

Triennial Torah Study – 3rd Year 02/02/2013

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We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Deut 3	Haggai	Neh 11-13	2 Corin 10-11
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Last-Minute Encouragement (Deuteronomy 3)

Moses reminds the new generation how God gave the Israelites victory over their enemies—“there was not a city which we did not take from them” (verse 4), although all of them “were fortified with high walls, gates and bars” (verse 5). This, says Moses, happened because “the Lord your God has given you this land to possess” (verse 18). This reminder was to inspire confidence in the Israelites at this momentous time—encouraging them to have faith as they crossed into the Promised Land, where they would meet Canaanite resistance. Moses, rather than wallowing in self-pity over the fact that he himself would not enter the land, obeys God’s command to provide this encouragement, particularly to Joshua, the new leader (verses 23-28). They need not fear the enemy since God will fight for Israel (verse 22).

Several commentaries including Tyndale and The Nelson Study Bible state that the “bedstead” of Og mentioned in verse 11 could also be translated sarcophagus. So the reference may be to the size of his coffin. These dimensions equal about 13 feet by 6 feet.

Haggai

“The Glory of This Latter Temple Shall Be Greater Than the Former” (Haggai 2:1-9)

The people of Judea had recommitted themselves to the work of God and had gotten off to a good new start. Through Haggai, God had exhorted them to the task and then encouraged them with the assurance of His presence with them. But that was of course not enough. This next message of Haggai illustrates the need for ongoing exhortation and encouragement—just as God’s people need today and at all times.

This next message comes just under a month from the recommencement of the temple construction. Interestingly, it comes on the 21st day of the seventh month, the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (see Leviticus 23:33-44). It was at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles that Solomon had dedicated the first temple. And for those who were old enough to remember, the annual Feast of Tabernacles was probably the time of the greatest expression of joy before the splendor of the former temple.

In recalling these things, some measure of disappointment may have set in—just as had happened when the foundation of the second temple was first laid, when those who remembered the former temple of Solomon wept (see Ezra 3:12-13). This could have been part of the reason for previously quitting the reconstruction—the idea of “What’s the use? It will never be as good as it was before.”

Haggai now “puts the discouraging sentiments into the mouths of the audience. They were all thinking it, and now Haggai has said it. The new is inferior to the old, and that fact along with the other discouraging circumstances had thoroughly depressed the people and stifled their initiative. One account of the effort Solomon put into his temple is recorded in 2 Chronicles 1-4. Compare this with the meager means of the

returned exiles, whose temple must have looked small indeed” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on Haggai 2:3-5). We can fall into this way of thinking with regards to the spiritual temple of God—His Church, considered either collectively or personally. Perhaps we reflect on the material accoutrements and accomplishments of the Church of God in the last century—with huge congregations, superb buildings and grounds, abundant financial means and a powerful, globe-girdling work. We could then look on the more modest physical situation of today and become discouraged—wondering what the use is of carrying on with the temple-building work God has delegated to us when our physical circumstances will seemingly never match what was there before. Maybe similar reasoning is applied to our spiritual condition if we have neglected our relationship with God: “I was so spiritually focused years ago. But I’ve made some wrong choices. I’ve done some bad things. I’ll never be where I was before. Why even bother?”

God did not leave the returned exiles hopeless. As Expositor’s notes: “Having brought the very problem of discouragement into focus, Haggai next offered the divine antidote: ‘Be strong...be strong...be strong... and work. For I am with you’ (v. 4). Notice the same imperative thrice repeated—to Zerubbabel, to Joshua, and to all the people. Notice also the threefold repetition of the formula ‘declares the Lord.’ The problem was essentially one of attitude. So the primary command was to take courage. When the people did that, the command to ‘work’ would be fulfilled quite naturally. For the Lord to have only said ‘work’ without giving assurances would have been inadequate motivation. These people did not need to be whipped but encouraged—not cudgeled but made optimistic. The most uplifting thing they or anyone could hear was that God was with them....

“The thought must have passed through some minds that God was with them no longer. There must have been those who were theologically naive and doubted that God could be with them if the temple and the ark [of the covenant] in particular were not intact. Undoubtedly fear gripped many of the returnees—fear that God had...[eternally abandoned] Jerusalem, fear that no amount of praying or piety would induce him to bless them again, fear that the whole endeavor was in vain, fear that the political enemies would in fact win, fear that all was lost. Therefore, the words of God through Haggai, which must have had a ring of authority to them, would have been of great comfort. And that encouraging word that shored up the sagging spirits of our spiritual forefathers should serve to bolster our spirits as well when we are spiritually discouraged” (note on verses 3-5).

Verse 6 is the only verse of Haggai quoted in the New Testament—in Hebrews 12:26. Haggai 2:5 is a reference to God’s Spirit being with the ancient Israelites at Mount Sinai. This is the time when Hebrews 12:26 says God’s “voice then shook the earth.” Haggai 2:6-7 goes on to describe the time when God “once more...will shake heaven and earth...and...all nations.” Hebrews 12:26-28 shows that the final shaking to come will leave only the Kingdom of God. This is certainly an end-time prophecy. It should be noted, though, that, as commentator Charles Feinberg explains, some have viewed Haggai 2:6-7 as referring “to the revolutions in the Persian and Greek empires. There were such shakings in these governments, but they can only be considered as initial and preparatory steps in the long process where the kingdoms are shaken from their position of rule, and finally the kingdom of the Lord Christ is realized upon earth” (The Minor Prophets, pp. 243-244). Given the turmoil at the beginning of Darius’ reign, it is conceivable that the returned exiles took this prophecy as applying to events of their own day—and misunderstanding this and the rest of Haggai’s prophecy as indicating the imminence of the messianic age.

