were upon it, and they would have it forwarded. Note, 1. Then good work goes on well, when people have a mind to it. 2. The reproaches of enemies should rather quicken us to our duty, than drive us from it.

7. But it came to pass, *that* when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, *and* that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, 8. And conspired all of them together to come *and* to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. 9. Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. 10. And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and *there is* much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall. 11. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. 12. And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us *they will be upon you*. 13. Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, *and* on the higher places, I even set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14. And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the LORD *which is* great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses. 15. And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.

We have here,

I. The conspiracy which the Jews' enemies formed against them, to stay the building by slaying the builders. The conspirators were not only Sanballat and Tobiah, but other neighbouring people whom they had drawn into the plot. They flattered themselves with a fancy that the work would soon

stand still of itself; but when they heard that it went on and prospered, they were angry at the Jews for being so hasty to push the work forward, and angry at themselves for being so slow in opposing it, (v. 7.) *they were very wroth. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel.* Nothing would serve but they would *fight against Jerusalem*, v. 8. Why, what quarrel had they with the Jews? Had they done them any wrong? Or did they design them any? No, they lived peaceably by them; but it was merely out of envy and malice; they hated the Jews' piety, and were therefore vexed at their prosperity; and sought their ruin. Observe, 1. How unanimous they were; *They conspired all of them together*, though of different interests among themselves, yet one in their opposition to the word of God. 2. How close they were; they said, "*They shall not know, neither see*, till we have them at our mercy." Thus they took crafty counsel, and digged deep, to hide it from the Lord, and promised themselves security and success from the secrecy of their management. 3. How cruel they were; *We will come and slay them*. If nothing less than the murder of the workmen will put a stop to the work, they will not stick at that; nay, it is their blood they thirst for, and they are glad of any pretence to glut themselves with it. 4. What the design was, and how confident they were of success; it was to *cause the work to cease*, (v. 11.) and this they were confident that they should effect. The hindering of good work is that which bad men aim at and promise themselves; but good work is God's work, and it shall prosper.

II. The discouragements which the builders themselves laboured under. At the very time when the adversaries said, *Let us cause the work to cease*; Judah said, "*Let us even let it fall, for we are not able to go forward with it*," v. 10. They represent the labourers as tired, and the remaining difficulties, even of that first part of their work, the removing of the rubbish, as insuperable, and therefore they think it advisable to desist for the present. Can Judah, that warlike valiant tribe, sneak thus? Active leading men have many times as much ado to grapple with the fears of their friends, as with the terrors of their enemies.

III. The information that was brought to Nehemiah of the enemies' designs, v. 12. There were *Jews that dwelt by them*, in the country, who, though they had not zeal enough to bring them to Jerusalem, to help their brethren in building the wall, yet, having by their situation opportunity to discover the enemies' motions, had so much honesty and affection to the cause, as to give intelligence of it; nay, that it might be the more credited, they came themselves to give notice of it; and they said it ten times, repeating it as men in earnest, and under a concern, and the report was confirmed by many witnesses; the intelligence they gave, is expressed abruptly, and finds work for the critics, to make out the sense of it; which perhaps is designed to intimate that they gave this intelligence as men out of breath and in confusion, whose very looks would make up the deficiencies of their words. I think it may be read, without supplying any thing, "*Whatever place ye turn to, they are against us*," so that you have need to be upon your guard on all sides." Note, God has many ways of bringing to light, and so bringing to nought, the devices and designs of his and his church's enemies. Even the cold and feeble Jews, that contentedly dwell by them, shall be made to serve as spies upon them; nay, rather than fail, *a bird of the air shall carry their voice*.

V. The pious and prudent methods which Nehemiah, hereupon, took to baffle the designs, and to cure his work and workmen; it is said, (v. 14.)

he looked. 1. He looked up, engaged God for him, and put himself and his cause under the divine protection, (v. 9.) *We made our prayer unto our God*. That was the way of this good man, and should be our way; all his cares, all his griefs, all his fears, he spread before God, and thereby made himself easy. This was the first thing he did; before he used any means, he made his prayer to God, for with him we must always begin. 2. He looked about him. Having prayed, he *set a watch against them*. The instructions Christ has given us in our spiritual warfare, agree with this example, Matth. 26. 41. *Watch, and pray*. If we think to secure ourselves by prayer only, without watchfulness, we are slothful, and tempt God. If by watchfulness, without prayer, we are proud, and slight God; and, either way, we forfeit his protection.

Observe, (1.) How he posted the guard, v. 13. In the lower places, he set them behind the wall, that they might annoy the enemy over it, as breast-work; but in the higher places, where the wall was raised to its full height, he set them upon it, that from the top of it they might throw down stones or darts upon the heads of the assailants: he set them after their families, that mutual relation might engage them to mutual assistance. (2.) How he animated and encouraged them, v. 14. He observed even the nobles and rulers themselves, as well as the rest of the people, to be in a great consternation upon the intelligence that was brought them, and ready to conclude that they were all undone, by which their hands were weakened both for work and war, and therefore he endeavours to silence their fears; "*Come*," says he, "*be not afraid of them*, but behave yourselves valiantly, considering, [1.] Whom you fight under; you cannot have a better Captain, *remember the Lord, who is great and terrible*; you think your enemies great and terrible, but what are they in comparison with God, especially in opposition to him? He is great above them to control them, and will be terrible to them when he comes to reckon with them." Those that with an eye of faith see the church's God to be great and terrible, will see the church's enemies to be mean and despicable. The reigning fear of God is the best antidote against the ensnaring fear of man. He that is afraid of *a man that shall die*, forgets *the Lord his maker*, Isa. 51. 12, 13. [2.] "*Whom you fight for*; you cannot have a better cause, you fight for *your brethren*, (Ps. 122. 8.) *your sons, and your daughters*. All that is dear to you in this world, lies at stake, therefore *behave yourselves valiantly*."

V. The happy disappointment which this gave to the enemy, v. 15. When they found that their design was discovered, and that the Jews were upon their guard, they concluded that it was to no purpose to attempt any thing, but that *God had brought their counsel to nought*. They knew they could not gain their point but by surprise, and if their plot was known, it was quashed. The Jews, hereupon, *returned every one to his work*, with so much the more cheerfulness, because they saw plainly that God owned it, and owned them in the doing of it. Note, God's care of our safety should engage and encourage us to go on with vigour in our duty. As soon as ever a danger is over let us *return to our work*, and trust God another time.

16. And it came to pass, from that time forth, *that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah*. 17. They

which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, *every one* with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other *hand* held a weapon. 18. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and *so* builded. And he that sounded the trumpet *was* by me. 19. And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another: 20. In what place *therefore* ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us. 21. So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears, from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. 22. Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. 23. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, *saving that* every one put them off for washing.

When the builders had so far reason to think the design of the enemies broken, *as to return to their work*, yet they were not so secure as to lay down their arms, knowing how restless and unwearied they were in their attempts, and that, if one design failed, they would be hatching another. Thus must we watch always against our spiritual enemies, and not expect that our warfare will be accomplished till our work is. See what course Nehemiah took, that the people might hold themselves in a readiness, in case there should be an attack.

1. While one half was at work, the other half was under their arms, holding *spears, and shields, and bows*, not only for themselves but for the labourers too, who would immediately quit their work, and betake themselves to their weapons, upon the first alarm, *v. 16.* It is probable that they changed services at such and such hours, which would relieve the fatigue of both, and particularly would be an ease to the *bearer of burthens*, whose *strength was decayed*; (*v. 10.*) while they held the weapons, they were eased and yet not idle. They thus dividing their time between the trowels and the spears, are said to *work with one hand*, and hold their weapons *with the other*, (*v. 17.*) which cannot be understood literally, for the work would require both hands, but it intimates that they were equally employed in both. Thus must we work out our salvation with the *weapons of our warfare* in our hand; for in every duty we must expect to meet with opposition from our spiritual enemies, against whom we must still be *fighting the good fight of faith*.

2. Every builder had a sword by his side, (*v. 18.*) which he could carry without hindering his labour. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit, which we ought to have always at hand, and ever to seek, both in our labours, and in our conflicts, as christians.

3. Care was taken both to get, and give, early notice of the approach of the enemy, in case they should endeavour to surprise them. Nehemiah kept a trumpeter always by him to sound an alarm

upon the first intimation of danger. The work was large, and the builders were dispersed; for in all parts of the wall they were labouring at the same time. Nehemiah continually walked round to oversee the work, and encourage the workmen, and so would have speedy intelligence if the enemy made an attack, of which, by sound of trumpet, he would soon give notice to all, and they must immediately repair to him with a full assurance that their *God* would *fight for them*, *v. 18.* 20. When they acted as workmen, it was requisite they should be dispersed wherever there was work to do; but when, as soldiers, it was requisite they should come into close order, and be found in a body. Thus should the labourers in Christ's building be ready to unite against a common foe.

4. The inhabitants of the villages were ordered to lodge within Jerusalem, with their servants, not only that they might be the nearer to their work in the morning, but that they might be ready to help in case of an attack in the night, *v. 22.* The strength of a city lies more in its hands than in its walls; secure them, and God's blessing upon them, and be secure.

5. Nehemiah himself, and all his men, kept close to their business. The spears were held up, with the sight of them to terrify the enemy, not only from sun to sun, but from twilight to twilight, every day, *v. 21.* Thus ought we always to be upon our guard against our spiritual enemies, not only (as here) while *it is light*, but when *it is dark*, for they are the *rulers of the darkness of this world*. Nay, so very intent was Nehemiah upon his work, and so fast did he hold his servants to it, that while the heat of the business lasted, neither he himself, nor his attendants, went into bed, but every night lay and slept in their clothes, (*v. 23.*) except that they shifted them now and then, either for cleanliness, or in a case of ceremonial pollution. It was a sign that their heart was upon their work, when they could not find time to dress and undress, but resolved they would be at all times ready for service. Then good work is likely to go on successfully, when these that labour in it, thus make a business of it.

## CHAP. V.

How bravely Nehemiah, as a wise and faithful governor, stood upon his guard against the attacks of enemies abroad, we read in the foregoing chapter. Here we have him no less bold and active to redress grievances at home, and, having kept them from being destroyed by their enemies, to keep them from destroying one another. Here is, I. The complaint which the poor made to him, of the great hardships which the rich (of whom they were forced to borrow money) put upon them, *v. 1. . 5.* II. The effectual course which Nehemiah took both to reform the oppressors, and to relieve the oppressed, *v. 6. . 13.* III. The good example which he himself, as governor, set them of compassion and tenderness, *v. 14. . 19.*

1. **A**ND there was a great cry of the people, and of their wives, against their brethren the Jews. 2. For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, *are many*; therefore we take up corn *for them*, that we may eat and live. 3. *Some* also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. 4. There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, *and that upon* our lands and vineyards. 5. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our

brethren, our children as their children : and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and *some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already, neither is it in our power to redeem them*; for other men have our lands and vineyards.

We have here the tears of the oppressed, which Solomon considered, Eccl. 4. 1. Let us consider them as here they are dropped before Nehemiah, whose office it was, as governor, *to deliver the poor and needy, and rid them out of the hand of the wicked oppressors*, Ps. 82. 4. Hard times and hard hearts made the poor miserable.

I. The times they lived in, were hard. There was a dearth of corn, (v. 3.) probably, for want of rain, with which God had chastised their neglect of his house, (Hag. 1. 9-11.) and the non-payment of their church-dues, Mal. 3. 9, 10. Thus foolish sinful men bring God's judgments upon themselves, and then fret and complain of them. When the markets are high, and provisions scarce and dear, the poor soon feel from it, and are pinched by it. Blessed be God for the mercy, and God deliver us from the sin, of *fulness of bread*, Ezek. 16. 49. That which made the scarcity here complained of, the more grievous, was, that their *sons and their daughters were many*, v. 2. The families that were most necessitous, were most numerous; here were the mouths, but where was the meat? Some have estates and no children to inherit them, others have children and no estates to leave them; those who have both, have reason to be thankful, those who have neither, may the more easily be content. Those who have great families and little substance, must learn to live by faith in God's providence and promise; and those who have little families and great substance, must *make their abundance a supply for the wants of others*. But this was not all, as corn was dear, so the taxes were high: the king's tribute must be paid, v. 4. This mark of their captivity still remained upon them. Perhaps it was a poll-money that was required, and then, their sons and their daughters being many, it rose the higher. The more they had to maintain, (a hard case!) the more they had to pay. Now, it seems, they had not wherewithal of their own to buy corn and pay taxes, but were necessitated to borrow. Their families came poor out of Babylon, they had been at great expense in building them houses, and had not yet got up their strength when these new burthens came upon them. The straits of poor housekeepers who make hard shift to get an honest livelihood, and sometimes want what is fitting for them and their families, are well worthy the compassionate consideration of those, who either with their wealth, or with their power, are in a capacity to help them.

II. The persons they dealt with, were hard. Money must be had, but it must be borrowed, and they that lent them money, taking advantage of their necessity, were very hard upon them, and made a prey of them. 1. They exacted interest from them at twelve *per cent.* the hundredth part every month, v. 11. If men borrow large sums, to trade with, to increase their stocks, or to purchase land, there is no reason but the lender should share with the borrower in his profit; or if to spend upon their lusts, or repair what they have so spent, why should they not pay for their extravagancies? But if the poor borrow, to maintain their families, and we be able to help them, it is certain we ought either to lend freely what they have occasion for, or (if they be not likely to repay it) to give freely something towards it. Nay, 2. They forced them

to mortgage to them their lands and houses for the securing of the money (v. 3.) and not only so, but took the profits of them for interest, (v. 5. compare v. 11.) that by degrees they might make themselves masters of all they had. Yet this was not the worst. 3. They took their children for bond-servants, to be enslaved or sold at pleasure, v. 5. This they complain of most sensibly, as that which touched them in a tender part, and they aggravate it with this, "*Our children are as their children*, as dear to us as their's are to them; not only of the same human nature, and entitled to the honours and liberties of that (Mal. 2. 10. Job 31. 15.) but of the same holy nation, free-born Israelites, and dignified with the same privileges. Our flesh carries in it the sacred seal of the covenant of circumcision, as well as *the flesh of our brethren*; yet our heirs must be their slaves, and *it is not in our power to redeem them*." This they made an humble remonstrance of to Nehemiah, not only because they saw he was a great man that *could* relieve them, but a good man that *would*. Whither should the injured poor flee for succour but *to the shields of the earth*? Whither but to the chancery, to the charity, in the royal breast, and those deputed by it for relief against the *summum jus—the extremity of the law*?

We will leave Nehemiah hearing the complaint, and inquiring into the truth of the complainants' allegations, (for the clamours of the poor are not always just,) while we sit down and look, (1.) With a gracious compassion upon the oppressed, and lament the hardships which many in the world are groaning under, putting our souls into their souls' stead, and remembering in our prayers and succours them that are burthened, as burthened with them. (2.) With a gracious indignation at the oppressors, and abhorrence of their pride and cruelty, who drink the tears, the blood, of those they have under their feet. But let those who show no mercy, expect *judgment without mercy*. It was an aggravation of the sin of these oppressing Jews, that they were themselves so lately delivered out of the house of bondage, which obliged them in gratitude to *undo the heavy burthen*, Isa. 58. 6.

6. And I was very angry when I heard their cry, and these words. 7. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, You exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them: 8. And I said unto them, We, after our ability, have redeemed our brethren the Jews, *which were sold unto the heathen*; and will you even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer. 9. Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? 10. I likewise, *and my brethren, and my servants*, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury. 11. Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive-yards, and their houses, also the hundredth *part* of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them. 12. Then said they, We

will restore *them*, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise 13. Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise.

It should seem, the foregoing complaint was made to Nehemiah, at the time when he had his head and hands as full as possible of the public business about building the wall; yet, perceiving it to be just, he did not reject it because it was unseasonable; he did not chide the petitioners, nor fall into a passion with them, for disturbing him, when they saw how much he had to do; a fault which men of business are too often guilty of, nor did he so much as adjourn the hearing of the causes or proceedings upon it till he had more leisure. The case called for speedy interposition, and therefore he applied himself immediately to the consideration of it, knowing that, let him build Jerusalem's walls ever so high, so thick, so strong, the city could not be safe while such abuses as these were tolerated.

Now observe, What method he took for the redress of this grievance, which was so threatening to the public.

I. He *was very angry*; (v. 6.) he expressed a great displeasure at it, as a very bad thing. Note, It well becomes rulers to show themselves angry at sin, that by the anger itself they may be excited to their duty, and by the expressions of it others may be deterred from evil.

II. He *consulted with himself*; v. 7. By this it appears that his anger was not excessive, but kept within bounds, that though his spirit was provoked, he did not say or do any thing unadvisedly. Before he rebuked the nobles, he consulted with himself what to say, and when, and how. Note, Reproofs must be given with great consideration, that what is well-meant, may not come short of its end, for want of being well managed. It is the *reproofs of instruction*, that *giveth life*. Even wise men lose the benefit of their wisdom sometimes for want of consulting with themselves, and taking time to deliberate.

III. He *rebuked the nobles and rulers*, who were the monied men, and whose power perhaps made them the more bold to oppress. Note, Even nobles and rulers, if they do that which is evil, ought to be told of it by proper persons. Let no man imagine that his dignity sets him above reproof.

IV. He *set a great assembly against them*; he called the people together to be witnesses of what he said, and to bear their testimony (which the people will generally be forward to do) against the oppressions and extortions their rulers were guilty of. Ezra and Nehemiah were both of them very wise, good, useful, men, yet, in cases not unlike, there was a great deal of difference between their management: when Ezra was told of the sin of the rulers in marrying strange wives, he rent his clothes, and wept, and prayed, and was hardly persuaded to attempt a reformation, fearing it to be impracticable, for he was a man of a mild tender spirit; when Nehemiah was told of as bad a thing, he kindled immediately, reproached the delinquents, incensed the people against them, and never rested till, by all the rough methods he could use, he forced them to reform; for he was a man

of a hot and eager spirit. Note, 1. Very holy men may differ much from each other in their natural temper, and in other things that result from it. 2. God's work may be done, well done, and successfully, and yet different methods taken in the doing of it; which is a good reason why we should neither arraign the management of others, nor make our own a standard. There are diversities of operation, but the same Spirit.

V. He fairly reasoned the case with them, and showed them the evil of what they did: the regular way of reforming men's lives, is, to endeavour, in the first place, to convince their consciences. Several things he offered to their consideration, which are so pertinent and just, that it appeared he had consulted with himself. He lays it before them, 1. That those whom they oppressed, were their brethren; *Ye exact every one of his brother*; it was bad enough to oppress strangers, but much worse to oppress their poor brethren, from whom the divine law did not allow them to *take any usury*, Deut. 23. 19, 20. 2. That they were but lately redeemed *out of the hand of the heathen*; the body of the people was so by the wonderful providence of God, some particular persons among them were so, who, beside their share in the general captivity, were in servitude to heathen masters, and ransomed at the charge of Nehemiah and other pious and well disposed persons. "Now," says he, "have we taken all this pains to get their liberty out of the hands of the heathen, and shall their own rulers enslave them? What an absurd thing is this! Must we be at the same trouble and expense to redeem them from you, as we were to redeem them from Babylon?" v. 8. Those whom God by his grace has made free, ought not to be again brought under *a yoke of bondage*, Gal. 5. 1. 1 Cor. 7. 23. 3. That it was a great sin thus to oppress the poor; (v. 9.) "*It is not good that ye do*; though you get money by it, you contract guilt by it, and *ought ye not to walk in the fear of God?*" Certainly you ought, for you profess religion, and relation to him; and if you walk in the fear of God, you will not be either covetous of worldly gain, or cruel toward your brethren." They that walk in the fear of God, will not dare to do a wicked thing, Job 31. 13, 14, 23. 4. That it was a great scandal, and a reproach to their profession; "*Consider the reproach of the heathen our enemies*, enemies to us, to our God, and to our holy religion. They will be glad of any occasion to speak against us, and this will give them great occasion; they will say, These Jews that profess so much devotion to God, see how barbarous they are one to another." Note, (1.) All that profess religion, should be very careful that they do nothing to expose themselves to the reproach of them that are without, lest religion be wounded through their sides. (2.) Nothing exposes religion more to the reproach of its enemies, than the worldliness and hard-heartedness of the professors of it. 5. That he himself had set them a better example, (v. 10.) which he enlarges upon afterward, v. 14, &c. They that rigorously insist upon their right themselves, will with a very ill grace persuade others to recede from their's.

