



KINGDOM PROVIDENCE

Forty Daily Devotions
from Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther
(Based on the NKJV)

Introduction

Throughout this devotional series, we will be reading from four books of the Bible that are named for people who fulfilled important roles at important times in the history of God's people. It is needless to say that each of their lives was marked by the extraordinary grace and providence of God. Esther 4:14 finds Mordecai sending a desperate message to Queen Esther in which he asks her this question: "Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther were all people who were where God wanted them to be at an exact time in history. Each fulfilled their holy calling simply by fulfilling God's providential plan for their own lives. May we learn to honor God in such a way in all that He has called us to do for Him. As you read through these books in the Bible, be reminded that no saint or service is insignificant in the eyes of God.

Daily Reading Schedule

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
1	Ruth 1:1-22	05/23/21
2	Ruth 2:1-23	05/24/21
3	Ruth 3:1-18	05/25/21
4	Ruth 4:1-22	05/26/21
5	Ezra 1:1-11	05/27/21
6	Ezra 2:1-24	05/28/21
7	Ezra 2:25-48	05/29/21
8	Ezra 2:49-70	05/30/21
9	Ezra 3:1-13	05/31/21
10	Ezra 4:1-24	06/01/21
11	Ezra 5:1-17	06/02/21
12	Ezra 6:1-22	06/03/21
13	Ezra 7:1-28	06/04/21
14	Ezra 8:1-36	06/05/21
15	Ezra 9:1-15	06/06/21
16	Ezra 10:1-44	06/07/21
17	Nehemiah 1:1-11	06/08/21
18	Nehemiah 2:1-20	06/09/21
19	Nehemiah 3:1-32	06/10/21
20	Nehemiah 4:1-23	06/11/21

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
21	Nehemiah 5:1-19	06/12/21
22	Nehemiah 6:1-19	06/13/21
23	Nehemiah 7:1-36	06/14/21
24	Nehemiah 7:37-73	06/15/21
25	Nehemiah 8:1-18	06/16/21
26	Nehemiah 9:1-38	06/17/21
27	Nehemiah 10:1-39	06/18/21
28	Nehemiah 11:1-36	06/19/21
29	Nehemiah 12:1-26	06/20/21
30	Nehemiah 12:27-47	06/21/21
31	Nehemiah 13:1-31	06/22/21
32	Esther 1:1-22	06/23/21
33	Esther 2:1-23	06/24/21
34	Esther 3:1-15	06/25/21
35	Esther 4:1-17	06/26/21
36	Esther 5:1-14	06/27/21
37	Esther 6:1-7:10	06/28/21
38	Esther 8:1-17	06/29/21
39	Esther 9:1-17	06/30/21
40	Esther 9:18-10:3	07/01/21

Day 1: Ruth 1:1-22

“But she said to them, ‘Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.’” (Ruth 1:20)

Providence

Simply speaking, providence is protective care. Spiritually speaking, providence is God guiding and directing all things to accomplish His divine will. Paul believed in a loving God who, “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). No book in the Bible better helps us to understand the providence of God than the Book of Ruth. The previous book in the Bible closes by declaring that, “In those days there was no king in Israel” (Judges 21:25). The Book of Ruth closes with the announcement of the birth of David, God’s chosen king for His people. As we read this book, we will see how carefully God guided the lives of different people to accomplish His will in providing a king for Israel. Some of the path was difficult. In today’s verses we find Naomi, a woman whose name means “Pleasant,” declaring that she would be better suited with the name Mara, which means “bitter.” With two sons in tow, this godly woman had faithfully followed her husband, Elimelech, to Moab. We know nothing about the life that she led in Moab, but we do know that she lost her husband and both of her sons there. With great sadness, Naomi decided to return to the land of Judah (v. 7). The Book of Ruth is named after one of the daughters-in-law of this woman and tells the story of how God’s divine providence allowed their sorrows to bring great joy to the people of their world forever.

Prayer Emphasis: **Be filled** with hope and expectation. **Trust** God even when you do not understand all that He is doing in your life. **Believe** that the *bitter* things might sometimes be the *better* things for God’s overall plan. **Thank God** for some past problem that He used to bring you to a better place in life.

Day 2: Ruth 2:1-23

“Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.” (Ruth 2:3)

No Coincidence

Upon their return to Judah, Ruth went to work in the fields of Boaz, “a relative” of her former father-in-law who was “a man of great wealth” (v. 1). Our focus verse states that “she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.” The Hebrew word that is translated “happened” in today’s focus verse comes from a word that is translated “chance” in several other translations, as well as in other places in the New King James Version. However, we know that it was not just by some “chance” that Ruth wound up gleaning in one of the fields of Boaz. We know God’s **Kingdom Providence** was guiding her to the place that she needed to be for His will to be accomplished in her life. When Boaz visited his fields, he saw young Ruth working among the poor who were allowed to glean from the bits of grain that were missed by the reapers and asked about her (v. 5). His foreman explained about Ruth’s circumstances and “fully reported” to Boaz about how faithful Ruth had been to follow Naomi in her return to the Promised Land after the death of her husband and sons (vs. 6 & 11). After that, Boaz instructed Ruth to “stay close by the young women” in his employ and “to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest” (v. 23). So she worked in the fields of Boaz by day “and she dwelt with her mother-in-law” (v. 23).

Prayer Emphasis: **Believe** that God’s divine plan may often be helped along by strong faith and a good work ethic! **Notice** the words used to describe Ruth’s commitment and work ethic in verse 7. **Determine** to be a faithful worker in whatever field God has placed you.

Day 3: Ruth 3:1-18

“*And now my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman.*” (Ruth 3:11)

“A Virtuous Woman”

The Hebrew words that are translated “virtuous woman” in today’s focus verse are translated “worthy woman,” “woman of noble character,” or “woman of excellence” in other translations of the Bible. We will see the word that is translated “virtuous” three times in Ruth. In Ruth 2:1, it was used to describe Boaz as a “mighty man of wealth.” Later we will see it used to state that Ruth “prospered” after following Naomi to Judah and Bethlehem. However, I find it interesting to see that this same word is most often translated “army” (56 times), “man of valor” (37 times), or “hosts” (29 times). Considering a woman’s role in the society in which Ruth lived, this is a very strong word that is being used to describe her faith in God and His divine plan for her life! Many have tried to take the part of the story of Ruth – and her decision to “lie down” (sleep) at the feet of Boaz – and make something sexual out of it. On the contrary, Boaz saw nothing wrong in her actions or intentions. After Boaz awoke to find Ruth sleeping there, she revealed her former husband’s relationship to her employer. As a “close relative” Boaz could claim the right of “Kinsman Redeemer” and take Ruth to be his own wife. There is no indication whatsoever that any kind of physical relationship ever existed between Ruth and Boaz outside of marriage.

Prayer Emphasis: Kingdom Providence can take one, seemingly insignificant young woman and make her an army of one for God’s divine purpose. **Accept** your own personal mission from God and **remain faithful** to Him despite any difficult circumstances or situations you may encounter.