Verse 7 mentions the “Desire of All Nations” and filling the temple with glory. Many have seen in these words a reference to the Messiah, Jesus Christ—that is, all nations desire a divine Savior and Deliverer and a relationship with the Creator of mankind even though they do not know His actual identity or understand God’s will. Others link the phrase “desire of all nations” to the mention of silver and gold in verse 8, seeing the “desire” as the precious things of the gentile nations being brought into the millennial temple of Ezekiel 40-44. Yet the mention of all the gold and silver in the world belonging to God may simply have been His way of telling the people that they need not fret over the absence of such precious metals from their present construction. After all, no matter how things look to them, God states that the glory of “this latter temple” shall be greater than the former (verse 9).

It perhaps seems odd that the millennial temple would be in view here considering that it will be a different temple than the one Zerubbabel built. Zerubbabel’s temple, the second temple, later renovated by King Herod, was utterly destroyed by the Romans. The millennial temple, as described in the final chapters of Ezekiel, will not be built until Christ’s return. It would seem, then, that the second temple must have been intended on some

level here in Haggai 2. Consider that a comparison is being drawn with Solomon's temple, and God is encouraging the people about the temple they are working on. How would it be an encouragement if the point were that the temple they were working on would not receive the greater glory—that the greater glory was instead reserved for a later temple to be built millennia after the one they were working on was destroyed?

Of course, Haggai's immediate audience would not have known any of this bad news. Moreover, we should return to verse 3, where Haggai asks, "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory?" Feinberg remarks, "From God's viewpoint there was only one house of the Lord on Mt. Zion, whether it was the Temple built by Solomon, Zerubbabel, or Herod later" (p. 243). Indeed, there is continuity between the temples. Nevertheless, we should recognize that a contrast is being drawn between "this latter temple" and "the former."

What, we might ask, did the second temple experience in the way of divine glory? After all, we've already seen that it was smaller. Moreover, factors evident upon later completion could have seemed to belie the idea of greater glory. "The Babylonian Talmud indicated five things were lacking in the Temple of Zerubbabel which were present in the Temple of Solomon: (1) the Ark of the Covenant [containing the Ten Commandments]; (2) the holy fire; (3) the Shekinah glory [the divine presence of God]; (4) the spirit of prophecy (the Holy Spirit); and (5) the Urim and Thummim" (p. 240). Yet consider that to this very temple, as later renovated by Herod, would come the Creator incarnate—God made flesh—Jesus Christ. Furthermore, as we will later consider in reading Acts 2, there is reason to believe that the temple may have been the "house" where Jesus' disciples were gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost following His death and resurrection—where the Holy Spirit came and filled them in a manifestation of power and thousands of gathered witnesses from different countries were converted as a result. This was the beginning of the New Testament Church—the spiritual temple of God as mentioned before—again providing a sense of continuity.

Indeed, the prophecy of the Desire of All Nations and the temple being filled with glory, while perhaps referring in part to events surrounding Christ's first coming, would—given the apparent time frame of following the shaking of all nations—seem to have more direct reference to events surrounding Christ's second coming. And the temple of God of that time referred to in the prophecy could well signify the spiritual one that continued right on beyond the destruction of the second temple and remains to this day—the New Testament Church of God.

Those elements of the first physical temple that were missing in the second have spiritual counterparts in the spiritual temple, the Church. Rather than the ark containing the Ten Commandments, the members of the Church of God have the law of God written on their hearts. Rather than the divinely ignited holy fire for sacrifices, those in the Church of God are offered up as living sacrifices, and their prayers as incense. The Shekinah (indwelling) glory of God abides within the members of His spiritual temple. The Church of God has the "prophetic word confirmed" (2 Peter 1:19). And rather than consult the Urim and Thummim, those in the Church are able to consult the full written Word of God and His ministry and receive discernment through God's Spirit. It is the Church of God, the spiritual temple, that will obtain the greatest glory of all, when it is fully glorified—indeed, deified—at the time of Christ's return. The glorified Church will then dwell with Christ at the physical millennial temple, again providing further continuity of the temple theme—that of a dwelling place, a house, a home for God and His family.

Haggai 2:9 ends with God's promise, "And in this place I will give peace"—shalom, ultimate contentment and satisfaction, with all as it should be. That certainly has not described the history of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount of any age since Haggai wrote. And even the Church, while experiencing a measure of the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7), has not received it in its fullness and perfection. That is something that lies yet in the future—the wonderful hope for which we wait.

"From This Day I Will Bless You" (Haggai 2:10-23)

Haggai's last two recorded messages came on the 24th day of the ninth month in Darius' second year (verses 10, 20)—corresponding to December 18, 520 B.C.

Haggai's first message on this day opens with a discussion of holiness and defilement. The previous month, Zechariah had issued a call to repentance, as we saw in our last reading (Zechariah 1:1-6). Though the people were once again engaged in the work of God, they still had personal sins, including wrong attitudes, to contend with. It was essential that they remain conformed to God's will.

In Haggai 2:11-13, God directs His prophet to ask the priests about issues of holiness. It was their responsibility to teach God's laws to the people, and it seems likely that this exchange took place before a gathering of the people. "There were two distinct questions: (1) If a man were carrying sacrificial (holy) flesh [that is, a dedicated meat offering] and happened to touch another object, would the object touched thereby become holy or set apart to the Lord? (2) If a man who was unclean by reason of contact with a corpse should touch any such object, would the object become unclean because of the man's uncleanness? The answer to the first question is negative; to the second it is affirmative. The passages bearing on the subject should be read carefully. (Note Lev 22:4-6; Num 19:11; and Lev 6:18.) Moral cleanness [which ritual purity symbolized] cannot be transmitted, said the Mosaic law, but moral uncleanness can. Legal impurity is more easily transmitted than legal purity. A healthy man cannot communicate his health to his sick child, but the sick child can communicate its disease to the father" (Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 245-246).

