

Triennial Torah Study – 3rd Year 12/01/2013



sightedmoon.com /triennial-torah-study-3rd-year-04042015 /

By Joseph F. Dumond

This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

Num 36		Neh 1-4	2 Corin 4-5
--------	--	---------	-------------

Inheritances to Remain Within Each Tribe (Numbers 35-36)

The daughters of Zelophehad, himself a grandson of Gilead of the tribe of Manasseh, had made an unusual appeal back in chapter 27—to inherit their father's land since he had left no surviving sons. And God gave Moses the judgment that the daughters were to receive the inheritance. But there was a complicating factor in this matter, which the Gileadite leaders among Manasseh brought before Moses. It had been good that the brotherless daughters of their tribe had been granted an inheritance. But what happens when they marry men from other tribes? Couldn't this gradually drain away the inheritance of Manasseh? And couldn't the same thing happen in other tribes? So God gives Moses another judgment. Women heirs among the ancient Israelites are permitted to marry only within their own tribe. "Thus no inheritance shall change hands from one tribe to another" (Numbers 36:9).

Nehemiah Learns of Jerusalem's Plight (Nehemiah 1)

As explained in the Bible Reading Program's introductory comments on Ezra and Nehemiah, the book of Nehemiah is evidently a continuation of the book of Ezra. While Ezra is

traditionally reckoned as the compiler of both sections, several parts of the section now referred to as Nehemiah were evidently written by Nehemiah himself. This is the case with Nehemiah 1:1-7:5.

As chapter 1 opens we are immediately introduced to Nehemiah (verse 1), whose name means "Comfort of Yhwh [the Eternal]," "Yhwh Comforts" or "Yhwh Is Consolation." The time is the month Kislev (corresponding to November-December) in "the twentieth year," referring to the 20th year of Persian Emperor Artaxerxes (see 2:1)—apparently Artaxerxes I Longinus, the same king who had earlier sent Ezra (see Ezra 7:1) but later ordered the reconstruction of Jerusalem's walls halted (see 4:21-23). This would date Nehemiah 1:1 to the end of 445 B.C.—more than 12 years after the return of Ezra to Judea in 457.

The place, according to Nehemiah 1:1, is Shushan, also known as Susa, one of the capitals of the Persian Empire—the one in which the book of Esther was set. This city was around 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf in what is today Iran.

Nehemiah is an important person. Like Joseph, Daniel and Esther before him, Nehemiah appears to have been placed by God in a strategic position in a foreign imperial government to accomplish God's will on the world scene. He refers to himself at the end of chapter 1 as "the king's cupbearer" (verse 11). This was an honored position of trust. Consider that a cupbearer was to ensure against the poisoning of a ruler. But there was much more to the job than that. The apocryphal book of Tobit, also from the Persian period, refers to a certain Ahikar as "chief cupbearer, keeper of the signet, and in charge of administration of the accounts under King Sennacherib of Assyria" (1:22, NRSV). As The Expositor's Bible Commentary notes on verse 11, "Varied sources suggest something about Nehemiah as a royal cupbearer:

"1. He would have been well-trained in court etiquette (cf. Dan 1:4-5).

"2. He was probably a handsome individual (cf. Dan 1:4, 13, 15; Jos[ephus] Antiq[uieties of the Jews] XVI, 230 {viii.1}).

"3. He would certainly know how to select the wines to set before the king. A proverb in the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Qamma 92b) states: 'The wine belongs to the master but credit for it is due to his cupbearer.'

"4. He would have to be a convivial companion, willing to lend an ear at all times.

"5. He would have great influence as one with the closest access to the king, able to determine who was able to see his master.

"6. Above all Nehemiah had to be one who enjoyed the unreserved confidence of the king.

The great need for trustworthy court attendants is underscored by the intrigues endemic to the Achaemenid court. Xerxes, father of Artaxerxes I, was killed in his own bedchamber by Artabanus, a courtier."

