HARD WORK IN HARD TIMES -- REBUILDING GOD'S WORK AND GOD'S PEOPLE

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

GOD'S LEADERS MOBILIZE GOD'S TROOPS TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WORK ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD DESPITE GOD'S ENEMIES

Paul Apple (May 2010, Rev. Jan. 2026))

For each section:

- Thesis statement … to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline … to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions … to encourage life application
- Representative quotations … to stimulate deeper insight

Nehemiah 2:20 "*The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build*"

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Paul Apple, 304 N. Beechwood Ave., Baltimore MD 21228.

www.bibleoutlines.com

paulgapple@gmail.com

TITLE: INTRODUCTION / OVERVIEW OF NEHEMIAH – REVIVAL OF GOD'S WORK AND OF GOD'S PEOPLE – HARD WORK IN HARD TIMES

BIG IDEA:
GOD'S LEADERS MOBILIZE GOD'S TROOPS TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WORK ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD DESPITE GOD'S ENEMIES

Name "*Nehemiah*" = Yahweh Consoles or Comforts – the discouraged exiles needed someone to bring them hope (Isa. 57:14-21)

INTRODUCTION:
Neh. 1:3 Two Main Problems: 2 main sections of the book
1) God's Work Needs Revival / Rebuilding (chaps. 1-7)
"*and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.*"
2) God's People Need Revival / Rebuilding (chaps. 8-13)
"*The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach*"

Kidner: the spiritual fortifying of the same community, by the reading of the law, an act of penitence and a special covenant, and by provision for the worship that God required.

We are uncomfortable in our circles with the term " **revival**." It seems so contrived. We pass by church signs that advertise: "Revival meeting every Friday night" and we can't help but be skeptical. Only the Holy Spirit can accomplish revival. But God sti ll is in the business of reviving and rebuilding. We don't want to become jaded or hard -hearted.

We need the lessons of this Book of Nehemiah – I estimate about 15 weeks, taking fairly big chunks at a time. There are 13 chapters.

I. BACKGROUND / CHALLENGES:
A. Timeline of Events
722 BC – Assyrians deported the 10 northern tribes of Israel (2 Kings 17) – due to idolatry and failure to observe God's regulations for worship; failure to repent when confronted by various prophets and warned of coming judgment

605 BC – Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and carried many people into captivity; fall of the monarchy; Jewish nation no longer politically viable – 70 year period of captivity; judgment against Judah (southern tribes) – what a threat and reproach to God's program

World power shifted from the Babylonians to the Persians
539 BC – edict of Cyrus to allow Jews to return to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem – book of Ezra (2 Chron. 36:22-23)
- Zerubbabel and Joshua led the first return (Ezra 1-6); **temple** was rebuilt (Haggai and Zech as prophets)
- Ezra led second return in 458 BC (Ezra 7-10) to enforce the **law** of Moses
- Nehemiah led the third return 445 BC to rebuild the **walls** of the city
  - first term as governor of Jerusalem (chaps. 1-12)
  - second term as governor (chap. 13) – 424 BC
    Gap of almost 20 years between chap. 12 and chap. 13

Book probably written by **Ezra** – draws upon many of the eyewitness accounts of Nehemiah (personal diaries, etc.); two books closely linked together – in fact book was labeled "Second Ezra" in the Septuagint and Latin Vulgate compilations
Neh and Malachi represent the final two books of OT revelation before God spoke again at the time of John the Baptist – 400 years of silence

B. Challenges and Obstacles
- Required courage to be willing to come back and be part of the rebuilding team – remnant living in Babylon were actually safer and more comfortable ; taking on large responsibility
- Difficult to be part of a small remnant (50,000 came back -- Ezra 2:64); comparison with former days when the temple was more impressive; God's work does not seem to be very impressive at this point in time
- At various periods complacency replaced the sense of urgency and the rebuilding of the temple under Ezra took a back seat; Haggai 1:1-15
- All types of opposition from various enemies – both internal and external – compromising alliances; false accusations; trying to make it look like the Jews were insurrectionists who would then cause trouble for the king of Persia
- Financial hardships; issues of security; temporal values

II. OUTCOME OF SUCCESS:
This is an encouraging book because the people of God enjoyed such great success.

1. Success in the Project Itself
6:15 -- "*So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days*."
A lot happened in a short period of time!
12:27 Dedication of the Rebuilt Walls with great celebration
"*Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps and lyres*."

2. Success in the Proclamation and Application of the Word of God to the Lives of the People
8:3 "*all the people were attentive to the book of the law*"
8:12 "*All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them*."

Kidner: Scripture is seen, then, in these two books as law to be obeyed and as revelation to be understood; to which we should add: as promises and warnings to evoke prayer and action.

3. Success in the Promotion of God's Overall Program for the Age
10:28-29 Renewal of the Special Covenant Relationship with all of its detailed provisions
"*taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of God our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes*"
- Continuity with God's Covenant people from the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
- Separation from the idolatry of the people around them; religious purity

4. Success because of the Pattern of Spiritual Leadership Demonstrated

13:31 Nehemiah at the end of the day wants some recognition from the Lord
"*Remember me, O my God, for good*"

5. Success Because of the Good Hand of the Lord Sovereignly at Work (1:10; 2:8,18)
Divine Vision -- 2:12 "*what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem*"
Divine Execution -- 2:20 "*The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build*"

III. FIVE THREADS RUNNING THROUGH THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH:

1. GOD'S LEADERS -- INSIGHTS INTO SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP – FEEL THE BURDEN AND STAY ON TASK

Nice transition from the two part series we just concluded on the type of local church leadership that God commends; Nehemiah was a strong leader – many admirable traits that we can follow; Throughout he combined aggressive faith with practical respo nsibility

4:9 "*We prayed . . . and set a guard against them day and night*"
4:14 "*Remember the Lord . . . and fight*"

Cromwell: Trust in God and keep your powder dry

A man of vision, a man of prayer, a man of faith, a man of courage, a man of action, a man who could motivate and manage others

2. GOD'S TROOPS --IMPERATIVE OF ALL HANDS ON DECK – FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL MINISTRY

Lessons of Ephesians 4 and 1 Cor. 12-14 regarding the importance of the entire body of Christ; spiritual gifts must be exercised

3. GOD'S WORK – ISOLATE WHAT IS TOP PRIORITY FOR GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRAM – FOCUS ON THE TASK AT HAND

Many distractions; many other things could consume our time and a mbition; easy to settle for something that is good rather than for God's best

4. GOD'S WORD – IMPERATIVE OF REPENTANCE AND RENEWED OBEDIENCE – FLEE SIN AND FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS – FAITH IN THE LORD IS THE KEY

We are living thousands of years later – and still the key to a successful life is the same – Trust and Obey, for there is no other way … that's it

5. GOD'S ENEMIES (STRONG OPPOSITION) – INSIGHTS INTO SATAN'S TACTICS TO DISCOURAGE AND DISTRACT – FIGHT OFF ALL THE THREATS (BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL)

If you are attempting something significant for God … something that is high priority for His program for that point in time – you should expect strong opposition from the enemy.

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BACKGROUND NOTES:

Redpath: **Victorious Christian Service**
There is no type of service any of us can undertake which is beset with so much potential as is the service of the Master. On the one hand, there is so much that is rewarding, and on the other hand, so much that is disappointing. Many are the obstacles to be overcome and many the pitfalls to be avoided. On how many occasions we have taken up a task in the name of the Lord only to withdraw, beaten, discouraged, and baffled, and yet, somehow, baffled to fight better. For every discouragement has been allowed to come to us in order that through it we may be cast in utter helplessness at the Saviour's feet. Then we return to the battle again, no longer trusting in the false and insufficient human resources which so foolishly we had taken into the battle, but now trusting in the limitless resources of our risen Lord.

Baxter: Nehemiah is a gem of a book in the spiritual lessons which it teaches us. It tells how, under the new leadership of Nehemiah, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt by the returned Remnant, and how the people themselves were reinstructed in the Law which God had given to their nation, long before, through Moses. This rebuilding of the city wall is like a graphic object - lesson illustrating those truths which lie at the heart of all true service for God; and he who will give heed to the lessons here vividly pictured will be a wise and successful builder in spiritual things.

Malick: **Background for Ezra and Nehemiah**:
The re-establishment of the exiles as God's people in Jerusalem and Judea gradually developed as they returned in waves under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, as God providentially made provision for them through the Persian rulers, as the Lord enabled them to rebuild Jerusalem, and as the people continually repented of their evil in order to follow God's law

Outline of Nehemiah:
I. (1:1 – 7:4) THIRD RETURN UNDER NEHEMIAH AND REBUILDING THE WALL:
The Nation is Physically Separated from the Gentiles: When Nehemiah learned about the distress of the Jews in Jerusalem he prayed to the Lord, sought permission from King Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and managed to spur on the people in Jerusalem to accomplish the task in spite of opposition from the people surrounding the city and the problems within the city because he was a man who trusted God and was wise in leadership
II. (7:5 – 13:31) THE RELIGIOUS REFORMS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH:
The Nation is Spiritually Separated from the Gentiles: After the people became identified as a new society under the Law of God with the walls of their capital city established, Nehemiah restored them from their falls back into disobedience so that they might obey God's Law

Mervin Breneman: One of the chief objectives of Ezra -Nehemiah was to show the Jews that they constituted the continuation of the preexilic Jewish community, the Israelite community that God had chosen. Thus, in this community they were to see a continuation of God's red emptive activity. This community is emphasized by allusions to the exodus in recounting postexilic parallels. The returnees experienced a new exodus. As soon as the new temple, which took the place of the preexilic temple, was completed, they celebrated the Passover (Ezra 6:19-22). Later, after reading the Law, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh 8). These feasts celebrate God's great saving acts in the exodus. . .

The emphasis on continuity with the covenant people of God led to a strong em phasis on separation from any form of defilement or syncretism with the surrounding people. The postexilic community was a tiny island in a great sea of peoples and religious traditions. It was important that the covenant community remain pure in doctrin e, customs, and ethical norms. . .

Kidner: What we see in Ezra -Nehemiah is an Israel cut down almost to the roots, but drawing new vitality from its neglected source of nourishment in the Mosaic law and already showing signs, by its new concern for purity, of growing into the Judaism which we meet, both for better and for worse, in the New Testament.

Wiersbe: **Outline**

I. CONCERN – (1)

1. Information (1:1 -3)
2. Intercession (1:4 -9)
3. Intention (1:10-11)

II. CONSTRUCTION – (2-3)

1. Authority (2:1 -10)
2. Investigation (2:11-16)
3. Challenge (2:17-20)
4. Assignments (3:1-32)

III. CONFLICT – (4-6)

1. Ridicule (4:1 -6)
2. Plots (4:7-9)
3. Discouragement (4:10)
4. Fear (4:11-23)
5. Selfishness (5:1-19)
6. Compromise (6:1-4)
7. Slander (6:5-9)
8. Threats (6:10-16)
9. Intrigue (6:17-19)

IV. CONSECRATION – (7-12)

1. The people (7:1 – 12:26)
    a. Checking the genealogy (7)
    b. Teaching the Word (8)
    c. Confessing Sin (9)
    d. Making a Covena nt (10:1 -12:26)
2. The walls (12:27-47)

V. CLEANSING – (13)

Stedman: The book of Nehemiah falls into two divisions. **ReConstruction** and **ReInstruction** . . . The theme of this book is that God fulfills our need for security, protection, and strength. . .

A wall is a very symbolic structure. It is more than just a barrier of stone and mortar. A wall is a statement.

The walls of the city of Jericho symbolized the pride and arrogance of that godless city, and

that is one reason why God chose to pull them down with nothing but Israel's faith, His own invisible power, and the people's deafening shout. He wanted to show that the arrogance of Jericho was no match for the humility of God's people when it was aligned with the limitless power of God Himself. . .

The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem symbolizes an act all believers should undertake. God calls each of us to rebuild the walls of our lives. What does that mean?

Jerusalem is a symbol of the City of God: God's dwelling place and the center of life for the world. In the New Testament, we see that God's ultimate dwelling place is in us, His people. When we rebuild the walls of our individual lives, we reestablish the protection and strength of God in our lives. We all have met people whose defenses have crumbled away. They have become human derelicts, drifting along the streets of our cities, hopeless and helpless, in many cases captive to alcohol, drugs, or a sexual addiction.

But God in His grace will often reach down and take hold of such a person. He will bring that person out of captivity and He will work with that person to rebuild the defenses and strength needed to resist temptation and escape from bondage. The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, the City of God, is a symbolic representation of the way in which the walls of any life, of any local church, of any community, or of any nation, can be rebuilt. It is a picture of the strength, power, and purpose that God wants to rebuild in us as a barrier to sin, discouragement, failure, and destruction.

The text shows us a five -step process that drives Nehemiah's action – a process that is relevant to any life:
(1) concern, (2) confession, (3) commitment, (4) courage, and (5) caution.

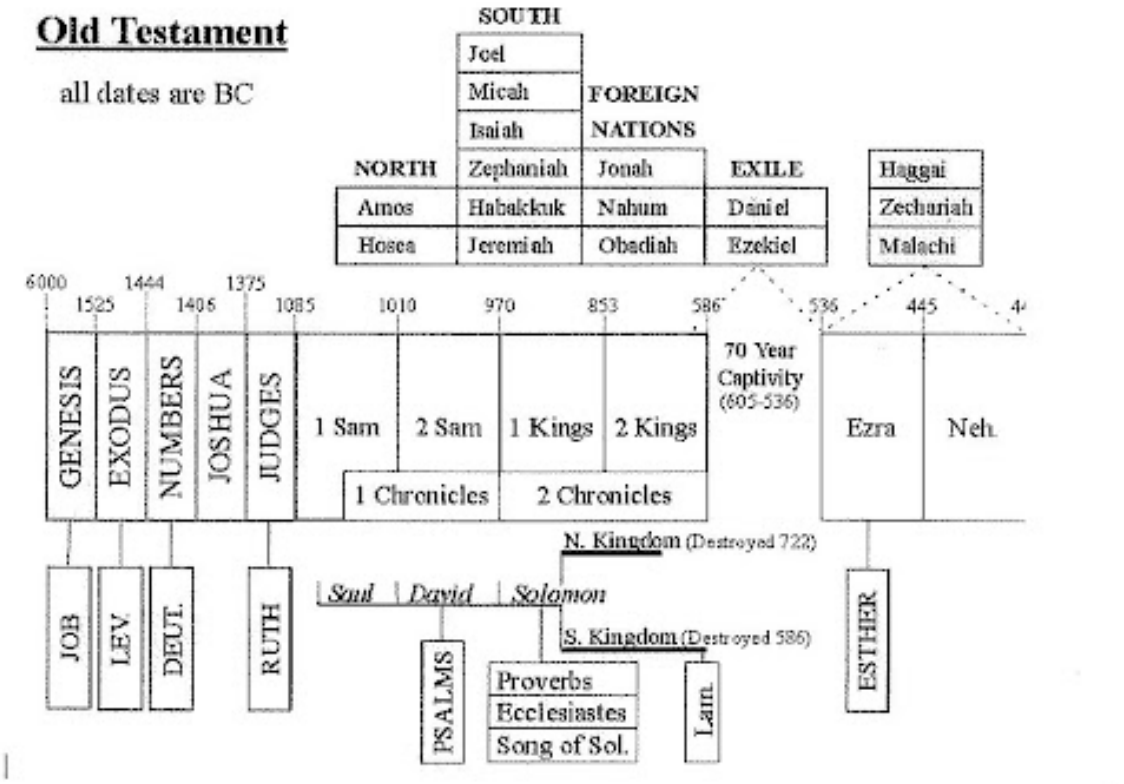
Swindoll: Quite frankly, I think the walls of our lives often lie in ruins through neglect. The leader who brings us to rebuild the walls is the Holy Spirit. And it is He who continues the work of reconstruction inside us. He tries His best to bring to our attention the condition of our walls, but sometimes we don't hear what He is saying. We are not hard of hearing; we simply don't listen.

Some of you are living within the walls of your life surrounded by ruin, and it all began very slowly. First there was a loose piece of stone or mortar. Then there was a crack that appeared in the wall. And then it broke into pieces, and there was a hole. Because of further neglect, the weeds of carnality began to grow through the wall. By and by, the enemy gained free access to your life.

You may be known as a solid Christian man or woman. But you know in your heart that although you are a Christian in the same sense that Jerusalem belonged to the Jews, the wall around your spiritual life that protects and defends you is in shambles. Such things as selfishness, lack of discipline, procrastination, immorality, not making time for God, compromise, and rebellion have come and sowed their ugly seeds. And they have begun to bear poisonous fruit.

OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

This morning we arrive at a significant milestone in our Survey Thru the Bible. The Book of Nehemiah takes us to the end of the OT era, to the days of Malachi. It is the 11th of the OT books that traces the chronological timeframe of the history of God's people. The other books are complementary and fit within that timeline. What was begun with the patriarchs in the book of Genesis now is completed in the days of Nehemiah. What lies ahead is the 400 years of prophetic silence until John the Baptist comes on the scene to announce the coming of the Messiah.



Historical Setting: Remember last week we learned that there were 3 waves of Jewish exiles returning to Jerusalem after the 70 Year Babylonian Captivity. The first 2 waves were covered in the Book of Ezra:

I (1-6) Return and Restoration under Zerubbabel
Restoration of Worship / Rebuilding the Temple

II. (7-10) Return and Restoration under Ezra
Recovery of God's Word / Conviction of Sin/ Heartfelt Repentance

Book of Esther fits in between those first 2 waves.

Now after a 13 year period, in 444 BC we have Nehemiah leading the third wave. Where Ezra was a priest and scribe leading the religious reforms with an emphasis on the Temple; Nehemiah

is the political governor leading the project to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and fortify the city. Then in concert with Ezra he continues to motivate the moral and social reforms of the people. Between chapters 12 and 13 there is a 20 year gap where Nehemiah is back in Persia performing his high level duties there; but he returns in 432 BC once again to Jerusalem and has to deal with the same sins and failures that he had addressed earlier.

Meaning of the Name *Nehemiah*: *Yahweh Consoles or Comforts* – the discouraged exiles needed someone to bring them hope
Who was the historical figure of Nehemiah? Identified as *the cupbearer to the king* at the end of **Chap. 1** – might sound like a low level position – but actually a very respected top level official who exercised great authority; a close confidant of the king with privileged access to him; tasted the wine before the king drank it to make sure he was not being poisoned; I am not much on wine but I wouldn't mind being the food tester for the fancy political banquets
He was a man of courage and great administrative and leadership skill; he was a godly man of prayer; a man of vision and a man of action

Just a quick word about the Authorship of the book: Remember that the two books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally combined as one in the original Hebrew manuscript. So it would not be surprising if Ezra wrote them both. Certainly there are some autobiographical personal sections that must have been written by Nehemiah. So there was some form of compiling involved. The same would be true if Nehemiah wrote both books and relied on some of Ezra's writings. Or there was a third unknown person who used materials from both Ezra and Nehemiah to author the two books.

The Book of Nehemiah addresses 2 major problems:

1) God's Work Needs **Revival** / **Rebuilding** (chaps. 1-7)
   "*and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down*
   and its gates are burned with fire." (**1:3**)
2) God's People Need **Revival** / **Rebuilding** (chaps. 8-13)
   "*The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity*
   are in great distress and reproach"

Nehemiah teaches us lessons of **spiritual leadership** as God's servant leads a revival of both God's Work and God's People.

J. Sidlow Baxter: Nehemiah is a gem of a book in the spiritual lessons which it teaches us. It tells how, under the new leadership of Nehemiah, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt by the returned Remnant, and how the people themselves were reinstructed in the Law which God had given to their nation, long before, through Moses. This rebuilding of the city wall is like a graphic object lesson illustrating those truths which lie at the heart of all true service for God; and he who will give heed to the lessons here vividly pictured will be a wise and successful builder in spiritual things.

The Book of Nehemiah neatly divides into 2 major sections:

I. (1-7) REVIVAL / REBUILDING OF GOD'S WORK
II. (8-13) REVIVAL / REBUILDING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

We have become uncomfortable in our theological circles with the term "**revival**." It seems so contrived. We pass by church signs that advertise: "Revival meeting every Friday night" or "Revival scheduled for such and such date." We shrink back from how the concept is portrayed by TV evangelists. We can't help but be skeptical. Only the Holy Spirit can accomplish revival. But what we have in the accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah is a genuine revival – even though it was short-lived. We need to believe that God still is in the business of reviving and rebuilding. We don't want to become jaded or hard-hearted.

J. Sidlow Baxter's Outline – Explore the Book

I. (1-6) The Reconstruction of the Wall

Nehemiah's Intercession (**1:1-11**)
- Nehemiah hears of the problems in Jerusalem and prays in **vs. 5**
- **1:11** "*Make your servant successful today*"

Nehemiah's Expedition (**2:1-16**)
- Makes his appeal to the King; receives authorization and assistance
- Returns to Jerusalem and conducts his famous night time inspection

Nehemiah's Exhortation (**2:17-20**)
- "*Let us arise and build*"
- Faces immediate pushback and opposition

The Rebuilding Attempted (**3:1-32**)
- Repairing all the various gates and infrastructure of the city of Jerusalem

The Rebuilding Obstructed (**4:1 – 6:14**)
- Large section detailing every type of attack and opposition imaginable

The Rebuilding Completed (**6:15-19**)
- "*So the wall was competed*" – in record time – in 52 days

II. (7-13) The Reinstructing of the People

Re-Registration of the Remnant (**7**)
- Census of those who had returned from Babylon

Re-Inculcation of the Law (**8**)
- Public Reading of the Law of God by Ezra along with instruction
- Reinstitution of the Feast of Booths

Re-Consecration of the People (**9-10**)
- Confession of sin
- Continued reading of the Law of God
- Long prayer recounting history of Israel's unfaithfulness and God's mercy
- Public signing of commitment to obey the covenant obligations

Re-Population of the City (**11**)
- Which people will live within the city of Jerusalem and who will take possession of their inheritance outside of Jerusalem

Re-Dedication of the Walls (**12**)
- And procedures for temple worship

Re-Extermination of Abuses (**13**)
- Cleansing of the temple
- Restoring of Tithes
- Restoring of sabbath observance
- Forbidding of mixed marriages with foreign wives

Big Idea: GOD'S LEADERS MOBILIZE GOD'S TROOPS TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WORK ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD DESPITE GOD'S ENEMIES

Read thru the book 5 times – each time focusing on what you can learn from each of these six perspectives and you will derive many valuable practical lessons.

I. INSIGHTS ABOUT GODLY LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATIVE SKILL

A. Godly Leadership

1. Strategic Vision

a. Vision must be emotionally burdened with seeing the Need

2:3 "*Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire*?"

Rick Duncan: **A visionary person**… (**Chap. 1**)

1. … sees the need. **vv. 1-3** (Look around you!)
2. … feels the need. **v. 4** (Look within you.)
   There is no such thing as emotionless vision. Passion!
3. … shares the need…
   … with God. (Look above you.)
   … with God's people. **v. 11a** (Look beside you.)
4. … meets the need. **v. 11b** (Look beyond you.)

b. Vision must be rooted in God's Purpose –
Nehemiah's vision to rebuild Jerusalem's walls wasn't about personal success but restoring God's people and God's glory.
2:17 "*let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem wo that we will no longer be a reproach*"

c. Vision Must Involve Long-Term Thinking –
Nehemiah not only rebuilds the walls but institutes social, economic, and religious reforms to ensure sustained renewal **–** a holistic approach **(Nehemiah 10–13).**

2. **Synergy between Prayer and Action** (Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility)

a. Priority of Prayer – Blend of dependent prayer and disciplined planning – followed by taking action

Must make prayer a priority; something that you do up front; not something added on as an afterthought; Before taking action, Nehemiah mourns, fasts, and prays. He seeks God's guidance before speaking to the king or initiating reforms**. 1:4-11**
When given the chance to speak to the king, Nehemiah prays silently and boldly asks for support, showing humility before God and confidence in his mission. **2:4-5**
These don't have to be long prayers – often he shoots up what one might call arrow prayers

- **2:4** – when he is actually in the king's presence; silent and brief prayer; then he turned and answered the king's question

How do you respond when you get bad news? Or good news?
Is Prayer your first priority?

b. Practical Necessity of Taking Action

Man of Action -- not satisfied just with initial fact finding investigation but takes on the challenge himself of rebuilding the walls; not just going to Jerusalem and gathering facts; **Chap. 3** – once he has assessed the situation, he leads the people in rebuilding the wall

4:4-6 – Response to opposition – Prays and then motivates the people to continue working
4:9 – Pray for protection; but set up a guard

3. **Servant Leadership --**Study **Chap.5** – Spiritual Leaders Must Set the Example for Sacrificial Ministry (cf. example of Christ)

4 Commitments Every Spiritual Leader Must Make

a) (:**14-15**) Letting go of rights and privileges – Modeling **Servant Heart**
"*Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food allowance.*"

Negative Example:

1) Laying Burdens on the people
"*But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people*"
2) Leveraging their Position for Material Prosperity
"*and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver;*"
3) Lording it over the people
"*even their servants domineered the people.*"

Fundamental Motivation: Mindset of the Fear of the Lord
"*But I did not do so because of the fear of God.*"

b) **(:16**) Laboring at the task at hand – Modeling **Partnership Commitment** instead of Exploitation

c) (:**17-18**) Leading by Example in the area of Generosity – Modeling **Sacrificing** for the Needs of Others

d) (:**19**) Looking for Reward from God – Modeling **Confidence in God's Faithfulness**

4. **Shepherd's Heart -- Displayed Genuine Care and Compassion towards His People Chap. 5** –

Some weak people in the community are being abused; taking economic advantage of the poor; Nehemiah decries this as an abuse; **5:13** – warns them – charging usurious interest; if you fail to keep this pledge of obedience, you will fall out of the pockets of God's robe and no longer be treated as His precious possession

Meets the needs of the poor that had been exposed; takes care of their physical welfare;

Is your heart towards others compassionate or cold? Cf. Compassion of Christ
Do the cares and concerns of others make it past the bottleneck of your own selfish concerns?

A Spiritual leader must display genuine concern for others that leads to action.

5. Successful in Motivating People

Knew when to exhort, encourage, how to motivate people
How to be both tender and firm

- "*in front of his house*" – phrase repeated – important to get the fortification secure; assigned them work that was close to them

B. Administrative Skill

1. Diagnosed and Prioritized Problems / Implemented Corrective Action

Exercised forethought and planning skills –

- Some people act before they think
- Some people are paralyzed with thinking and fail to act

2. Delegated Responsibility / Division of Labor – Chap. 3

huge job that needed to be done; break impossible job down into possible tasks and assign to particular individuals; empowers others

3. Delivers Results with Accountability and Transparency –

Nehemiah shares reports; holds public readings of the Law (**Chap. 8**), and avoids secretive decisions and hidden agendas. Clear Communication

4. Due Date Met

Always important to complete the project on time and under budget – using all available resources wisely
Only took 52 days to complete the rebuilding of the wall – remarkable – even Israel's enemies were impressed and had to attribute such success to the hand of God

II. INSIGHTS ABOUT GOD'S TROOPS – TEAMWORK AND BODY LIFE

A. Everybody Must Be Onboard with the Mission

1. Unified Commitment – 2:18

Nehemiah casts a clear and compelling vision: "*Let us rise up and build*." The people respond with unity and enthusiasm -- "*So they strengthened their hands for the good work*." A shared godly vision inspires **unified action** among God's people

2. Unstoppable Resolve –

Despite opposition from enemies, the team continues to press forward.

B. Everybody Must Be Valued

1. Universal Participation – Chap. 3:1, 8, 12

This chapter highlights over 40 groups (families, priests, craftsmen) each building different sections of the wall. The work of God advances when everyone—regardless of background—uses their gifts and serves their part.

Teamwork Includes Spiritual Leaders and Ordinary People --
Priests, goldsmiths, perfume-makers, and even rulers (with their daughters) work side-by-side. Body life is intergenerational, inclusive, and not limited to professionals or clergy

2. **Uplifting People – God's Work is Never Just About Building Projects – It's About People**

The wall was essential, but the heart of the mission was to gather, purify, and organize God's people.

Structures serve the people, and people serve the purposes of God. The mission is always **people-centered.**

3. **Unjust Behavior Dealt with Promptly (5:1-13)**

When internal injustice threatens unity, Nehemiah rebukes the nobles and urges compassion and fairness. The community repents and restores what was unjustly taken.

Teamwork requires equity, humility, and sacrifice for the common good.

C. Everybody Must Function as Partners in Mutual Ministry

Chap. 3 – 5 Principles of Partnership in Mutual Ministry

1) STARTS WITH CONSECRATION TO THE LORD
vs 1 "*they consecrated it*"

2) STRATEGICALLY FOCUSES ON THE AREA THAT MOST DEMANDS YOUR PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT
"*in front of his house*"

3) SHARES THE WORK ACROSS EVERY SEGMENT OF GOD'S PEOPLE – ALL PULLING THEIR WEIGHT
"*Next to him*" = key phrase – linked arm in arm; yoked together in ministry; no gaps

4) SHAMES THOSE WHO HAVE DIVIDED LOYALTIES AND DON'T PULL THEIR WEIGHT
Vs. 5 "*Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters*."

5) SALUTES EACH WORKER FOR MAKING A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION -- SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAMES OF THE WORKERS

III. INSIGHTS ABOUT GOD'S WORK/ KINGDOM AGENDA AND OUR FOCUS ON MISSION

How **concerned** are we for the **state of the Church of Jesus Christ and its progress**? We discuss and debate the various problems facing the church in our culture today; the sad state of

affairs as various trends continue to weaken the impact of the church. Let's just mention some of those **negative trends**:

1) **Holiness no longer seems the goal**
   - we do not discuss behavior problems in terms of sin and repentance
   - we have a generation that thinks it is OK to look the other way when you see sin
   - we shrink back from anything confrontational
   - we do not exercise discipline in the church – shallow believers
   - the distinction between believers and non-believers is blurring; we measure ourselves against ourselves rather than against the holy character of Jesus Christ
   - more concerned with trying to shore up our horizontal relationships and achieve personal fulfillment

2) **Church Methodology is market driven** – catering more to the felt needs of the unsaved
   - we are impressed with numbers and lots of programs and activities
   - we are driven more by expediency than conviction and principle
   - we are dominated by impressive charismatic personalities

3) **Bible is losing traction** as the objective authoritative source for what we believe and how we live;
we want to relate to Jesus Christ more as a buddy than as our Lord who should be in control of every aspect of our lives.

We can agree about these trends and others as well…
But **how concerned** are we for the state of God's Program?
How does our concern **motivate** and **energize** us to seek revival and commit ourselves to the true mission of the church – to focus on God's kingdom agenda?

A. Staying On Track

1. Burdened Heart Focuses on the Objective – (1:3-4)

Nehemiah is moved to tears and prayer when he hears of Jerusalem's broken state.

Kingdom work begins when God places a holy burden on someone's heart. Vision is born out of divine concern, not personal ambition.

2. Blueprint for Success Requires Careful Planning and Clear Communication

Rick Duncan: What does it take to turn vision into reality – **Developing a plan of action [Chap. 2]**

1. Be **patient**: Spend some time in God's waiting room. **v. 1a.**
2. Be **bold**. Let your fears feed your faith. **vv. 2-3**
3. Be **dependent**. Remember: What God originates, He orchestrates. **v. 4**
4. Be **prepared**. Since God is in charge, make your plans big. **vv. 5-8a**
5. Be **expectant**. Set your sails and wait for wind. **v. 8b**

Sometimes you find leaders with vision and no ability to implement. They label themselves as "Big Idea" people and "Visionaries" – but they never accomplish anything of lasting significance. People just become frustrated with repeated pleas to embrace a vision which they view as unrealistic. Other times you find hard workers who immerse themselves in all sorts of activity but without any strategic vision. They can spin their wheels with an abundance of sincere effort but don't really get anywhere because they are not working smart. They did not do the necessary preparation work to align their efforts with a strategic vision. You need the right blend in leadership of Vision and Execution. Some people might be stronger in one area than in the other.

Japanese proverb: Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.

STRATEGIC VISION BASED ON A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT MUST TRANSLATE INTO COMMITMENT TO HARD WORK IN DEPENDENCE ON GOD'S GOOD FAVOR DESPITE INTIMIDATING OPPOSITION

3. Backsliding Dealt with by Persistence and Follow-Through (Chap. 13)

Nehemiah returns to his duties in Persia and then comes back to check on Jerusalem, ensuring reforms are sustained**.** He finds that there has been significant backsliding. Once again he leads the people in restoring the focus of God's Work.

B. Prioritizing Core Values

1. Basis for National Revival = Covenant Renewal (Chap. 9-10)

1:8-10 Very aware of covenant requirements

The people confess sin, renew their covenant, and make specific commitments to live under God's rule.

Mission focus includes reorienting people to live under God's authority and design.

2. Basis for Positive Attitude = Great Joy in accomplishing the Mission (12:43)

Kingdom work ends not in self-congratulation but in worship, celebration, and thanksgiving to God**.**

"*and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar*."

3. Kingdom Agenda is defined by God not by man and God must receive all the glory.

Nehemiah 2:8, 2:18 -- Nehemiah credits "*the good hand of my God*" for every open door and provision. Kingdom advancement depends on God's favor and direction, not merely human effort.

IV. INSIGHTS ABOUT GOD'S WORD – RESPONDING IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

A. Value of God's Word

1. The Word of God is Foundational to Revival – Neh. 8;1-3

Chaps. 8-10 -- "The Back to the Bible Movement"; Spiritually oriented people have a hunger for the Word of God. All the people gather to hear Ezra read the Book of the Law from morning until midday. When God's Word is honored and proclaimed, it awakens hearts and revives a community.

2. Exposition and Explanation are essential so that people understand the Word and its application to their lives – Neh. 8:7-8

Trained bible experts (Levites) help the people understand the reading, giving the sense so they could grasp its meaning. Teaching and explanation are essential for the Word to produce transformation.

> "*they explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. [8] And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading*."

3. The Word leads to Conviction and Repentance -- Nehemiah 9:1–3

> "*Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dirt upon them. [2] And the descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. [3] While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God*."

Upon hearing the Law, the people weep, fast, and confess their sins.
The Word pierces the heart, bringing deep conviction and genuine repentance.

4. Joy comes from Trusting God and Obeying His Word – Neh. 8:12

> "*And all the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them*."

True understanding of Scripture leads not only to repentance but to joy and celebration in God.

B. Required Response of Faith and Obedience

1. Faith Responds to God's Word with Bold Action – Neh. 2:18

When Nehemiah shares God's plan, the people say, "*Let us rise up and build*."
True faith doesn't just believe the Word – it acts on it with courage and commitment.

2. Obedience Follows Understanding -- Nehemiah 8:13–18

Upon discovering the command to observe the Feast of Booths, the people immediately obey and celebrate it for the first time in generations.
God's people respond in obedience when His Word is clearly understood and embraced.

3. Obedience May Require Costly Change -- Nehemiah 10:28–31; 13:23–27

People agree to separate from ungodly relationships and change economic practices.
Following God's Word sometimes requires sacrifice and repentance in deeply personal areas.

V. INSIGHTS ABOUT GOD'S ENEMIES AND DEALING WITH OPPOSITION

A. Strategies of God's Enemies

a. Ridicule (**4:1-6**)
b. Plots (**4:7-9**)
c. Discouragement **(4:10**)
d. Fear (**4:11-23**)
e. Selfishness (**5:1-19**)
f. Compromise (**6:1-4**)
g. Slander (**6:5-9**)
h. Threats (**6:10-16**)
i. Intrigue (**6:17-19**)

B. Tactics of Dealing with Opposition

Remember the old saying: Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never harm me.
2 types of Attacks: Verbal and Physical

(4:1-3) ATTACK #1 – INSULTING FAITHFUL WORKERS – MOCKING, RIDICULE

A. What makes God's enemies really angry?

"*when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall,*
he became furious and very angry"

4 things make God's enemies really angry:

1. When they are Exposed as evil men who oppose God's kingdom program – look at what made the Pharisees angry –
   - anything that exalted Jesus Christ as the Son of God
   - anything that emphasized inner righteousness and exposed their hypocrisy
2. When Progress is made in areas that are critical to kingdom program success
3. When Spiritual growth and fervency increase
4. When they feel powerless to intervene – hands somewhat tied by decree of Artaxerxes

B. Tactics of Insulting / Mocking / Ridicule:

"*and mocked the Jews*" – Picked the wrong people to mock

1) 5 Mocking Questions: (**4:1-3**)

a. Mocking their **Power** = overall weakness and inadequacy
   "*What are these feeble Jews doing*?" frail, miserable, powerless
   You don't have adequate personnel to get the job done – you are pathetic and helpless
b. Mocking their **Goal** = claim of divine favor
   "*Are they going to restore it for themselves*?"
c. Mocking their **Faith** = nothing but religious futility
   "*Can they offer sacrifices*?"
d. Mocking their **Plans** = unrealistic timeframe
   "*Can they finish in a day*?"
   Your task is impossible; do you have any idea of the magnitude of what you are attempting?

e. Mocking their **Resources** = totally inadequate

"*Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones*?"

2) (:**3**) Judging the end result of their efforts to be **Futile**

"*Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, 'Even what they are building – if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down*!'"

(4:4-6) TWO FOLD RESPONSE

A. (:**4-5**) **Response of Prayer** – Lord, Blow them up – Imprecatory Prayers

"*Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders*."

B. (:**6**) **Response of Hard Work** – Staying on Task – Keep working hard

"*So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work*."

(:7-8) ATTACK #2: INTIMIDATING FAITHFUL WORKERS – MILITARY ATTACK

(4:9-23) 4 KEY ACTIVITIES TO FIGHT OFF DISCOURAGEMENT AND PROTECT AGAINST ENEMY ATTACKS:

1) (:9a) KEEP PRAYING
2) (:14a, 20) KEEP TRUSTING
3) (:9b-14) KEEP GUARDING
4) (:15-23) KEEP WORKING (WHILE YOU KEEP GUARDING) – 6 Insights:

a. (:15) Staying on Task

"*When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work*."

b. (:16-18a) Balancing Guarding and Working

c. (:18b-20a) Concentrating Defenses at the Point of Attack

d. (:21) Maximizing Every Opportunity to Work

"*So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared*."

e. (:22) Sacrificing Comfort for Protection and Productivity

"*At that time I also said to the people, 'Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day*.'"

f. (:23) Leading by Example

"*So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water"*

Enemies were very angry; stirring up trouble; needed to post a guard; desiring to put an end to the work; even the Jews that lived near them tried to halt the work
Don't Fear them but trust in the Lord – Fight – Work --
As the opposition increased, Nehemiah prayed and posted a guard – nothing inconsistent between the two

Chap. 6 – Opposition increases – focused on slandering Nehemiah personally to manipulate him
Turns to God in prayer; **6:15** wall completed in 52 days; **vs. 17** – opposition did not cease;
Fearless of men; didn't shrink back from the attacks
Do you think of yourself as fearless? How important do you find the thoughts of others about you to be to you? How much do you care what others think of you?
The only liberation from a debilitating fear of man is a real **fear of God** – the one whose respect we should desire
Christ faced opposition – **John 15; 1 Peter** – so His disciples will suffer
Godly leaders will face opposition; pray for your leaders

Resilient in the face of opposition – stands firm through prayer, strategic defense and trust in God

CONCLUSION: **Nehemiah wanted the Lord to remember his faithful service**

13:31 Nehemiah at the end of the day wants some recognition from the Lord
"*Remember me, O my God, for good*"
Refrain appears 3 times in final chapter: (:**14, 22, 31**)

What do you want God to remember of your life of service to Him?

Big Idea Review:
GOD'S LEADERS MOBILIZE GOD'S TROOPS TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WORK ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD DESPITE GOD'S ENEMIES

OUTLINE OF NEHEMIAH

HARD WORK IN HARD TIMES – REBUILDING OF GOD'S WORK AND GOD'S PEOPLE

GOD'S LEADERS MOBILIZE GOD'S TROOPS TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WORK ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD DESPITE GOD'S ENEMIES

I. (1:1 – 7:73) REVIVAL / REBUILDING OF GOD'S WORK

A. (1:1-11) REVIVAL (REBUILDING) STARTS WITH CONCERNED CONFESSIONAL PRAYER -- GRIEF OVER THE SHAMEFUL STATE OF GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRAM MOTIVATES SPIRITUAL LEADERS TO PETITION GOD FOR REVIVAL WITH CONFESSIONAL PRAYER

B. (2:1-10) TRUSTING GOD FOR PROVIDENTIAL FAVORS -- PUTTING THE PRIORITY ON THE SUCCESS OF GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRAM REQUIRES BOLD FAITH THAT COUNTS ON PROVIDENTIAL FAVORS

C. (2:11-20) VISION MUST TRANSLATE INTO COMMITMENT – STRATEGIC VISION BASED ON REALISTIC ASSESSMENTS MUST TRANSLATE INTO COMMITMENT TO HARD WORK IN DEPENDENCE ON GOD'S GRACE DESPITE AGGRESSIVE OPPOSITION

D. (3:1-32) PARTNERSHIP IN MUTUAL MINISTRY – GOD'S HONOR ROLL OF DEDICATED WORKERS --
EVERYONE MUST TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR SHARE OF GOD'S WORK – PARTNERSHIP IN MUTUAL MINISTRY GETS THE JOB DONE

E. (4:1-8) DEFENDING AGAINST DISCOURAGEMENT – BOASTING IN WEAKNESS – THE GREAT AND AWESOME GOD CAN PROTECT AND PROSPER A FEEBLE FEW WHO DON'T QUIT PRAYING AND DON'T QUIT WORKING DESPITE ANGRY OPPOSITION

F. (4:9-23) KEEP YOUR GUARD UP – KEEP PRAYING . . . KEEP TRUSTING . . . KEEP GUARDING . . KEEP WORKING -- ANGRY OPPOSITION REQUIRES A CONSTANT STATE OF GUARDED READINESS WHILE MAINTAINING FOCUS ON THE WORK AT HAND

G. (5:1-19) FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION VS SACRIFICIAL MINISTRY -- THE THREAT FROM WITHIN -- GOD'S LEADERS MUST PROHIBIT ANY TYPE OF FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION AND SET THE EXAMPLE FOR SACRIFICIAL MINISTRY

H. (6:1-19) GOD'S WORK PREVAILS DESPITE SATAN'S DEVIOUS TACTICS -- THE SCHEMING TACTICS OF GOD'S ENEMIES CAN NEVER THWART GOD'S PURPOSES

I. (7:1-73) THE IMPORTANCE OF GODLY WORSHIP – REBUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE (THE OUTER SHELL) PREPARES THE WAY FOR REVIVING THE PEOPLE INWARDLY TO FULFILL THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF GODLY WORSHIP

II. (8:1 – 13:31) REVIVAL / REBUILDING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

A. (8:1-18) THE CELEBRATION OF TRUTH -- PEOPLE OF THE BOOK -- REVIVAL STARTS WITH JOYFULLY SUBMITTING TO THE VOICE OF TRUTH

B. (9:1-38) HISTORICAL REVIEW OF GOD'S COVENANT LOYALTY --

1. (:1-15) CONFESSION OF SIN LEADS TO GENUINE WORSHIP FOR GOD'S COVENANT LOYALTY -- DEMONSTRATED THROUGHOUT HISTORY IN HIS PROVIDENTIAL FAITHFULNESS

2. (:16-31) HISTORICAL REVIEW OF ISRAEL'S REBELLION VS GOD'S PERSISTENT GOODNESS – GOD PERSISTS IN DISPLAYING HIS GOODNESS TOWARDS HIS CHILDREN DESPITE THEIR REPETITIVE CYCLES OF UNGRATEFUL REBELLION – WHY? BECAUSE HE IS GOOD BY NATURE

3. (:32-38) IS GOD GIVING YOU A FAIR SHAKE? BENEFITING FROM GOD'S PROMISES REQUIRES FIRST EMBRACING GOD'S JUSTICE

C. (10:1-39) REDEDICATION TO COVENANT OBLIGATIONS – REDEDICATION TO OBEYING GOD'S WORD SHOWS ITSELF IN SPECIFIC REFORMS

1. (:1-27) SIGNIFICANT RATIFIERS OF THE REVIVED COVENANT

2. (:28-29) SEPARATED REMNANT PLEDGES COMPREHENSIVE LOYALTY TO THE REVIVED COVENANT

3. (:30-39) SPECIFIC REGULATIONS OF THE REVIVED COVENANT – 4 AREAS

D. (11:1 – 12:26) MIGHTY MEN OF VALOR -- RE-SETTLEMENT OF JERUSALEM -- GOD'S KINGDOM ADVANCES WHEN MIGHTY MEN OF VALOR FORSAKE PERSONAL COMFORT TO VOLUNTEER FOR FRONT LINE DUTY IN THE FAITHFUL FULFILLMENT OF THEIR GOD APPOINTED ROLES

E. (12:27-47) CELEBRATION OF SUCCESSFUL REVIVAL / REBUILDING -- THE DEDICATION OF THE REBUILT WALL INVOLVED AN ELABORATE CELEBRATION BEFITTING THE CULMINATION OF SUCH A SUCCESSFUL REVIVAL

F. (13:1-31) DEALING WITH SPIRITUAL SLIPPAGE REQUIRES CONSTANT VIGILANCE AND GODLY LEADERSHIP TO PURIFY AND RESTORE PRACTICES TO BIBLICAL NORMS

1. (:1-14) CORRUPTION OF WORSHIP – BOASTFUL PRIDE OF LIFE

2. (:15-22) SECULARIZING THE SABBATH – GREEDY MATERIALISM – THE LUST OF THE EYES

3. (:23-31) MIXED MARRIAGES – THE LUSTS OF THE FLESH

TEXT: Nehemiah 1:1-11

TITLE: REVIVAL (REBUILDING) STARTS WITH CONCERNED CONFESSIONAL PRAYER

BIG IDEA:
GRIEF OVER THE SHAMEFUL STATE OF GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRAM MOTIVATES SPIRITUAL LEADERS TO PETITION GOD FOR REVIVAL WITH CONFESSIONAL PRAYER

INTRODUCTION:

How **concerned** are we for the state of the Church of Jesus Christ and its progress? We discuss and debate the various problems facing the church in our culture today; the sad state of affairs as various trends continue to weaken the impact of the church. Let's just mention some of those **negative trends**:

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We can agree about these trends and others as well; we like to analyze …
But **how concerned** are we for the state of God's Program?
How does our concern **motivate** and **energize** us to seek revival and commit ourselves to a rebuilding process?

BIG IDEA:
GRIEF OVER THE SHAMEFUL STATE OF GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRAM MOTIVATES SPIRITUAL LEADERS TO PETITION GOD FOR REVIVAL WITH CONFESSIONAL PRAYER

I. (:1-3) THE SHAMEFUL STATE OF GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRAM

A. (:1a) Discernment of Nehemiah –

"*The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah*" (10:1 only other reference to father = "wait for Yahweh")

Debate Over Authorship inconsequential – memoirs; parts written by Neh in 1st person; parts refer to him in third person – question is who was the compiler

J Vernon McGee: The use of the first person pronoun gives the impression that Nehemiah was the writer. If Ezra was the writer, he was copying from the journal of Nehemiah. This book, as was true in the Book of Ezra, has copies of letters, decrees, registers and other documents. The same man wrote both books — Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in the Hebrew canon.

Name Nehemiah = "*the Lord consoles*" – God's people needed strengthening and encouraging

God granted to him special understanding of the time and conditions in which he lived and how he could have a positive impact on God's Kingdom Program

God gave him a particular vision of specific work he could oversee that would be of strategic importance

B. (:1b-2) Details Surrounding the Background of the Book of Nehemiah

1. Time Reference – Nov / Dec -- 446/445 B.C.

"*Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year*"

David Wheeler: About 13 years after Ezra's return to Jerusalem. About 93 years after the first exiles' return under Zerubabbel. About 142 years after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

2. Place Reference

"*while I was in Susa the capitol*" – of the kingdom of Persia under King Artaxerxes

John MacArthur: Also known as Shushan, this city was situated E. of Babylon, about 150 mi N of the Persian Gulf. Susa was one of the Medo-Persian strongholds, a wintering city for many officials, and the setting of Esther.
[intolerably hot in summer months]

3. Occasion: Eyewitness Reporters Returning from Jerusalem

"*that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came*"
"*Yahweh is gracious*"
7:2 – Nehemiah granted his brother a position of responsibility in governing the work

4. Primary Issue of Concern

"*and I asked them*"

Wiersbe: A century and a half before, the Prophet Jeremiah had given this word from the Lord: "*For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Or who will turn aside to ask how you are doing*?" (**Jer. 15:5**, NKJV). Nehemiah was the man God had chosen to do those very things! **Some people prefer not to know what's going on**, because information might bring obligation.

a. Status of the People of God

"*concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity*"

Fensham: the exiles who had returned and escaped further captivity. Exile was regarded as a great shame for the Jewish people. If they returned to the Holy Land, it was interpreted as an

escape from shame.

b. Status of the Work of God – centered around the prosperity of Jerusalem
"*and about Jerusalem*."

Our lives need to be aligned with **God's purpose** for this point in history; what is important to God should be important to us

C. (:3) Distressed State of God's Kingdom Program
"*They said to me*" – Report of Devastation and Shame

1. Problem #1 – God's People Need Reviving / Rebuilding – **Chaps. 8-13**
"*The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach,*"

2. Problem #2 – God's Work (The Walls / Gates) Needs Reviving / Rebuilding – **Chaps. 1-7**
a. The Walls of the City of God
"*and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down*"

b. The Gates of the City of God
"*and its gates are burned with fire*."

John MacArthur: The opposition had successfully thwarted the Jews' attempt to reestablish Jerusalem as a distinctively Jewish city capable of withstanding its enemies' assaults, which could possibly lead to another destruction of the newly rebuilt temple.

Yamauchi: Most scholars, however, do not believe that Nehemiah's distress was caused by the condition of walls torn down 140 years before his time but rather by the episode of **Ezra 4:7-23**. According to this passage Jews had attempted to rebuild the walls earlier, in the reign of Artaxerxes I. But after the protest of Rehum and Shimshai, the king ordered the Jews to desist.

II. (:4) THE CONCENTRATED GRIEF OF GOD'S CONCERNED SERVANT

A. Emotional Response of Intense Grief – not just analyzing the situation but disconnected
1. Attentive to kingdom priorities
"*When I heard these words*,"

2. Shocked into interrupting normal activities – takes a lot to interrupt some people
"*I sat down*" -- are we more interested in our own agenda or God's agenda??

Derek Kidner: Since Nehemiah's natural bent was for swift, decisive action, his behaviour here is remarkable. It shows where his priorities lay.

Yamauchi: Custom of mourners being seated (cf. **Ps. 137:1; Job 2:13**)

3. Overcome with intense grief – this should be an **emotional message**
"*and wept and mourned for days*;"

Weeping not a sign of weakness – **Jer. 9:1; Acts 20:19; Ps. 69:9; Rom. 15:3**

Chuck Swindoll: I am deeply impressed with the fact that, though he possessed a high-ranking position in the world, he had a heart that was very tender toward God. It is rare to find these combined strengths in a person.

Psalm 30:5 "*Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning*."

James 4:9-10 "*Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you*."

Application: What does God want us to be weeping and mourning about right now?
Are we content to just look the other way and go on about our business??

B. Spiritual Response of Seeking the Lord

1. Concentrated Approach

a. Shutting out Distractions by Fasting – denying normal human appetites
"*and I was fasting*" (Esth 4:16; Dan 9:3; 10:3; Zech 7:3-7; 8:19)

b. Focusing on God in Prayer
"*and praying*"

2. Covenant Access to a Sovereign King
"*before the God of heaven*."
Privilege to have a personal relationship with the majestic ruler of the universe;
Special covenant relationship enjoyed by Nehemiah

Where do we turn for help?
Psalm 3:4 "*I was crying to the Lord with my voice,*
and He answered me from His holy mountain."

Psalm 5:1-2 "*Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my groaning.*
Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, for to You I pray."

Psalm 11:4 "*The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven*"

Just because you have the Vision and feel the Burden doesn't mean that you always take action immediately; might be some necessary preparation time
David Derry: A vision rarely requires immediate action. But it always requires patience.
Joseph reviewed his vision from an Egyptian dungeon.
Moses spent years following sheep.
David, the teenage king, spent years hiding in caves.
And **Nehemiah** was the cupbearer to the king whose ancestors had destroyed the very city he longed to rebuild. Be encouraged. God has you where He has you for a reason.

III. (:5-11) THE REPENTANT PLEA FOR COVENANT RENEWAL

A. (:5-6a) Calling on the Covenant God for Merciful Attention -- Invocation

"*I said, I beseech You,*"

1. Appeal to the Majesty of God
    a. Majestic Sovereignty
        "*O Lord God of heaven,*"

Kidner: appeal to God's majesty "puts man, whether friend or foe, in his place."

    b. Majestic Greatness
        "*the great and awesome God,*"

Yamauchi: "*Awesome*" is a Niphal participle from the verb *yare* ("to fear, revere"). He is the one to be feared (cf. Deut 7:21; Dan 9:4).

Breneman: God's awesomeness is the impression his total character and person leaves on all who encounter him.

Like the overall **impact of a brand**; when someone mentions MAC computers what comes to mind? The cool dude on the TV commercials taking on the stuffy PC exec; innovation; creativity; reliability; graphical utility; etc.
When someone mentions God … what should come to mind ..

    c. Majestic Covenant Loyalty
        "*who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,*"

Yamauchi: *hesed* means the quality that honors a covenant through thick and thin; steadfast love

2. Appeal to the Privilege of Intercession
    let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night,
    - God's servants have access to the throne of grace
    - God's servants have the expectation that God listens and hears
    - God's servants persevere with fervent intercession

3. Appeal to the Covenant Relationship with Israel
    "*on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants*"

God's people threatened once again with extinction

Transition: The Covenant needs to be renewed because it has been badly broken

B. (:6b-7) Covenant Breaking -- Humble Confession of Sin

1. Confessing Sin as Both Corporate and Individual
    a. General -- Corporate Sins
        "*Confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You;*"

    b. Specific -- Personal and Immediate Family Sins
        "*I and my father's house have sinned.*"

We have lost the discipline of confessing sin; we just want to move on and forget anything happened

Yamauchi: A true sense of the awesomeness of God reveals the depths of our own sinfulness (Isa 6:1-5; Luke 5:8)

2. Confessing Sin as Wickedness against a Holy God
"*We have acted very corruptly against You*"

We don't take sin seriously; we don't see it for the corruption that it is

3. Confessing Sin as Disobedience = Law Breaking of known requirements
"*and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.*"

C. (:8-10) Covenant Renewal – Reviewing Conditions for Scattering vs Regathering

1. Covenant Obligations Remembered For Scattering vs Regathering

a. For Scattering
"*Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples;*"

Not that God could ever forget or be unfaithful – but this key word "*Remember*" recurs frequently in the book (**4:14; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31**) -- Yamauchi
[Quoting Slotki – The original does not include *if* and is more forceful: "you will deal treacherously, I will scatter you," expressing an inescapable sequel]

b. For Regathering
"*but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.'* "

2. Covenant Investment Historically of God's Sovereign Grace and Power
"They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand." (restatement of **Deut. 9:29**)

Former Redemption from Egypt is the grounds for making a case that God must continue to guard and nurture His investment in His people

Redpath: Nehemiah's prayer was grounded in the Word, founded on the promises, rooted in God's past dealings.