VI. He earnestly pressed them not only not to make their poor neighbours any more such hard bargains, but to restore that which they had got into their hands, v. 11. See how familiarly he speaks to them; *Let us leave off this usury*, putting himself in, as becomes reprovers, though far from being any way guilty of the crime. See how earnestly, and yet humbly, he persuaded them; *I pray you leave off*; and, *I pray you restore*; though he had authority to command, yet, *for love's sake*, he *rather beseeches*. See how particularly he presses



them to be kind to the poor; to give them up their mortgages, put them again in possession of their estates, remit the interest, and give them time to pay in the principal. He urged them to their loss, yet, urging them to their duty, it would be, at length, to their advantage. What we charitably *forgive* will be remembered and recompensed, as well as what we charitably *give*.

VII. He laid them under all the obligations possible to do what he pressed them to. 1. He got a promise from them; (*v. 12.*) *We will restore them.* 2. He sent for the priests to give them their oath, that they would perform this promise; now that their convictions were strong, and they seemed resolved, he would keep them to it. 3. He bound them by a solemn curse or execration, hoping that would strike some awe upon them; *So let God shake out every man that performeth not this promise, v. 13.* This was a threatening that he would certainly do so, to which the people said, *Amen*, as to those curses at mount Ebal, (*Deut. 27.*) that their throats might be cut with their own tongues, if they should falsify their engagement, and that by the dread of that they might be kept to their promise: with this *Amen* the people *praised the Lord*: so far were they from promising with regret, that they promised with all possible expressions of joy and thankfulness. Thus David, when he took God's vows upon him, *sang and gave praises*, Ps. 56, 12. This was well, but that which follows, was better: they *did according to his promise*, and adhered to what they had done, not as their ancestors in a like case, who re-enslaved those whom, a little before, they had released, Jer. 34, 10, 11, 18. Good promises are good things, but good performances are all in all.

14. Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, *that is*, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. 15. But the former governors that *had been* before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God. 16. Yea, also, I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work. 17. Moreover, *there were* at my table a hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, besides those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. 18. Now *that* which was prepared *for me* daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. 19. Think upon me, my God, for good, *according to all that I have done for this people.*

Nehemiah had mentioned his own practice, as an inducement to the nobles not to burthen the poor, not with just demands; here he relates more particularly what his practice was, not in pride or vain-glory, or to pass a compliment upon himself, but as

an inducement both to his successors, and to the inferior magistrates, to be as tender as might be of the people's ease.

I. He intimates what had been the way of his predecessors, *v. 15.* He does not name them, because what he had to say of them, was not to their honour, and, in such a case, it is good to spare names; but the people knew how chargeable they had been, and how dear the country paid for all the benefit of their government. The government allows them forty shekels of silver, which was near five pounds, (so much a day, it is probable,) but beside that, they obliged the people to furnish them with bread, and wine, insisting upon it as perquisites of their office, and not only so, but they suffered their servants to squeeze the people, and to get all they could out of them. Note, 1. It is no new thing for those who are in public places, to seek themselves more than the public welfare, nay and to serve themselves by the public loss. 2. Masters must be accountable for all the acts of fraud and injustice, violence and oppression, which they connive at in their servants.

II. He tells us what had been his way. In general, he had not done as the former governors did; he would not, he durst not, *because of the fear of God.* He had an awe of God's majesty, and a dread of his wrath. And, 1. That restrained him from oppressing the people; those that truly fear God, will not dare to do any thing cruel or unjust. 2. It was purely that which restrained him; he was thus generous, not that he might have praise of men, or serve a turn by his interest in the people, but purely for conscience-sake, because of the fear of God; that will not only be a powerful, but an acceptable, principle both of justice and charity. What a good hand his predecessors made of their place, appeared by the estates they raised; but Nehemiah, for his part, got nothing, except the satisfaction of doing good; *Neither bought we any land, v. 16.* Say not then that he was a bad husband, but that he was a good governor, who aimed not to feather his own nest.

Let us remember the words of the Lord, how he said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*, Acts 20, 35. And observe here, (1.) How little Nehemiah received of what he might have required; he did the work of the governor, but he did not *eat the bread of the governor*, (*v. 14.*) did not require it, *v. 18.* So far was he from extorting more than his due, that he never demanded that, but lived upon what he had got in the king of Persia's court, and his own estate in Judea: the reason he gives for this piece of self denial, is, *Because the bondage was heavy upon the people.* He might have used the common excuse for rigour in cases, that it would be a wrong to his successors not to demand his dues; but let them look to themselves, he considers the present state of the Jews and while they groaned under so much hardship, he could not find in his heart to add to their burthen, but would rather lessen his own estate than ruin them. Note, In our demands, we must consider not only the justice of them, but the ability of those on whom we make them; where there is nothing to be had, we know who loses his right. (2.) How much he gave, which he might have withheld. [1.] *His servants' work, v. 16.* The servants of princes think themselves excused from labour; but Nehemiah's servants, by his order, no doubt, were *all gathered to the work.* Those that have many servants, should contrive how they may do good with them, and keep them well employed. [2.] *His own meat, v. 17, 18.* He kept a very good table, not on certain days, but constantly; he had many honourable guests, at least, 150 of his own countrymen, persons of the first rank, beside strangers that came to him



upon business; and he had plentiful provisions for his guests, beef, and mutton, and fowl, and all sorts of wine. Let those in public places remember that they were preferred to do good, not to enrich themselves; and let lesser people learn to use *hospitality one to another without grudging*, 1 Pet. 4. 9.

Lastly, He concludes with a prayer; (v. 19.) *Think upon me, my God, for good.* 1. Nehemiah here mentions what he had done for his people, not in pride, as boasting of himself, nor in passion, as upbraiding them, nor does it appear that he had occasion to do it in his own vindication, as Paul had to relate his like self-denying tenderness toward the Corinthians, but to shame the rulers out of their oppressions; let them learn of him to be neither greedy in their demands, nor palsy in their expenses, and then they would have the credit and comfort of it, as he had. 2. He mentions it to God, in prayer, not as if he thought he had hereby merited any favour from God, as a debt, but to show that he looked not for any recompense of his generosity from men, but depended upon God only to make up to him what he had lost and laid out for his honour; and he reckoned the favour of God reward enough; "If God do but *think upon me for good*, I have enough." His thoughts to us-ward are our happiness, Ps. 40. 5. He refers himself to God, to recompense him in such a manner as he pleased; "If men forget me, let my God think on me, and I desire no more."

## CHAP. VI.

The cries of oppressed poverty being stilled, we are now to inquire how the building of the wall goes forward, and in this chapter, we find it carried on with vigour, and finished with joy, notwithstanding the restless attempts of the gates of hell to hinder it. How the Jews' enemies were baffled in their design to put a stop to it by force, we read before, ch. 4. Here we find how their endeavours to drive Nehemiah off from it, were frustrated. I. When they courted him to an interview, with design to do him a mischief, he would not stir, v. 1. 4. II. When they would have made him believe his undertaking was represented as seditious and treasonable, he regarded not the insinuation, v. 5. 9. III. When they hired pretended prophets to advise him to retire into the temple for his own safety, still he kept his ground, 10. 14. IV. Notwithstanding the secret correspondence that was kept up between them and some false and treacherous Jews, the work was finished in a short time, v. 15. 19. Such as these were the struggles between the church and its enemies; but great is God's cause, and will be prosperous and victorious.

1. **N**OW it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and *that* there was no breach left therein, (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates,) 2. That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in *some one of* the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. 3. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, *I am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? 4. Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner. 5. Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me, in like manner, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand; 6. Wherein *was* written, It is re-

ported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith *it*, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. 7. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, *There is a king in Judah*: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together. 8. Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart. 9. For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, *O God*, strengthen my hands.

Two plots upon Nehemiah we have here an account of; how cunningly they were laid by his enemies, and how happily frustrated by God's good providence, and his prudence.

I. A plot to trepan him into a snare. The enemies had an account of the good forwardness the work was in, that all the breaches of the wall were made up, so that they looked upon it as good as done; though at that time the *doors of the gates* were off the hinges, v. 1. They must therefore, now or never, by one bold stroke, take off Nehemiah; they heard how well guarded he was, so that there was no attacking him upon the spot; they will therefore try by all the arts of wheedling to get him among them. Observe, 1. With what hellish subtilty they courted him to meet them, not in any city, lest that should have given cause to suspect that they intended to secure him, but in a village in the lot of Benjamin, "*Come, let us meet together* to consult about the common interests of our provinces;" or they would have him think that they coveted his friendship, and would be glad to be better acquainted with him, in order to a good understanding between them, and the settling of a good correspondence. But they thought to do him a mischief; it is probable that he had some secret intelligence given him, that they designed to imprison or murder him; or, he knew them so well, that, without breach of charity, he concluded they aimed at his life, and therefore, when they *spake fair*, he *believed them not*. 2. See with what heavenly wisdom he declined the motion. His *God did instruct him* to give them that prudent answer by messengers of his own, "*I am doing a great work*, am very busy, and am loath to let the work stand still while I leave it to *come down to you*," v. 3. His care was, that the work might not cease; he knew it would if he left it ever so little; and *why should it cease while I come down to you?* He says nothing of his jealousies, nor reproaches them for their treacherous design, but gives them a good reason, and one of the true reasons, why he would not come. Compliment must always give way to business. Let those that are tempted to idle merry meetings by their vain companions, thus answer the temptation, "We have work to do, and must not neglect it." Four times they attacked him with the same solicitation, and he as often returned the same answer, which, we may suppose, was very vexatious to them; for really it was the ceasing of the work that they aimed at, and it would make them despair of breaking the undertaking, to see the undertaker so intent upon it. *I answered them* (says he) *after the same manner*, v. 4. Note, We must never suffer ourselves to be overcome by the greatest

importunity to do any thing sinful or imprudent; but, when we are attacked with the same temptation, must still resist it with the same reason and resolution.

II. A plot to terrify him from his work. Could they but drive him off, the work would cease of course. This therefore Sanballat attempts, but in vain. 1. He endeavours to possess Nehemiah with an apprehension that his undertaking to build the walls of Jerusalem was generally represented as factious and seditious, and would be resented accordingly at court, *v. 5-7*. The best men, even in their most innocent and excellent performances, have lain under this imputation. This is written to him in an open letter, as a thing generally known and talked of, that it was reported among the nations, and Gashmu will aver it for truth, that Nehemiah was aiming to make himself king, and to shake off the Persian yoke. Note, It is common for that which is the sense only of the malicious, to be falsely represented by them as the sense of the many. Now Sanballat pretends to inform Nehemiah of this as a friend, that he might hasten to court to clear himself, or stay his proceedings for fear they should be thus misconstrued; at least, upon this surmise, he urges him to give him the meeting. "*Let us take counsel together*, how to quell the report;" hoping by this means either to take him off, or, at least, to take him off from his business. Thus were his words *softer than oil*, and yet *war was in his heart*, and he hoped, like Judas, to kiss and kill. But surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird; Nehemiah was soon aware what they aimed at, to *weaken their hands from the work*, (*v. 9*.) and therefore not only denied that such things were true, but that they were reported; he was better known than to be thus suspected. 2. Thus he escaped the snare, and kept his ground, nor would he be frightened by winds and clouds from sowing and reaping. Suppose it was thus reported, we must never omit known duty merely for fear it should be misconstrued, but, while we keep a good conscience, let us trust God with our good name. But indeed it was not thus reported. God's people, though sufficiently loaded with reproach, yet are not really fallen so low in reputation as some would have them thought to be.

In the midst of his complaint of their malice, in endeavouring to frighten him, and so weaken his hands, he lifts up his heart to Heaven in this short prayer, *Now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands*. It is the great support and relief of good people, that in all their straits and difficulties they have a good God to go to, from whom by faith and prayer, they may fetch in grace to silence their fears, and *strengthen their hands*, when their enemies are endeavouring to fill them with fears, and weaken their hands. When, in our christian work and warfare, we are entering upon any particular services or conflicts, this is a good prayer for us to put up, "I have such a duty to do, such a temptation to grapple with; *now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands*." Some read it, not as a prayer, but as a holy resolution, (for *O God*, is supplied in our translation,) *Now therefore I will strengthen my hands*. Note, Christian fortitude will be sharpened by opposition. Every temptation to draw us from our duty, should quicken us so much the more to duty.

10. Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabeel, who *was* shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple; and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay

thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. 11. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is *there* that *being* as I *am*, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. 12. And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13. Therefore *was* he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have *matter* for an evil report, that they might reproach me. 14. My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets that would have put me in fear.

The Jews' enemies leave no stone unturned, no way untried, to take Nehemiah off from building the wall about Jerusalem; in order to this, they had tried to fetch him into the country to them, but in vain; now they try to drive him into the temple for his own safety; let him be any where but at his work. Observing him to be a cautious man, they will endeavour to gain their point by making him cowardly. Observe,

1. How basely the enemies managed this temptation.

1. That which they designed, was, to bring Nehemiah to do a foolish thing, that they might laugh at him, and insult over him for doing it, and so lessen his interest and influence; (*v. 13*.) that *I should be afraid* and so they might have *matter for an evil report, and might reproach me*. This was indeed doing the Devil's work, who is men's tempter, that he may be their accuser, draw men to sin, that he may glory in their shame. The greatest mischief our enemies can do us, is, to frighten us from our duty, and bring us to do what is sinful.

2. The tools they made use of, were, a pretended prophet and prophetess, whom they hired to persuade Nehemiah to quit his work, and retire for his own safety. The pretended prophet was Shemaiah, of whom it was said that he was shut up in his own house, either under pretence of retirement for meditation and to consult the mind of God, or to give Nehemiah a sign in like manner to make himself a recluse. It should seem, Nehemiah had a value for him, for he went to his house to consult with him, *v. 10*. Other prophets there were, and one prophetess, Noadiah, (*v. 14*.) that were in the interest of the Jews' enemies, pensioners to them, and traitors to their country. Whether they pretended to inspiration, does not appear; they do not say, *Thus saith the Lord*, as the false prophets of old did; if not so, yet they would be thought to excel in divine knowledge, and human prudence, and to have uncommon measures of insight and foresight, and were therefore consulted in difficult cases, as prophets had been. These the enemies feed to be of counsel for them. Let us hence take occasion to lament, (1.) The wickedness of such bad men as these prophets: that ever any should be so perfidious as to betray the cause of God and their country, even under the pretence of communion with God, and concern for their country. (2.) The unhappiness of such good men as Nehemiah, who are in danger of being imposed upon by such cheats, and to whom no temptation comes with more force than that which comes under the colour of religion, of revelation and devotion, and is brought by the hand of prophets.

3. The pretence was plausible. These prophets suggested to Nehemiah, that the enemies would come

and slay him, in the night they would slay him, which he had reason enough to believe was true; they would, if they could, if they durst. They pretended to be much concerned for his safety; they were all undone, if any harm should come to him; and therefore they very gravely advised him to hide himself in the temple till the danger was over; that was a strong and sacred place, where he would be under the special protection of Heaven, Ps. 27. 5. If Nehemiah had been prevailed with to do thus, immediately the people would both have left off their work, and thrown down their arms, and every one would have shifted for his own safety; and then the enemies might easily, and without opposition, have demolished the works, broken down the wall again, and so gained their point. Though self-preservation is a fundamental principle of the law of nature, yet that is not always the best and wisest counsel, which pretends to go upon that principle.

II. See how bravely Nehemiah vanquished this temptation, and came off a conqueror.

1. He immediately resolved not to yield to it, v. 11. See here, (1.) What his reasonings are; *"Should such a man as I flee? Shall I desert God's work, or discourage my own workmen whom I have employed and encouraged? Shall I be over-credulous of report, and over-solicitous of my own life? I that am the governor, on whom so many eyes are, both of friends and foes? Another might flee, but not I. Who is there, that being as I am, in my post of honour, and power, and trust, would go into the temple, and lurk there, when business is to be done, yea, though it were to save his life."* Note, When we are tempted to sin, we should remember who, and what, we are, that we may not do any thing unbecoming us, and the profession we make. *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, Prov. 31. 4.* (2.) What was the result of his reasonings; he is at a point, *"I will not go in, I will rather die at my work, than live in an inglorious retreat from it."* Note, Holy courage and magnanimity will engage us, whatever it cost us, never to *decline a good work, nor ever to do a bad one.*

2. He was immediately aware of what was the rise of it; (v. 12.) *"I perceived that God had not sent him, that he gave this advice, not by any divine direction, ordinary or extraordinary, but with a design against me."* The wickedness of such mercenary wretches will, sooner or later, be brought to light. Two things Nehemiah says he dreaded in that which he was advised to. (1.) Offending God; *that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin.* Note, Sin is that which, above any thing, we should dread; and a good preservative it is against sin, to be afraid of nothing but sin. (2.) Shaming himself; *that they might reproach me.* Note, Next to the sinfulness of sin, we should dread the scandalousness of it.

3. He humbly begs of God to reckon with them for their base designs upon him; (v. 14.) *My God, think thou upon Tobiah,* and the rest of them, *according to their works.* As, when he had mentioned his own good services, he did not covetously or ambitiously prescribe to God what reward he should give him, but modestly prayed, *Think upon me, my God; (ch. 5. 19.)* so here he does not revengefully imprecate any particular judgment upon his enemies, but refers the matter to God; *"Thou knowest their hearts, and art the Avenger of falsehood and wrong; take cognizance of this cause, judge between me and them, and take what way and time thou pleasest to call them to an account for it."* Note, Whatever injuries are done us, we must not avenge ourselves, but commit our cause to him that judgeth righteously.

15. So the wall was finished in the twenty

and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. 16. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God. 17. Moreover, in those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. 18. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. 19. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

Nehemiah is here finishing the wall of Jerusalem, and yet still has trouble created him by his enemies.

1. Tobiah, and the other adversaries of the Jews, had the mortification to see the wall built up, notwithstanding all their attempts to hinder it. The wall was begun and finished in 52 days, and yet we have reason to believe they rested on the sabbaths, v. 15. Many were employed, and there was room for them; what they did, they did cheerfully, and minded their business, because they loved it. The threats of their enemies, which were intended to weaken them, it is likely, quickened them to go on with their work the more vigorously, that they might get it done before the enemy came. Thus, *out of the eater came forth meat.* See what a great deal of work may be done in a little time, if we would set about it in earnest, and keep close to it.