Day 4: Ruth 4:1-22

“*Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel!’*” (Ruth 4:14)

“Blessed be the LORD”

After establishing his legal rights as her Kinsman Redeemer, Boaz took Ruth into his home as his wife. God blessed their marriage with a son, causing the women who were acquainted with Naomi to declare, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative!” From what we have read in this wonderful little book, five words stand out. Those five words are found in verse 14 where the “LORD” is described by Ruth’s friends as the One “*Who has not left you!*” Satan may try to make us feel that God has forsaken us and left us to find our own way through life. The Book of Ruth teaches us that, when Ruth’s husband died, God was there! When she left her homeland of Moab and moved to a strange land with her mother-in-law, Naomi, God was there! When she worked like a hired servant in the fields of Boaz, God was there! And, when she took that great leap of faith by asking Boaz to be a Kinsman Redeemer for her, God was there! When we realize that this same statement holds true for us today, we will surely join with those who, at the conclusion of this story, shouted, “Blessed be the LORD!” The final words in Judges tell us that there was no king in Israel, but the final words in Ruth introduce us, through Ruth and Boaz, to King David.

Prayer Emphasis: Believe that God’s **Kingdom Providence** is at work in your own life. **Meditate** on the promise of God found in Hebrews 13:5: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” **Claim** this promise today and **testify** to someone about the faithfulness of God!

Day 5: Ezra 1:1-11

“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia...the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus...” (Ezra 1:1)

“Cyrus King of Persia”

Just as the Book of Ruth picked up where the Book of Judges ended, the Book of Ezra provides an exciting sequel to its preceding book, 2 Chronicles. The book begins by introducing us to “Cyrus king of Persia.” It might interest you to know that this man was mentioned, by name, 23 times in four different books of the Bible. It is a matter of record that Cyrus was mentioned three times in the *final two verses* of 2 Chronicles and then mentioned three more times in the *first two verses* of Ezra. This man, through the mighty workings of God, had an influence upon the lives of millions of people and, specifically, upon the lives of some great men like Isaiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel. We are told, by this king’s own words, that God “commanded (him) to build Him a house at Jerusalem” (v. 2). As we read through the Book of Ezra, we will surely see that God moves in mysterious ways! It might surprise some to learn that the phrase “God moves in mysterious ways” is not found anywhere in the Bible. There are several ideas about where this saying came from, one being a hymn written by William Cowper in the 19th century that says, “God moves in mysterious ways; His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.” Who would have believed that God could use a time of exile to bring great revival to His people? The Book of Ezra tells an amazing story of God’s grace and divine providence as we see His people being commissioned by Cyrus to return to their homeland to build a temple there.

Prayer Emphasis: Believe there is no place that puts us out of the reach of God! **Trust His Kingdom Providence** to be as evident and active in your life as in the lives of the people of the Bible. **Realize** that God can use some unexpected people to accomplish His divine purpose and will.

Day 6: Ezra 2:1-24

“Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon...” (Ezra 2:1)

“These Are the People”

Although chapter two includes another of the many long lists of names that are often found in the Bible, these names were important enough for God to record them so they must certainly be important enough for us to read them! The Hebrew word that is translated “people” in our focus verse is translated “sons” or “children” over 4,500 times in the Bible. Let this be a reminder that our circumstances do not alter our relationship with God. We are His “children” when we are in the *best* of situations and we remain His “children” even when we are in the *worst* of situations. None of the “people” listed in today’s verses would have considered being taken away from their homeland and being held captive in Babylon a good thing! However, we will see that, through God’s **Kingdom Providence**, “these are the people” who learned that God could take any situation and use it for His glory! In the part of the list that is included in our reading today, we first see Ezra listing some of the prominent religious leaders of the people (v. 2). For the record, the Nehemiah mentioned in this list is not the same Nehemiah that we will read about later. In addition, the Mordecai mentioned in the listing is not the cousin of Esther (Esther 2:5-7). After listing the leaders by name, Ezra then listed the remainder of the people by their 18 families.

Prayer Emphasis: Remember that every word in the Bible is inspired and written for our benefit. **Believe** that the same God that knew all these people by name is just as familiar with us today. **Believe** that God knows and loves you and **thank Him** for His personal love for you today!

Day 7: Ezra 2:25-48

“The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight.” (Ezra 2:41)

“The Sons of Asaph”

After listing the 18 families that were to return to Judah, God then included a listing of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and the Nethinim (vs. 36-43). The “Nethinim” were people who did custodial work as servants to those who ministered in the temple. Their title is actually translated as “the temple servants” or “the temple support” in many versions of the Bible. In today’s focus verse, God tells us that 128 of the people that were to return to their homeland and the daunting task of building the temple were “the singers: the sons of Asaph” (v. 41). Asaph was a prominent singer and music minister whom King David appointed to be over the sacred choral services in earlier days. The “sons of Asaph” are later mentioned as musicians in the temple (1 Chronicles 25:1-2 and 2 Chronicles 20:14). The titles to 12 of the Psalms bear the name of Asaph while, because of their content, Psalms 74, 75, and 79 are believed to have been written by some of the “sons of Asaph.” Music has always been of great importance to God, and it should, therefore, remain a very important part of our worship services today. If God has gifted you with a musical ability, you should seek out a way to use that ability for His honor and glory.

Prayer Emphasis: Notice that God pays close attention to even the smallest details. When it was decided that a team of people was needed to return to the homeland, God was careful to include people for every imaginable task. **Ask** God if He has a specific task for you to perform. **Seek** a place of service in the church and **faithfully fill** it. Why not join the choir and make a joyful noise unto the Lord?

Day 8: Ezra 2:49-70

“So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.” (Ezra 2:70)

Home Again! Home Again!

As a child, I remember my mother playfully singing part of what she believed to be a “Mother Goose” nursery rhyme whenever we pulled into the driveway of our home at the end of a long trip. She would sing, “Home again, home again. Jiggity-jig.” (Yes, that is the correct spelling for “jiggity.”) If we are excited about returning home from our short vacations and getaways, just imagine how excited these people must have been about returning to their homeland after spending 70 years as prisoners in Babylon. But getting home was not enough. Once they were home, they were immediately faced with the rebuilding of the beautiful temple that Solomon had earlier erected. The reference to, “the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem” (v. 68) is referring to the temple site and not the actual temple itself. As we all know, if there is going to be a building project then there is going to have to be a building fund. In these closing verses of Ezra 2 we are told of the gifts that were provided so the building project could begin. We are told “some of the heads of the fathers’ houses...offered freely for the house of God” (v. 68). Verse 69 tells us that these families gave “according to their ability.” The word that is translated “ability” there is earlier found in Genesis 31:6 where Jacob told Rachel and Leah, “You know that with all my *might* I have served your father.”

Prayer Emphasis: Ask yourself a difficult question today: “Am I really serving God with all of my might and ability?” **Determine** that God is worthy of your best effort and then **give** Him nothing less than that.

Day 9: Ezra 3:1-13

“And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.” (Ezra 3:1)

“As One Man”

It is not certain as to which month the phrase “when the seventh month had come” is referring. Some think it might be referring to the “seventh month” after the people left Babylon or the “seventh month” after they arrived in Jerusalem. However, the “when” is not nearly as important as what the people did in that seventh month. Our focus verse tells us that, “and the children of Israel were...gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.” This phrase strongly suggests that all the people agreed that it was time for the building project to begin. The construction began where their relationship with God found its beginning – at the “altar of the God of Israel” (v. 2). The men who were called upon to head up the construction were Jeshua (a descendant of Aaron, the priest) and Zerubbabel (a descendant of David, the king). This is a good time for us to be reminded that, because of the sacrifice of God’s Son, He has “washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us *kings* and *priests*” (Revelation 1:5-6). We, then, are descendants of both Aaron and David! They built the altar first so that they could “offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.” This was very important because the people needed to return to the Mosaic Covenant. It was partly because of their forsaking of that covenant that the nation had been delivered into captivity. Sometimes the best way to get back on the right path is to go right back to where you first left it!