D. (:11) Closing Request for Gracious Success

1. Success of God's Servants is Consistent with Glorifying God's Name

a. Intercessory Prayer Humbly Offered by God's Servant Nehemiah
"O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant"

b. Intercessory Prayer for the Benefit of God's People Glorifying God's Name
"*and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name,*"

"*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven….*"

2. Success Only Comes as a Gift of God's Grace
a. Goal = Quick Success
"*and make Your servant successful today*"

Consider what Nehemiah was contemplating; what type of success he was requesting; he was putting his life on the line; he was seeking to leave the security and comfort of his posh kingdom position to go labor in isolation and danger for the kingdom of God

Ezra 4:21 – success would involve the overturning of this former edict

Ray Stedman: In this passage, we see that Nehemiah is aware of the limitless power of God to change circumstances that are beyond human control.

b. Tactic = Stirring up the compassion of the king
"*and grant him compassion before this man."*

This famous and influential king was only a man under the authority of the king of the universe

Prov. 21:1 "*The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.*" (plaque on the wall as you enter our house)

3. Success Involves the Providential Dispensation of our Circumstances
"*Now I was the cupbearer to the king.*"

Nice dramatic surprise that Nehemiah springs on us here – he is in a position to have access to the king.
Not just a lucky thing that Nehemiah was in such a position of prominence with access to the King of Persia; God had Providentially directed his life journey and prepared him for this crucial moment in history
Not some minor position like present day butler; a lot of responsibility and a lot of danger involved

John MacArthur: As an escort of the monarch at meals, the cupbearer had a unique advantage to petition the king. Not only did the king owe him his life, since the cupbearer tested all the king's beverages for possible poison, thus putting his own life at risk, but he also became a close confidant. God sovereignly used this relationship between a Gentile and Jew to deliver His people, such as He did with Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and Mordecai.

Gene Getz: A mighty monarch such as the king of Persia would select for that position a man who was wise and discreet, and consistently honest and trustworthy. Nehemiah's position alone reveals much about his intellectual capabilities, his emotional maturity, and his spiritual status.

Warren Wiersbe: While Nehemiah was praying, his burden for Jerusalem became greater and his vision of what needed to be done became clearer. Real prayer keeps your heart and your head in

balance so your burden doesn't make you impatient to run ahead of the Lord and ruin everything. . . The king's cupbearer would have to sacrifice the comfort and security of the palace for the rigors and dangers of life in a ruined city. Luxury would be replaced by ruins, and prestige by ridicule and slander. Instead of sharing the king's bounties, Nehemiah would personally pay for the upkeep of scores of people who would eat at his table. He would leave behind the ease of the palace and take up the toils of encouraging a beaten people and finishing an almost impossible task.

Transition -- 2:1 – Four months had passed from the time of the bad report until Nehemiah took action

CONCLUSION:

Warren Wiersbe: **Does Anybody Really Care?**

"The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity." George Bernard Shaw put those words into the mouth of the Rev. Anthony Anderson in the second act of his play *The Devil's Disciple*. The statement certainly summarizes what Jesus taught in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37); and it rebukes all those who fold their arms complacently, smile benignly, and say somewhat sarcastically, "Ask me if I care!"

Nehemiah was the kind of person who cared. He cared about the traditions of the past and the needs of the present. He cared about the hopes for the future. He cared about his heritage, his ancestral city, and the glory of his God. He revealed this caring attitude in four different ways:

I. He cared enough to ask (**1:1-3**) – A Visionary person sees the Need
[PGA - **I. (:1-3) THE SHAMEFUL STATE OF GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRAM**]

II. He cared enough to weep (**1:4**) – A Visionary person feels the Burden
[PGA - **II. (:4) THE CONCENTRATED GRIEF OF GOD'S CONCERNED SERVANT**]

III. He cared enough to pray (:**5-10**) – A Visionary person relies on God's resources
[PGA - **III. (:5-11) THE REPENTANT PLEA FOR COVENANT RENEWAL**]

IV. He cared enough to volunteer (:11) – A Visionary person is all in (like the Poker analogy)
[PGA - **(:11) Closing Request for Gracious Success**]

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Are we sensitive to the signs of our times with respect to the status of God's kingdom program?

2) Do we investigate or just look the other way when we see problems?

3) Are we specific in our confession of our personal and family sins as well as humble to identify with the corporate sins of the present day church of Jesus Christ?

4) Does our level of concern cause us grief and motivate us to seek the Lord for His work of revival and rebuilding?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Edwin Yamauchi: The walls of Jerusalem that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, despite abortive attempts to rebuild them (Ezra 4:6-23), remained in ruins for almost a century and a half. Such a lamentable situation obviously made Jerusalem vulnerable to her numerous enemies. Yet from a mixture of apathy and fear the Jews failed to rectify this glaring deficiency. They needed the dynamic catalyst of an inspired leader, a man named Nehemiah.

Dr. Edward Watke Jr.: God's work is much more than a hobby, a profession, or a duty. It is a burden given by God for fruit in the life (John 15:16). Before we can ever do any work for God there must first be a consideration of the needs, and a willingness to weep over the ruins. We need to consider the ruins in our own souls—the ruin of the neglected lost, the neglected Word of God, and the neglected separation from sin.

Redpath: the Lord Jesus Christ has the supreme claim upon the life of each one of us. May you make your prayer as you read these messages, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do, and how wilt Thou have me to do it?" Only insofar as every part of your life is adjusted to God in every detail can God achieve His purpose through you, and only as He achieves His purpose through you will your life be successful in the truest sense of the word. . . you will discover that there is no winning without warfare; there is no opportunity without opposition; there is no victory without vigilance. For whenever the people of God say, "Let us arise and build," Satan say, "Let me arise and oppose." . . .

You are never used of God to bring blessing until God has opened your eyes and made you see things as they are. There is no other preparation for Christian work than that. Nehemiah was called to build the wall but first he had to weep over the ruins. . . God's purpose for Jerusalem was that its walls should be salvation and its gates should be praise, and the emblems of salvation and praise lay in utter ruin.

Rick Duncan: **Becoming a Person with Vision**
What is it that is broken in your life - something that needs to be rebuilt?
Everybody has something that is broken.
The most hopeless people in the world are people who recognize that they have a problem, but have no vision from God about how to solve with that problem.

Where there is no vision, the people perish… **Proverbs 29:18**

Series: Here's Hope: Rebuilding a broken world

Everybody ends up somewhere in life. A few people end up somewhere on purpose. Those are the ones with vision. The most practical advantage of vision is it sets a direction for our lives. It serves as a road map.

Nehemiah was the right man in the right place for God to use. He had vision – vision to see a problem… and it's solution. And because he had vision, he had hope

A visionary person…
1. … sees the need. **vv. 1-3** (Look around you!)
2. … feels the need. **v. 4** (Look within you.)
   There is no such thing as emotionless vision. Passion!
3. … shares the need…
   … with God. (Look above you.)
   … with God's people. **v. 11a** (Look beside you.)
4. … meets the need. **v. 11b** (Look beyond you.)

Illustration: Lisa Beamer… *Let's Roll*
Husband Todd. United Flight 93
One of Todd's favorite quotes was from Teddy Roosevelt.
The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena… who strives valiantly… who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat.

This is the way to have hope when things are broken.

As long as there's a God in heaven and people on earth who believe in Him and who will work with Him, there is hope!

David Derry: **20 Essential Building Blocks of Vision – Part 1**
This sermon series is based on the book "visioneering" by Andy Stanley. Parts of this sermon are taken directly from the material contained in his book.

Vision gives significance to the otherwise meaningless details of our lives. It's not always about what we're doing, but rather why we are doing it.

How many of you would be excited to spend all day today filling bags with dirt?
How many of you would be excited to spend all day today filling bags with dirt to build a dike around your city to keep it from being flooded?

Building Block #1 – A vision begins as a concern
Nehemiah's concern over the condition of Jerusalem consumed him. It broke his heart. Thoughts of what was, as opposed to what could be brought tears to his eyes. This was not just a casual concern…it was a vision in the making.

Building Block #2 – A vision does not necessarily require immediate action.
But the story of Nehemiah, along with numerous other Biblical accounts, illustrates the truth that a clear vision does not necessarily indicate a green light to begin. Too often when a person with an idea that seems to be a God ordained vision charges out of the gates too early, the result is failure, discouragement and disillusionment.

Not only does the vision need to mature, and we need to mature to be prepared for the vision, but God is also working behind the scenes to prepare the way. This is why it is so important to wait on his timing.

Building Block #3 – Pray for opportunities and plan as if you expect God to answer your prayers.

Building Block #4 – God is using your circumstances to position and prepare you to accomplish His vision for your life.

Chuck Swindoll: **Benefits of Prayer**

1) Prayer makes me wait – Prayer forces me to leave the situation with God
2) Prayer clears my vision – so you can see through God's eyes
3) Prayer quiets my heart = the best channel for removing my worries. Knees don't knock when you kneel on them.
4) Prayer activates my faith –

Got any rivers you think are uncrossable?
Got any mountains you can't tunnel through?
God specializes in things thought impossible;
He does the things others cannot do.

Michael Crawford – Freedom Church Windsor Mill – 2/3/19
Reformation is Always Birthed in the Room of Brokenness

Introduction: Beginning sermon series on Nehemiah
God actually cares

I. (:1) Background

Winter month; no kingdom (super power) on earth lasts forever (warning to America);
Babylon came to power and took Jews captive;
Medo-Persian kingdom took over; more friendly to the Jews; sent Ezra back with Nehemiah ;
Nehemiah just an ordinary person – not a priest or prophet or ruler;
Lots of devastation; transition time

II. (:2-3) Bad News comes in

<u>2 Key Questions:</u>

1) How is Jerusalem doing? – the physical place – God cares about physical cities
2) How are the people doing – the refugees who went back for rebuilding

<u>Answer:</u>

- Great trouble; tragedy; there is a disgrace about the place – nobody proud to be from Jerusalem (cf. negative vibes associated with Baltimore – murder, etc.)
- Physical wall (designed to keep in the people of the city and protect them; designed to keep out attackers) was broken down; like a war zone; no protection

III. (:4-9) Brokenness

- The news made him physically sit down; took away his legs and strength;
- Not just physical posture but emotional posture changed as well – weeping; there is a time to mourn; Jesus was a man of sorrows
- All Brokenness is rooted and grounded in disobedience and sin; sin leads to chaos and loss; a missing of the mark; all trauma in Baltimore is result of sin; need to love your neighbor as yourself

IV. (:10-11) Believer

"*I was cupbearer to the king*"
Not some exalted position; he tasted the king's drink first to make sure it was not poisoned; a job given to a Jew

Application:
- Need to see both the potential glory and the depravity of city of Baltimore
- Have a heart for the oppression, marginalization, pain, hurt
- There are some things (walls and coping mechanisms we have built up) that will keep you from experiencing brokenness –
- When God sees brokenness, God cares = fundamental nature of God – how are we like God or not?
- Narcissism = we only care about ourselves; every person out for themselves
- Temptation to deal with peripheral issues rather than core issues
- You invest in what you care about

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **The Person God Uses**
Introduction: We're just going to call this series, Together We Build. Because as you know, the book of Nehemiah, if you know anything about it, it's a book about building. There's really two parts to the whole book. The first seven chapters is all about rebuilding the wall, the wall around the ancient city of Jerusalem back in Nehemiah's day. And then the second part of the book from chapters 8 to 13 are about rebuilding the people.

God specializes in using ordinary people to do extraordinary things for His glory.
- Must be saved
- Must understand your spiritual giftedness

Big Idea: **5 Qualities of a Person God Uses**

I. The Person that God Uses Serves
When God looks for people to use, you know what? He looks for people who are already busy doing something. God doesn't use lazy people. He uses people that are already busy, already serving, and we could say this about Nehemiah. He was already highly esteemed. He was already doing something = king's cupbearer – putting his life on the line for the king.

Providentially, it just so happens that there in the palace, he bumps into some men from Judah. In other words, this wasn't an accident. This was kind of one of those divine appointments. We're faithful to our duties. We're faithful to our responsibilities. And one day, God providentially puts someone in our path, a hinged person, And the reason we call them hinge people is because just like big doors swing on small hinges, big events can swing upon small encounters with certain people that direct us about something or tell us about something. And suddenly our whole life is changed. This is what happened to Nehemiah.

Be faithful doing what the Lord has you to do. And you know what? God will arrange the circumstances.

II. The Person God Uses Cares – 1:2
Why would Nehemiah ask about this remnant of people who lived hundreds of miles away? He was already the king's cupbearer. This was a very influential position. He already was living well. His success was secure in this great position. He already had power. He already had

influence. He already had a good living. I mean, he could have had the attitude, you know, I'm not worried about them, things are going well here for me. But Nehemiah wasn't like that. He wanted to know what was going on. He was concerned about that.

III. The Person God Uses <u>Weeps</u> – 1:3

It broke his heart to hear the situation in Jerusalem. And so what happened? Notice his response, look in verse four. And it came to pass when I heard these words, notice his response, I sat down and wept and mourned certain days. Notice he did three things.

1) <u>He sits down</u> -- Jews, when they would weep, they would sit down on the ground? And this was a sign in the form of a physical gesture of deep sorrow.
2) <u>He wept</u> – What do you weep over?
3) <u>He mourned for days</u>

IV. The Person God Uses <u>Prays</u> – 1:5

Nehemiah was a man of prayer. The book opens in prayer here in chapter one, it'll close in prayer. And in between that, you know what you'll find? Nine prayers of Nehemiah. So in this book, he is constantly praying. The measure of how you're dependent upon God is in direct proportion to the time you spend in prayer.

Elements of his prayer:

1) <u>Passion</u> – prayer accompanied by fasting; **James 5:16**
2) <u>Adoration</u> -- He calls him *the great and terrible God*. God, you are awe-inspiring. And notice also, he's a God that *keeps covenant and mercy*. Remember in the Lord's Prayer, he said, *our Father, which art in heaven*, which the next phrase, *hallowed be thy name*. That's not a request. That's a command. That's an imperative verb in the Greek. So we can say it like this, our Father who art in heaven, let everyone count your name as holy. That's a command. We hallow your great name. And there's a sense in which this is exactly what Nehemiah is doing here. He is hallowing the name of God. So prayer includes worship. **Ps. 95:3**
3) <u>Confession</u> – **1:6** -- He confessed the sins of the nation, but along with that, he confessed his own sins before God.
4) <u>Supplication</u> – **1:8** -- Lord, I claim these promises. Now, what were the promises specifically? Well, actually, the promises were twofold. First of all, God said to his nation, his people, if you sin against me, if you don't follow my commandments, I'm going to carry you away into captivity into a foreign nation. Now, that had already happened. But there's a second part of that promise. After the captivity is over, if the people are repentant and they will obey me, then what did God promise? I will bring you back into the land that I put my name upon. I will protect you. I will supernaturally, providentially oversee all of these things.

V. The Person God Uses <u>Volunteers</u> – 1:11

Now think about this. He lives a good life. He lives in the palace with the king. He eats the king's food. He has a great salary. Did you know excavations have shown about this palace that was built with cedar, gold, and silver, and ivory? The walls were decorated artistically with color-glazed bricks. And so he had a really good, cushy job. He had a good life. But you know what he was saying? I'm willing to replace luxury and live in ruins.

God's looking for people like Nehemiah who are willing to say, Lord, here I am. I volunteer. Use me. Whatever sacrifice that you're calling upon me to do, I'm willing to do it. If you're going to

be used by God, you're going to have to be willing to make those decisions.

Conclusion:
If we want to be used by God to do great things, then we have to be willing to surrender ourself. Just like Nehemiah, willing to leave the palace and go to a place, a needy place, and do what needed to be done, overcome obstacles, overcome challenges. A man who cared, a man who wept, a man who was willing to serve, a man who prayed. That's what God needs of us.

TEXT: Nehemiah 2:1-10

TITLE: TRUSTING GOD FOR PROVIDENTIAL FAVORS – THE GOOD HAND OF GOD

BIG IDEA:
PUTTING THE PRIORITY ON THE SUCCESS OF GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRAM REQUIRES BOLD FAITH THAT COUNTS ON PROVIDENTIAL FAVORS

INTRODUCTION:

What does **God's Providence** mean to you? Do you have a sense that you are in the center of God's will in terms of lining up with His kingdom purposes for this age. Do you have an expectation that God in His timing is going to be gracious in very special ways that will enable you to minister effectively for Him? Not talking about miracles here … but directing the course of your life so that things turn out good from a ministry standpoint?

Zondervan: Providence concerns God's support, care, and supervision of all creation, from the moment of the first creation to all the future into eternity. Jesus Christ said, "*My Father is working still, and I am working*" (John 5:7). [What then is God doing?] Providence is God's activity through His unlimited power and knowledge to fulfill His purpose for the whole creation including man.

Short Def: The divine intervention in the affairs of man within the confines of natural law to bring about God's objectives

Works not just on the big picture, the global scale – but sovereignly governs all of the little details of our lives.

When it comes to opportunities for ministry – for accomplishing God's work here on earth – God's Providential working is the key. But He does not work apart from us or against our will. We must exercise bold faith and look for opportunities to minister. We cannot be passive in the process. It is not "let go and let God" but "trust God and move forward" with the expectation of His grace and power.

How can we trust God to tackle tough jobs? We need to learn from Nehemiah

BIG IDEA:
PUTTING THE PRIORITY ON THE SUCCESS OF GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRAM REQUIRES BOLD FAITH THAT COUNTS ON PROVIDENTIAL FAVORS

FOUR ASPECTS OF GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL FAVORS

I. (:1-3) PROVIDENTIAL POSITIONING -- AN ANTICIPATED OPPORTUNITY

A. Providential Positioning -- In Terms of the Trusted Relationship

[Transition phrase from end of **Chap. 1**]

"*Now I was the cupbearer to the king.*"

Had probably been in this capacity for a long time; very surprising in that Nehemiah was a Jew rather than a Persian; but he had developed this relationship of trust; become one of the king's chief counselors; his wisdom had proven out in many contexts; God had been preparing

Nehemiah for this very important mission

B. Providential Positioning -- In Terms of the Timing

> "*Now it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king*."

Importance of waiting before the Lord; the deepening of the burden; the development of the vision; the prayer for providential favor and success; period of **3-4 months** had intervened since the events of Chap. 1 when Nehemiah became concerned for the ruined condition of the City of God and the embarrassment it was to the reputation of God – the walls needed rebuilding and the people needed instruction and encouragement – Revival / Rebuilding was the burden on his heart – growing over this time period; **this period of waiting on the Lord was not wasted time**

Did he choose this day to be extra sad?? Maybe, maybe not … but it seems he is aware that the king is now going to sense his burden and bring things to a head; no longer masking his true feelings

Michael Crawford: Wrong for Christians to act as if appearing sad and mourning is not spiritual; there is a time for sadness; Nehemiah had been sad for 4 months; now his emotions are definitely emoting – cannot be hidden; sadness is the very tool God used to start the rebuilding process

Derek Kidner: Nehemiah has resolved to speak out '*today*' (1:11). He may even have decided to precipitate the enquiry by allowing his feelings to be obvious. Now the moment has come, and if he mishandles it there will not be another. Further, he will be asking the king to revise his policy, for the decision against Jerusalem had been official. (Ezra 4:21)

C. Providential Positioning -- In Terms of the Trigger – the Telegraphed Emotions – that is what is going to set everything in motion

> "*Now I had not been sad in his presence. So the king said to me, 'Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart*.'"

The king knew Nehemiah very well; they were very close; he could tell something was seriously wrong – recognized the distinction between physical sadness and emotional sadness

Sadness because of a burden from God; because of obedience; because he **cared deeply** [cf. **Chap. 1**] about God's people and God's program – does not mean that we are outside of God's will just because we are in the midst of sad times – sometimes Satan will use that emotion to try to accuse us … to make us think that we must be outside of God's will – but look at how sad the Apostle Paul must have been in various contexts of suffering and false accusations

D. An Awkward Opportunity -- Potential for Panic

> "*Then I was very much afraid*."

Why not greatly excited and overjoyed??

Sometimes we think everything was easy for these spiritual giants of old; as if everything ran smoothly and they just had so much grace that they didn't feel the heat;
Nothing sinful about being confronted with the emotion of fear; How will you respond? Will you be diverted from faithfulness or will you follow through in obedience?

Presence of Fear does not make us a failure – the bravest of men must confront their fears … We need to Fight Fear instead of Submit to Fear – use all of the supernatural weapons at our disposal – instead of being **paralyzed by fear**, we need to boldly obey in spite of our fears

Brian Bill: In the best selling book called, "*Who Moved My Cheese*," the author asks a very penetrating question, "What would you do if you weren't afraid." He points out that fear often keeps us from taking the steps we know we need to take. Fear can paralyze us.

A man of **courage** will take the same actions whether or not he is afraid

Dan Broadwater**: Why was he so afraid?**

- afraid of failure – nobody likes rejection; or starting something and not being able to complete it
- fear of man – especially such a powerful king – would be understandable
- fear of the future – the unknown – where this course would take him – Who knows??

Nehemiah was prepared for the moment of fear and had already made his decision that he was moving forward

T. S. Elliot: "Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go"

C.S. Lewis: "Problem is not that we ask too much, but we ask too little"

Nehemiah Dared to Ask – to make that bold request of God – but for something that was not self-serving but at the heart of God's kingdom program

E. An Anticipated Opportunity – Requiring Bold Initiative

"*I said to the king, 'Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire*?'"

Michael Crawford: "*Let the king live forever*" – really saying "Don't kill me but I am going for it!"

There it is … he has laid it on the line … it's all out there for the king to respond to;
great dramatic moment

Michael Crawford: **Problems**

- City is in ruins
- Gates are broken down
- Great trouble
- Disgrace

Derek Kidner: The remembered scene lives for us in this intimate, rapid narrative. We are involved in it, holding our breath with Nehemiah as he gasps a prayer and braces himself to reply. The exchanges are characteristic: the suppliant speaks with the slight verbosity that courtesy demands; the king with the brevity of one whose habitual role is to decide matters. Each of his questions goes straight to the next point.

What difference can one man make when the city of God lies in ruins?
When God's church is in such a mess … what difference can one man make?

II. (:4-5) PROVIDENTIAL VISION – AN AUDACIOUS OBJECTIVE

"Audacious" – intrepidly daring – characterized by resolute fearlessness, fortitude and endurance; not referring to any wrong tone of pride or arrogance

A. Setting the Stage for Ministry Proposal – for the <u>Presentation</u> of the Vision

"*Then the king said to me, 'What would you request*?'"

Might be hard to read the king's attitude at this point … probably not yet a blank check approach; perhaps still evaluating; maybe even somewhat skeptical …hard to say … more details need to be provided; the request needs to be fleshed out

Do you get nervous at work when you are getting ready to make a big presentation before some important folks; some performance anxiety? Huge burst of adrenaline; hands are all sweaty … it's a big moment; you are not going to be given a mulligan; no chance for a do-over

B. Solicitous Approach Towards Those in Authority – the <u>Precarious Nature</u> of the Vision

You do not control the success of the outcome – you need Providential Favors

<u>1. Seeking the Favor of Divine Providence</u>

"*So I prayed to the God of heaven*."

- Humble
- Dependent

Can only fire off these quick emergency prayers when you have laid the groundwork with a life of consistent persevering prayer

<u>2. Seeking the Favor of Human Authority</u>

"*I said to the king, 'If it please the king and if your servant has found favor before you,*"

C. Significant Ministry Objective – A Big Vision – the <u>Particulars</u> of the Vision

"*send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it*."

Great assurance in knowing you have been **sent by God** to accomplish your ministry objective

This is quite the Audacious Objective – huge in scope – given the danger and difficulty involved
Very strategic objective in terms of God's kingdom purposes

III. (:6-8) PROVIDENTIAL PROVISION – AN AMAZING OUTCOME

A. **Gracious Help Granted – Permission Granted**

<u>1. Timeline Requested</u> – King not even dictating the terms – very gracious

"*Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, 'How long will your journey be, and when will you return?'*"

Significance of the presence of the queen?

- private instead of public encounter?
- queen would be especially favorable to Nehemiah or to the plight of the Jews?
- as a witness to the king's decision?

Shows the value of Nehemiah to King Artaxerxes – did not want to lose him forever; wanted him to return to his position of trusted cup-bearer

2. Deadline Established

"*So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time.*"

King not reluctantly giving in but enthusiastically sending him – it pleased the king

Again shows his planning and preparation; he know how long the project would take; knew what resources it would require; not just shooting blindly from the hip
Deadlines are important at work

B. **Going the Extra Mile** -- Additional Help Requested and Received
Look at how God does above and beyond what we can imagine --

1. Additional Administrative Authorization

"And I said to the king, 'If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah,'"

Anticipated difficulties and obstacles; this was a dangerous undertaking

2. Additional Physical Resources

"*and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go.*"

Nehemiah had done his planning as God formed this vision within him; he knew what needed to be done; had counted the cost

Michael Crawford: Like obtaining a huge gift card to Lowes where you could obtain all the timber and supplies you needed for the building project

C. **Good Hand of God** (Providential Favor) Paving the Way = Key to the passage

"*And the king granted them to me because the **good hand** of my God was on me.*"

Hand: power, protection, provision, security, safety
Cf. **2:18; 13:31; Ezra 7:9; 8:18; Ps. 34:8; 119:68**

Redpath:

- Nehemiah wanted to know that he had been sent
- Nehemiah wanted to know that he would be safe
- Nehemiah wanted to know that he would be supplied

If God be for us, who can be against us – Rom. 8
Great Commission – All authority has been given to Christ and He promises that His good hand will be with us – Matt. 28:20

IV. (:9-10) PROVIDENTIAL PROTECTION -- FROM ANGRY OPPOSITION

A. Supreme Authority

"*Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters.*"

Nobody has enough authority to challenge the edict of the king; when you have been commended by the king, you have all the protection you need

B. Supporting Strength

"*Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.*"

King had provided abundant military power for the operation – not just letters of commendation; Of course we are most interested in the supernatural resources and weapons that strengthen us in our ministry battle; how many angels are looking over the ministry of God's church and protecting what we do?

C. Satanic Opposition

"*When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel.*"

Selfishly interested in protecting their own empire and agenda rather than getting in line with God's kingdom program – cared nothing about the welfare of God's people;

Ray Stedman: Whenever you read of the Ammonites, Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, Perizzites, or any of the other "*ites*," you have a picture of the enemy of God in the flesh. These various tribes symbolize satanic agency within human beings, causing them to oppose and resist the work, the will, and the ways of God. Sanballat and Tobiah are no different; they are enemies of God and enemies of Nehemiah.

Michael Crawford: Sanballat and Tobiah always show up to try to discourage and distract believers from the task at hand; not outside attacker but they live in our mind and heart; our internal voice that only we can hear telling us what we can't do; questioning whether this really is God's will

The good hand of God does not mean smooth sailing with no challenges

Contrast their displeasure with the pleasure of Artaxerxes in sending them

CONCLUSION:

"*Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.*" **Ps. 127:1**

"*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.*" **1 Cor. 15:58**

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do you consider your present job situation, your present challenges in life to be a divine appointment under the loving direction of the Providence of God?

2) Are you anticipating opportunities for testimony and ministry?

3) Has God been building in you a vision of how to use your spiritual gift to advance His kingdom purposes?

4) Do you expect to see Providential favors as you fight through your fears and commit yourself to bold obedience for the building up of God's people?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Westminster Confession of Faith: God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy.

Warren Wiersbe: **Three Evidences of Nehemiah's Faith**

1. (:**1-3**) He had the **faith to wait**

Three statements in Scripture have a calming effect on me whenever I get nervous and want to rush ahead of the Lord:

- "*Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord*" (Ex. 14:13)
- "*Sit still . . . until you know how the matter will turn out*" (Ruth 3:18)
- "*Be still, and know that I am God*" (Ps. 46:10)

2. (:**4-8**) He had the **faith to ask**
3. (:**11-18**) He had the **faith to challenge others**

Rick Duncan: What does it take to turn vision into reality – Developing a plan of action

1. Be **patient**: Spend some time in God's waiting room. **v. 1a.**
   - passionately pray
   - responsibly serve
2. Be **bold**. Let your fears feed your faith. **vv. 2-3**
3. Be **dependent**. Remember: What God originates, He orchestrates. **v. 4**
4. Be **prepared**. Since God is in charge, make your plans big. **vv. 5-8a**
5. Be **expectant**. Set your sails and wait for wind. **v. 8b**

Mark Copeland:

There are some things to keep in mind in regards to the special providence of God:

a. **The ultimate end sought is man's spiritual good, not material benefits**
   1) Material blessings may come to one as a result of special providence - **Mt 6:33**
   2) Yet God may also allow financial hardship, illness, or other physical trials to occur if He deems them suitable for our spiritual benefit - cf. **Ro 5:3-5; Jm 1:2-4**
   3) Thus we conclude that His ultimate goal is our spiritual good

b. **We should not presume all things are the result of special providence**

1) Things may happen that are accidental or coincidental - **Ec 9:11**
2) Too many credit God or give Him blame for every good or ill in life
3) Some things may be the result of Satan's activity (remember Job?) - cf. **1Pe 5:8-9**
4) Other things may be the consequence of evil men's actions (e.g., drunken driver)
5) Of course, God's special providence helps us overcome such evil - **Ro 8:35-39**

c. **Special providence and man's cooperation**
1) Promise of God's care does not mean that we need not take action
2) We must both pray and work for our food - cf. **Mt 6:11; 2Th 3:10; 1Ti 5:8**
3) We must work out our salvation, while God helps us - **Mt 6:33; Php 2:12-13; 1Pe 3:10-12**

Best we can do:

1. Possess the perspective of Mordecai - cf. **Es 4:14**
   a. He wondered whether Esther had been placed in her position by God
   b. Yet he did not presume such was actually the case
2. Remain open to the possibility the Lord's will may be different - cf. **Ro 1:10; Ac 18:21**
   a. We can only be certain in things pertaining to God's revealed will (the Scriptures)
   b. There is an uncertainty pertaining to God's permissive will ("If...") - cf. **Jm 4:15**
3. In everything give thanks - **Php 4:6**
   a. For the good things that come our way
   b. For the ill things too, as they can be used for our spiritual growth
4. Leave the ultimate determination of providence to God
   a. We need not "whittle on His end of the stick"
   b. We can believe in God's providence without being able to interpret every circumstance

http://www.ccel.org/contrib//exec_outlines/top/provgod.htm

Rev Gordon Dane: **The Good Hand of God Upon Me**

1. (:1-4) Nehemiah's Sadness

A. The Danger in his Sadness

may have been punishable by death; king didn't want people around him who were down in the dumps; he was sad because he had a burden from God; difficulties along life's way even though we are in the center of God's will for us; Apostle Paul had been called to be Apostle to Gentiles – but experienced much suffering; trying times don't mean that we are out of the will of God

(:**4**) Nehemiah's Prayer – when faced with difficulties and danger, he turns to God;

B. The Depth of His Sadness

Could not disguise it from the king; as a man thinketh in his heart so is he; does your burden show in what you do and say? He couldn't keep the burden hidden

II. (:5) Nehemiah's Solicitation
Bold enough to ask for help from the king; knows that he needs that help; cannot do the work on his own; involves practical help; otherwise he would not get very far; we also need the help of other believers; cooperative effort

A. For Royal Permission and Royal Authority to go down to Jerusalem
Otherwise he would get into trouble with the lower level governors of the region; we need sent people in the work of God; God gives you the burden; then he wants you to execute it; good to know that you are sent because discouragement will come; requires perseverance; becomes laborious; difficulties come up; we need the authority of the king; willing to go – Send Me!

B. (:7) For Royal Protection
We need protection in the work of God; there are many people who have suffered for the sake of Christ; we certainly need spiritual protection; the devil wants to disrupt the work; cause antagonism and disagreements; disrupt our families
Who are God's army to help us? The prayer warriors

C. (:**8**) For Royal Provision
We need supplies and provisions; the best resources available; also need the spiritual resources;

III. Nehemiah's Supply
"*the good hand of my God upon me*" – ultimately his supplies came from God Himself; every good gift and perfect gift came from above; cf. vs. 18 – encourages God's people; you prosper according to how the good hand of God is upon you; we need this in full measure; we need the doors to open; we need more blessing; we need to have an impact in the community; How do we get it? Waiting on God in prayer for 3-4 months; seek His face; can't arise and build unless we have the good hand of our God upon us

Dan Broadwater: **Daring to Ask**
Now it's time for him to step out in courage; to go before the king and dare to ask; are we running on empty because we are not asking to be used in building up God's kingdom; Ask, Seek and Knock; **Ps. 81:10;**
- What was he really asking for? Not just letters of protection and lumber; he wanted success in the project; he wanted God's favor to be shown to him; he wanted God's name to be known and lifted up; not just about Nehemiah being personally successful; he was kingdom oriented; not self oriented; not about Nehemiah and his agenda; what is our motivation?
- Whom did he ask? Both God and man
- What might prevent us from asking? Fear – this was not easy for Nehemiah; why was he afraid? Fear of failure; fear of rejection; fear of success?? If it gets started it will get so big, how can I keep up? Afraid that it was inappropriate for him to ask the king; difficult to bring the sacred into the secular in the workplace; putting himself at risk; may have been the fear of man; Prov. 16:14 if you get the king angry you are in big trouble; fear of the unknown – don't know how it is going to turn out;
How did Nehemiah deal with his fear? Short prayer; private prayer; king did not even know he was praying; Lord help me say the right words and give me your favor; here we go; I never pray more than five minutes at a time, but I never go more than five minutes without praying; some of

the most powerful prayers in the Bible are short prayers
- Ask God with Confidence --
    - Hand of MY God;
    - God's hand carries idea of protection; no one can take us out of hand of Christ;
    - Gracious hand

Go for it! Dare to Ask!

John MacArthur: Official letters transferred a portion of the king's authority to Nehemiah, in this context, he needed to pass through the lands of Judah's enemies who could harm him or prevent him from rebuilding Jerusalem. The roads upon which messengers, ambassadors, and envoys of all sorts traveled could be inspected for passage. Three months of travel from Susa to Jerusalem was long, dangerous, and ridden with protocol where letters were required for passage. The danger associated with the passage, but particularly the administrative authority which Nehemiah carried in the letters, led Artaxerxes to send captains of the army and horsemen with Nehemiah for protection.

Lumber was a very precious commodity. This is illustrated in a document from one ancient city in Mesopotamia in which a forest official is taken to court for cutting down a tree. Forests were carefully guarded, and written permission from the king would assure Nehemiah of the lumber he would need to build the citadel, wall reinforcements, and his own residence from which he would administrate the reconstruction.

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Preparing for the Impossible [Facing the Impossible]**
Introduction: Song: God specializes in things thought impossible. Now Nehemiah has a desire to go to Jerusalem, and he wants to rebuild those walls. and see God do great things, but where is Nehemiah? As we open up in chapter number two, Nehemiah is in Shushan, the palace. That's a long way away from Jerusalem. He was the king's cupbearer. How is he going to be able to just leave and go to Jerusalem? He just can't go in and quit and say, I'm done, I'm going to go to Jerusalem. And if he does do that, how is he going to get the materials? If you want to rebuild the walls of the city, you're going to need materials. And that means you're going to need money to do that. But not only that, you're going to need manpower. Where is all of that going to come from? I mean, from where Nehemiah sat, this just looked like an impossible project that he wanted to do. And then to add to that, there were enemies there around Judah that didn't want this to happen.

Big Idea: **Three principles we can learn from Nehemiah about attempting the impossible for God.**

I. Principle of Opening -- Wait for a Providential Opening
We just keep on praying. We return to it again and again. without ceasing.

A. Wait Prayerfully
If Nehemiah is going to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall, the first thing he's got to do is get the king's permission. **Prov. 21:1** If you've got a stubborn authority over you that seems to be blocking you from doing what God wants you to do, you know what? You commit that person to prayer and God is able to turn that heart. **Col. 4:3** Paul praying for an open door for ministry. **Rev. 3:8**

B. Wait Patiently
If you look in chapter 2 verse 1 it says it came to pass in the month Nisan. If you look in chapter

1 verse 1 it was in the month Cheslu. Cheslu is in December, Nisan is in April. Nehemiah began praying in December and he's still praying. Here it is April and he's still praying. You know what that means? He's waiting while he's praying.

We hate to be put on hold on the phone. When God puts you on hold, don't hang up the phone. Because what does the Bible say? *Therefore does the Lord wait that he might be gracious unto you.*

II. Principle of Opportunity – Be Prepared when the Opportunity Comes

Look at verse four*, then the king said unto me, for what doest thou make request? So I prayed to the God heaven.* Again, he realizes this is it. Here's the opportunity. It's right in front of him. And so he prays to the Lord. God, I can just imagine what he's praying. Lord, give me wisdom. Help me to answer just right. You know, God is opening the door. Listen, when God opens the door, don't be reluctant. Go through it.

A. Organize a Plan

The presence of faith doesn't mean the absence of organization. All right. God honors a plan. Going out in faith doesn't mean you go out disorderly or haphazardly. You know, we have to have a plan, and I think Nehemiah, while he's praying and he has this vision and this burden, he's putting together the plan of what he needs to do. The old Revolutionary War soldiers used to say it like this, trust in God, but keep your powder dry. Pray to God, but make your plans and organize. When prayer and providence and preparation meet, nothing can stop you.

B. Visualize the Project – 2:11

He makes a careful analysis of the situation before he even begins. He doesn't just get to Jerusalem and then just start working. A good leader doesn't rush into the work, but first he gets together all of the facts. He surveys the situation. He forms a strategy. Someone said leaders are awake when others are asleep. You know, there are some things that a leader just can't delegate. He's just got to do it himself.

1. <u>He Sees the Problem</u>

He looks closely at the ruins.

2. <u>He Sees the Potential</u>

Before anyone else ever saw Nehemiah's wall, he saw it in his mind. He saw it in his heart. He visualized what could be. Most great leaders are those who have a vision of what can be and what God wants to happen. What vision has God placed in your heart for his glory?

C. Mobilize the People – 2:17

Nehemiah has a difficult task now of motivating people who were already stuck, we could say, in a rut. He's got to motivate them. So what does he do here? There are three things that I see here that he does.

1. <u>He identifies with them</u>

He said, this isn't just your problem, this is our problem. This is something that we have to do. This is something that is gonna require teamwork. I'm here to work together with you. I wanna help you.

2. <u>He uses internal motivation</u>

He appeals to their sense of self-worth. He appeals to their sense of nationalism. He's saying,

look, we have got a job to do. And we have the tools. Our God has given us this opportunity, and we need to rise up and finish this job.

3. He described to them what God what doing.

III. Principle of Opposition
Because anytime you attempt to do anything for God, you are going to get opposition.

A. Don't Doubt God – Keep Your Faith in God
They used the weapon of ridicule.

B. Don't Get Distracted – Stay Focused
We're gonna stay focused. We're gonna rise up and build.

Conclusion: J. Hudson Taylor, the pioneer missionary to China, he said these words. He said, there are three stages in any great work. Attempted for God. Impossible, difficult, and done. Nehemiah went from impossible to done because he stayed focused, because he waited for God to open up the door. He was ready when the door opened, and he didn't succumb to any opposition. He just continued on.

TEXT: Nehemiah 2:11-20

TITLE: VISION MUST TRANSLATE INTO COMMITMENT – WE WILL ARISE AND BUILD

BIG IDEA:
STRATEGIC VISION BASED ON A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT MUST TRANSLATE INTO COMMITMENT TO HARD WORK IN DEPENDENCE ON GOD'S GOOD FAVOR DESPITE INTIMIDATING OPPOSITION

INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes you find leaders with vision and no ability to implement. They label themselves as "Big Idea" people and "Visionaries" – but they never accomplish anything of lasting significance. People just become frustrated with repeated pleas to embrace a vision which they view as unrealistic. Other times you find hard workers who immerse themselves in all sorts of activity but without any strategic vision. They can spin their wheels with an abundance of sincere effort but don't really get anywhere because they are not working smart. They did not do the necessary preparation work to align their efforts with a strategic vision. You need the right blend in leadership of Vision and Execution. Some people might be stronger in one area than in the other. Hopefully another value of the plurality of elder model is that we can achieve this proper blend of Vision and Execution. It is the same thing with Prayer. Everything that Nehemiah did was bathed in prayer. But he was both a man of prayer and a man of action. There was a prayer component and a practical component. Nehemiah models both.

Quotes:

Unknown: To accomplish great things we must first dream, then visualize, then plan... believe... act!

John H. Patterson: To succeed in business it is necessary to make others see things as you see them.

Japanese proverb: Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.

Joel A. Barker: Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.

Guy Kawasaki: A good idea is about ten percent and implementation and hard work, and luck is 90 percent.

THREE STEPS ON THE JOURNEY FROM VISION TO IMPLEMENTATON

I. (:11-16) CAREFUL INSPECTION -- BUILDING THE STRATEGIC VISION MUST BE BASED ON A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT (COUPLED WITH CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S GOOD FAVOR) – LEADER-FOCUSED

A. (:11-12) **Building the Strategic Vision**

1. Establishing Mission Headquarters / Base of Operations– Rest and Pray and Prepare

"*So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.*"

Nehemiah had been sent and supplied by King Artaxerxes on this divinely appointed mission. He **arrived in Jerusalem** after a difficult three month journey -- that was quite a success in itself; and now needed to begin the task as quickly as possible. Possibly needed some rest after the long journey; some time for reflection and prayer as well; some time to learn which key individuals he could take into his confidence for this initial work of inspection – So he invested these first 3 days wisely;

2. Enlisting the Help of a Few Key Advisors -- not going it alone
   "*And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me.*"

[Not a model of plurality of elder leadership here; but many good principles about leadership]
These were men who could be trusted; could keep a confidence;
These were men who were willing to work hard;
These were men who knew the situation and could properly brief Nehemiah
What an encouragement when you find such key allies – men in whom you can confide

Redpath: In the course of that night, while others slept, Nehemiah – wide-awake, burdened, conscious of desperate need and shame and ruin all around him – diagnosed the situation, surveyed the ruined walls, and contemplated the magnitude of the task to which God had called him. Imagine his grief of heart as he stumbled among those ruins of what was once a great and mighty fortress! Whenever a real work of God is to be done – a real work, not something superficial, but real – some faithful, burdened servant has to take a journey such as Nehemiah took, to weep in the night over the ruins, to wrestle in some dark Gethsemane in prayer. It is utter folly to refuse to believe that things are as bad as they really are.

3. Exercising Discretion
   "*I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding.*"

No need to tell everyone your vision prematurely. You first want to listen to God and get the vision for the mission firmly implanted before you will be prepared to face the inevitable opposition that will try to discourage you from the task. You want to have answers to the basic questions to show that you have done your homework.
You want to know what resources and materials will be needed for the construction and how you plan to obtain those resources.
You need a plan.

Animals would make noise … so only Nehemiah was mounted on this reconnaissance journey

Fensham: He used only one animal to ride on; more animals would have drawn the attention of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. . . Nehemiah and his small escort sneaked out. The men with him might have been residents of Jerusalem who knew the city well and could direct Nehemiah on his way.

B. (:13-16) **Based on a Realistic Assessment – Priority of Investigation and Inspection**

1. Secret Mission – already talked about his discretion
   "*So I went out at night*" – by moonlight (probably could not even use torches)

2. Selective Mission – wanted to closely examine key areas; tracking his way around the

city

"*by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate,*"

3. Sobering Mission – inspecting the degree of damage to the walls and the gates
   "*inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire.*"
   -- broken down condition
   -- burned by fire

שׂבר – "Inspect, Examine;" Probe a wound -- The word used here was one used of a physician inspecting a wound with great care.

Needed to know where he could rebuild the walls on the existing foundation; where he had to start from scratch and construct something new; how bad was the situation; how accurate had been the intelligence he had received; difficult to tell these things at night time (just had moonlight) but he did not want to tip his hand until he had done his planning and had his ducks in a row

4. Scrambling Mission – not just some easy ride around the city walls – lots of obstacles
   "*Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned.*"

Nehemiah did not let the size of the job deter him – Extremely challenging project
- many walls needed rebuilding
- many gates needed replacing

Maybe didn't seem so overwhelming at nighttime – how do you eat an elephant (or any difficult task)? One bite at a time

Probably did not make a full circuit of the city (i.e. turned westward)??, but retraced his steps (i.e. turned back)?? and entered the city where he had gone out – primarily checking out the southern portion – Judah most vulnerable to attack from the north – probably most of that area was completely devastated (Yamauchi)

Michael Crawford: Importance of using our sensory perceptions (seeing with our eyes, hearing with our ears, smelling with our nose, touching with our hands) as we take stock of the physical neighborhood God has called us to reach. Cannot accomplish this by just driving around and observing. You must get out and walk the streets and carefully observe the conditions around you. Church planters call this exegeting the place.

5. Secret Mission – ends up where he started – but now with firsthand knowledge
   "*And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the rest who did the work.*"

Not always wise to tell everybody everything; must use caution and discretion as a leader

Important for a leader to check out the facts for himself – don't just rely on what you are told

Brian Bill: Results of His Assessment:
It was a demanding job. The circuit of the walls was more than a mile long, and the new wall needed to be three or four feet thick, and fifteen to twenty feet high. This was not going to be easy but Nehemiah knew that he and his people had to give their best to it. The same is true for us – kingdom work is demanding, but it's worth our energy.

Now **switching focus** – the leader must have the vision … but he can't do all of the work; it has to be a cooperative effort – you must have the buy-in from the people

II. (:17-18) COOPERATIVE INSPIRATION -- BUY-IN FROM THE TROOPS TO COMMIT TO DO THE WORK MUST BE BASED ON CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S GOOD FAVOR – WORKER FOCUSED

A. (:17) **Buy-in from the Troops Solicited by the Leadership**

1. Precarious Predicament – Honest about how bad things are – no positive spin
   "*Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire.*"

- Must face up to reality – must see our situation for what it really is

- Nehemiah identified with the people – didn't come and condemn them – What a mess you have made of things; he was in the pit right with them

- What **broken down walls** do we see around us and **in us**? Walls that God meant for our spiritual protection which have been neglected and leave us vulnerable? Walls of prayer; walls of devotion to God; walls of time spent in His Word; walls of witnessing to others; walls of encouraging our family; walls of strengthening our church

- What do the **broken walls** of the testimony of God look like around us **in Christ's Church**?

- What do the **broken walls** of our **culture** look like?

2. Simple Solution – but a challenging task
   "*Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem*"

Leaders must be able to motivate people to cooperate

Rick Duncan: The job a great team builder and motivator is to take a complex problem and boil it down to a simple and easily understood solution.

3. God-Glorifying Goal
   "*that we may no longer be a reproach."*

Yamauchi: *Herpah* appears seventy times in the OT either as "abuse," "scorn," or, as in this case, "disgrace" (cf. 1:3; 4:4; 5:9).

Don Jones: Robert Louis Stevenson said, "Keep your fears to yourself but share your courage

with others." Nehemiah began to share the vision with those who were there. He knew he needed help to accomplish the task of God.

He took 3 steps to recruit the people (1) he asked the people to see what he saw (the ruined wall) (2) he then asked them to own the work, "Let us rebuild" (it's your wall too) and (3) it's God's mission and idea (not mine) and it is He who will give us the victory.

Someone has said, "Faith can move mountains, but don't be surprised if God hands you a shovel."

B. (:18) **Based on Encouraging Testimony that Motivates Commitment**
And I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me, and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, " Let us arise and build. "So they put their hands to the good work.

This was August 1, 444 B.C, for the wall was finished **fifty-two days later**, on September 21 (Neh 6:15).

Don't forget the importance of **Chap. 2 – Trusting God for Providential Favors**
Offering words of hope in the face of discouragement
Examine the types of excuses that they could have used
No excuse for hard work – must commit yourself together to getting the job done; it is a good work (just as work of oversight for elders is described as a good work)

Getz: When Nehemiah gave his challenge, the people's negative feelings became positive. **Despair turned to hope**. They responded and began the rebuilding process.

Brian Bill: Pointed the people to the **sufficiency of God:**
He didn't reach Jerusalem because he was a skillful persuader, or because the queen was possibly a compliant helper, or because the king was a generous benefactor, but only because God was a sovereign provider. Since God had done all that, He would certainly help them to complete the task of rebuilding the walls.

Wiersbe: Christian leaders today face these **same two obstacles** as they seek to lead God's people into new conquests for the Lord. How often we hear, "We're content the way things are; don't rock the boat by trying to change things." Or, "We tried that before and it didn't work!"

III. (:19-20) COMBATING INTIMIDATION – BOLDNESS TO OVERCOME INEVITABLE INTIMIDATION MUST BE BASED ON CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S GOOD FAVOR THAT FUELS COMMITMENT TO DO THE WORK – ENEMY FOCUSED

A. (:19) **The Despising of Nehemiah** -- Inevitable Opposition

"*But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, 'What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?*'"

1. Three Major Players:
    a. **Sanballat** – governor over Samaria; chief political enemy for Nehemiah (cf. 4:1-2)

b. **Tobiah** – Ammonites were enemies of the Jews; he had a lot of family connections in Jerusalem; probably a source of at of the intelligence gathering regarding what was happening there
c. **Geshem** – new player mentioned here

Kidner: Geshem was an even more powerful figure than his companions, though probably less earnestly committed to their cause. . . Geshem and his son ruled a league of Arabian tribes which took control of Moab and Edom (Judah's neighbours to the east and south) together with part of Arabia and the approaches to Egypt, under the Persian empire. So, with already a hostile Samaria and Ammon to the north and east, Judah was now virtually encircled. . .

2. Two Major Tactics:
a. First Tactic of Intimidation = **Ridicule** – making fun of the leader and his grandiose plans from such small beginnings; belittling their attempts – "*this thing*" – very contemptuous expression

"Sticks and stones may break my bones
But words will never hurt me" – Wrong

Where do we shrink back from having a testimony before unbelievers because we are afraid of ridicule?

b. Second Tactic of Intimidation = False Accusations of **Rebellion**
Look at how the Apostle Paul had to constantly deal with false accusations and attacks against the legitimacy of his apostleship

Brian Bell: Those who don't use their **Ridicule Rifle**, pull out their **Mockery Musket**, or their **Derision Derringer**, or their **Crossbow of Contempt**!

B. (:20A) **The Daring of Nehemiah** -- Boldness Based on Confidence in God's Good Favor
"*So I answered them and said to them, 'The God of heaven will give us success;*'"

C. (:20B) **The Determination of Nehemiah** -- Commitment to Do the Work – in the end it's all about Execution – Servants need to occupy themselves with what befits a servant = doing the work of their master
"*therefore we His servants will arise and build,*"
1. Overcoming Inertia

2. Working Hard

D. (:20C) **The Discernment of Nehemiah** -- Rewards will Follow Only to those who are the True Stakeholders
"*but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem*"

You are not one of us – so I do not need to listen to you; Unbelievers have no stake in the progress of the church of Jesus Christ;
You are not driven by a desire to see God glorified through the rebuilding of His Holy City and the furthering of His kingdom purposes;
You have no reward because you have no heart for God – what a sad state to be in …

Fensham: Nehemiah concluded his reply with certain important legal remarks. Jerusalem was

the city of the Jews and the enemies had no legal authority over it. . . they had no jurisdiction over the pure religion of the exiles. With this reply Nehemiah clearly drew the dividing line between himself and his opponents.

Breneman: When the enemies of God's work can find no legitimate basis for opposition, they may use ridicule, questioning the significance of our labors. This sometimes does more harm than even questioning one's credentials or good intentions (which Nehemiah's enemies also did) because it attacks the very impetus for action. Ridicule is especially hard to endure when the recipients are in the minority. Christians experiencing it should remember what Heb 11:38-39 says about the biblical heroes of faith: "*Some faced jeers and flogging . . . The world was not worthy of them . . . These were all commended for their faith.*" Jesus also suffered ridicule and mocking on many occasions (Luke 22:63-64; 23;11), and his followers can expect to face the same kind of opposition. . . Nehemiah refused to compromise. He denied his opponents a share in the work, the land, or the worship of the Jewish community (cf. Ezra 4:3).

John Newton on Psalm 87:

Saviour, since of Zion's city
I through grace a member am,
Let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in Thy name:
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.

CONCLUSION:

But for the people of God, once they understand the Vision – what does God want done to further His kingdom purposes – they then must move from Vision to Commitment

Business World knows what it means to **move from Vision to Commitment:**

"*How to Build a Team Using Vision, Commitment and Trust*" --

Vision means being able to excite the team with large, desired outcomes.

Large outcomes mean devising goals that attract missionaries. [Interesting word to use in secular context] The first step in vision is to project such a goal. This goal must be bigger than a pay check. It must contain challenge, appeal to personal pride, and provide an opportunity to make a difference and know it. Then the goal can become a **powerful vision**.

When we ponder a new commitment, we climb up to a kind of mental diving board. Commitments contain unknowns, and some warn of possible failure. It is common for people to neither jump nor climb back down the "ladder," but rather to stay stuck at the end of the board, immobilized in pros, cons, obstacles, and worries. In this state of mind, the obstacles begin to rule, obscuring the vision, blunting motivation.

http://www.learningcenter.net/library/building.shtml

Leaders are able to provide that encouragement that builds hope and a vision of success so that people don't remain stuck on the end of the board but dive into the commitment. As they work hard as a team they are able to focus on the goal instead of the potential obstacles. Confidence in God's Good Favor is the key.

STRATEGIC VISION BASED ON A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT MUST TRANSLATE INTO COMMITMENT TO HARD WORK IN DEPENDENCE ON GOD'S GOOD FAVOR DESPITE INTIMIDATING OPPOSITION

Let us be those who **Arise and Build!**

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do you spend time before the Lord formulating your vision before going in front of others to try to solicit buy-in and cooperation?

2) What types of obstacles discourage you from pursuing the work God would have you perform?

3) What specific testimony can you offer others to document the good hand of God working on your behalf and granting you fruit in ministry?