When the enemies heard that the wall was finished before they thought it was well begun, and when they doubted not but to have put a stop to it, they were much cast down in their own eyes, v. 16. (1.) They were ashamed of their own confidence, that they should *cause the work to cease*; they were crest-fallen upon the disappointment. (2.) They envied the prosperity and success of the Jews, grieved to see the walls of Jerusalem built, which, it may be, the kings of Persia had not permitted them thus to fortify the cities of Samaria. When Cain envied his brother, his *countenance fell*, Gen. 4. 5. (3.) They despaired of ever doing them the mischief they designed them, of bringing them down, and making a prey of them; and well they might, for they perceived, by the wonderful success, *that the work was wrought of God.* Even these heathens had so much sense, as [1.] To see a special providence of God conversant about the affairs of the church, when they did remarkably prosper. They said among the heathen, *The Lord has done great things for them*, it is his doing, Ps. 126. 2. God fighteth for Israel, and worketh with them. [2.] To believe that God's work would be perfect; when they perceived that the *work was of God*, they expected no other than that it would go on and prosper. [3.] To conclude that if it were of God, it was to no purpose to think of opposing it, it would certainly prevail and be victorious.

2. Nehemiah had the vexation, notwithstanding this, to see some of his own people treacherously corresponding with Tobiah, and serving his interest; and a great grief and discouragement, no doubt, it was to him. (1.) Even of the nobles of Judah, there were those who had so little sense of honour and their country's good, as to communicate with

Tobiah by letter, *v.* 17. They wrote with all the freedom and familiarity of friends to him, and welcomed his letters to them. Could nobles do a thing so mean? Nobles of Judah so wicked a thing? It seems, great men are not always wise, nor always honest. (2.) Many in Judah were in a strict but secret confederacy with him, to advance the interest of his country, though it would certainly be the ruin of their own. They were sworn unto him, not as their prince, but as their friend and ally, because both he and his son had married daughters of Israel, *v.* 18. See the mischief of marrying with strangers; for one heathen that was converted by it, ten Jews were perverted. When once they became akin to Tobiah, they soon became sworn to him. A sinful love leads to a sinful league. (3.) They had the impudence to court Nehemiah himself into a friendship with him; they *reported his good deeds before me*; represented him as an ingenuous person, and well worthy my acquaintance; as an honest person, and one that I might confide in. We are bid indeed to *speak ill of no man*, but never to speak well of bad men; *they that forsake the law, praise the wicked*, Prov. 28. 4. (4.) They were so false as to betray Nehemiah's counsels to him; they uttered Nehemiah's words to him, perverting them, no doubt, and putting false constructions upon them, which furnished Tobiah with matter for letters to put him in fear, and so drive him from his work, and discourage him in it. Thus were all their thoughts against him for evil, yet God thought upon him for good.

## CHAP. VII.

The success of one good design for God and our generation, should encourage us to proceed, and form some other: Nehemiah did so; having fortified Jerusalem with gates and walls, his next care is, I. To see the city well kept, *v.* 1. . 4. II. To see it well peopled, in order whereunto, he here reviews, and calls over, the register of the children of the captivity, the families that returned at first, and records it, *v.* 5. . 73. It is the same, in effect, with that which we had, *Ezra* 2. What use he made of it, we shall find afterward, when he brought one of ten to live in Jerusalem, *ch.* 11. 1.

1. **N**OW it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters, and the singers, and the Levites were appointed, 2. That I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: (for he *was* a faithful man, and feared God above many:) 3. And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one *to be* over against his house. 4. Now the city *was* large and great: but the people *were* few therein, and the houses *were* not builded.

God saith concerning his church, (Isa. 62. 6.) *I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem*; that is Nehemiah's care here; for dead walls, without living watchmen, are but a poor defence to a city.

1. He appointed the porters, singers, and Levites, in their places to their work; it is meant of their work in general, which was to attend the temple-service, that had been neglected in some degree, but now was revived. God's worship is the defence

of a place, and his ministers, when they mind their duty, are watchmen on the walls. Or, in particular, he ordered them to be ready against the wall was to be dedicated, that they might perform that service in an orderly and solemn manner; and the dedication of it was its strength. That is likely to be beneficial to us, which is devoted to God.

2. He appointed two governors or consuls, to whom he committed the care of the city, and gave them in charge to provide for the public peace and safety. Hanani, his brother, who came to him with the tidings of the desolations of Jerusalem, was one, a man of approved integrity, and affection to his country; the other was Hananiah, that had been ruler of the palace, for he that has approved himself faithful in less, shall be intrusted with more. Of this Hananiah it is said, that he *was a faithful man, and one that feared God above many, v.* 2. Note, (1.) Among those who fear God truly, there are some who fear him greatly, and excel others in the expressions and instances of that fear; and they are worthy a double portion of that honour which is due to them that *fear the Lord*, Ps. 15. 4. There were many in Jerusalem that feared God, but this good man was more eminent for religion and serious godliness than any. (2.) Those that fear God, must evidence it by their being faithful to all men, and universally conscientious. (3.) God's Jerusalem is then likely to flourish, when those rule in it, and have charge of it, who excel in virtue, and are eminent both for godliness and honesty. It is supposed, by some, that Nehemiah was now about to return to the Persian court to have his commission renewed, and that he left these two worthy men in charge with the affairs of the city in his absence. Good governors, when and where they cannot act themselves, must be very careful whom they depute.

3. He gave orders about the shutting of the gates, and the guarding of the walls, *v.* 3, 4. See here, (1.) What the present state of Jerusalem was. The city, in compass, was large and great, the walls enclosed the same ground as formerly, but much of it lay waste, for the houses were not built, few, at least, in comparison with what had been; so that Nehemiah walled the city in faith, and with an eye to that promise of the replenishing of it, which God had lately made by the prophet, *Zech.* 8. 3, &c. Though the people were now few, he believed they would be multiplied, and therefore built the walls so as to make room for them; had he not depended upon this, he might have thought walls without a city as great a reproach as a city without walls. (2.) What was the care of Nehemiah for it; he ordered the rulers of the cities themselves, [1.] To stand by, and see the city-gates shut up and barred every night; for in vain had they a wall, if they were careless of their gates. [2.] To take care that they should not be opened in the morning, till they could see that all was clear and quiet. [3.] To set sentinels upon the walls, or elsewhere, at convenient distances, who should, in case of the approach of the enemy, give timely notice to the city of the danger; and, as it came to their turn to watch, they must post themselves *over against their own houses*, because of them, it might be presumed, they would be in a particular manner careful. The public safety depends upon every one's particular care to guard himself and his own family against sin, that common enemy. It is every one's interest to watch, but many understand not their own interest; it is therefore incumbent upon magistrates to appoint watches. And as these people had lately found God with them in their building; (else they had built in vain,) so now that the wall was built, no doubt, they were made sensible that *except the Lord kept the city, the watchmen watched but in vain*, Ps. 127. 1, 2.

5. And my God put into my heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy: and I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein, 6. These *are* the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city; 7. Who came with Zerubbabel; Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah: the number, *I say*, of the men of the people of Israel, *was this*: 8. The children of Parosh, two thousand a hundred seventy and two. 9. The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. 10. The children of Arah, six hundred fifty and two. 11. The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand and eight hundred *and* eighteen. 12. The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 13. The children of Zattu, eight hundred forty and five. 14. The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and three score. 15. The children of Binnui, six hundred forty and eight. 16. The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and eight. 17. The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty and two. 18. The children of Adonikam, six hundred threescore and seven. 19. The children of Bigvai, two thousand threescore and seven. 20. The children of Adin, six hundred fifty and five. 21. The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. 22. The children of Hashum, three hundred twenty and eight. 23. The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and four. 24. The children of Hariph, a hundred and twelve. 25. The children of Gibeon, ninety and five. 26. The men of Beth-lehem, and Netophah, a hundred fourscore and eight. 27. The men of Anathoth, a hundred twenty and eight. 28. The men of Beth-azmaveth, forty and two. 29. The men of Kirjath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty and three. 30. The men of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. 31. The men of Michmas, a hundred and twenty and two. 32. The men of Beth-el and Ai, a hundred twenty and three. 33. The men of the other Nebo, fifty and two. 34. The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 35. The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. 36. The children of Jericho, three

hundred forty and five. 37. The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and one. 38. The children of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty. 39. The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. 40. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. 41. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. 42. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen. 43. The Levites: the children of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, *and* of the children of Hodevah, seventy and four. 44. The singers: the children of Asaph, a hundred forty and eight. 45. The porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, a hundred thirty and eight. 46. The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hashupha, the children of Tabbaoth, 47. The children of Keros, the children of Sia, the children of Padon, 48. The children of Lebana, the children of Hagaba, the children of Shalmi, 49. The children of Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, 50. The children of Reaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, 51. The children of Gaz-zam, the children of Uzza, the children of Phaseah, 52. The children of Besai, the children of Mennim, the children of Nephishesim, 53. The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, 54. The children of Bazlith, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, 55. The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Tamah, 56. The children of Neziab, the children of Hatipha. 57. The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Perida, 58. The children of Jaala, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, 59. The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Amon. 60. All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, *were* three hundred ninety and two. 61. And these *were* they which went up *also* from Tel-melah, Tel-haresha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer: but they could not show their father's house, nor their seed, whether they *were* of Israel. 62. The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred forty and two. 63. And of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, which took *one* of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite to wife and was

called after their name. 64. These sought their register *among* those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. 65. And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim. 66. The whole congregation together *was* forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore; 67. Besides their man-servants and their maid-servants, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and they had two hundred forty and five singing-men and singing-women. 68. Their horses, seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; 69. Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses. 70. And some of the chief of the fathers gave unto the work. The Tirshatha gave to the treasure a thousand drams of gold, fifty basons, five hundred and thirty priests' garments. 71. And *some* of the chief of the fathers gave to the treasure of the work twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand and two hundred pounds of silver. 72. And *that* which the rest of the people gave *was* twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand pounds of silver, and threescore and seven priests' garments. 73. So the priests, and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and *some* of the people, and the Nethinims, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities; and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel *were* in their cities.

We have here another good project of Nehemiah's; for wise and zealous men will be always contriving something or other for the glory of God and the edification of his church. He knew very well that the safety of a city, under God, depends more upon the number and valour of the inhabitants, than upon the height or strength of its walls; and therefore, observing that the people were few that dwelt in it, he thought fit to take an account of the people, that he might find what families had formerly had their settlement in Jerusalem, but were now removed into the country, that he might bring them back; and what families could any other way be influenced by their religion, or by their business, to come and rebuild the houses in Jerusalem, and dwell in them. So little reason have we to wish that we may be placed alone in the earth, or in Jerusalem itself, that much of our safety and comfort depend upon our neighbours and friends; the more the stronger, the more the merrier. It is the wisdom of the governors of a nation, to keep the balance even between city and country; that the metropolis be not so extravagantly large as to drain and impoverish the country, nor yet so weak as not to be able to protect it. Now observe,

I. Whence this good design of Nehemiah's came; he owns, (v. 5.) *My God put it into my heart.* Note, Whatever good motion is in our minds, either prudent or pious, we must acknowledge it to come from God. It was he that *put it into our hearts;*

for every good gift and every good work are from above; he gives knowledge, he gives grace; all is of him, and therefore all must be to him. What is done by human prudence, must be ascribed to the direction of Divine Providence; he that teaches the husbandman his discretion, (Isa. 28. 26.) teaches the statesman his.

II. What method he took in prosecution of it.

1. He called the rulers together, and the people, that he might have an account of the present state of their families, their number and strength, and where they were settled; which it is likely, when he summoned them to come together, he ordered them to bring along with them out of their several districts. And I doubt they were not so many but that it might be soon done.

2. He reviewed the old register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and compared the present accounts with that; and here we have the repetition of that out of Ezra 2. The title is the same here, (v. 6, 7.) as there, (v. 1, 2.) *These are the children of the province*, &c. Two things are here repeated and recorded a second time from thence; (1.) The names and numbers of their several families; and (2.) Their oblations to the service of the temple. The repetition of these accounts may intimate to us the delight which the great God is pleased to take in the persons, families, and services, of his spiritual Israel, and the particular notice he takes of them. He knows them that are his, knows them all, knows them by name, has his eye on the register of those children of the captivity, and does all according to the ancient counsel of his will concerning them.

[1.] Here is an account of the heads of the several families that first came up, v. 6. . 69. As to this, *First*, Though it seem of little use to us now, yet then it was of great use, to compare what they had been with what they now were. We may suppose they were much increased by this time; but it would do well for them to remember their small beginnings, that they might acknowledge God in multiplying their families, and building them up. By this means likewise their genealogies would be preserved, and the distinction of their families kept up, till the Messiah should come, and then an end be put to all their genealogies, which were preserved for his sake, but afterwards were needless. But *Secondly*, There are many differences in the numbers between this catalogue and that in Ezra. Most of them indeed are exactly the same, and some others within a very few under or over; (one or two perhaps;) and therefore I cannot think as some do, that that was the number of these families at their first coming, this as they were now, which was at least 40 years after, (some make it much more,) for we cannot suppose so many families to be not at all, or but little, altered in their numbers in all that time; therefore what differences there are, we may suppose to arise either from the mistakes of transcribers, which easily happen in numbers, or from the diversity of the copies from which they were taken, or perhaps one was the account of them when they set out from Babylon with Zerubbabel, the other when they came to Jerusalem. The sum totals are all just the same there and here, except of the singing-men and singing-women, which there are 200, here 245. Those were not of such importance, as that they should keep any strict account of them.

[2.] Here is an account of the offerings which were given toward the work of God, v. 70, &c. This differs much from that, Ezra 2. 68, 69, and it may be questioned whether it refers to the same contribution; here, the Tirshatha, or chief governor, begins the offering, who there was not mentioned. And the single sum mentioned there, ex-



ceeds all those here put together; yet it is probable that it was the same, but that followed one copy of the lists, this another; for the last verse is the same here that it was in Ezra 2. 70. adding, *ch. 3. 1.* Blessed be God that our faith and hope are not built upon the niceties of names and numbers, genealogy and chronology, but on the great things of the law and gospel. Whatever is given to the work of God, he is not unrighteous to forget it; nor shall even a cup of cold water, wherewith he is honoured, go without its reward.

## CHAP. VIII.

Ezra came up out of Babylon thirteen years before Nehemiah came, yet we have here a piece of good work which he did, that might have been done before, but was not, till Nehemiah came, who, though he was not such a scholar, nor such a divine, as Ezra, nor such a scribe in the law of his God, yet was a man of a more lively active spirit. His zeal set Ezra's learning on work, and then great things were done; as we find here, where we have, I. The public and solemn reading and expounding of the law, v. 1. - 8. II. The joy which the people were ordered to express upon that occasion, v. 9. - 12. III. The solemn keeping of the feast of tabernacles according to the law, v. 13. - 18.

1. **A**ND all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that *was* before the water-gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe, to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. 2. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. 3. And he read therein before the street that *was* before the water-gate, from the morning until mid-day, before the men and the women, and those that could understand: and the ears of all the people *were attentive* unto the book of the law. 4. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. 5. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God: and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground. 7. Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people *stood* in their place. 8. So they read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly, and gave the

sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading.

We have here an account of a solemn religious assembly, and the good work that was done in that assembly, to the honour of God, and the edification of the church.

I. The time of it was the *first day of the seventh month*, v. 2. That was the day of the *feast of trumpets*, which is called a *sabbath*, and on which they were to have a *holy convocation*, Lev. 23. 24. Numb. 29. 1. But that was not all; it was on that day that the altar was set up, and they began to offer their burnt-offerings after their return out of captivity, a late mercy in the memory of many then living; in a thankful remembrance of that, it is likely, they had kept this feast, ever since, with more than ordinary solemnity. Divine favours which are fresh in mind, and which ourselves have been witnesses of, should be, and usually are, most affecting.

II. The place was in the *street that was before the water-gate*, (v. 1.) a spacious broad street, able to contain so great a multitude, which the court of the temple was not, for, probably, it was not now built near so large as it had been in Solomon's time. Sacrifices were to be offered only at the door of the temple, but praying, and praising, and preaching, were, and are, services of religion as acceptably performed in one place as in another. When this congregation was thus met in the street of the city, no doubt, God was with them.

III. The persons that met, were all the people, who were not compelled to come, but voluntarily gathered themselves together by common agreement, as one man: not only men came, but women and children, even as many as were capable of understanding what they heard. Masters of families should bring their families with them to the public worship of God. Women and children have souls to save, and are therefore concerned to acquaint themselves with the word of God, and attend on the means of knowledge and grace. Little ones, as they come to the exercise of reason, must be trained up in the exercises of religion.

IV. The master of this assembly was Ezra the priest, he presided in this service. None so fit as he to expound and preach, who was such a ready scribe in the law of his God. 1. His call to the service was very clear; for, being in office as a priest, and qualified as a scribe, *the people spake to him to bring the book of the law*, and read it to them, v. 1. God gave him ability and authority, and then the people gave him opportunity and invitation. Knowledge is spiritual alms, which they that are able should give to every one that needs, to every one that asks. 2. His post was very convenient, he stood in a pulpit or tower of wood, *which they had made for the word*; so it is in the original; *for the preaching of the word*, that what he said, might be the more gracefully delivered and the better heard, and that the eyes of the hearers might be upon him, which would engage their attention; as Luke 4. 20. 3. He had several assistants, some that stood with him; (v. 4.) six on his right hand, and seven on his left: either his pulpit was so contrived as to hold them all in a row, as in a gallery, (but then it would scarcely have been called a *tower*,) or they had desks a degree lower. Some think that he appointed them to read when he was weary; at least, his taking them as assessors with him, put an honour upon them before the people, in order to their being employed in the same service another time. Others who are mentioned, (v. 7.) seem to have been employed at the same time in other places near at hand, to read and expound to those who could not come within hear-



ing of Ezra. Of those also there were 13 priests, whose lips were to keep knowledge, Mal. 2. 7. It is a great mercy to a people thus to be furnished with ministers that are apt to teach; happy was Ezra in having such assistants as these, and happy those in having such a guide as Ezra.

V. The religious exercises performed in this assembly were not ceremonial, but moral, praying and preaching. Ezra, as president of the assembly, was, 1. *The people's mouth to God*, and they affectionately *joined with him*, v. 6. He blessed the Lord as the great God, gave honour to him, by praising his perfections, and praying for his favour; and the people, in token of their concurrence with him, both in prayers and praises, said, *Amen, Amen*, and lifted up their hands, in token of their desire being toward God, and all their expectation from him; they also bowed their heads, in token of their reverence of him and subjection to him. Thus we must adore God, and address ourselves to him, when we are going to read and hear the word of God, as those that see God in his word, very great and very good. 2. *God's mouth to the people*, and they attentively hearkened to him. This was the chief business of the solemnity, and observe,

(1.) *Ezra brought the law before the congregation*, v. 2. He had taken care to provide himself with the best and most correct copies of the law; and what he had laid up for his own use and satisfaction, he here brought forth, as a good householder, out of his treasury, for the benefit of the church. Observe, [1.] The book of the law is not to be confined to the scribes' studies, but to be *brought before the congregation*, and read to them in their own language. [2.] Ministers, when they go to the pulpit, should take their Bibles with them; Ezra did so; thence they must fetch their knowledge, and according to that rule they must speak, and must show that they do so. See 2 Chron. 17. 9.

(2.) He opened the book with great reverence and solemnity, *in the sight of all the people*, v. 5. He brought it forth with a sense of the great mercy of God to them in giving them that book: he opened it with a sense of his mercy to them in giving them leave to read it, that it was not a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed. *The taking of the book, and the opening of the seals*, we find celebrated with joy and praise, Rev. 5. 9. Let us learn to address ourselves to the services of religion with solemn stops and pauses, and not go about them rashly; let us consider what we are doing, when we take God's book into our hands, and open it, and so also when we bow our knees in prayer; and what we do, let us do it deliberately, Eccl. 5. 1.