God explains that this is just how it had been with the Jewish nation (verse 14). When the returned exiles arrived in Judea, they had set up the altar of God and reinstated sacrifices (Ezra 3:1-6). Yet when the people gave up on their duty to reconstruct the temple, the ongoing sacrifices did not purify them even in a ritual sense. Instead, God considered these offerings unclean because the whole focus of the nation was wrong. Even the priests to whom Haggai spoke had been guilty—and it must have stung when they understood the point he was making.

Consider the imagery here further. Haggai's example was of a person, an individual, carrying sacrificial meat in his garment and of another person, again an individual, who was unclean because of a dead body. If there were one or a few people with right standing before God through physical and spiritual sacrifices, these could not spread righteousness throughout the nation just by their presence. On the other hand, a person who had become defiled through contact with a dead body would spread defilement (physical uncleanness being symbolic of spiritual uncleanness). A little sin in a group will spread (see 1 Corinthians 5). Perhaps what started as the wrong attitudes of a few people spread throughout the nation, eventually leading to the disengagement of the people from the rebuilding project.

Since Zechariah had just issued a call to repentance, we may surmise that some still had wrong attitudes even after the recommitment of the nation. Again, all it took was a few bad apples and the whole Jewish nation was at risk of being corrupted once again. The current rebuilding effort had to be accompanied by the right attitudes and ongoing obedience or the result would be the same. Just having a temple would not shield them from this reality. "The existence of the temple itself guaranteed nothing. The hearts of the people had to be in harmony with the sacrifices being made" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Haggai 2:13-14).

In verse 15, the New King James Version has "consider from this day forward...." And yet what follows concerns past circumstances. The Hebrew word translated "forward" literally means "upward," and its meaning here is disputed. Some translations have it as "backward"—as in the English idioms where "up the chain" denotes an earlier episode and "down the line" denotes a later one. If the meaning is "forward," the sense here is "From now on you need to think about these past circumstances." If the meaning is "backward," the concept is "Think back from this day on these past circumstances." (The same applies to verse 18).

But the time frame of the past circumstances is not immediately clear. When was "stone ... laid upon stone in the temple"? Some maintain that this refers to the laying of the foundation of the temple 16 years earlier (see Ezra 3:8-12). Others believe the reference is to the resumption of work on the temple just three months prior (see Haggai 1:14-15). Still others think the reference is to the day of Haggai's present message, the 24th day of the ninth month—seeing verse 18 as saying that it was on this particular day "that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid."

To understand, we should consider the circumstances the people were to reflect on. God had cursed their efforts and their produce to humble them and provoke them to repentance (verses 16-17). Interestingly, verse 17 is a quote from one of the earlier Minor Prophets, Amos, who had applied these words to the nation of Israel (see Amos 4:9). Nevertheless, the wording parallels the Lord's statements about the returned exiles in Haggai 1 (verses 6, 9-11). And it fits well with the point about their past defilement that He had just made in verses 10-14. Since their alienation from God and consequent punishment are said to have come before the laying of stone upon stone (verse 15), the stone-laying here would not seem to be the earlier laying of the foundation in Ezra

3—as the people were not then being punished for disobedience. (Unless the Exile as a whole is in view, but the blighted crops and hail seem to denote not the experience in Babylon but rather the punishment the people experienced in Judea after forsaking the temple reconstruction.)

How are we to reconcile the apparent contradiction of the temple foundation having been laid 16 years earlier (Ezra 3:8-12) and now again at the time of Haggai's preaching (Haggai 2:18)? There are a few possibilities. It may be that the foundation laid 16 years earlier was unfinished—and that work on it was resumed and completed during Haggai's ministry. It could also be that the foundation was earlier completed and even built upon but that, due to problems resultant from neglect, the structure had to be taken back down to the foundations and repairs made. It is also possible "that the first marked the subterranean foundation-laying and the second the first building at ground level as in ancient Mesopotamian practice" (New Bible Commentary: Revised, note on verse 18).

The laying of stone upon stone in verse 15, then, seems to refer to the resumption of the work on the temple three months prior. And the day of Haggai's current message being the date the foundation was laid (verse 18) would appear to mean that the foundation was finished on that day. We could perhaps loosely paraphrase verses 15-19 like this: "Think about how things were. Before you resumed work on the temple three months ago, I made things really hard for you when you would not repent. But now from this 24th day of the ninth month (on which the foundation has been completed), you may not see the results yet but I'm turning things around for you to bless you."

It is possible that there is a dual application to Haggai's message. A number of people have recognized the 24th day of the Hebrew ninth month, Kislev, as marking an important occasion in the modern history of the Jewish people. In 1917 the date corresponded to December 9, the day the Turks surrendered Palestine to the British during World War I. The British represent the leading nation of Israelite descent (see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*). And Britain is subject to the British monarchy—the Jewish dynasty of David (see our online publication *The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future*). As noted earlier, Haggai 2:17 was quoted from Amos 4:9, which referred initially to destruction to come on the northern kingdom of Israel. The words seem parallel to the national curses for disobedience in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. These passages seem to set forth a 2,520-year withholding of blessings—for the northern kingdom extending from their captivity and fall in the late 700s B.C. to the late 1700s and early 1800s A.D. (see "Birthright Blessings Delayed for 2,520 Years" at www.ucg/brp/materials/index.htm). Yet what of Judah? Interestingly, 2,520 years prior to 1917 was 604 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar initially invaded ancient Judah in 605 B.C. but then quickly returned to Babylon to assume the throne of the Babylonian Empire upon the death of his father. As explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Jeremiah 36, he returned in Kislev of the next year to secure his claim on Judah and its neighbors. It was at this time that a fast was called and Jeremiah's book was read to the people—and King Jehoiakim, having one last opportunity to repent, instead burned Jeremiah's book.