4) Do you have confidence that God will give you success and does that confidence fuel energy to devote yourselves to doing the necessary work?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kidner: Nehemiah, as ever, is a model of good sense, piety and attention to detail. For all his speed and drive, he does not rush into action (11) or talk (12). He anticipates the obvious objection that a newcomer can have no idea of the task, so he briefs himself thoroughly and chooses his moment to show his hand (16). He has not only kept his plans from the enemy: he has kept the initiative *vis-à-vis* the leaders whom he must convince and arouse. He would have lost this if he had been exposing half-formed ideas piecemeal to every acquaintance. Above and beyond his sound tactics, however, was the conviction that basically the project was not his. It was from God and "for Jerusalem" (12) – not from Nehemiah nor for his prestige. . .

It seems, then, that Nehemiah set out from the west side of the city, coming out of the ruined gateway and turning left towards the south, and so round to the eastern side. There he was soon forced to dismount and proceed on foot along this ridge above the Kidron valley (14b, 15a), before turning back and re-entering the city at his starting-point. . .

On the debit side it is the disgrace, not the insecurity of their position, which strikes him – for Jerusalem should be seen as "the city of the great Kin" and "the joy of all the earth." And on the credit side he speaks first of the hand of . . . God upon him, and only then of the words (of) the king.

Breneman: Nehemiah was able to discern the proper time to present the building project, and he knew how to motivate the leaders and the people. He used four incentives:
1) He identified with the people; he spoke of "*the trouble we are in.*"
2) He stressed the seriousness of the situation. A leader must be realistic and honestly assess the facts. People will have confidence in such a leader
3) Nehemiah was committed to taking definite action

4) He used his personal testimony of God's grace to assure them of God's favor on the project (v. 18). A Christian leader must encourage trust in God by leading in faith as well as in action.

Donald K. Campbell: (Nehemiah: Man in Charge) Lists 21 characteristics necessary for effective leadership:
1. He established a reasonable and attainable goal.
2. He had a sense of mission.
3. He was willing to get involved.
4. He rearranged his priorities in order to accomplish his goal.
5. He patiently waited for God's timing.
6. He showed respect to his superior.
7. He prayed at crucial times.
8. He made his request with tact and graciousness.
9. He was well prepared and thought of his needs in advance.
10. He went through proper channels.
11. He took time (three days) to rest, pray, and plan.
12. He investigated the situation firsthand.
13. He informed others only after he knew the size of the problem.
14. He identified himself as one with the people.
15. He set before them a reasonable and attainable goal.
16. He assured them God was in the project.
17. He displayed self-confidence in facing obstacles.
18. He displayed God's confidence in facing obstacles.
19. He did not argue with opponents.
20. He was not discouraged by opposition.
21. He courageously used the authority of his position.

Brian Bill: The tools are now out of the toolbox – waiting, trusting, praying, planning, and testifying. Are you ready to pick them up and start using them? It's not enough to just rely on your "religious resume." And the tasks are ready to be tackled – replenish your resources, assess the need, recruit workers, inspire confidence, and handle opposition. This is a continual commitment and a long term-task. God wants us fully engaged for the long haul.

Gordon Dane: **Preparing for Action**
Lord Jesus is our great commander who leads us into action; It was one thing to hear about the desperate situation from afar; quite another to see it first-hand; if he cried when he heard . . . surely he cried when he saw; spiritual walls broken down as well; all zeal and burden for the work of the Lord were gone; he enters into the enterprise; prayerful element coupled with a practical element; some people pray and never do anything; Insights into how we should enter into any work of God in a practical sense;
3 Particular Elements to Nehemiah's Preparation for the work:
1. **Consideration** – (:11-16) Investigated what he would do
    a. Waiting – for three days – he took a rest; rough trip from Susa; hundreds of miles; we can't give our best when we are tired; some people unable to take a rest; Yes, the devil doesn't take a holiday … but all of the work of God does not depend on you; contemplating – observing the people and the circumstances; listen to the Lord; wait upon the Lord
    b. Went Out by Night – for the purpose of investigation of the broken down walls; walls are being broken down today; we need to see things as they really are today

2. **Cooperation** (:17-18) –

a. Invited the People

"*let us*" – cooperate together; fellowship; overcoming of jealousies and antagonisms towards one another; believers are like porcupines – come together because there is strength in unity … but then we prick one another and push apart from each other; cf. geese flying in V formation – can go 70% further than geese flying alone; we get further if we can cooperate together

b. Inspired them; encouraged them – this is God's work,

c. Introduced organization among them – need the build the wall in our own particular space; all labor in our own space; sometimes people despise organization … but it is needed

3. **Confrontation** – (:19-20) not a pleasant thing to be laughed at or ridiculed; when we start to build the wall, the enemy will come; physical and spiritual opposition; stop you building the wall of prayer in your life, witness, etc; when the devil's mad, we're glad; he resisted the enemy; we want nothing to do with you; God can bring us success; on judgment day will we be able to say that we were involved and engaged in the work of God? Or did we neglect His work?

TEXT: Nehemiah 3:1-32

TITLE: PARTNERSHIP IN MUTUAL MINISTRY – GOD'S HONOR ROLL OF DEDICATED WORKERS

BIG IDEA:
EVERYONE MUST TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR SHARE OF GOD'S WORK – PARTNERSHIP IN MUTUAL MINISTRY GETS THE JOB DONE

INTRODUCTION:

All of Scripture is equally inspired … does not mean that all of Scripture is equally interesting or even equally helpful. This is one of those grind-it-out chapters providing a ton of detail. We just want to extract the higher level principles that will be helpful to us. Probably not part of your Bible memory program.

Charles Swindoll has preached effective insights from God's Word for decades. He wrote a book on Nehemiah (Hand Me Another Brick). He completely skipped Nehemiah 3.
We are not going to skip Chap. 3 – In fact there are some valuable insights here for us.

Look at map – started at the Sheep Gate in NE corner – worked around in counter-clockwise fashion – ending back up at the Sheep Gate = place closest to the temple where the sheep were brought in to be sacrificed – All about access to the Holy God – the privilege we have of worshiping Him and bearing a testimony to Him – that privilege must be protected and promoted

6 PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP IN MUTUAL MINISTRY

I. STARTS WITH CONSECRATION TO THE LORD

Must start here: vs 1 "*they consecrated it*" – set apart to a sacred cause or service
Have to start somewhere – Note that the high priest and the key spiritual leaders set the example for all of the people; such physical work was not above them; they fully participated and led the way
Not motivated from pride or selfish ambition or trying to establish a name for yourself
Foundation of all we do is Jesus Christ – otherwise walls will just fall down again
Paul was careful regarding how he built – we are to follow his example

1 Cor. 3:10-15
Any project undertaken for the Lord must be fully consecrated to Him – to His glory
We cannot do anything for the Lord until first our own lives have been set apart for the Lord to direct and use as He would see fit
Rom. 12:1 "*Therefore I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship*"

Derek Kidner: When it was complete, the entire wall would be dedicated in a ceremony of processions, songs and sacrifices (**12:27ff**).

II. STRATEGICALLY FOCUSES ON THE AREA THAT MOST DEMANDS YOUR PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

"*in front of his house*"
What better motivation than to throw yourself into work that is most appropriate for you

Everybody is not performing the same work – but is contributing to the overall goal
Another example of the use of our **spiritual gifts** for the good of the entire body – do the work that God wants you to be doing – don't have to go around trying to critique or fix everybody else's work …

Perhaps some application to the connection between maintaining a godly home as the base of your ministry and service; you cannot neglect your home and then go try and serve; our home must first be consecrated to the Lord and protected; then that becomes the base for our ministry

Derek Kidner: The word *repaired* will now dominate the chapter. . . a general term meaning "to make firm or strong". It does not necessarily mean restoring everything as before.
In fact Nehemiah shortened the wall due to all of the debris and kept the line more on the high ground, instead of extending to the bottom valley near the Gihon spring.

III. SHARES THE WORK ACROSS EVERY SEGMENT OF GOD'S PEOPLE – ALL PULLING THEIR WEIGHT

"*Next to him*" = key phrase – linked arm in arm; yoked together in ministry; no gaps

- high priest and all the other priests, Levites – **religious leaders** rolled up their sleeves and labored alongside everyone else

- **political officials**

- Both men and **women** -- look at reference to "*he and his daughters*" **vs. 12**

- all types of **trades** – doing work outside of their main area of expertise
  - goldsmiths **vs. 8, 32**
  - merchants **vs. 32**
  - perfumers **vs. 8**

- all levels of **economic status**
  - poor common folk
  - rich nobles – more of a challenge for them – look at the one negative comment
    Vs. 5 "*but their nobles did not support the work of their masters*"

- all **ages** – multiple generations

- some people did **more work** than others (**3:11, 19, 21, 24, 27, 30**)

- some people **worked harder** than others – example of Baruch in **3:20**
Warren Wiersbe: The Hebrew word means "to burn or glow" and suggests that Baruch burned a lot of energy! "*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might*" (**Eccl. 9:10**)

- people **restored** from previous wrongdoing – given a second chance – Malachi (**3:11**) – cf. **Ezra 10:31** – had submitted to Ezra's demand to forsake mixed marriages

It was not just Jerusalem's citizens who rebuilt the walls. Volunteers came from **outlying areas**: Jericho, Gideon, Tekoa, Mizpah, Zanoah, Beth Halkerem, Beth Zur and Keilah. They saw the value in supporting God's kingdom program.

Look at the "*one another*" passages speaking of mutual ministry

Redpath: The entire population responded to Nehemiah's plea for help and cooperation, and this account shows a warm-hearted and enthusiastic spirit. Each had his own particular job to do, and no one was envious of the job that somebody else did. Each was satisfied with his particular assignment, and every section of the wall was cared for.

Are all of us **pulling our weight** in the building of God's church?

IV. SHAMES THOSE WHO HAVE DIVIDED LOYALTIES AND DON'T PULL THEIR WEIGHT

Vs. 5 "*Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters*."

Case of **divided loyalties** – you cannot serve God and Mammon
Or maybe simply a matter of **pride** – thinking too highly of themselves as though manual labor was beneath them

Tekoa – town 10-12 miles south east of Jerusalem in Judah; largely a wilderness on the range of hills which rise near Hebron and stretch toward the Dead Sea –
Fensham: could easily be attacked by Geshem the Arab

John MacArthur: Cf. **6:17-19** Nehemiah added a footnote that in the days of building the wall, the nobles of Judah who refused to work (**3:5**) were in alliance and correspondence with Tobiah because, although his ancestors were Ammonites (**2:19**), he had married into a respectable Jewish family. Shemaiah was from the family of Arah (**Ezr 2:5**); his son Jehonanan was the son-in-law of Meshullam who shared in the work of building (3:4, 30). According to **13:4**, the High-Priest, Eliashib, was related to Tobiah (which is a Jewish name). The meddling of these nobles, by trying to play both sides through reports to Tobiah and to Nehemiah (**v. 19),** only widened the breach as Tobiah escalated efforts to frighten the governor.

Vs. 27 causes some folks to do **extra labor** to pick up the slack
"*After them the Tekoites repaired another section in front of the great projecting tower and as far as the wall of Ophel*."

V. SALUTES EACH WORKER FOR MAKING A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION -- SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAMES OF THE WORKERS

Redpath: In the Hebrew tongue, a man's name was often descriptive of his character. That was true of God, also. The name of God always reveals the character of God – so here with these names.

(:1) Eliashib – "*God restores*" – Charles Ryrie: energetically helped Nehemiah in constructing the walls, but later caused him trouble by allowing alliances with the Samaritans (**13:4**)

(:2) Men of Jericho –

(:2) Zaccur – "*mindful*"

(:3) Sons of Hassenaah – "*to prick, thorny*"

(:4, 21) Meremoth – "*elevations*" – two sections

(:4, 30) Meshullam the son of Berechiah – "*friend*" – two sections
Probably of humble means; lived in a smaller chamber – like a studio apartment; but not insignificant when it came to performing the work of the Lord

(:4) Zadok, son of Baana – "*righteous*" –

(:5) Tekoites – "*trumpet blast*" – birthplace of Amos

(:6) Jehoida – "*Jehovah knows*"

(:7) Melatiah – "*Jehovah delivered*" – a Gibeonite

(:7) Jadon – "*thankful*" -- the Meronothite,

(:7) Men of Gibeon – "*hill city*"

(:7) Men of Mizpah – "*watchtower*"

(:8) Uzziel – "*my strength is God*"

(:8) Hananiah, one of the perfumers – "*God has favored*"

(:9) Rephaiah – "*tower, raised platform, pulpit*"

(:10) Jedaiah – "*praised of Jehovah*" --

(:10) Hattush -- ?

(:11) Malchijah – "*my king is Jehovah*"

(:11) Hashub – "*considerate*"

(:12) Shallum – "*retribution*"

(:13) Hanun – "*gracious*"

(:13) Inhabitants of Zanoah – "*cast off*"

(:14) Malchiah – "*my king is Jehovah*"

(:15) Shallun – "*retribution*"

(:16) Nehemiah – "*Jehovah comforts*" – refers to another Nehemiah

(:17) The Levites

(:17) Rahum – "*compassion*"

(:17) Hashabiah – "*Jehovah has considered*"

(:18) Bavai – "*my goings*"

(:19) Ezer – "*treasure*"

(:20) Baruch – "*blessed*" – some worked **more zealously** than others! All of the effort expended was not equal

(:22) The priests, the men of the plain

(:23) Benjamin – "*son of the right hand*" **Deut. 33:12** "*Of Benjamin he said, 'May the beloved of the Lord dwell in security by Him, who shields him all the day, and he dwells between His shoulders.*'"

(:23) Hasshub –

(:23) Azariah – "*Jehovah has helped*"

(:24) Binnui – "*built up*"

(:25) Palal – "*judge*"

(:25) Pedaiah – "*Jehovah has ransomed*"

(:26) temple servants living in Ophel

(:28) The priests

(:29) Zadok son of Immer – "*righteous*" – we need to sure we are strong in integrity

(:29) Shemaiah – "*heard of Jehovah*"

(:30) Hananiah, son of Shelemiah – "*God has favored*"

(:30) Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph – "*gracious*"

(:31) Malchiah the goldsmith's son – "*my king is Jehovah*"

(:32) The goldsmiths

(:32) The merchants

VI. SOLIDIFIES THE OVERALL GOAL -- SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLACES REPAIRED – THE SPECIFIC WALLS , GATES, TOWERS, POOLS

Focus on the **10 Gates** – Spiritual Lessons illustrated in the rebuilding of the Ten Gates

Ps. 87:2 "*The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you O city of God*."

1) Sheep Gate – NE tip; then narrative moves in counter-clockwise direction and ends up back here; sacrificial animals brought through this gate to the temple altar – priests would be especially interested in repairing this section
Warren Wiersbe: This gate reminds us of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who died for the sins of the world (**John 1:29; 5:2**).

Ray Stedman: The cross is that instrument in God's program that puts human pride to death. We cannot save ourselves. Only the Lamb of God, slain for us, can save us. The cross, the Sheep Gate, is the starting place, the source of our strength for the task of rebuilding.

Tower of the Hundred (Meah) –

Tower of Hananeel – "*God has favored*"
John MacArthur: This northern section of Jerusalem opened up to the central Benjamin plateau where enemy forces could attack most easily from the N. The rest of the perimeter of the city was protected by the natural valley topography.

2) Fish Gate – John MacArthur: Men of Tyre and other coastal towns routinely brought fish to sell
Mark 1:17 "*Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*."

3) Old Gate –
Ray Stedman: This gate represents truth. In many Christians' lives this gate is broken down, and they are no longer resting upon the truth. Truth is always old, settled, eternal; old things provide the base upon which everything new must rest.

The nature of truth is illustrated by the story of a man who went to visit an old musician. He knocked on the musician's door and sad "What's the good word for today?" The old musician said nothing in reply. Instead, he turned and took a tuning fork down from a nearby shelf. He struck the tuning fork against the shelf so that a note resounded through the room.

Then the musician said, "That, my friend, is A. It was A yesterday. It was A five thousand years ago, and it will be A five thousand years from now." Then he added, thumbing over his shoulder, "The tenor across the hall sings off-key. The soprano upstairs flats her high notes. The piano in the next room is out of tune." He struck the tuning fork again, and said, "That is A and that, my friend, is the good word for today." God's truth never changes.

Broad Wall –

Tower of the Furnaces –

4) Valley Gate – **2:13, 15** – Nehemiah had begun and ended his inspection journey at this point
Place of humility and lowliness of mind
Ray Stedman: the attitude God wants to build in us is one of humble dependence upon His infinite resources.

5) Dung Gate – [my favorite] – refuse carted to the valley of Hinnom – Gate of Elimination
Warren Wiersbe: The sanitary disposal of waste materials is essential to the health of a city. This gate did not have a beautiful name, but it did perform an important service! It reminds us that, like the city, each of us individually must get rid of whatever defiles us, or it may destroy us (**2 Cor. 7:1; 1 John 1:9**).

6) Gate of the Fountain – **John 4:14**
Warren Wiersbe: In the Bible, water for drinking is a picture of the Holy Spirit of God (**John 7:37-39**). . . Spiritually speaking, we have moved from the Valley Gate (humility) to the Dung Gate (cleansing) to the Fountain Gate (fullness of the Spirit).

Ray Stedman: It symbolizes the Holy Spirit, which is the river of life in us, enabling us to obey His will and His Word. Notice that this gate comes immediately after the Dung Gate. After our inner corruption is purged by our active consent, then the cleansing fountain of the Spirit washes us clean.

Pool of Siloah at the king's garden – "*sent*"

7) Water Gate
water for washing is a picture of the Word of God (**Eph. 5:26; John 15:3**).
Ray Stedman: Note that the Water Gate in Jerusalem did not need to be repaired. Evidently it was the only part of the wall still standing. The text mentions that people lived nearby, but it doesn't mention that the Water Gate needed repair. The Word of God never breaks down. It doesn't need to be repaired. It simply needs to be reinhabited.

8) Horse Gate – symbol of warfare

9) East Gate
Ray Stedman: This gate faced the rising sun and is the gate of hope. It is the gate of anticipation of the coming day when all the trials of life and the struggles of earth will end, when the glorious new sun will rise on the new day of God.

10) Gate Miphkad (Inspection Gate) – place where judgment was conducted

CONCLUSION: SUCCEEDS BECAUSE OF THE GOOD HAND OF GOD'S FAVOR
God's roll call of faithfulness and dedication;
Sometimes God's people have to bond together and grind it out to get the necessary work done.
4:6 Look at how Nehemiah humbly gave the credit to the people – a leader can accomplish nothing unless the people are dedicated to do the work: "*So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, <u>for the people had a mind to work</u>.*"
Let's ask the Lord for that type of mindset and dedication.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When the roll is called up yonder, what significant projects will we have completed as partners in the gospel with our fellow brethren?

2) What names listed here strike you in terms of their significance (look them up in a Bible dictionary to get the meaning)?

3) Why didn't Nehemiah just pay some contractors to do the physical labor of rebuilding the walls?

4) How much complaining and murmuring do you see as the people go about their work for the Lord?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Living Hope Church: More than 30 households are mentioned by family name. There are 41 sections in this project consisting of walls and gates. Here is the key language of the chapter:

1. Repaired (38), built (5), rebuilt (3) and restored (1). Forty-seven times we are told that the work is taking place, the work is being done.
2. Ten gates are mentioned and Nehemiah walks around the city in a counter-clockwise direction. . .

The **Sheep Gate** is where sheep were brought in for the sacrifice. It is closest to the Temple. This is putting God first. . .

Verse 5 - the nobles of the **Tekoites** would not stoop to serve the Lord. They faced chores they didn't like and they refused to participate. It is recorded for eternity. In **verse 27** the Tekoites, in a rare instance of folks surpassing their leaders, actually apply themselves to a second section. . .

We see pockets of grace. In **verse 14 Malchijah** is mentioned. In **Ezra 10:31** he was a priest in sin because he had a foreign wife. Now he leads responsibly.

Dale Ralph Davis:
(**3:1**) **Leadership by example**: The high priest and priests were first out of the starting block. They apparently did not have the idea that such work was for "peons." Rather, those with sacred office took the lead in the restoring work.

(**3:5**) **The Presence and Problem of Arrogance**: The verse is puzzling, but it seems that there were some from the town of Tekoa, the "nobles," who refused to assist in the work. Did they think it was beneath them? By contrast, however, the chapter is littered with others who had social and political clout who avidly contributed their share to the work (see Neh. 3:9,12,15,19).

The Achievement of Non Professionals: Yamauchi cites the experience and testimony of Viggo Olsen, who helped rebuild ten thousand houses in war-ravaged Bangladesh in 1972. Olsen derived unexpected inspiration from reading **Nehemiah 3**, admittedly not one of the more moving passages of Scripture. However, Olsen said, "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." Is this not a healthy reminder in a day when the church is so a-gawk over competence and professional skills?
http://www.baptiststart.com/nehemiah.html

Derek Gentle: It's one of those passages one is tempted to skip over. It seems to be nothing more than a list of names we can't pronounce... a "nothing" chapter... just boring detail and data. But on closer examination, we discover that Nehemiah 3 is a roll call of faithfulness and valor.

It is proof that God takes note of what we do for His name's sake. It is evidence that our labor in the Lord is never in vain. Even if we are not the wealthiest or the most powerful persons, God knows our names and records our service.

To make repairs, various groups accepted responsibility for different sections of the wall - and they all worked simultaneously. 40 different groups are listed as participating. 28 times one reads phrases like, *And next to them*, *Next to him*, *After him*, *Beside him*. Section by section... side by side... they each did their part.

Some had larger sections... and some smaller. Some repaired parts of the wall. Some worked on towers and others hung new gates... There were different kinds of work to be done.

Different kinds of people were involved in the work.
Priests and Levites and temple workers completed several different sections of the wall. There were men from the city of Jericho. There were people representing all the trades and professions. There was Hannaniah the perfumer. There were goldsmiths and merchants. Most worked sections in front of their own homes. Shallum worked on his part of the wall, "together with his daughters."

There was Malchijah and Ezer, rulers over their districts. Working on another portion of the same wall was Shemanaiah, the guard of the east gate. ...Leaders and followers working together. Section by section... side by side... they each did their part.

Two notations are of singular note... While the workers from Tekoa repaired two sections, "their nobles" are singled out for the only negative comment in the chapter, because they "did not lift a finger to help." In contrast, Baruch has the honor of being described as having diligently repaired his section.

Every list has its first entry and the first wall builder listed is Eliashib the high priest. Verse 1 tells us that he, along with his fellow priests, "began rebuilding." Every great work of God has to have its beginning and its beginners. And that's what we do today... we begin. And that's who we have the privilege of being today... the ones who begin the work.
http://www.baptiststart.com/print/and_next_to_them.html

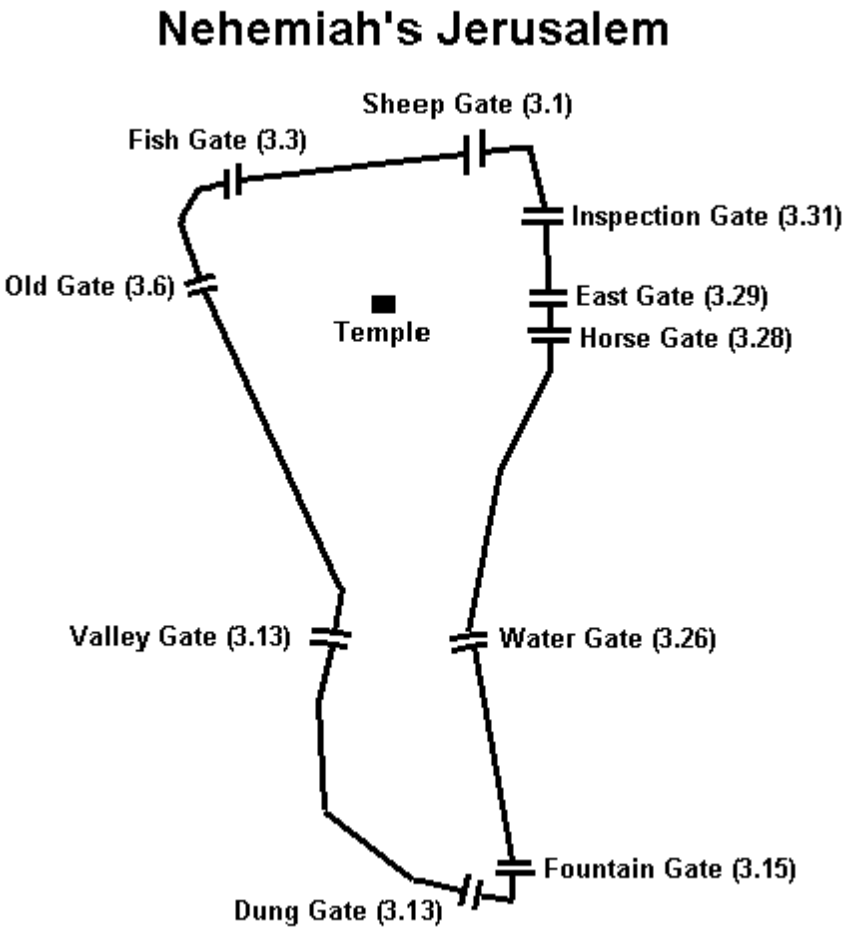
John Johnson: **Nehemiah 3** is the rather colorless account of forty crews working side by side, in forty-five sections

- Disparate people up till now
- From every profession, rank, class, age-merchants, shopkeepers, temple servants, farmers, herdsmen, daughters
- Who, after 140 years, were suddenly mobilized into community, galvanized into a common cause
- A people shaken out of their own self-centered concerns to share in something bigger than themselves
- Something "tipped" them over

http://www.baptiststart.com/nehemiah.html

JesusPlusNothing.com: **The Gates of Spiritual Progression**

Chapter three concerns itself with the rebuilding of the walls and specifically the ten gates that separated each section. What also stands out is the people that God has recorded as doing the work. So what can we take from a chapter such as this? Well, quite a lot actually. I believe that each of the gates speak of different experiences in our Christian life that we need to come into. Their order and position is very specific and give us insight into the journey that God takes each of His children on. The layout and positioning of these gates can be seen in the picture below.



The meaning of the ten gates of Jerusalem.

Sheep Gate (vs 1,32) – The very first gate mentioned is the sheep gate. It was called the sheep gate because this was the gate which the sheep and lambs used in the sacrifice were bought through. No prizes for knowing that this speaks of the very first experience we come into in our Christian life – that is, a realisation that Jesus was the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. The sheep gate then speaks to us of the cross and the sacrifice that was made for our sins. It is the starting point of everything but you will also notice if you read the entire chapter that the sheep gate is also mentioned at the very end once we have come full circle. That is because everything starts and ends with Jesus' death on the cross.

Fish Gate (vs 3) – The Fish gate was next to be mentioned. It was called the fish gate because the fisherman of Galilee would bring their catch in through this gate to be sold. For us, it speaks of evangelism as we have been called to be 'fishers of men'. It is a natural progression in our Christian life that after seeing that Jesus dies for our sins, that we would want to tell others about it. Even surveys have shown that believers who have been saved less than two years win the most people to the Lord. Their simple testimony of what Jesus has done in their lives qualifies them to be great 'fishers of men.'

Old Gate (vs 6) – The Old gate was next and this speaks to us of the old ways of truth. A young Christian having experienced the sheep gate, then the fish gate soon sees the need for experiencing the old gate. This means learning the old ways of truth that never change. Jeremiah 6:16 states 'Thus says the Lord, Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is and walk in it; And you will find rest for your souls.'

Valley Gate (vs 13) – Examining the picture above you notice that there is a long distance before you come to the next gate, which is the valley gate. For a new Christian the Lord allows a 'honeymoon' type period where He teaches you and His presence is strong in your life. This can go on for some time as indicated by the positioning of the old and valley gates. But sooner or later the valley gate must come. The valley gate speaks to us of humbling and trials – valley type experiences used by the Lord for our personal growth. Never easy but the Christian needs to remember that in the natural nothing really grows on the mountain tops, but it certainly does down in the valleys. So it is in the spiritual. Never a nice experience but it always produces fruit.

Dung (Refuse) Gate (vs 14) – Again there is quite a distance to the next gate indicating that, unfortunately, the valley experience can carry on for some time. But the result of that experience is clearly seen in this next gate – the dung gate. This is the gate that they would take all the refuse and rubbish out of Jerusalem, down to the valley of Hinnom to be burned. This is what happens in our own life. Valley experiences are used by the Lord to clear away the rubbish so that true faith, refined by the fire, can come forth and produce fruit. Clearing away the rubbish in our lives is never easy but the benefits of this experience can be seen in the next gate. You will notice also that at this point of your Christian life there is a dramatic 'turning of the corner' that takes place. From the diagram above, up until this point we have been moving downward and the experiences have been hard, but having come to this point there is a sharp turn in the road and we begin to move upward again.

Fountain Gate (vs 15) – You will notice from the picture that the fountain gate is located extremely close to the dung gate. In other words, after a valley type experience where rubbish in our lives is cleared out and true faith comes forth, then the fountains begin to flow and it doesn't take long! This speaks to us of the living waters of the Holy Spirit that cleanse our lives and empower us for our Christian life.

Water Gate (vs 26) - The next gate we arrive at is the water gate. The water gate is a picture I believe of the word of God and it's effect in our life. **Eph 5:26** states '… having washed her by the water of the word.' It is no coincidence that this gate was located next to the fountain gate as the two often go together. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes the word of God alive to us personally, allowing cleansing, encouragement and direction to take place in our life.

Horse Gate (vs 28) - The horse gate speaks to us of warfare as horses were used in battle and became a symbol of war. **Revelation 19:11** 'I saw Heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness does He judge and make war.' Spiritual warfare, as we will see in this entire study on Nehemiah, is a requirement of every Christian because we are all in a battle whether we know it or not. The last three gates are also prophetic I believe of the end times return of Jesus Christ. You will notice that all three gates are very close together and so are the events which they symbolise. Prophetically, the horse gate speaks of the day of the Lord and the end time judgement as recorded in the book of Revelation **chapters 6-19**.

East Gate (vs 29) – The east gate has been set-aside especially by God and was known by Jews for one particular event – the coming of the Messiah! **Ezekiel 44:1-3** '… the gate that looked toward the east, and it was shut. The Lord said to me, 'This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the Lord God of Israel has entered by it.' The east gate opens and looks toward the Mount of Olives and we know that when Jesus returns He will return to this mount. (**Zech 14:4**). He will then enter Jerusalem by the east gate. The east gate then speaks of the return of Jesus Christ. For our Christian life is shows us of our need to live with this hope and to long for His return. A specific crown is even given to those who do this (**2 Tim 4:8**). Prophetically this gate is very close to the horse gate because the day of God's wrath ends with the coming of the Lord Jesus as described in **Revelation 19**.

Inspection Gate (vs 31) - The final gate is the inspection gate. This gate speaks to us of the bema seat of Christ where our lives are inspected and rewarded appropriately. In our Christian experience we should be living with this in mind. We are called to live our lives with eternity in view, caring more for the things of eternity than the temporal that we see around us. Prophetically this gate also speaks of the judgement of the nations that takes place when Jesus returns. This is recorded in the sheep and the goats judgement in **Mathew 25:31-46**.

http://www.jesusplusnothing.com/studies/online/nehem3.htm

Warren Wiersbe: British humorist Jerome K. Jerome said, "I like work, it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours." When it comes to the work of the Lord, there is no place for spectators or self-appointed advisors and critics; but there is always room for workers. . .

George Morrison reminds us "that for this restoration, no **new** material was needed. In the debris of the ruined masonry lay all the material required . . . and it seems to me that is always so when the walls of Zion are rebuilt" (Morning Sermons, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931, p. 249). It is not by inventing clever new things that we take away the church's reproach, but by going back to the old truths that made the church great in ages past. They lie like stones in the dust, waiting for some burdened Nehemiah to recover them and use them. [new timber was needed to replace the gates that had been burned with fire]

Brenaman: vv. 16-32 – The style of this section of the text is somewhat different from vv. 1-15. The most evident difference is that the landmarks are now primarily houses and other buildings

instead of gates. . . the wall on the east side of the city did not follow the old wall but was built farther up on the crest of the hill.

Jay Jones – Freedom Church Windsor Mill – 2/17/19

I. The People

A. Eliashib the high priest (**v. 1**); cf. **Heb. 5:1-4** – look at the role of the high priest; why was he placed first in this list of workers; dedicating the work to God; this was God's work
B. Men of Jericho – travelled from 18 miles away to help in the effort; cf. other churches which have been a part of Windsor Mill church plant
C. Women as well as men (**vs. 12**); old as well as young; skilled as well as unskilled – God uses everybody; God cares for people thru people; the primary qualification to do God's work is Availability; **Gal. 3:28** – God cares not only for the Jews but for all people
D. Working right where they lived – do we have the vision to see the broken down walls around us – in our family, our community, our city

II. The Work

A. Seeing how great the devastation, would we choose to rebuild?
B. 2 miles of walls needed rebuilding; 10 gates – huge project – but God cares more about the people than the walls
C. Cause of ruin = rebellion of God's people – they brought the devastation on themselves
D. Nature of the work is to build brick upon brick; stone upon stone
E. **2 Pet. 3:9** – Uniting all of God's people to come under the protection of the kingdom of God; requires unity of people working side by side; God will never leave us or forsake us

III. The Purpose

A. What fuels our work is our belief system -- For the advancement of the kingdom of God
B. Involves both walls for Protection and for Redemption – answers the question that people will always ask when you are doing God's work = "What is this that you are trying to do?"
C. God is in the process of exchanging Jerusalem's shame for His fame
D. Jesus' heart is broken for our city
E. God was interested not just in protecting the Jews … but in protecting future lineage for the coming of His Son the promised Messiah to accomplish our Redemption
F. Christ came to die for our sins at just the right time in history; we are doing God's work here in Windsor Mill at just the appointed time; God will come to comfort you at just the right time; Today is the day of salvation … don't delay in responding to His love and care

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Together We Build**

Introduction: When people read the book of Nehemiah, they come to **chapter 3**, normally what they do is they skip over this. And they go straight into **chapter 4**. Because, again, on the surface, what you see is an endless list of Hebrew names that are very hard to pronounce. And for the most part, these are **unknown people**. I think it's one of the most important chapters, because it's in this chapter that we actually discover how Nehemiah was able to rebuild the wall in 52 days.

What we see as we come to **chapter 3** is really Nehemiah's incredible gift of administration and organization. He was able to mobilize the people, organize the people, and just get them working. it also shows how there's a great unity and teamwork that went with rebuilding those walls. In order to accomplish that task in 52 days, they had to be unified, they had to work together as a team. And by the way, in the church, we're not building walls, we're actually

building bridges, aren't we? We're trying to reach out and reach people for Christ. And just like Nehemiah and his people needed teamwork and unity, we need teamwork and unity in the church, don't we? in order to accomplish the purpose that God has given.

Big Idea**: Some Ingredients that promote teamwork and unity in the work of the Lord**

I. A Determined Purpose for the Work

The question is, why rebuild these walls? Due to reproach -- they wanted to rebuild the city, not just for themselves, but for the glory of God. for the name of God.

Now look in chapter 3, look again in verse number 1. Notice again, the principle of worship and sacrifice that their relationship to God is first. In a sense, he's putting God first by mentioning this gate here first. We must be sure that we're dedicated to the Lord in our worship, in our devotion, before we start any work. You understand that? Worship comes before work. And we serve because of our worship.

II. A Devoted Person over the Work

Nehemiah was that person.

A Few Principles about Leadership

1. A leader must not mind if the credit goes to another

He's willing to let the people have that credit that they deserve.

2. A leader must motivate people
   Gave them a section of the wall that they were interested in

3. A leaders must plan and organize

4. A leader must delegate

5. A leader must oversee
   - He sets clear objectives
   - He picks the right people
   - He holds them accountable
   - He encourages and coaches

6. A leader must give proper recognition

The important thing is not so much that Nehemiah recognized every worker, but that God recognized every worker.

7. A leader must not get distracted by those who will not cooperate

III. A Dedicated People in the Work

Look at the diversity of all of the people

TEXT: Nehemiah 4:1-8

TITLE: DEFENDING AGAINST DISCOURAGEMENT -- BOASTING IN WEAKNESS

BIG IDEA:
THE GREAT AND AWESOME GOD CAN PROTECT AND PROSPER A FEEBLE FEW WHO DON'T QUIT PRAYING AND DON'T QUIT WORKING DESPITE ANGRY OPPOSITION

INTRODUCTION:
Once we commit ourselves to God's work it is very easy to become discouraged and lost heart. Nehemiah has been a great leader for God's little flock amidst the rubble of Jerusalem.

- His heart has been burdened with the sad state of affairs – the walls of Jerusalem lie in ruins and the people need to be rebuilt spiritually as well.
- He has humbly set the example of confessing national sin and seeking revival.
- He has allowed God to build his vision for what work needs to be accomplished.
- His Vision has translated into commitment to do the work.
- He has motivated partnership in mutual ministry so that everyone pulls their weight.

Now he must lead the people through the pitfalls of discouragement as they face angry opposition. The enemy will attack on every front and try to get God's people to pull back and quit. The enemy always wants us to focus on our weakness – we are too few; too poor; too weak.

Discouragement is much more of an epidemic type threat than the swine flu (Brian Bill) --

- It's **universal.** None of us are immune to discouragement. Everyone you have ever known has been discouraged at one time or another.
  - It's **recurring**. Being discouraged once does not give you an immunity to the disease. You can be discouraged over and over again. In fact, you can even be discouraged by the fact that you are discouraged a lot.
  - It's **highly contagious**. Discouragement spreads by even casual contact. People can become disheartened because you are discouraged. You can be bummed out because other people are discouraged.

But God can enable us to overcome and defeat Discouragement. God's strategy throughout history has been to display His power through our weakness. We need to come to grips with that strategy and embrace it for our own lives. If we fight against that principle we will be constantly frustrated.

God does not want to share His glory with anyone. "How about with me?" you say.

If our focus is on our enemies or on our own weakness, we will become discouraged.
But when our focus is on our Great and Awesome God and His kingdom program, we will be victorious.

Warren Wiersbe: Opposition is not only an evidence that God is blessing, but it is also an opportunity for us to grow. The difficulties that came to the work brought out the best in Nehemiah and his people.

THE GREAT AND AWESOME GOD CAN PROTECT AND PROSPER A FEEBLE FEW WHO DON'T QUIT PRAYING AND DON'T QUIT WORKING DESPITE ANGRY OPPOSITION

Two fold Attack – The Enemy Wants us to Focus on our Weakness, Discourage Us, and Cause us to Quit the Priority Work of God / Sandwiched in between these two attacks we will see a Two Fold Response – but will focus more on that in the next sermon after taking a break for our Christmas message next Sunday

I. (:1-3) ATTACK #1 – INSULTING FAITHFUL WORKERS – MOCKING, RIDICULE

A. What makes God's enemies really angry?

"*when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry*"

4 things make God's enemies really angry:

1. When they are Exposed as evil men who oppose God's kingdom program – look at what made the Pharisees angry –
   - anything that exalted Jesus Christ as the Son of God
   - anything that emphasized inner righteousness and exposed their hypocrisy

2. When Progress is made in areas that are critical to kingdom program success
   - threatened by change and by progress; they want the status quo where they are building an empire for themselves – not concerned with God's kingdom program; react with jealousy and spirit of rivalry
   - evangelizing new people groups – remember the story of Jim Elliott
   - underground churches thriving in areas like China
   - trying to recover critical aspects of church age truth and practice
     - Reformation doctrines – emphasis on sovereignty of God
     - Believer Baptism – look at attacks on the AnaBaptists
     - Priesthood of all believers – religious hierarchy wants to protect their status
     - Plurality of elder leadership

3. When Spiritual growth and fervency increase
   - high view of the Scriptures – The Battle for the Bible – by Hal Lindsey
   - importance of prayer
   - aggressive pursuit of the Great Commission
   - emphasis on holiness and church discipline

4. When they feel powerless to intervene – hands somewhat tied by decree of Artaxerxes

B. Tactics of Insulting / Mocking / Ridicule:

"*and mocked the Jews*" – Picked the wrong people to mock

Psalm 2: "*Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed …*"

Psalm 74:18 "*Remember this, O Lord, that the enemy has reviled, and a foolish people has spurned Your name*."

1. Addressing the insults to a receptive audience:
    a. *his brothers*
    b. *wealthy men of Samaria* – very comfortable and complacent; not concerned with the devastated condition of God's holy city

2. Highlighting the weakness and inadequacy of the workers and their resources –
<u>5 Mocking Questions:</u>
    a. Mocking their **Power** = overall weakness and inadequacy
        "*What are these feeble Jews doing*?" frail, miserable, powerless
        You don't have adequate personnel to get the job done – you are pathetic and helpless

Fensham: "The Hebrew root *'mll* is occasionally used in the OT to denote the fading or withering of a plant (Isa. 16:8; 24:7; etc.). It is also used of people without any hope (Isa. 19:8; Hos. 4:3). It is employed here in Nehemiah [translated "feeble," v. 2] to ridicule the Jews."

Jesus Christ is not building His church today by some impressive multi media campaign with a lot of glitz and famous personalities and huge budgets and sophisticated marketing techniques – He wants to rely on the power of secret prayer; on the faithfulness of daily one-to-one witnessing; on each of us using our own spiritual gift to build one another up

Such mocking and scorn is very hurtful

b. Mocking their **Goal** = claim of divine favor
"*Are they going to restore it for themselves*?"

c. Mocking their **Faith** = nothing but religious futility
"*Can they offer sacrifices*?"

Wiersbe: It will take more than prayer and worship to rebuild the city!

Redpath: Even if you do start out, God isn't going to take any notice of you and He won't help you.

d. Mocking their **Plans** = unrealistic timeframe
"*Can they finish in a day*?"
Your task is impossible; do you have any idea of the magnitude of what you are attempting?

e. Mocking their **Resources** = totally inadequate
"*Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones*?"

God loves this type of challenge – because it is our very weakness that presents the perfect backdrop for the display of His awesome power and glory – He wants it known that He brings victory by His grace – not by our numbers or might

How does God undertake for us to support our Power, Goal, Faith, Plans, Resources
Biblical Illustrations:
Remember the story of **Gideon** and his soldiers – **Judges 7:2** "*The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.*'"

1 Sam. 14:6 Jonathan's great victory "*Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the Lord will work for us, for the Lord is not restrained to save by many or by few*." He took the bold step of faith … but trusted in God giving the victory

2 Chron. 14:11 godly **king Asa** – removed the high places, fortified the cities, commanded Judah to seek the Lord and obey Him (vs. 4); was attacked by the powerful Ethiopians: "*an army of a million men and 300 chariots … Lord, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O Lord our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; let not man prevail against You. So the Lord routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah*"

2 Chron. 32:7-8 Sennachereib invading Judah; prayer of Hezekiah and his words to his trembling people - "*Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria nor because of all the horde that is with him; for the one with us is greater than the one with him. With him is only an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles*."

God knocks down the **walls of Jericho** in a surprising way

God slays the giant **Goliath** with the small stone from the slingshot of young **David**
Psalms 20:7 "*some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God*"

Apostle Paul learned this lesson in his ministry as he was under severe challenge and ridicule:
2 Cor. 4:7 "*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves*"
Swindoll: There is no power or tenacity in a clay pot. It is fragile and plain. It often leaks. The passing of time only makes the vessel weaker. Paul was saying that any manifestation of power comes not from the pot, but rather from what the pot contains.
2 Cor. 12:9 "*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me*."

3. (:3) Judging the end result of their efforts to be **Futile**
"*Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, 'Even what they are building – if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down*!'"

Nothing more demoralizing than to think that all of your hard work and sacrifice and blood, sweat and tears will result in blowing in the wind; your wall will be so flimsy that the light footsteps of a fox would dislodge the stones

Satan wants us to believe in the humanistic message of Ecclesiastes – that men are destined for

vanity – all of your efforts won't amount to anything in the end – but the power of Jesus Christ makes for a far different ending – one that is satisfying; a wall that is indestructible; a church that cannot be defeated – not even the gates of hell can prevail against what Christ sets out to accomplish

II. (:4-6) TWO FOLD RESPONSE

A. (:4-5) Response of Prayer – Lord, Blow them up – Imprecatory Prayers

"*Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders.*"

What about loving your enemies?? Father, forgive them …. Turning the other cheek . . .

Yamauchi: Nehemiah did not personally take action against his opponents but called down the vengeance of God. Ackroyd: "To understand such violent language, we need to appreciate fully the sense of the divine purpose at work, so that opposition is not seen in human terms but as opposition to God himself." Nehemiah's prayer borrows from the language of Jeremiah (Jer 12:3; 17:18; 18:21-23).

Warren Wiersbe: We must remember that Nehemiah was praying as a servant of God concerned for the glory of God. He was not requesting personal vengeance but official vindication for God's people. The enemy had blasphemously provoked God before the builders, and this was a terrible sin. The opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah against the Jews was in reality opposition against God.

Breneman: Christians are under the new covenant and are admonished to love our enemies and to make it our primary concern to lead a wicked world to faith and forgiveness through the message of the cross. Nevertheless, God's people can ask him to judge injustice and to thwart the plans of those who would hinder God's work.

Matthew Henry: Therefore we should be angry at the malice of persecutors, not because it is abusive to us, but because it is offensive to God; and on that we may ground an expectation that God will appear against it. Ps. lxxiv. 18, 22

Don't be Demoralized

We need to strengthen ourselves in the Lord; allow Him to constantly encourage us; we need strong spiritual leaders that will set the example in this area of encouragement

B. (:6) Response of Hard Work – Staying on Task – Keep working hard

"*So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.*"

Derek Kidner: the sturdy simplicity of that statement, and of the behaviour it records, makes Sanballat and his friends suddenly appear rather small and shrill, dwarfed by the faith, unity and energy of the weak. The builders' method, too, was sound in that it gave priority to closing the ring, at however modest a level, rather than to completing a number of separate sections in succession.

Christ did not answer back; Apostle Paul did not debate his detractors. "*I labored even more*

than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." 1 Cor. 15:10

Jason Freeman: Circle the phrase, "*half its height*."

Isn't that the way it always happens? Right when you come to the halfway point discouragement sets in. When we start something new our excitement and enthusiasm for a project/ for a relationship/ for our faith carries us forward. But then we come to the point of no return, we reach the mid-way point and negative thoughts begin. We begin to examine our progress. What once seemed possible now looks impossible, the results that at first encouraged us now appear small and insignificant, the help we had in the beginning has started to fade and the finish line seems more distant then when we began.

Discouragement loves the mid-point. It loves the point of no return – the place where you can't start over and you can't quit (because the cost of failure is too great). The point where your accomplishments don't seem to match the energy or resources you have spent.

Keep Your Focus

Staying on task solves a multitude of attitude problems.

Will look at the same two fold response next week –

Derek Kidner: The partnership of heaven and earth, of trust and good management, is taken for granted as something normal and harmonious; and the order of precedence between them is no formality"

III. (:7-8) ATTACK #2: INTIMIDATING FAITHFUL WORKERS – MILITARY ATTACK

A. (:7) God's Enemies Respond in Anger When God's Kingdom Program Advances

1. Powerful Alliance – Understandable that the people would be fearful
   "*Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites*"

Samaritans were led by Sanballat; Arabs were led by Geshem; and the Ammonites by Tobiah (**2:19**)

John MacArthur: *the Ashdodites* – Added to the list of enemies already given are the dwellers of Ashdod, one of the former Philistine cities to the West of Jerusalem. Apparently they came to the point where they were at least contemplating a full-scale attack on Jerusalem because of the rapid progress of the wall.

Warren Wiersbe: The city was now completely surrounded by enemies! To the north were Sanballat and the Samaritans; to the east, Tobiah and the Ammonites; to the south, Geshem and the Arabs; and to the west, the Ashdodites. Ashdod was perhaps the most important city in Philistia at that time, and the Philistines did not want to see a strong community in Jerusalem.

2. Progressive Accomplishments – repairs were being made successfully
   "*heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed,*"

Matthew Henry: They flattered themselves with a fancy that the work would soon stand still of itself; but, when they hear that it went on and prospered, they were angry at the Jews for being so hasty to push the work forward, and angry at themselves for being so slow in opposing it.

3. Passionate Anger
   "*they were very angry*."

Redpath: The world will always be angry at any message which exposes sin. If a preacher dares to emphasize the truth that the New Testament demands repentance, that behind all saving faith there must be a deliberate turning from sin before there can be any blessing, that the gospel ruthlessly exposes our tragic condition and our utter bankruptcy before it applies the balm of Gilead – I'm telling you, the world will always be angry at a message like that.

B. (:8) God's Enemies Conspire to Fight Against God's Faithful Workers and God's Kingdom Program

1. Unity is no problem for God's Enemies
   "*All of them conspired together*"
   Might make for strange bedfellows …
   "You can't beat collusion" . . . but we can with God's help
   Secret conspiracy involved because of the blessing of Artaxerxes

Warren Wiersbe: God's people sometimes have difficulty working together, but the people of the world have no problem uniting in opposition to the work of the Lord.

2. Persecution Should be Expected – directed against God's vital interests
   "*to come and fight against Jerusalem*"

3. Goal is to Demoralize God's Faithful Workers
   "*and to cause a disturbance in it*."

Derek Kidner: How much of this was mere sabre-rattling it is hard to be sure. The failure of this impressive group to strike a single blow suggests that "*the king's letters*" (**2:9**) gave them pause. But their plotting, however half-hearted, clearly included potential raids and harassments (**8**), and had to be taken seriously.

(:14) CONCLUSION:

"*Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses*."

Theodore Roosevelt: It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly. Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure,

than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where do we see examples of the anger of God's enemies being unleashed today? What type of criticism have we faced for attempting great things for God?

2) Are we willing to maintain our testimony to the Lord even if others ridicule us?

3) Is the type of imprecatory prayer we see here still appropriate in the church age?

4) Is our church characterized by people who are united together with a mind to work?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Dr. Ralph Davis: How are we to view Nehemiah's prayer? Some interpreters get "antsy" here and think this practice is surely unworthy of New Testament Christians. But before we jump all over Nehemiah, we should keep the following observations in mind:
a. It is a prayer for justice, for judgment against sin.
b. As such, it is a prayer for God to act. Nehemiah is not presuming to take vengeance into his owns hands; he commits that to God, which is exactly what Romans 12 instructs us to do.
c. This prayer presupposes that the project in question is the work of God; hence to mock it or those doing it is to assault the honor of God.
d. These are not personal enemies (as those Jesus speaks of in Matt. 5:43ff.) but enemies of God's kingdom.
e. There is no indication that Sanballat, Tobiah, et al., repented or sought repentance, and so considerations like those in Matthew 18:21-22 do not apply (sentimentalists sometimes seem to expect such).

Steve Zeisler: Over and over again, the voices challenged, frustrated, and belittled the Jews. Why would it be different this time? The walls were broken because their hearts were broken. That remains one of the points of application for us. Most of us live with restrictions we don't need to live with. Most of us have stopped trying in some area of our life because we've grown so weary of failure. Most of us have things about us that we don't believe God can do. We've stopped talking to him about them. What's the point? And even if we did start, opponents would jump in and ridicule us: "If even a fox were to jump on that sad, ridiculous effort you're making, it would topple in a minute. It's not good for anything." . . .

Nehemiah began not by giving lectures to the workers, organizing raiding parties against the enemies, or creating propaganda campaigns to put a different spin on the words that they were saying. He didn't begin with any kind of human response to the problem. The first thing he did was go to God and say, "Fight for us, Lord."

John Johnson: THIS IS WHAT SHAME DOES:
1) IT RIDICULES ONE'S ABILITIES
- Sanballat mocked those on the wall for overestimating their abilities (verse 2)
- "What are these feeble, withered, LAME Jews doing?"
- "Will they restore it by themselves, as if they are capable of fixing anything?"

2) SHAME ALSO RIDICULES ONE'S FAITH
- "Will they bring sacrifices to a God who long since abandoned them?" (verse 2)
- "Do they think He is interested anymore?"
- Their intent was to keep them in their statement of judgment, of unforgiveness
- "Do their prayers will build this wall?"

3) SHAME RIDICULES ONE'S DREAMS
- Can they finish in a day, or even in their lifetime? (verse 2)
- Between the lines: "Have these idiots any idea the task they have taken on?"
- "Can they build with materials that have lost their integrity, which fire has corrupted?"
- "Anyone knows limestone, softened by fire, loses its durability."
- Added to the shame was the sarcasm of Tobiah "Even the lightness of a fox will create its own breaches" (verse 3)

Chuck Swindoll: He arrived in Jerusalem a solitary man with the task of overcoming years of apathy and entrenched enemy resistance, not to mention the already daunting engineering challenge of rebuilding the wall. Leadership, unlike mere management, is all about constructive change. How he got this project started is a model for leaders who want to move their organization toward more successful directions. His methods included astute observation, careful planning, appropriate timing, savvy motivation, effective communication, and unwavering dedication to a clear vision. Is it any wonder he succeeded?

Most importantly, Nehemiah never wandered far from his God, which prepared him to handle one of the greatest challenges to effective leadership: criticism.

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Dealing with Discouragement**

Introduction: When you're doing something for God and things are going well, you better watch out. Because that's when Satan likes to attack. There will always be opposition to anything that you attempt to do for God, and it's going well. It's like someone said, when God's people have a mind to work, then the enemy has a mind to wreck.

Satan uses the same old devices -- let's look at discouragement and how to deal with it.

I. The Curse of Discouragement

A. Discouragement is Critical

One of Satan's greatest weapons is ridicule. He'll just ridicule people. Thomas Carlyle called ridicule the language of the devil. Shakespeare said ridicule was paper bullets to the brain. But let me tell you, some of those paper bullets have slain many a warrior. There are some people that can stand up under a lot of pressure, but they wither and crumble when they're ridiculed.

- Criticizes their size
- Asks taunting questions

B. Discouragement is Concentrated

Now what I want you to see here is how these names that are given and these people groups, if you look at a map geographically, they kind of surround the city of Jerusalem. There's Sanballat

of Samaria, there's Tobiah of Ammon, there's the Arabians, there's the men of Ashdod. And again, if you look at that on a map, you would see Samaria was to the north, and Ammon was to the east, and the Arabs was to the south, and Ashdod was to the west. And so we could just really look at it and say, this attack was from all sides.

C. Discouragement is Clever – 4:6
Satan knows exactly the time when to hit you. He knows exactly the time when to come at you. And a lot of times it is when you're halfway done.

D. Discouragement is Contagious – 4:10
If the leaders get discouraged, you can rest assured the people are going to get discouraged.

II. The Cause of Discouragement
A. Fatigue – 4:10
Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is to go to sleep. One French philosopher said this, I have so much to do today, I simply must go to bed. Vince Lombardi said fatigue makes cowards of us all.