(3.) He and others read in the book of the law, *from morning till noon*, (v. 3.) and they read distinctly, v. 8. Reading the holy scriptures in religious assemblies, is an ordinance of God, whereby he is honoured, and his church edified. And, upon special occasions, we must be willing to attend for many hours together on the reading and expounding of the word of God: they here were thus employed six hours. Let those that read and preach the word, learn also to deliver themselves distinctly; as those who understand what they say, and are affected with it themselves, and who desire that those they speak to, may understand it, retain it, and be affected with it likewise. *It is a snare for a man to devour that which is holy*.

(4.) What they read, they expounded, showed the intent and meaning of it, and what use was to be made of it; they gave the sense in other words, that they might *cause the people to understand the reading*, v. 7, 8. Note, [1.] It is requisite that those who hear the word, should understand it, else it is to them but an empty sound of words,

Matth. 24. 15. [2.] It is therefore required of those who are teachers by office, that they explain the word, and give the sense of it. *Understandest thou what thou readest?* And, *Have ye understood all these things?* are good questions to be put to the hearers; but, *How should we, except some one guide us?* is as proper a question for them to put to their teachers, Acts 8. 30, 31. Reading is good, and preaching good, but expounding brings the reading and the preaching together, which makes the reading the more intelligible, and the preaching the more convincing.

(5.) The people conducted themselves very properly, when the word was read and opened to them.

[1.] With great reverence. When Ezra opened the book, *all the people stood up*, (v. 5.) thereby showing respect both to Ezra and to the word he was about to read. It becomes servants to stand when their master speaks to them; in honour to their master, and to show a readiness to do as they are bidden.

[2.] With what fixedness and composedness they *stood in their place*; (v. 7.) several ministers were reading and expounding at some distance from each other, and each of the people kept his post, did not go to hear first one and then another, to make remarks upon them, but stood in his place, that he might neither give disturbance to another, nor receive any disturbance himself.

[3.] With great attention and a close application of mind; *the ears of all the people were unto the book of the law*, (v. 3.) were even chained to it, they heard readily, and minded every word. The word of God commands attention, and deserves it. If through carelessness we let much slip in hearing, there is danger that through forgetfulness we shall let all slip after hearing.

9. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. 10. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the far, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for *this day is holy unto our LORD*: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. 11. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace; for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. 12. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

We may observe here,

1. How the people were wounded with the words of the law, that were read to them. The law works death, and speaks terror, shows men their sins, and their misery and danger because of sin, and thunders a curse against every one that continues not in every part of his duty. Therefore when they heard it, they *all wept*; (v. 9.) it was a good sign that their hearts were tender, like Josiah's, when he heard the words of the law. They wept to think how they had offended God, and exposed themselves, by their many violations of the law; when some wept, all wept, for they all saw themselves guilty before God.

II. How they were healed and comforted with the words of peace, that were spoken to them. It was well that they were so much affected with the word of God, and received the impressions of it; but they must not exceed in their mourning; especially not at this time, because the day was holy to the Lord, it was one of the solemn feasts on which it was their duty to rejoice. And even sorrow for sin must not hinder our joy in God, but rather lead to it, and prepare us for it.

1. The masters of the assembly endeavoured to pacify them, and encourage them. Now Nehemiah is brought in, and not before in this chapter: he took notice of the people's weeping, Ezra was pleased to see them so affected with the word, but Nehemiah observed to him, and Ezra concurred in the thought, that it was now unseasonable; this day was holy, it is called a *sabbath*, (Lev. 23. 24.) and therefore was to be celebrated with joy and praise, not as if it were a day to afflict the souls. (1.) They forbade the people to mourn and weep; (v. 9.) *Be not sorry*, (v. 10.) *Hold your peace, neither be ye grieved*, v. 11. Every thing is beautiful in its season; as we must not be merry when God calls to mourning; so we must not frighten and afflict ourselves when God has given us occasion to rejoice. Even sorrow for sin must not grow so excessive, as to hinder our joy in God, and our cheerfulness in his service. (2.) They commanded them to testify their joy, to put on the garments of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness. They allowed them, in token of their joy, to feast themselves, to eat and drink better than on other days, to eat the fat, and drink the sweet: but then it must be, [1.] With charity to the poor; "*Send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared*, that your abundance may supply their want; that they may rejoice with you, and their loins may bless you." Christ directs those that make feasts, to invite their poor neighbours, Luke 14. 13. But it is especially the duty of a religious feast, as well as of a religious fast, to draw out the soul to the hungry, Isa. 58. 7, 10. God's bounty should make us bountiful. Many will eat the fat, and drink the sweet themselves, even to excess, that will never allow portions, nor scarcely crumbs, to the poor, who may read their own doom in the parable of the rich man, Luke 16. 19, &c. But such know not, or consider not, what God gave them their estates for. Observe, We must not only give to those that offer themselves, but send to those that are out of sight. *The liberal devises liberal things*, and seeks objects of charity. [2.] It must be with piety and devotion; *the joy of the Lord is your strength*. Let it not be a carnal sensual joy, but holy and spiritual, *the joy of the Lord*, joy in the goodness of God, under the conduct and government of the grace of God; joy arising from our interest in the love and favour of God, and the tokens of his favour. This joy will be your strength, therefore encourage it; it will be your strength, *First*, For the performance of the other duties of the feast; the more cheerful we are in our religious exercises, the more we shall abound in them. *Secondly*, For all which you have to do, in conformity to the law of God which has been read to you. Holy joy will be oil to the wheels of our obedience. *Thirdly*, For the resisting of your enemies that are plotting against you. The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies, and put our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks.

2. The assembly complied with the directions that were given them. Their weeping was stilled, (v. 11.) and they made great mirth, v. 12. Note, We ought always to have such a command of every passion, as that, however it may break out, it may soon be restrained and called in again, when we

are convinced that it is either unreasonable or unseasonable. *He that has such a rule as this over his own spirit, is better than the mighty*. Observe, (1.) After they had wept, they rejoiced; holy mourning makes way for holy mirth; they that sow in tears, shall reap in joy; they that tremble at the convictions of the word, may triumph in the consolations of it. (2.) The ground of their joy was very good; they made mirth, not because they had the fat to eat, and the sweet to drink, and a deal of good company, but because they had understood the words that were declared to them. Note, [1.] To have the holy scriptures with us, and helps to understand them, is a very great mercy, which we have abundant reason to rejoice in. Bibles and ministers are the joy of God's Israel. [2.] The better we understand the word of God, the more comfort we shall find in it; for the darkness of trouble arises from the darkness of ignorance and mistake. When the words were first declared to them, they wept, but when they understood them, they rejoiced, finding, at length, precious promises made to those who repented and reformed, and therefore there was hope in Israel.

13. And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. 14. And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: 15. And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive-branches, and pine-branches, and myrtle-branches, and palm-branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. 16. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water-gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. 17. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun, unto that day, had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. 18. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

We have here,

1. The people's renewed attendance upon the word. They had spent the greatest part of one day in praying and hearing, and yet were so far from being weary of that new moon and sabbath, that, the next day after, though it was no festival, the chief of them came together again to hear Ezra expound, (v. 13.) which they found more de-

lightful and gainful than any worldly pleasure or profit whatsoever. Note, The more we converse with the word of God, if we rightly understand it, and be affected with it, the more we shall covet to converse with it, and to increase in our acquaintance with it, saying, *How sweet are thy words unto my mouth!* They that understand the scriptures well, will still be desirous to understand them better. Now the priests and the Levites themselves came with *the chief of the people to Ezra*, that prince of expositors, *to understand the words of the law*, or, as it is in margin, *that they might instruct in the words of the law*; they came to be taught themselves, that they might be qualified to teach others. Observe, 1. Though, on the first day, Ezra's humility had set them *on his right hand, and on his left, as teachers with him*, (v. 4, 7.) yet now, they being by trial made more sensible than ever of their own deficiencies, and his excellencies, on the second day, their humility set them at Ezra's feet, as learners of him. 2. Those that would teach others, must themselves receive instruction. Priests and Levites must be taught first, and then teach.

II. The people's ready obedience to the word in one particular instance, as soon as they were made sensible of their duty therein. It is probable that Ezra, *after the wisdom of his God that was in his hand*, (Ezra 7. 25.) when they applied themselves to him for instruction out of the law on the second day of the seventh month, read to them those laws which concerned the feasts of that month, and, among the rest, that of the feast of the tabernacle, Lev. 23. 34. Deut. 16. 13. Ministers should preach not only that which is true and good, but that which is seasonable, directing to the *work of the day in its day*.

Here is, 1. The divine appointment of the feast of tabernacles reviewed, v. 14, 15. *They found written in the law* a commandment concerning it. They that diligently search the scriptures, will find these things written there, which they had forgotten, or not duly considered. This feast of tabernacles was a memorial of their dwelling in tents in the wilderness, a representation of our tabernacle-state in this world, and a type of the holy joy of the gospel-church. The conversion of the nations to the faith of Christ is foretold under the figure of this feast; (Zech. 14. 16.) they shall come to *keep the feast of tabernacles*, as having no continuing city. This feast was to be proclaimed in all their cities. The people were themselves to fetch boughs of trees, (they of Jerusalem fetched them from the mount of Olives,) and to make booths or arbours, of them, in which they were to lodge, (as much as the weather would permit,) and to make merry during the feast.

2. This appointment religiously observed, v. 16, 17. Then we read and hear the word acceptably and profitably, when we do according to what is written therein; when what appears to be our duty, after it has been neglected, is revived.

(1.) They observed the ceremony; they sat in booths, which the priests and Levites set up in the courts of the temple: those that had houses of their own, set up booths on the roofs of them, or in their courts; and those that had not such conveniences, set them up in the streets. This feast had usually been observed, (2 Chron. 5. 3. Ezra 3. 4.) but never with such solemnity as now, since Joshua's time, when they were newly settled, as they were now newly re-settled in Canaan. That man loves his house too well, that cannot find in his heart to quit it, a while in compliance either with an ordinance or with a providence of God.

(2.) They minded the substance; else the ceremony, how significant soever, had been insignificant. [1.] They did it with gladness; with very

great gladness, rejoicing in God, and his goodness to them. All their holy feasts, but this especially, were to be celebrated with joy, which would be much for the honour of God, and their encouragement in his service. [2.] They attended the reading and expounding of the word of God, during all the days of the feast, v. 18. They improved their leisure for this good work: spare hours cannot be better spent than in studying the scriptures, and conversing with them. At this feast of tabernacles, God appointed the law to be read, once in seven years: whether this was that year of release in which that service was to be performed, (Deut. 31. 10, 11.) does not appear: however they spent all the days of the feast in that good work, and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, as God had appointed, in which they finished the solemnity the 22d day of the month, yet did not scatter, for the 24th day was appointed to be spent in fasting and prayer. Holy joy must not indispose us for godly sorrow, any more than godly sorrow for holy joy.

## CHAP. IX.

The tenth day of the seventh month between the feast of Trumpets, (ch. 8. 2.) and the feast of Tabernacles, (v. 14.) was appointed to be the day of atonement; we have no reason to think but that it was religiously observed, though it is not mentioned. But here we have an account of an occasional fast that was kept a fortnight after, with reference to the present posture of their affairs, and it was, as that, a day of humiliation. There is a time to weep as well as a time to laugh. We have here an account, I. How this fast was observed, v. 1. . . 3. II. What were the heads of the prayer that was made to God on that occasion, wherein they made a thankful acknowledgment of God's mercies, a penitent confession of sin, and a humble submission to the righteous hand of God in the judgments that were brought upon them, concluding with a solemn resolution of new obedience, v. 4. . . 38.

1. **N**OW in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sack-clothes, and earth upon them. 2. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. 3. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God *one* fourth part of the day, and *another* fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God

We have here a general account of a public fast which the children of Israel kept, probably, by order from Nehemiah, by and with the advice and consent of the chief of the fathers. It was a fast that men appointed, but such a *fast as God had chosen*; for,

1. It was a day to *afflict the soul*, Isa. 58. 5. Probably they assembled in the courts of the temple, and they there appeared in sackcloth, and in the posture of mourners, with earth on their heads, v. 1. By these outward expressions of sorrow and humiliation they gave glory to God, took shame to themselves, and stirred up one another to repentance. They were restrained from *weeping*, ch. 8. 9. but now they were directed to weep. The joy of our holy feasts must give way to the sorrow of our solemn fasts when they come. Every thing is beautiful in its season.

2. It was a day to *loose the bands of wickedness*, and that is the fast that God has chosen, Isa. 58. 6. Without this, spreading sackcloth and ashes under

us, is but a jest. The seed of Israel, because they were a holy seed, appropriated to God, and more excellent than their neighbours, *separated themselves from all strangers*, with whom they had mingled themselves, and joined in affinity, *v. 2.* Ezra had separated them from their strange wives some years before, but they had relapsed into the same sin, and had either made marriages, or at least, made friendships, with them, and contracted such an intimacy as was a snare to them. But now they separated themselves from the strange children, as well as from the strange wives. They that intend by prayers and covenants to join themselves to God, must separate themselves from sin and sinners; for *what communion hath light with darkness?*

3. It was a day of communion with God; they *fasted to him, even to him*; (*Zech. 7. 5.*) for, (1.) They spake to him in prayer, offered their pious and devout affections to him, in the confession of sin, and the adoration of him as the Lord and their God. Fasting without prayer, is a body without a soul, a worthless carcase. (2.) They heard him speaking to them by his word, for they read in the book of the law, which is very proper on fasting days, that, in the glass of the law, we may see our deformities and defilements; and know what to acknowledge, and what to amend. The word will direct and quicken prayer, for by it the Spirit helps our praying infirmities. Observe how the time was equally divided between these two. Three hours (for that is the fourth part of a day) they spent in reading, expounding; and applying the scriptures; and three hours in confessing sin, and praying; so that they staid together six hours, and spent all the time in the solemn acts of religion, without saying, *Behold what a weariness is it!* The varying of the exercises made it less tedious, and, as the word they read, would furnish them with matter for prayer, so prayer would make the word more profitable. Bishop Patrick thinks that they spent the whole twelve hours of the day in devotion, that from six o'clock in the morning till nine they read, and then from nine to twelve they prayed; from twelve to three they read again, and from three till six at night they prayed again. The work of a fast day, is a good work, and therefore we should endeavour to make a day's work, a good day's work of it.

4. Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God. 5. Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethariah, said, Stand up, and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever; and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. 6. Thou, *even thou*, art LORD alone: thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all *things* that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee. 7. Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham: 8. And foundest his heart faithful

before thee, and madest a covenant with him, to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give *it*, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous: 9. And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red Sea: 10. And showedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land; for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them: so didst thou get thee a name, as *it is* this day. 11. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters. 12. Moreover, thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar, and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. 13. Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments and true laws, good statutes and commandments: 14. And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant: 15. And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them. 16. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, 17. And refused to obey, neither were mindful of the wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not. 18. Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy god that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations; 19. Yet thou, in thy manifold mercies, forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go. 20. Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. 21. Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their

clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. 22. Moreover, thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. 23. Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess *it*. 24. So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduest before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would. 25. And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and olive-yards, and fruit-trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. 26. Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets, which testified against them to turn them to thee; and they wrought great provocations. 27. Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest *them* from heaven; and, according to thy manifold mercies, thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies. 28. But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore ledest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest *them* from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them, according to thy mercies; 29. And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them,) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear: 30. Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets; yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands. 31. Nevertheless, for thy great mercies' sake, thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou *art* a gracious and merciful God. 32. Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest cove-

nant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. 33. Howbeit, thou *art* just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: 34. Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them. 35. For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works. 36. Behold, we *are* servants this day; and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers, to eat the fruit thereof, and the good thereof, behold, we *are* servants in it: 37. And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we *are* in great distress. 38. And because of all this, we make a sure *covenant*, and write *it*: and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal *unto it*.

We have here an account how the work of this fast-day was carried on.

I. The names of the ministers that were employed. They are twice named, (v. 4, 5.) only with some variation of the names. Either they prayed successively, according to that rule which the apostle gives, (1 Cor. 14. 31.) *Ye may all prophesy one by one*; or, as some think, there were eight several congregations at some distance from each other, and each had a Levite to preside in it.

II. The work itself they employed themselves in; 1. They prayed to God, cried to him with a loud voice, (v. 4.) for the pardon of the sins of Israel, and God's favour to them. They cried aloud, not that God might the better hear them, as Baal's worshippers, but that the people might, and to excite their fervency. 2. They praised God; for the work of praise is not unseasonable on a fast-day: in all acts of devotion, we must aim at this, *to give unto God the glory due to his name*.

The summary of their prayers we have here upon record; whether drawn up before, as a directory to the Levites what to enlarge on, or recollected after, as the heads of what they had in prayer enlarged upon, is uncertain. Much more, no doubt, was said than is here recorded; else confessing and worshipping God had not taken up a fourth part of the day, much less two-fourths.

In this solemn address to God, we have, (1.) An awful adoration of God, as a perfect and glorious Being, and the Fountain of all beings, v. 5, 6. The congregation is called upon to signify their concurrence herewith, by standing up; and so the minister directs himself to God, *Blessed be thy glorious name*. God is here adored, [1.] As the one only living and true God; *Thou art Jehovah alone*, self-existent and independent; there is

no God beside thee. [2.] As the Creator of all things; *Thou hast made heaven, earth, and seas*, and all that is in them. The first article of our creed is fitly made the first article of our praises.

[3.] As the great Protector of the whole creation; "Thou preservest in being all the creatures thou hast given being to." God's providence extends itself to the highest beings, for they need it, and to the meanest, for they are not slighted by it. What God has made, he will preserve; what he does, is firm, Eccl. 3. 14. [4.] As the Object of the creatures' praises; *The host of heaven*, the world of holy angels, *worshipeth thee*, v. 6. But *thy name is exalted above all blessing and praise*; it needs not the praises of the creatures, nor is any addition made to its glory by those praises. The best performances in the praising of God's name, even those of the angels themselves, fall infinitely short of what it deserves. It is not only exalted above our blessing, but above all blessing. Put all the praises of heaven and earth together; and the thousandth part is not said of what might and should be, said of the glory of God. *Our goodness extendeth not to him*.

(2.) A thankful acknowledgment of God's favours to Israel, many of which are here reckoned up in order before him, and very much to the purpose, for, [1.] We must take all occasions to mention the loving kindness of the Lord, and in every prayer give thanks. [2.] When we are confessing our sins, it is good to take notice of the mercies of God, as the aggravations of our sins, that we may be the more humbled and ashamed, and call ourselves by the scandalous name of *ungrateful*. [3.] When we are seeking to God for mercy and relief in the time of distress, it is an encouragement to our faith and hope, to look back upon our own and our fathers' experiences; "Lord, thou hast done well for us formerly, shall it be all undone again? Art thou not the same God still?"

Let us briefly observe the particular instances of God's goodness to Israel here recounted.

*First*, The call of Abraham, v. 7. God's favour to him was distinguishing; Thou didst choose him; his grace in him was powerful to bring him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and, in giving him the name of Abraham, he put honour upon him as his own, and assured him that he should be the *father of many nations*. *Look unto Abraham your father*, (Isa. 51. 2.) and see free grace glorified in him.

