

## THOSE WHO CAME OUT OF BABYLON

As an early morning seminary teacher in California I found the calling to be demanding physically, mentally and spiritually, but many blessings flowed from being into the Holy scriptures daily. I team taught with another teacher and we divided up the chapters to teach. One day as I opened up the book of Nehemiah to prepare for my portion of the lesson, I realized that the 2 chapters I had to teach were mostly just a long list of complicated Old Testament names—not exactly an exciting topic for teenagers at 6:00 am

The book of Nehemiah itself though, is amazingly exciting. It tells the story of Nehemiah, who was “sort of the Chuck Connors of the Old Testament” as one student put it. As forewarned by prophets like Isaiah and Lehi, the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and captured the Israelites in about 597BCE and carried off about 10,000 captives to Babylon for 70 years. The book of Nehemiah takes place at the end of that captivity, which, it turns out—was actually not so bad in beautiful Babylon. The Jews had created businesses and integrated well into the Babylonian prosperity. Nehemiah, also an Israelite, even held the position as royal cupbearer to the King, a position of authority, prestige and power. One day Nehemiah received news of the depressing state of Jerusalem—the beloved homeland and temple site was in ruins, overrun by robbers, rats and refuse. By the power of God, Nehemiah was able to get permission from the king to take his people and return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall around the city in order to protect it and help rebuild the temple and Jerusalem. Nehemiah went to the congregations in Babylon and called for his people to come out of Babylon and return to Jerusalem to build Zion. But to his dismay—the captives were not eager to leave the prosperity, beauty and ease of Babylon. They were very comfortable in the world, and the return to Zion meant sacrifice, poverty and a disruption of their lives. Finally a faithful remnant of draftees and volunteers agreed to come out of Babylon and return with Nehemiah and rebuild the wall. It is an exciting story of how they built the wall with weapons in one hand and trowels in the other, and the scriptures record the names of the families and individuals who built and protected each segment. It is a great story—but the chapters I had to teach were the list of names, not the story.

As I knelt and sought help from above on how to teach this section, the Spirit brought to my mind the lesson I was to give. I could see how to apply the lesson to my students: Those seminary students were the faithful little remnant, the ones who chose everyday to not align themselves with the values of Babylon. These were the girls who chose to wear shirts under the strapless prom dresses, these were the young men who never watched R movies; these were the faithful few at the high school who did not play sports on Sunday, or swear, or cheat, or drink—the ones who got up at 5:00 am every single school day to be at seminary at 6:00am. As I knelt there, grateful to my Heavenly Father for showing me what to teach these faithful teens—a distinct phrase came to my mind, one of those clear revelations you would never think of yourself. The Lord said to me, “*And I know their names.*” At that moment I began to weep—knowing that God today, as in Nehemiah’s day--knows the names of each individual who chooses to come out of Babylon.

S.C.