Prayer Emphasis: Review your personal relationship with God and make sure that you are keeping the main thing the main thing! **Make** the altar the foundational part of your service to God. **Do** what you do for Him because of what He has done for you!

Day 10: Ezra 4:1-24

“In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.” (Ezra 4:6)

“An Accusation”

In the first part of today’s reading, we see where some of the “adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants...were building the temple” so they tried to pose as allies and volunteered to assist in the construction of the temple (v. 1). Because Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the heads of Israel refused their offer, “the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah” and “troubled them in (their) building.” They even “hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose” (4:4-5). Today’s reading finds these adversaries writing “an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem” (v. 6). A copy of what was written to King Artaxerxes is included in this chapter along with a copy of the letter he wrote in response. Upon receiving the letter that gave them permission to stop the work on the temple, “Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions...went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease” (v. 23). Because of their resistance “the work of the house of God...at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia” (v. 24). This was some 18 years after Cyrus allowed the people to return to their homeland to build the temple.

Prayer Emphasis: Expect opposition when you set out to do a great work for God! **Refuse** to be shocked by those who will present themselves as friends when they are not at all friendly toward God or His causes. **Be** both *patient* and *persistent* in your efforts to accomplish the will of God in your life.

Day 11: Ezra 5:1-17

“Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah...prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.” (Ezra 5:1)

“Haggai and Zechariah”

About 15 years after “the work of the house of God...at Jerusalem ceased” (4:24), Haggai and Zechariah began to prophesy “to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel” (v. 1). In response, “Zerubbabel...and Jeshua...rose up and began to build the house of God” (v. 2). Whether the reference to the prophets of God being “with them” and “helping them” refers more to preaching or actual labor is unknown. Most believe they were “helping” by exhorting and encouraging the people to build. What these men preached is recorded in the books of the Old Testament that are named after them. Ezra did not deal directly with this issue in his historical record of these events, but both of these prophets clearly placed the blame for Israel’s hard times on the people’s lack of obedience to God in the past. But as soon as the work was resumed, another effort was made to stop it. Another letter was sent to King Darius, this time from a man named Tattenai. His letter reported that the Jews had returned to the building of the temple and their work went on “diligently” and the project was prospering (v. 8). He told Darius that, when asked from whence their authority to build the temple came, they reported first that they were “servants of the God of heaven” (v. 11) and then added that they were operating under a decree that had been originally issued during the reign of King Cyrus (v. 13). Tattenai suggested that the records be checked to see if such a decree actually had been written and that King Darius should render an opinion on whether or not the work could proceed.

Prayer Emphasis: Expose yourself to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God by regularly attending the preaching services. **Make** your spiritual diet a priority in your life.

Day 12: Ezra 6:1-22

“And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently.” (Ezra 6:12)

A Stern Warning

Verse 1 states that “...King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives” and “a scroll was found” that contained a record of King Cyrus’ decree (v. 2). Along with that record, they found specific instructions that permitted the construction of the building to be at least partially financed from the king’s treasury. It also stated that the “gold and silver articles of the house of God...be restored and taken back to the temple” and deposited in “the house of God” (v. 5). Verse six is so cool. There, King Darius said to Tattenai and his partners to “keep yourselves” from Jerusalem and from interfering with the work on the temple. King Darius even stated that the building could be partially funded by the taxes that the people would have been paying to Persia! He basically told Tattenai that the men who were building the temple should be given whatever they needed to finish the work there. In return, the king asked only that God’s people include him and his family in their prayers (v. 10). At the close of his response to Tattenai, King Darius included a stern warning against anyone who would make any effort to keep the temple from being finished.

Prayer Emphasis: Never underestimate the power of God. Believe that His Kingdom Providence can cause men everywhere to act in accordance with His will. Pray for those who govern us on a daily basis (see 1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Day 13: Ezra 7:1-28

“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.” (Ezra 7:10)

Ezra’s “Prepared Heart”

You may not have noticed it, but we have read through a good portion of the Book of Ezra without even once seeing his name. He is not mentioned until we arrive here at Ezra 7:1. We will find him mentioned 12 more times in Ezra and then another 12 times in Nehemiah. Ezra is never mentioned by name outside of the books Ezra and Nehemiah. We do not know a lot about Ezra, but what we do know is quite impressive. He was a descendant of Aaron (v. 5). He was “a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses” and “the hand of the LORD his God” was “upon him” (v. 6). Verse six contains the first of eight times that the Bible mentions God’s hand being on Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Nehemiah 2:8, 18). He came to Jerusalem approximately 80 years after Zerubbabel under the commission of King Artaxerxes. It is quite apparent that God’s **Kingdom Providence** had prepared the heart of yet another non-Jewish king to advance His will for the Israelites. Verse 10 states that “Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.” Some translations say that Ezra “set his heart” or that he “devoted himself” to doing the three things that are mentioned in that verse. One of the first things that God wanted us to know about Ezra was that he was a priest who was determined to know, do, and teach God’s Word.

Prayer Emphasis: By God’s great **Kingdom Providence** Ezra was convinced that he was where God wanted him to be and that he was doing exactly what God wanted him to do. Can you say the same? **Search** your heart and see if God is urging you to serve in some special capacity in the church.

Day 14: Ezra 8:1-36

“Then we departed...on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road.” (Ezra 8:31)

“Then”

It took some time, but I read this verse from 37 different translations of the Bible and found that 21 of them began the verse with the word “then.” In 7:9 we read that “On the first day of the first month (Ezra) began his journey from Babylon.” Today, we read that, some 11 days later, “on the twelfth day of the first month” he departed “to go to Jerusalem.” It is apparent that “the hand of our God” that was “upon” Ezra, led him, as God always does, to do things “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). Before the four-month journey began, Ezra took the time to make sure that he had the right people in place. The first 14 verses of chapter eight list the people who were to accompany Ezra to Jerusalem. Ezra determined that he needed more Levites (teachers of the Law) so he sent messengers to secure more of these spiritual leaders before he began the journey (vs. 15-20). Verses 21-23 describe a time that was devoted to fasting and prayer prior to the beginning of the long march to Jerusalem. After the necessary *spiritual* preparations were made, Ezra devoted some time to the *physical* preparations that needed to be made for the journey and the work that the people would face upon their arrival in Jerusalem (vs. 24-30). It was only “then” – after 10 days of planning, fasting, praying, and providing – that Ezra and his group of about 5,000 moved forward to join their brethren at the temple site.

Prayer Emphasis: Remember the importance and value of prayer, planning, and providing. *Prayer* involves the heart and soul; *planning* involves the mind; and *providing* involves our strength. (See Mark 12:30)

Day 15: Ezra 9:1-15

“For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.” (Ezra 9:2)

“Leaders and Rulers”

Shortly after his arrival in Jerusalem, this man who “prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel” (7:10) was met by some of the leaders who had come to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and were informed of a major problem. At this time Ezra and his group had been in Jerusalem for about five months (compare Ezra 7:9 with 10:9) and Ezra had, no doubt, been teaching on the statutes and ordinances of God. That teaching would have forbidden intermarrying with non-Jewish people. Hence the *preaching* uncovered a *problem*. Often, when this happens, it is the preacher that has to go and not the problem! However, these people reacted differently. They knew what they had been doing was wrong. They had historical evidence – even through the life story of King Solomon – of how intermarriage most often led to idolatry and the practice of false religion. And perhaps the saddest part of this problem was that the “leaders and rulers (had) been foremost in this trespass” (v. 2). For the record, God’s forbidding the Jews from marrying Gentiles was not a *racial* issue. All the peoples of these regions were of the same race. God’s prohibition against marrying Gentiles was based on a *religious* issue. Ezra knew that the only way to keep the *nation* in a right relationship with God was to keep the *home* in a right relationship with Him!