*Secondly*, The covenant God made with him, to give the land of Canaan to him and his seed, a type of the better country, v. 8. And this covenant was sure, for God found Abraham's heart faithful before God, and therefore found it so, because he made it so, (for faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God,) and therefore performed his words; *for with the upright he will show himself upright*, and wherever he finds a faithful heart, he will be found a faithful God.

*Thirdly*, The deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, v. 9-11. It was seasonable to remember this, now that they were interceding for the perfecting of their deliverance out of Babylon. They were then delivered, in compassion to their affliction, in answer to their cry, and in resistance of the pride and insolence of their persecutors: wherein they dealt proudly, God showed himself above them, (Exod. 18. 11.) and so *gave him a name*; for he said, *I will get me honour upon Pharaoh*; even to this day, the name of God is glorified for that wonderful work. It was done miraculously: signs and wonders were showed for the effecting of it; their deliverance was in the destruction of their enemies; they were *thrown into the dregs*, as irrecoverably as a stone into the mighty waters.

*Fourthly*, The conducting of them through the

wilderness, by the pillar of cloud and fire, which showed them which way they should go, when they should remove, and when and where they should rest; directed all their stages, and all their steps, v. 12. It was also a visible token of God's presence with them, to guide and guard them. They mention this again, (v. 19.) observing, that though they had by their sins provoked God to withdraw from them, and leave them to wander and perish in the by-paths of the wilderness, yet in his manifold mercy he continued to lead them, and took not away the *pillar of cloud and fire*, v. 19. When mercies, though forfeited, are continued, we are bound to be doubly thankful.

*Fifthly*, The plentiful provision made for them in the wilderness, that they might not perish for hunger; Thou *gavest them bread from heaven*, and *water out of the rock*, (v. 15.) and, to hold up their hearts, a promise that they should go in, and possess the land of Canaan. They had meat and drink, food convenient in the way, and the good land at their journey's end; what would they more? This also is repeated, (v. 20, 21.) as that which was continued, notwithstanding their provocations; *Forty years didst thou sustain them*. Never was people so long nursed, and so tenderly; they were wonderfully provided for, and, in so long a time, *their clothes waxed not old*, and, though the way was rough and tedious, *their feet swelled not*, for they were *carried as upon eagles' wings*.

*Sixthly*, The giving of the law upon mount Sinai. This was the greatest favour of all that was done them, and the greatest honour that was put upon them. The Lawgiver was very glorious, v. 13. "Thou didst not send only, but camest down thyself, and *spakest with them*," Deut. 4. 33. The law given, was very good; no nation under the sun had such *right judgments, true laws, and good statutes*, Deut. 4. 8. The moral and judicial precepts true and right, founded upon natural equity, and the eternal reasons of good and evil; and even the ceremonial institutions good, tokens of God's goodness to them, and types of gospel-grace. Particular notice is taken of the law of the 4th commandment as a great favour to them; *Thou madest known unto them thy holy sabbath*, which was a token of God's particular favour to them, distinguishing them from the nations who had revolted from God, and quite lost that ancient part of revealed religion; and was likewise a means of keeping up their communion with him. And with the law and the sabbath, he *gave his good spirit to instruct them*, v. 20. Beside the law given on mount Sinai, the five books of Moses, which he wrote as *he was moved by the holy Ghost*, were constant instructions to them, particularly the book of Deuteronomy, in which God's Spirit by Moses instructed them fully. Bezaleel was filled with the *Spirit of God*; (Exod. 31. 3.) so was Joshua; (Numb. 27. 18.) and Caleb had another spirit.

*Seventhly*, The putting of them in possession of Canaan, that good land, *kingdoms and nations*, v. 22. They were made so numerous as to replenish it, (v. 23.) and so victorious as to be masters of it; (v. 24.) the natives were given into their hands, *that they might do with them as they would*, set their feet, if they pleased, on the necks of their kings. Thus they gained a happy settlement, v. 25. Look upon their cities, and you see them strong and well fortified. Look into their houses, and you find them fine and well furnished, filled with all sorts of rich goods. Take a view of the country, and you will say that you never saw such a fat land, so well stored with *vineyards and olive yards*. All these they found made ready to their hands; so they delighted themselves in the gifts of God's great goodness. They could not wish to be more easy or



happy than they were, or might have been, in Canaan, had it not been their own fault.

*Eighthly*, God's great readiness to pardon their sins, and work deliverance for them, when they had, by their provocations, brought his judgments upon themselves. When they were in the wilderness, they found him a *God ready to pardon*, (v. 17.) a *God of pardons*, so the margin reads it, who had proclaimed his name there, *forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin*; who has power to forgive sin, is willing to forgive, and glories in it. Though they forsook him, he did not forsake them, as justly he might have done, but continued his care of them, and favour to them. Afterward, when they were settled in Canaan, and sold themselves by their sins into the hands of their enemies, upon their submission and humble request, he *gave them saviours*, (v. 27.) the judges, by whom God wrought many a great deliverance for them, when they were on the brink of ruin. This he did, not for any merit of their's, for they deserved nothing but ill, but according to his mercies, his manifold mercies.

*Ninthly*, The admonitions and fair warnings he gave them by his servants the prophets. When he delivered them from their troubles, he *testified against their sins*, (v. 28, 29.) that they might not misconstrue their deliverances as connivances at their wickedness. That which was designed in all the testimonies which the prophets bore against them, was, to bring them again to God's law, to lay their necks under its yoke, and walk by its rule. The end of our ministry, is, to bring people to God, by bringing them to his law, not to bring them to ourselves, by bringing them under any law of our's. This we have again, v. 30. *Thou testifiedst against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets*. The testimony of the prophets was the testimony of the Spirit in the prophets, and it was the spirit of Christ in them. 1 Pet. 1. 10, 11, *They spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*, and what they said is to be received accordingly. God gave them *his Spirit to instruct them*, (v. 20.) but they not receiving that instruction, he did by his Spirit testify against them; if we will not suffer God's word to teach and rule us, it will accuse and judge us. God sends prophets, in compassion to his people, (2 Chron. 36. 15.) that he may not send judgments.

*Tenthly*, The lengthening out of his patience, and the moderating of his rebukes. *Many years did he forbear them*, (v. 30.) as loath to punish them, and waiting to see if they would repent; and when he did punish them, he did not *utterly consume them nor forsake them*, v. 31. Had he forsaken them, they had been utterly consumed; but he did not stir up all his wrath, for he designed their reformation, not their destruction.

Thus do they multiply, thus do they magnify, the instances of God's goodness to Israel, and we should do in like manner, that the goodness of God, duly considered by us, may lead us to repentance, and overcome our badness; the more thankful we are for God's mercies, the more humbled we shall be for our own sins.

3. Here is a penitent confession of sin, their own sins, and the sins of their fathers. The mention of these is interwoven with the memorials of God's favours, that God's goodness, notwithstanding their provocations, might appear the more illustrious, and their sins, notwithstanding his favours, might appear the more heinous. Many passages in this acknowledgment of sins and mercies are taken from Ezek. 20. 5-26, as will appear by comparing those verses with these; for the word of God is of use to direct us in prayer, and by what he says to us, we may learn what to say to him.

[1.] They begin with the sins of Israel in the wilderness; *they, even our fathers*, (so it might bet-

ter be read,) *dealt proudly*, (though, considering what they were, and how lately they were come out of slavery, they had no reason to be proud,) *and hardened their necks*, v. 16. Pride is at the bottom of men's obstinacy and disobedience; they think it below them to bow their necks to God's yoke, and a piece of state to set up their own will in opposition to the will of God himself. There were two things which they did not duly give heed to, else they had not done as they did. The word of God they heard, but they did not hearken to God's commandments. And the works of God they saw, but they were not mindful of his wonders: had they duly considered them as miracles, they would have obeyed from a principle of faith and holy fear; had they duly considered them as mercies, they would have obeyed from a principle of gratitude and holy love. But when men make no right use either of God's ordinances, or of his providences, what can be expected from them? Two great sins are here specified, which they were guilty of in the wilderness; meditating a return, *First*, To Egyptian slavery, which, for the sake of the garlick and onions, they preferred before the glorious liberty of the Israel of God, attended with some difficulty and inconvenience. *In their rebellion, they appointed a captain to return to their bondage*, in distrust of God's power, and contempt of his good promise, v. 17. *Secondly*, To Egyptian idolatry; *they made a molten calf*, and were so sottish as to say, *This is thy God*.

[2.] They next bewail the provocations of their fathers after they were put in possession of Canaan. Though there they *delighted themselves in God's great goodness*, yet that would not prevail to keep them close to him; for, *nevertheless they were disobedient*, (v. 26.) and wrought great provocations. For, *First*, They abused God's prophets, *slew them* because they testified against them, to turn them to God; (v. 26.) so returning the greatest injury for the greatest kindness. *Secondly*, They abused his favours, *after they had rest, they did evil again*, (v. 28.) not wrought upon, either by their troubles, or their deliverances out of trouble. Neither fear nor love would hold them to their duty.

[3.] They, at length, come nearer to their own day, and lament the sins which had brought those judgments upon them, which they had long been groaning under, and were now but in part delivered from: *We have done wickedly*; (v. 33.) *our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers*, have all been guilty, and we in them, v. 34. Two things they charge upon themselves, and their fathers, as the cause of their troubles, *First*, A contempt of the good law God had given them. They *sinned against thy judgments*, the dictates of divine wisdom, and the demands of divine sovereignty: though they were told how much it would be for their own advantage to govern themselves by them, *for if a man do them, he shall live in them*, (v. 29.) yet they would not do them, and so, in effect, said, that they *would not live*; they *forsook their own mercies*. This abridgment of the covenant, *Do this, and live*, is taken from Ezek. 20. 13. and is quoted, Gal. 3. 12 to prove that *the law is not of faith*; it was not then as it is now, *Believe and live*, yet they gave a *withdrawing shoulder*, so it is in the margin. They pretended to lay their shoulders under the burthen of God's law, and put their shoulders to the work, but they proved withdrawing shoulders, they soon flew off, would not keep to it, would not abide by it; when it came as we say, to the setting to, they shrunk back, and would not hear; they had a backsliding heart. And though God by his prophets called them to return, they *would not give ear*; (v. 30.) he *stretched out his hands, but no one regarded*. *Secondly*, A contempt of the good land



God had given them, (v. 35.) "Our kings have *not served us in their kingdom*, not used their power for the support of religion; our people have not served thee in the use of the gifts of thy great goodness, and in that large and fat land which thou not only gavest them by thy grant, but gavest before them by the expulsion of the natives, and the complete victories they obtained over them." They that would not serve God in their own land, were made to serve their enemies in a strange land, as was threatened, Deut. 28. 47, 48. It is a pity that a good land should have had inhabitants, but so it was with Sodom; fatness and fulness often make men proud and sensual.

(4.) Here is a humble representation of the judgments of God, which they had been, and were now, under.

[1.] Former judgments are remembered as aggravations of their sins, that they had not taken warning. In the days of the judges, their *enemies vexed them*; (v. 27.) and when they did evil again, God did again *leave them in the hands of their enemies*, who could not have touched them, if God had not given them up; but when God left them, they got and kept dominion over them.

[2.] Their present calamitous state is laid before the Lord; (v. 36, 37.) *We are servants this day*. Free-born Israelites are enslaved, and the land which they had long held by a much more honourable tenure than grand sercantry itself, even by immediate grant from the crown of Heaven to them as a peculiar people above all people of the earth, they now held by as base a tenure as villanage itself, by, from, and under, the kings of Persia, whose vassals they were. A sad change! But see what work sin makes! They were bound to personal service; they have *dominion over our bodies*; they held all they had, precariously, were tenants at will, and the land-tax that they paid, was so great, that it amounted even to a rack-rent; so that all the rents, issues, and profits of their land, did, in effect, accrue to the king, and it was as much as they could do to get a bare subsistence for themselves and their families out of it: this, they honestly own, was for their sins; poverty and slavery are the fruits of sin; it is sin that brings us unto all our distresses.

(5.) Here is their address to God under these calamities.

[1.] By way of request, that their trouble might not seem little, v. 32. It is the only petition in all this prayer. The trouble was universal; it was come on their kings, princes, priests, prophets, fathers, and all their people; they had all shared in the sin, (v. 34.) and now all shared in the judgment. It was of long continuance, from the time of the king of Assyria, who carried the ten tribes captive, unto this day, "Lord, let it not all seem little, and not worthy to be regarded, or not needing to be relieved." They do not prescribe to God what he shall do for them, but leave it to him only desiring he would please to take cognizance of it, remembering that when he saw the affliction of his people in Egypt to be great, he came down to deliver them, Exod. 3. 7, 8. In this request, they have an eye to God, as one that is to be feared, for he is the great, the mighty, and the terrible, God; and as one that is to be trusted, for he is our God in covenant, and a God that keeps covenant and mercy.

[2.] By way of acknowledgment notwithstanding, that really it was less than they deserved, v. 33. They own the justice of God in all their troubles, that he had done them no wrong; "We have done wickedly in breaking thy laws, and therefore thou hast done right in bringing all these miseries upon us." Note, It becomes us, when we are under the rebukes of Divine Providence, though ever so sharp,

and ever so long, to justify God, and to judge ourselves; for he will be clear when he judgeth. Ps. 61. 4.

(6.) Here is the result and conclusion of this whole matter; after this long presentation of their case, they came, at last, to this resolution, that they would return to God and to their duty, and oblige themselves never to forsake God, but always to continue in their duty. "Because of all this, we make a sure covenant with God; in consideration of our frequent departures from God, we will now more firmly than ever bind ourselves to him. Because we have smarted so much for sin, we will now steadfastly resolve against it, that we may not any more withdraw the shoulder." Observe, [1.] This covenant was made with serious consideration; and so is the result of a chain of suitable thoughts, and so is a reasonable service. [2.] With great solemnity; it was written, in *perpetuum, rei memoriam*—that it might remain a memorial for all ages; it was sealed too, and left upon record, that it might be a witness against them if they dealt deceitfully. [3.] With joint-consent; "We make it, we are all agreed in it, and do it unanimously, that we may strengthen the hands one of another." [4.] With fixed resolution; "It is a sure covenant, without reserving a power of revocation. It is what we live and die by, and never go back from." A certain number of the princes, priests, and Levites, were chosen as the representatives of the congregation, to subscribe and seal it, for and in the name of the rest. Now was fulfilled that promise concerning the Jews, that when they were returned out of captivity, they should *join themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant*, (Jer. 50. 5.) and that (Isa. 44. 5.) that they should *subscribe with their hand unto the Lord*; he that bears an honest mind, will not startle at assurances; nor will those that know the deceitfulness of their own hearts, think them needless.

## CHAP. X.

We have, in this chapter, a particular account of the covenant which, in the close of the foregoing chapter, was resolved upon; they struck while the iron was hot, and immediately put that good resolve in execution, when they were in a good frame, lest, if it had been delayed, it had been dropped. Here we have, I. The names of those that set their hands and seals to it, v. 1. 27. II. An account of those who signified their consent and concurrence, v. 28, 29. III. The covenant itself, and the articles of it in general, that they would *keep God's commandments*; (v. 29.) in particular, that they would not marry with the heathen, (v. 30.) nor profane the sabbath, nor be rigorous with their debtors, (v. 31.) and that they would carefully pay their church-duties, for the maintenance of the temple-service, which they promise faithfully to adhere to, v. 32. 39.

1. **N**OW those that sealed *were*, Nehemiah the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah, 2. Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 3. Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah, 4. Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, 5. Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 6. Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 7. Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, 8. Maaziah, Bilgai, Sheamaiah: these *were* the priests. 9. And the Levites: both Joshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel: 10. And their brethren, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, 11. Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah, 12. Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, 13. Hodijah, Bani, Beninn. 14. The chief of the people; Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam,

Zatthu, Bani, 15. Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, 16. Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, 17. Ater, Hizkijah, Azzur, 18. Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai, 19. Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, 20. Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, 21. Meshazzeel, Zadok, Jaddua, 22. Pelatiah, Hanan, Ananiah, 23. Hoshea, Hananiah, Hashub, 24. Hallohesh, Pileha, Shobek, 25. Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, 26. And Ahijah, Hanan, Anan, 27. Malluch, Harim, Baanah. 28. And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; 29. They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our LORD, and his judgments, and his statutes; 30. And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons: 31. And *if* the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath-day to sell, *that* we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day; and *that* we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

When Israel was first brought into covenant with God, it was done by sacrifice, and the sprinkling of blood, Exod. 24. But here it was done by the more natural and common way of sealing and subscribing the written articles of the covenant, which bound them to no more than was already their duty.

Now here we have,

I. The names of those public persons who, as the representatives and heads of the congregation, set their hands and seals to this covenant, because it would have been an endless piece of work for every particular person to have done it. And if these leading men did their part in pursuance of this covenant, it would have good influence upon all the people.

Now observe, 1. Nehemiah, who was the governor, signed first, to show his forwardness in this work, and to set others a good example, *v.* 1. Those that are above others in dignity and power, should go before them in the way of God. 2. Next to him subscribed 22 priests, among whom I wonder we do not find Ezra, who was an active man in the solemnity, (*ch.* 8. 2.) which was but the first day of the same month, and therefore we cannot think he was absent; but he, having before done his part as a scribe, now left it to others to do their's. 3. Next to the priests, 17 Levites subscribed this covenant, among whom we find all or most of those who were the mouth of the congregation in prayer, *ch.* 9. 4, 5. This showed that they themselves were affected with what they had said, and would not bind those burthens on others, which they themselves declined to touch. They that lead in prayer, should lead in every other good work. Next to the Levites, 44 of the chief of the people gave it under their hands for themselves and all

the rest, chiefly those whom they had influence upon, that they would keep God's commandments. Their names are left upon record here, to their honour, as men that were forward and active in reviving, and endeavouring to perpetuate, religion in their country: the memory of such shall be blessed. It is observable, that most of those who were mentioned, *ch.* 7. 8, &c. as heads of houses or clans, are here mentioned among the first of the chief of the people that subscribed; whoever was the present head bearing the name of him that was head when they came out of Babylon, and these were fittest to subscribe for all those of their father's house. Here are Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zatthu, Bani, (*v.* 14.) Azgad, Bebai, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, and some others in the following verses, that are all found in that catalogue. They that have interest, must use it for God.

II. The concurrence of the rest of the people with them, and the rest of the priests and Levites, who signified their consent to what their chiefs did. With them joined, 1. Their wives and children, for they had transgressed, and they must reform; every one that had knowledge and understanding, must covenant with God. As soon as young people grow up to be capable of distinguishing between good and evil, and of acting intelligently, they ought to make it their own act and deed, to *join themselves to the Lord.* 2. The proselytes of other nations, all that had separated themselves from the people of the lands, their gods and their worship, under the law of God, and the observance of that law. See what conversion is; it is separating ourselves from the course and custom of this world, and devoting ourselves to the conduct of the word, of God. And as there is one law, so there is one covenant, one baptism, for the stranger, and for him that is born in the land.

Observe how the concurrence of the people is expressed, *v.* 29. (1.) They clave to their brethren; one and all. Here, whom the court blessed, the country blessed too! The commonalty agreed with their nobles in this good work. Great men never look so great, as when they encourage religion, and are examples of it; and they would by that, as much as any thing, secure an interest in the most valuable of their inferiors. Let but the nobles cordially espouse religious causes, and perhaps they will find people cleave to them therein closer than they can imagine. Observe, Their nobles are called their *brethren*, for, in the things of God, rich and poor, high and low, meet together. (2.) They entered *into a curse and an oath.* As the nobles confirmed the covenant with their hands and seals, so the people with a *curse and an oath*; solemnly appealing to God concerning their sincerity, and imprecating his just revenges if they dealt deceitfully. Every oath has in it a conditional curse upon the soul, which makes it a strong bond upon the soul; for our own tongues, if false and lying tongues, will fall, and fall heavy, upon ourselves.