In verse 2 of chapter 1 we see that Nehemiah's brother has just returned from a visit to Jerusalem. (We will see him mentioned again in Nehemiah 7:2 as receiving charge from Nehemiah over Jerusalem.) The report of Hanani and his traveling companions is not good. The Jews of Judea are suffering disgrace and persecution. The city wall is broken down and the gates of the city have been burned. While this could conceivably have referred to the Babylonian destruction of 142 years prior, it seems more likely to refer to recent devastation. Most scholars understand it to refer to the Samaritan military action to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem's city wall as ordered by Artaxerxes (compare Ezra 4:21-23). As explained in the comments on our previous reading, this probably occurred in conjunction with the rebellion of the satrap Megabyzus in 449 B.C.

About two years later, Megabyzus reasserted his loyalty to Artaxerxes (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 508). But the damage in Jerusalem was done. It was now five years after the revolt and just three years after the reaffirmation of Persian rule. Evidently, things had not improved for the Jews of Judea in this short period.

Nehemiah is sorely grieved and immediately commences on a period of fasting and prayer, confessing the people's sin. In doing so, he is evidently speaking generally of the Israelites' national proclivity to sin rather than some specific sin of the Judean Jews, as he includes his own sins in the confession. He well understands that the people's long history of immorality is the reason they have been reduced to being such a weakened people. Yet Nehemiah reminds God of His promises to regather His people and asks particularly that God will grant him favor with the king (Nehemiah 1:4-11)—evidently to make a case for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, as we will see in chapter 2.

Nehemiah Sent to Rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2)

It is some time before Nehemiah says something about the Judean situation to Artaxerxes. "There was a delay of about four months from Kislev (Nov.-Dec.) [445 B.C.], when Nehemiah first heard the news (1:1), to Nisan (Mar.-Apr.) [444 B.C.], when he felt prepared to broach the subject to the king. There are various explanations for this. The king may have been absent in his other winter palace at Babylon. Perhaps the king was not in the right mood. Even though Nehemiah was a favorite of the king, he would not have rashly blurted out his request. We know it was politic to make one's requests during auspicious occasions such as birthday parties or when rulers were in a generous mood (Gen 40:20; Esth 5:6; Mark 6:21-25; Jos[ephus] Antiquities of the Jews] XVIII, 289-93 {viii.7}). It is certain that Nehemiah did not ask in haste but carefully bided his time, constantly praying to God to grant the proper opening" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on Nehemiah 2:1).

At last an opportunity presents itself when the king asks him about his downcast demeanor. Nehemiah had hidden his feelings up to this point (verses 1-2). Perhaps it was too hard to contain them any longer, though it could well be that he purposely let his feelings show on this occasion to provide a segue into making his request. In any case, the moment is now prime to speak, but Nehemiah is filled with trepidation. As The Nelson Study Bible points out, "Persian monarchs believed that just being in their presence would make any person happy. Yet, Nehemiah was about to request the emperor's permission to go to Jerusalem, suggesting that he would rather be somewhere other than in the emperor's presence. On top of that, it was Artaxerxes himself who had ordered the work on the wall to be stopped (see Ezra 4:21-23). Nehemiah had reason to be afraid" (note on Nehemiah 2:2).

Yet, of course, Nehemiah in reality had more reason to not fear. And despite his concerns, he sets a wonderful example for all of us in dealing with this difficult moment in a manner that gives him the confidence to proceed. He silently prays to the ultimate ruler of heaven and earth, Almighty God, probably asking for the right words to say and that his request is well received (verse 5).

The response of verse 6 is extremely encouraging. Whereas Artaxerxes could have had Nehemiah executed then and there, the king instead asks him how long he would be gone. And then remarkably this king who had ordered the cessation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls

happily gives permission to Nehemiah to return and resume the construction. Moreover, we are told in Nehemiah 5:14 that Artaxerxes appointed Nehemiah as governor of the land of Judah when he sent him.

There may have been broader political considerations for the king's decision. Recall that the satrap Megabyzus, who had led the region under his authority containing Judea in revolt against Persian rule, had renewed his fealty to the emperor only three years earlier. Thus, "the Syro-Palestinian satrapy was [still] in a very precarious position as far as Artaxerxes was concerned. He knew full well that what had happened once could happen again and that he might be unable to recover his rebellious territories the next time. Clearly he was willing to do anything that might consolidate his position and ensure continued loyalty from his volatile subjects. When Nehemiah volunteered to go to Jerusalem to stabilize the situation there, Artaxerxes saw in the request not only a way to accede to the heartfelt burden of his beloved cupbearer for his Jewish kinfolk, but a way to place someone over Judah whom he could trust to remain loyal to Persia and to achieve a climate of tranquility and order" (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 508). Moreover, it was probably in the confusion of Megabyzus' rebellion that Artaxerxes gave the earlier order to halt the refortification of Jerusalem's defenses. Further reports from the region may have revealed the Jews under Ezra as not having sided with the revolt—which would have been more reason to allow them to resume the work of restoring their holy city.