Prayer Emphasis: Seek to be a leader who leads in accordance with the *laws* of God and not the *lusts* of the flesh. **Realize** that even the best of people have a seed of selfish desire within their hearts. **Remain** committed to the reading of God’s Word and **allow** it to cleanse your heart of sin and selfishness.

Day 16: Ezra 10:1-44

“Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel...” (Ezra 10:1)

“While Ezra Was Praying”

We have said much about Ezra and his commitment to the *preaching* of the Word of God, but today’s focus verse directs us to pay attention to his *praying*. It is apparent that the sin that was dealt with in chapter nine had gone on for a long time and it had been tolerated, and committed, even by the leaders of God’s people. (Remember, Ezra arrived in Jerusalem about 80 years after the first group that went there with Zerubbabel.) Ezra’s preaching uncovered a serious problem and that serious problem had to be dealt with in a biblical way. It is obvious that the people were repentant for they “wept very bitterly” (v. 1). One of the leaders came to Ezra and confessed that, “We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land” (v. 2). Such matters should drive the preacher to prayer (v. 1) and to fasting (v. 6). As you read through chapter 10, you will see that even some “priests” had committed this trespass (10:18). They are mentioned, by name, in verses 18-44. How sad it is to see that “all of these had taken pagan wives” and some of them “had children” with these Gentile women (v. 44). It is no wonder that Ezra, the man who had set his heart to teaching and preaching the Laws of God, also set his heart to pray!

Prayer Emphasis: Meditate on the story of Ezra today and **ask** God to help you retain what you have read and to practice it in your daily living. **Commit** time to Bible reading and study as well as to prayer and fasting. **Refuse** to be a leader that does not honor the commands of God in your everyday living.

Day 17: Nehemiah 1:1-11

“The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan, the citadel.” (Nehemiah 1:1)

“Nehemiah”

Nehemiah’s name means “Jehovah Comforts” or “Jehovah Consoles.” There is no question that this man, by God’s **Kingdom Providence**, was used to bring great comfort and consolation to the people of God, especially those who lived in Jerusalem. In Ezra, we read about the group of Jews that Zerubbabel led as they returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of God somewhere around 538 BC. We also read about Ezra later coming with a smaller group of people around 80 years later (approximately 458 BC). Nehemiah was called of God to Jerusalem about 13 years after Ezra’s arrival there. Nehemiah’s story divides very evenly into two sections. Chapters 1-7 deal with the *reconstruction* of the walls of Jerusalem while chapters 8-13 deal with the *restoration* of the people of Jerusalem. We will see that the walls were not the only things that had been destroyed and neglected. The hearts of the people were also in serious need of some repair. After hearing the disheartening reports concerning the condition of the walls of Jerusalem, and the distress in which its inhabitants were living (v. 3), Nehemiah entered into a season of prayer and planning. Ultimately, he asked God’s blessings on his plan to approach King Artaxerxes and seek his permission to travel to Jerusalem to evaluate the situation there.

Prayer Emphasis: Seek to be a comforter to someone who is grieving or distressed today. **Ask** God what you can do to be a part of the restoration of relationships and then be obedient to what God tells you to do. **Look** for something good that you can do for the church grounds and then volunteer to do it. (P.S. – You might want to check with the Building Committee first!) ☺

Day 18: Nehemiah 2:1-20

“And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.” (Nehemiah 2:1)

Patience!

Nehemiah told us that it was “in the month of Chislev” that he received the devastating report of the deplorable conditions of the walls of Jerusalem (1:1). Now he tells us that it was “in the month of Nisan” (2:1) that he finally had the opportunity to speak to King Artaxerxes about his desire to visit and help the people of his homeland. Since both Nehemiah 1:1 and 2:1 mention “the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes,” we can know that about four months passed before Nehemiah was afforded an opportunity to seek permission to move forward with his plan. God’s Kingdom Providence was at work when Nehemiah went into minister to the king. He did not have to bring his plan up because the king noticed that something was wrong with Nehemiah. Nehemiah tells us that he “had never been sad in (the king’s) presence before” (2:1). The king questioned Nehemiah as to what was troubling him, and Nehemiah promptly jumped at the opportunity to share his dream of helping the people of Jerusalem. He was very specific in his request, stating, “I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my father’s tombs, that I may rebuild it” (v. 5). Soon Nehemiah was in Jerusalem, seeing for himself the work that needed to be done there. Verses 18 and 19 inform us that he encountered some people who greatly desired to *help* him and others who greatly desired to *hinder* him.

Prayer Emphasis: Ask God for patience! **Realize** that something worth doing is worth the wait! **Expect** both support and opposition when you set out to do something for God. **Remember** that, when it comes to the work of God, if He calls you *to* it, He will enable you to *do* it!

Day 19: Nehemiah 3:1-32

“Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors...” (Nehemiah 3:1)

The Ten Gates of Jerusalem

The gates to a city were of extreme importance. Their purpose was to keep wrong things out and to keep the right things in. One of the first things that moved Nehemiah to tears was his hearing that the “gates” of Jerusalem had been “burned with fire” (1:3). This devotional will offer a brief description of each of the 10 gates in the wall of Jerusalem. **The Sheep Gate:** It was called the sheep gate because this was the gate which the sheep and lambs that were used in the sacrifice were bought through. **The Fish Gate:** It was called the fish gate because the fisherman of Galilee would bring their catch in through this gate to be sold. **The Old Gate:** This was probably one of the first gates ever built in the wall of Jerusalem. **The Valley Gate:** Several valleys surround Jerusalem and this gate apparently opened out to the valley of Hinnom. **The Refuse Gate:** All of Jerusalem’s refuse and rubbish was taken out through the dung gate, down to the valley of Hinnom, where it would be burned. **The Fountain Gate:** The fountain gate is located near the pool of Siloah, which was often used by the people for personal cleansing before proceeding to the temple. **The Water Gate:** The Water Gate led down to the Gihon Spring, which was located adjacent to the Kidron Valley. **The Horse Gate:** The horse gate was close to the King’s stables, and the men of Jerusalem would ride their horses out of this gate to war. **The East Gate:** This gate is located on the east side the city (duh!) on the opposite side of the Mount of Olives. **The Inspection Gate** (also known as the Miphkad gate): The word in Hebrew has a military connection and, according to tradition, it was at this gate that David would meet his troops to inspect them.

Prayer Emphasis: Recognize that each of the 10 gates of Jerusalem represented something spiritual to the Israelites and each had its own story. There is much to be learned from a study of these gates.