III. The general purport of this covenant. They laid upon themselves no other burthen than this necessary thing, which they were already obliged to by all other engagements of duty, interest, and gratitude—to *walk in God's law, and to do all his commandments*, *v.* 29. Thus David swore that he would *keep God's righteous judgments*, Ps. 119. 106. Our own covenant binds us to this, if not more strongly, yet more sensibly, than we were before bound, and therefore we must not think it needless thus to bind ourselves. Observe, When we bind ourselves to do the commandments of God, we bind ourselves to do *all* his commandments, and therein to have an eye to him as the Lord, and our Lord.

IV. Some of the particular articles of this covenant; such as were adapted to their present temptations.

1. That they would not intermarry with the heathen, *v.* 30. Many of them had been guilty of this, *Ezra* 9. 1. In our covenant with God, we should engage particularly against those sins that we have been most frequently overtaken in, and damaged by. They that resolve to *keep the commandments of God, must say to evil-doers, Depart*, *Ps.* 119. 115.

2. That they would keep no market on the sabbath-day, or any other day of which the law had said, *Ye shall do no work therein*. They would not only not sell goods themselves for gain on that day, but they would not encourage the heathen to sell on that day, by buying of them, no not victuals, under pretence of necessity; but would buy in their provisions for their families the day before, *v.* 31. Note, Those that covenant to keep all God's commandments, must particularly covenant to keep sabbaths well; for the profanation of them is an inlet to other instances of profaneness. The sabbath is a market day for our souls, but not for our bodies.

3. That they would not be severe in exacting their debts, but would observe the 7th year as a year of release, according to the law, *v.* 31. In this matter they had been faulty, (*ch.* 5.) and here therefore they promise to reform. This was the acceptable fast, to *undo the heavy burthen*, and to *let the oppressed go free*, *Isa.* 58. 6. It was in the close of the day of expiation, that the jubilee trumpet sounded. It was for the neglect of observing the 7th year as a year of rest for the land, that God had made it enjoy its sabbaths 70 years; (*Lev.* 26. 35.) and therefore they covenanted to observe that law. Those are stubborn children indeed, that will not amend the fault which they have been particularly corrected for.

32. Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel, for the service of the house of our God; 33. For the show-bread, and for the continual meat-offering, and for the continual burnt-offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin-offering, to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. 34. And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood-offerings, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed, year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law; 35. And to bring the first-fruits of our ground, and the first-fruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD; 36. Also the first-born of our sons, and of our cattle, (as it is written in the law,) and the firstlings of our herds, and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God; 37. And that we should bring the first-fruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine, and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our

ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. 38. And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure-house. 39. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi, shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

Having covenanted against the sins they had been guilty of, they proceed in obliging themselves to revive and observe the duties they had neglected. We must not only *cease to do evil*, but *learn to do well*.

I. It was resolved in general, that the temple-service should be carefully kept up, that the work of the house of their God should be done in its season, according to the law, *v.* 33. Let not any people expect the blessing of God, unless they make conscience of observing his ordinances, and keeping up public worship. Then it is likely to go well with our houses, when care is taken that the work of God's house go on well. It was likewise resolved, that they would never *forsake the house of their God*, (*v.* 39.) as they and their fathers had done, nor forsake it for the house of any other god, or for the high places, as idolaters did; nor forsake it for their farms and merchandises, as those did, that were atheistical, and profane. They that forsake the worship of God, forsake God.

II. It was resolved in pursuance of this, that they would liberally maintain the temple-service, and not starve it. The priests were ready to do their part in all the work of God's house, if the people would do theirs, which was, to find them with materials to work upon. Now here it was agreed and concluded,

1. That a stock should be raised for the furnishing of God's table and altar plentifully. Formerly, they were treasures in the house of the Lord for this purpose, but those were gone, and there was no settled fund to supply the want of them. It was a constant charge to provide show-bread for the table, two lambs for the daily offerings, four for the sabbaths, and more, and more costly, sacrifices for other festivals, occasional sin-offerings, and meat-offerings, and drink-offerings for them all. They had no rich king to provide these, as Hezekiah did: the priests could not afford it, their maintenance was so small; the people therefore agreed to contribute yearly, each of them, the third part of a shekel, about ten pence a piece for the bearing of this expense. When every one will act, and every one will give, though but little, toward a good work, the whole amount will be considerable. The Tithing did not impose this tax, but the people made it an ordinance for themselves, and charged themselves with it, *v.* 32, 33.

2. That particular care should be taken to provide wood for the altar, to keep the fire always burning upon it, and wherewith to boil the peace-offerings. Each of them, priests and Levites as well as people, agreed to bring in his quota, and cast lots in what order he should bring it in, which family first, and which next, that there might be a constant supply, and not a scarcity at one time, and

an overplus at another, *v.* 34. Thus, they provided the fire and the wood, as well as the lambs for the burnt-offerings.

3. That all those things which the divine law had appointed for the maintenance of the priests and Levites, should be duly paid in, for their encouragement to mind their business, and that they might not be under any temptation to neglect it for the making of necessary provision for their families. Then the work of the house of God is likely to go on, when those that serve at the altar, live, and live comfortably, upon the altar. First-fruits and tenths were then the principal branches of the minister's revenues, and they here resolve, (1.) To bring in their first-fruits justly, of their ground and trees, *Exod.* 23. 19. *Lev.* 19. 24. The first-born of their children, even the money wherewith they were to be redeemed; and of their cattle, *Exod.* 13. 2, 11, 12. This was given to the priests, *Num.* 18. 15, 16. Also the first-fruits of their dough, (*Num.* 15. 21.) concerning which, there is a particular order given in the prophecy concerning the second temple, *Ezek.* 44. 30. (2.) To bring in their tenths likewise, which were due to the Levites, (*v.* 37.) and a tenth out of those tenths to the priests, *v.* 38. This was the law; (*Num.* 18. 21-28.) but these dues had been withheld, for which God, by the prophet, charges them with *robbing him*, (*Mal.* 3. 8, 9.) at the same time encouraging them to be more just to him and his receivers, with a promise that if they brought the *tithes into the store-house*, he would *pour out blessings upon them*, *v.* 10. This therefore they resolve to do, that there might be meat in God's house, and plenty in the store-chambers of the temple, where the vessels of the sanctuary were, *v.* 39. We will do it (say they) *in all the cities of our tillage*, *v.* 37. *In all the cities of our servitude*, so the LXX. for they were servants in their own land, *ch.* 9. 36. But (as Mr. Poole well observes) though they paid great taxes to the kings of Persia, and had much hardship put upon them, they would not make that an excuse for not paying tithes, but would render to God the things that were his, as well as to Caesar the things that were his. We must do what we can in works of piety and charity, notwithstanding the taxes we pay to the government; and cheerfully perform our duty to God in our servitude, which will be the surest way to ease and liberty in God's due time.

### CHAP. XI.

Jerusalem was walled round, but it was not as yet fully inhabited, and therefore was weak and despicable. Nehemiah's next care is to bring people into it: of that we have here an account. I. The method taken to replenish it, *v.* 1, 2. II. The principal persons that resided there, of Judah and Benjamin, *v.* 3. . 9. Of the priests and Levites, *v.* 10. . 19. III. The several cities and villages of Judah and Benjamin, that were peopled by the rest of their families, *v.* 20. . 36.

1. **A**ND the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities. 2. And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. 3. Now these *are* the chief of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem, (but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities,) *to wit*, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants. 4. And at Je-

rusalem dwelt *certain* of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah; Athaiah the son of Uziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalakeel, of the children of Perez; 5. And Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. 6. All the sons of Perez that dwelt at Jerusalem *were* four hundred threescore and eight valiant men. 7 And these *are* the sons of Benjamin; Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed the son of Pedaziah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jesaiah. 8. And after him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred twenty and eight. 9. And Joel the son of Zichri *was* their overseer: and Judah the son of Senuah *was* second over the city. 10. Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin. 11. Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, *was* the ruler of the house of God. 12. And their brethren, that did the work of the house, *were* eight hundred twenty and two: and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashur, the son of Malchiah, 13. And his brethren, chief of the fathers, two hundred forty and two: and Amashai the son of Azareel, the son of Ahasai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, 14. And their brethren, mighty men of valour, a hundred twenty and eight: and their overseer *was* Zabdiel, the son of *one of* the great men. 15. Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hashub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni: 16. And Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chief of the Levites, *had* the oversight of the outward business of the house of God. 17. And Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi. the son of Asaph, *was* the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer; and Bakkukiah, the second among his brethren, and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. 18. All the Levites in the holy city *were* two hundred fourscore and four. 19. Moreover, the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren that kept the gates, *were* a hundred seventy and two.

Jerusalem is called here the *holy city*, (*v.* 1.) because there the temple was, and that was the place God had chosen to put his name there; upon this account, one would think, the holy seed should have all chosen to dwell there, and have striven for a habitation there, but on the contrary, it seems, they declined dwelling there; either, 1. Because a greater strict-

ness of conversation was expected from the inhabitants of Jerusalem than from others, which they were not willing to come up to: those who care not for being holy themselves, are shy of dwelling in a holy city, they would not dwell in the *New Jerusalem* itself for that reason, but would wish to have a continuing city here upon earth. Or, 2. Because Jerusalem, of all places, was most hated by the heathen their neighbours, and against it their malicious designs were levelled, which made that the post of danger, (as the post of honour usually is,) and therefore they were not willing to expose themselves there. Fear of persecution and reproach, and running themselves into trouble, keeps many out of the holy city, and makes them backward to appear for God and religion, not considering that as Jerusalem is with a special malice threatened and insulted by its enemies, so it is with a special care protected by its God, and made a *quiet habitation*, Ps. 46. 4, 5. Or, 3. Because it was more for their worldly advantage to dwell in this country. Jerusalem was no trading city, and therefore there was no money to be got there by merchandises, as there was in the country by corn and cattle. Note, All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's, Phil. 2. 21. It is a general and just complaint, that most people prefer their own wealth, credit, pleasure, ease and safety, before the glory of God and the public good.

People being thus backward to dwell at Jerusalem, now that it was poor, we are here told,

1. By what means it was replenished. 1. The rulers dwelt there, v. 1. That was the proper place for them to reside in, because *there were set the thrones of judgment*, (Ps. 122, 5.) and thither, in all difficult matters, the people resorted with their last appeals. And if it were an instance of eminent affection to the house of God, zeal for the public good, and of faith, and holy courage, and self denial to dwell there at this time, the rulers would be examples of these to their inferiors. Their dwelling there would invite and encourage others to dwell there too; *Magnates, Magnates—The mighty are magnetic*. When great men choose the holy city for their habitation, it brings holiness into reputation, and their zeal will provoke very many. 2. There were some that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem, bravely postponing their own secular interest to the public welfare, v. 2. It is upon record, to their honour, that when others were shy of venturing upon difficulty, loss, and danger, they *sought the good of Jerusalem, because of the house of the Lord their God. They shall prosper, that thus love Zion*, Ps. 122. 6. 9. It is said, *The people blessed them*. They praised them, they prayed for them, they praised God for them. Many that do not appear forward themselves for the public good, will yet give a good word to those that do, God and man will bless those that are public blessings, which should encourage us to be zealous in doing good. 3. They, finding that *yet there was room*, concluded upon a review of their whole body, to bring one in ten to dwell in Jerusalem; who they should be, was determined by lot, the disposal whereof, all knew, was of the Lord. This would prevent strife, and would be a great satisfaction to those on whom the lot fell to dwell at Jerusalem, that they plainly saw God appointing the bounds of their habitation. They observed the proportion of one in ten, as we may suppose, to bring the balance between the city and country to a just and equal poise; so it seems to refer to the ancient rule of giving the tenth to God; and what is given to the holy city, he reckons given to himself.

II. By what persons it was replenished. A general account is here given of the inhabitants of Je-

rusalem, because the *governors of Judah* looked upon them as *their strength in the Lord of hosts their God*, and valued them accordingly, Zech. 12. 5.

1. Many of the children of Judah and Benjamin dwelt there; for, originally, part of the city lay in the lot of one of those tribes, and part in that of the other; but the greater part was in the lot of Benjamin, and therefore here we find of the children of Judah only 468 families in Jerusalem, (v. 6.) but of Benjamin, 928. v. 7, 8. Thus small were its beginnings, but, afterward, before our Saviour's time, it grew much more populous. Those of Judah all descended from Perez, or, Pharez, that son of Judah, of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came. And though the Benjamites were more in number, yet of the men of Judah it is said, (v. 6.) that they were valiant men, fit for service, and able to defend the city in case of an attack. Judah has not lost its ancient character, of a lion's whelp, bold and daring. Of the Benjamites that dwelt in Jerusalem, we are here told who was overseer, and who was second, v. 9. For it is as necessary for a people to have good order kept up among themselves, as to be fortified against the attacks of their enemies from abroad; to have good magistrates, as to have good soldiers.

2. The priests and Levites did many of them settle at Jerusalem; where else should men that were holy to God, dwell, but in the holy city?

(1.) Most of the priests, we may suppose, dwelt there, for their business lay where the temple was. Of them that did the work of the house in their courses, here were 822 of one family, 242 of another, and 128 of another, v. 12, 14. It was well that those labourers were not few. It is said of some of them, that they were *mighty men of valour*; (v. 14.) it was necessary that they should be, for the priesthood was not only a work, which required might, but of warfare, which required valour, especially now. Of one of these priests it is said, that he was *the son of one of the great men*. It was no disparagement to the greatest man they had, to have his son in the priesthood; he might magnify his office, for his office did not in the least diminish him.

(2.) Some of the Levites also came and dwelt at Jerusalem, yet but few in comparison, 284 in all, (v. 18.) with 172 porters, v. 19. For, much of their work was to *teach the good knowledge of God* up and down the country, for which purpose they were to be scattered in Israel: as many as there was occasion for, attended at Jerusalem, the rest were doing good elsewhere. [1.] It is said of one of the Levites, that he had *the oversight of the outward business of the house of God*, v. 16. The priests were chief managers of the business within the temple-gates; but this Levite was intrusted with the secular concerns of God's house, that were *in ordine ad spiritualia—subservient to its spiritual concerns*, the collecting of the contributions, the providing of materials for the temple-service, and the like, which it was necessary to oversee, else the business would have been starved, and have stood still. Those who take care of the *τὰ ἔξω—the outward concerns* of the church, the serving of its table, are as necessary in their place, as those who take care of its *τὰ ἔσω—its inward concerns*, who give themselves to the word and prayer. (2.) It is said of another, that he was *the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer*. Probably, he had a good ear and a good voice, and was a scientific singer, and therefore was chosen to lead the psalm. He was precentor in the temple. Observe, Thanksgiving is necessary in prayer; they should go together; giving thanks for former mercies is a becoming way of begging further mercies. And care should be taken in public service, that every thing be done in the best

manner, *decently and in good order*; in prayer, that one speak, and the rest join; in singing, that one begin and the rest follow.

20. And the residue of Israel, of the priests *and* the Levites, *were* in all the cities of Judah, every one in his inheritance. 21. But the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel: and Ziha and Gispah *were* over the Nethinims. 22. The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem *was* Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha. Of the sons of Asaph, the singers *were* over the business of the house of God. 23. For *it was* the king's commandment concerning them, that a certain portion should be for the singers, due for every day. 24. And Pethahiah the son of Meshezabeel, of the children of Zerach, the son of Judah, *was* at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people. 25. And for the villages, with their fields, *some* of the children of Judah dwelt at Kirjath-arba, and *in* the villages thereof, and at Dibon, and *in* the villages thereof, and at Jekabzeel, and *in* the villages thereof, 26. And at Jeshua, and at Moladah, and at Bethphelet, 27. And at Hazar-shual, and at Beer-sheba, and *in* the villages thereof, 28. And at Ziklag, and at Mekonah, and *in* the villages thereof, 29. And at En-riimon, and at Zareah, and at Jarmuth, 30. Zanoah, Adullam, and *in* their villages, at Lachish, and the fields thereof, at Azekah, and *in* the villages thereof. And they dwelt from Beer-sheba unto the valley of Hinnom. 31. The children also of Benjamin from Geba *dwelt* at Michmash, and Aija, and Beth-el, and *in* their villages, 32. And at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, 33. Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, 34. Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, 35. Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen. 36. And of the Levites *were* divisions *in* Judah, and *in* Benjamin.

Having given an account of the principal persons that dwell in Jerusalem, (a larger account of whom we had before, 1 Chron. 9. 2, &c.) Nehemiah, in these verses, gives us some account of the other cities, in which dwelt *the residue of Israel*, v. 20. It was requisite that Jerusalem should be replenished, yet not so as to drain the country; *the king himself is served of the field*, which will do little service, if there be not hands to manage it; let there therefore be no strife, no envy, no contempt, no ill will, between the inhabitants of the cities and those of the villages; both are needful, both useful, and neither can be spared.

1. The Nethinims, the posterity of the Gibeonites dwelt in Ophel, which was upon the wall of Jerusalem, (ch. 3. 26.) because they were to do the servile work of the temple, which therefore they must be posted near to, that they might be ready to attend, v. 21.

2. Though the Levites were dispersed through the cities of Judah, yet they had an overseer who

resided in Jerusalem, superior of their order, and their provincial, to whom they applied themselves for direction, who took care of their affairs, and took cognizance of their conduct, whether they did their duty, v. 22.

3. Some of the singers were appointed to look after the necessary repairs of the temple, being ingenious men, and having leisure betwixt their hours of service; they were *over the business of the house of God*, v. 22. And it seems the king of Persia had such a kindness for their office, that he allotted a particular maintenance for them, beside what belonged to them as Levites, v. 23.

4. Here is one that was the king's commissioner at Jerusalem; he was of the posterity of Zerach, v. 24. For of *that* family of Judah, there were some now settled in Jerusalem, and not all of Pharez, as appears by that other catalogue, 1 Chron. 9. 6. He is said to be *at the king's hand*, or, *on the king's part*, in all matters concerning the people, to determine controversies that arose between the king's officers and his subjects; to see that what was due to the king from the people, was duly paid in, and that what was allowed by the king for the temple-service, was duly paid out; it was happy for the Jews, that one of themselves was in this post.

5. Here is an account of the villages, or country-towns, which were inhabited by the residue of Israel. The towns in which the children of Judah dwelt, v. 25. . . 30. Those that were inhabited by the children of Benjamin, v. 31. . . 35. And divisions for the Levites among both, v. 36. We will now suppose them safe and easy, though few and poor. Indeed, by the blessing of God, they were likely to increase in wealth and power; and they would have been more likely, if there had not been that general profaneness among them, and lukewarmness in religion, which the prophet Malachi charges them with, (in God's name,) who it is supposed, prophesied about this time, and in whom prophecy ceased for some ages, till it revived in the Great Prophet and his forerunner.

## CHAP. XII.

In this chapter, are preserved upon record, I. The names of the chief priests and the Levites that came up with Zerubbabel, v. 1. . . 9. II. The succession of the High Priest, v. 10, 11. III. The names of the next generation of the other chief-priests, v. 12. . . 21. IV. The eminent Levites that were in Nehemiah's time, v. 22. . . 26. V. The solemnity of dedicating the wall of Jerusalem, v. 27. . . 43. VI. The settling of the offices of the priests and Levites in the temple, v. 44. . . 47.