Nehemiah received from the king safe-conduct letters and a military escort. Ezra did not have such an escort on his journey because he would not ask for it lest it appear a lack of faith. Perhaps Nehemiah did not need to ask. Furthermore, this escort would have provided convincing proof of Nehemiah's investiture of authority in his visits to the provincial governors. The king also provided him with requisition orders for obtaining lumber for work in Jerusalem on the gates of the citadel just northwest of the temple (which overlooked the temple complex), on the city wall and on the governor's residence in which he would live.

In verses 9-10 we see that not everyone is pleased with the arrival of Nehemiah and his company. Verse 10 mentions the Samaritan leader Sanballat the Horonite. He "is attested to in the Aramaic papyri of Elephantine [i.e., of the Jewish community on the Nile island of Elephantine in southern Egypt] as having been governor of Samaria in the seventeenth year of Darius II, that is, in 407 [B.C.]. Since by then he had adult sons, it is certainly reasonable that he had been governor forty years earlier [when Nehemiah first arrived]" (Merrill, p. 509). Sanballat being called a Horonite seems to refer to his coming from the city of Beth-Horon, 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem. As this town was within the territory of Judea, it may be that Sanballat's authority had reached into Judea before Nehemiah's arrival—which would give greater impetus to his opposition.

Tobiah is referred to as "the servant, the Ammonite" (KJV). "Servant" probably denotes being a servant of the king—which is why the NKJV gives the word here as "official." The reference to Ammon probably refers not to his ethnicity but to his area of administrative oversight. For Tobiah is actually an Israelite name meaning "Yhwh Is Good." This would seem to make him at

least part Jewish. And there is more reason to think so. We elsewhere learn that he was married to a Jewish woman—the daughter of a certain Shechaniah (compare 3:29; 6:18; not the Shechaniah of Ezra 10:2). Tobiah gave an Israelite name to his own son—Jehohanan (meaning “Yhwh Is Merciful”). He too married a Jewish woman—the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berechiah, leader of one of the groups repairing the wall (compare Nehemiah 3:4, 30; 6:18). As Expositor’s notes on 2:10: “Some scholars speculate that Tobiah descended from an aristocratic [Israelite] family [known as the Tobiads] that owned estates in Gilead and was influential in Transjordan and in Jerusalem even as early as the eighth century B.C.” The same commentary goes on to conclude: “Tobiah was no doubt the governor of Ammon or Transjordan under the Persians. His grandson Tobiah is called ‘the governor of Ammon.’ The site of Araq el-Emir (‘caverns of the prince’), about eleven miles west of Amman, was the center of the Tobiads. The visible remains of a large building on top of the hill (Qasr el-‘Abd, ‘castle of the slave [or servant],’ 60 by 120 feet) have been interpreted as a Jewish temple built by a later Tobiad. On two halls are inscriptions with the name Tobiah in Aramaic characters. The date of the inscriptions is much disputed”—but they nonetheless illustrate the persistence of this name among the Ammonite governors during the Persian and Greek periods. Nehemiah 6:18 tells us that many in Judah were pledged to his service, so he too seems to have exercised a significant measure of control within the province.

These men were greatly concerned despite the fact that Nehemiah had not actually told them or even the Judeans why he had really come. To further conceal his intentions, he decides to secretly inspect the city wall by night. “Since Nehemiah had arrived in Jerusalem from the north, he would have seen that side of the wall as he approached the city. If he lived in the southwestern part of the city, he could have had ample time for viewing the western wall. Nehemiah seems to have been concerned with inspecting the southern and eastern walls of Jerusalem. With a few servants, he passed through the Valley Gate into the Valley of Hinnom. He then traveled along the south wall. When the piles of stone and heaps of rubble obstructed his passage, he dismounted his animal and continued on foot up the Kidron valley in order to view the eastern wall” (Nelson, note on verses 12-15). “Apparently the eastern slope of the City of David was in an impassable condition due to collapsed retaining walls and ruined structures” (The Holman Bible Atlas, 1998, p. 172).