It certainly seems more than a mere coincidence that exactly 2,520 years elapsed from this confirmed subjugation of the Davidic dynasty in the Holy Land to Babylon until the restoration of the Davidic dynasty's sovereignty over the Holy Land—and that this restoration occurred on the 24th day of Kislev. This would later lead to the return of Jews to the Holy Land and the formation of the Jewish state of Israel. Thus, it may well be that God's statement that He will bless the Jews from the 24th day of Kislev concerns, on some level at least, the events of 1917. And there may yet be other applications, as the prophecy that follows in Haggai 2, still connected with the 24th of Kislev, concerns the end time.

Zerubbabel Chosen as a Signet (Haggai 2:10-23)

The 1st four verses of Haggai 2 constitute a second message given through the prophet on the same 24th day of Kislev. This final message of the book is addressed to Judah's governor, Zerubbabel.

The shaking of heaven and earth (verse 21) is repeated from verse 6—when God said greater glory than Solomon's temple would fill the new temple. Unless Haggai in some unrecorded sermon disabused them of the notion, the reference to the throwing down of the "throne of kingdoms" and the destruction of the strength of the gentile kingdoms (verse 22) would likely have been seen by the Jews of Judea as a reference to the fall of Persia—a concept to which the turmoil at the beginning of Darius' reign, which was still going on at this time, may well have lent credence.

God's reference to Zerubbabel as "My servant" and to His choosing him as a signet (verse 23) would have had quite an impact as well. Zerubbabel's grandfather was Jeconiah or Jehoiachin, whose descendants God had banned from the throne of David (Jeremiah 22:30). In giving that ban God had declared, "As I live...though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck you off" (verse 24). Those considering Haggai's prophecy might easily have wrongly concluded the following: the Persian Empire is now crumbling; God has overturned His ban on Jeconiah's descendants; Zerubbabel will soon reign as king; Zerubbabel is the Messiah.

Time would soon reveal these conclusions as erroneous. Darius soon solidified his rule and strengthened and expanded the Persian Empire. God did not negate His own word in removing the dynastic ban He had placed on Jeconiah's descendants. Zerubbabel never became king. And thus he was certainly not the prophesied Messiah. In fact, he mysteriously disappears from the storyline of Ezra shortly afterward, which we will later consider.

The book of Hebrews interprets the great shaking of Haggai 2:6 in an end-time sense. This is the reasonable interpretation of what is apparently the same shaking in verse 21. The overthrow of the "throne of kingdoms" (verse 22) will be accomplished in the same time frame. "Notice that it is 'throne' in the singular and not the plural. There is one supreme ruler over the earth, permitted by God and carried out by Satan, and it will be replaced by that of our Lord Jesus Christ. (See Rev 11:15)" (Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 247). Enemy forces fighting among themselves (Haggai 2:22) is another characteristic of the time of Christ's return (see Zechariah 14:13).

Then in verse 23 we have the exaltation of Zerubbabel, which occurs "in that day." Clearly this did not refer to the time of Haggai's preaching. "In that day" would here signify the day of the great future shaking just indicated—the time of Jesus Christ's second coming. Moreover, the phrase "in that day" is a typical formulation in prophecy for the end-time Day of the Lord.

Given all this, how are we to understand this future exaltation of Zerubbabel? There are a few different prevalent ideas. On one hand, Zerubbabel is seen as the predecessor of the Messiah. That is, in addressing Zerubbabel but specifying the time as that of the great shaking, the one really being addressed is the person who will hold Zerubbabel's office at that later time—the Messiah. In another view, Zerubbabel is simply seen as a representative type or symbol of the coming Messiah—wherein the faithful Davidic leader of the Jews stands for the ultimate faithful Davidic leader of the Jews. Alternatively, the exaltation and choosing of Zerubbabel is viewed as a reference to the Messiah coming from his line of descent—and Jesus is legally reckoned as a descendant of Zerubbabel through His adoption by Joseph (see Matthew 1; we will consider the physical genealogy of Luke 3 when we come to the New Testament).

There is, however, another very real and even likely possibility. Near the beginning of Haggai's short book, Zerubbabel had led the way in the nation's repenting and returning to the work of God (see Haggai 1:12, 14). And here at the end, he is promised a sure reward. Zerubbabel would indeed reign as a king before God. But not through his physical descent from Jeconiah, as that was forbidden. Rather, at the end of this evil age, when the spiritual powers and governments that dominate this planet are shaken and overthrown, Zerubbabel will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Spiritually born in a new body in direct descent from Almighty God, his descent will no longer be reckoned according to the flesh. Like all the saints, He will be able to sit with Jesus Christ on the throne of David and reign.