Day 20: Nehemiah 4:1-23

“But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews.” (Nehemiah 4:1)

Facing Opposition

It wasn’t long after the people began to restore the walls and gates that the opposition began to ridicule them. Verses 1-3 describe the efforts of the opposition to mock and ridicule the workers and their efforts. They tried to make the workers believe that their efforts were wasted because their walls would not even keep a fox from breaking them down. Verses 6-8 describe a plan to attack those who were working on the walls. God’s enemies had heard that the walls were halfway completed so they conspired with others to “attack Jerusalem and create confusion” (v. 8). But people were not the only enemies of the work. Verse 10 describes the physical exhaustion that the people were beginning to experience after doing so much work in such a short amount of time. We read that, “The strength of the laborers (was) failing” even though there was still much work to do (v. 10). How did Nehemiah and the people respond to this criticism? The answer is found in verse 9: “Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.” So, the people prayed but they put some feet to their prayers by posting an around the clock security team to protect them and their work.

Prayer Emphasis: Pray for those who seem to be in opposition to the work the church is trying to do. **Plan** to keep on working in the face of opposition and criticism. **Believe** that it is time for the church to be diligent in its efforts if we are to make a difference in our world.

Day 21: Nehemiah 5:1-19

“And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against the Jewish brethren. For there were those who said, ‘We...are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live.’” (Nehemiah 5:1-2)

Problems Within!

At least to this point, Nehemiah’s opposition came primarily from those who lived outside of Jerusalem and Judah. However, before the walls were completed, he began to encounter some of the most serious opposition that any spiritual leader can face – opposition from within! Every spiritual leader must face this kind of opposition at some time. Even Jesus had someone from within His organization that proved to be an enemy in the end. It wasn’t enough that Nehemiah had to deal with Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. Now he is beginning to see the work hindered by some of his own people. On top of that, the people were beginning to feel some financial pressures, as well. Now Nehemiah had to deal with a constant double threat. The external opposition posed a constant threat to the security of the people and the completion of the project, thereby threatening the mental well-being of those who were already physically exhausted from the work. Adding the kind of mental fatigue that comes from such opposition did nothing but exaggerate and exacerbate the situation. If you have ever faced such problems, you know that exaggeration and exacerbation only lead to exasperation! Because of external pressures, physical exhaustion, and fear, morale was already low (4:10-12). What did Nehemiah do? Let me answer that question in Nehemiah’s own words: “Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall...All my servants were gathered there for the work” (v. 16).

Prayer Emphasis: Refuse to allow problems to drive you *away*. Instead, allow your problems to drive you to *pray*! We can rest assured that the moment we see Jesus we will realize that He was worthy of our faithfulness, even when we are facing opposition.

Day 22: Nehemiah 6:1-19

“...Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, ‘Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono.’ But they thought to do me harm.” (Nehemiah 6:2)

More Distraction

As if the problems that Nehemiah and his workers faced were not enough, they were soon faced with a major distraction that almost brought the work on the walls to a stop. After trying to lure Nehemiah to a village “in the plain of Ono” in order to do him harm, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem later tried to hire prophets to try to lure Nehemiah into the inner buildings of the temple where only the priests were allowed (vs. 1-4). But Nehemiah did not fall for either of their traps. The first would have cost him his life, and the latter would have cost him his reputation. Nehemiah knew that only certain priests could enter that part of the temple, and he wisely chose not to defile that holy place (vs. 10-13). However, in between those two attempts to kill or discredit him, there was another desperate effort to do away with Nehemiah. Verses 5-7 describe an open letter that this evil committee of three threatened to send to King Artaxerxes. The letter began with this statement: “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says...” The letter contained some “rumors” (v. 6) that Nehemiah was only building the walls of Jerusalem so that he could proclaim himself to be king. Thus, the *naysayers* had become *they sayers*, and their evil words almost succeeded where weapons had failed. In spite of the opposition, Nehemiah and the people completed the building in 52 days (v. 15)!

Prayer Emphasis: Refuse to listen to or repeat gossip. **Realize** that half-truths, rumors, and innuendo have done more damage to the work of God than any other tool of Satan. **Pray** for your church and your fellow church members today!

Day 23: Nehemiah 7:1-36

“And I said to them, ‘Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors...’” (Nehemiah 7:3)

More on the Gates

The walls were not the only thing that had to be repaired if the people of Jerusalem were to be safe and secure. The gates also needed to be repaired. One of the causes for the “great distress” mentioned in chapter one was the fact that “the wall of Jerusalem (was) also broken down, and its gates (were) burned with fire” (1:3). After “the wall was built” and Nehemiah “hung the doors,” “Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel” were given charge of their maintenance (vs. 1-2). There are five different men named Hanani mentioned in the Bible. This man Hanani is mentioned only in Nehemiah and was one of the men that delivered the report to Nehemiah about the horrible conditions in Jerusalem (1:2). We do not know for sure if this man was an actual brother of Nehemiah or just a close relative. There are 14 different men named Hananiah in the Bible and three of them are mentioned in the Book of Nehemiah. (The best known of all of the Hananiahs is probably the one that was renamed Shadrach and was one of the three Hebrew children who were thrown into the burning fire for refusing to bow down to an idol.) We do know that this Hananiah was known as “a faithful man” and one who “feared God more than many” (7:2). To these two men, and their assistants, Nehemiah gave the charge to keep the gates closed except for a few hours in the brightest part of the day. Even then, the gates were to be manned by guards.

Prayer Emphasis: **Pray** for God’s protection upon our church and upon our people when we meet there. **Pray** for Christians everywhere who are being persecuted and even martyred for their faith in Christ.

Day 24: Nehemiah 7:37-73

“So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities.” (Nehemiah 7:73)

“The Nethinim”

Some translations of the Bible do not include the formal name “Nethinim” in today’s focus verse. Instead, they use the words “temple servants,” which is exactly what the Nethinim were. The word literally means “given ones” or “those set apart,” and refers to those who were set apart to service in the temple. In the King James Version of the Bible, the Nethinims are mentioned 18 times, with all but one of those times being in Ezra or Nehemiah. These “set apart” servants assisted the priests and the Levites in much of the manual labor required to keep the temple operating. Ezra 8:20 provides us some history of how these workers became a part of the temple service. There we read of, “the Nethinim, whom David and the leaders had appointed for the service of the Levites”. The Bible lists them as being separate from the priests and Levites (see Nehemiah 11:3 and 1 Chronicles 9:2). Nehemiah 3:26 states that these temple servants also assisted in the repairing of at least certain portions of the wall of Jerusalem because they lived in the section of the city that that part of the wall protected. The Nethinim were probably not forced laborers or common slaves. Nehemiah 10:28 lists them among “all those who had separated themselves from the people of the lands to the Law of God”. The last mention of these servants of the temple tells us that “the Nethinim dwelt in Ophel” and “Ziha and Gishpa were over” them (Nehemiah 11:21).

Prayer Emphasis: Whether your translation refers to these temple workers as “Nethinim” or “temple servants,” **realize** that they were a group of people who gave themselves to the service of God and His temple. There are many ways that you could assist those who serve in our church ministries. **Seek** out one of those positions and fill it.

Day 25: Nehemiah 8:1-18

“Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.” (Nehemiah 8:1)

“As One Man”

Chapter seven left us with “the children of Israel” leaving Jerusalem after the walls were completed and, once again, living “in their cities” (7:73). An earlier devotion mentioned that Ezra had returned to Jerusalem 14 or 15 years before Nehemiah for the primary purpose of encouraging and exhorting the people through the teaching of God’s Law. Four times in Ezra 7, Ezra was called a “scribe” (teacher) and in Ezra 7:6 he was referred to as “a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses.” Although Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries, there certainly didn’t seem to be any conflict in their responsibilities. Ezra seemed to be God’s man for encouraging the *hearts* of the people while Nehemiah was God’s man for encouraging the *hands* of the people. The phrase “as one man” provides a strong indication that the people were in agreement that they wanted to hear more of the preaching and teaching that Ezra had been doing from the “Book of the Law of Moses.” Verse three states that “the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.” When Ezra first arrived in Jerusalem, he found the moral and spiritual condition of the people to be far below what God’s Laws demanded. It would seem that the building program about which we have been reading was as much about building and restoring people as it was about building and restoring walls and buildings!