We next see that Nehemiah was an inspirational and motivational leader—able to stir the Jews into resuming work on the city wall (verses 17-18). It is wonderful to read the enthusiasm of their response: “Let us rise up and build.”

As a side note, it is interesting to consider that no specific mention is made of Ezra at this point, although he could have been among the priests or officials mentioned in verse 16. We do see him later in the book but not until chapter 8. This has led some to question the traditional chronology of Ezra’s return preceding that of Nehemiah. Yet the Bible makes it clear that Ezra came to Judea in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:8) while Nehemiah came in the 20th

(2:1). It could well be that Ezra was not playing as prominent a role at this later time, 13 years after the prior mention of him in Ezra 10—especially considering the earlier Samaritan action that Artaxerxes ordered against the Jewish rebuilding. Ezra could have been sidelined as governor. Perhaps Sanballat or Tobiah had been given administrative authority over Judea—or possibly just assumed control. Furthermore, as a priest and scribe, Ezra may have decided to devote himself more to his religious duties—and perhaps now deferred to the leadership of the high priest Eliashib (see 3:1). Age and health could also have been factors. Nevertheless, we will see Ezra mentioned again in a spiritual leadership role in Nehemiah 8. And tradition reckons him as the one who established the Hebrew Bible in its present form—a paramount responsibility.

Returning to the story, the renewed work on the city wall provokes ridicule and derision from Sanballat, Tobiah and another foreign leader, Geshem the Arab (spelled Gashmu in the Hebrew of 6:2). This man is “documented outside the Bible.... The primary source of information is a silver bowl discovered in 1947 at Tell el-Mashkutah in Lower [i.e., northern] Egypt. Like three other such bowls it has a dedicatory inscription to the goddess Han’-llat; in addition, it has the line, ‘that which Qaynu, son of Ga?mu, king of Qedar, brought in offering to Han’-llat.’ Ga?mu is the biblical Geshem. On the basis of the particular Aramaic writing, the nature of the bowl, and Athenian coins discovered at the same site, this inscription has been dated [to the right time frame of] around 400 [B.C.]” (Merrill, p. 509). As the king of Qedar or Kedar—a nation of nomads in northern Arabia—Geshem and his people would have “served the Persians by controlling the caravan routes between Palestine and Egypt” (“Lingering Resentment Boils Over,” Word in Life Bible, sidebar on 4:7).

These leaders’ accusations of defying the emperor (2:19) were not sincere, as Nehemiah had already given them the royal decree expressing the king’s will in this matter (see verse 9). These antagonists were quite resistant “to the reestablishment of Judah as a viable and powerful rival to their own principalities. They had no doubt sided with Megabyzus in his rebellion and now correctly saw Nehemiah as a strong pro-Persian sent among them to police the region as the henchman of Artaxerxes himself. That they dared to interfere with Nehemiah’s project shows a certain residue of independence from Persia, especially since the content of Artaxerxes’ letter of authorization was well known to them” (Merrill, pp. 509-510).

Nehemiah rebuffed them, confident in God’s providential care for His people and His desire to reestablish them in Jerusalem (verse 20).

Organization of the Rebuilding Work (Nehemiah 3)

The Jews immediately commence rebuilding the city wall according to Nehemiah’s organization of the work. He assigns various sections to different groups—families, neighborhoods and even professional guilds. The people had to work together not only within their particular teams but also in cooperation with other teams. Note how many times the phrase “next to them” occurs in

the chapter. Major building work always takes work teams cooperating together. This is true even in the spiritual work of the people of God's Church today.

There was much work to be done. The Holman Bible Atlas states: "Nehemiah 3 contains numerous references to gates and structures along Jerusalem's fortifications. Unfortunately, identifying archaeological remains with any of these structures has been difficult, yet archaeologists have provided a clearer picture of Nehemiah's Jerusalem. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., settlers confined themselves to the eastern ridge, the old City of David and the Temple Mount. There is no evidence of any occupation of the western ridge during the Persian era, although parts of Hezekiah's walls must have remained in fragmentary condition. Settlement upon the City of David apparently was more constricted than ever before. Much of the eastern slope perhaps was left unprotected, as a new line of defense was established farther up the slope, perhaps built along the line of a much earlier wall. Fragments of a wall built of roughly dressed limestone near the crest have been identified by some archaeologists as 'Nehemiah's Wall,' but others believe the 'wall' is actually a quarry line. A few of the domestic structures on the eastern slope were reused, but most buildings were located on the crest of the ridge.