B. Frustration – 4:10
Every building site you've ever been to where things are happening is going to have piles of rubbish around. And I'll tell you something else, whenever God is working, that doesn't mean there's going to be an absence of problems or friction. In fact, the friction and the problems might be an indication that God is doing things. And so a lot of times what will happen is some people will come along and they'll point out some of the problems and some of the frictions and what they'll fail to see is what God is doing.

C. Failure – because of their negative outlook
They don't have a mind to work anymore. They've developed this negative outlook. And again, that's exactly what Satan wants.

You ever hear the expression in the doldrums? Someone's in the doldrums. You know what that comes from? This is actually a part of the ocean near the equator that's called the doldrums. And the reason it's called that, it's a place where it just seems like when a vessel gets there, it doesn't make a whole lot of progress. It's an area that abounds with baffling winds that makes it hard for any vessel to sail through there. And so it just looks like there's no progress that's being made. It's called the doldrums. And a lot of times, spiritually, that's where people can get into doldrums.

D. Fear – 4:11
Here's this external pressure now that amplifies the internal weakness, and there's fear. Well, fear will paralyze you. It'll keep you from doing what God wants you to do. Fear is the dark room where negatives are developed.

III. The Cure for Discouragement
A. Take it to the Lord in Prayer
B. Develop a Warrior Mentality – 4:13
C. Stay Focused on the Lord – 4:14
D. Be Vigilant While You Work – 4:15
E. Determine a Rallying Point – 4:19

TEXT: Nehemiah 4:9-23

TITLE: KEEP YOUR GUARD UP – KEEP PRAYING . . . KEEP TRUSTING . . . KEEP GUARDING . . . KEEP WORKING

BIG IDEA:
ANGRY OPPOSITION REQUIRES A CONSTANT STATE OF GUARDED READINESS WHILE MAINTAINING FOCUS ON THE WORK AT HAND

INTRODUCTION:
Boxing illustration: Keeping your guard up – can never let your guard down; Certainly our forces stationed over in Iraq and Afghanistan understand this principle. The enemy can attack at any time. Their tactics are devious – suicide bombers – guerrilla warfare; you have to sleep with your weapon at your side; no different in the Christian warfare

Illustration of the **Christian's armor** – **Ephes. 6:16** *"in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."*
The devil is firing flaming arrows at us – trying to accuse us and mock us and intimidate us and discourage us from doing God's work; can't go out in this wicked world in the morning if we don't have on our Christian armor

We are told to "*Resist the devil*" and he will flee from us – not stand still and pray and do nothing

Once again we see the balance between trusting in God's Sovereign protection and yet taking our responsibility to protect ourselves

4 KEY ACTIVITIES TO FIGHT OFF DISCOURAGEMENT AND PROTECT AGAINST ENEMY ATTACKS:

I. (:9a) KEEP PRAYING – short phrase but ¼ of our message this morning
"*But we prayed to our God*"
Look at that transitional word "*But*" –
The Enemy does not want you to Pray; they had been plotting a surprise attack; they first had tried to insult the workers and discourage them with their mocking taunts – but we learned last week to boast in our weakness and allow the power of God to work on our behalf to accomplish what looks to be impossible; when **insults** (mocking, ridicule) didn't do the trick; they tried the **intimidation** of a military attack – but Nehemiah would not allow the people to wilt under such angry threats – He immediately turned to God in prayer

All of our work for God **must start with Prayer**; when we come under attack; when we feel the burden of discouragement, we need to go to God in prayer

Cares Chorus
by Kelly Willard
I cast all my cares upon You,
I lay all of my burdens down at Your feet.
And any time I don't know just what to do,
I will cast all my cares upon You.

Prayer has already been a **key theme** in the Book of Nehemiah – **Review**:
1:4 – fasts and prays when he hears the report of the devastation in Jerusalem – starts with confession of corporate sin; pleads for the favorable hand of God – providential blessing upon the work
2:4 -- moment of crisis before the king when he is about to present his petition – He shot up a quick inner prayer and then boldly made his request
2:12 – listening to God speak back to him and form the vision in his mind and heart for the work that needed to be done and for the strategy to accomplish the work
Chap. 3 – prayers of consecration associated with the completing of various phases of the rebuilding project
Now we get to **Chap. 4** and the angry opposition that tries to shut down God's work – once again the leaders of God's people must start with prayer **– vs. 4-5**

A. The Privilege of Prayer

Not a waste of time or a burden

Look at how Christ valued the time spent alone with His heavenly Father; he protected that time and made it a priority – despite his busy schedule and all of the demands upon Him

Study His prayer in **John 17:25-26** *"O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them*." Spent the hours right before His arrest, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane

B. The Personal Nature of Prayer

- personal in the <u>relationship</u> we have to God as our Father and Chief Shepherd – pray to "*our*" God
- personal in the <u>concern</u> God has for our individual needs – "It matters to Him concerning you" – Think about that – the God of the universe – the one who created each star in the vast universe; the one who is orchestrating His grand plan for all of history – it matters to Him concerning you

  1 Pet. 5:7 "*casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you*" – Do you think the Jews in Jerusalem were troubled with any anxiety or fear?
- personal in the <u>plan</u> that God has for each of our lives – not just a master plan for all of history

C. The Power of Prayer

E. M. Bounds <u>Power Through Prayer</u>
"What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use – men of prayer, men mighty in **prayer.** . . The pulpit of this day is weak in praying. The pride of learning is against the dependent humility of prayer. . . Prayer is not to the modern pulpit the mighty force it was in Paul's life or Paul's ministry. Every preacher who does not make prayer a mighty factor in his own life and ministry is weak as a factor in God's work and is powerless to project God's cause in this world."
(Also pp. 122-123)

But Nehemiah does not stop with Prayer – there are 3 other critical activities that provide the proper balance; emphasis on prayer does not mean we ignore our practical responsibilities and

take care of the things we can control

II. (:14a, 20) KEEP TRUSTING

"*Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord our God*"
Ps. 20:7

"*and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith*" **1 John 5:4**

Nehemiah does not have a great deal to say about **Faith** in this chapter – but he models it in his courage as he rallies the people – two very short expressions of faith:

A. Remember the Greatness of God = Only defense against paralyzing fear and discouragement

Vs. 14a *"When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: 'Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome'"* . . *and fight* …

Good leader senses the fear that is rising and takes action to counter it;
Takes courage to inspire courage in others
Need to take our eyes off of our troubles and our circumstances; then off of ourselves and our weakness and inadequacies and **turn our eyes upon Jesus**
Music is a great help; reading through the Psalms and finding one that fits our emotional State; remembering how God has come through for you and your family in the past

B. Remember the Grace of God -- He Gives us the Victory

Vs. 20 *"Our God will fight for us"* [just had exhorted the people to be prepared to fight]
Sometimes after ministry success, we get too big for our britches; we forget our own bankruptcy and the grace of God that accomplished all for us; Very sad when God's people want to take credit for God's victories
No challenge is too great if God is on our side – Remember the grasshopper mentality (Num. 13:33) of the spies who had checked out the promised land – the fruit looks great but there are giants in the land – be like Joshua and Caleb who understood that *"Our God will fight for us"*

The Enemy does not want you to Trust in God

Even though the success of the venture depends ultimately on the providential favor of the sovereign God (which is why it is so essential to keep on praying and keep on trusting), Nehemiah devotes most of the attention in this chapter to the 2 activities that involve man's responsibility: **Keep Guarding** and **Keep Working**
He is very **practical** in his administration of the work and his directing of the efforts of the people

III. (:9b-14) KEEP GUARDING = the main focus of this chapter – Keep Your Guard Up

A. (:9b) Constant Vigilance

"*and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night*"
Cannot relax for a moment; don't be surprised by opposition

The Enemy does not want you to Be on Guard

How do we guard our children against the forces of evil in this world – certainly not by sending them out to pre-school to be influenced at such a young age when they are so vulnerable; certainly we are careful about the type of friends they hang around

How do we guard our own eyes against lust; against temptation in any form; if we know we are weak in an area, we need to set up a guard; may involve some accountability

How do we guard the church against error? Have to check into problems and take action; can't just ignore things and hope that things will take care of themselves

Constant vigilance is needed because of:

B. (:10-12) Constant Threat of Discouragement – 3 specific threats detailed here

1. Overwhelming Task (:10)

   "*Thus in Judah it was said, 'The strength of the burden bearers is failing, Yet there is much rubbish; and we ourselves are unable to rebuild the wall.'*"

   "*the work is great and extensive*" (:20)

   How do we respond when faced with tasks that seem overwhelming?
   Doubting their ability to complete the task; plus they were dog-tired from having reached the half-way mark

Wiersbe: Why did this discouragement rise from the royal tribe of **Judah**? (See Gen. 49:8-12). They had David's blood in their veins, and you would think they would be men and women of great faith and courage. The answer is found in **Nehemiah 6:17-19**: Some people in the tribe of Judah were secretly cooperating with the enemy. The ties of marriage were stronger than the bonds of commitment to the Lord. According to **13:15-22**, some of the leaders of Judah were not wholly devoted to the Lord, but were more interested in making money. The combination of marriage and money divided their loyalties, and they became the cause of discouragement.

Important that we impact unbelievers; don't be in relationships with unbelievers where they are impacting you negatively and drawing you away from the Lord; Are you being used by the enemy to discourage the hearts of God's faithful people; how about discouraging the hearts of your parents??

Redpath: If these walls were to stand, they had to be built on solid foundations, and therefore every bit of rubbish had to be cleared away until the foundations were exposed. Before the walls could be built, there was a great deal of underground work to be done. Before they started building the walls upward, they had to have the foundations downward. Before they could bear fruit outwardly, they had to bear fruit inwardly. They had to go down before they could go up.

2. Covert Conspiracies (:11)

   "*Our enemies said, 'They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work.'*"

   3 pretty intimidating objectives: all planned and carried out in secret (supposedly)

   a. Infiltration

b. Annihilation
c. Cessation

cf. political scheming in the workplace

3. Internal Doubts (:12) – Failing Hearts

"When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, 'They will come up against us from every place where you may turn,'"

Yamauchi: *"Ten times over"* is an idiomatic expression for "again and again" (Gen 31:41).

Report of the **pessimists** – no way out; impossible situation; hopeless; no way to turn for deliverance; that report led to growing fear among the leaders and the people

C. (:13a) Concentration of Defenses on Points of Weakness

"then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places,"

Anticipate where the enemy is most likely to strike; act strategically;
Use your resources wisely

D. (:13b, 14b) Concern for Personal Interests

"and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows."
"fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses."

Remember that they were positioned to do the work of rebuilding closest to their home.

Protecting what is most precious is a great motivator; self preservation;
Some things are worth fighting for

IV. (:15-23) KEEP WORKING (WHILE YOU KEEP GUARDING) – Six Insights:

A. (:15) Staying on Task

"When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work."

Careful guarding provides the safe environment for staying focused on the work God has called us to carry out
God is the one who personally frustrates the plans of His enemies and grants us success; the coalition conspiracy apparently backed off their plans for a military strike once they lost the element of surprise – Why would they back off??

Ps. 33:10-11 *"The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation."*

The Enemy does not want you to keep working to accomplish God's Kingdom Priorities

B. (:16-18a) Balancing Guarding and Working

1. Half of the people delegated to each priority – Guarding and Working

"From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates;"

Spurgeon loved this verse right here …
Wiersbe: When Charles Spurgeon started his church magazine in 1865, he borrowed the title from Nehemiah and called the publication The Sword and the Trowel. He said it was "a record of combat with sin and labor for the Lord." It is not enough to build the wall; we must also be on guard lest the enemy take it from us. **Building** and **battling** are both a normal part of the Christian life if we are faithful disciples (Luke 14:28-33).

Might be referring to some special subset of people … or perhaps to all of the men;
Nice balance between offensive and defensive weapons

2. Strategic Military Leadership
   "and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah."
   Leadership is always important

3. Even the Workers (the Builders) were always prepared to Fight
   "Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. As for the builders; each wore his sword girded at his side as he built"

   No one should be found who isn't holding a weapon and prepared to use it

C. (:18b-20a) Concentrating Defenses at the Point of Attack

"while the trumpeter stood near me. I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, 'The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there.'"

Clear communication; pre-determined signals and instructions; everybody on the same page; not trying to fight the enemy alone; rallying the troops and unifying them to make a united stand against the onslaught of the enemy;

Application: do we sound the alarm when an attack arises? Do we rally to one another's side to fight the enemy together? Or is everyone isolated, fighting their own little battle with no help from the body?
"*the work is great and extensive*" – much to accomplish; What can I do to help?

D. (:21) Maximizing Every Opportunity to Work

"So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared."

Had to use every minute of daylight available; wanted to complete the task as quickly as possible; when the sun came up the next day they started all over again; had to be an exhausting project;

E. (:22) Sacrificing Comfort for Protection and Productivity

"At that time I also said to the people, 'Let each man with his servant spend the night

within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day.'"

Important to concentrate the forces within the walls of Jerusalem.

Fensham: The people coming from the rural areas and villages preferred to spend the night in their homes. This created a situation of movement into the city early in the morning and out of the city late in the evening. This could be dangerous for two reasons: the people going to and fro might be attacked by the enemies, and it was not easy to check on the people arriving. The enemies might easily have the opportunity to sneak in.

F. (:23) Leading by Example

"*So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water*."

Not some type of ivory tower, theoretical leadership. Nehemiah was down in the trenches, rolling up his sleeves, strapping a sword on his thigh and calling out "Hand me another brick." His family did not enjoy some type of royal pass where they took the cushy spectator seats and watched the work from afar. They volunteered for the dirtiest and hardest tasks and showed people the way.

CONCLUSION:

No time for discouragement in the work of the Lord; we need to be growing in holiness; we need to be using our spiritual gifts to build the church of Jesus Christ –

"*Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lie ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*." Philippians 3:12-14

For us that one thing that we must do involves four key activities to fight off discouragement and protect against enemy attacks:

- Keep **Praying**
- Keep **Trusting**
- Keep **Guarding**
- Keep **Working**

ANGRY OPPOSITION REQUIRES A CONSTANT STATE OF GUARDED READINESS WHILE MAINTAINING FOCUS ON THE WORK AT HAND

Swindoll: Discouragement is nothing more than a barrier Satan erects between great people and great achievements. I wonder how many great triumphs we might have seen but didn't because great people simply lost heart.

Poem: **Don't Quit**

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low, and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,

When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As everyone of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won had he stuck it out.
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,
You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out,
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,
It's when things seem worse,
That you must not quit.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When are you tempted to rely on prayer to the exclusion of being responsible to do the practical things that you can impact?

2) What qualities of a good leader does Nehemiah exhibit in this passage?

3) How do we fight off discouragement and fear?

4) Should God's people always stand and fight or is it appropriate at times to retreat or surrender?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kidner: The famous sword-and-trowel exercise, which could have been a fiasco, was well thought out. Builders, needing both hands free, had swords at their belts; carriers, ranging further and risking more, needed weapons at the ready. But the heavier and longer-range equipment (16) could not be dealt with in such ways, nor could defence be simply a matter of every man fighting for himself. The answer was the shift-system for some, and the posting of officers as described in verse 16, unified by a single commander and clear communication (18b-20). But to Nehemiah these were no more than workmanlike precautions of limited value. His confidence went deeper: *Our God will fight for us* (20). He knew the truth of Psalm 127: "*Unless the Lord builds . . . Unless the Lord watches over the city . . . It is in vain*."

Redpath: The final documentary evidence of the church is that a work is going on, that a wall is being built, that a life is being transformed. I believe that if Satan gets Christian people involved in controversy at the expense of capturing souls for Christ he has secured a master stroke. Men

spend their lives in so-called "defense of truth," and defense of position, and neglect the main task of building. They fight over hairsplitting matters of doctrine while souls are perishing.

The enemy used force once against John Bunyan and flung him into the Bedford jail, but the wall went up because there he wrote Pilgrim's Progress. Five times they put Wesley in jail, but the wall went up and the Methodist revival spread like a plague. The enemy can use force and pressure, but the only answer is that the wall goes up. The best defense of truth and the best attack against error is to propagate the gospel, and to build up the Spirit-filled life. Nehemiah got on with the job even as he battled against the foe; his principle was never to leave the building for the battling.

MacArthur: Perseverance in the Christian life is a ceaseless warfare against the forces of the kingdom of darkness (see Eph. 6:10-19). Christians therefore need to be reminded to expect hardships and persecution and not be dismayed by them. Jesus promised that "*in the world you have tribulation*" (John 16:33). "*Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus,*" Paul exhorted Timothy, since "*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*" (2 Tim. 2:3; 3:12). James gave the good news that such tribulation produces spiritual endurance (James 1:2-4).

Alan Cairns: **Is. 40:31** Answer to discouragement in the ministry; when the bearers of the burdens of the work are feeling discouraged in the heat of the day you seek your strength from the Lord; God will either take the burden off your shoulders or strengthen your shoulders to bear it; You don't get stronger by having all the burdens taken away; If He doesn't take it away it is for your good; Here's the danger when the burden bearers get weak; You can't build a wall on top of a bunch of rubbish; you need to remove the rubbish; when you get tired the rubbish begins to accumulate; the devil has one purpose in mind: make the work to cease; don't give any place to the devil; Why not be afraid? Remember the Lord! Don't give in to weakness or fear; the future of your family is at stake; everybody committed themselves to the work and to the guarding of the work; use the sword of the Spirit for the battle for souls (evangelistic zeal), and for the battle for your family and for your church

TEXT: Nehemiah 5:1-13

TITLE: FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION – THREAT FROM WITHIN

BIG IDEA:
GOD'S LEADERS MUST PROHIBIT ANY TYPE OF FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION (AND SET THE EXAMPLE FOR SACRIFICIAL MINISTRY)

INTRODUCTION:
As I was finishing my preparation last night for today, I came across an interesting reference on the web to the message I preached last week from Neh 4 – Keep on Praying, Trusting, Battling and Building. Apparently Coach Harbaugh of the Baltimore Ravens must be reading my sermons on my BibleOutlines site. Because after the Ravens defeated the Raiders last Sunday to qualify for the playoffs, Coach geared his locker room speech around the same message from Neh.4. He brandished a sword and a shovel before the players and gave a pep talk about the team's identity revolving around **Building** and **Battling**. In fact the team is going to wear a new patch on their jersey with emblem of a sword and a shovel. Pretty powerful stuff. I'm not sure how he'll use today's message – but I'm glad he's tuned in!

Today we are switching gears from threats from without to look at threats from within – threats that could break apart the unity of God's people and cause the work to come to a screeching halt.
[Read the text]
Need some background before exploring this subject of Financial Exploitation.

OUR CULTURAL CONTEXT
Examples of Financial Exploitation: (major problem in our culture)
- Overextension of Credit – targeting college students and young people and encouraging them to buy things they cannot really afford on credit; not caring about the financial strain that is going to result

> "Predatory lending" is defined as consumer loans with any or all of the following characteristics: aggressive and deceptive marketing, lack of concern for the borrower's ability to pay, high interest rates and excessive fees, unnecessary provisions that do not benefit the borrower (e.g., balloon payments or single-premium credit life insurance), large prepayment penalties, or faulty . Such abuses occur with institutions such as consumer finance companies, banks, and mortgage brokers. These lenders cater to low-income, high-risk consumers who may have difficulty obtaining traditional mortgage credit.
> http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-161557324/consumer-experiences-predatory-lending.html

- Whole home mortgage travesty – taking advantage of people's dreams to fulfill the American Dream; encouraging them to buy a home they cannot really afford; only to have it foreclosed on them down the road; think of the impact this continues to have on individuals as well as our overall national economy; foreclosures at an all-time high

- Elderly are often the target of various schemes – especially dishonest tactics designed to dupe them out of their savings

- Non profit organizations that take such a high percentage of the donations for administration costs (fund raising, excessive internal salaries, etc.)

> For better or worse, the percentage of total expenses going to program costs is the most common measure of nonprofit organizational efficiency. Focus group research has found that donors expect worthy organizations to have low fundraising and administrative costs. Consequently, nonprofits frequently tout their low overhead ratios in their mailings to the donors. Most striking, the federal government's Combined

Federal Campaign, which raised nearly $250 million for nonprofits in 2003, requires that participating organizations certify that their combined fundraising and administrative costs constitute no more than 25 percent of the organization's total revenues.

http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/FAQ/index.php?category=40

Misuse of funds by large organizations – look at recent examples

- Christian ministries where the motivation of the spiritual leader is financial gain; look at their standard of living compared to the people they are supposedly serving; that is why transparency in financial accounting has become so much more important

CULTURAL CONTEXT OF ISRAEL:

Def. of Usury: the lending of money with an interest charge for its use; an unconscionable or exorbitant rate or amount of interest; in excess of legal rate – So it can refer to normal interest or excessive interest

Ex. 22:25 "*If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest*." Ok to lend – in fact a gracious thing to do where appropriate; but don't charge any interest at all

Deut. 23:19-20 "*You shall not charge interest to your countrymen; interest on money, food, or anything that may be loaned at interest. You may charge interest to a foreigner, but to your countrymen you shall not charge interest, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land which you are about to enter to possess*."
(**Deut. 15:7** principle of compassion toward the needy; don't use the upcoming Year of Jubilee as excuse not to lend at this point in time; "*open your hand wide*")
Lev. 25:35-40

John MacArthur: According to Mosaic law, the Jews were forbidden to take interest from their brothers on the loan of money, food, or anything else. If the person was destitute, they should consider it a gift. If they could pay it back later, it was to be without interest (see **Lv 25:36, 37; Det 23:19, 20**). Such generosity marked the godly (see **Ps 15:5; Jer 15:10**; cf. **Pr 28:8**). Interest could be taken from foreigners (**Dt 23:20**). Interest loans were known to exceed 50 percent at times in ancient nations. Such usury took advantage of people's desperation and was virtually impossible to repay, consuming their entire family assets and reducing the debtors to permanent slavery.

How can you treat members of God's family different than members of unbelievers??
Gal. 6:10 "*while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith*."
2 very different mindsets:

- What's mine is mine and I will use it how I see fit and nobody will lay any obligations on me – American spirit of independence
- What's mine is God's and the family of God will use it corporately in a way that meets the needs of all members of the body of Christ – early NT church – **Acts 2: 44-45** "*And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need*." We get so concerned about adding caveats to passages like this (it is not advocating socialism; it was voluntary; special hard times applied for these out of country visitors …) that we blunt the impact of the application to us

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

Raises the question:

Is it Wrong to Borrow and Lend Money?

Difference when you borrow to purchase assets that appreciate (such as your house) vs when you borrow to buy things you can't afford now and things that are depreciating so that if the loan were to be called in you would not have enough resources to pay it

Fundamental Principle: **Rom. 13:8** "*Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law*."

Our duty to pay our financial obligations – not saying that it is always wrong to borrow; you don't really owe in this context unless you are late in your payments

Special Circumstances within the Nation of Israel:

- Importance of the Private Ownership of the family's portion of the promised land

John MacArthur: Enemy opposition and difficult times in general had precipitated economic conditions which had a devastating effect on Judah's fragile life. The effect of this extortion on the morale of the returnees was worse than the enemy opposition.

I. (:1-5) COMPLAINT OF THE EXPLOITED POOR – WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

A. Financial Exploitation Threatens the Unity and Peace of God's People

"*Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.*"

Breneman: The same word "*outcry*" also describes the complaint of the Israelites under Egyptian oppression in **Exod 3:9**.

Look at the heartache in many family businesses – they split up over wrangling about the riches
Look at the alimony involved in divorce proceedings and all of the nastiness

Derek Kidner: While the few weeks of rebuilding seem certainly too short a time for these developments (the whole enterprise took only fifty-two days, 6:15), Judah's post-exilic history had not begun with Nehemiah's arrival, nor even with the "great trouble and shame" which were reported to him in Susa. His diverting of manpower from raising crops to raising walls may have been the final burden; it did not have to be the first.

The hidden strains within the community, masked by the concerted defence effort . . . needed bringing to the surface, like, e.g., those of the early church (cf. Acts 6:1); and in this case, as in the other, thanks to fine leadership, nothing but good was to come of the exposure. Incidentally it emerges that the wives could take some credit for the protest (1).

B. Financial Exploitation Creates a Caste System of Financial Disparity and Dependence

(Remember the importance of private ownership of each family's portion of the Promised Land)

Look at the cries of these Jewish laborers – you can see them throwing down their work tools in frustration and complaining that they just can't go on in this rebuilding project

1. Exploitation Arising From Desperate Economic Conditions –

Impact on **Large Families**

"*For there were those who said, 'We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live.'*"

2. Exploitation Arising From Mortgaging the Future for Present Survival = Usury --
Impact on **Landowners**

"*There were others who said, 'We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine.'*"

3. Exploitation Arising From Enforcing Servitude on Fellow Brethren --
Impact on **Liberty**

Prov. 22:7 "*The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender's slave*."
Doesn't forbid borrowing; but it is certainly better not to have to borrow

a. Downward Spiral of Borrowing

"*Also there were those who said, 'We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards.*"

Chuck Swindoll: Artaxerxes was demanding a heavy tribute in excess of what the land could produce . . . Furthermore, tax collectors in that day were notoriously corrupt, inflating the tax bill and pocketing the difference.

b. Incongruity of Slavery among Family Members

"*Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children.*"

c. Shame of Slavery

"*Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage already,*"
Might even be some references to some forced types of marriages that were not desirable but became almost necessary for survival

d. Hopelessness of No Potential for Income

"*and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others.*"

John MacArthur: Complaints against the terrible exploitation and extortion by the rich Jews who would not help, but forced people to sell their homes and children, while having no ability to redeem them back. Under normal conditions, the law offered the hope of releasing these young people through the remission of debts which occurred every 7 years or in the 50th year of Jubilee (**Lv 25**). [ex of Grace in the OT!} The custom of redemption made it possible to "buy back" the enslaved individual at almost any time, but the desperate financial situation of those times made that appear impossible.

II. (:6-11) CONCLUSION OF THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE – WHAT'S THE PRONOUNCEMENT?

A. Righteous Indignation

"*Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words.*"

There is a time when anger is appropriate and it is not sinful; Nehemiah was a busy man involved with directing a major project – but he recognized when he needed to pause, take off his hard hat and deal with personnel issues

B. Righteous Condemnation of Usury (in the Context of Family – Fellow Israelites)

> "*I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, 'You are exacting usury, each from his brother!'*"

Wrong to charge any interest at all to your fellow members of the nation of Israel;
Got very angry, but he thought before he spoke; leader must be able to exercise self control – especially of his emotions; not just making some knee-jerk decision; very deliberate and purposeful in how he addressed this crisis; but did not back away from the necessary confrontation and dealt with the situation immediately

Didn't blame everyone – addressed those who were the problem
Chuck Swindoll: "the guys with the heavy wallets"

John MacArthur: The commitment of the nobles and rulers to the reconstruction project was negligible (cf. 3:5), while their loyalty to Tobiah and others in opposition added to their opportunistic attitudes, placing them close to the status of opposition. They had become the enemy from within.

Derek Kidner: What exactly was the reproach in verse 7? . . . the words implied a strict business relationship (cf. the Heb. of **1 Sa. 22:2**), and Nehemiah's charge is therefore (in our terms) the lenders were behaving like pawnbrokers – and harsh ones at that – instead of like brothers. They were lending only with the best of cover [collateral] and, in their case, with the worst of motives. It was quite legal to demand a material pledge against a loan (cf. e.g., **Dt. 24:10-13**), and Nehemiah himself had probably exercised this right. But in hard times legal rights, to say nothing of wrongs, can deal mortal blows.

C. Righteous Reasons Why Usury is Sinful – Already stated above that it is just plain Wrong – but Wrong because it is **Inconsistent in 3 Key Areas:**

> 1. Contradicts the Historical Precedent of Conforming to God's Redemptive Purposes for His People = Release From Bondage
>
> > "*Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. I said to them, 'We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?' Then they were silent and could not find a word to say.*"

Got together a large group of the community – public sin needed to be dealt with in public way; he was going to use peer pressure in a positive way

Look at how God had delivered the nation out of bondage in Egypt
Look at how God was delivering them from the 70 year captivity to Babylon
Look at how they used their financial resources to buy out the servitude commitments of specific families in the immediate context
Now they were going to go against all of that precedent and disobey the law as well!

Wrong to enslave your fellow brothers – you could treat them as hired help… but not as slaves

2. Contradicts the Fear of the Lord and Maintaining a Good Testimony

"*Again I said, 'The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?'*"

Conscience alone should inform you as to what is good behavior and what is not pleasing to the Lord; plus they had all kinds of specific revelation on these subjects

The Fear of the Lord should be a reliable guide; their conscience was dulled; they were ignoring their accountability before God
That's what happens in our lives when we don't take sin seriously; when we live as the unsaved live

Wrong not to maintain your distinctive testimony before a watching world

3. Contradicts Godly Examples of Generosity

"*And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain.*"

Wrong not to practice Compassion and Generosity = Grace in the OT

Breneman: He had also been lending money and grain. Whatever is meant by the terminology, we might assume that Nehemiah had been acting in accordance with the Law. This would mean he was not charging interest, although he may have been loaning against a pledge. However, he realized that the situation now required **giving**, not lending. Sometimes one can help others by lending, but at other times even that is not enough; we must be willing to give unselfishly (cf. Deut. 15:7-18).

D. Righteous Plea for Repentance and Restitution

1. Plea for Repentance

"*Please, let us leave off this usury.*"

Must stop these practices immediately; no discussion or argumentation; he realized the potential for division among God's people and for impacting the work that needed to take place; you can't accomplish God's kingdom objectives when there is sin in the camp

2. Plea for Restitution

"*Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them.*"

Luke 19:1-10 Example of Zaccheus

Problem: "*hundredth part*" sounds like far too low an amount … may be referring to a refund of the interest charged on the loan or the capital gained by the acquisition of this property; some suggest variant readings here

III. (:12-13) COMMITMENT TO RESTITUTION BY THE REPENTANT WEALTHY – WHAT'S THE PROMISE?

A. Pledge of Restitution

1. Full Return

"*Then they said, 'We will give it back'*"

2. Free Pass

"*and will require nothing from them;*"

3. Faithful Compliance

"*we will do exactly as you say.*"

B. Ratification of the Pledge by Nehemiah

1. Confirmation by the Priests

"*So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise.*"

Need to reinforce their commitment to keep this promise; Nehemiah did not just naively trust them; he understood that they had made an emotional decision that they might easily renege on later

2. Curse by God

"*I also shook out the front of my garment and said, 'Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.'*"

Fensham: In those days people kept some of their personal belongings in the folds of their gowns or garments. We may call it the pocket of the gown. Nehemiah emptied the pocket before the people, shaking out everything. This became now a symbol of a curse, a kind of rite he performed to illustrate the curse. It was shown to the people in its empty state to signify that, if they should fail to keep the promise, they would be shaken out in the same manner and they would have nothing left.

C. Ratification of the Pledge by the Community

1. Positive Affirmation

"*And all the assembly said, 'Amen!'*"

2. Praise of the Almighty

"*And they praised the LORD.*"

3. Practical Application

"*Then the people did according to this promise.*"

CONCLUSION:

How Nehemiah dealt so decisively with sin in the midst of the people is the same way we must address any sin problem:

1) **Put a stop to it immediately** – remember our counseling skit – "STOP IT"! – you can't delay when it comes to sin

2) **Pay back** whatever you owe; make restitution; make things right; deliver apologies; ask for forgiveness
3) **Promise** not to revisit the sin; make a commitment; get some accountability; take your repentance seriously
4) **Praise the Lord** and move on – not just Put Off / but Put On the positive behavior and put the focus on pleasing the Lord and worshiping and serving Him

Make sure we are not taking advantage of anyone who is in a desperate situation; make sure that our financial decisions are marked by generosity and compassion

Next Week we will see the contrasting behavior from Financial Exploitation:
(:14-19) SETTING THE EXAMPLE FOR SACRIFICIAL MINISTRY

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why does this problem arise at this particular point in time and is addressed at this point in the book? Does it seem out of place or does it fit into the context?

2) Famine in Israel is usually associated with God's judgment. Why would there be a famine at the point when they are engaged in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and focused on God's kingdom priorities?

3) How do these instructions impact our practices of lending and borrowing in a capitalistic society today? What are the implications for a church borrowing money for a building program?

4) What do we learn about the importance of restitution and its connection to repentance?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Redpath: There was a food crisis in the Jerusalem area, a famine caused by the very large increase in population – the third verse tells about it. The country became overpopulated with the returning Jews and their large families. This was making immense demands upon the produce of the land, for there had probably been a neglect of tilling the land over the years of dispersion, and perhaps also neglect because of enthusiasm for rebuilding the wall.

Furthermore, heavy taxation was also bringing dissatisfaction. We see in **verse 4** that the king who had sent Nehemiah on his way still had this country under his control, and the people were obliged to pay heavy taxes. All these factors added up to a serious food shortage.

Unfortunately, as always, there were people who were prepared to take advantage of the situation. It must have been very distressing to Nehemiah to find that they were his own people, the Jews. A few were rich, and because they were rich they immediately took the chance to "feather their nests" at other people's expense, to grant loans at high rates of interest; to make mortgages only under oppressive terms, to take into their homes the sons and daughters of other people as slaves and make it impossible for their parents ever to redeem them again. This whole

unhealthy situation led to misunderstanding, trouble, and friction, doubt and suspicion among God's people. Those people who had been so united in objective became divided in affection, and Nehemiah found a situation developing that was threatening to bring to nothing the work of God.

Chuck Swindoll: In ancient times, the custom was to indenture oneself as a servant until the debt was paid. In other words, a man would exchange labor for enough cash to pay off his debt. He and, usually, his family with him would become the slaves of another for a period of time – but the creditors would charge so much interest that the borrower could never end his term of service.

Breneman: The culmination of these problems may have occurred shortly before the wall was finished in August-September. This would have been near the end of the harvest, and the creditors would have required payment of capital and interest on loans. According to 4:22, Nehemiah had asked the workers to stay in Jerusalem and not return to their villages. This must have caused a shortage of workers for the harvest. The extra labor on the wall no doubt affected the efficiency of the harvest and the income many families normally would have received from working in the harvest. In short, the economic situation was more critical because the people dedicated so much labor to the wall.

David Silversides: **Trouble Inside the Church**
Threat to the inner unity of the people of God;

I. (:1-10) Looking on Their Own Things

A. (:**1-5**) Complaints of the People

Wives joined with their husbands in this complaint; trying to feed their large families from meager resources at their disposal; those who were used to gathering corn now had to buy it because of the work on the walls and having to live within the city; had to mortgage their property to keep going; loan shark activity; children sold into slavery; Inexcusable conduct

B. (:**6-10**) Reaction of Nehemiah

1. Prompt Response – sympathized with afflicted brethren and realized this threat to unity of people of God required him to drop everything and address this problem
2. Angry Response – righteous anger against sin just as example of Christ in cleansing temple of moneychangers; not the uncontrollable fury of the carnal mind which comes so easily to all of us; we should be angry at blatant wickedness (**Ephes. 4:26** – an anger that is not sinful)
3. Thoughtful Response – controlled nature vs impulsive response which does more harm than good;
4. Public Rebuke of Open Sin – took the matter to the great assembly; wasn't pleasant
5. Abysmal Witness before the World – the heathen would reproach them because of their conduct

II. (:11-13) The Fruit of Repentance

Nehemiah demands no less; Spirit of God at work making this rebuke effective; rebuke does not automatically produce a good effect; Nehemiah took action to make sure that this commitment stuck; God reduce any man to utter poverty who refuses to perform this oath; day began with pain and ended with praise

III. (:14-18) A Pattern of the Believers

Showing yourself a pattern of good works – **Titus 2:7; 1 Tim. 4:12**

A. (:**14**) Nehemiah gave up what was due him – as governor his predecessors had served themselves first; undoubtedly he was a wealthy man, an officer of state and counselor to the king; so he waived his salary of governor because of the demands of the Lord's cause at that time; the fear of God governed him
B. (:**16**) A man committed to the Work of the Lord – he could have looked after his own business interests; but gave his attention and energy to the building of the wall (Phil 2:19-20)
C. (:**17-18**) An Example of Hospitality – wealthy man but a faithful steward; his wealth was decreasing during this period; supporting a wide range of people

IV. (:19) Seeking God's Blessing with a Clear Conscience
Must do our labor for the Lord rightly with an upright heart; not meriting forgiveness; but living righteously; how we treat the brethren is important in the eyes of God
Application: real Christianity affects our money

Jonathan Stobbs: **Faulty Finance and Dangerous Division**
(Pennzance Baptist Church) Event that had the ability to hamstring the work of God; places the whole work in jeopardy; comes at a time when Nehemiah is incredibly busy; selfishness brings trouble;
I. (:1-5) Greedy Exploitation
Circumstances: Famine and isolation from trade; enemy after failing to succeed from attacks from outside will try to attack from within; using selfishness and greedy ambition; how easy it is to put ourselves at the center of everything; this famine a result of failure of some kind – maybe directed against the nobles who have not been committed to the work; comes at a time when the people are extremely tired; lacked money for necessities and for taxes; people being ruthlessly exploited by rich Jews; even the wives were voicing their concerns at a time when culturally they would tend to be silent and let their husbands address it; Year of Jubilee intended to bring economics back into balance; land restored to original owners and slaves set free; only the children were being sold – breaking up the family; being treated as slaves and not as hired workers; God has a special concern for the poor

II. (:6-11) Godly Example that Nehemiah Presents
Luke 19:1-10 example of Zaccheus in making restitution

III. (:12-13) Guided Eventuality
If sin is public and open, so must be the repentance

Brian Bill: **How to Stop Strife**
Review:
Chap. 1 – personal challenge
Chap. 2 – political challenge
Chap. 3 – administrative challenge -- positioning the right workers in the right place for the right reasons.
Chap. 4 -- emotional challenge – discouragement
Chap. 5 – internal challenge --

Illustration: I'm told that when a group of thoroughbred horses face an enemy attack, they stand in a circle facing each other, and with their back legs, kick out at the foe. Donkeys, on the other hand, do just the opposite. They make a circle and face the threat while using their hind legs to kick at each other!

I. (:1-5) Complaints that Nehemiah Heard

II. (:6-13) Steps that He Took – His rebuke involved 6 different appeals

A. Appealed to their love (:7)
B. Reminded them of God's Redemptive purpose (:8)
C. Appeal based on God's Word (:9a)
D. Reminded to remember their Witness (:9b)
E. Appealed to his own actions (:10-11) – had lent money but not charged interest
F. Appealed to the judgment of God (:12-13)

III. (:14-19) The Example that Nehemiah Set
http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=58396

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Dealing with Conflict Head-on**
Introduction: It's really a chapter about conflict resolution. You know, that's kind of a hot topic in the business world, in the social arena, and rightfully so, because conflict can tear your team apart, whether you have a team in the church working together, or you have a team on the court, let's say, in athletics, or a team on the field. or in the home or in the office. Conflict can do irreparable damage to whatever team is trying to work together.

Here in **chapter 5**, he stops work on the wall. This is unique, because what opposition from without could not do, conflict from within was able to do, and that is to stop work on the building of the wall. And so he has to kind of lay down his tools, lay down his construction hat, and stop building the wall, and start dealing with the wall that the people were putting up between themselves, because there was conflict that was taking place among the people.

I. Recognize Legitimate Complaints
These are the ones that are putting the work into the wall. These are the ones that are sacrificing. These are the ones that are really devoted to doing what God wants done. But they have a problem in **verse 1**. Some rich, noble rulers there in Jerusalem were taking advantage of the situation and they were exploiting their fellow Jews.

There were four different groups of people who were in this crisis.

- **5:2** -- People who owned land, but didn't have any food
- **5:3** -- Landowners who had mortgaged their lands, vineyards, and houses in order to buy food. Inflation on the rise; prices were going higher; combination of debt and inflation wiped out any equity that they had and so they were selling their land to buy food
- **5:4** -- People forced to borrow money just to pay tribute taxes that went not for local services but directly to the king
- **5:5** – Those who were exploiting others -- not against the law of God to loan money to one another, but it is against the law of God in the Old Testament to charge interest on that loan. **Deut. 23:19-20**

II. Think Before You Speak – 5:6-7
Nehemiah got angry at such exploitation. Then he consulted with himself. The Hebrew literally reads this. *My heart consulted within me*. Some commentators have suggested another form of the Hebrew verb here could mean this. I controlled myself. I mastered my emotions. I mastered my feelings. And this is significant. You know, Nehemiah, he got filled with anger, but he didn't go off in a rage. He didn't blast those that were wrong. He stopped, he cooled off, he prayed

through the situation, he thought about it deeply. What does the Bible say in **Proverbs 16:32**? *He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city*.

III. Meet Face to Face
In **verse 7** it seems to indicate that first of all he confronted them privately, and then he confronted them publicly. Cf. pattern from **Matt. 18**

IV. Remind One Another of Your Special Relationship in God's Family
This is how you know that you're really a child of God, because you really love one another. It's a sign of true salvation.

V. Address the Offense Biblically – 5:8
He reminds them that they weren't right according to the scripture.

Nehemiah was also concerned about the name of God. Look at the end of **verse number 9** where he says, "*...ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies*?" They needed to remember that they were a witness to the rest of the world. The heathen were watching them to see how they were treating each other. And you know, Israel was to be a light to the nations.

VI. Seek Restoration – 5:11

VII. Remind One Another that God is Watching – 5:12
Upgrades the level of their commitment to an oath

VIII. Be an Example of Selflessness – 5:8, 10, 14
Selfishness destroys relationships. It divides churches. It brings misery. And so Nehemiah, you know what he's going to do? He's going to be an example as a leader of selflessness. He's going to model the opposite and expect others to act as he acts. Don't be selfish, but be selfless.

He laid aside his rights. He didn't take advantage of the people with his position and power. He had a right to that allowance from the people, serving them as governor, but he wouldn't do it. I mean, after all, think about it. When he ate a meal, it wasn't just him. He had 150 people that sat around his table. Who's going to pay for all that? Rather than taking from the people, Nehemiah took out of his own pocket and said, I'll take care of it myself. That's what he did. He was so generous. and ready to give. You know why? Because God was generous with him.

TEXT: Nehemiah 5:14-19

TITLE: EXAMPLE OF SACRIFICIAL MINISTRY

BIG IDEA:
SPIRITUAL LEADERS MUST SET THE EXAMPLE FOR SACRIFICIAL MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION:

I deserve better. Don't you frequently think that about your sacrificial service for the Lord? I mean here we are doing the hard work of trying to start a local church – that's what's at the heart of the Great Commission. (OK, maybe a little more evangelism would be helpful . . .) but I am putting a lot of energy and commitment into this ministry.

Look at how other leaders are demanding and receiving all types of perks. They make sure that people give them respect; pay them attractive salaries to minister; fix them up with a comfortable study with plenty of time off for travel and reflection and rest. My Monday mornings are not spent recuperating on the golf course. I'm back at the pressure grind of trying to eke out a living. **Don't I deserve a break**?

When I was young … did I want to go into the ministry because I wanted to live sacrificially for the Lord?? NO! I liked the life I say in our senior pastor. Don't have to sweat a lot; can spend a lot of time in your plush study; treated very well by everyone in the congregation and even in the community ..

Is it wrong for people to shower respect and personal favors and material compensation upon their spiritual leaders? No – that is not the lesson here.

- But demanding and expecting such treatment is wrong.
- Not being sensitive to your situation and what the Lord is trying to accomplish is wrong.
- Placing burdens on the people to whom you minister is wrong.
- Not setting an example of rolling up your sleeves and joining in the tedious part of the work is wrong.
- Thinking that you should be spoiled as a privileged prince or a king is wrong.

Let's not lose sight of the example of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and that of the Apostle Paul (saw much of this in our study of 1 Thessalonians) – the preeminent apostle who wrote so much of the NT and started so many productive ministries. What were there expectations and how were they treated?

Is it worth it to sacrifice in the ministry?

We must remember: the rewards have not yet been handed out

Nehemiah gives us a glimpse once again of what it means to set the example for sacrificial ministry.

SPIRITUAL LEADERS MUST SET THE EXAMPLE FOR SACRIFICIAL MINISTRY

This last half of chap. 5 is the balancing contrast to the example of financial exploitation in the ministry that we studied last week.
(lot of Scripture references today – parallel passages that drive home the main points)

Ralph Davis: (Re verses 14-19) which are something of an extract out of Nehemiah's diary. It interrupts the chronological flow of the matter at hand (cf. v. 14a), but is likely placed here to set forth a positive sample of Nehemiah's walking in the fear of God (v. 15) over against the heartlessness of the profiteering Jews in verses 1-13.

4 COMMITMENTS EVERY SPIRITUAL LEADER MUST MAKE:

If you are unwilling to make these commitments, do not aspire to spiritual leadership

I. (:14-15) LETTING GO OF RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES -- MODELING SERVANT LEADERSHIP

A. Good Example: Mindset of Foregoing Legitimate Privileges

> "*Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food allowance.*"

First term of office as governor (445 to 443 BC)

Christ: "*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant*" (**Phil. 2:5-7**)
"*You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to your. Truly, truly, I say to you a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*" (**John 13:13-17**)

Apostle Paul: "*Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? . . . But I have used none of these things . . . What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*" (**1 Cor. 9:3-18**)

B. Bad Example: Mindset of Forced Rule and Feathering One's Own Nest

1. Laying Burdens on the People

> "*But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people*"

Christ: "*Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" (**Matt. 11:28**)
"*The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves*

are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger." (**Matt. 23:2-4**)

Apostle Paul: "*Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?*" (**2 Cor. 12: 14-18**)

2. Leveraging their Position for Material Prosperity
   "*and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver;*"

Christ: "*The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*." (**Matt. 8:20**)
"*I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh*." (**John 6:51**)

Apostle Paul: "*Are they servants of Christ? – I speak as if insane – I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure*." (**2 Cor. 11: 23-27**)

Peter: "*I do not possess silver and gold*" (**Acts 3:6**)

Illustration: When the citizens of High Wycombe, England, elect a new mayor, all the town councilors are weighed in public, following an ancient custom. Those whose weight is less than or at least not more than when they took office are warmly applauded - they have not grown fat at public expense.

3. Lording it Over the People
   "*even their servants domineered the people.*"

Christ: Completely different leadership style -- "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many*." (**Matt. 20:25-28**)

Apostle Paul: "*But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith*" (**Phil. 2:17**)

(Diotrephes in 3 John)

C. Fundamental Motivation: Mindset of Fear of the Lord

"*But I did not do so because of the fear of God.*"

Prov. 19:23 "*The fear of the lord leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil.*"

People with a big ego and sense of their own importance have allowed their pride and ambition to suppress their fear of God; they come to believe that they are above the law of God; they deserve special exemptions; they live on a different plane and should not be held to the same accountability that applies to God's people in general
Matt. 18:1-6 – Instruction on Humility – how would you like to die an awful death by drowning? Good Question: *Who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*
You better not cause one of God's little ones to stumble or hurt them in any way because you are building an empire for yourself

We do not have to follow the crowd and fall into the same corrupt practices of the world; we need to dare to be a Daniel and stand out and be different

Christ: "*I say to you, 'My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows'*." (**Luke 12:4-7**)

Apostle Paul: "*work out your salvation with fear and trembling*" (**Phil. 2:12**)

II. (:16) LABORING AT THE TASK AT HAND – MODELING PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT INSTEAD OF EXPLOITATION

A. Rolling up one's own sleeves vs. Ivory Tower Delegation

"*I also applied myself to the work on this wall;*"

1. Shared Labor -- "*I applied myself*"

Some spiritual leaders present themselves as the designated "Visionary" – but their great vision involves you doing all the work that they find distasteful or tedious

Must be willing to do the dirty work – not just rally the troops to work hard; Nobody around to make Nehemiah do this; he applied himself to the work at hand

Problem of too many chiefs and not enough Indians

Verb: הֶחֱזַקְתִּי -- "use one's strength; put forth strength" –
word used throughout **chap. 3** for "*made repairs*"
1:10 used for the *strong hand of God*;
2:18 (ASV) "*And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work.*"

Gen. 48:2 "*When it was told to Jacob, 'Behold, your son Joseph has come to you,' Israel collected his strength and sat up in the bed*."

2. Sweat Equity -- "*to the work*"

Sam Ewing: Hard work spotlights the character of people; some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don't turn up at all.

1 Tim. 3:1 "*If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do*"

3. Staying on Task -- "*on this wall*"

Stayed on task – the work on this wall; did not get distracted; did not introduce his own agenda; did not rely on his own wisdom to come up with some other plan; allowed the Lord to build a vision in his mind and than implemented that vision

Christ (the Carpenter): "*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work*." (**John 4:34**) (cf. model of **Wayne Wever** - PEF)
"*For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves*." (**Luke 22:27**)
Came to seek and to save the lost – passed on to His disciples the Great Commission – we know what the task at hand is

Apostle Paul (the Tentmaker): worked night and day
"*I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus , that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive*.'" (**Acts 20:33-35**)

B. Valuing the Vulnerable vs. Selfish Exploitation
"*we did not buy any land,*"
Look at how "public servants" enrich themselves while in office and set themselves up for further riches when they leave office

- All types of real estate scams involving high level politicians

- Example of Insider Trading – always at the expense of someone

- Example of people using political office to get themselves a high-paying job when they leave

Breneman: The land Nehemiah refers to is that which governors could accumulate from people's failure to pay taxes or to repay debts.

MacArthur: Even though the time to purchase property from those forced to sell couldn't have been better, Nehemiah maintained a consistent personal policy not to take advantage of another's distress. He worked on the wall rather than spending his time building personal wealth.

Jer. 22:13-19 Key Passage [separate sermon]

Instead Christ modeled Compassion – **Is. 42:1-4**
Edward J. Young: Just as the bruised reed cannot withstand any force that might soon break it, so weak men, broken in power and strength because of oppression they are suffering, will collapse under violent force. The servant does not destroy such weak men. Rather, he takes pity upon their low estate. His actions are in strong contrast to those of earthly conquerors.

C. Committing Family Resources vs. Spoiling the Royal Household
"*and all my servants were gathered there for the work.*"

No one missing in action; followed Nehemiah's example
Benefiting the nation rather than working on his personal estate; like an Amish barn raising; many hands make light work; the lazy always make excuses

III. (:17-18) LEADING BY EXAMPLE IN THE AREA OF GENEROSITY -- MODELING SACRIFICING FOR THE NEEDS OF OTHERS

A. (:17-18a) Unselfish Sharing

1. Generous Hospitality -- Feeding the Appropriate Guests
   a. Providing for the Key Officials of the Kingdom
   "*Moreover, there were at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials,*"

You thought you didn't have a big enough dining room table to entertain people!

   b. Providing for the Visiting Dignitaries from other Nations
   "*besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us.*"

True public servant – ran the government at his own expense

Apostle Paul: "*nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.*" (**2 Thess. 3:8-9**)

"*So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*" (**Gal. 6:10**)

2. Generous Provisions – not talking about institutional type food here
   a. Allotment of Beef
   "*Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox and six choice sheep,*"

   b. Allotment of Poultry
   "*also birds were prepared for me;*"

   c. Allotment of Wine
   "*and once in ten days all sorts of wine were furnished in abundance.*"

Yamauchi: meat sufficient to provide one meal for 600 to 800 persons

Christ: "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" (**Matt. 6:11**) patterned after the manna in the wilderness

Apostle Paul: "*for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means; and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*" (**Phil. 4:11-13**)
2 Cor. 9:6-9 "*not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*"

B. (:18b) Unselfish Sensitivity

"*Yet for all this I did not demand the governor's food allowance, because the servitude was heavy on this people.*"

Absorbing the pressure and responsibility instead of passing it along to a people that were already overburdened

Don't be a Burden on the people, but a Blessing – (review of Point #1) – Nehemiah had no problem sacrificing in order to be a blessing to the people; he knew how much pressure they were already under
I. (:14-15) LETTING GO OF RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES --
MODELING SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Example of Egyptians by contrast – Jews were afflicted and oppressed and cried out; response was to beat them and lay even harder burdens on them ("Hand Me Another Brick" – play on title of Swindoll's commentary) – **Exod 1 :13-14; 5:7-21**

Example of Split of Kingdom – Rehoboam – **2 Chron. 10:1-11** – followed the foolish advice of the novice counselors who advocated an oppressive type of domineering rule; instead of following the wise counsel of the older elders who lobbied for kindness and compassion

IV. (:19) LOOKING FOR REWARD FROM GOD – CONCLUSION -- MODELING CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

"*Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.*"

Same plea repeated at the end of the book **13:14, 22, 31**

A. Appeal to God's **Faithfulness**

"*Remember me,*"

- Many promises about future rewards; God will not forget His loyal servants

B. Appeal to God's **Sovereignty**

"*O my God,*"

C. Appeal to God's **Goodness**
"*for good,*"
– comes down on the side of goodness; loves to give good gifts to His children

D. Appeal to God's **Justice**
"*according to all that I have done for this people.*"
Harvest Law still applies

In contrast to instant gratification and recognition and reward; Remember God's Harvest Law – as you sow, so shall you also reap; the compensation will ultimately be commensurate with the faithfulness; therefore be careful how you build; integrity of ministry is important

Max Lucado: (lesson that someone related to him) "God has shown me that IT'S NOT ABOUT ME, and IT'S NOT ABOUT NOW."

You want to look for reward from the right place; if you are a man-pleaser or looking for reward right now you will not endure through the ministry challenges and remain faithful

When you are motivated by the **fear of the Lord** and the desire to please Him . . .
When you act on the basis of **love and compassion for God's people** – sacrificing your own material resources to make sure you don't further burden down others . . .
You should have the expectation of ultimate reward from the righteous judge

Nehemiah's efforts brought tangible good results to God's people

Swindoll: This could appear to be a bold, self-promoting prayer at first glance, asking to be rewarded for all the good he's doing for the people of Jerusalem. But it's much more. This is a prayer that invites the Lord to hold him accountable for his actions and to treat him accordingly. (Psalms 139:23-24) Furthermore, he commits himself to such conduct as would be worthy of reward.

Leadership is no bed of roses –
J. Oswald Sanders: A cross stands in the way of spiritual leadership, a cross upon which the leader must consent to be impaled.

CONCLUSION:

Another birthday – <u>How do I want to be remembered?</u>
How did Nehemiah want to be remembered?
How did Paul want to be remembered?
As one who exemplified each of the **4 commitments** of spiritual leaders we have just studied:

A. Servant Leadership
<u>Wise master builder</u> who followed God's plan for church structure and ministry philosophy – that includes a plurality of godly servant elders in each local church – submitted to the Chief Shepherd (**1 Cor. 3:10**); not a shoddy builder who cuts corners and follows the path of expediency – whatever seems to produce the best results at the moment

B. Partnership Commitment
Aggressively using my spiritual gift for the furtherance of the kingdom; as well as

promoting the ministry of my fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord; in my case that means discernment and accuracy in expositing God's Word; *a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth* (**2 Tim. 2:15**)

C. Sacrificing for the Needs of Others

Boasting in not being a Burden to God's people, but rather a Blessing; Generous, unselfish, hospitable, gracious (**1 Cor. 9:3-18; 2 Cor. 11:23-27**)

D. Confidence in God's Faithfulness

Finish the course laid out for me as a faithful steward of what has been entrusted to me and look for that future reward (**2 Tim. 4:6-8**)

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why did Nehemiah go for such a long stretch of time (12 years) without accepting his deserved food allowance?