Prayer Emphasis: Expose yourself to the teaching and preaching of the Word of God. **Note** the three benefits that came to the people as a result of God’s Word. First, they were convicted of their sin (v.9). Next, they were led to worship (v. 15). Then, they experienced great joy (v. 17)!

Day 26: Nehemiah 9:1-38

“And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.” (Nehemiah 9:3)

Six Hours?

If you only knew how hard most preachers work to try to get people out of church as close to noon as possible! Today’s focus verse describes a worship service that lasted at least three, and maybe even six hours! And we are told that the people “stood” during the entire service. “One-fourth of the day” (three hours if a twelve-hour day is considered and six hours if a twenty-four hour day is considered) was spent reading “from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God” while an additional “one-fourth of the day” was spent as the people “confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.” Several of the Levites mentioned in chapter eight were involved in the leading of this great praise and worship service. It seems that the men mentioned in 9:4 were leading the people in *prayer* while the men named in 9:5 were leading the people in *praise*. The “stairs” that these men stood upon may have been some of the stairs that led from one level of the temple area to another or the stairs that allowed access to the “platform of wood” that Ezra stood upon while he read to the people from the Word of God (8:4). Whether three hours or six hours, this was probably such an exciting and wonderful service that no one left early!

Prayer Emphasis: Read Nehemiah 9:36 and consider how happy the people were to be *who* they were, *where* they were, and to be doing *what* God, in His **Kingdom Providence**, had called them to do! **Read** Nehemiah 9:37 and see that, even in these ancient days, the paying of taxes led people to be “in great distress.”

Day 27: Book Nehemiah 10:1-39

“Now the rest of the people...all those who had separated themselves...to the Law of God...these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into...an oath to walk in God’s Law...” (Nehemiah 10:28-29)

A Unanimous Decision

The last verse in chapter nine mentions a written “covenant” that the “leaders...Levites...and priests” signed and sealed. The “we” in that verse clearly indicates that this was a covenant made by the people and not just their spiritual leaders. The first verses of chapter 10 list the names of the leaders who were willing to place “their seal on the document.” Note that Nehemiah’s name is the first on that list! Many of the names that are listed here in the first eight verses of chapter 10 will be found in the list of “the heads of the fathers’ houses” in verses 12-21 of chapter 12. Although we know very little about most of these people who signed this document, you can rest assured that they were there by God’s **Kingdom Providence**, and they, evidently, were committed to standing firmly and faithfully for God. Even though it was not possible for all of the people to “sign and seal” this document, the “rest of the people” all “joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law...and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD (their) God” (v. 28-29). The “curse” that is mentioned here is probably referencing the curses that God stated would accompany disobedience in Deuteronomy 28:15-68. You might say that the leaders signed this document with their *hands* while the people pledged to “sign” it with their *feet* by walking in obedience to God and His Word.

Prayer Emphasis: Accept the fact that very few churches or Christians can agree on all of their preferences, but **refuse** to accept anything less than a unanimous decision when it comes to committing our lives to obeying God and doing God’s will in our lives.

Day 28: Nehemiah 11:1-36

“Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem...And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.” (Nehemiah 11:1-2)

The Final Ingredient

After the walls of the city were completed and the temple was built, there remained one final ingredient to complete the restoration of God’s holy city – inhabitants! It makes sense that the people left the burned-out and broken-down Jerusalem and went to dwell in safer places. Jerusalem had gone from being the Bible’s “Holy Ghost Town” to just a “ghost town!” Now that the city was ready, somebody had to be willing to live there. First, we see the “leaders of the people” deciding to dwell in Jerusalem. Then we see “the rest of the people” casting “lots to bring one-out-of-ten to dwell in Jerusalem.” Since “nine-tenths” of the people were “to dwell in other cities” we clearly see that God desired that at least 10 percent of His people live and dwell in Jerusalem. The first part of today’s focus verses reveals that “the leaders of the people” were willing to set an example for others to follow. Leaders must lead by *example* and not just by *exhortation*. They had no right to expect the people to live in Jerusalem if they themselves were not willing to live there. The second part of the focus verses indicates there were some who “willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.” These were men who did not live there because they were *leaders* or because they were selected by a *lottery*. These were men who decided to live in Jerusalem because of the *leadership* of the Lord! They sacrificially left their former homes and families and moved to Jerusalem.

Prayer Emphasis: Pray for someone in leadership at your church and then let them know that you are praying for them. **Consider** serving in some position of leadership in the church. **Volunteer** to **serve** on a committee or team that might need your assistance.

Day 29: Nehemiah 12:1-26

“Moreover the Levites...and Mattaniah who led the thanksgiving psalms, he and his brethren. Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brethren, stood across from them in their duties.” (Nehemiah 12:8-9)

“In Their Duties”

Throughout the Book of Nehemiah, much has been said about the work that went on during the rebuilding of the walls and city of Jerusalem. Now, here in the first part of chapter 12, the Holy Spirit wants to give some credit to some of those who accepted positions of responsibility after the city was restored and repopulated. Our focus verse speaks of those who “stood...in their duties.” The word that is translated “duties” in the NKJV is translated “watches,” “offices,” and even “services” in other translations of the Bible. The first time this word is found in the Bible, it is used to describe God’s “charge,” “orders,” or “requirements” of Abraham (Genesis 26:5). This word is found four times in Nehemiah. The first time we saw this word in Nehemiah (7:3) it was used to describe the duties of those who stood “guard” at the gates. The final time that we will see it in this book is when Nehemiah “assigned *duties* to the priests and Levites” in the second to last verse in the book (13:30). Many of the names listed in today’s verses are unfamiliar to us, and are not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, especially outside of the Book of Nehemiah. However, they represent the names of many people who were willing to accept responsibility and do their duty for God and His Kingdom. As such, each one of them is a representative of what we mean when we use the term **Kingdom Providence**. God has a place of service for every person and a person for every place of service.

Prayer Emphasis: Pursue a place of service in God’s Kingdom work through the church. Do not wait to be asked! **Ask** leadership about opportunities to serve and then get in place and do your duty! **Believe** that God can use you in a distinct and definite way.

Day 30: Nehemiah 12:27-47

“Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites...to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness...with thanksgiving and singing...” (Nehemiah 12:27)

The Dedication Ceremony

We are told that the people “sought out the Levites...to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness.” Our focus verse mentions two very important aspects of this great dedication service: “thanksgiving” and “singing.” One of the most important responsibilities of the Levites was to lead the people in songs of worship and praise to God. Much of their singing was accompanied by musical instruments. Today’s focus verse also mentions “cymbals and stringed instruments and harps.” There are about 22 different kinds of musical instruments mentioned in the Bible, all of which were used to enhance the worship experiences of God’s people. While verse 27 mentions the musicians, verse 28 gives special mention to the “singers.” Many refuse to sing because they do not consider themselves to be good singers. I am one that believes that God is looking for good *saints* (saved people) more than He is looking for good *singers*! Leading people in worship demands that you, yourself, are worshiping God. You cannot lead someone else to do something that you are not doing yourself. Worship is not about *entertainment* but about *enjoyment*. It is about the saints of God publicly enjoying their relationship with God and His people. Worship is not about *feeling* – it is about *fellowship*. It is about our fellowship with God and our fellowship with other Christians.