1. **N**OW these *are* the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, 2. Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, 3. Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, 4. Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah, 5. Miamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, 6. She-maiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah, 7. Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, Jedaiah. These *were* the chief of the priests, and of their brethren, in the days of Jeshua. 8. Moreover, the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, *which was* over the thanksgiving, he and his brethren. 9. Also Bakkukiah and Unni, their brethren, *were* over against them in the watches. 10. And Jeshua begat Joiakim, Joiakim also begat Eliashib, and Eliashib begat Joiada, 11. And Joiada begat Jonathan, and Jonathan



begat Jaddua. 12. And in the days of Joiakim were priests, the chief of the fathers: of Seraiah, Meraiah: of Jeremiah, Hananiah: 13. Of Ezra, Meshullam: of Amariah, Jehohanan: 14. Of Melicu, Jonathan: of Shebaniah, Joseph: 15. Of Harim, Adna: of Meraioth, Helkai: 16. Of Iddo, Zechariah: of Ginnethon, Meshullam: 17. Of Abijah, Zichri: of Miniamin of Moadiah, Piltai: 18. Of Bilgah, Shammua: of Shemaiah, Jehonathan: 19. And of Joiarib, Mattenai: of Jedaiah, Uzzi: 20. Of Sallai, Kallai: of Amok, Eber: 21. Of Hilkiah, Hashabiah: of Jedaiah, Nethaneel. 22. The Levites, in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, were recorded chief of the fathers; also the priests, to the reign of Darius the Persian. 23. The sons of Levi, the chief of the fathers, were written in the book of the Chronicles, even until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. 24. And the chief of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brethren over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, ward over against ward. 25. Mattaniah, and Bakkukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, were porters, keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gates. 26. These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe.

We have here the names, and little more than the names, of a great many priests and Levites, that were eminent in their day, among the returned Jews. Why this register should be here inserted by Nehemiah, does not appear; perhaps to keep in remembrance those good men, that posterity might know to whom they were beholden, under God, for the happy revival and re-establishment of their religion among them. Thus must we contribute toward the performance of that promise, (Ps. 112. 6.) *that the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.* Let the memory of the just be blessed, be perpetuated. It is a debt we still owe to faithful ministers, to remember our guides, who have spoken to us the word of God, Heb. 13. 7. Perhaps it is intended to stir up their posterity, who succeeded them in the priest's office, and inherited their dignities and preferments, to imitate their courage and fidelity. It is good to know what our godly ancestors and predecessors were, that we may learn thereby what we should be. We have here,

1. The names of the priests and Levites that came up with the first out of Babylon, when Jeshua was High Priest. Jeremiah and Ezra, though both of them were priests, are mentioned with the first, (v. 1.) but, it is supposed, not Jeremiah the prophet, or Ezra the scribe; the fame of the one was diffused long before, and the other some time after. Of one of the Levites it is said, (v. 8.) that he was *over the thanksgiving*, that is, he was intrusted to see that the psalms, the thanksgiving psalms, were

constantly sung in the temple in due time and manner. The Levites kept their turns in their watches, relieving one another as becomes brethren, fellow-labourers, and fellow-soldiers.

2. The succession of High Priests during the Persian monarchy, from Jeshua (or Jesus) who was High Priest at the time of the restoration, to Jaddua (or Jaddus) who was High Priest when Alexander the Great, after the conquest of Tyre, came to Jerusalem, and paid great respect to this Jaddus, who met him in his pontifical habit, and showed him the prophecy of Daniel, which foretold his conquests.

3. The next generation of priests, who were chief men, and active in the days of Joiakim, sons of the first set. Note, We have reason to acknowledge God's favour to his church, and care of it, in that, as one generation of ministers passes away, another comes. All these who are mentioned, (v. 1, &c.) as eminent in their generation, are again mentioned, though with some variation in several of the names, (v. 12, &c.) except two, as having sons that were likewise eminent in their generation; a rare instance that 20 good fathers should leave behind them 20 good sons, (for so many here are,) that filled up their places.

4. The next generation of Levites, or rather, a later generation; for those priests mentioned flourished in the days of Joiakim the High Priest, these Levites in the days of Eliashib, v. 22. Perhaps then the forementioned families of the priests began to degenerate, and the third generation of them came short of the two first; but the work of God shall never fail for want of instruments. Then a generation of Levites was raised up, that were recorded chief of the fathers, (v. 22.) and were eminently serviceable to the interests of the church, and their service not the less acceptable either to God or his people, for their being Levites only of the lower rank of ministers. Eliashib the High Priest being allied to Tobiah, (ch. 13. 4.) the other priests grew remiss; but then the Levites appeared the more zealous, as appears by this, that these who were now employed in expounding, (ch. 8. 7.) and in praying, (ch. 9. 4, 5.) were all Levites, not priests, regard being had to their personal qualifications more than to their order. These Levites were some of them singers, (v. 24.) to praise and give thanks, others of them porters, (v. 25.) keeping the wards at the thresholds of the gate; and both according to the command of David.

27. And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps. 28. And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi; 29. Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem. 30. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall. 31. Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall, toward



the dung-gate: 32. And after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah, 33. And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, 34. Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah; 35. And *certain* of the priests' sons with trumpets; *namely*, Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph; 36. And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarael, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them. 37. And at the fountain-gate, which was over against them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water-gate eastward. 38. And the other *company of them that gave thanks* went over against *them*, and I after them, and the half of the people upon the wall, from beyond the tower of the furnaces even unto the broad wall; 39. And from above the gate of Ephraim, and above the old gate, and above the fish-gate, and the tower of Hananeel, and the tower of Meah, even unto the sheep-gate: and they stood still in the prison-gate. 40. So stood the two *companies of them that gave thanks* in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me: 41. And the priests; Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; 42. And Maaseiah, and Shemaiah, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah *their overseer*. 43. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced; so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

We have read of the building of the wall of Jerusalem with a great deal of fear and trembling; we have here an account of the dedicating of it with a great deal of joy and triumph. *They that sow in tears shall thus reap.*

I. We must inquire what was the meaning of this dedication of the wall; we will suppose it to include the dedication of the city too, (*contiens pro contento—the thing containing for the thing contained,*) and therefore it was not done till the city was pretty well replenished, *ch.* 11. 1. It was a solemn thanksgiving to God for his great mercy to them, in the perfecting of this undertaking, which they were the more sensible of, because of the difficulty and opposition they had met with in it. 2. They hereby devoted the city in a peculiar manner to God and to his honour; and took possession of it for him, and in his name. All our cities, all our houses, must have holiness to the Lord written upon them, but this city was (so as never any other was) a *holy city*, the *city of the great King*; (Ps. 48. 2. and

Matth. 5. 35.) it had been so ever since God chose it to put his name there, and, as such, it being now refitted, it was afresh dedicated to God by the builders and inhabitants, in token of their acknowledgment that they were his tenants, and their desire that it might still be his, and that the property of it might never be altered. Whatever is done for their safety, ease, and comfort, must be designed for God's honour and glory. 3. They hereby put the city and its walls under the divine protection, owning that *unless the Lord kept the city*, the walls were *built in vain*. When this city was in possession of the Jebusites, they committed the guardianship of it to their gods, though they were blind and lame ones, 2 Sam. 5. 6. With much more reason do the people of God commit it to his keeping, who is All-wise and Almighty. The superstitious founders of cities had an eye to the lucky position of the heavens; (see Mr. Gregory's works, *p.* 29, &c.) but these pious founders had an eye to God only, to his providence, and not to fortune.

II. We must observe with what solemnity it was performed, under the direction of Nehemiah.

1. The Levites from all parts of the country were summoned to attend. The city must be dedicated to God, and therefore his ministers must be employed in the doing of it, and the surrender must pass through their hands. When those solemn feasts were over, (*ch.* 8. and 9.) they were gone home to their respective posts, to mind their cures in the country, but now their presence and assistance were again called for.

2. Pursuant to this summons, there was a general rendezvous of all the Levites, *v.* 28, 29. Observe in what method they proceeded.

(1.) They *purified themselves*, *v.* 30. We are concerned to *cleanse our hands*, and *purify our hearts*, when any work of God is to pass through them. They purified themselves, and then the people: they that would be instrumental to sanctify others, must sanctify themselves, and set themselves apart for God, with purity of mind and sincerity of intention. Then they purified *the gates and the wall*. Then may we expect comfort, when we are prepared to receive it. *To the pure all things are pure*; (Tit. 1. 15.) and to them who are sanctified, houses and tables, and all their creature-comforts and enjoyments, are sanctified, 1 Tim. 4. 4, 5. This purification was performed, it is probable, by sprinkling the *water of purifying*, or of *separation*, (as it is called, Num. 19. 9.) on *themselves* and the *people*, the walls and the gates; a type of the blood of Christ, with which our consciences being *purged from dead works*, we became fit to *serve the living God*, (Heb. 9. 14.) and to be his care.

(2.) The princes, priests, and Levites, walked round upon the wall in two companies, with musical instruments, to signify the dedication of it all to God, the whole circuit of it, *v.* 36. So that, it is likely, they sung psalms as they went along, to the praise and glory of God. This procession is here largely described. They had a rendezvous at one certain place, where they divided themselves into two companies. Half of the princes, with several priests and Levites, went on the right hand, Ezra leading their van, *v.* 36. The other half of the princes and priests, who gave thanks likewise, went to the left hand, Nehemiah bringing up the rear, *v.* 38. At length both companies met in the temple, where they joined their thanksgivings, *v.* 40. The crowd of the people, it is likely, walked on the ground, some within the wall, and others without; one end of this ceremony being to affect them with the mercy they were giving thanks for, and to perpetuate the remembrance of it among

them—processions, for such purposes, have their use.

(3.) The people *greatly rejoiced*, v. 43. While the princes, priests, and Levites, testify their joy and thankfulness by *great sacrifices, sound of trumpet, musical instruments, and songs of praise*, the common people testified theirs by loud shouts, which were heard afar off, farther than the more harmonious sound of their songs and music; and these shouts coming from a sincere and hearty joy, are here taken notice of; for God overlooks not, but graciously accepts, the honest zealous services of mean people, though there is in them little of art, and they are far from being fine. It is observed, that the women and children rejoiced; and their Hosannas were not despised, but recorded to their praise. All that share in public mercies, ought to join in public thanksgivings. The reason given, is, that *God had made them rejoice with great joy*; he had given them both matter for joy, and hearts to rejoice; his providence had made them safe and easy, and then his grace made them cheerful and thankful. The baffled opposition of their enemies, no doubt, added to their joy, and mixed triumph with it. Great mercies call for the most solemn returns of praise, *in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem*.

44 And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings, for the first-fruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them, out of the fields of the cities, the portions of the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited. 45. And both the sinners and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. 46. For in the days of David and Asaph, of old, *there were* chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God. 47. And all Israel, in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers and the porters every day his portion; and they sanctified *holy things* unto the Levites, and the Levites sanctified *them* unto the children of Aaron.

We have here an account of the remaining good effects of the universal joy that was at the dedication of the wall. When the solemnities of a thanksgiving-day leave such impressions on ministers and people, as that both are more careful and cheerful in doing their duty afterward, then they are indeed acceptable to God, and turn to a good account. So it was here.

1. The ministers were more careful than they had been of their work; the respect the people paid them upon this occasion, encouraged them to diligence and watchfulness, v. 45. *The singers kept the word of their God*, attending in due time to the duty of their office; the *porters* too, they *kept the ward of the purification*, that is, they took care to preserve the purity of the temple, by denying admission to those that were ceremonially unclean. When the joy of the Lord thus engages us to our duty, and enlarges us in it, it is then an earnest of that joy, which, in concurrence with the perfection of holiness, will be our everlasting bliss.

2. The people were more careful than they had been of the maintenance of their ministers. The people, at the dedication of the wall, among other

things they made matter of their joy, rejoiced *for the priests, and for the Levites that waited*, v. 44. They had a great deal of comfort in their ministers, and were glad of them; when they observed how diligently they waited, and what pains they took in their work, they rejoiced in them. Note, The surest way for ministers to recommend themselves to their people, and gain an interest in their affections, is, *to wait on their ministry*, (Rom. 12. 7.) to be humble and industrious, and to mind their business; when these did so, the people thought nothing too much to do for them, to encourage them. The law had provided them *their portions*; (v. 44.) but what the better were they for that provision, if what the law appointed them, either was not duly collected, or not justly paid them?

Now, (1.) Care is here taken for the collecting of their dues; they were modest, and would rather lose their right than call for it themselves; the people were many of them careless, and would not bring it unless they were called upon; and therefore *some were appointed*, whose office it should be to gather into the treasuries *out of the fields of the cities, the portions of the law for the priests and Levites*, (v. 44.) that their portion might not be lost for want of being demanded. This is a piece of good service, both to ministers and people, that the one may not come short of their maintenance, nor the other of their duty.

(2.) Care is taken, that, being *gathered in*, it might be duly *paid out*, v. 47. They gave the singers and porters their daily portion, over and above what was due to them as Levites; for we may suppose that when David and Solomon appointed them their work, (v. 45, 46.) above what was required from them as Levites, they settled a fund for their further encouragement. Let those that labour more abundantly in the word and doctrine, be counted worthy of this double honour. As for the other Levites, the tithes, here called *the holy things*, were duly set apart for them, out of which they paid the priests their tithe according to the law. Both are said to be *sanctified*; when what is contributed, either voluntarily or by law, for the support of religion and the maintenance of the ministry, is given with an eye to God and his honour, it is sanctified, and shall be accepted of him accordingly, and it will *cause the blessing to rest on the house*, and all that is in it, Ezek. 44. 30.

## CHAP. XIII.

Nehemiah, having finished what he undertook for the fencing and filling of the holy city, returned to the king his master, who could not long be without him, as appears, v. 6. But, after some time, he obtained leave to come back again to Jerusalem, to redress grievances, and purge out some corruptions which had crept in in his absence; and very active he was in reforming several abuses, which here we have an account of. I. He turned out from Israel the mixed multitude, the Moabites and Ammonites especially, v. 1. . 3. With a particular indignation, he expelled Tobiah out of the lodgings he had got in the courts of the temple, v. 4. . 9. II. He secured the maintenance of the priests and Levites to them more firmly than it had been, v. 10. . 14. III. He restrained the profanation of the sabbath-day, and provided for the due sanctification of it, v. 15. . 22. IV. He checked the growing mischief of marrying strange wives, v. 23. . 31.

1. **O**N that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever; 2. Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse

men; howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3. Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude. 4. And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, *was allied unto Tobiah*: 5. And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat-offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, (which was commanded *to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters,*) and the offerings of the priests. 6. But in all this *time* was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king. 7. And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. 8. And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household-stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. 9. Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers; and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat-offering and the frankincense.

It was the honour of Israel, and the greatest preservation of their holiness, that they were a peculiar people, and were so to keep themselves, and not to mingle with the nations, nor suffer any of them to incorporate with them.

Now here we have,

I. The law to this purport, which happened to be read *on that day, in the audience of the people*, (v. 1.) on the day of the dedication of the wall, as it should seem, for with their prayers and praises they joined the reading of the word; and though it was long after, that the other grievances, here mentioned, were redressed by Nehemiah's power, yet this of the mixed multitude, might be redressed then by the people's own act, for so it seems to be, v. 3. Or, perhaps, it was on the anniversary commemoration of that day, some years after, and therefore said to be *on that day*. They found a law, that the Ammonites and Moabites should not be naturalized, should not settle among them, nor unite with them, v. 1. The reason given is, because they had been injurious and ill-natured to the Israel of God, (v. 2.) had not showed them common civility, but sought their ruin, though they not only did them no harm, but were expressly forbidden to do them any. This law we have, with this reason, Deut. 23. 3-5.

II. The people's ready compliance with this law, v. 3. See the benefit of the public reading of the word of God; when it is duly attended to, it discovers to us sin and duty, good and evil, and shows us wherein we have erred. Then we profit by the discovery, when by it we are wrought upon to separate ourselves from all that evil to which we had addicted ourselves. They *separated from Israel all the mixed multitude*, which had of old been a snare to them, for the *mixed multitude fell a lusting*, Numb. 11. 4. These inmates they expelled, as usurpers and dangerous.

III. The particular case of Tobiah, who was an Ammonite, and to whom, it is likely, the historian had an eye in the recital of that law, (v. 1.) and the reason of it, v. 2. For he had the same enmity to Israel, that his ancestors had, the spirit of an Ammonite, witness his indignation at Nehemiah, (ch. 2. 10.) and the opposition he had given to his undertakings, ch. 4. 7. Observe,

1. How basely Eliashib the chief priest took this Tobiah in, to be a lodger even in the courts of the temple. (1.) He was allied to Tobiah, (v. 4.) by marriage first, and then by friendship: his grandson had married Sanballat's daughter, v. 28. Probably, some other of his family had married Tobiah's, and (would you think it?) the High Priest thought the alliance an honour to his family, and was proud of it, though really it was his greatest disgrace, and what he had reason to be ashamed of. It was expressly provided by the law, that the High Priest should marry *one of his own people*, else he *profanes his seed among his people*, Lev. 21. 14. And for Eliashib to contract an alliance with an Ammonite, a *servant*, (for so he is called,) and to value himself upon it, probably, because he was a wit, and a beau, and cried up for a fine gentleman, (ch. 6. 19.) was such a contempt of the crown of his consecration, as one would not wish should be told in Gath, or published in the streets of Askelon. (2.) Being allied to him, he must be acquainted with him. Tobiah, being a man of business, has often occasion to be at Jerusalem, I doubt, upon no good design. Eliashib is fond of his new kinsman, pleased with his company, and must have him as near him as he can; he has not a room for him stately enough in his own apartment, in the courts of the temple; therefore out of several little chambers which had been used for store-chambers, by taking down the partitions, he contrived to make one great chamber, a state-room for Tobiah, v. 5. A wretched thing it was, [1.] That Tobiah the Ammonite should be entertained with respect in Israel, and have a magnificent reception. [2.] That the High Priest, who should have taught the people the law, and set them a good example, should, contrary to the law, give him entertainment, and make use of the power he had, as overseer of the chambers of the temple for that purpose. [3.] That he should lodge him in the courts of God's house, as if to confront God himself; and this was next to setting up an idol there, as the wicked kings of old had done. An Ammonite must not *come into the congregation*; and shall one of the worst and vilest of the Ammonites be courted into the temple itself and caressed there. [4.] That he should throw out the stores of the temple, to make room for him, and so expose them to be lost, wasted, and embezzled, though they were the *portions of the priests*, merely to gratify Tobiah. Thus did he *corrupt the covenant of Levi*, as Malachi complained at this time, ch. 2. 8. Well might Nehemiah add, (v. 6.) *But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem*. If he had been there, the High Priest durst not have done such a thing. The envious one, who sows tares in God's field, knows how to take an opportunity to do it when the *servants sleep*, or are absent, Matth. 13. 25. The golden calf was made when Moses was in the mount.