2) In what ways can leaders be a burden on the people whom they are supposed to be serving?

3) Where have you seen leaders practice a contented and generous spirit instead of a demanding and selfish spirit?

4) How confident are you that God will remember and reward you for the good that you have done for the kingdom?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Swindoll: **How to Handle a Promotion**

1. Promotions bring Privileges

Increased responsibility always affords the recipient new or added rights, benefits, and special favors. The wise leader will use them without abusing them. Temptations arise

2. Promotions Threaten Policies

His administration replaced a corrupt government. The people were used to dirty politics – including overtaxation, extortion, and favoritism. The leader's integrity is at stake.

3. Promotions Involve Projects

Nehemiah did not accept the position of governor so he could engage in his own pet enterprises. He stayed at the task of building the wall. He did not abuse the promotion. He didn't turn it into a lucrative opportunity for himself. He never lost sight of the goal.

4. Promotions Affect People

He led with compassion. My accountability to my Lord is the focus of my life. I fear Him too much to indulge myself.

Redpath: The previous leaders had made it a practice to profit at the expense of the people. Regardless of the poverty or the slavery or the unjust conditions around him, the governor usually saw to it that he himself never suffered, and that his needs were cared for first. . . It

would not have surprised the people if he had indulged in the same practice. But he saw that such a self-indulgent standard of living was threatening the whole testimony of God.

MacArthur: (v. 14) Refers to the provisions from the Persian administration, but from which Nehemiah had chosen not to partake because it would have to come from taxing his poverty-stricken people (v. 15). The statement is testimony to the wealth of Nehemiah gained as the king's cupbearer in Persia.

Rick Duncan: **When Builder Becomes a Blessing**
Leader must ask: Am I being a blessing to the people around me or a burden? A leader must know how to say "No" to himself so that he does not abuse the privileges and perks of leadership. You are building a broken down wall with a dream team? If you won't sacrifice to see the dream come true, then neither will they! Sacrifice is the clearest demonstration of your commitment to what could be. Restricting privileges always involves **sacrifice** and **servanthood.** v. 16.

Jim Drake: **Commitments of a Leader**
1. Commitment of Time – Nehemiah stayed on task for a long time (12 years mentioned here); look at how pastors hop around
2. Commitment of Sacrifice
3. Commitment of Compassion -- Understand where they're coming from. Understand their strengths and weaknesses. Understand their limitations and personality quirks. And when you understand those things, have compassion on them rather than demanding things of them that they aren't capable of doing.
4. Commitment of Humility
http://sermoncentral.com/Sermon.asp?SermonID=136712

Tim Olson: **Integrity in a Corrupt World**
Introduction: The Temptations of Position and Power; keys to maintaining your integrity:
1. (:14-16) Focus on the Work … Not the Perks
2. (:17-18) Focus on People's Needs . . . Not Personal Rights
3. (:19) Focus on God's Favor – Not Man's
Conclusion: Serve with Integrity

Marcus Lollar – Freedom Church – 3/3/19 – **Chapter 5**
I. (:1-8) We are Called to Engage the Community
- A. (:1-5) We Need to Be in the Presence of the People
- B. (:6-8) We Must Listen to the Community – be able to hear their needs

II. (:9-13) We are Called to Action When Faced with Injustice
- A. (:9-11) Be Willing to Call Out Injustice When You See it; don't procrastinate
- B. God's Word should be Our Standard When Speaking to Injustice; must know the Bible
- C. (:12-13) Expect a Response

III. (:14-18) We are Called to Be an Example in Our Community
- A. Don't Exploit the People but Serve Sacrificially
- B. Look at Poor Examples
- C. Look at Good Examples – especially example of Christ

IV. (:19) We are Called to Pray for God's Favor in Our Local Community
2 Chron. 16:9 – example of Christ

TEXT: Nehemiah 6:1-19

TITLE: GOD'S WORK PREVAILS DESPITE SATAN'S DEVIOUS TACTICS

BIG IDEA:
THE SCHEMING TACTICS OF GOD'S ENEMIES CAN NEVER THWART GOD'S PURPOSES

INTRODUCTION:

There are certain attitudes that can paralyze us and prevent us from accomplishing the work of God. Probably the biggest is **Fear** – fear of failure; fear of some type of opposition; fear of inadequacy; fear of what other people will think about what we are doing … Coupled closely with fear is **Discouragement** – losing heart and wanting to quit the fight. Satan works overtime to create these attitudes of fear and discouragement – maybe you had to fight off these paralyzing attitudes this past week. Satan uses **Deception** to try to get us to disbelieve God's promises and God's resources and believe certain lies instead. He employs a number of devious tactics to promote Fear and Discouragement.

Nehemiah had to lead the people through these challenges in order to reach his goal of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

I. (:1-9) FIGHT OFF DISCOURAGEMENT –
II. (:10-14) FIGHT OFF DECEPTION –
III. (:15-19) FINISH THE WORK –

5 Enemy Tactics sprinkled through this section; all oriented around promoting Fear, Discouragement, Deception – Key is sticking to the task at hand and being strengthened by God to complete His Work

I. (:1-9) FIGHT OFF DISCOURAGEMENT –
WHEN SATAN TRIES TO FRIGHTEN YOU AND GET YOU TO QUIT, STAY ON TASK AND ASK GOD TO STRENGTHEN YOUR HANDS

A. **(:1) Waking Up the Enemy -- Kingdom Progress Activates Kingdom Enemies**

"*Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and that no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates*,"

Churck Swindoll: The attack upon Nehemiah was very significant because it happened at a crucial juncture in his life. . . he was nearly finished with the greatest task that Jerusalem's citizens had seen in their generation. Not very long before they were ready to cut the ribbon and enjoy a jubilant celebration, the enemy began to plot Nehemiah's demise.

B. **(:2-4) Watching Out for Subtle Enemy Traps Involving Compromise –**
Enemy Tactic of Compromise and Distraction (1)

1. Innocent Sounding Proposals

"*then Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, 'Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono*.'"

Located on the seacoast near the Gaza strip; a nice resort area for a religious conference; let's

organize a retreat … instead of being adversaries and snipping at one another, let's get together and discuss what we have in common

Says "O No!" to Ono

Derek Kidner: about equidistant from Samaria and Jerusalem. At the same time, it was for Nehemiah more than a day's journey from his city, and (as Brockington points out) at the very limits of his territory to the north-west, bordering the districts of both Samaria and Ashdod. Since both of these were hostile regions (cf. 4:2, 7) the plan smelt of treachery. At best, the journey would have wasted precious days; therefore wisely enough he based his refusal on this, rather than on his suspicions.

Ecumenicism seems Innocent on the Surface – "*let us meet together*"

The undiluted preaching from God's Word and an authoritative stand on truth seem to be on the decline. What we're seeing instead is a broadening of the gospel, a redefining of what it means to be a Christian, and a growing emphasis on inclusion and tolerance. Ecumenism has come to mean "reducing all elements of faith to the lowest common denominator. God's Word is neglected, experience is valued above truth, a false and selfish "faith" is promoted, and sound doctrine and correction are despised as "divisive" and "unloving."
http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/False%20Doctrines/ecumenical_movement.htm

2. Evil Intentions

"*But they were planning to harm me*."

Never forget that Satan has an agenda which he is actively pursuing

We are not supposed to judge motives = go out and shout from the rooftops … but here Nehemiah exercises discernment – had a history of dealing with these people

Discernment helps you to sense trouble and avoid it; is your discernment atenna finely tuned so that it alerts you when something is off base?
[**Conscience** is just a guide to whether you are doing what is right; discernment goes beyond that to evaluate external conditions; both can be seared and rendered ineffective]

3. Dismissing Distractions – despite Repeated Pressure

"*So I sent messengers to them, saying, 'I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?' They sent messages to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way*."

- takes vision for the greatness of the work to which God has called you

Decker**: Illustration**: In the first half of the 20th century, there was a missionary in China who did a great job as a linguist and a diplomat in his work for the Lord. His abilities were so outstanding that one of the American companies in China tried to hire him. They offered him an attractive job with a salary to match, but he turned them down. He told them that God had sent him to China as a missionary and that was what he was going to do. He thought that would end the matter, but instead they came back with a better offer and an increase in salary. He turned

that down too, but again they came back, doubling the salary that had originally been proposed. Finally he said to them, "It is not your salary that is too little. It's the job that's too small!"

- understands the importance of leadership staying on task
- refuses to stop the momentum of making progress; not easy to start up again
- persists in the face of growing pressure

Chuck Swindoll: there's a great difference between being an available man or woman of God and being a puppet of people – a great difference. Some people never understand how you can say no. But every leader must reserve that right. One of the marks of maturity is the ability to say no without explanation.

Warren Wiersbe: The Jews had nothing in common with Sanballat and his crowd, so there could be no basis for cooperation. Nehemiah had made that clear at the very outset of the project (**2:20**) . . . Decisions based only on *opinions* must be reconsidered, but decisions based on *convictions* must stand unless those convictions are changed. Otherwise, decision becomes indecision; and the leader who ought to be a guidepost becomes a weather vane.

C. (:**5-8**) **Warding Off the Intimidating Tactic of Outrageous Slander --**
<u>Enemy Tactic of Slander (2)</u>

> "*Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand. In it was written, 'It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports. You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, A king is in Judah! And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together.' Then I sent a message to him saying, 'Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind*.'"

Escalating from private invitation to public intimidation

Warren Wiersbe: A open letter to a royal governor would be both intimidating and insulting. Letters to officials were rolled up and secured with seals so that only those with authority could open and read them. Sanballat wanted the public to know the contents of the letter because he hoped to undermine Nehemiah's reputation and authority.

Def. of Slander – "the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another's reputation"
Closely aligned with **Gossip** – a rumor or report of a personal or sensitive or intimate nature; sharing dirt about someone

Making some very public and harmful accusations:

- We have what we are going to claim on good authority – should be believable
  Really just unsubstantiated rumors that they had created themselves
  Chuck Swindoll: rumors involve exaggeration and inaccuracy
- When you came to Jerusalem, you had evil motives – you wanted to gather a bunch of followers and subvert their loyalty and cause them to start their own little kingdom agenda
- Your work is not what it might seem

- You are driven by selfish ambition – you want to be king [so often people accuse us of what they are truly guilty of – exposes the evil of their heart]
- You are twisting God's Word to support your personal agenda

Your only way out is to play ball with us

How can people believe such lies?? Incredibly, they do. Slandering motives of a faithful, godly leader. All you can do is remain calm and issue a denial.
Look at what I do and say – rather than inventing stories that judge my motives.

Christ faced similar charges of sedition (**Luke 23:1-5**)
Paul faced similar charges (**Acts 24:4-5**) – on trial for his life

Watch who you get together with to "*take counsel together*" – leads down a slippery slope;
They get you to enter into agreements that involve compromise and error;
They divert your trust from the one, true God
- Israel always warned against taking refuge or counsel in Egypt
- Psalm 1 – look at the separated stance of the blessed man

Breneman: Jerusalem had a history of rebelling against controlling empires.

Don't hear much about **Separation** anymore – emphasis is on being inclusive
2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1

D. **(:9) Working Hard in Dependence Upon God for the Strength to Overcome Fear and Discouragement**

"*For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking, 'They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands*."

Tactics of Satan are powerful
Adolph Hitler: Mental confusion, contradiction of feeling, indecisiveness, panic; these are our weapons.

The Antidote is to Work Hard; the enablement comes from the Grace of God who strengthens our hands; enables us to persevere
Are your hands weak? Are you seeking God to give you His resources for His work?
Are you looking to man or to God for approval and for recognition?
Christ's word to His disciples was constantly "*Fear not, I am with you*"

II. (:10-14) FIGHT OFF DECEPTION – WHEN SATAN TRIES TO FRIGHTEN YOU AND UNDERMINE YOUR FAITH, EXERCISE DISCERNMENT AND BOLDLY STAND YOUR GROUND

A. (:10-11) Enemy Tactic of Expediency (3)

1. (:**10**) Screen Counsel Carefully

"*When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, 'Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night*.'"

Derek Kidner: The fact that Shemaiah would propose going to the Temple shows that his disability, if it existed at all, was only temporary, hardly a sufficient reason to bring the governor to his house.

John MacArthur: To enter and shut himself in the Holy Place would have been a desecration of the house of God and would have caused people to question his reverence for God.

Breneman: This show of fear, and even cowardice, would be a lack of trust in God and would undermine the confidence of the people in his leadership.

Deut. 13:1-5 – how can we test those who claim to be bringing to us the Word of God?

2. (:**11**) Stand on Integrity and Resist Expedient Solutions

"*But I said, 'Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.*'"

Prov. 28:1 "*The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion.*"

Derek Kidner: Nehemiah was no priest, and had no right of access to the temple itself (as distinct from the surrounding courtyards). King Uzziah, trespassing, had been fortunate to escape with no more than leprosy (2 Ch. 26:16ff; cf. Nu 18:7). Nehemiah, had he tried to save himself in such a way would have lost, possibly, his life, certainly his honour; and would have jeopardized the very cause he had at heart.

B. (:12-13) Enemy Tactic of Entrapment (4)

"*Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered his prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me.*"

Satan cannot stand a man of integrity will try to ruin his reputation; entice him into sin; tempt him in every way possible; twist the Word of God as Satan did when he tempted Christ in the wilderness; always trying to trip us up

James 1 – don't ever accuse God of trying to entrap you into sin; but Satan loves this tactic of entrapment; our sinful nature plays right into his hand; easy for us to believe his deception and turn away from the standards of holiness and fall into sin
A good reputation built up over a lifetime can be lost very quickly in the foolishness of chasing after the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life (**1 John 2:15-17**)

Don't take someone's advice just because they claim to have God's perspective on the situation; check things out

C. (:14) Theme of God's Faithful Judgment

"*Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me.*"

Recurring Theme: Remember Me; Remember my enemies, my attackers

Because God remembers, we don't have to! Don't keep rehashing injustice in your mind.

Ezek 13:17-23 reference to prophetesses

Do you believe everything you hear? Do you search the Scriptures yourself to see that the counsel you are being given is biblical? Are you easy to deceive? Do you stand against Satan with boldness, maintaining your Integrity?

III. (:15-19) FINISH THE WORK – GREAT THINGS CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH GOD'S HELP . . . BUT UNDERSTAND THAT SATAN NEVER GIVES UP

A. (:**15-16**) **Recognition of God's Favor Causes Enemies to Temporarily Back Off**

1. **(:15**) Successful Completion (in record time)

"*So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days*."

52 day project – Incredible!

Attributed to the strength and providential favor of the Lord and the courage and persevering work of the people under the godly leadership of Nehemiah.

2. (:**16**) Impactful Testimony – Impact on the godly; Impact on God's enemies

"*When all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God*."

B. (:**17-19a**) **Relational Disloyalties that Threatened Kingdom Progress -- Enemy Tactic of Disloyalty (5)**

"*Also in those days many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him*."

Those that we expect should be loyal to us cause us the greatest grief when they don't stand by us

C. (:**19b**) **Renewal of the Attacks**

"*Then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me*."

Breneman: Tobiah must have had many good traits, and some of the people were led astray by him; nevertheless, he was trying to hinder Nehemiah's leadership. His involvement may be the most sinister aspect of the story. Only Nehemiah's faith and clear-headed resoluteness equipped him for the challenge.

Derek Kidner: Tobiah was a more insidious influence in this respect than Sanballat, since he was probably a fellow-Jew, in addition to being (as his own and his son's names indicate) a nominal adherent of Yahweh. His numerous binding agreements within the Jewish community were

probably trading contracts, facilitated by his marriage connections. His wife's family, the descendants of Arah, is mentioned in Ezra 2:5, and while neither Shecaniah nor this Meshullam can be identified, we know from 13:4 that Tobiah had family ties with the priestly or high-priestly house of Eliashib, probably by marriage. While such links and loyalties were embarrassing enough in themselves, we now learn how busily they were exploited by intrigues, persuasive talk, leaks of information and threatening letters. All this, in addition to the outside pressures already described, brought Nehemiah under attack from almost every quarter.

Threat of fear and discouragement must be constantly combated. You have victory, but then Satan comes at you again. He only has a limited number of tactics to keep throwing at you.

CONCLUSION: Do you feel Afraid, Discouraged in serving God? Are you confused … maybe Deceived?
Is something knocking you off course in serving God? Need to live your life according to God's priorities; don't let neutral things or even good things become the enemy of the best

5 Tactics of Satan:

- Compromise and Distraction
- Slander
- Expediency
- Entrapment
- Disloyalty

Need to:

- Fight Discouragement
- Fight Deception
- Finish the Work and allow God to strengthen your hands so that He may be glorified in accomplishing His great work

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How do you respond to bullying tactics of intimidation or hurtful slander and gossip?

2) Where have you taken a stand against compromise and against the deceitfulness of an ecumenical spirit?

3) How do you fight off discouragement and fear and deception?

4) Where do you need perseverance and persistence to finish the work God has committed to you?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Redpath: God had only one way of fulfilling His redemptive plan to save your soul from hell, and that was to secure the utter cooperation of His well-beloved Son who had been with Him

since before time was. And the Lord Jesus, in order to be the vehicle through whom God could fulfill our redemption, had to face exactly what Nehemiah had to face. "Come down and meet with us in the plain," said Nehemiah's enemies. And the crowd jeered at Christ and they spat upon Him and mocked Him as He hung upon a cross, "If thou be the Son of God, come down."

We hear the echo of Nehemiah's words, "I cannot come down; I am doing a great work." "He saved others, himself he could not save." And what a work! If He had come down, there would not have been salvation for one single individual, and the whole world would have been plunged into an eternal hell. Jesus said, in effect, "No, I cannot and will not come down, for then nobody will be saved." . . .

They slandered Him: He not only faced the snare of the world's friendship but the subtlety of the world's slander. They said He was a gluttonous man and a winebibber. They said He was a friend of sinners. They misrepresented His motives over and over again. They accused Him falsely. But when He was reviled, He reviled not again.

Fensham: This section describes the consummation of the whole task of Nehemiah. He came to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. It was not an easy task; enemies from inside and outside tried to stop the work. Serious internal economic problems developed. In spite of all these attacks and setbacks the wall was finished in the remarkably short time of fifty-two days.

Warren Wiersbe: **Four Strategies of Satan in Opposing Nehemiah**

1. (:**1-4**) Compromise – "We will help you work"
2. (:**5-9**) Slander – "We'll tell everybody about you"
3. (:**10-14**) Threats – "We will protect your life"
4. (:**15-19**) Intrigue – "We will not give up"

David Silversides: **The Blessing of God in Troublous Times**

Dan. 9:25 – Prophecy that the rebuilding of Jerusalem would be in troublous times

"*more than conquerors through Him who loved us*" – God blessing His people in the midst of troubles

1. (:1-14) Satan's Devices

2 Cor. 2:11 we are not to be ignorant of his devices

Trying to destroy either Nehemiah or his credibility before the people

a. (:**1-4**) <u>False Unity</u> – Samaritans had a form of Judaistic religion that was essentially pagan; offer of peace talks was attractive; enemies were getting concerned; dangerous ecumenical get-together; slothful Christians are more easily led astray; Persistent answering (:4) – flimsy view of God's guidance might tell you, "well this has come to me 4 times so maybe it is from the Lord" – but it was wrong in principle so it was wrong each time

b. (:**5-9**) <u>False Stories</u> – posing as friends concerned about rumors; open letter because it was intended to promote such rumors rather than help Nehemiah deal with them;

- Rejection **(:8)** – denial of the truth of these rumors
- Prayer (:9) – contrast between intended weakening effect that these rumors would cause and the strengthening that comes from God

c. (:**10-14**) <u>False Prophecy</u> – shut himself up under pretense of intense communion with God?? Now he has a word from the Lord; claiming that God had sent him

2. (:15-16) The World's Sorrow at the Work of God

When the ungodly saw the evident blessing of God they lost their nerve; discouraged in their wickedness; we must not expect everyone to be pleased when God blesses His church; look at the self righteous elder brother of the Prodigal Son; look at the time of the Reformation and all of the conflict

3. (:17-19) More False Brethren
"Tobiah" – *the Lord is good*; son's name = "the Lord has shown mercy" – had a nominal connection to God; kept up correspondence to nobles who supported him; related to some of them by marriage ties; trying to wear down Nehemiah's resistance to false ecumenism and ruin

Dr. J. Drew Conley: **Foiling the Enemy's Tactics**
K&D – Title of this section = "Snares laid for Nehemiah – Completion of the wall" – task got done despite the obstacles and attacks; we face enemies; the devil is our slanderer, our Adversary; we need to resist him, steadfast in the faith **1 Pet. 5:8-10**
"Through many dangers, toils and snares .. Grace will lead me home" -- all of us have a calling as believers – because God exists He will take us through the problems for His glory
Four Common Tactics
1. Distraction (:**1-4**)
Extreme NW border – near hostile territories; taking him away from the work he needed to do; what takes our time away from the work of God? Need a right estimate of what's really important in life; what am I supposed to be giving my time and energy to? Satan doesn't have to use bad things to keep us from accomplishing God's will for our lives; effective in using good things or neutral things; we must choose what is most important to be done; look at all the amusements that can consume our time; keep your focus where it belongs; When you are saying *Yes* to one thing you are saying *No* to many other things; we have a life of boxes; we drive in boxes on wheels, we live in boxes that we spend time fixing up, we sit on couch and watch a box for entertainment; amusement ought nought to displace the work of God that needs to get done

2. Slander **(:5-9**)
Most open letters aren't written to solve problems but to produce them; look at unsigned letters; accused of pride and self-seeking; not ambition that brought him to Jerusalem but the call of God; short, urgent prayers – simple, direct, effective

3. Fear (:**10-14**)
They called on Nehemiah to act out of self interest and to run from danger inherent in serving the Lord; trying to paralyze him by means of fear; he needed to be finishing the work strong; people were looking to him for leadership; lot of well-meaning people that will try to get you to do things that the Word of God forbids; giving unbiblical counsel; Search the Scriptures; **Is. 8:20**

4. Disloyalty (:**15-19**)
Usually a friend or family member or someone I have high regard for presents this temptation to compromise (otherwise we can combat it without difficulty); good people will criticize and oppose you for doing the right thing; Christ was betrayed and denied by His own disciples; stay the course of godliness no matter what; men can get sidelined by disillusionment and disappointment with the people of God – get over it; people are fickle; people you thought would give their right arm for you will be the first to abandon you; anchor your soul in God not in men; God is faithful and will reward your service

Paul Decker: 4 Distractions that will keep us from our holy ambition
1. Insincerity (:1-4)
2. Inaccuracy (:5-9)
3. Intimidation (:10-14)
4. Infiltration (:17-19)
http://www.sermoncentral.com/Sermon.asp?SermonID=55544

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Dealing with Satan's Schemes**

Introduction: The rebuilding project wasn't without difficulty. We learned in chapter number four that Nehemiah had to overcome some violent threats from the enemy. There were enemy nations around. They didn't want him rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They had a vested interest in the Jews not prospering in the land. But Nehemiah overcame those obstacles. And then there was discouragement. Some of the people got discouraged. And Nehemiah was able to minister to them. And then there were internal conflicts. The wealthy were taking advantage of the poor. And Nehemiah had to deal with that. And he dealt with it head on. And now, they're almost done rebuilding the walls. He's making great progress. Even though he has to overcome obstacles, they're still making great progress. We saw in chapter 3 where he was an administrative genius, really, just organizing over 42 groups around the wall, and they were all doing their job, and some were working double time, and doing above and beyond. But when we come here to chapter 6, What we see are several schemes that are thrown at him. We could call these the **four schemes of Satan**. The wall is up, but the gates are still not on. And so the enemy knows this is a key time. He better attack now.

I. Distraction – 6:1

Up until this point in the whole building program, Sanballet, Tobiah, and Geshem, they opposed everything that Nehemiah did. They opposed the Jews, but now suddenly they want to cooperate. And they offer to meet Nehemiah in a village halfway between Jerusalem and Samaria, right on the border of Jerusalem and Samaria, a quiet place. And so their idea was, hey, you're willing to meet us halfway, Nehemiah?

But really they're not interested. in helping Nehemiah. They want to hinder him, they want to take him down, and Nehemiah is able to see through this ruse. This is nothing but a distraction to keep the job from getting done.

II. Defamation – 6:5

They're going to circulate a letter accusing Nehemiah of sedition and rebellion and leading a revolt. There's this open letter, and it's circulating all around, this idea that Nehemiah wants to be king, and that's why he wants the wall. And they're saying, by the way, Nehemiah, we're going to tell the king of Persia what you're doing. You're leading a rebellion. This is the way Satan works. He works through rumor mills, he works through gossip, he works through slander.

If you take care of your character, God will take care of your reputation. I'm not saying you won't be slandered. I'm not saying people won't believe it. But ultimately, you know what always happens? God will vindicate you.

III. Deception -- 6:10

The enemy hires a false prophet. And he comes to Nehemiah pretending to be from God, but he's not from God. So notice this false prophet's act. He devises a really clever plan. This false prophet is pretending to speak a word from God to Nehemiah. Nehemiah, here's what God is telling me to tell you. Go to the temple. Lock yourself in the temple, because people will kill you, take refuge in the temple there.

What was the problem with that? No one's supposed to go into the holy place except the priest. Especially the Holy of Holies. Besides, Nehemiah says, should such a man as I run away? This is a show of fear, even cowardice. It also shows a lack of trust in God.

There's a lot of deception going on out there. And Satan is in a lot of deception. And the way that we discern God and His Word, and when God's speaking to us, is through the Word of God that He's given us. That's why we have to know God's Word. And we have to watch out for deceptions. Just because a man says that he speaks for God, doesn't mean that he always speaks for God.

IV. Disruption – 6:15

Some practical lessons:

- Do not expect perfection in Christian work
- When God's people compromise with the world, it hinders God's work
- The more we read God's Word the better discernment we have of Satan's schemes

TEXT: Nehemiah 7:1-73

TITLE: THE IMPORTANCE OF GODLY WORSHIP

BIG IDEA:
REBUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE (THE OUTER SHELL) PREPARES THE WAY FOR REVIVING THE PEOPLE INWARDLY TO FULFILL THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF GODLY WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

Why was it so important that the Jews return from exile in Babylon and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? What was God trying to accomplish? What was the ultimate goal? There were a ton of devastated cities back then; cities where enemies had trampled down the people and burned their walls and reduced their houses to a pile of rubble. What was so special about Jerusalem?

This is a **transition chapter** between the two main sections of the Book of Nehemiah. You cannot study this chapter in isolation. It is a transition between a historical record that centers on the governing leadership of Nehemiah in rebuilding the walls of the city and a record that centers on the priestly ministry of Ezra in reviving the people. Beginning in Chap. 8 we will see the importance of the Word of God in that revival process. We will see the necessity of holiness – including the corrective process of repentance from sin and rededication to righteousness.

Look back at the **origins of the nation of Israel**. God called Abram to take his family and leave their homeland of Ur to travel to a promised land which He would show them. You see the faithfulness of Abram reflected in his three defining activities: (12:7-8; 13:4, 18; 21:33)

- pitched his tent – Guidance / Pilgrim existence
- built an altar – Worship, Sacrifice – Priority of Worship
- called on the name of the Lord – Faith, Prayer

Look back at the **building of the original temple** by Solomon in the City of David.
Work would be accomplished by Solomon, not David – **2 Sam. 7:13, 26 –** goal was worship;
2 Sam. 24:18 – place for future temple picked out by God – threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (**vs. 25**) -- pretty specific selection
1 Kings 8:11 – the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord when the Ark of the Covenant was brought inside

The outer shell of church structure and organization means nothing unless it facilitates the inward heart worship of the one true God
John 4:23-24 "*an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*"

Maybe worship doesn't mean much to you as you come here this morning; hopefully you will come away with a sense of how important worship is to God; created to worship; diff than animals

3 PREPARATIONS THAT REFLECT THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP

I. (:1-4) THE COMMANDING OF GOD'S PEOPLE -- THE LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNING AND GUARDING MUST PROVIDE A SECURE SETTING FOR WORSHIP

True godly worship is eroded when leaders are lax in their governing and in their guarding

A. (:1-2) Principles of Governing Diligently

1. Key Priorities Pursued in Leadership

a. First Things First – nothing happens until you have basic perimeter security

"*Now when the wall was rebuilt*"

What looked like Mission Impossible now is Mission Accomplished

b. Finishing Touches

"*and I had set up the doors*,"

c. Focus on Core Functionality

"*and the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed*"

Gatekeepers – probably of the walls rather than the temple here

Look at the **importance of music** in the realm of worship

At least 18 references to singers and 8 references to giving thanks

Not just an optional accessory – serves a core function

- appreciate those who serve in this ministry
- prayer for strong leadership here going forward
- are we singing with all of our heart to the Lord

Warren Wiersbe: What good are strong new gates if nobody is guarding them and controlling who enters and leaves the city? What good are walls if the gates are open to every foe who wants to enter the city?

2. Key People Positioned in Leadership – Importance of gift of administration

"*then I put Hanani my brother, and Hananiah the commander of the fortress, in charge of Jerusalem, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many*."

Get the right people on the bus – not nepotism here

What qualities do you value in spiritual leadership?

- **Faithfulness --** 1 Cor. 4:2 "*required of stewards that one be found trustworthy*"
- **Fear of God**

Yamauchi: *men of integrity* – men of truth; used once in the plural in **Ex. 18:21**; cf. Paul's praise of Timothy in Phil 2:19-21

Warren Wiersbe: Like all good leaders, Nehemiah knew he couldn't do the job alone. One of his first official acts was to appoint two assistants . . . The citadel was a fortress in the temple area, guarding the north wall of the city, which was especially vulnerable to attack.

B. (:3-4) Principles of Guarding Securely

1. Take Extra Precautions Where Necessary

"*Then I said to them, 'Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot, and while they are standing guard, let them shut and bolt the doors.*'"

Don't get sloppy or complacent about this matter of guarding the city of God
Look at all of the worldly practices that have crept into the worship of God in the church today; someone was not minding the gate; someone let the enemy come within the camp
People with discernment can be easily criticized as being too harsh when in reality they are fulfilling their responsibility to guard the truth – Titus 1:9 "*holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict*" – today people minimize the importance of sound doctrine; they call you judgmental and harsh if you are bold to refute those who contradict

John MacArthur: In the ancient Near East, it was customary to open the city gates at sunrise and close them at sunset. Nehemiah recommended that his not be done, because of the hostility of the enemies. Rather the gates were to be kept shut until well into the heat of the morning when everyone was up and active. When the gates were shut, they were to be guarded by sentinels at watch stations and in front of their own vulnerable homes (**v.4**).

2. Task Each Member of the Community with their Responsibility

"*Also appoint guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each at his post, and each in front of his own house.*"
Don't rely on outside mercenaries
Define the scope of their responsibility

Two types of guards:
- those patrolling the wall and responsible for specific sections
- those standing watch by their own homes

3. Taylor the Security to the Particular Vulnerabilities of the Situation

"*Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built.*"

Nehemiah = a Man of Vision -- saw both the vulnerabilities and the potential for the city of Jerusalem
Much work remained to be done; but securing the walls was a good start

Illustrations: Some people have **no vision**:

A Western Union internal memo in 1876 said…
"This '**telephone**' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us."

In the 1920s, David Sarnoff's associates in response to his urgings for investment in the **radio** said…
"The wireless music box has no imaginable commercial value. Who would pay for a message sent to nobody in particular?"

A Yale University management professor in response to Fred Smith's paper proposing reliable **overnight delivery service**…
"The concept is interesting and well-formed, but in order to earn better than a 'C,' the idea must be feasible." --Fred Smith, by the way, went on to found Federal Express Corp.

Importance of Worship: **Ps. 29: 1-2** "*Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty, Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in holy array*."

II. (:5-65) THE COMMUNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE – THEY MUST ASSEMBLE IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOD'S GUIDELINES FOR WORSHIP

A. (:5) Task of Enrollment of those Dedicated to God's Kingdom Purposes

"*Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogies. Then I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up first in which I found the following record*."

B. (:6-7) Recognition of Rulers who Understood the Importance of Jerusalem

"*These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city. Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvaim Nehus, Baanah*."

Warren Wiersbe: These twelve men may have represented the twelve tribes of Israel, even though ten of the tribes had been assimilated by the Assyrians when the Northern Kingdom was captured in 22 B.C. The "Nehemiah" mentioned here is not the author of this book, since these men lived nearly a century before. It appears that these were the elders of the people who helped Zerubbabel, the governor, establish the nation.

C. (:8-65) Recognition of Roles -- Categories of People – Look at the emphasis on roles that facilitate Godly Worship

1. (:**8-38**) People of Israel
   - Messianic line had to be verifiable
   - God had not forgotten His people
   - Importance of recognizing people for their role

Wiersbe: these people were God's "bridge" from the defeats of the past to the hopes of the future. These Jews were the "living link" that connected the historic past with the prophetic future and made it possible for Jesus Christ to come into the world.

2. (:**39-42**) Priests

3. (:**43-45**) Levites

4. (:**46-60**) Temple Servants and Sons of Solomon's servants
   a. (:**46-56**) Temple Servants

   b. (:**57-59**) Sons of Solomon's servants

   c. (:**60**) Total

   "*All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392*."

D. (:61-65) Purity of Worship -- Legitimacy is a Key Issue -- Documentation Problems
Purity of the church must be maintained

III. (:66-73) THE CONSECRATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE – THEY MUST PUT A PRIORITY ON THE HOUSE OF GOD BEFORE THEIR OWN HOMES

A. (:66-69) Strength in Numbers – People of God much stronger when assembled together

1. The People

"*The whole assembly together was 42,360, besides their male and their female servants, of whom there were 7,337; and they had 245 male and female singers.*"

2. Their Mounts

"*Their horses were 736; their mules, 245; their camels, 435; their donkeys, 6,720.*"

B. (:70-72) Sacrificial Giving – God raises up the resources to accomplish His work

1. Introduction

"*Some from among the heads of fathers' households gave to the work.*"

2. Political Leader

"*The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold drachmas, 50 basins, 530 priests' garments.*"

3. Family Leaders

"*Some of the heads of fathers' households gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,200 silver minas.*"

4. General Public

"*That which the rest of the people gave was 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,000 silver minas and 67 priests' garments.*"

Look at the godly means of raising money to conduct the work of God; we live in such a pragmatic age; whatever happened to freewill giving
You don't see any coercion here; no strong arm tactics

2 dangers
- regarding the material things of the church as most important
- regarding the material things of the church as irrelevant

C. (:73) Secondary Priorities – Emphasizing God's work does not hinder the provision of our personal needs

"*Now the priests, the Levites, the gate-keepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants and all Israel, lived in their cities. And when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel were in their cities.*"

They remembered the local cities from which they had come, and they returned back to those cities. But they first gave priority to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.
When we give God the priority and seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, He provides for those secondary priorities that are important to us

CONCLUSION:
Maybe you are here today as just an empty wall – just an outer structure with no inward spiritual life; no heart to genuinely worship God in spirit and in truth.
We are not playing church here; we are involved in the hard work of **governing** and **guarding** to facilitate what is of ultimate importance to God – the worship of the one true God in holiness and from the heart.

3 PREPARATIONS THAT REFLECT THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP
I. (:1-4) THE COMMANDING OF GOD'S PEOPLE --
II. (:5-65) THE COMMUNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE –
III. (:66-73) THE CONSECRATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE –
God desires us to assemble together, consecrate ourselves to Him and worship Him in spirit and in truth; let's do that as we gather now around the Lord's Table

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where do we have a tendency to relax when really we need to be extra vigilant?

2) In what ways can we show recognition in the church for the contributions that each person and each family makes?

3) What priority do we give to the music ministry in our local church?

4) Does our strong emphasis on edification contribute to the goal of promoting godly worship in the church?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: The walls were completed, the gates were restored, and the enemy was chagrined; but Nehemiah's work was not finished by any means. Now he had to practice the truth Paul emphasized in **Ephesians 6:13**, "*And having done all, to stand*." Nehemiah had been steadfast in building the walls and in resisting the enemy, and now he had to be steadfast in consolidating and conserving the gains. "*Look to yourselves*," warned the Apostle John, "*that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward*" (**2 John 8**).

Derek Kidner: A comparison of this list [that in **Ezra 2**] with Nehemiah's copy of it (**Ne. 7:7bff.**) reveals a startling contrast between the transmission of names and that of numbers — for the names in the two lists show only the slightest variations whereas half the numbers disagree, and do so apparently at random. The fact that the two kinds of material in the one document have fared so differently lends the weight of virtually a controlled experiment to the many other indications in the Old Testament that numbers were the bane of copyists.

The figure of 42,360 [in **Ezra 2:64**] appears as the total also in **Nehemiah 7:66** and 1 Esdras

5:41, yet the individual items add up to three different totals, as follows: Ezra, 29,818; Nehemiah, 31,089; 1 Esdras, 30,143… There is general agreement that the divergences are copying errors, arising from the special difficulty of understanding or reproducing numerical lists.

Jason Jones: **Foundations for Renewal**
The next thing that Nehemiah does is commission these men primarily in regard to protecting the city. He gives them instructions about when to open the gates. You might think after accomplishing such a great feat, and having such spiritual victory, Nehemiah and the Jews would feel bulletproof. They may have, but not Nehemiah. He knew biblical truth that spiritual victories are short-lived, and the minds and hearts of the Jewish people have short memories when it comes to faithfulness to God. . .

Nehemiah made worship into a high priority again. It was a problem when Haggai preached, and it got better, but people slipped again. What we must understand is that worship of God is a top priority. **Ps 29:2, John 4:23, 1 Chron 16:29, 1 Pet 2:9** . . .
http://www.sermoncentral.com/Sermon.asp?SermonID=113012

David Silversides: **Seeking the Prosperity of Zion**
1. (:1) The Priority of the Worship of God
Situation of danger, yet they are bothering about singers and Levites and the procedures for the worship of God; biblical worship matters; not just private worship but the priority on public, corporate worship; do you consider this in choosing a college, in changing locations for a job??
2. (:2) The Right Men in Office
There were many nobles in Jerusalem; some had behaved extremely selfishly (had not joined in the work); some had been disloyal (in league with Tobiah, the enemy); great gifts and abilities are no substitute for godliness; doesn't follow that a man who has great gifts is necessarily godly;
3. (:3-4) The Vigilance of the People of God
The times called for special vigilance;
4. (:5) Acknowledging the God of Wisdom
Plan to reckon the people by geneology;
5. (:6-62) Preserving the Evident Trustworthiness of the Promises of God
The Lord's cause must come first; repopulation of Jerusalem was important; establishment of Jerusalem was bound up with the honor of God; ensuring previous connection with families of Jerusalem; desired continuity with the past; appropriate allotment of places and ownership of the land; proof of Christ's credentials was important – **Gen. 49:10; Micah 5:2**;
6. (:63-65) Purity of Worship
Their claim to the priesthood was unclear so it was wise to exercise caution; nothing doubtful is admitted into the worship of God; burden of proof should be on those who want to introduce something new into the worship of God; *whatsoever is not of faith is sin*
(:63-65) Purity of God's People
Be holy for I am holy; Priesthood (ceremonial purity) was a pattern of what the people were to be in actual terms; Separateness from sin;
7. (:70-73) Freely Giving
No fund raising events in the Bible; no raffles; 2 dangers
- regarding the material things of the church as most important
- regarding the material things of the church as irrelevant

http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?chapter=7&BibleOnly=true&currSection=sermonsbible&keyword=Nehemiah

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **A Life That Counts for God**

Introduction: Have you ever struggled with feelings that your life is not worthwhile? If our lives count for God, then they'll not count just for this time, but they'll also count for eternity. This is a transitional chapter. It's kind of a pivotal chapter in the book. And what I mean by that is that chapters 1 through 6 describe the restoration of the wall. He rebuilt the wall. We saw that in chapter 6, he finished it. And then in chapters 8 through 13, it's going to deal with the restoration of the people. So in chapters 1 through 6, he rebuilds the wall, and chapters 8 through 13 will be the restoration and the revival of the people.

In chapter 7, what this does is it kind of serves as a **transitional chapter**. Because if you look at the first three verses, it's describing the precautions that Nehemiah took to guard the newly walled city from attack. He's really making preparations for what's going to happen later on. And he's going to make precautions about the city wall, but also the city of Jerusalem at this time is not very highly populated. And he wants the city to become what God wants it to become, and that is, again, the spiritual and national center of Israel. But you can't do that if there's no people in the city, right? So now he wants to repopulate the city of Jerusalem. And basically, in verses 4 down to verse 73, then it looks forward to the reforms of what's going to take place in the rest of the book.

Now, this list of names that we see here in chapter 7, which we also see in the book of Ezra, this is a list of names of the people who came back from Babylon from the captivity. And so Nehemiah is going to use this list to designate people that will go back to repopulate the city. This is what he's going to use this list for. And basically what he's going to encourage these people to do is fulfill God's purpose.

If you want your life to count for God, then you need to commit yourself to the things that matter to God.

Big Idea: **Five things that really matter to God**

I. Worship Matters to God – 7:1

Do you know what the reason for your existence here is? To glorify God. and to worship Him? what is worship? Well, it can be defined, the New Testament word, just means to kiss towards or to bow down, the Hebrew word actually means to bow down, and we know it's just basically giving the honor and the glory that is rightfully due unto God. Now, Stephen Charnock called it this, he said, it's nothing else but a rendering to God of the honor that is due to Him. And that's what we do when we come to God's house, we give to God the rightful honor that is due to Him. And what I see in scripture is that it's really defined in two ways.

1) It's defined in who we are. Not just an activity, although it includes an activity, but it's who we are.
2) It's also what we do here at church.

II. Godly Character Matters to God – 7:2

Nehemiah selects Hanani and Hananiah for positions of responsibility.

There are three qualities of a godly person.

1) Faithfulness – reliable, truthful, firm; someone that you could trust

2) Fear of God -- The fear of the Lord is a reverential attitude that leads to right actions.
3) Watchfulness – **7:3 --** Now he trusted God, but he also set up a watch. The two are not in opposition.

III. Your Place in God's Plan Matters to God – 7:4

If you know Jesus, God has given you a purpose in His kingdom, a calling, something that you fulfill, something that you do. He has gifted you in that way. And you need to know what that is and just do that.

IV. Your Commitment to God's Purpose Matters to God – 7:6

You say, what's the purpose of God? Same one, we are now to be a glory to God in this world. We are to be his people. We are to be that light. And this should be the thing that's foremost in our mind, the kingdom of God. What did Jesus say? Seek ye first the kingdom of God. And all these other things will be added unto you. Friend, if you want a life that really counts for God, then you need to commit to God's purpose. And God's purpose is his own glory. Everything is about the glory of God.

V. People Matter to God -- 7:6-73

God knows every one of these people by name. He knows everything about them.

Families are important to God – **7:9**.

TEXT: Nehemiah 8:1-18

TITLE: THE CELEBRATION OF TRUTH – PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

BIG IDEA:
REVIVAL STARTS WITH JOYFULLY SUBMITTING TO THE VOICE OF TRUTH

INTRODUCTION:

Voice of Truth Lyrics – Casting Crown
Oh what I would do to have
The kind of faith it takes to climb out of this boat I'm in
Onto the crashing waves

To step out of my comfort zone
To the realm of the unknown where Jesus is
And He's holding out his hand

But the waves are calling out my name and they laugh at me
Reminding me of all the times I've tried before and failed
The waves they keep on telling me
Time and time again, "Boy, you'll never win!"
"You'll never win"

But the voice of truth tells me a different story
And the voice of truth says "Do not be afraid!"
And the voice of truth says "This is for my glory"
Out of all the voices calling out to me
I will choose to listen and believe the voice of truth.

We have many voices calling out to us – which voice will we choose to listen and believe?
- Voice of Temptation
- Voice of Inadequacy
- Voice of Doubt
- Voice of Humanism
- Voice of Pride

Truth floats my boat – there are many things we choose to **celebrate** in life – maybe some of you have recently celebrated a birthday; certainly the Olympic athletes are celebrating their great victories in the Vancouver Games – God's people have special occasions that merit celebrations as well

3 WAYS WE NEED TO CELEBRATE GOD'S TRUTH

I. (:1-8) FOCUS ATTENTION ON UNDERSTANDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

A. (:1-2) Desire the Word -- Take Advantage of Opportunities to Hear and Understand God's Word

And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of

men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.

1. Unified Assembly – *And all the people gathered as one man*
   unified gathering for the purpose of learning God's truth
   Not just for some subset of the people – but all who were of age to understand

2. Symbolic Setting = *the square which was in front of the Water Gate*

Derek Kidner: The Water Gate was on the east side of the city (3:26), giving access to the principal spring, the Gihon, in the valley below. It is interesting that this assembly, unlike that of Ezra 3:1ff, was not held in the Temple court, where the altar was the focal point, but at one of the centres of city life . . .

Warren Wiersbe: That the leaders chose the Water Gate for the site of the assembly is interesting. In the Bible, water for washing is a picture of the Word of God (John 15:3; Eph. 5:26), while water for drinking is a picture of the Spirit of God (John 7:37-39). When we apply the water of the Word to our lives, then the Spirit can work and bring the help we need. It is refreshing to the soul when you receive the Word and allow the Spirit to teach you.

3. Designated Teacher = *Ezra the scribe*

Importance of public proclamation of God's Word – Nehemiah did not mind that Ezra was the better person to play the important role of proclaiming God's Word. His goal was not to monopolize the leadership.

Churck Swindoll: We have all seen leaders who try to make the project or the job about themselves. Rather than serve the needs of their followers, they turn their position into a means of self-aggrandizement and pride. They are nauseating examples of excessive image building. One authority, speaking of this type of leader, declared rather forcefully:

> The leader may consciously enjoy a feeling of superiority and aloofness, showing itself in condescension, vanity, conceit and self-pride. He may demand too much adulation and personal loyalty, and therefore try to surround himself with sycophants, "yes-men" and "rubber stamps." He may want his own way too much and too often, and be too opinionated and obstinate about taking counsel with his colleagues and followers. (Ordway Tead, The Art of Leadership)

Ezra 7:10 "*Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel*."

4. Inspired Instruction Manual = *the book of the law of Moses*

Can you imagine a stadium of thousands of people chanting "We want the Word!"

5. Sacred Stewardship – *which the Lord had given to Israel*
   Privilege of protecting and passing along God's revelation to others

6. Application Oriented – *who could listen with understanding* – Tremendous Access

America = Land of Opportunity

Look at Bible smuggling ministries – many countries have limited access to God's Word

Do we desire to listen and understand and apply the Word of God?

7. Strategic Timing – *on the first day of the seventh month* **Deut 31:11-13**

Perfect time for the people to repent and make a fresh start in trying to follow the Lord:

Breneman: The seventh month was important in the Jewish calendar. The first day was the **Feast of Trumpets**, later celebrated as the New Year. On the tenth day the **Day of Atonement** was celebrated, and on the fifteenth the **Feast of Tabernacles** began. According to **Deut 31:11-13**, the proclamation of the cancellation of debts for each sabbatical year was made during the Feast of Tabernacles. During the same feast every seventh year, the law was to be read to "men, women and children."

Thomas Constable: The "*first day of the seventh month*" (**v. 2**) was the day on which the Israelites were to observe the **Feast of Trumpets** (**Lev. 23:24**). The priests blew trumpets to assemble the people, to announce God's working among them, and to signal preparation for the Day of Atonement, which followed on the tenth of the month (**Lev. 23:27**).

B. (:3-4) Listen to the Word -- Test the Attention Span of the People

He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand.

5-6 hours of reading from the scroll – over a period of a week (v. 18) – Very intensive Bible conference
Had the support of the key leaders of the people – probably not Levites since they are mentioned later

This is a message you desperately need; modern preaching has given in to the short attention span of people in a culture that is driven by visual media; should we just be presenting short video clips; must all truth be packaged in fancy PowerPoint presentations?

Make sure that our method exalts the power of the objective truth of the Word of God rather than just playing on the entertainment lust of an experience-oriented culture

C. (:5-6) Respect the Word -- Treat God and His Gracious Revelation with Great Respect

Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Derek Kidner: the royal reception given to the Word of God. This day was to prove a turning-point. From now on, the Jews would be predominantly "the people of a book"

Sometimes we get so casual that we forget that even our posture says something – look at how the TV analysts are focusing lately on not just what someone says … but their body language –

What's your posture this morning – How attentive are you to the Word?

Everything was arranged and orchestrated to promote respect for God's Word – thus encouraging submission and obedience

Let's say "*Amen, Amen*" before we even understand what God requires of us

How do we disrespect the Word of God? By deciding what is important for us to obey – e.g. maybe we decide that the Feast of Booths is not all that important . . .

The proclamation of the Word of God remains a focal point of our worship; we too are people of the book; it is hypocrisy to make some grandiose claim that you love Jesus deeply and yet pay very little attention to the Word of God which reveals Him

One way we respect the Word is by being careful to explain it accurately; some people are very careless and slipshod in their interpretation and application; we need to value workmen that get it right; we cannot put up with error or shallow teaching; we have a lot to cover and very limited time to get the job done (cf. pressure on teachers to cover material – you throw in some snow days and you wonder how you can get the job done)

Let's come in humility and in an attitude and heart posture of worship of the **great** and awesome God whom we serve

Not worshiping the Bible; but having a very high view of the Word of God – corresponds to a high view of the great God who reveals Himself through this channel

Truth engages our Intellect, Emotions, Will

D. (:7-8) <u>Explain the Word</u> -- Teach the Meaning and Application of the Word of Truth

Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

People say that the Bible is not relevant – nobody wants to hear this outdated message anymore

Explanation of expositional instruction – dig out the one meaning and explain it; then apply it

Derek Kidner: The basic meaning . . . is "to make distinct or separate", which could denote either that the reading was well articulated or that the law was read and expounded section by section. . . The whole occasion emphasizes the clarity and candour of God's dealings with His people

John MacArthur: This may have involved translation for people who were only Aramaic speakers in exile, but more likely it means "to break down" the text into its parts so that the

people could understand it. This was an exposition or explanation of the meaning and not just translation.

Thomas Constable: Not only did the leaders read the Word of God, they also translated it from the Hebrew language into Aramaic, the common language of the Persian Empire. Some of the Jewspresent did not know Hebrew (**13:24**) having grown up in Babylon and elsewhere away from Jews who maintained fluency in the Hebrew language.

You need to **understand** so that you can **submit** to the Word and **apply** it to your life

II. (:9-12) FEAST ON THE WORD OF TRUTH WITH GREAT JOY RATHER THAN PROLONGED SORROW

A. (:9) Being Convicted by God's Word Brings the Danger of Despair

> *Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.*

Derek Kidner: holiness and gloom go ill together . . . To be altogether joyful was the prospect held before the guests of God (**Dt. 16:15**), and words that went most naturally with "holiness" were not only "justice and righteousness" but "glory", "beauty", "strength" and "joy."

Chuck Swindoll: The people began to weep because they knew they were guilty. They thought back over the years they had lived with no spiritual guidance. They also recalled the sins of their forefathers that had caused them to fall into captivity. The depth of their guilt brought weeping. (And that's a good sign, by the way. At times, guilt is an excellent motivation. Not all guilt is wrong. Sometimes God uses guilt to bring people out of sin and into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.) In this moment of guilt, Nehemiah stood and said, "Now stop that. God is forgiving. Let's move on. This is a holy day. This is a day not to cry but to celebrate."

Famous Tom Cruise line: "You want the truth? You can't handle the truth!"

We need to make sure that we move quickly from conviction of sin to a heavy dose of **the grace of God and the sufficiency of His power and His resources**

B. (:10) Submitting to God's Word Brings the Joy of Revitalization

> *Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

Lev. 23:40 – Commanded to rejoice … start obeying NOW

There is a time to celebrate – do that with all your heart
- eat some of your favorite foods
- have another Orange Freeze

Be generous towards those who need some practical help so you all can rejoice together in the Lord; never lose sight of the community aspect of the body of Christ

Understand the connection between Consecration and Joy

Breneman: 2 reasons to rejoice:
- the people had repented
- this was the first day of the seventh month, the Feast of Trumpets, which was a day of rejoicing (**Lev 23:23-25**; **Deut 16:15**)

In what way should *the joy of the Lord be our strength*?

Redpath:
- joy based upon forgiveness
- joy nourished in affliction
- joy that is dependent on obedience to God and not upon successful Christian service
- joy that is independent of circumstances

The secret of JOY is Jesus … Others . . . Yourself – in that order

Joy that finds its satisfaction in Christ so that we are not so tempted to find our joy in the pleasures of this world, in sinful pursuits; then joy will strengthen us against temptation; will fortify us for perseverance; will help us to endure trials; will be an encouragement to others; you need more Joy – get more of the Word and meditate on the precious promises of God and His pledge of sufficient resources to meet our every need as well as the prospect of future glory and rewards
Ultimately you lose a loved one in the Lord – but you don't sorrow as the world sorrows … you have the joy of the Lord as your strength

Jer. 15:16 "*Your words were found and I ate them, and your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts*."

Ps. 19:8 "*The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart*"

Ps. 119: 162 "*I rejoice at your word, as one who finds great spoil*."

C. (:11-12) Understanding God's Word Brings Great Celebration -- Summary

So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

III. (:13-18) FOLLOW THE WORD OF TRUTH IN COMPLETE OBEDIENCE – WITH SPECIAL APPLICATION TO THOSE AREAS WHERE YOU HAVE BEEN NEGLIGENT

A. (:13-14) Study the Word Diligently to Gain Insight into Necessary Behavior Changes

Not some type of academic interest; they wanted to discover what God had commanded and change their behavior accordingly; especially important for the head of each household to take responsibility for his family; look how easy it had been for them to be neglectful of God's requirements; the clear teaching was there all the time – they just had not been interested in obeying

Parable of the Soils – same message to different groups of people; what makes the difference in terms of the impact of the Word? Whether there are prepared hearts to receive it and obey it – you need good soil

Branam: It had to do with the difference in how the Word of God is received. In Luke chapter eight he told a story about a sower who went out to sow. And he said the seed was like the Word of God. And he found four different types of soil. And in the story the seed never changes, but the soil changes four tines. You have one soil that was rocky. You had one soil that was thin. You had one soil that was full of weeds and then you had one soil that was good soil.