"The fact that Nehemiah completed his initial repairs in fifty-two days [as we will see in 6:15] argues strongly that segments of the earlier defenses must have been still standing; presumably the western line of defense and the walls enclosing the Temple Mount were on the same lines as those prior to 586 B.C. The Valley Gate (Neh. 3:13), along the Tyropoeon Valley [on the west side], has tentatively been identified by some scholars with remains dating from the Iron Age. The location of other gates in Nehemiah 3 are more speculative. It seems reasonable to locate the Water Gate (Neh. 3:26) near the Gihon Spring [on the east side] and the Fountain Gate at the base of the southeastern hill (Neh. 2:14; 3:15). Several towers mentioned in Nehemiah 3 (the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred) undoubtedly lay along the northern defenses where Jerusalem was most vulnerable. Jerusalem of Nehemiah's day was slightly smaller than the city of David and Solomon, perhaps covering thirty-seven to thirty-eight acres" (p. 172).

Finally, we should observe that the work in Jerusalem was done by people from all walks of life—just as it is in the Church of God today. The Expositor's Bible Commentary notes on verse 32: "We know from chapter 5 that there were deep economic differences in Judean society. With the exception of the nobles of Tekoa (v. 5), everyone pitched in, from the high priest (v. 1) to goldsmiths and perfume makers (vv. 8, 31) and even women (v. 12), to accomplish a common task. Some, like the commoners of Tekoa, even did more than their share (v. 27). What an inspiring example of what can be done when God's people work together under dynamic leadership! Viggo Olsen, who helped rebuild ten thousand houses in war-ravaged Bangladesh in 1972, derived unexpected inspiration from reading a chapter ordinarily considered one of the least interesting in the Bible: 'I was struck...that no expert builders were listed in the "Holy Land brigade." There were priests, priests' helpers, goldsmiths, perfume makers, and women, but no expert builders or carpenters were named.'"

The Wall Under Threat (Nehemiah 4)

Even as Sanballat and Tobiah contemptuously mocked the Jewish rebuilding effort (verses 12), we can perhaps sense the panic behind their words. They were really worried. Jewish success could mean their demise. While their taunting and ridicule is intended to shake the confidence of the Jews, it is also a self-deceptive way of steadying their own shaken confidence.

Nehemiah does not answer them. Instead, he prays to God to turn the reproach back on their heads and that their sin not be blotted out—recognizing that they were actually belittling God Himself (verses 4-5). This is not a prayer for eliminating any possibility that they would ever find forgiveness through repentance. It is simply asking that God, as a matter of justice and defending His reputation, not let what they have done go undealt with.

In verse 6 we see that the confidence of the people is not shaken. Their minds are instead set on the task assigned to them and they succeed in joining the wall's sections together—though not yet to full height.

News of this development infuriates the Jews' enemies, as Jerusalem would soon be a strong fortress. In addition to Sanballat and Tobiah, we also see reference here to the Arabs (among whom Geshem was a leader—see 2:19), the Ammonites (of whom Tobiah was apparently governor) and the Ashdodites (4:7). Ashdod was one of the five principal cities of the Philistines. Yet those who lived there at this time may not have been full-blooded Philistines. The Assyrians destroyed the city in 711 B.C. It was later controlled by the Babylonians and then the Persians, who repopulated it. "With the Persian conquest alternate patches of the Palestinian coast were parceled out to the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon, which provided ships for the Persian navy. During this period Ashdod was the most important city on the Philistine coast" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on verse 7).

The Jews' enemies lashing out in anger is not a matter of genuine indignation but of alarm. They are rather afraid of what is happening. As they see it, things have gotten out of control— that is, out of their control. They decide that they had better put a stop to this business right away— before it is too late. So they begin plotting against the Jews.

