

I have Read:

1. Nehemiah, Malachi
2. Syllabus
3. III Nephi 24-25
4. Esther
5. Jacob 2:31-35, D&C84:31, -34; 128:24, 64:23-24; 110:13-16.

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Religion 321
Unit XII 302

The Rebuilding of Jerusalem

Both Nehemiah and Malachi were prophets of the period during and just after the return of the Jews to Jerusalem especially at the time when the walls of the city were being rebuilt. Although scholars are not certain which chronological period Malachi belongs to, Nehemiah is introduced as a Jew in Persia "in the 20th year of Artaxerxes" ...in the yr about 445 B.C. (Neh 2:1) One gains the impression that Nehemiah was in a position not only to "get the ear of the King" but also was in a position that he could influence him. The King gives him permission to return to Jerusalem for "a time" (2:6) implying that the King fully expects him to report back to the court. He also gives Nehemiah an escort and papers to the governors of the occupied territories through which he has to pass for safe passage and also to the governor of Jerusalem that enables him to get timber to rebuild the walls and gates of the city.

In Jerusalem, Nehemiah also shows his ability to lead people and his understanding of human nature. He assigns the rebuilding of different sections of the wall to about 40 different groups or families. Each is responsible for that section of the wall. You can see the family or group pride this engenders and possibly the competitive "speed" to finish first that is inherent in the situation. He accomplishes the task in 52 days. (6:15) despite many attempted treacheries by his enemies to inhibit his actions. When he finished the work he put his brother Hanani in charge of Jerusalem, organized the temple corps and then proceeds to take a census of the people. The Priests were required to prove their genealogies and those who could not were removed from their duties.

Then Ezra the scribe reads the law to the people and "they understood it." (8:8). They wept with joy and with sorrow (because of their former disobedience to the law and at this time some of the Jewish Holidays as instituted by Moses were restored. As a result of the reading of the law, the people renewed their covenants with the Lord and promise, among other things to 1) Keep the Sabbath, 2) Not marry outside the covenant 3) return to the law of sacrifice as laid down by the law. They made a "sure" covenant and wrote it and had the Priest "seal" it. (9:38).

II (from Esther) How did it come about that Haman had to honor Mordecai, whom he hated? In this section of Esther we certainly see in the court of the King the pattern of intrigue and deceit that has typified the "Kingly" tradition everywhere. In the first place one wonders why Mordecai's saving of the King had not been drawn to his attention before. And why the incident had not been totally hidden? (perhaps a Jewish Historian or scribe?) This time, however, Haman was caught in the trap of his own vanity. He was sure that the King was referring to himself as the man the King wished to honor. Probably because of the impending dinner with the King and the Queen which he thought (again mistakenly) was intended as an honor to himself. One can imagine his wrath when the honor fell to Mordecai instead of himself.

III. Did I hear correctly in class that "Esther" is not in the Jewish scriptures? ^{not in the DSS.} I wonder why? The point I want to pursue in this paragraph is somewhat tied in with the above fact. Women in general are not much mentioned in either the Bible ^{or} of the Book of Mormon. Male Chauvinism? Most males seem to want to avoid the threat to their ego by the female. Instinct? or vanity? or the "false teachings of the Fathers?" In the first chapter of Esther, it is difficult to understand the punishment of Vashti. In a court where the King had many wives and concubines, SHE was the queen. This indicates the regard which the King had for her when he was sober, at least. Or it may indicate the nobility of her birth which entitled her to the position. The King desired to brag about her beauty before the people and the nobles (1:11), but this seems a rash act in view of the seclusion which the ^Persian and other Eastern people afforded, indeed forced, upon their women. A woman raised to not being displayed in public, of being covered and veiled whenever in public and who was of royal birth was, it seems to me, justified in refusing. Indeed, she probably felt that when the King came to his senses he would realize that he had made a mistake. This particular king must have been weak. His nobles and advisors seem to have been able to persuade him easily. They played upon his vanity--and his sense of power. "If you let Vashti get away with this all women will despise their husbands (and might disobey them occasionally, too)" so to speak. In chapter two "After the wrath of King Ahasuerus was appeased (and he was sober again) he remembered Vashti and what she had done" the scripture reads, and I wonder if something is left out.

At this point the scriptures should have said "and he repented his harshness" but it may have been too late, and he may have signed into law something which he later regretted, as happened later in the book when he had allowed Naman to set a day to destroy the Jews. One hopes that in this situation, too, he softens his decree as much as is possible towards Vashti. For the first time I got the impression that THIS beauty contest was not like the beauty contests where you line up the maidens and choose the "ONE" who is most beautiful. I get the impression from this that "ALL" the maidens who were brought to the king became "HIS" and became part of the royal concubinage, but that he chose Esther out of them to be the queen. His choice made it possible for Esther to save her people in this situation and one can easily see the hand of the Lord in the situation. It is a Book of the Old Testamont which shows the position of the woman in the Eastern society very clearly. It brought to my mind the cigarette commercial: "Baby, you've come a long way!" Indeed!

Since I read Esther as well as Nehemiah and Malachi, I took a little "poetic" (or something) license and made my report longer. o.k.?

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