Zerubbabel, whose name means "the Seed of Babel"—signifying his birth there—can thus be viewed as typical of all God's servants. We have all been born in the Babylon of this world. But like Zerubbabel, we can be the "chosen" of God. We can function as God's signet. God may well have intended Zerubbabel to begin functioning in that capacity while still in the flesh—from that same 24th day of Kislev. In its entry on "signet" in the context of Haggai 2:23, *A Dictionary of Bible Types* states: "This unusual compliment is probably the greatest given to a man by the living God. He informed Zerubbabel that He would touch his life in such a blessed way that he would leave on every other life he touched the imprint of God and the impress of heaven. His conversation with others and his manner of life with them would make an indelible impression upon their hearts and they would know that he was a man of God" (1999, p. 371). This should characterize all of our lives even now. And if we remain

faithful, when glorified in the Kingdom of God, together with Zerubbabel and the rest of the saints, we will be able to serve as the perfect representatives of God the Father and Jesus Christ for all eternity.

Nehemiah 11

The People of Jerusalem and Other Towns of Judea (Nehemiah 11)

In chapter 5, Nehemiah had been concerned with the lack of people living in Jerusalem and a census was taken of the Jews of Judea with that concern in mind. Now we see that this was to provide the groundwork for a redistribution of the population so as to move more people into the capital. Nehemiah's solution was to "tithe" from the outlying areas—directing a tenth of the people from around the country to relocate to Jerusalem. This was determined by lot (10:1)—as was the responsibility for the wood offering in our previous reading (10:34). "The casting of lots, small stones or pieces of wood, was viewed by the Jews as a pious way of determining God's will. Thus Nehemiah left the choice of those who should move to Jerusalem up to God. The practice was used in choosing portions of the land to be occupied by the original conquerors of Canaan in Joshua's time" (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 1991, p. 320).

Yet notice from verse 2 that those who moved did so as a willing offering of themselves. To uproot from family and friends and move to a distant place to forge new friendships and a new life is never an easy thing. Yet, they were willing to move for the sake of serving God, just as people through the ages have done (and still do) to serve God's work and purpose.

Verses 3-24 list various residents of Jerusalem and some of their responsibilities. Verses 25-36 then list people in outlying areas. As in other passages regarding the people of Judea following the Babylonian Exile, we can see here that only two tribes of Israel are represented besides the priests and Levites—Judah and Benjamin. The people of the tribe of Judah dwelt in 17 towns and their surrounding villages. The Benjamites lived in 15 towns. "The limits of the Judean settlement after the return from Babylon have been confirmed by archaeological evidence; none of the YHD-YHWD (the official designation of the Persian province of Judea) coins have been found outside the area demarcated by these verses" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verses 25-30).

The Dedication of the Wall and Separation From Foreigners (Nehemiah 12:27-13:3)

Many believe that the dedication described in this passage most naturally follows the 52-day rebuilding of the city wall in chapters 3-6. Others see it as occurring a little later if the book's arrangement is chronological. Yet still others recognize it as occurring many years later—following the events of our previous reading. Indeed, a straightforward reading of the text leads to this conclusion. For according to Nehemiah 13:4, the reading from the law in verses 1-3 resulting in a separation from foreigners came before the high priest Eliashib provided Tobiah with quarters within the temple—which happened during Nehemiah's absence (see verses 6-7). And the reading of the law and resultant separation are said to have happened "on that day" (13:1)—that is, on the day of the events of the previous passage describing the dedication of the wall and Levitical appointments made at the same time.

It appears odd that the city wall would be dedicated more than 12 years—and probably more like 15 or more years—from the time of its completion. It seems more likely that this was a rededication. And there would have been a good reason for this based on our previous reading. Notice in verse 30 that the people, gates and wall were purified. They had been defiled. Consider what had transpired. The wall and gates of Jerusalem had been rebuilt to maintain the peace and sanctity of the people and temple within. Yet the defenses had been "penetrated"—not by force of arms but by permitting evil to flow in (through the admittance of Tobiah and the Sabbath-breaking merchants and the intermarrying with pagans). So there was a real need here to purify the city wall and rededicate it to the sanctifying and protective purpose for which it was constructed. No doubt this would also have refocused the people on the great spiritual work and reformation of earlier years—helping to inspire a national recommitment to God and His ways.

As to the details of the ceremony, "There were two great processions, starting probably from the area of the Valley Gate (2:13, 15; 3:13) in the center of the western section of the wall. The first procession led by Ezra ([12:]36) and Hoshaiiah (v. 32) moved in a counterclockwise direction on the wall; the second with Nehemiah

moved in a clockwise direction. They met between the Prison Gate and the Water Gate and then entered the temple area (cf. Ps 48:12-13). 'To the right' [in Nehemiah 12:31] translates yamin. The literal rendering is misleading, as this procession went left to the south. The Semite oriented himself facing east; so the right hand represented the south (cf. the name of Yemen in southern Arabia; see Josh 17:7; 1 Sam 23:24; Job 23:9)" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on Nehemiah 12:31). Notice also that here we again see Ezra and Nehemiah together as contemporaries.

The specific mention of the prohibition of Ammonites and Moabites from God's national assembly as discovered in the law and the separation this brought about (13:1-3) is directly related to what had happened in Nehemiah's absence—the admittance of the Ammonite governor to the temple (verses 4-7) and the intermarriage with women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab (verse 23).

Many would contend, and it could well be, that chapters 8-10 describing the reading of the law at the fall festivals and the renewal of the covenant that followed it actually follows after 13:3 chronologically.