2. How bravely Nehemiah, the chief governor, threw him out, and all that belonged to him, and restored the chambers to their proper use. When he came to Jerusalem, and was informed by the good people, who were troubled at it, what an intimacy was grown between their chief priest, and their chief enemy, it *grieved him sore*, (v. 7, 8.) that God's house should be so profaned, his enemies so caressed and trusted, and his cause betrayed by him that should be its protector and patron. No-

thing grieves a good man, a good magistrate, more than to see the ministers of God's house do any wicked thing. Nehemiah has power, and he will use it for God. (1.) Tobiah shall be expelled; he fears not disobliging him, fears not his resentments, or Eliashib's, nor excuses himself from interposing in an affair that lay within the jurisdiction of the High Priest, but, like one zealously affected in a good thing, expelled the intruder, by casting forth all his household-stuff: he did not seize it for his own use, but cast it out, that Tobiah, who, it is probable, was now absent, when he came again, might have no conveniencies for his reception there. Our Saviour thus *cleansed the temple*, that the *house of prayer* might not be a *den of thieves*. And thus they that would expel sin out of their hearts, those living temples, must throw out its household stuff, and all the provision made for it, strip it, starve it, and take away all those things that are the food and fuel of lust; this is, in effect, to mortify it. (2.) The temple-stores shall be brought in again, and the *vessels of the house of God put in their places*; but the chambers must first be sprinkled with the water of purification, and so cleansed, because they had been profaned. Thus when sin is cast out of the heart by repentance, let the blood of Christ be applied to it by faith, and then let it be furnished with the graces of God's Spirit for every good work.

10. And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given *them*: for the Levites and the singers that did the work were fled every one to his field. 11. Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. 12. Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn, and the new wine, and the oil, unto the treasuries. 13. And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Maitaniah: for they were counted faithful; and their office was to distribute unto their brethren. 14. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.

Here is another grievance redressed by Nehemiah.

1. The Levites had been wronged: that was the grievance, their *portions* had not been given *them*, v. 10. Perhaps Tobiah, when he took possession of the store-chambers, seized the stores too, and, by the connivance of Eliashib, converted them to his own use. The complaint is not that they were not collected from the people, but that they were not given to the Levites, and the Levites were so modest as not to sue for them; for the Levites and singers were fled every one to his field. This comes in as a reason, either, (1.) Why their payments were withheld; the Levites were non-residents: when they should have been doing their work about the temple, they were at their farms in the country, and therefore the people were little inclined to give them their maintenance. If ministers have not the encouragement they should have, let them consider, whether they themselves

be not accessory to the contempt they are under, by the neglect of their business. Or rather, (2.) It is the reason why Nehemiah soon perceived that their dues had been denied them, because he missed them from their posts. "Where are the singers?" (said Nehemiah,) "Why do not they attend according to their office, to praise God?" Why, truly they were gone every one to his country-seat, to get a livelihood for themselves and their families out of their grounds, for their profession would not maintain them. A scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry. The work is neglected, because the workmen are. It was not long since the payment of the salaries appointed for the singers was put into a very good method; (ch. 12. 47.) and yet how soon did it fail, for want of being looked after!

2. Nehemiah laid the fault upon the rulers, who should have taken care that the Levites minded their business, and had all due encouragement therein. This is required from christian magistrates, that they use their power to oblige ministers to do their duty, and people to do their's. Nehemiah began with the rulers, and called them to an account, *Why is the house of God forsaken?* (v. 11.) Why are the Levites starved out of it? Why did not you take notice of this, and prevent it? The people *forsook the Levites*, which was expressly forbidden; (Deut. 12. 19.—14. 27.) and then the Levites forsook their post in the house of God. Both ministers and people, who forsake religion and the services of it, and magistrates too, who do not what they can to keep them to it, will have a great deal to answer for.

3. He delayed not to bring the dispersed Levites to their places again, and set them in their stations, as the word is, v. 11. A Levite in his field (*clericus in foro—a minister in a market*) is out of his station; God's house is his place, and there let him be found. Many that are careless, would do much better than they do, if they were but called upon. *Say to Archippus, Take heed to thy ministry.*

4. He obliged the people to bring in their tithes, v. 12. His zeal provoked their's; and when they saw the Levites at their work, they could not, for shame, withhold their wages any longer, but honestly and cheerfully brought them in. The better church-work is done, the better will church-dues be paid.

5. He provided that just and prompt payment should be made of the Levites' stipends; commissioners were appointed to see to this, (v. 13.) and they were such as were counted faithful, that is, had approved themselves so in other trusts committed to them, and so had purchased to themselves this good degree, 1 Tim. 3. 13. Let men be tried first, and then trusted; tried in the less, and then trusted with more. Their office was to receive and pay, to distribute to their brethren in due season and due proportions.

6. Having no recompense (it is a question whether he had thanks) from those for whom he did these good services, he looks up to God as his Pay-Master, (v. 14.) *Remember me, O my God, concerning this.* Nehemiah was a man much in pious ejaculations; on every occasion, he looked up to God, and committed himself and his affairs to him. (1.) He here reflects with comfort and much satisfaction upon what he had done for the house of God and the offices thereof: it pleased him to think that he had been any way instrumental to revive and support religion in his country, and to reform what was amiss. What kindness any show to God's ministers, thus shall it be returned into their own bosoms, in the secret joy they shall have there, not only in having done well, but in having done good, good to many, good to souls. (2.) He here

refers himself to God to consider him for it, not in pride, or as boasting of what he had done, much less depending upon it as his righteousness, or as if he thought he had made God a debtor to him, but in a humble appeal to him concerning his integrity and honest intention in what he had done, and a believing expectation, that he would not be unrighteous to *forget his work and labour of love*, Heb. 6. 10. Observe how modest he is in his requests; he only prays, *Remember me*, not *Reward me*; *Wipe not out my good deeds*, not *Publish them*, *Record them*. Yet he was rewarded, and his good deeds recorded; for God does more than we are able to ask. Note, Deeds done *for the house of God and the offices of it*, for the support of religion, and the encouragement of it, are good deeds; there is both righteousness and godliness in them, and God will certainly remember them, and not wipe them out; they shall in no wise lose their reward.

15. In those days saw I in Judah *some* treading wine-presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all *manner of burdens*, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath-day: and I testified *against them* in the day wherein they sold victuals. 16. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. 17. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing *is* this that ye do, and profane the sabbath-day? 18. Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath. 19. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and *some* of my servants set I at the gates, *that* there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath-day. 20. So the merchants, and sellers of all kind of ware, lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. 21. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do *so* again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no *more* on the sabbath. 22. And I commanded the Levites, that they should cleanse themselves, and *that* they should come *and* keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath-day. Remember me, O my God, *concerning* this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

Here is another instance of that blessed reformation in which Nehemiah was so active; he revived sabbath-sanctification, and maintained the authority of the fourth commandment; a very good deed this was for the house of God and the offices thereof; for where holy time is overlooked and made

nothing of, it is not strange if all holy duties be neglected. Here is,

I. A remonstrance of the abuse. The law of the sabbath was very strict, and much insisted on; and with good reason, for religion is never in the throne, while sabbaths are trodden under foot. But Nehemiah discovered even in Judah, among those to whom sabbaths were given for a sign, this law wretchedly violated. His own eyes were his informers; magistrates, who are in care to discharge their duty aright, will, as much as may be, *see with their own eyes, and accomplish a diligent search* to find out that which is evil. To his great grief, it appeared that there was a general profanation of the sabbath, that holy day, even in Jerusalem, that holy city, which was so lately dedicated to God. 1. The husbandmen trod their wine-presses, and brought home their corn, on that day, (v. 15.) though there was an express command, that *in earing-time, and in harvest-time, they should rest* on the sabbaths, (Exod. 34. 21.) because then they might be tempted to take a greater liberty, and to fancy that God would indulge them in it. 2. The carriers *loaded their asses with all manner of burthens*, and made no scruple of it, though there was a particular proviso in the law for the cattle resting, (Deut. 5. 14.) and that they should *bear no burthen on the sabbath day*, Jer. 17. 21. 3. The hawkers, and pedlars, and petty chapmen, that were men of Tyre, that famous trading city, *sold all manner of ware* on the sabbath-day; (v. 16.) and the children of Judah and Jerusalem had so little grace as to buy of them, and so encourage them making our Father's day a day of merchandise, contrary to the law of the fourth commandment, which forbids the *doing any manner of work*. No wonder there was a general decay of religion, and corruption of manners among this people, when they *forsook the sanctuary, and profaned the sabbath*.

II. The reformation of it. They that are jealous for the honour of God, cannot bear to see his sabbath profaned. Observe in what method this good man proceeded in his zeal for the sabbath.

1. *He testified against them* who profaned it, (v. 15.) and again, v. 21. He not only expressed his own dislike of it, but endeavoured to convince them that it was a great sin, and showed them the testimony of the word of God against it. He would not punish it, till he had laid open the evil of it.

2. He reasoned with the rulers concerning it, took the nobles of Judah to task, and contended with them, v. 17. The greatest of men are not too high to be told of their faults by those whose proper office it is; nay, great men should be, as here, contended with in the first place because of the influence they have upon others. (1.) He charged them with it, *Ye do it*. They did not carry corn nor sell fish, but, [1.] They connived at them that did, and did not use their power to restrain them, and so made themselves guilty, as those magistrates do, who bear the sword in vain. [2.] They set a bad example in other things; if the nobles allowed themselves in sports and recreations, in idle visits, and idle talk, on the sabbath-day, the men of business, both in city and country, would profane it by their worldly employments, as more justifiable. We must be responsible for the sins which others are led to commit by our example. (2.) He charges it upon them as an evil thing, for so it is, proceeding from a great contempt of God and our own souls. (3.) He reasons the case with them, (v. 18.) and shows them that sabbath-breaking was one of the sins for which God had brought judgments upon them, and that if they did not take warning, but return to the same sins again, they had reason to expect further judgments; *Ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath*. This Ezra

concluded, *If we again break thy commandments, wilt not thou be angry with us till thou hast consumed us?* Ezra 9. 14.

3. He took care to prevent the profanation of the sabbath, as one that aimed only at reformation; if he could reform them, he would not punish them, and if he should punish them, it was but that he might reform them. This is an example to magistrates to be heirs of restraint, and prudently to use the bit and bridle, that there may be no occasion for the lash.

(1.) He ordered the gates of Jerusalem to be kept shut from the evening before the sabbath to the morning after, and set his own servants (whose care, courage, and honesty, he could confide in) to watch them, that no burthens should be brought in on the sabbath-day, nor late the night before, nor early in the morning after, lest sabbath-time should be trencched upon, *v.* 19. Those that came in to worship in the courts of the temple, were, no doubt, admitted to pass and repass, but none that came to sell goods, *they were forced to lodge without the city,* (*v.* 20.) where, no doubt, they wished the sabbath were gone, that they might sell corn.

(2.) He threatened those who came with goods to the gates, who pressed hard for entrance, telling them that if they came again, he would certainly lay hands on them, *v.* 21. This deterred them from coming any more. Note, If reformers will but put on resolution, more may be done toward the breaking of bad customs than they can imagine. Vice connived at, is indeed a daring thing, and will bid defiance to counsel and reproof; but it may be made cowardly, and will be so, when magistrates make themselves a terror to it. *The king that sits on the throne of judgment, scatters away all evil with his eyes.*

(3.) He charged the Levites to take care about the due sanctifying of the sabbath, that they should cleanse themselves in the first place, and so give a good example to the people, and *that they should some of them come and keep the gates,* *v.* 22. Because he and his servants must shortly return to court, he would leave this charge with some that might abide by it, that not only when he was present, but in his absence, the sabbath might be sanctified. *Then* there is likely to be a reformation in this and other instances, when magistrates and ministers join their forces. The courage, zeal, and prudence, of Nehemiah in this matter, are here recorded for our imitation; and we have reason to think that the cure he wrought, was lasting; for, in our Saviour's time, we find the Jews in the other extreme, over-scrupulous in the ceremonial part of sabbath-sanctification.

4. He concludes this passage with a prayer, *v.* 22. In which, observe, (1.) The petitions; *Remember me,* (as the thief on the cross,) *Lord, remember me,* that is enough; God's thoughts to usward are very precious, Ps. 40. 5. He adds, *Spare me;* so far is he from thinking that what he had done, did properly merit a reward in strict justice, that he cries earnestly to God *to spare him,* as Jeremiah, (*ch.* 15. 15.) *Take me not away in thy long-suffering,* (*ch.* 10. 24.) *Correct me not in anger,* and (*ch.* 17. 17.) *Be not a terror to me.* Note, The best saints, even when they do the best actions, stand in need of *sparing mercy,* for *there is not a just man that doeth good, and sinneth not.* (2.) The plea; *According to the greatness (or multitude of thy mercies).* Note, God's mercy is what we must depend upon, and not any merit of our own, when we appear before God

23. In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon,

and of Moab: 24. And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. 25. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, *saying,* Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. 26. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. 27. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? 28. And *one* of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, *was* son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me. 29. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. 30. Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; 31. And for the wood-offering at times appointed, and for the first-fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

We have here one instance more of Nehemiah's pious zeal for the purifying of his countrymen, a peculiar people to God; that was the thing he aimed at in the use of his power, not the enriching of himself.

I. See here how they have corrupted themselves by marrying strange wives. This was complained of in Ezra's time, and much done towards a reformation, Ezra 9. and 10. But when the unclean spirit is cast out, if a watchful eye be not kept upon him, he will re-enter, so he did here; though, in Ezra's time, they that had married strange wives, were forced to put them away, which could not but occasion trouble and confusion in families, yet others would not take warning; *Nitimur in vetitum—We still lean toward what is forbidden.* Nehemiah, like a good governor, inquired into the state of the families of those that were under his charge, that he might reform what was amiss in them, and so *heal the streams, by healing the springs.*

1. He inquired whence they had their wives, and found that many of the Jews had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab; (*v.* 23.) either because they were fond of what was far-fetched, or because they hoped by these alliances to strengthen and enrich themselves. See how God by the prophet reproves this, (Mal. 2. 11.) *Judah has dealt treacherously,* and broken covenant with God, the covenant made in Ezra's time, with reference to this very thing; he has *profaned the holiness of the Lord, by marrying the daughter,* that is, the worshipper, *of a strange god.*

2. He talked with children, and found they were children of strangers, for their speech betrayed them. The children were bred up with their mothers, and learned of them and their nurses and



servants to speak, so that they could not speak the Jews' language, either not at all, or not readily, or not purely, but half in the speech of Ashdod, or Ammon, or Moab, according as the country was, which the mother was a native of. Observe, (1.) Children, in their childhood, learn much of their mothers, *Partus sequitur ventrem*—*They are prone to imitate their mothers.* (2.) If either side be bad, the corrupt nature will incline the children to take after that, which is a good reason why christians should not be unequally yoked. (3.) In the education of children, great care should be taken about the government of their tongues; that they learn not the language of Ashdod, any impious or impure talk, any corrupt communication.

II. See what course Nehemiah took to purge out this corruption, when he discovered how much it had prevailed.

1. He showed them the evil of it, and the obligation he lay under to witness against it. He did not seek an occasion against them, but this was an iniquity to be punished by the judge, and which he must by no means connive at; (*v. 27.*) "*Which we hearken to you*, who endeavour to palliate and excuse it? No, it is an evil, a great evil, it is a *transgression against our God, to marry strange wives*, and we must do our utmost to put a stop to it; you beg that they may not be divorced from you, but we cannot hearken to you, for there is no other remedy to clear us from the guilt, and prevent the infection." (1.) He quotes a precept, to prove that it was in itself a great sin; and makes them swear to that precept, *Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons*, &c. which is taken from Deut. 7. 3. When we would reclaim people from sin, we must show them the sinfulness of it in the glass of the commandment. (2.) He quotes a precedent, to show the pernicious consequences of it, which made it necessary to be animadverted upon by the government; (*v. 26.*) *Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?* The falls of great and good men are *therefore* recorded, that we may take warning by them, to shun the temptations which they were overcome by. Solomon was famous for wisdom, there was no king like him for it; yet, when he married strange wives, his wisdom could not secure him from the snares, nay it departed from him, and he did very foolishly. He was beloved of God, but that threw him out of God's favour, and went near utterly to extinguish the holy fire of grace in his soul: he was king over all Israel, but that lost him ten of his twelve tribes. You plead that you can marry strange wives, and yet retain the purity of Israelites; but Solomon himself could not; even *him did outlandish women cause to sin*. Therefore let him that *thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall*, when he runs upon such a precipice.

2. He showed himself highly displeased at it, that he might awaken them to a due sense of the evil of it. He *contended with them*; (*v. 25.*) they offered to justify themselves in what they did, but he showed them how frivolous their excuses were, and argued it warmly with them. When he had silenced them, he *cursed them*, that is, he denounced the judgments of God against them, and showed them what their sins deserved. He then picked out some of them that were more obstinate than the rest, and fit to be made examples, and *smote them*, that is, ordered them to be beaten by the proper officers according to the law, Deut. 25. 2, 3. To which he added this further mark of in-

famy, he *plucked off their hair*, or cut or shaved it off; for it may be so understood. Perhaps they had prided themselves in their hair, and therefore he took it off, to deform and humble them, and put them to shame; it was, in effect, to stigmatise them, at least, for a time. Ezra, in this case, had plucked off his own hair, in holy sorrow for the sin; Nehemiah plucked off their hair, in a holy indignation at the sinners. See the different tempers of wise, and good, and useful, men, and the divers graces, as well as divers gifts, of the same Spirit.

3. He obliged them not to take any more such wives, and separated those whom they had taken. He *cleansed them from all strangers*, both men and women, (*v. 30.*) and made them promise with an oath that they would never do so again, *v. 25.* Thus did he try all ways and means to put a stop to this mischief, and to prevent another relapse into this disease.

4. He took particular care of the priests' families, that they might not lie under this stain, this guilt. He found, upon inquiry, that a branch of the High Priest's own family, one of his grandsons, had married a daughter of Sanballat, that notorious enemy of the Jews, (*ch. 2. 10.—4. 1.*) and so had, in effect, twisted interests with the Samaritans, *v. 28.* How little love had that man either to God or his country, who could make himself, in duty and interest, a friend to him that was a sworn enemy to both. It seems, this young priest would not put away his wife, and therefore Nehemiah *chased him from him*, deprived him, degraded him, and made him for ever incapable of the priesthood. Josephus says that this expelled priest was Manasseh, and that when Nehemiah drove him away, he went to his father-in-law Sanballat, who built him a temple upon mount Gerizzim, like that of Jerusalem, and promised him he should be High Priest in it, and that then was laid the foundation of the Samaritans' pretensions, which continued warm to our Saviour's time; (*John 4. 20.*) *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain*. When Nehemiah had thus expelled one that had forfeited the honour of the priesthood, he again posted the *priests and Levites, every one in his business*, *v. 30.* It was no loss to them to part with one that was the scandal of their coat; the work would be done better without him. When Judas was gone out, Christ said, *Now is the Son of Man glorified*, *John 13. 30, 31.*

*Lastly*, Here are Nehemiah's prayers on this occasion.

(1.) He prays, *Remember them, O my God, v. 29.* "Lord, convince and convert them, put them in mind of what they should be and do, that they may come to themselves." Or, "Remember them, to reckon with them for it; remember it against them." If we take it so, this prayer is a prophecy, that God would remember it against them. They that defile the priesthood, despise God, and shall be lightly esteemed. Perhaps they were too many and too great for him to deal with, "Lord" (says he) "deal thou with them, take the work into thine own hands."

(2.) He prays, *Remember me, O my God, v. 31.* The best services done to the public have some times been forgotten by those for whom they were done; (*Ecc. 9. 15.*) therefore Nehemiah refers himself to God, to recompense him, takes him for his Pay-Master, and then doubts not but he shall be well paid. This may well be the summary of our petitions, we need no more to make us happy than this; *Remember me, O my God, for good.*