Prayer Emphasis: Contact someone who is involved in our music ministry today, and **thank** them for the important part they play in our worship services. **Pray** for our music ministers and music ministries today.

Day 31: Nehemiah 13:1-31

“On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God.” (Nehemiah 13:1)

The Main Thing

We should not be left thinking that the dedication ceremony was just a time for thanksgiving and singing. In the last part of chapter 12, we see the people offering “great sacrifices” and rejoicing (12:43). Now, the first verse of today’s reading states, “On that day they read from the Book of Moses.” They read from the place in the Scriptures where God declared that “no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God” (See Deut. 23:3-4). This prohibition stemmed from the way these two nations had treated Israel almost 1,000 years earlier as God’s people travelled through the wilderness towards the Promised Land. This prohibition was not as much about retribution as it was about a respect for God’s promises. Centuries before these peoples refused to be a blessing to the people of Israel. God promised Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, that He would “bless those who bless you, and... curse him who curses you” (Genesis 12:3). This command about the Ammonites and the Moabites was a simple fulfillment of that promise. It was a reminder that we will always reap what we sow – even if much time has passed from the time of sowing. An Israelite became a part of God’s covenant by *birth*, but an Ammonite or Moabite could not. They had to become a part of the covenant by *choice* – by joining with God’s covenant people and submitting to God’s Laws.

Prayer Emphasis: **Realize** that *no one* becomes a Christian by *chance* and that *anyone* can become a Christian by *choice*! Christianity is not based on our *natural* birth but on our *spiritual* birth. Have you been born again? If not, please **seek out** a believer who can help you come to know Christ today!

Day 32: Esther 1:1-22

“But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.” (Esther 1:12)

The Virtues of Vashti

It would have been very difficult to write a devotional series on people who experienced great **Kingdom Providence** without including the story of Esther. Esther is the last of the section of the Bible commonly referred to as “the historical books.” We do not know who wrote this book, but we do know about whom they wrote! The book is named after its main character, Esther. Through the providence of God, Vashti, the wife of King Ahasuerus, refused his request that she entertain the king’s drunken guests by wearing her crown and displaying her personal beauty. Ahasuerus is better known as Xerxes and was the son of King Darius of Persia. (These names should be familiar to you after reading through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.) This is no fictional story based on fictional characters. Archaeologists long ago discovered the ruins of the palace where all these events took place. At that time, the Persian Empire was the largest empire in the world. However, the man who ruled that empire could not even rule his own home! But that was not so much to his failure as it was to God’s power and His purposes. Vashti was probably not a Christian woman, but she was obviously a woman of morals and character. While the Bible commands that women should “submit to their own husbands” (Ephesians 5:22) it does not demand that a woman obey her husband if doing so violates the commands of God.

Prayer Emphasis: **Ask** God to help you see Esther as more than just a few pages of history. **Read** it carefully and prayerfully, while **asking** God to reveal to you your own special place in His **Kingdom Providence**.

Day 33: Esther 2:1-23

“So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.” (Esther 2:16)

More About Patience

It seems as if every page and paragraph of the Bible has something to say about patience. Esther 2:16 was chosen as our focus verse because it teaches us something about the way God works and the waiting that God’s people should be willing to do in order that His divine will might be accomplished in our lives. While yesterday’s reading told us that the events recorded in chapter one transpired “in the third year” of the reign of King Ahasuerus (1:3), today’s focus verse tells us that the events about which we are now reading transpired “in the seventh year of his reign.” This means that the few verses between Esther 1:3 and 2:16 are actually separated by the space of about four years! If we are not careful, we do not recognize the passage of time in the story of the Bible. However, if we read carefully and prayerfully, we will see that God’s **Kingdom Providence** does not work according to man’s calendar or time expectations. So, four years pass before we first read Esther’s name in the book of the Bible that is named after her. Verse seven tells us that Esther was first named “Hadassah” and was later named “Esther” after she was adopted by her cousin Mordecai. Esther was described as being “lovely and beautiful” (v. 7). The word that is translated “lovely” in the NKJV is actually translated “form” in at least four places in some translations of the Bible. The word that is translated “beautiful” here is also found in Esther 2:2 & 3. It is a word that had to do with “appearance,” and it is translated “appearance” more than in any other way in the KJV and other translations.

Prayer Emphasis: Remember that earthly attributes, no matter how striking they might be, will never accomplish what godly character can do when it is exhibited in the life of a believer. One of the godliest attributes that God promised His people is patience! **Exhibit** patience in your life today!

Day 34: Esther 3:1-15

“After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman...and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.” (Esther 3:1)

Meet Haman

Haman was “the son of Hammedatha the Agagite” who was the king of the Amalekites, a people who had been the sworn enemy of the Israelites since Israel left Egypt and set out on their march to the Promised Land. Exodus 17:16 states, “The LORD has sworn: The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” The phrase, “from generation to generation” does not mean “from time to time” but “forever.” Mordecai, a Jewish man who was faithful to God above all others, refused to bow down and pay homage to Haman (v. 2) even though the leaders of the people spoke to him “daily” (v. 4) encouraging him to do so. Obviously, Haman’s pride was wounded by Mordecai’s refusal to honor him and his new position. Verse five of today’s reading states that Haman “was filled with wrath.” It is a sad day for any person when anger is allowed to control their thinking and their actions. Haman used Mordecai’s refusal to bow as an opportunity to strike a blow against all of God’s people as he “sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus” (v. 6). Soon Haman was given a “decree” which “was written to all that Haman commanded” (v. 12) and it was “sent by couriers into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews...in one day” (v. 13).

Prayer Emphasis: Refuse to allow anger to control any part of your life. **Expect** persecution if you stand boldly for God by refusing to honor any person above Him. **Pray** for persecuted Christians today.

Day 35: Esther 4:1-17

“And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king’s treasuries to destroy the Jews.” (Esther 4:7)

“The Love of Money”

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul stated, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” and we certainly see one of the “evils” that the love of money brought to the heart of Haman and, thusly, to the lives of Mordecai and all of the Jews. Yesterday’s reading told us that Haman’s decree allowed all of those who obeyed the command to kill the Jews, young and old, and “to plunder their possessions” (3:13). When Esther received word of her uncle’s rebellion and his public mourning over the pending persecution of his people, she sent a messenger to Mordecai to learn why he was leading the people in a time of “great mourning...with fasting, weeping, and wailing” (v. 3). Obviously, Mordecai knew what kind of results this promised bounty that had been placed on the heads of his people might bring when he mentioned “the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king’s treasuries to destroy the Jews” (v. 7). Perhaps this moment was when Esther fully understood all that had transpired in her life and how, by God’s **Kingdom Providence**, she had “come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (v. 14). By faith, she decided to lay her own life on the line in an effort to spare her people from the evil plan of Haman (v. 16).

Prayer Emphasis: Use your money for the glory of God and **refuse** to allow money to use you! **Become** a faithful steward of your money and honor God with it. **Seek** to live free of greed, anger, and hatred! **Repent** for any time that you have allowed such things to control you and **forgive** others who have hurt you because of their weaknesses in this area.