As to why the events of our previous and current readings are switched around from chronological order in the book's arrangement, we can perhaps see a logical reason. The first part of chapter 12 (verses 1-26) lists the leaders of the priests and Levites. This is probably followed by a description of the dedication ceremony because it gives a further listing of the Levites and their responsibilities (verses 27-47). Next the reading of the law and resultant separation from foreigners is mentioned because this happened on the same day (13:1-3). Finally, in the remainder of chapter 13, an explanation is given as to why this dedication ceremony and separation from foreigners was happening. This arrangement, probably chosen by Ezra in his compilation work, also allows the book to end with a prayer for God to remember all that Nehemiah had done in His service (13:31).

In its note on this verse, Expositor's gives a great summary of Nehemiah's life and work: "Nehemiah provides us with one of the most vivid patterns of leadership in Scriptures.

"1. He was a man of responsibility, as shown by his position as the royal cupbearer.

"2. He was a man of vision, confident of who God was and what he could do through his servants. He was not, however, a visionary but a man who planned and then acted.

"3. He was a man of prayer who prayed spontaneously and constantly even in the presence of the king (2:4-5).

"4. He was a man of action and cooperation, who realized what had to be done, explained it to others, and enlisted their aid. Nehemiah, a layman, was able to cooperate with his contemporary, Ezra the scribe and priest, in spite of the fact that these two leaders were of entirely different temperaments.

"5. He was a man of compassion, who was moved by the plight of the poorer members of society so that he renounced even the rights he was entitled to (5:18) and denounced the greed of the wealthy (5:8).

"6. He was a man who triumphed over opposition. His opponents tried ridicule (4:3), attempted slander (6:4-7), and spread misleading messages (6:10-14). But through God's favor Nehemiah triumphed over all difficulties."

The Religious Leadership (Nehemiah 12:1-26)

This passage lists leaders among the priests and Levites in the time of the first return under Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua and in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Verses 12-21 give the later heads of the priestly families that arrived with Zerubbabel, listed in verses 1-7. The following succession of high priests is given: Jeshua; Joiakim; Eliashib (high priest when Nehemiah arrives); Joiada; Jonathan; Jaddua (verses 10-11, 22). There is wide dispute over whether this list is complete or skips some generations.

Verse 22 mentions this record being kept during the reign of "Darius the Persian." This evidently refers to Emperor Darius II, also known as Ochus or Nothus, who reigned from 423 to 404 B.C.—though some argue for Darius III (Codomanus), who reigned from 336 until his overthrow by Alexander the Great in 330. The Expositor's Bible Commentary states: "The fact that a Jaddua is mentioned as the high priest [at the time of Alexander] by Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chap. 7, sec. 2)... has caused some scholars to favor the later king [Darius III]. A Johanan appears, however, as the high priest [of Jerusalem] in an Elephantine papyrus [from the Jewish community of southern Egypt] dated to 407 B.C....and this favors an identification with Darius II. The recently discovered Samaria papyri [illustrating the routine practice of alternating generations having the same name] has persuaded some scholars that the Jaddua in Nehemiah was not the Jaddua in Josephus but the grandfather of the latter" (note on verse 22). The latter seems most likely, as the same commentary details in its introduction to the book of Ezra.

The tradition attributing to Ezra the compilation of this book and the canonization of the Old Testament also argues for identifying Darius here as Darius II (whose reign came 34 years after Ezra's arrival in Judea)—and for Jaddua being an earlier high priest than the one referred to by Josephus. This is because Ezra would no longer have been living by the time of Darius III's reign and Alexander's conquest (as this would have been more than 120 years after his arrival).

For our next reading we are skipping over the rest of chapter 12 concerning the dedication of the city wall and skipping to 13:4, which begins a section that, as this verse states, came before the events surrounding the dedication. Chapter 13, as we will see, describes problems that Nehemiah faced when he returned from a trip back to the Persian court at the end of his initial 12 years as governor (see verses 6-7; compare 5:14).

Returning Home and Finding a Mess (Nehemiah 13:4-31)

Nehemiah's first term as governor lasted 12 years—from the 20th year of Artaxerxes (444 B.C.) to the king's 32nd year (432-431 B.C.) (see Nehemiah 2:1; 5:14; 13:6). Either Nehemiah was recalled to the Persian court at this time or it was the agreed-upon term limit from the start (compare 2:6). Note that Artaxerxes is referred to in 13:6 as the king of Babylon. This was accurate since Babylon was now part of Persia. It remained a significant fact since Babylonia was where most of the Jewish exiles dwelt. Moreover, it could be that the emperor was in temporary residence in Babylon when Nehemiah returned to him.

We don't know how long Nehemiah remained at the imperial court. It could have been several months or even a few years. Verse 23 seems to argue for the latter, as we will see. In any case, it was evidently long enough for some serious lapses to occur in Judea during his absence.

When he finally comes back, Nehemiah encounters some major problems. First of all, his old nemesis Tobiah has returned. Recall that Tobiah, evidently the Ammonite governor who was probably part Jewish and related to some of the priests—and to whom many in Jerusalem had been pledged in service—was one of the main enemies who had attempted to thwart the rebuilding of the city wall, even writing threatening letters to Nehemiah (2:10, 19; 4:3; 6:10-12, 17, 19). And now this wicked man has his own guest quarters in the temple compound itself as sanctioned by the high priest! (13:4-7). It is an unconscionable outrage—an affront, in fact, to God Himself. Stunned and dismayed at what has happened, Nehemiah takes immediate action, having Tobiah's furnishings thrown out and the defiled rooms cleansed (verses 8-9).