The Jews resort to their only sure defense—prayer to Almighty God. This time it is a collective prayer of the people, not merely a private prayer of Nehemiah (verse 9). Yet even as they pray, they do what they humanly can to protect themselves by posting watchmen at all times.

In verse 10 we see that the great task of rebuilding is taking its toll on the Jewish workers. Fatigue and the sheer volume of debris lead to discouragement. In the next verse we see that despite the posted watch, the adversaries seem to think that they can still catch the builders by surprise. But the plot is discovered before it can be executed.

The Jews are then arrayed for battle and exhorted to bravery on the basis of two factors: 1) The people are to remember all that God has done for His people; and 2) the people are to reflect on

the fact that they, unlike their enemies, are defending their homeland and families. But the attack doesn't come. Foiled in their hopes for a surprise attack, the adversaries are so far unwilling to challenge the Jews' newly instituted security measures.

There are spiritual parallels to the dual responsibilities in verse 17. We must not neglect our own spiritual survival and security, nor must we neglect doing the Work of God.

The last three words of the chapter in the original Hebrew—is silho hammayim—as Expositor's notes on verse 23, "are notoriously difficult to interpret; they are literally 'each man his weapon the water'.... The NIV rendering is similar to that of the RV: 'every one (went with) his weapon (to) the water,' and the JPS: 'every one that went to the water had his weapon.' This would parallel the way Gideon's selected men drank their water with weapons in hand as an indication of their vigilance.... The Vulgate took the word silho, not in the sense of 'his weapon,' but as a verb meaning 'stripped himself'... ('every one stripped himself when he was to be washed'). This sense was followed by the KJV [and NKJV]: 'every one put them [i.e., their clothes] off for washing'"—that is, only for washing.

Despite the still-constant threat of enemy attack, the rebuilding work went on.

2 Corinthians 4

The apostles laboured with much diligence, sincerity, and faithfulness. (1-7) Their sufferings for the gospel were great, yet with rich supports. (8-12) Prospects of eternal glory keep believers from fainting under troubles. (13-18)

Verses 1-7 The best of men would faint, if they did not receive mercy from God. And that mercy which has helped us out, and helped us on, hitherto, we may rely upon to help us even to the end. The apostles had no base and wicked designs, covered with fair and specious pretences. They did not try to make their ministry serve a turn. Sincerity or uprightness will keep the favourable opinion of wise and good men. Christ by his gospel makes a glorious discovery to the minds of men. But the design of the devil is, to keep men in ignorance; and when he cannot keep the light of the gospel of Christ out of the world, he spares no pains to keep men from the gospel, or to set them against it. The rejection of the gospel is here traced to the willful blindness and wickedness of the human heart. Self was not the matter or the end of the apostles' preaching; they preached Messiah as Yeshua, the Saviour and Deliverer, who saves to the uttermost all that come to God through him. Ministers are servants to the souls of men; they must avoid becoming servants to the humours or the lusts of men. It is pleasant to behold the sun in the firmament; but it is more pleasant and profitable for the gospel to shine in the heart. As light was the beginning of the first creation; so, in the new creation, the light of the Spirit is his first work upon the soul. The treasure of gospel light and grace is put into earthen vessels. The ministers of the gospel are subject to the same passions and weaknesses as other men. God could have sent angels to make known the glorious doctrine of the gospel, or could have sent the most admired sons of men to teach the nations, but he chose humbler, weaker

vessels, that his power might be more glorified in upholding them, and in the blessed change wrought by their ministry.

Verses 8-12 The apostles were great sufferers, yet they met with wonderful support. Believers may be forsaken of their friends, as well as persecuted by enemies; but their God will never leave them nor forsake them. There may be fears within, as well as fightings without; yet we are not destroyed. The apostle speaks of their sufferings as a counterpart of the sufferings of Christ, that people might see the power of Christ's resurrection, and of grace in and from the living Jesus. In comparison with them, other Christians were, even at that time, in prosperous circumstances.