Day 36: Esther 5:1-14

“And the king said to her, “What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you – up to half the kingdom!” (Esther 5:3)

“What is Your Request?”

After her communications with Mordecai, Esther got busy and prepared a plan of action. It is obvious that she knew she was risking her own life by doing so because she stated, “If I perish, I perish” (4:16). When she approached the king, he told her that he would grant her any request “up to half the kingdom” (v. 3). One is here reminded of the request of a very young King Solomon who, when God told him that He would give him anything that he desired, asked only for “wisdom and knowledge” (2 Chronicles 1:10). What kinds of things do you ask of God? What would you do if you were granted such an offer from the King of kings or even a human king like Ahasuerus? Esther, like Solomon, chose wisely. Her request was that the king and Mordecai attend two banquets. After her request was granted, Haman was filled with both anger and pride – two of the deadliest sins in the Bible! Although he was “joyful and with a glad heart” that he had been invited to a second, private banquet with just him and the king as Esther’s “guests,” his heart was still “filled with indignation against Mordecai” (v. 9). After learning of Haman’s supposed good fortune, “His wife...and all his friends said to him, ‘Let a gallows be made...and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet’” (v. 14). In the requests of Esther and Haman, we see the vast difference between their heart attitudes. One desired only what was good for the whole, while the other desired only what for good for self! How sad it is to see that Haman was “pleased” at such a suggestion!

Prayer Emphasis: **Review** your own prayer life and your personal requests of God. **Ask** yourself if they are for the good of the church as a whole or if they are centered in your own personal preferences and desires.

Day 37: Esther 6:1 – 7:10

“So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king’s wrath subsided.”
(Esther 7:10)

Haman Humbled and Hanged

Hold on tight because our story really gains momentum as things begin to unravel and go downhill for Haman! On the night before the second banquet, “the king could not sleep” so he commanded that someone should “bring the book of the records...and they were read before the king” (6:1). Those records contained the story of two servants who once plotted to kill. Their plan was thwarted because Mordecai reported them. As the king considered how Mordecai should be honored for his loyalty, Haman came “to suggest that the king hang Mordecai” (6:4)! When the king inquired about ways in which one might honor a loyal servant, Haman “thought in his heart” that the king was talking about him (6:6). Haman had several suggestions and, after hearing them, the king commanded that all of those things be done for Mordecai! Haman hurried home “mourning and with his head covered” in shame and disgrace (6:12). Shortly, some servants of the king came to “bring Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared” (6:14). Upon his arrival at the banquet, Haman heard the king once again offer to fulfill any request of Queen Esther. It was then that Esther disclosed what she knew about the evil plan to destroy her and her people. The king angrily demanded to know the name of the man who would make such an evil plan and was told “the adversary” was none other than “wicked Haman” (7:5-6). The humbled Haman pleaded for his life (7:7). At the suggestion of Harbonah, one of the king’s eunuchs, Haman was hanged on the very gallows that he had ordered to be prepared for the execution of Mordecai (7:9-10).

Prayer Emphasis: Remember that God’s Word teaches us that we will reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7), so **live** and **act** accordingly! **Turn** to Matthew 7:12 and **review** the teaching on the “Golden Rule.”

Day 38: Esther 8:1-17

“You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king’s name...for whatever is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet ring no one can revoke.” (Esther 8:8)

A Decree from the King

Even though Haman was now gone, his evil plan remained in place. Knowing the “one day” (3:13) that was set for the annihilation of the Jews was at hand, Esther made a passionate request of the king that he “counteract the evil of Haman...and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews” (v. 3). She wisely asked that the king “revoke the letters devised by Haman” (v. 5). True to his promise, the king had Esther and Mordecai write “a decree concerning the Jews...in the king’s name” and sealed “with the king’s signet ring” (v. 8). Perhaps the greatest lesson to be learned from the story of Esther is found in the fact that her people, who were unable to save themselves from the destruction that the evil Haman had planned for them, were ultimately saved as a result of a decree from the king. We must never forget that God’s **Kingdom Providence** has also brought us to the place that we have been saved as a result of a decree from the King of kings and the Lord of lords! But the story is about more than that! The story goes on to say that this decree was to be taken to “every province and published for all people” (v. 13). Because of the king’s decree, the Jews were spared from a day of great sorrow and provided a day of “joy and gladness” that led to “many of the people” converting to the Jewish faith and a personal belief in their God (v. 17)!

Prayer Emphasis: Note that the king’s decree was “to every province” and “to every people in their own language” (v. 9). This would be a great day to **pray** for the work of our missionaries, the Gideons International, and other Christian organizations that strive to distribute the Word of God on a world-wide basis.

Day 39: Esther 9:1-17

“...the time came for the king’s command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them.” (Esther 9:1)

“On the Day”

Back in chapter three, we read about a decree from the king that all of the Jews be killed “in one day” – with that day being “the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar” (3:13). In today’s Scripture we read that, in spite of the second decree issued by the king, some of the enemies of the Jews still attempted to destroy and plunder the Jews. However, on that day, the very day that had been designated in Haman’s evil plan, “the opposite occurred” and the Jews “overpowered those who hated them” (v. 1). Notice that this day was “in the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar” and that it was “on the thirteenth day” of that month (v. 1). Our hearts should soar at the thought that, on the very day that Satan’s allies had hoped to *destroy* the Jews, God authored a plan to *deliver* them! And, we should not be amazed that, in His **Kingdom Providence**, God used a non-Jewish king and a woman to accomplish that great plan! In the eyes of the ancient Jews, King Ahasuerus was a “heathen” and women were considered to be little more than chattel property and servants to men! In the Book of Esther we see that God truly does choose “the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” so that “no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)! The day after what was supposed to be the Jew’s day of *destruction* was made “a day of feasting and gladness” because of God’s great *deliverance* (v. 17)!

Prayer Emphasis: Celebrate your own spiritual birthday and other days that God’s **Kingdom Providence** has been manifested in your life. **Realize** that every day is a day for “feasting and gladness” for the believer!

Day 40: Esther 9:18-10:3

“Now all the acts of his power and his might, and the account of the greatness of Mordecai...are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?” (Esther 10:2)

“The Greatness of Mordecai”

The book that contains Esther’s story also contains “the account of the greatness of Mordecai” (10:2). The feast that was to be held “on the fourteenth day of Adar” in the times of Mordecai and Esther was to be celebrated “yearly” (9:19-20). The festival of Purim is celebrated every year on the 14th of the Hebrew month of Adar. It commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia from Haman’s plot “to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews...in one day” (3:13). The events of this Jewish holiday include the reading of the Book of Esther and the Purim Feast! I think I would love this Jewish holy day because fasting for non-medical reasons is prohibited on this day! They believe that everyone should join in on the celebration of the great victory that God gave to His people. Today would be a great time to offer up a special prayer for God’s chosen people! If you know a Jewish person, contact that person and express your appreciation for the great contributions that their faith in God has made to all of the peoples of the world. Pray for our political leaders and ask God to remind them that it is in the best interest of any nation to be a blessing to the Jews, God’s chosen people. Believe that true greatness can be found in common people who choose to obey God.

Prayer Emphasis: Thank God for His **Kingdom Providence!** Trust God to do for you what He has always done for His people! **Speak** often of the providential care of God and **share** what He has done for you at every opportunity. **Contact us** at gary@seminolebc.com or 850-562-8069 if we can pray for you or help you in any way.