B. (:15-17) Submission to the Word Brings Great Joy

Important to study the details; need to follow through with practical application; need to encourage the entire community of believers to follow suit

"*And there was great rejoicing*"

C. (:18) Summary of Their Joyful Submission to the Word of Truth

"*He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance*."

CONCLUSION:

Now you no longer had just empty walls of the city of God; Instead you had people who have been revitalized; you have a revival of focus on the Word of God; you have a celebration of God's Truth and you have joyful submission in obedience to the voice of truth

Out of all the voices calling out to me
I will choose to listen and believe the **voice of truth.**

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How strong is our desire to hear more of the Word of God?

2) How do people show respect or disrespect for the Word of God?

3) In what sense are we strengthened by the joy of the Lord?

4) Do we appreciate the privilege that is ours to understand the Word of God?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Redpath: At this moment of achievement, therefore, there was nothing more necessary than that the people of God should be brought to an intelligent understanding of the Word of God, and to a

spiritual understanding of the secret of their strength for the future . . . The result was that the people were made conscious of their own failure and sin, and they wept. What an amazing thing! This day of great victory was also a day of deep conviction resulting in sadness of heart as they discovered how serious had been their failure in the light of God's Word. . . But if it be true that we are utterly helpless, how is the battle to be won? What is the secret of strength? Where can power be found to avoid the failures and shortcomings of the past?

The answer of Ezra and Nehemiah was simply this, "*The joy of the Lord is your strength*."

- joy based upon forgiveness
- joy nourished in affliction
- joy that is dependent on obedience to God and not upon successful Christian service
- joy that is independent of circumstances

The secret of JOY is Jesus … Others . . . Yourself – in that order

Dr. Edward Watke Jr.: **The importance of God's Word for us**.

- We are saved by hearing and applying the Word of God to our hearts and lives (**I Peter 1:23**).
- We are given faith by hearing (**Romans 10:17**).
- We are made clean by applying and heeding the Word of God (**John 17:17; 15:3**).
- We are edified by the Word (**Acts 20:32**).
- We are led by the Word **(Psalm119:105**).
- We are successful in our lives through the power of the Word in our lives (**Joshua 1:8,9**).
- We are fruitful as God uses His Word in our lives and through our lives to touch others (**Psalm 1:2,3**).

Thomas Constable: This was another instance in Israel's history of a covenant renewal accompanying a spiritual awakening (cf. **Exod. 34; Josh. 24; 2 Kings 18; 22-23; Ezra 10:12-14**; et al.).

The fact that Nehemiah did not move back to Susa when he finished the wall and secured the city shows that his concern was not primarily those projects. The larger goal of reestablishing the Jews in the land to which God had told them to return following the exile was his primary objective (cf. **Isa. 48:20; Jer. 50:8; 51:6**). He wanted to see God's will done. He put God's interests before his own.

The Mosaic Law specified that once every seven years the people of Israel were to assemble and listen to the reading of the Law. This was to take place during the Feast of Booths (also called Tabernacles, **Deut. 31:10-13**). This occasion provided an opportunity for the people to renew their commitment to Yahweh and His Law. Such covenant renewal ceremonies had taken place earlier in Israel's history (e.g., **Josh. 8:30-35; 24:1-27**; et al.) and were common in the ancient Near East. **Nehemiah 8** records another of these that took place in the year 444 B.C.

Brian Branam: The Bible says that when they gathered at the water gate and they heard the reading and teaching of the Word of God it broke them in so many ways. They wept. They were excited. They were joyful. I mean, they went through a gamut of things as they heard the Word of God. It has a very living quality to it. It has a way of getting inside of us, of doing something in there. But I want to tell you this. The Word of God is not a magic

book that will just overcome everyone in the room.

I could take the Word of God and read it to one group and it would be about as exciting as an insurance seminar to them. And then I could take the Word of God and read it to another group and it would break out in revival just like it did in the book of Nehemiah when Ezra read it. What is the difference?

Jesus taught us a lot about it. It had to do with the difference in how the Word of God is received. In Luke chapter eight he told a story about a sower who went out to sow. And he said the seed was like the Word of God. And he found four different types of soil. And in the story the seed never changes, but the soil changes four tines. You have one soil that was rocky. You had one soil that was thin. You had one soil that was full of weeds and then you had one soil that was good soil.

And so the way the Word of God is received by the hearer makes a huge difference in the way the Word of God impacts and comes alive in our life even in the ministry of Jesus Christ. We know as he traveled around there were places where he did all kinds of miracles, right? There were people begging him to stay in their town, right?
But the Bible says in Matthew 13, "He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

Even his ministry of miracles, his ministry of healing, his ministry of teaching was not well received in a certain place because of their unbelief. He didn't do a whole lot there. It was received completely different than it was in other places where it was more successful.

And so it all has to do with reception. And that is what the point is. Somehow in order for the Word of God to do its work, it has got to get in there somehow. That is what I was telling the kids. The Word of God doesn't do any good collecting dust on your shelf. Somehow it has got to get in you in order for it to take root and do something inside of our lives. And that all has to do with the attitude. . .

The way we gather says a lot about how the Word of God is going to be received. We ought to gather with enthusiasm. We ought to gather with anticipation. You know what? There are other places in our lives where we gather with enthusiasm. What about a gathering at a concert? People gather at a concert pretty pumped up, right? People pay a lot of money to go to a concert.
http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=72406162324

David Silversides: **God Uses the Word**
People of Judah re-established as people of the book. Importance of the written Word of God and its authority. A reviving of attention and believing submission to the Word of God.
1. (:1-4) Desiring the Word
The people as a whole evidently wanted the Word of God. **Ezra 7:10** – had been teaching the people for some time. All who could understand were there. They were united by the Word of God. Ezra had been in obscurity for quite some time. Now he emerges again. Leaders showing that together they also submitted to the Word of God. They came together as one man and listened as one man. Doctrine (the truth of God) unites those who love Christ.

2. (:5-8) Reverencing the Word
An awesomeness in their view of God; they reverenced God with great joy (the two are not incompatible); Listening to the infallible Word of God is a vital part of worshiping God; we don't have to be careful about being too attached to the Bible; the man who professes to love Christ and ignores the Bible is a hypocrite; the Word of God is to be understood; there is only one direct meaning to any portion of Scriptures; **1 Cor. 14:20** -- "*be not children in understanding*"; **Ephes. 4:11-14**

3. (:9) Sorrow Through the Word
Rom. 3:20 -- "*by the law is the knowledge of sin*"; as we come to understand what a holy God requires; the law shows us what we should be and what we are not; **2 Cor. 7:9** – *godly sorrow unto repentance*;

4. (:9-12) Joy Through the Word
God commanded them to rejoice; this feast was to be one of joy; Thomas Watson: found 2 things difficult in preaching: to make the wicked sad and the righteous joyful; the understanding of God's Word made them first sorrowful and then joyful; same source of the message; must have a truth-led emotion; emotion not rooted in truth is meaningless; when we find joy in God we are less inclined to look to find joy in sin; it is in man's nature to want to have joy; not all causes of pleasure are godly; Satan's lie = sin is essential to happiness; serve God with gladness; *lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us*

5. (:13-19) Following the Word
Feast of Tabernacles **– Lev. 23:40ff**; this part of the festival had been neglected since days of Joshua; now they had a desire to submit to this requirement as well

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Bring the Book**
Introduction: What we're going to look at here in Nehemiah 8 is a time of revival for the nation of Israel. Derek Kidner, in fact, he says this, he said, this day was to prove a turning point. For now on, the Jews would be predominantly **a people of the book**. A strong emphasis on the Word of God is one of the primary marks of spiritual renewal or spiritual revival.

There's another leader that steps forward. He becomes the central figure, and his name is Ezra. And so really, it switches to third-person. about what's happening because Ezra is now the leader and Ezra and Nehemiah together are gonna emphasize God's Word and make God's Word central in the life of the nation.

I. The Reading of the Word – 8:1
A. **Notice <u>the Place</u>**.
This is at **the water gate**. This is on the east side of the city of Jerusalem, opposite the east gate of the temple by the Gihon Spring that is there. Archaeologists have discovered remnants of that gate area. This is the water gate because obviously that's where people went to get water. Water was necessary for life.

B. Notice <u>the People</u>
They came as one man with his unity of purpose.

C. Notice their Request
It's the people saying to Ezra, bring the book. This is the attitude of the people. The people are saying, we want to hear the Word of God. Even those children that were able to come into the congregation and hear with understanding, they were there as well. **8:2**

The strength of a church will be in direct proportion to the number of people who read and study God's Word.

II. The Reverencing of God's Word – 8:4
When he opened up the scripture, the Bible says they all stood up. And why did they do that? Because this was an act of reverence for God's word. They believed that what they were about to hear was not the word of man, this was the word of God, and so they wanted to give it reverence. They stood for six hours just to hear the Word read to them. and to understand it.

III. The Revealing of the Word – 8:7
When I say the revealing of the word, I mean **understanding** it. He was reading it in Hebrew. And many of them had been in Babylon for all these years. Some of them really didn't understand Hebrew or they forgot a lot of Hebrew. And so there was a need then to stop and make the people, make sure that they understand.

I believe in what is called the **perspicuity** of Scripture, that is the clarity of Scripture. You read it, you're gonna get it, because it's really not that hard in most places. But we all would have to admit that there are some places in the Bible that are hard. and it demands diligent study. And that's why God has given to the church gifted teachers and preachers and pastors to help explain the meaning of Scripture.

The word **expository** simply means to expose, to put on display, to just explain. And to me, expository preaching is not a method so much as it is a philosophy. You see, since I believe that this is the very Word of God, I'm not, God didn't call me to invent a message. He just called me to preach his message that he wrote. I'm not a waiter, or excuse me, I'm not a chef, I'm the waiter, all right? God cooked the meal, I just have to deliver it without messing it up, right?

A. Sound Bible teaching must be accurate.
Exegesis means out of. I'm taking out of the Bible what's there. Eisegesis is reading into the Bible something that's not there. So I make it accurate and clear and then apply it to life. Martin Luther condemned preachers who aimed at the intellectuals in the crowd and neglected the simple and the unlearned people.

B. Sound Bible teaching requires a commitment on the part of the teacher.
In order to really be prepared for a sermon, it takes hours of diligent study. I would say for me, eight to 10 hours per sermon, at least eight hours.

IV. Responding to the Word – 8:9
There's tears. And why? Because there's brokenness. And what brought the brokenness? They're understanding what God says, and they're seeing what the Word says, and they're looking at their life, and they're realizing they're not living up to what God says. And you know what the Word of God does? **It brings conviction**. God convicts us that He might forgive us. And after that, there comes a time of **rejoicing**.

V. Returning to the Word – 8:13-18

They hadn't obeyed the feasts since the days of Joshua. And now here's the whole nation, and they're getting back, they're returning back to obeying God's word. Friend, that is spiritual renewal. Someone said revival is a new obedience to the word of God.

TEXT: Nehemiah 9:1-15

TITLE: HISTORICAL REVIEW OF GOD'S COVENANT LOYALTY

BIG IDEA:
CONFESSION OF SIN LEADS TO GENUINE WORSHIP FOR GOD'S COVENANT LOYALTY -- DEMONSTRATED THROUGHOUT HISTORY IN HIS PROVIDENTIAL FAITHFULNESS

INTRODUCTION:

Jesus instructed His disciples regarding the **greatest commandment** of all: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*." (**Matt. 22:36**) How are we doing in obeying that command? One thing that greatly helps is to truly understand **the character of God**. Certainly Jesus Christ Himself is the supreme revelation of who God is: "*This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*." (John 17:3) But one main reason we **study the OT** is to learn of the attributes of God so we can love Him more deeply and worship Him more fervently. God has not changed – He is the same today as He was back then. The revival of the Jewish people in the days of Nehemiah under the teaching of Ezra the scribe put renewed emphasis on that OT revelation. We saw last week how they listened and submitted to the **Voice of Truth** as it was read to them from the law.

CONFESSION OF SIN LEADS TO GENUINE WORSHIP FOR GOD'S COVENANT LOYALTY -- DEMONSTRATED THROUGHOUT HISTORY IN HIS PROVIDENTIAL FAITHFULNESS

(:1-5) SETTING THE STAGE – PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

A. (:1) Mourning for Sin Prepares the Heart for Worship = Heart Attitude

"*Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them.*"

Derek Kidner: The feast had finished on the 22nd day. . . But now it was equally important to set this delight firmly in contrast to the gall of sin, and to face the facts of the past and the challenge of the future. So at this turning-point in the people's history, the seven-day feast must leave behind it something more durable than a sweet taste in the mouth. The responsive mood must be harnessed to the will. And, with the realism of that culture, the body and its attire must express the same self-humbling and sorrow as would the words and tone of voice.

Matt. 5:4 "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*." Sermon on the Mount = understanding the righteousness of God – not externals – but based in the heart

Luke 18:9-14 – Story of the contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector
"*He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt*"
Sometimes it is very easy to pick out the faults of others but never mourn over your own Sin

Jonah 3:5 "*Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them*." Exceedingly wicked city

B. (:2) Separation from Sin Prepares the Heart for Worship = Cleansing Action

"*The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and* ***confessed their sins*** *and the iniquities of their fathers.* (**Lev 20:26**)

We are going to see in **10:28** what this separation involved (also **13:1-3; 23-31**)

Divorcing of all wives taken from the surrounding heathen nations

Fensham: It is of interest that the congregation did not only confess their own sins, but also those of their ancestors. This is a recurring theme in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah. They felt their solidarity with past generations.

1 John 2:15 "*Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*"

2 Cor. 6:14-18 "*Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? . . . Therefore come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord*"

C. (:3) Responding to the Word of God with Confession of Sin Prepares the Heart for Worship

"*While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they* ***confessed*** *and worshiped the LORD their God.*

John MacArthur: They read for 3 hours about the sins of their fathers and for 3 more hours confessed that they had been partakers of similar evil deeds. In response to all of this, they worshiped.

D. (:4-5a) Spiritual Leaders Prepare the Hearts of God's People for Worship

"*Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Chenani, and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God. Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah, said,*"

E. (:5b) Focusing on Blessing God Prepares the Heart for Worship

"*Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever! O may Your glorious name be blessed and exalted above all blessing and praise!*"

Hymn: <u>All Praise to Him Who Reigns Above</u> (81)

We don't talk much about what it means to **bless the Lord**. For His amazing forgiveness; His mercy and grace and compassion and faithfulness … that despite all of our sins, He remains today our faithful God

Chuck Swindoll: It is rare to hear genuine praise, which is simply the practice of putting all thoughts of self aside to concentrate on adoration of God, and God alone – for His character, for His attributes, for his unmatched qualities.

Having said all of this about preparation for worship . . . what strikes me is that God's people today are **unwilling to confess their sins**. The greatest hindrance to our love for God and

genuine worship is our unwillingness to confess our sins. We don't think that we do anything wrong.

8 WAYS WE EXPERIENCE GOD'S COVENANT LOYALTY – PROMPTING OUR WORSHIP

I. (:6) HE IS THE GOD OF CREATION AND THE DESIGNER OF LIFE

"*You alone are the LORD. You have made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them And the heavenly host bows down before You.*"

"*host*" – could refer either to the stars or to angels – most likely angels – who bow down in worship (1 Kings 22:19; **Ps. 103:20-21**; **148:2**) -- Yamauchi

Illustration: During the French Revolution, many people wanted to get rid of Christianity forever. On one clear night an atheist boastfully proclaimed his beliefs to a poor peasant: "Everything will be abolished churches, Bibles, and the clergy. Yes, even the word "God" itself! We shall remove everything that speaks of religion." The peasant gave a quiet chuckle. The atheist wanted to know what the believer was laughing about. The peasant then pointed to the stars and replied, "I was just wondering how you're going to manage to get all of those bright lights out of the sky!"

Application:

- Do you acknowledge accountability to the God who created you and submit to His rule?
- Are you thankful for how He designed you?

Hymn: This Is My Father's World (58)
I Sing the Almighty Power of God (57)

Contemporary Song: Indescribable by Chris Tomlin'
Wonderful Maker by Jeremy Camp

From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea
Creation's revealing Your majesty
From the colors of fall to the fragrance of spring
Every creature unique in the song that it sings
All exclaiming

Indescribable, uncontainable,
You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.
You are amazing God
All powerful, untamable,
Awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim
You are amazing God

Who has told every lightning bolt where it should go
Or seen heavenly storehouses laden with snow
Who imagined the sun and gives source to its light
Yet conceals it to bring us the coolness of night

None can fathom

Indescribable, uncontainable,
You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name
You are amazing God
All powerful, untamable,
Awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim
You are amazing God
You are amazing God

Indescribable, uncontainable,
You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.
You are amazing God

All powerful, untamable,
Awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim
You are amazing God

Indescribable, uncontainable,
You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.
You are amazing God

Incomparable, unchangeable
You see the depths of my heart and You love me the same
You are amazing God
You are amazing God

II. (:7) HE IS THE GOD OF ELECTION AND TRANSFORMATION

"*You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, And gave him the name Abraham.*"

Abram = "*the father is exalted*" / Abraham = "*the father of a multitude*" (**Gen. 17:4-5**)

Application:

- Do you acknowledge God's Sovereignty to do as He pleases or do you want to be in control?
- Are you thankful for the way God has guided you in life and the changes He has brought about?

Hymn: The Church's One Foundation (200, vs. 2)
Have Thine Own Way, Lord (372)
What a Wonderful Change in My Life (281)

Contemporary Song: Mighty to Save by Laura Story
Everyone needs compassion, love that's never failing
Let mercy fall on me
Everyone needs forgiveness, the kindness of a Savior
The hope of nations

Savior, He can move the mountains
My God is mighty to save, he is mighty to save
Forever, Author of Salvation
He rose and conquered the grave
Jesus conquered the grave

So take me as you find me, all my fears and failures
Fill my life again
I give my life to follow, everything I believe in
Now I surrender

Savior, He can move the mountains
My God is mighty to save, he is mighty to save
Forever, Author of Salvation
He rose and conquered the grave
Jesus conquered the grave

Shine your light and let the whole world see
We're singing
For the glory of the risen king, Jesus
Shine your light and let the whole world see
We're singing
For the glory of the risen king

III. (:8) HE IS THE GOD OF COVENANT PROMISE AND FAITHFULNESS

"*You found his heart faithful before You, And made a covenant with him To give him the land of the Canaanite, Of the Hittite and the Amorite, Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite -- To give it to his descendants. And You have fulfilled Your promise, For You are righteous.*"

Application: all about the Goodness of God
- Do you acknowledge that God always keeps all of His promises?
- Are you thankful for the spiritual victories that God has graciously provided for you?

Hymn: Great is Thy Faithfulness (37)
Standing on the Promises (225)

Contemporary Song

IV. (:9-10) HE IS THE GOD OF COMPASSION AND MIRACULOUS REDEMPTION

"*You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, And heard their cry by the Red Sea. Then You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants and all the people of his land; For You knew that they acted arrogantly toward them, And made a name for Yourself as it is this day.*"

Application:
- Do you acknowledge that God cares about the pressures and burdens of your life?

- Are you thankful for God's redemption in sparing you the penalty for your arrogance and rebellion?

Hymn: O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing (90)
Does Jesus Care? (416)

Contemporary Song: Beautiful Redemption by Joy Williams
Mercies New by Nichole Nordeman

I've had my forty days and forty nights at sea
I've had forty years in the wilderness, or so to speak
I've walked with sand from the ocean floor on my feet
To turn and say You left me
I'm a doubting Thomas needing to believe
I'm a perfumed sinner just like Magdalene
I am Judas kissing on Your cheek, eager to deceive
I am all of these
I cry, Father, Father, forgive me
You say, Child, I already have

You are Beautiful
Beautiful Redemption
You are Beautiful
Beautiful Redemption

I'm the guilty thief that's hanging by Your side
And my shame is dying with Your sacrifice
And all my fears come crashing down as I look in Your eyes
I see paradise

Hallelujah (we all, we all, we all fall down)
Hallelujah (we all, we all, we all fall down)
Hallelujah (we all, we all, we all fall down)
Hallelujah (we all, we all, we all fall down)

You are Beautiful
Beautiful Redemption
You are Beautiful
Beautiful Redemption

V. (:11) HE IS THE GOD OF DELIVERANCE AND VENGEANCE

"*You divided the sea before them, So they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground; And their pursuers You hurled into the depths, Like a stone into raging waters.*

Application:

- Do you acknowledge that God has powerfully delivered you from the bondage of sin?
- Are you thankful for God's righteous vengeance?

Hymn: A Mighty Fortress is Our God (11)

Contemporary Song: Strong Tower by Kutless

When I wander through the desert
And I'm longing for my home
All my dreams have gone astray
When I'm stranded in the valley
And I'm tired and all alone
It seems like I've lost my way

I go running to Your mountain
Where your mercy sets me free

[chorus]
You are my strong tower
Shelter over me
Beautiful and mighty
Everlasting King
You are my strong tower
Fortress when I'm weak
Your name is true and holy
And Your face is all I seek

In the middle of my darkness
In the midst of all my fear
You're my refuge and my hope
When the storm of life is raging
And the thunder's all I hear
You speak softly to my soul

VI. (:12) HE IS THE GOD OF GUIDANCE AND ABIDING PRESENCE

"*And with a pillar of cloud You led them by day, And with a pillar of fire by night To light for them the way in which they were to go.*"

Application:
- Do you acknowledge that God has the wisdom to direct your paths in the best possible course?
- Are you thankful for God's presence with you today?

Hymn: The King of Love My Shepherd Is (46)
Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us (321)
He Leadeth Me, O Blessed Thought (439)
All the Way My Savior Leads Me (440)
Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah (448)

Contemporary Song: God Moves in a Mysterious Way by Jeremy Riddle

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm

Deep in unsearchable mines

Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings, in blessings
In blessings on your head

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense
But trust Him for His grace
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face

His purposes will ripen fast
Unfolding every hour
The bud may have a bitter taste
But sweet will be the flower

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain
God is His own interpreter
And He will make it plain

In His own time
In His own way...

VII. (:13-14) HE IS THE GOD OF REVELATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

"*Then You came down on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. So You made known to them Your holy sabbath, And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, Through Your servant Moses.*"

Application:

- Do you acknowledge that God's truth is righteous and helpful rather than optional and burdensome?
- Are you thankful for the spiritual insight God has given you?

Hymn: Open My Eyes, That I May See (350)
The Bible Stands Like a Rock Undaunted (218)

Contemporary Song

VIII. (:15) HE IS THE GOD OF PROVISION AND EVERLASTING INHERITANCE

"*You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger, You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst, And You told them to enter in order to possess The land which You swore to give them.*"

Application:

- Do you acknowledge that God sustains you every day with the necessities of life?
- Are you thankful for the future inheritance He has promised?

Hymn: Break Thou the Bread of Life (220)

Contemporary Song

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Must all of our prayers be spontaneous or can there be preparation and even writing down some specific thoughts to communicate to God?

2) When confronted with our own sin and failure to follow the Lord, how should we respond?

3) Does our worship focus on the attributes of God and our appreciation of those attributes in our own experience?

4) Just as the nation of Israel was reminded of lessons from her history, what lessons must we remember from our own history of God's faithful and merciful dealings with us?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Chuck Swindoll: Whenever the people of God began to doubt His promises, or worry that He might have given up on them, or become discouraged I the midst of a trial, they typically rehearsed the Exodus story. This reminded them of the foolish question their ancestors once asked – while pressed against the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army bearing down fast – "Did you led us into the desert to die?!" (**Exodus 14:11-12**) The answer they received at the Red Sea resounded down the corridors of history and echoed off each obstacle: "Of course not!" This is the story of the Exodus.

Redpath: Confessions of sin and repentance are not things to be left in the background of Christian life, things that were only connected with the early days of Christian experience – far from it. It is the humble and contrite heart which God does not despise. It is the proud whom He knoweth afar off. If you avoid in your present Christian life a daily humiliation before God, you will soon become hardhearted, cold and indifferent to the things of God.

God will never plant the seed of His life upon the soil of a hard, unbroken spirit. He will only plant that seed where the conviction of his Spirit has brought brokenness, where the soil has been watered with the tears of repentance as well as the tears of joy. Days of great joy in the Lord are always accompanied by days of great humiliation in ourselves. How often the discovery of something new in the loveliness of the Lord Jesus has brought with it the discovery of some new corruption in our own hearts.

Breneman: The exodus profoundly influenced Israel's theology, especially in three areas:

(1) in the way Israel viewed history as God's acts and as a dialogue between God and persons,
(2) in Israel's emphasis on justice and freedom, and
(3) in the basis for the biblical language of redemption.

David Silversides: **God-Glorifying Confession of Sin**
Chap. 8 – the reading of the law had produced sorrow for sin; during period of rejoicing during the feast this mourning was postponed; day of prayer and humiliation on the 24th day; spiritual reviving was needed as well as outward change; must be an acknowledgment of sinful failure in the past before people could recommit to following the Word of God

1. (:1-3) A Day of Sorrow
Fasting – denial of normal appetite of the body to give priority to spiritual things; sackcloth = sign of sorrow; casting of dust = expression of their lowly state as mortal, sinful men; separation from those who did not worship the Lord – we are not called to blend in with an ungodly world; there must be a difference between the people of God and the world; means there is a cost to following Christ; be willing to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than the pleasures of sin; outward signs of seriousness about seeking the Lord; no mighty work of the Spirit apart from heartfelt repentance; all meetings cannot be celebration and praise

2. (:4-31) A Day of Remembrance
Loud voice expressed earnestness and made sure all could hear; in this prayer led by Levites there was immense emphasis on the past (**Ps. 105-106; 78**); addressed to God Himself; God knew their history – He had brought it all about; to remind the people what God is like and the history of His dealings; to plead with God to act as He has done in the past – consistent with His character; His name is glorious; He is exalted above all blessing and praise – after all of our worship, God is vastly greater than all of our ascription of greatness to Him; impossible for us to ascribe too much greatness and honor to God; Various stages of their history

a. <u>God the Creator</u> (:**6**) – uniqueness of God; creator of entire universe; many people have never thought much about God as Creator; living in a generation that is in gross darkness about the most basic of truths; that is why God has absolute right over everything; if you don't get this point right, you won't get anything right; God isn't some vague life force; He is distinct from Creation

b. <u>Faithful and Just</u> (:**7-8**) – Call of Abraham and Covenant Promise of the Land

c. <u>God's Knowledge and Grace</u> (:**9-15**) -- the Exodus from Egypt with great signs and wonders; parting of the Red Sea and destruction of their enemies; marvelous power of God on their behalf; deliverance of His people and destruction of his enemies (**Ps 136** "*for His mercy endureth forever*" = covenant love to His people); the events of Sinai (:**12**) – physical direction; gave them the truth which was good for them – Surely they would be a grateful and thankful and humble people – yet we see the longsuffering of God for their pride and obstinance

Gene Getz: The material in **9:5b-10:39** follows the normal covenant form used in the ancient Near East:

- preamble (**9:5b-6**),

- historical prologue (**9:7-37**),
- acceptance of the covenant (**9:38-10:29**),
- and the stipulations (**10:30-39**).

Warren Wiersbe: As you read this prayer, notice that it reveals
- the greatness of God (**9:1-6**),
- the goodness of God (**vv. 7-30**);
- and the grace of God (**vv. 31-38**).

Separation without devotion to the Lord becomes isolation, but devotion without separation is hypocrisy.

Brian Bill: This prayer is a brilliant mosaic of biblical quotations, recollections, images and phrases. The Levites, who led the people in this prayer of confession, knew Scripture by heart and relied on the language of the patriarchs, prophets, priests and psalmists. This confession accurately expresses the people's disappointment with themselves and their confidence in God. In other words, this declaration of guilt has two elements they confess who God is and they confess their sins.

Michael Stover: **Our Great God**
I. GOD IS GREAT IN CREATION – (**6**)

II. GOD IS GREAT IN CONVENANTS – (**7-8**)
A. The word "covenant" has to do with an agreement.
B. God's covenants are really God's promises to do something for us.
C. Some covenants are conditional and some are unconditional. Here the covenant with Abraham is cited.

III. GOD IS GREAT IN CONFLICTS – (**9-15**)
A. Against Pharoah (**9-10**)
B. At the Red Sea (**11**)
C. In the wilderness (**12-15**)
1. Leadership (**12**)
2. Giving of the Law (**13-14**)
3. Provision (**15a**)
4. Promise (**15b**)

IV. GOD IS GREAT WITH COMPASSION – (**16-20**)
A. Israel sinned against God. (**16-17a**)
B. God showed compassion by not forsaking them, guiding them, instructing them, feeding them and giving them water. (**17b-20**)

V. GOD IS GREAT IN COMPLETION – (**21-25**)
A. God kept His promises.
B. He preserved Israel in the wilderness for forty years.
C. He gave victory over their enemies, multiplied their children and enabled them to conquer the land. God completed the work which He had started.

VI. GOD IS GREAT IN CORRECTION – (**26-35**)

A. Even though God shows compassion, He still exercises discipline.
B. God will correct.

Ray Stedman: **Let us Bow Before our Maker**
They were aware that the evil of one generation is often passed along to the next. Many today have forgotten that this principle still applies. . .

In this prayer of the Levites in Nehemiah 9 we Three hours of confession and then three hours of praise! Thus they presented their case to God. As we read on we will see that the Levites divided themselves into two groups. Some were standing on the stairs leading up to the Water Gate and others were on a platform on the opposite side of the square. These groups were calling back and forth to the people, one group confessing the sins of the people, the other praising God in language that fit the situation at the time.

Standing on the stairs were the Levites – Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani – who called with loud voices to the Lord their God [these were the confessors].

And the Levites – Jesuha, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashab-neiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah – said: "Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting" [these were the praise leaders]. {**Neh 9:4-5a** NIV}

We have, then, a kind of antiphonal chorus: one group confessing sin, another group answering them, extolling the glory, compassion and mercy of God.

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **True Confession**
Introduction: I want to deal with this whole chapter here. And you'll notice right away when you get to Nehemiah chapter 9, this is kind of a long chapter. This is 38 verses. This whole chapter is a prayer. This is one long prayer. We could call this a **prayer of confession**. When does it take place? It takes place right after the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. They go from feasting to fasting. their mood changes quickly.

Big Idea: In order to have revival and renewal, there has to be great confession of sin.
Let me give you a few reasons why, as Christians, we need to continue to confess our sins.

Why confess our sins?
- Because God tells us to. The verb there, *confess*, is a present indicative act of that is a continual action.
- but also we're to let the peace of God rule in our heart, right?
- if we don't, there's a loss of fellowship.
- unconfessed sin hinders prayer Is. 59.1.

6 Characteristics of True Confession

I. True Confession Begins with the Word of God
- Reading of God's Word
- Conviction of sin

II. True Confession Involves Brokenness and Repentance over sin

We never really stop to think about how damaging sin really is, and how sin disappoints God, and how God hates sin. We don't see it as horrible. And so I think that there should be some manner of mourning and sorrow over sin in our life. We should take time to think about the devastating effect of sin. Thomas Watson said this, the eye is made for both seeing and weeping. Sin must first be seen and then it must be wept over. God's Word helps us to do both.

III. True Confession Involves the Greatness of God – 9:5-35

IV. True Confession Meditates on the Consequences of Sin – 9:36-37

It's put us into slavery. It's caused us to be under these kings. And what they're saying is it's nobody's fault but ours. This is what we've done. And here's the lesson. Sin will enslave. Sin will rob you of the blessings that God intended for you when God gave that land to Israel.

If sin is dominating you, you are its slave. And sin wants to dominate you. And so when we confess our sins, one of the things that we should do is we should think about how sin is a great destroyer. and enslaves us. Sin destroys relationships. Sin will destroy your happiness. Sin will destroy your sense of self-worth because it will tear you down.

V. True Confession Seeks to Glorify God – 9:33

We're glorifying Him because we are confessing that He's right. and whatever punishment that he wants to give. And so we glorify God in the way we confess sin. On the other hand, when we try to find an excuse and blame it on someone else, that's the opposite. We're kind of bringing a reproach to the name of God. We're impugning the name of God.

VI. True Confession Commits to a New Beginning of Obedience – 9:38

TEXT: Nehemiah 9:16-31

TITLE: HISTORICAL REVIEW OF ISRAEL'S REBELLION VS GOD'S PERSISTENT GOODNESS

BIG IDEA:
GOD PERSISTS IN DISPLAYING HIS GOODNESS TOWARDS HIS CHILDREN DESPITE THEIR REPETITIVE CYCLES OF UNGRATEFUL REBELLION – WHY? BECAUSE HE IS GOOD BY NATURE

INTRODUCTION:

You have all seen those commercials where the young women are ecstatic because "He went to Jareds!" and they flash the big rock on their finger. Well every time I take Karen to a fancy jewelry store to look at a brilliant diamond [you have to understand some illustrations are more hypothetical than historical], they display the stone the same way. They like to lay it out for you against the backdrop of a dark, black cloth – Why? Because the brilliance of the diamond is best exhibited against such a background of stark contrast. So it is with the Goodness of God. Today's message is going to show that great contrast between our sin and God's Goodness from the historical record of God's gracious dealings with the nation of Israel.

- God's Goodness displayed over and over
- Man is totally Undeserving because of his ungratefulness and disobedience and rebellion
- So Why does God still remain faithful and shower His people with Goodness?? Because of who He is = He is Supremely Good

Remember the rich young ruler who approached Jesus in **Mark 10:17-18**
"Why do you call me Good? No one is good except God alone."

This is the **Gospel Message** – Where sin abounds, God's Grace abounds even more; His Grace is greater than all of our sin – not a license or encouragement to sin – but encourages us despite our failures to keep turning back to God for forgiveness and grace – *His goodness endures forever*

2 Tim. 2:13 *"If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself."*

5 REPETITIVE CYCLES OF GOD'S AMAZING GOODNESS DESPITE MAN'S UNGRATEFUL REBELLION

Historical review started last week in Neh chapter 9 with this great prayer of confession of sin and testimony to God's Covenant Loyalty. You remember it started with the Call of Abraham and the formation of the nation of Israel from the Book of Genesis (9:7-8); then continued into Book of Exodus (9:9-12); then the giving of the Law and the preservation of the nation in the wilderness through vs. 15.
[Last Week's theme: **8 WAYS WE EXPERIENCE GOD'S COVENANT LOYALTY – PROMPTING OUR WORSHIP**]

Today we are looking at **verses 16-31**

I (:16-17) CONTRAST BETWEEN MAN'S REBELLION AND GOD'S GOODNESS – PERIOD OF NUMBERS AND WILDERNESS WANDERINGS

A. Man's Ungrateful Rebellion – Despising the Goodness of God

1. Root Problem = Pride in establishing Self as the Ultimate Authority

*"**But they**, our fathers, acted arrogantly;"*

In contrast to God . . . "our father" = talking about the people of God; we know that unbelievers refuse to recognize the authority of God and set themselves up as the master of their own universe – but how often do we act arrogantly despite knowing better?

This root problem of Pride continues to plague us our entire life – Probably our toughest spiritual battle; What God had done for His people should have produced grateful hearts and a spirit of humility and meekness – look at the meekness of Moses and the meekness of Jesus Christ – not weakness, but allowing God to be in control of their situation completely and trusting in the Goodness of God

2. Refusal to Listen to the Authoritative Voice of God

They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments. They refused to listen,"

What happens when children are stubborn and refuse to listen to the commands of their parents? Things don't go so well – many parallels to parenting when we are studying the goodness of God; just as a father, He delights out of His Goodness to give good gifts to His children; His commands are intended to be helpful, not harmful

What are some ways we refuse to listen to the authoritative voice of God?

- We fail to spend time with God and in His Word
- We get defensive when God sends someone across our path to give us some insight into an area where we are weak or disobedient
- We fail to listen to our conscience so that it becomes dull and ineffective

3. Revisionist View of History

"and did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them;"

They did not really forget the historical fact of miraculous events like the crossing of the Red Sea – but they forgot the significance of those events and they turned their back on the lessons of history that would have reinforced the goodness of God

Liberal theologians take things a step further – they deny the actual historicity of the events – these were just myths – like Aesop's Fables – just nice stories

But God instructs us to remember both the deeds and their significance:

Psalm 145:7 *"They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness And will shout joyfully of Your righteousness."*

Education: Example of **Revisionist History:**

In a building named after a hero of the battle of the Alamo -- another battle is being fought. This time, it's a battle in the culture war.

Members of the Texas State Board of Education are trying to hash out what should and should not be in the social studies textbooks of 4.7 million students in Texas and beyond. That's because what Texas wants ends up in textbooks used all over the country. . .

"I noticed the review committee had deleted describe the role religion played in the founding of our country. I was stunned. I was shocked."

Mavis Knight on the Texas Board of Education says, "From my perspective, it gets to be the point of being a little silly."

http://www.myfoxny.com/dpp/news/education/texas-textbook-hearings-20100310

4. Rebellion Against Authority

"So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt."

MacArthur: The Hebrew of this statement is almost a repeat of **Numbers 14:4**, which records the discontent of the people with God's plan and Moses's leadership. In contrast the spies pointed out that the land God had promised to give them was *"an exceedingly good land."* (vs. 7)

Are we going to turn back and put ourselves under bondage to sin again = picture of Egypt being the world system; even the wilderness is only a picture of wrestling with sin without victory and fruitfulness; only entrance into Canaan is a picture of the victorious life that comes when we yield the members of our body as those alive from the dead to accomplish the righteousness of living for Jesus Christ (Romans 6)

Who is your leader today? Whom do you follow?
Are you still in slavery to sin or experiencing the freedom of victory in Christ and all of the blessings of the Goodness of God? [Transition]

B. God's Amazing Goodness

1. Rooted In His Character

"But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness;"

2. Displayed In His Care of His People

"And You did not forsake them."

Would have been so easy for God to walk away and forsake us sinners; We deserve to be abandoned;
We know what it feels like to be cut off from support relationships – it is painful; How painful if God turns His back on us; Christ took our sins on Himself; He was made sin for us; He endured the Father forsaking Him on the cross

II (:18-25) CONTRAST BETWEEN MAN'S REBELLION AND GOD'S GOODNESS – PERIOD OF WILDERNESS WANDERINGS AND CONQUEST OF CANAAN (Numbers, Deut., Joshua)

A. (:18) Man's Ungrateful Rebellion – Despising the Goodness of God

1. Foolish Idolatry
   "Even when they made for themselves a calf of molten metal"

While God was in the process of giving them His law – tremendous privilege of God's revelation; yet the people despised this display of God's goodness

2. Mocking Insults
   "and said, 'This is your God Who brought you up from Egypt,'"

3. Shocking Irreverence
   "and committed great blasphemies,"

B. (:19-25) God's Amazing Goodness
   1. Rooted In His Character
      "You, in Your great compassion"

   2. Displayed In His Care of His People – <u>4 Amazing Blessings</u>
      a. Guiding Presence in the Journey of Faith
         " did not forsake them in the wilderness; The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day, to guide them on their way, nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go."

They were in the wilderness because of discipline; even discipline is a demonstration of God's Goodness – **Heb. 12** teaches us to appreciate God's discipline

      b. Gracious Enlightenment Regarding God's Expectations – Giving of the Law
         "You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,"

Nothing teaches us as effectively as <u>personal tutoring</u>; that is one reason homeschooling has proven to be so effective; classroom instruction has much value; but personal tutoring that is customized to the needs of the individual can do the job quicker and more effectively;
Here we have insight into the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the OT; referenced also in **vs. 30**

      c. Generous Provision in the Wilderness Wanderings
         (1) Food -- Manna in the wilderness
            "Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth,"

Walk out of your tent every morning and pick up the baked goods for breakfast – what a deal! People of God didn't appreciate it – grumbled and complained

         (2) Drink -- Water in the desert
            "and You gave them water for their thirst."

We have such an abundance of variety – yet we are probably the most discontented people of all time. That is what history demonstrates happens during times of prosperity and peace. Because we forget to depend upon God for our daily sustenance.

         (3) Long Term Sufficiency
            "Indeed, forty years You provided for them in the wilderness and

they were not in want;"

MacArthur: The same word is used in **Ps. 23:1**, "*I shall not want*." Even during the long season of chastisement, God miraculously cared for their every need.

Review your life and the experiences of your family – when have you been in want?

(4) Physical Care

(a) Clothing

"*Their clothes did not wear out,*"

Look at all that fills our closets – we need bigger closets – shirts, ties, shoes, handbags … John the Baptist advised: if you have the luxury of having 2 coats, you might want to give 1 to someone else who is in need; you can only wear one – He wasn't much of a fashion guru

(b) Health

"*nor did their feet swell.*"

Swindoll: Despite their recurring fits of doubts, grumbling, rebellion, and outright idolatry, the Lord brought them into the Promised Land, settled them, and began to prosper them.

d. Growing Dominion in the Promised Land

"You also gave them kingdoms and peoples, and allotted them to them as a boundary. They took possession of the land of Sihon the king of Heshbon and the land of Og the king of Bashan. 23 "You made their sons numerous as the stars of heaven, and You brought them into the land which You had told their fathers to enter and possess. 24 "So their sons entered and possessed the land. And You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and You gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, to do with them as they desired."

Promise of territory growth – tremendous military victories

Promise of numerical growth – fulfilling the promises to Abraham

Note that God does not mention key names of leaders like Joshua … Why? Because they were simply instruments that God used. They were not the ones who should get the credit for the accomplishments. Everything came to the nation as a gift from the sovereign God.

Look at all God did for them in His Amazing Goodness; now switch gears/ What was <u>their Role</u>?

e. Grabbing Up the Goodies that came to them undeserved from the labors of others – God Gives … we just receive the gifts as undeserved sinners

"<u>They</u> captured fortified cities and a fertile land. <u>They</u> took possession of houses full of every good thing, hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, fruit trees in abundance."

- Nice not to have to build walls around your own cities – they could appreciate how much hard work was involved in such projects
- Nice not to have to build or furnish your own houses – just there for the grabbing and the possession
- Nice to not have to dig your own wells – but have abundant water
- Nice to drink wine without the hard work of cultivating the vineyards

- Nice to eat fruit without having to cultivate the trees

f. Summary: Great Satisfaction with the Abundance of God's Goodness
"So they ate, were filled and grew fat, and reveled in Your great goodness."

No limits to God's Goodness

III (:26-27) CONTRAST BETWEEN MAN'S REBELLION AND GOD'S GOODNESS – PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

A. (:26) Man's Ungrateful Rebellion – Despising the Goodness of God

1. Casting Off God's Authority
"But they became disobedient and rebelled against You, and cast Your law behind their backs" very disrespectful

2. Killing God's Messengers
"*and killed Your prophets who had admonished them so that they might return to You*"

Popularity is not a good test of a prophet – must look from God's perspective to aspect of faithfulness to deliver the correct message
Purpose of warnings is to get people to wake up and turn back to God (condition of Nineveh)

3. Calling God a Liar
"*and they committed great blasphemies.*"

B. (:27a) God's Loving Discipline
"Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them,"

Swindoll: This is the story of Judges. Seven bewildering cycles of prosperity, sin, decline, oppression, repentance, and deliverance, then back around to prosperity again, though less than before. It's a tragic, sickening, downward spiral into national chaos on every level – spiritual, political, economic, and social.

C. (:27b) God's Amazing Goodness

1. Rooted In His Character
"*But when they cried to You in the time of their distress, You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion*"

manifold mercies – not just one-sided

Exodus 33:19 "*And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.*"

2. Displayed In His Care of His People
"*You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors*"

IV (:28-29a) CONTRAST BETWEEN MAN'S REBELLION AND GOD'S GOODNESS (PERIOD OF THE JUDGES – CONTINUED)

A. Man's Ungrateful Rebellion – Despising the Goodness of God

"But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You;"

B. God's Loving Discipline

"Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them."

C. God's Amazing Goodness

1. Rooted In His Character

"When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, And many times You rescued them according to Your compassion,"

2. Displayed In His Care of His People

"And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law."

V (:29b-31) CONTRAST BETWEEN MAN'S REBELLION AND GOD'S GOODNESS – PERIOD OF THE MONARCHY

A. Man's Ungrateful Rebellion – Despising the Goodness of God

"Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, by which if a man observes them he shall live. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen."

Mark Fitzpatrick:

Progressive stages of rebellion against God – pictured in their body language:

1. withdrew their <u>shoulder</u> (speaks of willingness to work for the things of God)

2. hardened their <u>neck</u> (refusing to turn back to God)

3. finally the <u>ear</u> which they closed (refusal to listen)

B. God's Amazing Goodness (Finishing cycle has a double emphasis on the Goodness of God)

1. Rooted in His Character = longsuffering

"However, You bore with them for many years,"

2. Displayed in His Care of His People

"and admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets, Yet they would not give ear."

C. God's Loving Discipline

"Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands."

D. God's Amazing Goodness – finishes with this twofold emphasis on God's Goodness

1. Rooted in His Character

"Nevertheless, in Your great compassion"

2. Displayed In His Care of His People
" You did not make an end of them or forsake them,"

3. Rooted In His Character
"for You are a gracious and compassionate God."

CONCLUSION:

Wiersbe: Against the dark background of Israel's unfaithfulness shines the bright light of the faithfulness of God. When Israel obeyed Him, He was faithful to bless; when they disobeyed Him, He was faithful to chasten; when they asked for mercy, He was faithful to forgive. God is willing to give His people many privileges, but He will not give them the privilege of sinning and having their own way. God's purposes are more important than our pleasures, and He will accomplish His purposes even if He has to chasten us to do it.

If you have not yet bowed the knee to Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, the message of the Book of Romans is that you dare not continue to presume upon the goodness of God.

Romans 2:4 *"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance*?"

For the people of God, we must pay close attention to these lessons from history. Every act of rebellion and of disobedience is an affront to the goodness of God. Our Heavenly Father delights to shower us with His blessings. We need to live with thankful hearts and fully embrace the goodness of God.

Psalm 23:6 *"Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever*."

Psalm 31:19 *"How great is Your goodness, Which You have stored up for those who fear You, Which You have wrought for those who take refuge in You, Before the sons of men*!"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) As you take time to reflect on your family's history, do you see any recurring cycles that parallel the track record of the people of God as recorded in this passage?

2) How can you more adequately express your appreciation to God for the goodness He has demonstrated to you?

3) Are there any areas where you are not listening to God or becoming stiff-necked and stubborn in refusing to remember His graciousness and respond to His commands?

4) How can we become more like God in dealing with forgiveness and grace and compassion and longsuffering towards those who deserve our anger?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Breneman: A major change in thought is signaled in this verse by the initial *"but they*." What God did for and gave to Israel should have produced thankfulness and humility in them. That it did not was the great tragedy of the Old Testament. *"Stiff-necked"* is a common biblical expression for stubbornness (cf. Exod 32:9; Jer 7:26; 17:23). The imagery is that of an animal that struggles against having a yoke placed on its neck. This attitude of pride and wickedness was widespread during the monarchical period and is claimed to have been the reason for the fall of both Samaria and Judah (cf. Jer 17:9).

Alistair Begg: **The Goodness of God**
Learning from the past how to live in the present; theme of Fiddler on the Roof … "Tradition teaches us who we are and what God expects of us" – that is what we gain from the study of history (v.1-15)
4 Statements about the Goodness of God:
1. (:6-15) God's Goodness is revealed in all He has done – even difficult things and disappointments and pain – touches upon creation, election, redemption, provision for His people

2. (:16ff) God's Goodness is displayed in the face of disobedience
Stiff necked arrogance is striking in the background of God's provisions for His people; they lacked nothing (:21); tragically true that they appreciated nothing (:17); rings with a relevant note down through the corridors of time; God has supplied our needs way beyond all we could think or imagine; we have vast resources and lack virtually nothing; we live in one of the most malcontented generations; how can we summarize this disobedience? **Expressed in 4 ways**:

a. Their Obstinate **Refusal** (:16-17)
b. Their Incomplete **Remembrance** (:17); selective memory – they didn't forget that the crossing of the Red Sea took place but they forgot what it represented
c. Their Unwarranted **Rebellion** – Deut. 1:26 *"unwilling to go up"*
d. Their Ill-advised **Return** – Num. 14 – chronicles this in a quite graphic way

Ps. 106 parallels 9th chap. of Neh. (vs. 25, 43) -- they grumbled in their cars and did not obey the Lord; they chose to do their own thing and sin ate them like a disease; we understand what it is to be disobedient; some of us are living in a spiritual slump – present in person but refusing to listen on the inside; Heb. 4 – the message was *of no value* to them because they refused to combine it with faith; "I got nothing out of that sermon" – no surprise; what a perversity to want to go back to Egypt; do you remember how bad was your unregenerate state; Am I submitting to the authority of others in my life?
God's Goodness is revealed in the face of that disobedience – a forgiving God, gracious, compassionate; vs. 17 = wonderful verse – *therefore He did not desert them* = which is what we would expect; Instead we should *revel in God's great goodness*;

He gave me beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise
For the spirit of heaviness.
That we might be trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord

That He might be glorified.

3. God's Goodness is Displayed in the Discipline of His Children
The Lord disciplines those he loves (**Heb. 12**)

4. (:32ff) God's Goodness is Displayed in the Confession of His People
You are personal to us; powerful to us; a promise-keeping God
http://www.truthforlife.org/resources/message/the-goodness-of-god-pt3/

Kidner: Each of the two parties, God and man, stands out with special clarity against the background of the other. Sin abounds, grace superabounds. Israel opts for turning back to Egypt and for a new god; the Lord stands by His people, keeps His promises and meets their deepest and most elementary needs. Throughout this miraculous pilgrimage *"they lacked nothing"* – and appreciated nothing. This part of their history ends with an undeserved and unstinted inheritance, *"full of good things*."

Redpath: Just suppose you and I could take one day and do just that: lay down our tasks and show the Lord for one day that fellowship with Him was more important than anything else in the world. Just suppose you took time to reflect on God's goodness and to go back over the story of your life, the milestones past which He has led you, the path along which He has brought you. What a blessing it would be to reflect upon His goodness! I think we could come to the conclusion that God's mercy with a sinner is only equaled and perhaps outmatched by His patience with the saints, with you and me. One principle of revival is taking time for reflection upon God's goodness, upon His way with you through the years that have passed. Have you done that lately?

Mark Fitzpatrick: **A disobedient nation … A faithful God**
Assessing the past; looking back in their history; rather than constantly worshiping this faithful God, the people repeatedly disobeyed; yet God continued to remain faithful to keep His covenant promises; more of an overview of the passage
(:16-17a) Refusal to Obey -- 7 distinct clauses; a symmetry or parallelism describing the wickedness of these people: A B C D C B A – at the core = "*they refused to obey* (or listen)"
If we are ignorant of God's Word we will be ignorant of His Works; Rebels by desire, by choice and by action; contrast the hardness of heart of the people with the dealings of God with them; Ex. 34 – the giving of the law and the second giving of the law was not a sign of God's judgment but God's mercy;
(:18) Overt Idolatry – Ex. 32:1-8
(:19-25) -- 7 key points of **God's gracious dealings** with His people:
1) God did not forsake them but led them in the wilderness even though they provoked God (:19); very hard to comprehend this
2) He instructed them and fed them (:20); God was getting no obedience from these people;
3) He sustained them in all things in the wilderness (:21); the very fact they endured 40 years is a testimony (journey only takes 11 days); going around in circles because of their own unfaithfulness – symbolic of our own spiritual wanderings
The wilderness is a picture of wandering in the barrenness of our disobedience (Egypt is the world – we are meant to leave there and go to victory; but quite often we find ourselves sitting on the fence); Canaan is a picture of entering into all of the blessings in this world which we can have if we obey God (more than a picture of heaven)
4) (:22) He gave them nations --

5) (:23) He multiplied them and gave them the abundance of the land
6) (:24) He gave them dominion over the people of the land – *Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*
7) (:24) He gave them every good thing the land of Canaan had to offer – picture of entrance into gospel blessings and privileges; God just gives us everything; nothing was held back from them
(:26) Cycle repeats – Unbelievable disobedience of the people
(:27-28) Fatherly discipline – this is a mercy; **Responds to their cry for help**; natural for human beings to cry out to God in desperate situations; then we quickly return to our sinful ways once things are easy again; if you put 2 oxen in the field will they naturally plow the field?? The yoke has to be put upon them and they have to be guided; then they will plow the field quite effectively; we need the yoke of God's commandments and guidance; **Amos 6:1** "woe to those who are at ease in Zion" (LXX "despise Zion"); God became their adversary for good
(:29b) Disease of Disobedience – withdrew their shoulder (speaks of willingness to work for the things of God); hardened their neck (refusing to turn to God); finally the ear which they closed (refusal to listen) – progressive nature of their disease; am I at any of these stages? Let's not lose heart in doing good; obedience to God is work; ultimate leads to apostasy
(:30) Results of Apostasy –
(:31) Faithfulness of God will never be thwarted by the disobedience of His people – 2 Tim. 2:13 – If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful because He cannot deny Himself – His faithfulness is not based on me
http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?currPage=4&keyword=Nehemiah&BibleOnly=true&currSection=sermonsbible&chapter=9&verse=0&AudioOnly=false&SortBy=bible

Dr. J. Drew Conley: **God's Goodness to a Rebellious People**
One of the great prayers of the Bible; Problem: we don't pray like we should; we don't know how to pray; often our prayers amount to rapidly uttered cliches; many believers seem ill at ease in talking to their God; How easily are prayers are all about us, like giving God His assignments for the day.
Review: this prayer in Neh 9 started with pure adoration to God (last message)
Here **(:16-25)**: God's Goodness in stark contrast to Man's Persistent Disobedience

1. **Goodness actively demonstrated**
2. **Goodness is totally undeserved**
3. Why should God be good to me: **Goodness rooted in God's Character**

Those 3 points are a summary of the Gospel message

1. **Goodness actively demonstrated**

Big problems with liberal theology: says that none of these things really happened; the miracles didn't really happen; but like Aesop's fables they have a valuable lesson to us as a story; but God's goodness is actively demonstrated at particular times in history; We worship a historical God who actively demonstrates His goodness; It is a mercy that God tells us what to do (the giving of the law as His instruction manual) because He is perfect and all-wise and loving; gave us His commandments; miracle is just common fare for God; God won't cut us off and forsake us; the God of heaven cares about what I eat, what I wear, the condition of my feet; nothing is said of key leaders like Joshua because God gave them the victory; focus is all on God; no credit to man;
We are quick to charge God with not being good;

Atheist: How could there be a good, all-powerful God who allows so much suffering?

- look at all of the good things God has demonstrated around us
- God takes note of the bad things and is doing something about it
    - He tells us why pain and suffering exist
    - He is doing something to rescue those who put their trust in Him
    - He subjected the creation to vanity in hope; would we believe that sin was evil if no suffering associated with it?