What brought the high priest Eliashib down from his wonderful example of personally working on the wall (see 3:1) to this disgrace is unknown. It may have been an act of desperation to keep a failing priesthood functioning. Consider that in his investigation of the matter, Nehemiah realizes that the people of Judea have not been giving their tithes and offerings to the Levites. With no means to live, the Levites employed at the temple returned to farming as a way to get by (verse 10). With very little supplied to them, the Levites did not in turn tithe and give offerings to the temple for the priests (compare 10:38). Notice that Tobiah was actually housed in the area that had previously been used to store the tithes and offerings (13:5). These rooms were evidently empty and unused. Perhaps Tobiah had used this situation as an inroad back into Jerusalem, particularly if some who had been formerly pledged to him called upon his help. It could well be that Tobiah struck a deal with Eliashib to provide for the needs of the priests if he were given the access to the temple complex. Perhaps there were certain other incentives such as renewed pledges of loyalty.

As to why the tithing and offering system had broken down, nothing is said. Perhaps the people simply let down in what they should have been doing. This matter could have been brewing even before Nehemiah left—coming to a head when the problem finally manifested itself in food shortages during his absence. In any case, the governor takes the leaders of the nation to task over this situation and finally gets the tithing system going again, appointing faithful overseers to ensure fair distribution (verses 11-13). In contrast to the poor example of Eliashib, Nehemiah showed himself steadfast in God's way through all these years since we were first introduced to him. And he prays to God to reward his faithful leadership (verse 14).

It should be noted that if the covenant of chapter 10 was made years earlier, then the people let down in these areas despite its specific mention of maintaining faithfulness in tithes, offerings and providing for God's house. Yet, if the arrangement order of the book is not strictly chronological, it could be that the covenant was made after the events of chapter 13 because of them. The same applies to the other two major problems Nehemiah dealt with after his return—Sabbath violation (verses 15-22) and intermarriage (verses 23-28).

Concerning the first problem, foreigners were coming into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day doing work inside the city and hauling in provisions, which were then sold to the Jews. Yet the law had specifically forbidden even foreigners from doing work within the gates of the Israelites—that is, within areas they controlled (see Exodus 20:10). The Jews were in the wrong not only for permitting this but also for what they themselves were doing—going about their regular shopping for the coming days on God’s Holy Day. Some see this passage as implying that it is wrong to pay for a meal on the Sabbath. Yet there is nothing in the Law that specifically forbids making a payment for something on the Sabbath. What the Law prohibited was working on the Sabbath such as doing regular business. Indeed, the Fourth Commandment is to treat the Sabbath as holy—distinct and separate, devoted to God. Yet here the Jews were engaging in routine commerce and stocking up on provisions for future use, thereby taking time and focus away from the observance of this special day.

Nehemiah’s immediate solution to the problem is to close the city gates during the Sabbath. After a couple Sabbaths of merchants camping outside the city—obviously in an attempt to lure the Jews into a return to shopping—Nehemiah threatens to take them into custody if they persist, leading them to stop (verses 19-22). Again Nehemiah prays for God to remember his service and to grant him mercy and salvation (verse 22).

As quick as Nehemiah is to deal with this matter, it seems highly unlikely that it could have been happening in the latter years of his prior administration. It must have started while he was away. A spiritual letdown that had been underway for some time, as evidenced by the lack of tithing, moved out of the shadows and became full blown in Nehemiah’s absence. Yet there was probably a more immediate reason for the buying and selling on the Sabbath. This whole situation was very likely connected to the presence of Tobiah. Perhaps many of the foreign merchants were part of the contingent the Ammonite governor brought with him. Allowing large numbers of foreigners to set up shop in the city may have been part of the bargain struck between Tobiah and the high priest (and other city leaders). It was only to be expected that these merchants would operate with no regard for the Sabbath just as they always had—or, if they gave it superficial homage to start with, that they would do all they could to push the boundaries so as to gradually flout this inconvenience.

This all speaks to the consequences of Eliashib’s terribly wrong decision. It is unlikely that he foresaw or intended these corruptions, but they teach a painful lesson. What seems like a small compromise at the time can often snowball into a cascade of sins.

The other problem Nehemiah encountered, intermarriage, was also probably a result of the reintroduction of Tobiah and his allies into Jewish society. Indeed, a grandson of the high priest had married the daughter of—of all people—Sanballat the Horonite, the Samaritan governor and archenemy of the Jews of Judea! (verse 28; see 2:10; 4:1-3, 7; 6:1-9, 12-14). This may have been part of cementing the alliance between Eliashib and Tobiah. Nehemiah mentions some Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab (verse 23). The people of Ammon and Moab would have been from Tobiah’s province. And the city of Ashdod was allied to Tobiah and Sanballat (see 4:7-8). This was a former Philistine city yet, as explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on chapter 4, its inhabitants were probably not full-blooded Philistines (compare Zechariah 9:6) as the city was destroyed by the Assyrians, repopulated by the Babylonians and given by the Persians to the people of Tyre and Sidon as an important port. Some of the Tyrian merchants of verse 16 may have been from Ashdod.

The “language of Ashdod” (verse 24) may have been Philistine, a Phoenician dialect or a local dialect of Aramaic, the international language of the Persian Empire. The language of Judea refers to either Hebrew or the Jewish dialect of Aramaic. Given that Judea was such a small province, it seems unlikely that the problem of intermarriage had been going on during the later years of Nehemiah’s first term in office, for he would most likely have found out about it and taken steps to put a stop to it. Yet if these marriages took place during his absence, then he must have been gone a few years to allow enough time for children to be born to them and for the children to grow to speaking age.

There may not have been many such children. Perhaps there were relatively few offenders thus far. Nevertheless, intermarriage with pagans was a “great evil” (verse 27). This problem had faced Ezra upon his arrival in Judea. And here it was again. Ezra’s initial response had been mourning and pulling out his own hair (see Ezra 9:1-4). Nehemiah’s different temperament is illustrated in his more drastic reaction of pulling out the offenders’ hair! (Nehemiah 13:25).