Verses 13-18 The grace of faith is an effectual remedy against fainting in times of trouble. They knew that Christ was raised, and that his resurrection was an earnest and assurance of theirs. The hope of this resurrection will encourage in a suffering day, and set us above the fear of death. Also, their sufferings were for the advantage of the church, and to God's glory. The sufferings of Christ's ministers, as well as their preaching and conversation, are for the good of the church and the glory of God. The prospect of eternal life and happiness was their support and comfort. What sense was ready to pronounce heavy and long, grievous and tedious, faith perceived to be light and short, and but for a moment. The weight of all temporal afflictions was lightness itself, while the glory to come was a substance, weighty, and lasting beyond description. If the apostle could call his heavy and long-continued trials light, and but for a moment, what must our trifling difficulties be! Faith enables to make this right judgment of things. There are unseen things, as well as things that are seen. And there is this vast difference between them; unseen things are eternal, seen things but temporal, or temporary only. Let us then look off from the things which are seen; let us cease to seek for worldly advantages, or to fear present distresses. Let us give diligence to make our future happiness sure.

2 Corinthians 5

The apostle's hope and desire of heavenly glory. (1-8) This excited to diligence. The reasons of his being affected with zeal for the Corinthians. (9-15) The necessity of regeneration, and of reconciliation with God through Christ. (16-21)

Verses 1-8 The believer not only is well assured by faith that there is another and a happy life after this is ended, but he has good hope, through grace, of heaven as a dwelling-place, a resting-place, a hiding-place. In our Father's house there are many mansions, whose Builder and Maker is God. The happiness of the future state is what God has prepared for those that love him: everlasting habitations, not like the earthly tabernacles, the poor cottages of clay, in which our souls now dwell; that are mouldering and decaying, whose foundations are in the dust. The body of flesh is a heavy burden, the calamities of life are a heavy load. But believers groan, being burdened with a body of sin, and because of the many corruptions remaining and raging within them. Death will strip us of the clothing of flesh, and all the comforts of life, as well

as end all our troubles here below. But believing souls shall be clothed with garments of praise, with robes of righteousness and glory. The present graces and comforts of the Spirit are earnest of everlasting grace and comfort. And though God is with us here, by his Spirit, and in his ordinances, yet we are not with him as we hope to be. Faith is for this world, and sight is for the other world. It is our duty, and it will be our interest, to walk by faith, till we live by sight. This shows clearly the happiness to be enjoyed by the souls of believers when absent from the body, and where Jesus makes known his glorious presence. We are related to the body and to the Lord; each claims a part in us. But how much more powerfully the Lord pleads for having the soul of the believer closely united with himself! Thou art one of the souls I have loved and chosen; one of those given to me. What is death, as an object of fear, compared with being absent from the Lord!

Verses 9-15 The apostle quickens himself and others to acts of duty. Well-grounded hopes of heaven will not encourage sloth and sinful security. Let all consider the judgment to come, which is called, The terror of the Lord. Knowing what terrible vengeance the Lord would execute upon the workers of iniquity, the apostle and his brethren used every argument and persuasion, to lead men to believe in the Lord Jesus, and to act as his disciples. Their zeal and diligence were for the glory of God and the good of the church. Christ's love to us will have a like effect upon us, if duly considered and rightly judged. All were lost and undone, dead and ruined, slaves to sin, having no power to deliver themselves, and must have remained thus miserable for ever, if Christ had not died. We should not make ourselves, but Christ, the end of our living and actions. A believer's life should be devoted to Christ. Alas, how many show the worthlessness of their professed faith and love, by living to themselves and to the world!

Verses 16-21 The renewed man acts upon new principles, by new rules, with new ends, and in new company. The believer is created anew; his heart is not merely set right, but a new heart is given him. He is the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Though the same as a man, he is changed in his character and conduct. These words must and do mean more than an outward reformation. The man who formerly saw no beauty in the Saviour that he should desire him, now loves him above all things. The heart of the unregenerate is filled with enmity against God, and God is justly offended with him. Yet there may be reconciliation. Our offended God has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ. By the inspiration of God, the Scriptures were written, which are the word of reconciliation; showing that peace has been made by the cross, and how we may be interested therein. Though God cannot lose by the quarrel, nor gain by the peace, yet he beseeches sinners to lay aside their enmity, and accept the salvation he offers. Christ knew no sin. He was made Sin; not a sinner, but Sin, a Sin-offering, a Sacrifice for sin. The end and design of all this was, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, might be justified freely by the grace of God through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Can any lose, labour, or suffer too much for Him, who gave his beloved Son to be the Sacrifice for their sins, that they might be made the righteousness of God in him?