2 Pet. 3 longsuffering towards us; giving more time for men to repent and be saved;

2. **Goodness is totally undeserved**

People ask: Why do bad things happen to good people?
Better question: Why do good things happen to bad people?
Need to be honest with ourselves; why is God so good to us – given our persistent sinfulness?
Man's natural tendency is to rob God of credit for what he has done:

- if it happened a long time ago, we discount it – didn't really happen; didn't really matter
- there are theologians who don't even believe in God; "a-theologians" – or at least they don't believe in the God of the Bible

Do I believe that there is no limit to what God can do? Golden calf meant to represent Jehovah God; but actually = syncretism = mixing true religion with God's truth; if I redefine God I am not offering "worth-ship" but de-valuing God; what type of worship does God accept; cf Nahab and Abihu who offered strange fire; look at King Saul: *to obey is better than sacrifice* – look at Uzzah trying to steady the ark of the covenant as they transported it in the wrong manner; look at Annaniah and Saphira in the NT lying about their offering; we must have the right kind of worship; don't teach as doctrine the commandments of men (error of the Pharisees)

3. **Goodness rooted in God's Character**

The reason He didn't abandon them was because of the type of God He is by nature; He is ready to pardon; Sin displays how wonderful God is and shows His manifold grace; takes a long time for God to flare His nostrils in anger; not because of some goodness in us; demonstrates His compassion over and over again; that is why we have Hope! God is Good! You can find grace and mercy and pardon from such a God; this is a God I can talk to in prayer

TEXT: Nehemiah 9:32-38

TITLE: IS GOD GIVING YOU A FAIR SHAKE?

BIG IDEA:
BENEFITING FROM GOD'S PROMISES REQUIRES FIRST EMBRACING GOD'S JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION:
Man loves to sit in the role of the Supreme Court Justice – deciding what is right and what is wrong; deciding what is fair and what type of justice should be dispensed. What a job – who wouldn't like that prestigous seat. You are the final authority. Nobody can overturn your decision. Even when it comes to evaluating the actions of God … man likes to be the one making the decision about what is fair. **Is God giving you a fair shake?** Maybe you come this morning with some bitterness towards God. Why is He allowing you to experience affliction? It may be related to discipline for sin (the context here in Neh 9) or it may be simply related to His wisdom in allowing a specific trial. In either case we know that the conditions of our life right now cannot contradict God's intrinsic nature.

God has demonstrated His **covenant loyalty** and His faithfulness to His intrinsic nature of **Goodness** down through history. That was the message of the first 31 verses of chapter 9. But God wants man to agree that He has acted fairly when it comes to our specific situation.

The problem is that most people want to try to twist God's promises to realize all of the benefits of God's Faithfulness and Goodness without first embracing His justice. They treat God as a rabbit's foot they can rub for good luck; or as a box of fortune cookies where they pluck one out each morning and name and claim some sweet promise. God will not allow Himself to be played in that way.

Deut 28 – classic chapter on the blessings and curses proclaimed by God in the Mosaic Covenant
- **:1-14** (vs. 1, 13-14) there are **conditions** to the promises
- **:15-68** (vs. 15, 58) – far longer section; what happens if you fail to live up to the conditions of the covenant? Curses instead of blessings … even though God will still keep His promises to Abraham and the nation overall

Any evaluation of God's Fairness by an Israelite must take into consideration Deut. 28

4 PRINCIPLES GOVERNING GOD'S SENSE OF FAIRNESS

I. (:32) MERCY MUST TRIUMPH OVER JUDGMENT (**James 2:13**)
When we show a spirit of favoritism and a critical judgmental spirit – like that talked about in James 2 where we favor the rich over the poor – we deny the reality of how God has treated us in His great mercy – Ultimately, what did we deserve from God? Yet we have experienced His great Mercy … so when it comes to any question in our mind about God's fairness to us it must ultimately be answered by going back to confessing God's great mercy in saving us – He owes us nothing! How can we question His fairness? We know that even in our present affiction, He will ultimately deliver His children. The Question is "**How long**?" We lose patience; we struggle with perseverence

But the important principle to remember is **MERCY MUST TRIUMPH OVER JUDGMENT**

"The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is your faithfulness"
Message of Jeremiah in Book of Lamentations 3:22

It is only because of His mercies that we are not totally consumed; that we have Hope at all

A. God Never Changes – He Acts in a Manner Consistent with His Character
He is never going to stop being Who He is; Who He has demonstrated Himself to be down through history; that is why we derive value from studying these OT stories – God never changes

1. **Covenant Commitment**
"Now therefore, our God,"

Nehemiah, the master builder, building here on all of his previous ministry; getting ready to make a significant request to God; to petition Him for something very important; He has completed the project of rebuilding the walls of the city; he is committed to the more important rebuilding project – reviving the spiritual lives of God's people so that they once again serve Him in obedience and faithfulness

He begins with the recognition of the unique personal relationship the Jewish people enjoy with the one true God; in contrast to the idols worshiped by the nations around them; they know God; God is on their side; He works for their good; His purposes for history include taking care of Israel
Personal relationship; elect nation –
very common phrase in **Neh; 4:4, 9, 20; 5:9; 6:16**; chaps 10 ff also "the house of our God"

Are you confident that God is on your side? Is He your God; can you call on Him in faith knowing that He is listening to your request? Or have you replaced God in your life with other idols – idols of materialism and pleasure that are as dumb as wood and stones when it comes to meeting your deepest needs?

2. **Majestic Might**
"the great, the mighty, and the awesome God,"

Nothing can frustrate God's plans; He can carry out His purposes

Is God **great** in your thinking? **Ps. 95:3** *"For the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods … Come let us worship and bow down .. let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand"* – don't harden your hearts in disobedience and rebellion

Is God **mighty** and **awesome** in your thinking? **Neh. 1:5**; **Deut. 10:17** *"For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. He executes justice* [seen as a good thing]" –
Our response: fear Him, serve him, cling to Him, swear by His name – "*He has done these great and awesome things for you*"

When we come to God in prayer to make a request . . . first make sure that we understand Who

God is

Kidner: *great* is a reminder that God does not share our narrowness of vision or of being; *mighty* is a virile word, fit to describe the paladins who did exploits for David (2 Sa. 23:8ff), or "*the King of glory . . ., mighty in battle*" (Ps. 24:8), or the divine prince of Isaiah 9:6. *Terrible* is misleading, for the word used here means awe-inspiring, not ruthless. It is related to the expression "*the fear of the Lord*", that filial relationship which, in the most positive of senses, puts us securely in our place, and God in His

3. **Loyal Love** – Sums up previous 2 messages (listen on www.sermonaudio.com)
    a. (9:1-15) Historical Review of God's Covenant Loyalty
        "*who keeps covenant*"

    b. (9:16-31) Historical Review of the Goodness of God
        "*and lovingkindness*"

B. God Cares About Our Troubles -- Puts a Limit on the Severity and Length of Necessary Discipline – Here is the one request that Nehemiah makes in this lengthy prayer:

1. Sensitivity to the Severity – this is the one Petition
    "*Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You,*"

Doesn't sound like our prayers at all – we just string one request after another; Nehemiah spends the bulk of his prayer time rehearsing who God is in His character and what God has done for His people down through history

(Exod 18:8 – testimony of Jethro to the goodness of God; Num 20:14 – Moses speaking to the king of Edom; Lam 3:5 "*He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship*")

Not minimizing the pain and the suffering = "*hardship*" – Does God really understand what I am going through? Does He see? Has He forgotten me? Does He care? That's when we need to go to the Gospel accounts and see the compassion of Jesus in action; look at how His heart goes out to those in need – You have health issues; financial issues; relationship issues; job issues; car troubles; all types of pressure – how about all of those troubles you have brought on yourself as the consequences of sinful decisions you have made?? Does God care about those hardships or just say – "You made your bed, now sleep in it?

Commercial: dog that can't sleep; tosses and turns – worried about the safety of his bone: "trouble, trouble …"

Trouble … trouble, trouble, trouble …
Been doggin' my soul since the day I was born
Worry . . . worry, worry, worry . . .
Just will not seem to leave my mind alone

2. Scope of the Discipline
    "*Which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people,*

these are people that want to serve the Lord; no one in the nation got a free pass; no one was

immune from the hardship of God's discipline on the nation – not even the prophets who faithfully proclaimed God's words of warning; no partiality; no special exemptions

a. Royalty – kings and princes – current and future leaders

b. Religious Leaders – priests and prophets

c. Regular Folks – fathers and all your people

3. Sensitivity to the Timetable
"From the days of the kings of Assyria to this day."

70 years of Captivity literally fulfilled
New era in God's program for His people

Kidner: The kings of Assyria were the first of the successive world powers to meance and then subjugate Israel and Judah since the bondage in Egypt. From the middle of the 9th century BC to Nehemiah's day in the middle of the 5th century, first Assyria, intermittently, then Babylon and Persia had dominated this small people. And Greece and Rome were to follow.

II. (:33-35) DISOBEDIENCE DESERVES DISCIPLINE – 4 CONFESSIONS OF A CONTRITE HEART

A. Embracing God's Justice = **Key Testimony**
"However, You are just in all that has come upon us;"

(**2 Chron 12:1-8** account of bondage to Shishak of Egypt under kingdom of Rehoboam in Judah when they forsook the law of the Lord; look at the difference between serving God and serving sin; Ezra 9:13-15; Ps 119:137 *"Righteous are You, O Lord, and upright are Your judgments."*; Jer 12:1 – Age old question: Why do the wicked prosper?; Dan 9:14 *"for the Lord our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice."*)

Is this the testimony of our heart? To agree with God that He is just in how He has afflicted us?

"It is Well With My Soul" – songwriter – different circumstances; no discipline for sin involved

This hymn was written by a Chicago lawyer, **Horatio G. Spafford**. You might think to write a worship song titled, 'It is well with my soul', you would indeed have to be a rich, successful Chicago lawyer. But the words, "When sorrows like sea billows roll ... It is well with my soul", were not written during the happiest period of Spafford's life. On the contrary, they came from a man who had suffered almost unimaginable personal tragedy.

Horatio G. Spafford and his wife, Anna, were pretty well-known in 1860's Chicago. And this was not just because of Horatio's legal career and business endeavors. The Spaffords were also prominent supporters and close friends of D.L. Moody, the famous preacher. In 1870, however, things started to go wrong. The Spaffords' only son was killed by scarlet fever at the age of four. A year later, it was fire rather than fever that struck. Horatio had invested heavily in real estate on the shores of Lake Michigan. In 1871, every one of these holdings was wiped out by the great Chicago Fire.

Aware of the toll that these disasters had taken on the family, Horatio decided to take his wife and four

daughters on a holiday to England. And, not only did they need the rest -- DL Moody needed the help. He was traveling around Britain on one of his great evangelistic campaigns. Horatio and Anna planned to join Moody in late 1873. And so, the Spaffords traveled to New York in November, from where they were to catch the French steamer 'Ville de Havre' across the Atlantic. Yet just before they set sail, a last-minute business development forced Horatio to delay. Not wanting to ruin the family holiday, Spafford persuaded his family to go as planned. He would follow on later. With this decided, Anna and her four daughters sailed East to Europe while Spafford returned West to Chicago. Just nine days later, Spafford received a telegram from his wife in Wales. It read: "Saved alone."

On November 2nd 1873, the 'Ville de Havre' had collided with 'The Lochearn', an English vessel. It sank in only 12 minutes, claiming the lives of 226 people. Anna Spafford had stood bravely on the deck, with her daughters Annie, Maggie, Bessie and Tanetta clinging desperately to her. Her last memory had been of her baby being torn violently from her arms by the force of the waters. Anna was only saved from the fate of her daughters by a plank which floated beneath her unconscious body and propped her up. When the survivors of the wreck had been rescued, Mrs. Spafford's first reaction was one of complete despair. Then she heard a voice speak to her, "You were spared for a purpose." And she immediately recalled the words of a friend, "It's easy to be grateful and good when you have so much, but take care that you are not a fair-weather friend to God."

Upon hearing the terrible news, Horatio Spafford boarded the next ship out of New York to join his bereaved wife. Bertha Spafford (the fifth daughter of Horatio and Anna born later) explained that during her father's voyage, the captain of the ship had called him to the bridge. "A careful reckoning has been made", he said, "and I believe we are now passing the place where the de Havre was wrecked. The water is three miles deep." Horatio then returned to his cabin and penned the lyrics of his great hymn.

The words which Spafford wrote that day come from 2 Kings 4:26. They echo the response of the Shunammite woman to the sudden death of her only child. Though we are told "her soul is vexed within her", she still maintains that 'It is well." And Spafford's song reveals a man whose trust in the Lord is as unwavering as hers was.

It would be very difficult for any of us to predict how we would react under circumstances similar to those experienced by the Spaffords. But we do know that the God who sustained them would also be with us.

No matter what circumstances overtake us may we be able to say with Horatio Spafford...

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

B. Contrasting God's Faithfulness with Man's Disobedience

"*For You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly.*"

You cannot get any more direct than this simple appraisal; no smokescreens; no excuses; no blameshifting; no end runs; no confusing of the issues

We all remember the illustration of the young boy who is being disciplined by his Mom –

> He was in church with his mother and he would not sit still. He kept standing up in the pew. His mom kept saying sit down. He would sit down for a few minutes and get back up again. She said again, "I said sit down." This happened several times. The little boy stood up and would not sit down. His mother, aggravated, put her hand on the top of his head and pushed him down. The little boy sat fuming. He looked at his mom and said, "**I may be sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside** ."

– still have a heart attitude of rebellion; you can pressure my external behavior to change … but

my heart attitude remains rebellious

C. Rejecting God's Requirements

"For our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers have not kept Your law Or paid attention to Your commandments and Your admonitions with which You have admonished them."

D. Spurning God's Goodness

1. Rejecting God's Authority

"But they, in their own kingdom,"

2. Despising God's Goodness

"With Your great goodness which You gave them,"

3. Ignoring God's Faithfulness

"With the broad and rich land which You set before them,"

4. Rebelling Against God's Service

"Did not serve You or turn from their evil deeds."

(Deut 28:20; Judg 2:19; Ps 106:39; Is 1:16; Jer 4:4; 21:12; 23:2, 22; Hos 9:15; Zech 1:4)

Swindoll: No leader can effectively chart a new path toward healing and recovery without first acknowledging his or her organization's present reality. If earnings are negative and plummeting, the CEO must accept the hard, cold truth without the distortion of optimistic or pessimistic lenses. If the church is wracked with division, the pastor must peel away all the masking to expose the cracks. If the company is rife with incompetence, the leader must recognize the need for replacment or training before setting substantive goals. Quite often, the very act of stating present realities will suggest the appropriate solutions. God loves it when we're vulnerable and painfully honest before Him.

III. (:36-37) BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS BRING BURDENSOME BONDAGE – 4 UPSIDE DOWN CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

A. **Upside Down Relationship** – Slaves instead of Sovereigns

"Behold, we are slaves today,"

Breneman: It was one thing to be a slave in a foreign land, but to be a slave in their own land was quite another.

B. **Upside Down Remuneration**

"And as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty, Behold, we are slaves in it. Its abundant produce is for the kings"

Worst possible judgment – the good things that were intended for us are consumed by our enemies

People talk about being upside down in their finances all of the time – you buy a house and all of a sudden the market tanks and now you find yourself upside down – owing much more than the house is now worth; no way you can get out from under; that is what happens to businesses all of

the time

C. **Upside Down Rulership**

"Whom You have set over us because of our sins; They also rule over our bodies And over our cattle as they please,"

Man likes to think he can be autonomous; ruling over himself – but he ends up in bondage

D. **Upside Down Relief** – Jesus came so that we might experience great peace

"So we are in great distress."

Commercial: "How do you spell Relief? Rolaids" – brand of antacid; baseball season almost beginning – they used to sponsor the Major League Baseball award for top relief pitchers

Breneman: God's providential role in history is displayed with great care in this chapter. What humans may attribute to secular causes, the biblical authors understood to have derived from none other than the living God.

IV. (:38) COVENANT BLESSINGS CALL FOR PERSONAL COMMITMENT

1. Written Commitment

"Now because of all this we are making an agreement in writing;"

We live in an age where people shy away from commitment
God keeps His Commitments

Kidner: the verb translated "*make*" is *karat "to cut*," which has strong association with covenant-making.

2. Ratified Commitment – Action Plan – detailed in chap. 10

"And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests."

Leaders must lead with their personal commitment

Cannot be any turning back

Substituting Obedience at every point where disobedience had been their downfall

Foolish: to continue along the same path, practicing the same historical errors of disobedience and rebellion and expect different results; must be a commitment to change

CONCLUSION:

We end up back at the beginning – asking ourselves the all important question:

Is God giving you a fair shake?

If you have resisted making the commitment to transfer the mastery of your life over to Jesus Christ and submit to Him as your Lord and Savior, you cannot expect Mercy to Triumph over

Judgment in your situation. You need to repent and acknowledge your sin and say: "God you are just in sending me to hell to pay the penalty for my sins. But I want to put my trust completely in Jesus Christ and cast myself upon your mercy for salvation."

If you are a believer and experiencing God's Discipline, you must confess that your disobedience deserves God's discipline. Your life is upside down in a number of areas because of the consequences of your own sin. You must make the commitment to get back on track and obey God. There is hope because God takes note of your situation. He cares about what is troubling you.

But even if we are just experiencing the pressure and pain that comes from trials that are not connected to sin, we must maintain a healthy perspective towards God's Justice.

BENEFITING FROM GOD'S PROMISES REQUIRES FIRST EMBRACING GOD'S JUSTICE

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How *great* and *mighty* and *terrible* is your view of God?

2) In what areas of your life do you tend to struggle with the fairness of God?

3) Where is your life upside down so that you are not experiencing the victory and the blessings that God could make available to you?

4) Do you tend to shy away from commitment to God?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Swindoll: **A Challenge to Strong Leaders**

I want to issue a challenge. My challenge is only to those leaders who genuinely want to achieve success – whatever your arena and wherever you lead. I'm not restricting this to ministry or to the spiritual realm in secular contexts. Define "success" however you want to. If record fourth-quarter earnings is what defines success in the eyes of your organizaton, then this is for you as well.

I challenge you to set aside an afternoon, find a place where you can be alone, and compose a prayer using Nehemiah's model. Write it out, taking each of the four dimensions in order. (Looking up, Looking back, Looking in, Looking forward)
"Lord help me to discover the best path forward" . . . If you have a detailed business plan, write it out as a prayer, committing the strategies to the glory of God and yourself to implementing them.

Fensham: In these verses the author confesses the sins of his people, past and present. Again the feeling of solidarity with his people becomes apparent. The totality of sins through the ages

forced the Lord to take steps against his people. The Israelites were delivered into the hands of foreign kings, who oppressed them and made slaves of them. In this pericope the theme of cause and effect is visible: the sins of the Israelites were the cause for action by the Lord; the effect was their servitude. Sins would be punished. The history of Israel gives evidence of this punishment. Religious apostasy was not condoned. At the same time the people of God were never abandoned by him, because of his *covenant* and *covenant love* (v. 32). We may presume that the patriarchal covenant is intended here. The leading covenant partner, the Lord, kept his covenant by his special interest in his people. They had broken the covenant, but the Lord was still faithful to it. It was the same kind of situation as the one described in Exod. 32-34. The Sinai covenant was broken by the Israelites, but the partiarchal covenant still existed. So they were not abandoned by the Lord (cf. vv. 18-19). *Terrible.* Cf. Neh. 1:5, *Kings of Assyria*. This might be a reference to the Assyrian kings Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and especially Senacherib. Another possibility is that it is simply a pseudonym for the Persian kings. *You are just*. Cf. Ezra 9:15.

Alistair Begg: **Saying "No" to Neglect**
In the Hebrew Bible, Chap. 10 begins with 9:38. The people of God enter into a binding agreement. *"We will not neglect the house of our God."***10:39**
9:38 *"In view of all this"* = review of Chap. 9 – history of ancient Israel; one of the longest prayers in the OT; Who am I? How did I get here? How do I relate to God and History" = Theology - -thinking of all of their tomorrows in light of all of their yesterdays;
We can never go forward effectively until we have learned to look back properly; learn lessons from our past so that we might avoid making similar mistakes in the future; living God, personal God exists who is unfolding His plan and purpose for all of history; not just disjointed events where the only thing that matters is how things impact us today; must have a biblical sense of history; godless world view = life is a series of disjointed and unrelated activities that have no significance beyond the present = existentialism; still need to "Seize the Day" but only in light of God ordering the affairs of time; not despair of the past or fear of the future but confidence in the God who orders all of history; world = nothing matters beyond the moment; "Yesterday is dead and gone and tomorrow is out of sight … help me make it through the night" – Kris Kristoferson – today is divorced from yesterday and tomorrow .. that is not true; Yesterday and tomorrow matter as well; otherwise there is ultimate emptiness
Phil. 3:14 – Apostle Paul's perspective; forgets what is behind; not saying he does not reflect on the past; he does not look back on past events in such a way as to impede his present progress (by complacency, discouragement, depression, pride, etc.).
Problem if you fail to look in your rear view mirror with consistency; to take a glance back with frequency gives you perspective; to be locked in the rear view mirror is death; in all that has happened to me you have been just even when I was wrong; declaration vs. 38 to establish their direction in the days to follow; unanimity in the agreement; leaders must lead

Mark Fitzpatrick: **The Renewal of the Covenant**
(Then: the Ratifiers of the Covenant; the Requirements of the Covenant)
1. (:32) **The Foundation of the Covenant** = the Character and Works of God
Solemn promise, agreement between God and man; What God is and What God has done;
a. *"our God"* – very common phrase in Neh; 4:4, 9, 20; 5:9; 6:16; chaps 10 ff also "the house of our God"; powerful phrase; people often flippantly use that phrase; to really believe this is a very strong principle; He is My God – that is very personal; demands a personal relationship; lots of people can stand at a distance; He belongs to us
b. *"the great God"* – in contrast to all the gods of the nations; Ps. 95:3 – the only true

God vs idols; king of kings and lord of lords; Titus 2 "*glorious appearing of the great God*" identified as Christ;

c. "*the mighty God*" – Is. 9:6 – He makes the difference; He has an effect; the world has a very impotent view of God; "*All power in heaven and on earth is given unto Me*" – by right;

d. God is "*terrible*" – more than awesome; 1:5 – "*the great and terrible God*" – both refs in the context of keeping the covenant; creates fear; makes men tremble; creates awe in the minds of men and women; can create earth shattering events; He is the God who speaks to us in still small voice; treats us with tender care rather than how He treats His enemies; more than "awesome" – there is a dread and a reverence

What God does: *keeps covenant and mercy*; otherwise we would be in a terrible position; if we could never know for sure that we were forgiven we would be a miserable people; this God is sought and petitioned to protect and deliver His people from their enemies

2. (:33) 6 types of people mentioned here – 3 groups

Royalty: kings and princes

Religious: priests and prophets

Remnant: fathers and people

3. God is not in any way blamed for their sad state but is vindicated

We're not saying that God doesn't control evil; He does; but God is never wrong; Amos 3:6; Is. 45:7 – not necessarily because they are worse sinners; but a warning to the world; God has done it; but we are to blame for our wickedness; the guilt is upon the people; Dan. 9:5 "*we have sinned . . .*" – same terminology

4. Failure on the part of leadership – monarchy form of leadership is responsible before God; when we stop keeping the Word of God and hearing the Word of God we will stop being grateful to God; thankless in their hearts; they actually became the enemies of God; workers of wickedness; **Deut 28** – promises of blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience; so many blessings available; longer list of curses;

Brian Bill: In verse 38, it says that the people made a "*binding agreement*" and put it into writing. That means it was **personal**. It was **practical**. And it was **public**.

1. Personal. What do you need to do this morning? First of all, do you personally see God as great, as good, and as gracious? If not, determine to lock into these theological truths and to never doubt them again. Personalize your faith by making it real.

2. Practical. Secondly, based on who He is, what is the Holy Spirit prompting you to do right now? What practical step does He want you to implement?

3. Public. Thirdly, how can you make your decision public?

Octavius Winslow: It would be incorrect to suppose that the chastisements of our heavenly Father were in themselves pleasant and desirable. They are no more so than the physician's recipe, or the surgeon's lancet. But as in the one case, so in the other, we look beyond the medicine to its sanative qualities, we forget the bitterness of the draught in its remedial results. Thus with the medicine of the soul-the afflictions sent and sanctified by God. Forgetting the bitter and the pain of God's dealings, the only question of moment is what the cause is and what the design of my Father in this? The answer is-our deeper sanctification.

Carl Haak – Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church – **LET NOT ALL OUR TROUBLE SEEM LITTLE TO THEE**

All of your troubles which you experience are not little to your God; the chastenings that God sends to you because of your sins; the sovereign hand of God is anxious to mold you to His glory; but He pledges that He will surround you with divine compassion; He will give you grace

to submit to these troubles; He will work out a perfect way for you in order that our hope would be in God and in His inexhaustible grace; culmination of everything that Nehemiah has labored for to this point; outpouring of the Spirit of God in period of revival and spiritual awakening; desire to be found in the place of worship of God; we must first put away the love of this world; we must confess our sins; worship service centered in the proclamation of the goodness of God to His people; God is more glorious than we can ever ascribe to Him or say in our praise and adoration; we must take God's mercy for granted; but there is always hope for us in the way of repentance; here is the petition that the people make and the only one in **vs. 32** – Now that we understand what kind of a God you are, we have something we want to ask of God: Lord, in the midst of our troubles we need to know that you think of us in compassion; may it not be trivial, insignificant in the grand scheme of all things; look at how when you tell your trouble to someone they play the "top it" game – that's nothing compared to my trouble …; God has a heart of compassion for us; Ps. 149:4 *"the Lord takes pleasure in His people"* – Ephes. 3:10-11 God's eternal intention and purpose is that He might show the riches of His grace through the church; Does God really care about my troubles? As we come to know our own sins, shame comes upon us; trouble: something weighing on your heart; think about it all day at work; saps your energy; takes away all your joy; sighing of heart
http://www.georgetownprc.org/nehemiah/Broadcast%202008%2007-13.mp3

TEXT: Nehemiah 10:1-39

TITLE: REDEDICATION TO COVENANT OBLIGATIONS

BIG IDEA:
REDEDICATION TO OBEYING GOD'S WORD SHOWS ITSELF IN SPECIFIC REFORMS

(9:38) INTRODUCTION / TRANSITION:

"Now because of all this We are making an agreement in writing; And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests."

Why would you go to the trouble of some type of formal written document to express your rededication to covenant obligations? Writing something down accomplishes several things:

- It proves you are serious about what you are promising – that is why we have written treaties and contracts; you are familiar with the expression: "I want that in writing." Look at the famous documents of our country – The Declaration of Independence; the Bill of Rights
- It makes your commitment concrete and specific. Too often we make some type of general promise that is so broad and vague we never follow through.
- It raises the level of accountability. You can measure whether the promises have been kept.

The people of Nehemiah's day had allowed the Word of God to penetrate their hearts and expose their failures of the past. They now wanted to start fresh and commit themselves to obeying the will of God. This was a major point of consecration for the nation.

You might be at a point in your life where some form of rededication is needed.

Romans 12:1-2 "*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect*."

Some churches emphasize the need for Christians at some point in their spiritual walk to come to a crisis point dedication or rededication moment when they fully embrace the Lordship of Jesus Christ and submit to His will. In some circles this is associated with very strong emotional pleas and altar call types of public commitments. While we might want to caution against some of the emotional excess, we don't want to minimize the need for personal commitment; for consecration; for rededication.

Cf. Bible conference: **Resolved** (June in Palm Springs) – Background from the life of Jonathan Edwards: ***Resolved means what it sounds like: it's a deliberate, committed disposition.***

As a 19-year old in the mid-1700s, Jonathan Edwards became serious about the direction of his life. He began to understand the nature of God, and what he discovered was both delightful and disturbing. The more he investigated the infinite tributaries of God's nature, the more he unearthed his own sinfulness. From then on, the weight of God's glory became the gravity of his life. He was compelled to respond.

So he sat down with a quill and paper and wrote out **a series of commitments**. These were simple statements, conclusions, and commitments forged in the immensity of God and the trauma of His holiness. All of them began with the same word—"Resolved".

The Resolved conference is a call for a new generation to live with the same resolve.

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What specific changes in behavior is God calling you to make in your life? It's great to pledge in general with the people of God that you are committed to obeying all of God's Word. But the proof of such dedication will be seen in the specific reforms you make – walking by faith, relying on the grace and power of God to transform your life.

I. (:1-27) SIGNIFICANT RATIFIERS OF THE REVIVED COVENANT

A. (:1) Political Representatives – Leaders must lead by example

"*Now on the sealed document were the names of: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah,*"

The "*and*" indicates that the first 2 are a distinct group from the list of priests that follow

Nehemiah had no problem putting his "**John Hancock**" first on the document – clearly stating his intentions.

As every schoolboy knows, the biggest, boldest and most defiant signature on the Declaration of Independence was scrawled by John Hancock of Massachusetts. So completely did it overshadow the autographs of the other founding fathers that the term 'John Hancock' has become synonymous with 'signature' and each of us at the one time or another has spoken of 'putting his 'John Hancock' at the bottom of a document

Before there was John Hancock there was Nehemiah leading the way with his bold signing of the revived covenant.

B. (:2-8) Priests (21 people)

"*Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah. These were the priests.*"

Derek Kidner: This accounts, incidentally, for the non-appearance of Ezra's name among the signatories, since he was a member of the family which heads the list, the house of *Seraiah* (which also included the high priest)

The Book of Nehemiah has placed a huge emphasis on the **importance of worship**. This chapter focuses in on the temple and all that is involved in offering the sacrifices and orchestrating the corporate worship in Jerusalem now that the walls have been rebuilt. The Priests are featured as key leaders in the spiritual life of the community.

C. (:9-13) Prominent Levitical Families and Teachers

"*And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; also their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Bani, Beninu.*"

6 of these were involved in the reading of the law in 8:7

D. (:14-27) Patriarichal Family Leaders

"*The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, Malluch, Harim, Baanah.*"

Some these were listed in **7:8-25**

Breneman: mostly family representatives. The first twenty-one are nearly parallel to the list of **Ezra 2:3-30** (and **Neh 7**). The remaining twenty-three include some families who helped build the wall (**Neh 3**) and some new ones; perhaps some returned from Babylonia more recently, and others were branches of older families. It is also possible that some could have been families who had remained in Judah during the captivity and now joined the returned exiles.

This passage places a lot of emphasis on the **role of the father** to provide the spiritual leadership in the home.
You say: I am not a political figure; I am not a Priest – but you are a priest – we are all part of the royal priesthood – you are significant to God; one that He wants to see be dedicated to Him

II. (:28-29) SEPARATED REMNANT PLEDGES COMPREHENSIVE LOYALTY TO THE REVIVED COVENANT

A. By Avoiding Conformity to the World

"*Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding,*"

Gets back to **Rom. 12:1-2**

How much are we impacted by the peer pressure of the lifestyle of the world around us? Where the Bible clearly speaks regarding the mind and will of God, do we prove ourselves to be friends of the world or friends of God? There is no middle ground.
There must be separation in terms of our intimate friendships. It matters who we hang with. Part of our taking up the cross of Jesus daily and participating in His sufferings means that we truly identify with Him and take on the reproach and the mocking of the world. Noah certainly wasn't a cool dude when he preached God's message of impending judgment to a world of carousing drunks who lived from one party to the next. Lot had trouble applying this principle of separation and his family paid dearly for his life of compromise.
We need to evaluate what pulls us closer to God and what pushes us farther from Him. How much do you value intimacy with Jesus Christ as opposed to being accepted by your non Christian friends?

The message of separation from the world needs to be proclaimed with greater clarity and greater urgency. We have allowed even our churches to become comfortable social settings for the unsaved. It is easy to see who is impacting whom.

We still are called to live in the world; not remove ourselves to some monastery where we can

hide out. We still are called to be fishers of men; to go out into the highways and byways and compel them to repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ. We live in this world . . . but our value system is not of this world. We need to be separate because God is a holy God.

Read **Psalm 15** – when people think of us do we have this type of reputation for integrity and righteousness? If not … what behavior do we need to change? Where do we need to rededicate ourselves to obeying the Word of God?

B. By Aligning with Consecrated Fellow Believers

> "*are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes;*"

The local church is the community of believers where you come to join together to take a stand on together obeying the Word of God; are we joined together on that basis? Do we hunger to see what God has revealed on the next page of this book so that we can put it into practice? Do we understand the accountability involved – spoken of here as a "*curse and an oath*" – revelation demands a response; greater light brings greater accountability; that doesn't mean there is any excuse in remaining ignorant; but God will expect great things of us based on our easy access to His truth

Some believers resist joining together with other believers; they don't want their lives to be transparent to others; they want to try to hide out in the world as undercover Christians .. they are ashamed of Christ; Christ says He will be ashamed of them when he returns in His glory – they are hypocrites – not genuine believers who have been transformed by His grace

Swindoll: Take note of two facts that identified these people as extraordinary; they had separated themselves from the godless people living around them as well as their pagan lifestyles, and they were wise, discerning people who knew what they were doing. By endorsing the document, a person understood that he and his family were part of God's unique, set-apart people and agreed to live accordingly, rejecting the lifestyles of the pagans living near their community.

They made a decision to put first things first, regardless of the situation.

This action, this document, was a crucial choice in the life of Israel. They drove a literary stake into the ground that day, which became their rallying point. They erected a written monument much like the founding documents that made the United States a nation. They drafted and ratified their declaration of dependence and distinction – their constitution. It established their purpose and values.

Wiersbe: **Num. 30:2**; Since an oath involved the name and possible judgment of God, it was not to be taken lightly. Jesus warned against using empty oaths (Matt. 5:33-37; 23:16-22), and Solomon gave a similar warning (Eccl. 5:1-7).

Problem with Vows: look at how easily we break our commitments

- Example of the Jews back at the giving of the law in Deut. 28 – failed miserably; failed repeatedly
- Example of Peter – Mark 14:27-29

Still of value:

- make your intentions serious and specific so you can measure whether you are making

progress towards your goals
- expression of love – look at marriage vows
Steve Zeisler: A vow to obey is often the best way to tell the Lord we love him.

Are you taking a stand to avoid conformity with the world and align yourself with fellow consecrated believers?

III. (:30-39) SPECIFIC REGULATIONS OF THE REVIVED COVENANT – 4 AREAS

A. (:30) Regulations Regarding Separation / Mixed Marriages

"*and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.*"

Warren Wiersbe: The Jewish remnant was surrounded by idolatrous Gentiles, who wanted the Jews to become a part of their social, religious, and business society. But the Law of Moses prohibited God's people from living like the Gentiles, although it didn't stop the Jews from being good neighbors or even good customers. . . Separation that ignores God and other believers is isolation and will eventually lead to sin. . . The legalist wants to live by rules, but that style of life only keeps you immature and dependant on your spiritual leaders. The only way to grow in a balanced life is to give yourself totally to God and follow Him by faith.

Illustration: close business partnership with unbelievers

1 Cor. 6-7
James 4:4

B. (:31) Regulations Regarding Sabbath Laws

Fundamental Principle: **Matt. 6:33** "*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*"

(**Ex 20:8-11; 23:11-12; 31:15-17; Lev. 25:2-7; Deut. 15:1-3**)

1. Restraint of Trade Can be a Good Thing

"*As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day;*"

Do Sabbath Day regulations apply to believers in the Church Age?

What Applications can we make from the principles revealed here?

Illustration: **Chick-fil-A** – closed on Sundays

Steve Zeisler: The last thing the Sabbath means is that we say no to a life of maximum acquisition. My highest goal is not making the most I possibly can and preserving everything I make. If I'm going to keep the Sabbath, it means I have something I value more than that.

John Piper: The beautiful thing about the sabbath is that God instituted it as a weekly reminder of two things. One is that all true blessing comes from his grace, not our labor. The other is that we

hallow him and honor him and keep the day holy if we seek the fullness of his blessing by giving our special attention to him on that day.

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Important to think of sabbath as a sign – one of the **OT shadows** where the fulfillment came in Christ:

1) Rest of Creation – **Ex. 20:11** -- realize that God does all of the work; human body needs a break; God rested because His work of creation was done; time to look back and reflect on it
2) Rest of Redemption and Deliverance – **Deut. 5:15** --

* * * * *

Ray Stedman: This is exactly what happened with these Old Testament shadows, including the Sabbath. When the Lord came, and his work was ended, making possible the true fulfillment of God's intention in the Sabbath, the picture was no longer needed. The weekly sabbath ended at the cross. Paul specifically says this. In the letter to the Colossians he confirms it to us. In Chapter 2, beginning with Verse 13, he says,

> *And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it [not him; it, the cross]. Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and Drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.* {**Col 2:13-17** RSV}

The Sabbath has always been Saturday and it always will be. It is the seventh day of the week. Sunday has always been the first day of the week. It has never been a sabbath, and it is pure legalism to call it a sabbath or to treat it as one. It is not a day of rest or restricted activity and it is not designed as such. It is the first day of the week; to Christians, **the Lord's day**.

So the secret of true Christian life is to cease from dependence on one's own activity, and to rest in dependence upon the activity of An other who d wells within. That is fulfilling the sabbath, the true sabbath.

> *So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God [it is available to us now]; for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his*{**Heb 4:9-10 RSV**}

According to the Word of God the body must have one day in seven to rest. The mind and the emotions require it, too. We are under so much tension today from so many demands upon us that our emotions sometimes get out of joint. We find ourselves growing irascible, testy and short-tempered. We are unable to keep control at times. These are symptoms of approaching burnout. The spirit within, the very center of our being, requires time to meditate, to contemplate and relate to life. We need time to see the big picture and pull back for a bit from things around. God has provided for this in the Sabbath.

Learn to work and live out of rest. Learn that God will pick up what you do and use it far greater than you were able to do. Expect him to do so and rest on that fact. Do not strain or worry, and feel it all depends on you to produce success in a ministry.

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2. Rest for the Land Encourages Dependence on the All Sufficient Provider

"*and we will forego the crops the seventh year*"

3. Release From Financial Debt Encourages Community Unity

"*and the exaction of every debt.*"

Warren Wiersbe: The observance of the Sabbath was a distinctively Jewish practice (**Neh. 9:14; Ex. 20:8-11; 30:12-18**); the Gentiles around Jerusalem would treat the seventh day of the week like any other day and want to socialize and do business.

John Whitcomb: the year of release (**Ex 23:10, 11; Deut 15:1,2**)

C. (:32-33) Regulations Regarding Shekels for the Temple Tax

"*We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God.*"

One third of a skekel -- About one-eighth of an ounce

John MacArthur: The Mosaic ordinance required one-half of a shekel (see **Ex. 30:11-16**), but the severe economic straits of the time led to the reduced amount. By the time of Christ, the people had returned to the Mosaic stipulation of one-half of a shekel.

Yamauchi: Some argue that the later shekel was based on a heavier standard, thus one-third of the later shekel was equal to one-half of the earlier shekel. That is, the later Babylonian-Persian shekel was twenty-one grams, whereas the former Phoenician shekel was fourteen grams, hence one-third the former was equal to one-half the latter. . .
"bread of arrangement" – These were twelve cakes of fine flour arranged in two rows of six set out each Sabbath **(Lev 24:6-7**). Elsewhere they are also called "bread of the face" – that is, bread set before the presence of God (**Exod 25:30; 1 Sam 21:6**; **1 Kings 7:48**).

A lot involved in maintaining *the work of the house of our God*
Providing the financial support that maintains the ministry of the local church

Warren Wiersbe: The tax was a reminder to the people that God had redeemed them and paid a price to set them free, and that they should behave like people who belonged to God.

D. (:34-39) Regulations Regarding Sacrifices to God and Support of the Priestly Ministry

1. The Wood Offering

"*Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law;*"

Warren Wiersbe: Since the fire on the brazen altar was to be kept burning constantly (Lev. 6:12-13), it required a steady supply of wood; and wood was a precious commodity.

Might have seemed like such a waste – bringing wood to burn

2. The First Fruits – giving God the first and the best

"*and that they might bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the LORD annually, and bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God. We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God,*"

Prov. 3:9 "*Honor the Lord from the wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine*."

3. The Tithes

"*and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns. The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse.*"

Warren Wiersbe: The Jews were to bring a tenth of their produce to the Lord each year for the support of the Levites (**Lev. 27:30-34**). The Levites then gave a "tithe of the tithe" to the priests (**Num. 18:25-32**). The Jews were also to tithe the 90 percent that was left and take it to the temple for the annual feasts (**Deut. 26:1-11**). To these two tithes was added a third tithe, received every third year for the poor (vv. 12-15; 14:28-29).

Application: all that we have belongs to the Lord and we are stewards, making investments for eternity. How can we fail to be generous and to trust the Lord for the provision of our needs?

CONCLUSION:

Illustration: -- William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army was once asked what his secret was to his incredible ministry. This is what he said, "God has had all that there was of me. There have been men with greater brains than I…but from the day I got the poor of London on my heart and caught a vision of what Jesus Christ could do with me and them, on that day I made up my mind that God should have all of William Booth that there was."

Does God have all of you? Have you dedicated yourself to completely obeying the Word of God? The proof is whether you reform your behavior in specific areas as you come to understand what the Word says.

REDEDICATION TO OBEYING GOD'S WORD SHOWS ITSELF IN SPECIFIC REFORMS

I. (:1-27) SIGNIFICANT RATIFIERS OF THE REVIVED COVENANT

II. (:28-29) SEPARATED REMNANT PLEDGES COMPREHENSIVE LOYALTY TO THE REVIVED COVENANT

III. (:30-39) SPECIFIC REGULATIONS OF THE REVIVED COVENANT – 4 AREAS

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Is it appropriate for Christians today to make solemn promises of commitment and obedience to God or would this be presumptuous?

2) When you evaluate your Christian life, where are you in danger of falling into the trap of either conformity to the world or isolationism?

3) What is your approach towards observing one day of the week as somehow special and devoted to the worship of God?

4) Are you contributing your fair share towards the mission of the church in furthering the kingdom of God?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Chuck Swindoll: Where the world is concerned, distinction and conformity pull us in opposite directions. Do you want to know today whether you have really conformed to this world or not? Ask yourself, "How distinctive am I?" This has nothing to do with religious activity or how much involvement you have at church. Distinction is a measure of how authentic your ethics and your conduct are when compared to New Testament Christianity. Look at your life, your home, your work, your worship, and then ask yourself, "Am I really distinct? Could a person get to know the real me and see God's message on display?"

David Clines: **Nehemiah 10**, despite its forbidding portal of 27 verses of proper names, is in reality a small treasure house of post-exilic interpretations of earlier Israelite law.

> -- "*Nehemiah 10 as an Example of Early Jewish Biblical Exegesis*," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 21 (1981):111.

Brian Bill: **Making Investments That Last**

Are vows of any use today? Help us to be specific in our commitments; reinforce and express our love (cf. marriage vows). . . many of us never come to the point of getting serious in our walk with God simply because we never get specific with Him. We hear sermons and sense the Spirit's tug at our heart, but until we decide to be completely committed to Him, we won't be. As we celebrate communion this morning, I invite you to use this time to think through any decisions the Lord wants you to make. Perhaps you've been challenged or convicted by the Lord during this series. Listen to Him and decide right now to put into practice what you know you need to do. If you've broken some promises with Him or with others, confess it right now.

Ray Stedman: When you come to the New Testament the tithe is no longer laid upon believers as a requirement, despite the fact that many churches teach that we are to pay the tithe today. The New Testament teaches that Christians are to give a proportion of their wealth to the Lord to recognize that it all came from him. You are permitted to determine that proportion yourself, "*according as God has prospered you*" {cf, 1 Cor 16:2 KJV}. Chapter 16 of First Corinthians, and Chapters 8 and 9 of Second Corinthians, are devoted to this subject. There we are told to

choose ourselves how much we can give to God. The motive is God's primary concern. We are to give as a response of gratitude for the blessings he has given us. God pays careful attention to the motive. Offerings do not mean a thing in his sight unless they are given with a cheerful spirit and from a thankful heart. They are to be used for the support of the ministry, but they are given as an expression of thanksgiving on our part.

Steve Zeisler: The problem with making vows or stern statements of intention, speaking in ringing terms that call for changes to be effected in the future, is that we don't have access to the places deep inside us where the changes need to be made. We can't overcome our fears, strengthen what is feeble, or substitute humility for self-importance. That's why we need a Savior. God needs to intervene to make us different at the deepest levels.

Stephen Hamilton: **A New Covenant with God**
Details of the covenant with God; the chapter of the consecration; seeking to obey the Lord by fulfilling the obligations of the covenant; solemn and earnest rededication of the people to the Lord; **Rom. 12:1-2**; put their names to a solemn oath before their God; some people refuse to make any commitments to God lest they renege; but people sign up for payments on a house or a car or an insurance policy; it is a right thing to make promises to God and pray for grace to fulfill them;
I. The Need for the Covenant (:38) "*because of all this*" – **Chap. 9:16 ff** –
A. because of the sins of the past; failure to keep former promises to the Lord; they didn't argue: we broke other covenants so we will not longer make any covenants; No; confession of sin; sorry for their sins; we fail the Lord and need rededication and reconsecration; Ps. 51 penitential psalm;
B. Because of the situation of the present – the enemy had the upper hand in Judah

II. The Nature of the Contents – specific reference to 3 matters
A. The Word **10:29** – commitment to the Word of God; to observe and to do all that God says; Sola Scriptura; do "all" – no cherry picking

B. Their works –
1. Separation; had already caused great trouble in Israel; **Deut. 7:3-4**; the unequal yoke never has God's blessing upon it; not OK in certain circumstances; **2 Cor. 6** – immediate context and first application is to personal holiness and separation – times when we are compelled to change our circle of friends; Can two walk together unless they be agreed; **Psalm 1; Prov. 13:20** a companion of fools shall be destroyed; it does matter who we keep company with; **1 Cor. 15** – don't get taken in by good looks and good personality; I am a companion of all them that fear thee;
2. Sabbath keeping – is Sabbath keeping legalistic? The idea that every day is the Lord's day does not wash; He has established one day as His day; **Ex. 20** – work on 6 days; is the commandment still in force? 6 24 hour days of creation not indeterminate periods; Sabbath day almost entirely forgotten; every desecration of God's Sabbath is an attack on the worship of the almighty God; it is a holy day, not a holiday; don't make it your practice to buy and sell on the Lord's day; the exception is being used as the rule; works of necessity and mercy – can't tell the doctor not to treat people on Sunday; has become an elastic term; ceremonial law of Jews vs God's moral law – didn't start with nation of Israel – look at murder of Cain – law already in place; law of God codified by Moses, but eternal like God Himself; Paul said he was under the law to Christ; if you love me keep my commandments; old farming method of rotating crops – land would get a rest and people would exercise faith to trust God for their needs;

3. Standing Debts

C. Their worship – **vs. 32-39** house is mentioned 9 times;

Alistair Begg: **Restructuring Our Finances (10:30)**
They confirmed their commitment by putting it in writing. We ask, "I would like to have that in writing." What is the nature of your resolve? They bound themselves with a curse and an oath. Put some flags out in front of them so they could see whether they were hitting the target of obeying God's Word (not just hitting golf balls into a field). Put 3 flags in the ground:

Obeying God's Word involved:

I. Realigning Their Focus

A. Thinking in terms of God's Purposes rather than their Personal Preferences
B. Thinking in terms of Responsibilities rather than Rights
C. Thinking in terms of Long Term Effect rather than Short Term Enjoyment

II. The Redirecting of Their Families

A. The Gathering of their Families
B. The Guiding of their Families
C. The Giving of their Families

III. Restructuring Their Finances

Two subjects of sex and money provide greatest joy yet possibility for greatest abuse; need balanced approach – rather than celibacy and poverty; money should not be seen as an evil to be shunned but a blessing to be enjoyed and invested
How you use your resources is an indication of your priorities; look at your checkbooks;

A. There were opportunities they chose to reject

1. In relation to the sabbath – we will not buy on the sabbath or holy day – **Ex. 20:8**; bizarre state of affairs in relation to their time; certainly makes good business sense to spread your cost structure over 7 days and maximize earning potential
2. Rejected opportunity to work the land on the seventh year – **Ex. 23: 10** – could have tried to justify working the land in many ways; dramatic, radical impact of the Word of God in their lives; they read the Book; understand the Book; committed to obeying the Book – no matter who says it is crazy or whatever it will mean

B. There were responsibilities they accepted

It is going to cost them to be a worshipper; it is going to make demands on them; it is not going to be the left-overs of their life; Worship that doesn't cost me anything is worth nothing at all; not trying to cheat God – difference in standards; bread, grain, wood to burn on the altar; children need to see that we use our resources for God; tithing is a good place to begin; focal point of God's dealing is in His church; should be a priority – the focus and emphasis; Seneca: "money has never yet made anyone rich." Commitment to God redirects our finances; **1 Tim. 6:9** – addresses the wannabees; God is happy when we are able to enjoy things in the right way;

Love of Money leads to:

1) a loss of contentment -- **1 Tim. 6:6**
2) a loss of trust in God -- 6:17
3) a loss of balance in our lives – trip themselves up
4) a loss of peace
5) a loss of eternal perspective on life

6) a loss usefulness -- **Matt 6:24**
7) a loss of humility – don't be arrogant
8) a loss of hope –

Signs that I love money:

1) When money thoughts consume my day
2) When the blessings of others make me jealous
3) When success is defined by what I have vs. what I am in Jesus Christ
4) When my family is neglected in my pursuit of money – I'll be home soon
5) When I close my eyes to the genuine needs of others
6) When I live in paralyzing fear of losing my money
7) When I am prepared to borrow myself into bondage
8) When I give to God my left-overs rather than my first-fruits

Jonathan Edwards: **The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards (1722-1723)**

Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake.

Remember to read over these Resolutions once a week.

1. Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriad's of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great soever.

2. Resolved, to be continually endeavoring to find out some new invention and contrivance to promote the aforementioned things.

3. Resolved, if ever I shall fall and grow dull, so as to neglect to keep any part of these Resolutions, to repent of all I can remember, when I come to myself again.

4. Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God; nor be, nor suffer it, if I can avoid it.

5. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.

6. Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.

7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.

8. Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God.

9. Resolved, to think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death.

10. Resolved, when I feel pain, to think of the pains of martyrdom, and of hell.

11. Resolved, when I think of any theorem in divinity to be solved, immediately to do what I can towards solving it, if circumstances don't hinder.

12. Resolved, if I take delight in it as a gratification of pride, or vanity, or on any such account, immediately to throw it by.

13. Resolved, to be endeavoring to find out fit objects of charity and liberality.

14. Resolved, never to do anything out of revenge.

15. Resolved, never to suffer the least motions of anger to irrational beings.

16. Resolved, never to speak evil of anyone, so that it shall tend to his dishonor, more or less, upon no account except for some real good.

17. Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

18. Resolved, to live so at all times, as I think is best in my devout frames, and when I have clearest notions of things of the gospel, and another world.

19. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour, before I should hear the last trump.

20. Resolved, to maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking.

21. Resolved, never to do anything, which if I should see in another, I should count a just occasion to despise him for, or to think any way the more meanly of him.

22. Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can, with all the power; might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.

23. Resolved, frequently to take some deliberate action, which seems most unlikely to be done, for the glory of God, and trace it back to the original intention, designs and ends of it; and if I find it not to be for God's glory, to repute it as a breach of the 4th Resolution.

24. Resolved, whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back, till I come to the original cause; and then both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it.

25. Resolved, to examine carefully, and constantly, what that one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to doubt of the love of God; and to direct all my forces against it.

26. Resolved, to cast away such things, as I find do abate my assurance.

27. Resolved, never willfully to omit anything, except the omission be for the glory of God; and frequently to examine my omissions.

28. Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

29. Resolved, never to count that a prayer, nor to let that pass as a prayer, nor that as a petition of a prayer, which is so made, that I cannot hope that God will answer it; nor that as a confession, which I cannot hope God will accept.

30. Resolved, to strive to my utmost every week to be brought higher in religion, and to a higher exercise of grace, than I was the week before.

31. Resolved, never to say anything at all against anybody, but when it is perfectly agreeable to the highest degree of Christian honor, and of love to mankind, agreeable to the lowest humility, and sense of my own faults and failings, and agreeable to the golden rule; often, when I have said anything against anyone, to bring it to, and try it strictly by the test of this Resolution.

32. Resolved, to be strictly and firmly faithful to my trust, that that in Prov. 20:6, "A faithful man who can find?" may not be partly fulfilled in me.

33. Resolved, always to do what I can towards making, maintaining, establishing and preserving peace, when it can be without over-balancing detriment in other respects. *Dec.26, 1722.*

34. Resolved, in narration's never to speak anything but the pure and simple verity.

35. Resolved, whenever I so much question whether I have done my duty, as that my quiet and calm is thereby disturbed, to set it down, and also how the question was resolved. *Dec. 18, 1722.*

36. Resolved, never to speak evil of any, except I have some particular good call for it. *Dec. 19, 1722.*

37. Resolved, to inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent, what sin I have committed, and wherein I have denied myself: also at the end of every week, month and year. *Dec.22 and 26, 1722.*

38. Resolved, never to speak anything that is ridiculous, sportive, or matter of laughter on the Lord's day. *Sabbath evening, Dec. 23, 1722.*

39. Resolved, never to do anything that I so much question the lawfulness of, as that I intend, at the same time, to consider and examine afterwards, whether it be lawful or no; except I as much question the lawfulness of the omission.

40. Resolved, to inquire every night, before I go to bed, whether I have acted in the best way I possibly could, with respect to eating and drinking. *Jan. 7, 1723.*

41. Resolved, to ask myself at the end of every day, week, month and year, wherein I could possibly in any respect have done better. *Jan. 11, 1723.*

42. Resolved, frequently to renew the dedication of myself to God, which was made at my baptism; which I solemnly renewed, when I was received into the communion of the church; and which I have solemnly re-made this twelfth day of January, 1722-23.

43. Resolved, never henceforward, till I die, to act as if I were any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's, agreeable to what is to be found in *Saturday, January 12. Jan.12, 1723.*

44- Resolved, that no other end but religion, shall have any influence at all on any of my actions; and that no action shall be, in the least circumstance, any otherwise than the religious end will carry it. *Jan.12, 1723.*

45. Resolved, never to allow any pleasure or grief, joy or sorrow, nor any affection at all, nor any degree of affection, nor any circumstance relating to it, but what helps religion. *Jan.12* and *13.1723.*

46. Resolved, never to allow the least measure of any fretting uneasiness at my father or mother. Resolved to suffer no effects of it, so much as in the least alteration of speech, or motion of my eve: and to be especially careful of it, with respect to any of our family.