As with the Sabbath and tithing, it is not clear if the covenant to refrain from such intermarriage in chapter 10 came long before a resurgence of the problem in chapter 13 or if the covenant was made after Nehemiah's dealing with the problem in chapter 13. As the prophet Malachi addresses some of the same issues dealt with in Nehemiah 13, many date his book to the time of Nehemiah's absence. Yet it could well have been earlier, prior to Nehemiah's initial arrival. Since the matter is unclear, we will wait until we have covered all of Nehemiah before reading the book of Malachi.

Yet again, Nehemiah prays to be remembered by God (Nehemiah 13:31). Though this is the end of the book, we have one more reading from Nehemiah that follows it chronologically.

2 Corinthians 10

The apostle states his authority with meekness and humility. (1-6) Reasons with the Corinthians. (7-11) Seeks the glory of Yehovah, and to be approved of Him. (12-18)

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

While others thought meanly, and spake scornfully of the apostle, he had low thoughts, and spake humbly of himself. We should be aware of our own infirmities, and think humbly of ourselves, even when men reproach us. The work of the ministry is a spiritual warfare with spiritual enemies, and for spiritual purposes. Outward force is not the method of the gospel, but strong persuasions, by the power of truth and the meekness of wisdom. Conscience is accountable to Elohim only; and people must be persuaded to Elohim and their duty, not driven by force. Thus the weapons of our warfare are very powerful; the evidence of truth is convincing. What opposition is made against the gospel, by the powers of sin and Satan in the hearts of men! But observe the conquest the word of Elohim gains. The appointed means, however feeble they appear to some, will be mighty through Elohim. And the preaching of the cross, by men of faith and prayer, has always been fatal to idolatry, impiety, and wickedness.

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 10:7-11

In outward appearance, Paul was mean and despised in the eyes of some, but this was a false rule to judge by. We must not think that none outward appearance, as if the want of such things proved a man not to be a real believer, or an able, faithful minister of the lowly Saviour.

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 10:12-18

If we would compare ourselves with others who excel us, this would be a good method to keep us humble. The apostle fixes a good rule for his conduct; namely, not to boast of things without his measure, which was the measure Elohim had distributed to him. There is not a more fruitful source of error, than to judge of persons and opinions by our own prejudices. How common is it for persons to judge of their own religious character, by the opinions and maxims of the world around them! But how different is the rule of Yehovah's word! And of all flattery, self-flattery is the worst. Therefore, instead of praising ourselves, we should strive to approve ourselves to Elohim. In a word, let us glory in the King of our salvation, and in all other things only as evidences of his love, or means of promoting his glory. Instead of praising ourselves, or seeking the praise of men, let us desire that honour which cometh from Elohim only.

2 Corinthians 11

The apostle gives the reasons for speaking in his own commendation. (1-14) Shows that he had freely preached the gospel. (5-15) Explains what he was going to add in defence of his own character. (16-21) He gives an account of his labours, cares, sufferings, dangers, and deliverances. (22-33)

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 11:1-4

The apostle desired to preserve the Corinthians from being corrupted by the false apostles. There is but one Son of Elohim, one Spirit, and one gospel, to be preached to them, and received by them; and why should any be prejudiced, by the devices of an adversary, against him who first taught them in faith? They should not listen to men, who, without cause, would draw them away from those who were the means of their conversion.

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 11:5-15

It is far better to be plain in speech, yet walking openly and consistently with the gospel, than to be admired by thousands, and be lifted up in pride, so as to disgrace the gospel by evil tempers and unholy lives. The apostle would not give room for any to accuse him of worldly designs in preaching the gospel, that others who opposed him at Corinth, might not in this respect gain advantage against him. Hypocrisy may be looked for, especially when we consider the great power which Satan, who rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience, has upon the minds of many. And as there are temptations to evil conduct, so there is equal danger on the other side. It serves Satan's purposes as well, to set up good works against the atonement of The Messiah, and salvation by faith and grace. But the end will discover those who are deceitful workers; their work will end in ruin. Satan will allow his ministers to preach either the law or the gospel separately; but the law as established by faith in Yeshua's righteousness and atonement, and the partaking of his Spirit, is the test of every false system.

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 11:16-21

It is the duty and practice of believers to humble themselves, in obedience to the command and example of the Yeshua; yet prudence must direct in what it is needful to do things which we may do lawfully, even the speaking of what Elohim has wrought for us, and in us, and by us. Doubtless here is reference to facts in which the character of the false apostles had been shown. It is astonishing to see how such men bring their followers into bondage, and how they take from them and insult them.

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 11:22-33

The apostle gives an account of his labours and sufferings; not out of pride or vain-glory, but to the honour of Elohim, who enabled him to do and suffer so much for the cause of Yeshua; and shows wherein he excelled the false apostles, who tried to lessen his character and usefulness. It astonishes us to reflect on this account of his dangers, hardships, and sufferings, and to observe his patience, perseverance, diligence, cheerfulness, and usefulness, in the midst of all these trials. See what little reason we have to love the pomp and plenty of this world, when this blessed apostle felt so much hardship in it. Our utmost diligence and services appear unworthy of notice when compared with his, and our difficulties and trials scarcely can be perceived. It may well lead us to inquire whether or not we really are followers of our Messiah. Here we may study patience, courage, and firm trust in Elohim. Here we may learn to think less of ourselves; and we should ever strictly keep to truth, as in Elohim's presence; and should refer all to his glory, as the Father.