47. Resolved, to endeavor to my utmost to deny whatever is not most agreeable to a good, and universally sweet and benevolent, quiet, peace_able, contented, easy, compassionate, generous, humble, meek, modest, submissive, obliging, diligent and industrious, charitable, even, patient, moderate, forgiving, sincere temper; and to do at all times what such a temper would lead me to. Examine strictly every week, whether I have done so. *Sabbath morning. May 5,1723.*

48. Resolved, constantly, with the utmost niceness and diligence, and the strictest scrutiny, to be looking into the state of my soul, that I may know whether I have truly an interest in Christ or no; that when I come to die, I may not have any negligence respecting this to repent of. May *26, 1723.*

49. Resolved, that this never shall be, if I can help it.

50. Resolved, I will act so as I think I shall judge would have been best, and most prudent, when I come into the future world. *July 5, 1723.*

51. Resolved, that I will act so, in every respect, as I think I shall wish I had done, if I should at last be damned. *July 8, 1723.*

52. I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again: Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age. *July 8, 1723.*

53. Resolved, to improve every opportunity, when I am in the best and happiest frame of mind, to cast and venture my soul on the Lord Jesus Christ, to trust and confide in him, and consecrate myself wholly to him; that from this I may have assurance of my safety, knowing that I confide in my Redeemer. *July 8, 1723.*

54. Whenever I hear anything spoken in conversation of any person, if I think it would be praiseworthy in me, Resolved to endeavor to imitate it. *July 8, 1723.*

55. Resolved, to endeavor to my utmost to act as I can think I should do, if I had already seen the happiness of heaven, and hell torments. *July 8, 1723.*

56. Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.

57. Resolved, when I fear misfortunes and adversities, to examine whether ~ have done my duty, and resolve to do it; and let it be just as providence orders it, I will as far as I can, be concerned about nothing but my duty and my sin. *June 9, and July 13 1723.*

58. Resolved, not only to refrain from an air of dislike, fretfulness, and anger in conversation, but to exhibit an air of love, cheerfulness and benignity. *May27,* and *July 13, 1723.*

59. Resolved, when I am most conscious of provocations to ill nature and anger, that I will strive most to feel and act good-naturedly; yea, at such times, to manifest good nature, though I think that in other respects it would be disadvantageous, and so as would be imprudent at other times. *May 12, July ii,* and *July 13.*

60. Resolved, whenever my feelings begin to appear in the least out of order, when I am conscious of the least uneasiness within, or the least irregularity without, I will then subject myself to the strictest examination. *July 4, and 13, 1723.*

61. Resolved, that I will not give way to that listlessness which I find unbends and relaxes my mind from being fully and fixedly set on religion, whatever excuse I may have for it-that what my listlessness inclines me to do, is best to be done, etc. *May 21,* and *July 13, 1723.*

62. Resolved, never to do anything but duty; and then according to Eph. 6:6-8, do it willingly and cheerfully as unto the Lord, and not to man; "knowing that whatever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord." *June 25* and *July 13, 1723.*

63. On the supposition, that there never was to be but one individual in the world, at any one time, who was properly a complete Christian, in all respects of a right stamp, having Christianity always shining in its true luster, and appearing excellent and lovely, from whatever part and under whatever character viewed: Resolved, to act just as I would do, if I strove with all my might to be that one, who should live in my time. *Jan.14' and July '3' 1723.*

64. Resolved, when I find those "groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26), of which the Apostle speaks, and those "breakings of soul for the longing it hath," of which the Psalmist speaks, Psalm 119:20, that I will promote them to the utmost of my power, and that I will not be wear', of earnestly endeavoring to vent my desires, nor of the repetitions of such earnestness. *July 23,* and *August 10, 1723.*

65. Resolved, very much to exercise myself in this all my life long, viz. with the greatest openness I am capable of, to declare my ways to God, and lay open my soul to him: all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and every thing, and every circumstance; according to Dr. Manton's 27th Sermon on Psalm 119. *July 26,* and *Aug.10 1723.*

66. Resolved, that I will endeavor always to keep a benign aspect, and air of acting and speaking in all places, and in all companies, except it should so happen that duty requires otherwise.

67. Resolved, after afflictions, to inquire, what I am the better for them, what good I have got by them, and what I might have got by them.

68. Resolved, to confess frankly to myself all that which I find in myself, either infirmity or sin; and, if it be what concerns religion, also to confess the whole case to God, and implore needed help. *July 23,* and *August 10, 1723.*

69. Resolved, always to do that, which I shall wish I had done when I see others do it. *Aug. 11, 1723.*

70. Let there be something of benevolence, in all that I speak.

Aug. 17, 1723

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **After You Say Amen**
Introduction: I want to talk about just a renewal of your vows before the Lord.
3 Steps to spiritual revival:

1. Hearing of God's Word – **Chap. 8**
2. Confession of Sin – **Chap. 9**
3. Commitment to the Lord – **Chap. 10**

We need to get the cobwebs cleaned out of our life spiritually, but we have to kill the spider.

Big Idea: 3 Vows to the Lord

I. Vow of Submission to God's Word

Not only do we have to hear God's word, we have to make some decisions with reference to obedience. And that's the difference between a true believer and a false professor. It's okay to make a vow, but you better keep it. Leaders have to show the way, they have to be the example and commitment in their spiritual walk.

II. Vow of Separation – 10:28

- Vows of separation from the world unto the Lord.
- Vows about only marrying believers.
- Vows about the Sabbath.

III. Vow of Support for the Work of God – 10:32

- Temple Tax – **10:32**
  This was an annual census of people 20 years of age and older. It was kind of a half shekel tax to keep up the house of God.
- Wood Offering – **10:34**
- Firstfruits – **10:35**
- Tithes – **10:37**

Conclusion: Look at the last phrase of verse 39. It's really the key. And where it says, and we will not forsake the house of our God. We will not forsake the house of our God. I think we live in a day where people are not being faithful to the house of God, where people easily forsake the house of the Lord.

TEXT: Nehemiah 10:30-39

TITLE: OT PRACTICES: SABBATH KEEPING AND TITHING

BIG IDEA:
REDEDICATION TO OBEYING GOD'S WORD SHOWS ITSELF IN SPECIFIC REFORMS – EMPHASIS ON SABBATH KEEPING AND TITHING

INTRODUCTION / TRANSITION:
Transitioning back into the Book of Nehemiah – We are deep into the second half of the book. Already covered the rebuilding of the wall; now we are picking back up in Chap. 10 dealing with the revival of the people; they have just expressed their commitment and rededication to obey their covenant obligations. We want to slow down and go into some more depth in the last 8 verses of this chapter.

4 Specific Regulations:
-- understand the nature of obedience for Israel
-- understand what principles to apply to our situation today under the New Covenant in the Church Age

Last time covered the first 2 Regulations:
1) (:30) Regulations Regarding Separation / Mixed Marriages

2) (:31) Regulations Regarding Sabbath Laws – once Christ has come as the fulfillment of all the OT types and signs and shadows, you don't want to place yourself back under obligation to the OT law; people struggle today with the concept of the sabbath and how it should apply to us; you have the Seventh Day Adventists making this doctrine one of their key distinctives . . . that they feel obligated to continue to worship God on the sabbath; you have a large number of Protestant evangelical churches making a huge deal about the importance of Christians today observing the Lord's Day (Sunday) as parallel to how the Jews needed to observe the sabbath; **Reviewing** what we covered on this topic – we need to slow down and make sure we understand this topic

Was God tired? Is that why He rested on the seventh day? Did He need a break because He was worn out? The sabbath is about the ending of a particular effort; God had completed His (**Ex. 20:8**) creation; also a foreshadowing of Christ coming to complete our Redemption (**Deut. 5:15**) – the Jews kept the day holy by putting their focus on God instead of on their daily responsibilities and looking both backward to the completion of God's work of creation and forward to the completed work which the coming Messiah would accomplish and cry out from the cross: "*It is finished*"

Matt. 12:6-8 "*something greater than the temple is here . . . For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.*" Do we as believers need to continue to worship in the temple? Why is not this as big of a deal as whether we should continue to worship on the sabbath?
It's not our connection to the right day; it's not our connection to the right place (John 4); it's our connection to the right person – the Lord Jesus Christ is the one we worship; we live by grace through faith to please Him as thanksgiving for the free gift of salvation we enjoy

That is the message of the entire **Book of Galatians** – we are free from the obligation to obey the

law; we are no longer under the law;
Some will say that we are no longer under the ceremonial and civil provisions of the law, but still under the moral obligations – that carves the law up into thirds in a way it was never presented in the OT; we have been freed from the law as a requirement for how to live in order to please God; that does not lead to license but to obedience to Christ – He has written a new law on our hearts – those moral provisions will still be the same – Do not murder, do not steal, etc. – but the observance of the sabbath had a distinctly OT Jewish flavor to it; never repeated in the NT --

Col. 2:16-17 *"Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath day – things which are a mere **shadow** of what is to come; but the **substance** belongs to Christ."*

That is the message of the entire **Book of Hebrews** – Christ is superior in every sense … the mediator of a new covenant

Heb. 4:9-10 *"So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."* – talking about the Jewish people as the people of God – the opportunity was still open for them to repent and fully trust Christ; for those who were genuine believers to persevere in their faith; to enter into the rest of spiritual salvation that will culminate in the rest of our heavenly inheritance -- so that we fully enter into the benefit of Christ's redemption and work on our behalf – Can you see how the Sabbath was a type – and Christ is presented as the substance and the fulfillment?

What about these sabbath regulations for believers today?
By application we see that the NT church made a point to assemble for worship, not on Saturday the sabbath, but on Sunday, the Lord's day – as designated by His resurrection from the dead. This did not make Sunday "the new sabbath." These Jewish Christians wanted to make plain their new life in Christ was not linked to their obedience to the OT law – Any attempt to enforce OT sabbath law is a step backwards with a serious loss of focus on the newness of life we now have in Jesus Christ. Cf Peter's insight into the dietary laws – no need to place such restrictions on yourself in the church age – **Acts 10:15** *"what God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy"*

Stedman: So the true sabbath rest is to rest on Another, and this is the divine provision to produce fruitfulness and abundance of victory in a Christian's life.

It is still important to always put the priority on worshiping God; not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together; make sure that our physical body still follows the helpful principle of 6 days of work and one day of rest and revitalization – but this is different from putting oneself under obligation to observe the OT sabbath laws; good thing for Chick-fil-A to close …

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." {**Matt 11:28-30** RSV}

The final 2 specific regulations concern our Money – MONEY MATTERS

(:32-39) SPECIFIC REGULATIONS OF THE REVIVED COVENANT
A. (:32-33) Regulations Regarding Shekels for the Temple Tax – Obligation to Support the Ongoing Worship Functions Associated with the Temple (the house of God)

"We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God."

Did you bring any shekels with you today? What is your obligation towards God with respect to your shekels? God has a lot to say about your money. Just because we don't take up an offering in the service but have a box in the back instead does not mean that we are de-emphasizing our gifts to God as part of our overall worship.

One third of a skekel -- About one-eighth of an ounce

MacArthur: The Mosaic ordinance required one-half of a shekel (see **Ex. 30:11-16**), but the severe economic straits of the time led to the reduced amount. By the time of Christ, the people had returned to the Mosaic stipulation of one-half of a shekel.

Yamauchi: Some argue that the later shekel was based on a **heavier standard**, thus one-third of the later shekel was equal to one-half of the earlier shekel. That is, the later Babylonian-Persian shekel was twenty-one grams, whereas the former Phoenician shekel was fourteen grams, hence one-third the former was equal to one-half the latter. . .
"bread of arrangement" – These were twelve cakes of fine flour arranged in two rows of six set out each Sabbath (Lev 24:6-7). Elsewhere they are also called "bread of the face" – that is, bread set before the presence of God (Exod 25:30; 1 Sam 21:6); 1 Kings 7:48).

A lot involved in maintaining *the work of the house of our God*

Wiersbe: The tax was a reminder to the people that God had redeemed them and paid a price to set them free, and that they should behave like people who belonged to God.

Let's reserve any remarks about application to us today until we study the corresponding 2nd regulation:

B. (:34-39) Regulations Regarding Sacrifices to God and Support of the Priestly Ministry – Expressed in 3 Areas of Responsibility

1. **The Wood Offering** – to burn on the altar = a sacrifice to God

   "Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law;"

Wiersbe: Since the fire on the brazen altar was to be kept burning constantly (Lev. 6:12-13), it required a steady supply of wood; and wood was a precious commodity.

Might have seemed like such a waste – bringing wood to burn
Booming Logging industry supported by the need for sacrifices in the temple

2. **The First Fruits** – to support **the Priests** -- giving God <u>the first and the best</u>

   "and that they might bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the LORD annually, and bring to the house

of our God the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God. We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God,"

Giving is never to be an after-thought; a priority of the highest order
Support and promotion of the Worship of God and expansion of His kingdom

Priests are a special subset of the Levites – descended from high priest Aaron;
All priests were Levites … but not all Levites were priests;
[Not sure that this distinction was always maintained.]
Levites would help the priests with the sacrifices associated with worship; with singing; with the reading of the law; with the teaching of the law

Wayne Blank: Levi had 3 sons - Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. From those branches of the family, the Levites were organized into 3 levels of service:

- The first level was composed of Aaron and his offspring, who were descended from Levi's son Kohath. They formed the priesthood.
- The second level was made up of all of the other descendants of Kohath who were not descendants of Aaron. They were in charge of the most sacred parts of the Tabernacle (Numbers 3:27-32, 4:4-15, 7:9).
- The third level consisted of all of the descendants of Gershon and Merari, who were given lesser duties (Numbers 3:21-26,33-37).

Prov. 3:9 "*Honor the Lord from the wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine*."

3. **The Tithes** – to support **the Levites**
   "*and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns. The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse*."

Wiersbe: The Jews were to bring a tenth of their produce to the Lord each year for the support of the Levites (Lev. 27:30-34). The Levites then gave a "tithe of the tithe" to the priests (Num. 18:25-32). The Jews were also to tithe the 90 percent that was left and take it to the temple for the annual feasts (Deut. 26:1-11). To these two tithes was added a third tithe, received every third year for the poor (vv. 12-15; 14:28-29).

Don't lose sight of the major point:
REDEDICATION TO OBEYING GOD'S WORD SHOWS ITSELF IN SPECIFIC REFORMS – EMPHASIS ON SABBATH KEEPING AND TITHING
Here: what we do with our shekels today

Should we be preaching the message of **Malachi 3:8-12**?? *"Will a man rob God? … Bring the*

whole tithe into the storehouse . . ." Is the storehouse now the local church and you are commanded to each give one tenth of your income or you are robbing God? Is tithing the key to enjoying material prosperity and God's blessing?

Application: all that we have belongs to the Lord and we are stewards, making investments for eternity. How can we fail to be generous and to trust the Lord for the provision of our needs?

Origin of concept of Tithing:

Genesis 14:18-20 – Abraham, returning from his military victory over the invading Mesopotamian kings, gave Melchizedek, the king-priest of Salem, a tenth of all. Showed the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood (type of Christ) to the Aaronic. –
Piper: So our first encounter with tithing is one where the giver is not paying God to stir him into action, but one where the giver is responding to God who has just fought for him and given him victory and great blessing.

Genesis 28:22 – Jacob, fleeing from Esau, promised to give a tenth to God if God prospered him. "*Of all that you give me I will surely give a tenth to You*." Recognition that all we have comes to us as a gift from God. Not holding on to the other 9/10 as if it is mine and not Gods; a pledge that we are a steward of all that God has entrusted to us

Under the law of Moses, tithing regulations were spelled out in detail – difficult to reconcile all of the passages and determine where they overlap (e.g. first fruits and tithes) or where they are speaking of separate and distinct offerings

You hear a lot of churches call for the collection of tithes and offerings – as if there is some sort of obligation to give a tenth … and then your free will offerings extend beyond that … What does the NT teach?
Does the NT command **tithing** for today? (many offerings involved – they were required to give much more than 10%)
Luke 18:12 – we see a faithful tither – a self righteous, Pharasaical hypocrite
What did Christ say about tithing – still talking to those under the law:
Matt. 23:23-24 "*these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others*"

Now let's look at some **Examples of Giving in the NT** – what type of giving is commended?

Look at the widow who gave her very last coin – nothing to do with tithing – **Mark 12:41-44**
Commended by Jesus: "*she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on*" – not being irresponsible
Look at the Value of her gift; Look at the Sacrifice of her gift – in terms of Uniqueness and Completeness
Look at Zaccheus who was converted from his sinful practices as a tax-gatherer extorting extra money from the people – **Luke 19:1-10** -- "*Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor*" – No set percentage standard that is dictated – a matter of the heart

Matt. 19:21 "If you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me" That's 100%.

Luke 14:33 "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" Again 100%

Look at the practice of the early church in the Book of Acts:

Acts 2:44-45 – nothing said here about tithing
Acts 3:6 – Peter did not even have any silver or gold to give alms to the needy
Acts 4:32-34 – another example of total commitment; no needy people among them
Acts 4:36-37 – example of Joseph – sold a property and gave the full purchase price
Acts 5:1-11 counter example of Ananias and Sapphira – lied about how much they were giving
The amount of giving is under our control – but don't lie about it
If tithing was the accepted standard, you would have thought that Ananias would have complied with that; actually the standard practice was much more sacrificial and total
Acts 6:1ff – feeding of the widows; 12 apostles devoting themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word – sounds like they were supported full time in the gospel ministry
Acts 8:18 – you cannot offer money as a bribe for spiritual graces
Acts 11:29-30 Relief sent to Judea
"in the proportion that any of the disciples had means" – voluntary response to specific need; indicated that they had not previously just divested themselves of all of their money
Acts 18:3 working as a tentmaker at Corinth
Acts 20:33-35 – example of Apostle Paul presented to elders at Ephesus; sometimes supported by gifts; other times felt it was important to work at a secular occupation and set a good example that *it is more blessed to give than to receive*
2 Cor. 8-9 Key passage about giving – many principles we could extract here …

Must ask the right question:
Not: How much am I obligated to give to God?
Danger in even saying that one tenth is a good guideline; we then think we have checked the box and the rest belongs to us for our own discretionary pleasures

But: How much am I willing and able to give to God?
Piper: How much do I dare keep to spend on myself? **2 Cor. 2:14**

Principles of NT Giving:
1) In Faith, a matter determined between you and God – How has He prospered you? How much can you trust Him to provide for you?

2) Sacrificially – a privilege to give; not a duty or a burden – beg for the opportunity to meet the needs of others and make an investment for eternity

3) Cheerfully, willingly, from the heart

To Support what type of Needs:
1) Practical needs of the saints

2) Itinerant missionaries advancing the gospel to new locations

3) Furtherance of the work of the local church including support of preachers and teachers

Our order of priority: buildings / senior pastor / administration / missionary work / practical needs

CONCLUSION:
How committed are you to obeying God? The proof is whether you reform your behavior in specific areas as you come to understand what the Word says. These final two areas in chapter 10 relate to Money Matters – how we use our resources to meet the needs of others and advance the kingdom of God in this church age.

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Stedman: The tithe was a tax levied upon people for the purpose of supporting a priesthood, a separate body of people who did religious things. When you come into the New Testament you find the priesthood has, in a sense, been eliminated. Now every Christian is a priest. We are a royal kingdom of priests, the epistles tell us, and there is no special collection or tax to support it.

It is laid upon us to give voluntarily, as our hearts are stirred and moved by the grace of God. That is what these Macedonians did. They understood that once you have given yourself it is easy to give anything else. That is the key.

The proper Christian attitude towards possessions is reflected in the hymn which we sang:

We give Thee but Thine own,
What-e'er the gift may be:
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.

You do not take 10 per cent and give it to the Lord and the 90 per cent remains yours. That is not Christian giving. 100 per cent of it belongs to God. The true Christian attitude is, "It is all yours, Lord. You do what you want with it. Whatever you tell me to do with it, I'll do, because it belongs to you, not to me. I am merely a steward, a trustee of it, responsible to distribute it for your name's sake." That is what these Macedonians had seen, and, therefore, having given themselves, they freely followed up with everything they had.

This is also Jesus' teaching. Once he was asked whether people should pay taxes or not. He asked for a coin, and, holding it up, he said, "Whose image is on this coin?" They answered, "Caesar's." Jesus' words in answer have never been forgotten: "Give to Caesar the things that have Caesar's picture on them, the things of Caesar, but give to God the things that have the image of God upon them," {cf, Matt 22:20-21, Mark 12:16-17, Luke 20:24-25}.

Who bears the image of God? You do, don't you? You are made in his image; you bear the imprint of his image. Give that to God then. That is what he wants. When you give that, then everything else will follow. You hold things in trust to be used whenever he lets you know that a need exists for them. That is proper Christian giving.

Principles for Giving from **1 Cor. 16:1-4**

1.A universal practice,	*"as I directed the churches"*
2.A weekly activity,	*"On the first day of every week"*
3.A personal act,	*"each one of you"*
4.A predetermined objective,	*"is to put aside and save"*
5.A proportionate amount,	*"as he may prosper"*
6.An unpressured response,	*"so that no collections be made when I come"*
7.A responsible delivery.	*"when I arrive . . ."*

TEXT: Nehemiah 11:1 – 12:26

TITLE: MIGHTY MEN OF VALOR -- RE-SETTLEMENT OF JERUSALEM

BIG IDEA:
GOD'S KINGDOM ADVANCES WHEN MIGHTY MEN OF VALOR FORSAKE PERSONAL COMFORT TO VOLUNTEER FOR FRONT LINE DUTY IN THE FAITHFUL FULFILLMENT OF THEIR GOD APPOINTED ROLES

11:14 "*valiant warriors*"

INTRODUCTION:

Where are **God's Mighty Men of Valor** today? Look around in the church and you scarcely can find them. Who will take a courageous stand for the Lord? Who will lead their family at great cost and sacrifice? Much less take on leadership in the church of Jesus Christ? Some of you young ladies may have been praying that God would send just one mighty man of valor your way – Where is he? We seem to have a mismatch in the church today of more committed women than committed men. That is a huge problem when God's program for church leadership requires a plurality of godly elders – hopefully mighty men of valor.

Remember way back when young David was selected by Samuel to be the next king and began serving in Saul's court, here is how he was initially described: **1 Sam. 16:18** "*Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the Lord is with him*." What an impressive list of credentials – including some attributes we might not expect to see linked. He was both a sensitive, creative musician and a fierce and mighty warrior.

King David had his mighty men of valor who supported God's kingdom efforts in his day.

2 Sam. 10:7 we see Joab named as the leader of the army, in particular of a special band of *mighty men* – of *choice men* (v.9); of men who gained the victory that day by being strong and showing themselves to be courageous on behalf of God's people and His kingdom objectives – defeating Ammon and the Arameans

2 Sam. 16:6 as we see David fleeing Jerusalem from the threat of his rebellious son Absalom, he is accompanied by his special band of mighty men on his right hand and on his left; Shimei cursed him and threw stones at him while mocking him in a loud voice, but David restrained his mighty men from taking action

2 Sam. 17:8,10 look at this very vivid picture of these mighty men as Hushai warns Absalom of what he is up against in attacking his father – "*You know your father and his men, that they are mighty men and they are fierce, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. And your father is an expert in warfare . . . And even the one who is valiant, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will completely lose heart; for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man and those who are with him are valiant men*." – no picture of a sissy here; not how spiritual leaders are depicted in the movies and on TV; no sense of weakness or timidity

2 Sam. 23:8-39 Honor Roll of David's mighty men of valor

Today we seem faced with a church that has been stripped of its masculinity. In fact it is the rare church even within evangelical Protestantism that does not seem to at least entertain the issue of allowing women to serve as pastors. Why not? We don't want strong male leadership. That would be chauvinistic. We don't want a distinction in roles between the sexes. That would not be fair. We seem to want equal opportunity at all costs. That is the direction of our United States military. Why shouldn't women fly our fighter jets and drive our tanks and serve on our nuclear subs? So along with the feminizing of male leadership, you have the defeminizing of our privileged ladies. Where will it all stop? Didn't God create them male and female with significant distinctions in intended roles?

In our passage we are going to study the activities of another group of mighty men of valor – those who served with Nehemiah in the repopulating of the holy city of Jerusalem

Problem: Neh. 7:4 "*Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built*" Very similar to the problems in starting up a local church and having very few people – not very attractive to others

6 KEYS FOR GOD'S KINGDOM TO ADVANCE:

(Understand verses 1-2 and you will understand the thrust of the passage)

I. LEADERS MUST COMMIT TO LEAD

"*Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem*" We are going to talk about why that was so important in a few minutes – this section is all about the repopulating of the rebuilt city; Who were the first to move in and set up residence? Nehemiah and his top leaders

Very simple concept – Leaders Must Commit to Lead: (7:2 and other leaders mentioned)

- You cannot desire to be a leader and then want to stay in the background;
- You cannot desire to be a leader and then be unwilling to make hard decisions;
- You cannot desire to be a leader and not set the course and vision for others to follow

Nehemiah always received his vision from God in terms of what needed to be done. There was no one else he could look to for instruction. He set the example and his high level leaders followed his example.

Steve Zeisler: The Vow-Makers
Jerusalem had been a bit of a ghost town when the walls were down. Nobody wanted to live there. It was a place that had sad old memories but no present or future. Israelites had settled in the wide region around and had built farms and small communities, but not enough people wanted to live in Jerusalem. So they had to draft citizens to come and live there to bring the city to life again.

Ray Stedman: The great principle to remember in reading the Old Testament is that what happens to Israel **on a physical level** pictures what is happening to us on the **spiritual level**. Read with that principle in mind, it becomes a wonderful book of instruction. God, too, is a Builder. The New Testament tells us that he is building a city and one which has inhabitants. It is called The New Jerusalem. It is not like the old one, made of bricks and mortar, but a new city built of spiritual stones -- "living stones," according to the New Testament {1 Pet 2:5}. It is intended to be inhabited by redeemed people. If you draw that parallel you will begin to see some of the teaching of this passage in Nehemiah.

Danger of plurality of elder rule – criticized for not allowing for **strong leadership**; what if every man backs off and expects the other leaders to fill the gap?
1 Timothy 3:1 "*It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do*."

Why don't people want to become leaders? Many reasons … some valid … but some are excuses

- Don't want the pressure and responsibility
- Don't want to make sacrifices and give up their personal comforts; especially the freedom to use their time as they please

Blessing of having a godly wife to support her husband's role as a leader

- How many men cannot consider leading because the wife doesn't want any part of it?
-

We want to direct people's faith and dependence to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ; we are just undershepherds.
Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face; follow Him

II. GOD'S KINGDOM PRIORITIES MUST BE EMBRACED

What was so important about living in Jerusalem?

- Who cares about God's program for Jerusalem?
- Who cares about the importance of temple worship?
-

Ron Daniel: Notice that in verse one, Jerusalem is called "*the holy city*." This title shows that it has been specifically set apart for God's use. It is sacred, sanctified, and separate from all other cities. The only other city that receives this name in the Bible is the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of new heaven to the new earth after the original heaven and earth pass away (Rev. 21:1-2).

The Holy City should be inhabited by holy people – that is what is appropriate
Psalm 15 "*O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart*."

David Guzik: If such a blessing is reserved for those who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem, what was it about the city that would have made it an honorable choice to live there?
i. To live in Jerusalem, you had to re-order your view of material things; you had to give up land in your previous region, and take up some kind of new business in Jerusalem
ii. To live in Jerusalem, you had to re-arrange your social priorities, surely leaving some friends and family behind in your old village
iii. To live in Jerusalem, you had to have a mind to endure the problems in the city. It had been a ghost town for seventy years, and was now basically a slightly rebuilt, somewhat repopulated ghost town. The city didn't look all that glorious, and needed work
iv. To live in Jerusalem, you had to live knowing you were a target for the enemy. There were strong walls to protect you, but since Jerusalem was now a notable city with rebuilt walls, the fear was more from whole armies than bands of robbers. The old village was nice, but not in much danger from great armies

v. The Bible tells us there is a city coming down from heaven to earth, when God is done with this earth as we know it, and it calls that city New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). People don't want to be citizens of the New Jerusalem for the same reasons many didn't want to be citizens of Nehemiah's Jerusalem

We have been called to a high calling of holiness because our God is holy.

Christ is our model both of holiness and of fully embracing kingdom priorities – "*Behold, I have come to do your will, O God*" – **Heb. 10:7**

The Apostle Paul was able to say follow me as I follow Christ – "*For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" (**Phil. 2:21**)

- Priority of the local church today – not just para church organizations; can't give up
- Priority of church planting and church multiplication – not just personal discipleship
- Priority of involvement in the Great Commission – strategic importance of those areas that are underserved with the gospel message – Romans 10 – *How will they hear without a preacher?*

III. COURAGE AND COMMITMENT MUST TRUMP PERSONAL COMFORT

Closely tied to the previous point

Ron Daniel: In an agrarian society, you grow your own food to sustain yourself, and to sell or trade for other necessities. But when living in a city, you make your living by offering support systems to other city dwellers, and purchasing food from the agrarian bunch. The city has to be populated enough to require your service and to generate the income necessary to buy the food. The **catch-22** of city populations is that if no one is there, no one moves there. If no one moves there, no one is there.

What was so costly and sacrificial about living in Jerusalem?

- significant danger involved; possibly focus of future attack
- much responsibility associated with rebuilding and temple worship, etc.

- Cut off from social ties to family and friends
- Putting yourself in a more vulnerable position in every way
    - Open to military attacks
    - Not as secure a situation financially

What is involved in **moving out of our comfort zone** in order to do what God wants us to do?

Look at **Paul's final charge** to his young protégé Timothy in 2 Tim – not promising him a life of comfort – wanted him to count the cost – but to then fully enter into the yoke of leadership:
1:8-9 "*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling*"

2:1ff "*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be*

able to teach others also. Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."

Courage and Commitment must always be the resolve of spiritual leaders

IV. THE PEOPLE MUST VOLUNTARILY SUBMIT TO GOD'S SOVEREIGN RULE (AND TO GOD'S APPOINTED RULERS)

"but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem; the holy city, while nine-tenths remained in the other cities."

- Look at the confidence of the people in the sovereignty of God – let's just roll the dice
and trust God to bring the right outcome

Brian Bill: In **Nehemiah 11**, we come across a situation where the people are faced with a national referendum. But instead of taking a vote, they flip a coin to determine what should be done. Actually, the biblical phrase is that they "cast lots." In the Old Testament, the casting of lots was like throwing dice and was a way of discovering God's will. We even see this used in the Book of Acts when the disciples are trying to figure out who should replace Judas in **Acts 1:26**: "Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles."

They didn't believe in "luck" or "chance." They actually were so committed to the sovereignty of God that they knew God would direct the outcome of the lots according to His divine providence**. Proverbs 16:33** says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." The votes are cast by the people but the election is determined by the Lord.

Breneman: God can use different means to make known His will. The use of the lot is seen a number of times (**Num 26:55-56; 1 Chr 24:5; 25:8**). Today Christians do not depend on this means of ascertaining God's will. Since the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer, we can expect God to make his will known through his Word, through inner conviction, and through his guidance of the circumstances. Nevertheless, we should not limit what God can do; he is sovereign and may use unusual means in specific circumstances. The important matter is to trust God for guidance.

Very structured society

- Heads of households – importance of the family unit
- Overseers in various areas and then the second in command
- Religious leaders
- Political leaders
Pethahiah the king's representative in all matters concerning the people

Adam Clarke: He was the governor appointed by the Persian king over the Jewish nation in those matters in which the civil government interfered with Jewish concerns. He no doubt fixed, levied, and received the tribute.

Ron Daniel: Peth-akh-YAW means, "Freed by Yahweh," Mesh-ay-zab-ALE means "God delivers," and ZEH-rakh means, "Rising." In every matter between the people and the king, they

were reminded that God was on their side, a God Who arises to bring deliverance and freedom. God can bring good out of evil in His sovereign providence – account of Perez in Gen. 38

Silversides: God uses unpromising material for the building of His church\

V. THE PEOPLE MUST ACTIVELY SUPPORT THE FRONT LINE TROOPS

"*And the people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.*"

- Look at the *blessing* for their obedience – would that God's people would always recognize and reward such an example

They committed to pray for them; spoke well of them
They committed to encourage them financially
They committed to respect them very highly for their labor of love

Not everyone can serve on the front lines – think of the military analogy – those who remain at home must make sacrifices as well to provide for the needs of those on the front line and support them in every way possible

VI. MIGHTY MEN OF VALOR MUST EXCEL AT THEIR GOD APPOINTED ROLES

Phil Johnson: **Time to Act Like Men in the Church**
(see below)

(:**3-19**) Different classes of People in Jerusalem
(introduced in **:3-6** and then detailed in :7-19)

Adam Clarke: A good deal of difference will be found between the enumeration here and that in 1 Chronicles 9:2, There, those only who came with Zerubbabel appear to be numbered; here, those, and the persons who came with Ezra and Nehemiah, enter into the account.

Look at the numbers that are cited below

- People that may seem insignificant – not even mentioned here by name; but significant to God; significant to the advance of God's kingdom
- People are more important than programs – when evaluating a church – don't go by how many programs they operate; what type of mighty men of valor are actively leading

Heads of the provinces
Israelites (from the northern tribes)
Priests (:**10-14**) and associated helpers and valiant warriors
Seraiah the leader of the house of God
Other kinsmen who performed the work of the temple, **822**
Heads of fathers' households, **242**
Valiant Warriors, **128** noted for strength of body and military courage
And their overseer was Zabdiel, the son of Haggedolim (:14)
Levites (:**15-18**) – total of **284**

Those in charge of the outside work of the house of God (:16)
Mattaniah, leader in beginning the thanksgiving at prayer (:17)
Importance of leading in singing; getting us off on right note

Temple Servants
Also the gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon and their brethren who kept watch at the gates, were **172** (:19)

Ron Daniel: These are "the gatekeepers of the entrance of the tent of meeting" (1Chr. 9:21), the guys who kept watch at the gates at each of the temple entrances (1Chr. 9:17-27), stationed in the thresholds as guards on all four sides. Now, these weren't simply doormen. They... 1Chr. 9:26-29 ...were in an office of trust, and were over the chambers and over the treasuries in the house of God. And they spent the night around the house of God, because the watch was committed to them; and they {were} in charge of opening {it} morning by morning. Now some of them had charge of the utensils of service, for they counted them when they brought them in and when they took them out. Some of them also were appointed over the furniture and over all the utensils of the sanctuary and over the fine flour and the wine and the oil and the frankincense and the spices.

Descendants of Solomon's Servants
Sons of Judah
Sons of Benjamin (:**7-9**) **928** strong
Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer
Judah the son of Hassenuah was second in command of the city
Sons of Perez singled out for attention – **468** *able men*

(:**20-21**) Living outside Jerusalem
The rest of Israel, of the priests and of the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, each on his own inheritance
But the temple servants were living in Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of the temple servants

Ron Daniel: Ophel = subdivision of Jerusalem, located in a ridge of hills inside Jerusalem just south of the temple area.

(:**22-24**) Religious and Political Leaders
Uzzi – overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem
Sons of Asaph – who were the singers for the service of the house of God
For there was a commandment from the king concerning them
And a firm regulation for the song leaders day by day

Adam Clarke: Some have thought that they had been Jewish singers employed in the service of the Persian king, to whom he had given a salary, and to whom he wished still to continue the same.

(:**25-36**) 90% of the people lived in surrounding cities

(**12:1-21**) Priests and Levites who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and then were subsequently raised up
Genealogy of Jeshua the high priest given prominence

(:**1-7**) Family names of the priests at the time of the first return under Zerubbabel
(:8-9) Family names of the Levites at the same time
(:**10-11**) Line of the high priests
(:**12-21**) priests in the time of Jehoiakim, the second generation after the return
(:**22-23**) adds details about the records
(:**24-26**) more about the Levites and details about the chronology -- Breneman

Rom. 12:6-8 every believer must play their important role
"*Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*"

CONCLUSION:
Ray Stedman: The passage teaches us that we must not forget past heroes, the men of fame and of glory whom God has used in former days

God sees and keeps good records – He will Reward
When the final Honor Roll is called, the Mighty Men of Valor will step forward to receive their crowns and rewards

Hebrews 6:10: "*For God is not so unjust as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.*"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Would you be willing to uproot your family and move to a different city for the sake of the gospel if that is what the Lord wanted you to do? Do you have the sense of being in the place where God wants you to be?

2) Do you think God keeps track of your voluntary sacrifices and commitment to the cause of the kingdom? Look at the importance Nehemiah placed on recording lists of people associated with various aspects of the ministry.

3) Do you have a sense of being in the ministry, equipped with a specific spiritual gift and performing significant ministry for the church of Jesus Christ?

4) Are you looking for applause and recognition from men or content to be faithful in your ministry role and look to God for commendation?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Brian Bill: **Taking Time to Give Thanks**
Since the walls and gates of Jerusalem were now restored, it was important that the builders

inhabit their capital city and make the population grow. Some of the citizens volunteered willingly while others had to be "drafted." We see this in verse 1: "Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns." The people had promised to tithe their produce and income in chapter 10; now Nehemiah decides to tithe the people by arranging for 10% of them to move from the suburbs to the city.

These believers exhibited four counter-cultural traits that have application to us today. Regardless of who is the president, this is how God wants us to live.

4 Traits to Emulate
1. Move out of your comfort zone.
2. Commit to holiness.
3. Mobilize for ministry.
    three different groups in this passage:
        Those with leadership gifts.
        Those with administrative gifts
        Those with serving gifts.
4. Adore God in worship.
Worship can be defined as "worth-ship," where we engage our mind, our emotions, and our will to gratefully acknowledge the worth of our God. There is no other human activity as lofty as that of adoring God.

Jason Jones: **Intentional Impact – Penetrating your city for Jesus Christ**
No excessive segregation: Remember that this list of people was chosen by lot. They are listed kind of like an honor roll list in the Gazette, but remember they are all moving to Jerusalem together. The priests, Levites, gatekeepers were going to live right alongside the regular families. There was not a separation of ages, or classes, or races, or occupations except for the purpose of the list. The only division that we see is by family or tribe. This is because the family is prioritized in scripture. They all lived together as the family of God. They all learned together using the family structure as the primary means of discipleship . . .

Young and old can work together to accomplish a common goal. And I am not saying that we should scrap the whole age-graded structure (although it is hard to find a biblical justification for it), or get rid of the Youth group, SSs, or Senior ministry, but that we must begin to think outside this structure and not require and all ministry be done for a specific age group. And not be so selfish as to always requiring the church to do ministry for you. And be willing to learn about the old times, and new times, and get involved with those of other generations so that the glory of Christ might be furthered, and the wisdom of age and the vibrancy of youth is not overlooked. . .

Changing Consumer Landscape These top 20 trends compiled by Social Technologies Organization are listed in no particular order.
1. Cultural Flows—the spread of ideas, media, products, brands, and lifestyles to new places—are increasing as the world becomes more interconnected. These expose new ideas, products, and ways of thinking.
2. Time Pressure. Most of us feel we have less time to manage mounting levels of activity, information, and choice, and the resulting accelerated pace of life.
3. Cultural Multipolarity. The ability to produce and disseminate culture in its modern forms is rising in more places around the world. These new cultural power centers are driving the

emergence of cultural multipolarity.
4. Asia Rising. Asians are strengthening their economic and cultural clout and boosting their world prominence.
5. Media Spread. Mass media is accessible to more people.
6. Social Freedom. Globally the range of personal, political, and economic options open to individuals is growing. Political change, economic growth, and information flows, spread individualism and expand consumer choices.
7. Transparency. The increasing ability to gather, store, and share information makes it easier to know about people, products, companies, and governments.
8. Monetization. As more people equate time and money, more choose goods and services that offer convenience and save time.
9. Rising Mobility in emerging markets impacts lifestyles and fuels demand for mobility-related goods and services.
10. Migration. International and internal migration continues at high levels and affects many aspects of life.
11. Networked World. Information devices are spreading, enabling new connections between organizations, objects, and people; allowing more information to travel faster.
12. Consumerism is an option for more people than ever before due to globalization and rising incomes.
13. Changing Families. Falling fertility rates and smaller families drive the aging of the world population and change the structure many of societies markets.
14. Women's Power socially, politically, and economically is growing globally.
15. Electrification changes life's pace, including how people cook, work, and access entertainment and information.
16. Aging. By 2050, the median age will rise by 10 years, to 37. Result—2 billion people aged 60 and over.
17. Ethical Consumption. More buyers consider ethical, religious, political, and other beliefs in their purchase decisions.
18. Population Growth. Every decade adds hundreds of millions of people to earth's population.
19. Middle-Class Growth is unfolding in emerging markets.
20. Urbanization. The number of people living in urban areas has risen from roughly 1 billion in '60 to 3 billion now. Lives change when people move to cities.

Steven J. Cole: **You're In the Ministry Now**
Big Idea: **All of God's people should be ministry oriented.**
These people had willing hearts to do whatever God wanted them to do, and each functioned in their own unique capacity. As we examine the section that lists the names of the Jewish citizens, four factors emerge that help us define what ministry involves. The section dealing with the dedication of the wall reveals four requirements for the person involved in ministry (= every believer).

WHAT DOES MINISTRY INVOLVE?
1. Ministry involves a willingness to live where God wants you to live.
Nehemiah got the wall built, but there were not many people living in the city (**7:4**). When the people returned from the exile, the walls were torn down and there was a lot of rubble from the previous destruction. It would have required a lot of work to clear the rubble and restore the city. As the former capital, the restored city would have been a major target for enemies to attack. At first there wasn't much economic opportunity there. It was far easier to settle out in the country and farm your own plot of ground. So most of the people had been content to live in the

surrounding villages scattered across the land. But Nehemiah knew that if the city was to be strong and prosperous and if the worship in the temple was to thrive, the city had to be well populated with citizens who could defend it in case of attack. As **11:1** notes, the leaders lived in Jerusalem, but most of the people did not. So they cast lots to pick one out of ten who would move to Jerusalem. It seems that some who were not chosen volunteered to move, either in place of or in addition to those who drew the lot (**11:2**). The ones who stayed in the villages blessed those who were willing to move to Jerusalem. Those who moved had to pull up roots where they were already established, give up their acreage in the country, and move into what quickly became a somewhat crowded city. Based on the number of men who moved to the city (3,044), there were about 10,000, conservatively estimated, who moved into the city, with a total population of 100,000 Jews in the land (Howard Vos, cited by James Boice, Nehemiah: Learning to Lead [Revell], p. 175). Although it was inconvenient and less desirable in some ways to move from the country to the city, these people were willing to live where God wanted them to live in order to serve His purpose.

2. Ministry involves serving in the sphere in which God calls you to serve.
Chapter 11 lists the heads of families in Jerusalem (**11:3-9**); the priests (**11:10-14**); the Levites (**11:15-18**); the gatekeepers and temple servants (**11:19-21**); various officials appointed by the king of Persia (**11:22-24**); and, the people who lived outside the city (**11:25- 36**). Each served in his respective sphere for the effective operation of the city and the nation. Those who lived outside of the city had to farm the land to provide food for those in the city. Each had a different role, but each role was vital to the entire cause.

In the body of Christ, God has gifted us in different ways, but every part is vital for the overall functioning and health of the body (**1 Cor. 12:12-30**). We should learn to coordinate and complement each other without friction or rivalry. Problems often develop in the body because the eye looks at everyone from the perspective of the eye only, and the hand views everything from the perspective of the hand. But the eye should value the hand and the hand should value the eye.

3. Ministry involves a willingness to serve without acclaim.
Most of these names mean nothing to us. Some aren't even listed by name, but are lumped together with all of their kinsmen as a group (**11:12-14**). Zabdiel is named (**11:14**), although he means nothing to us, but 128 of his kinsmen go unnamed, except to say that they were valiant warriors. But 128 valiant warriors were no small part of a secure, safe city!

The church needs many people like that in order to function well. This place would shut down in a week if we didn't have many who labor faithfully behind the scenes. You never see them up front, but they do what God has given them to do. They're like your vital organs: you never see them, but when one of them shuts down, you're in big trouble! Note two things about these people: · Faithfulness, not fame, is the issue. Motive is what matters. If we serve to try to gain esteem and recognition, we're doing it for the wrong reason. We'll get angry when others do not give us the strokes that we're seeking.

Chuck Swindoll writes, "If you desire fame and recognition, you will most likely fail as a leader and your efforts will go unrewarded for all eternity. That's not a threat; it's a promise" (Hand Me Another Brick [Thomas Nelson Publishers], p. 171). He goes on to cite **Matthew 6:1**, "*Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven*." · God notices even if others do not.

God saw fit to record these names that mean absolutely nothing to us. But they meant something to God, and that's what ultimately matters. If you're getting upset because no one in the church notices all that you do, your focus is in the wrong place. Look to the Lord, whom you are serving. And remember **Hebrews 6:10**: "*For God is not so unjust as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.*"

4. Ministry involves people first and programs second.
These long lists underscore the importance of people to God. Each one of these strange, hard-to-pronounce names represents a person whom God loved and knew. Jesus said that the good shepherd "*calls his own sheep by name*" and that his "*sheep follow him because they know his voice*" (**John 10:3, 4**). The Christian faith is all about personal relationships, first with God, and then with one another (the two great commandments, **Matt. 22:37-40**). Programs should always be the vehicle through which we minister to people. If a program is not doing that, we need to axe the program and replace it with something that ministers God's Word to people. Apart from programs, if you have the proper ministry mindset, you will seek to relate to people. On Sunday mornings, take the initiative to meet new people. Make them feel welcome here. Introduce them to others. While we can't get well acquainted with everyone, if it is a person to whom you can relate, set up a time to get together for coffee or have them over to dinner. Share your own testimony and ask them about how God has worked in their lives. Ministry takes place though relationships. That threatens some people. It's safer to work in a program, or to be involved in maintaining the building, where you can keep your distance from people. But God isn't saving buildings or sanctifying programs. He is saving and sanctifying people, and He does that through His people reaching out in love to others.

Ray Stedman: **The Ways God Works**
But there is something very interesting here. If you read this carefully, it is apparent that when a man was chosen to move into Jerusalem he was permitted to decline if he wanted to. That is because God wanted volunteers for this. So a man could be chosen, but could decide against moving. Then the lot would be cast again and another name chosen. Sooner or later someone would be found who consented freely to go. According to the account, those who chose to go were commended by the people. They honored them because they volunteered to do what God called them to do.

The application for us is obvious. The same principle applies in the church today. According to the New Testament, we are all called into the ministry -- all of us! The ministry belongs to the saints! The minute you become a Christian you are moved into God's new Jerusalem. You are asked to take up labor there, to do work according to the spiritual gift God has given you. But you must also volunteer to do it. God does not force his people to do what they are asked to do. He gave us all spiritual gifts, but he does not force us to use them. Yet if you want to be respected or honored and commended at last by the Lord himself and by all his people, then the wise thing is to volunteer to perform the realm of ministry he has opened up for you.

Perez was one of the sons of Judah, who was in turn the son of Jacob, one of the twelve patriarchs who fathered the twelve tribes. The story of his birth, in Genesis 38, is a rather lengthy, sordid account which relates how Judah conceived this son with his own daughter-in-law. Thus it was an illegitimate birth. At his birth it was found that the mother was about to bear twins, and his brother started to emerge first. The midwife tied a scarlet string around his finger

to indicate he would be the oldest of the twins, but then the baby pulled his arm back and the other twin came out. Because he broke out in that fashion he was named Perez, which means "breaking out." But following this rather shadowed beginning he went on to become one of the great heroes of Judah. His descendants are traced in almost every generation since. Even here in Nehemiah, some 400 years after Judah lived, Perez is regarded as one of the heroes of the nation. His descendants are called "the brave men of Perez."

Then, with regard to the people of Benjamin, notice that they provided twice as many men from this small tribe as those from larger tribe of Judah. The sordid history of Benjamin is given us in the book of Judges. The last few chapters of that book tell a sorry tale of people who fell into sexual sin and began to practice homosexuality. It was a terrible disgrace and stain on the life of Israel. But two important men came from this tribe:

One is called Saul, the first king of Israel. He is a great disappointment for though he began well he ends his forty years of reign in bitter, acrimonious, angry rebellion against God. He finally takes his own life on a battlefield. There is another Saul, however, in the New Testament, who also came from the tribe of Benjamin. This is Saul of Tarsus, who is better known to us, of course, as the Apostle Paul.

What is all this teaching us? I think it illustrates what the New Testament often tells us, that God is no respecter of persons. He does not care how you started out in life. You do not wreck your chances for success in his eyes by beginning at a very low level. God can cleanse people and use them in mighty and wonderful ways. He chooses, we are told, the obscure, the once tainted, the rejects of life. He loves to pick up those kinds of people and do wonderful things with them.

Chuck Swindoll: 5 groups of people that willingly gave of themselves for the work of the ministry:

1) Those who willingly moved into the city
2) Those who worked in the temple
3) Those who worked outside in related areas
4) Those who willingly prayed
5) Those who sang in the services for God

Phil Johnson: **Time to Act Like Men in the Church**
Evangelicals seem committed to keeping the church in a soft and dainty tone; Where does Seeker Sensitivity fit into what the church should be; a typically effeminate trend; giving way to the emerging church and the emphasis on dialogue and tolerance; "*Preach the Word*"; not an ego-massaging message that caters to itching ears; the sissification of the church; everything in the church more and more dominated by feminine themes: personal relationships, dealing with your emotional hurts; real men are turned off by a lot of this; problem is far worse in liberal churches; far worse in Europe than in America; the influence and involvement of men has been diminishing – despite massive Promise Keepers rallies; need to recapture masculinity; women buy more than 75% of the evangelical books – what can we do to make this manuscript more appealing to women – drives the editorial process; Leadership in the church is male – that is the way God designed it! Soften it; contemporize it; Crisis in the church that stems from the decline of masculinity; not belittling women; men have been too timid, too lazy, etc.; Puritans exemplified virile approach to theology; decline after that; passion in the pulpit gave way to eloquence; Spurgeon hated the effeminate tendencies of the Victorian pulpit; "Don't be indifferent to truth and righteousness;" He was a man's preacher; follow Scripture rather than the

trends of contemporary culture; not talking about bravado or boyishness but authentic Christ-like character including strength and courage and conviction;
Ephes. 4:13-15 – what kind of gifts did Christ give to men? The gifts themselves are men; the gift here is not the office; it is the man who fills the office; Christ gave these men to the church

Mark Fitzpatrick: **The Resettlement of the People**

A. **(:1-9)** Inhabitants of Jerusalem who settled there by lot of their own accord
B. (:**10-24**) Priests and Levites
C. (:**25-36**) Rest of the people including priests and Levites who dwelt in outer cities of Judah and Benjamin

Where did the rulers dwell? **(:1-6)** In Jerusalem; the most difficult and challenging place to dwell in; all would be expected to do their part; to shoulder the burden of the city of God; be an example and encouragement to the people; **1 Pet. 5** "*the elders which are among you*" – being examples to the flock; work hard for God and for His people; in the church we are all meant to work; that does not mean we all do the same work; there is something for us all to do; How seriously do you take your ministry? All commanded to pray for the peace of Jerusalem – God's people; How much have I prayed this week for the church; involves labor; prayer not meant to be enjoyable but my responsibility and work;

David Silversides: **God Builds Up Jerusalem**
After the spiritual reviving of the people; now the formation of the new society; essential that the city be well populated for security and defense;

1. **A Willing People (:1-2)**

Not an appeal to chance, but God's Providence; and made things impartial from man's standpoint; what seems random to us is actually governed by God; involved sacrifice; uprooting themselves from place where they were established and possibly prosperous; put themselves in the front hairs of the enemy; place where the hostility of the enemy is most aroused = place where God is honored and worshiped; **1 Cor. 16:15** "*they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints*" – seeking the welfare of the people of God; **2 Cor. 8:1-5**; How many Christians are giving priority to the Lord's cause – even in the matter of where to live; Phil. 2:20-21; people must be broken by sin in order to be willing; humbled; see the riches of divine grace

2. **Good out of Evil (:3-5) –**

Perez was one of the sons of Judah – cf. Gen. 38; union of Judah and Tamar = low point to which the nation had come; descendants among the honored men; God glorified His grace; God working all things for the good of His people; God uses unpromising material for the building of His church

3. **Prepared for Worship (:10-23)**

List of priests and Levites; gatekeepers **Ps. 84:10**; necessary planning and organization so that the worship of God took place according to God's regulations; make sure our worship is honoring to God = biblical in form (we have much more freedom regarding the form and details – great simplicity) and heartfelt; don't come to worship unprepared; complexity of OT worship demanded a certain thoughtfulness; don't let simplicity of ordinances cause us to be thoughtless; singers mentioned (:**22-23**); **2 Chron. 5:12** – appointed by God – a choir to sing the praises of the Lord; Heb. 13:10, 15 – we offer the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips

4. **All Need the Word (:24-36)**

Distribution of the people throughout the surrounding cities and countryside; Levites and Priests spread around as well to teach the people

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **A Heart for Ministry**

Introduction: God doesn't divide us up that way, clergy and laity. And so if we think that way, if we have that mentality, that means there'll just be a handful of people that's doing all the work of the ministry, and a lot of people that are just pretty much sitting back and letting others do the work. You enter into ministry, the moment you trust Jesus as your Savior, you are called to be one of God's servants, one of God's ministers. This whole group of people are people who are servants of the Lord, that are willing servants to do whatever God wants them to do. And we can learn a lot about all these people that are named in here.

Big Idea: **What does ministry involve? What does it take to be useful in God's work?**

I. A Willing Heart – 11:1

So here's this big city. The problem is, it's an unoccupied city. And what good is a city if there's no people? Now remember, part of God's plan was to repopulate Jerusalem and make it, once again, the capital of the nation. At the time, Jerusalem wasn't really a desirable place to live. And again, the reason for that is because there was a lot of rubble in the city from the previous destruction. Also, it wasn't really a safe place to live. Why? Because the enemies of God's people would target Jerusalem. It was a whole lot easier to settle on the outskirts of Jerusalem, where it was easier to have your own plot of ground. You could raise a crop on that. Nehemiah said, let's line everybody up. Let's cast lots. And one out of every 10 families will move into the city of Jerusalem. All of them were willing.

The first question we should ask is, Lord, where do you want me? And what do you want me to do? And that's what these people were like. They were saying, Lord, we'll go wherever. If you want us there, we will. And so we admire that willingness. God wants a willing heart.

II. A Servant's Heart – 11:12

These were just people who just did the menial tasks there in the temple. The point is that everyone had a place to serve. The point is, is that each had a gift and an ability that God gave them for the work so that they could use it and employ it in God's work. Unity comes when, in that diversity, everyone understands their role and they do that together as a team.

I like what one person said about this as far as giftings. Carl George, he made this observation. He said that people usually complain, and what they complain about in the church will probably be that person's area of spiritual gift.

III. A Clean Heart – 12:30

They cleanse themselves. Now, it doesn't tell us specifically how, but no doubt there was probably a lot of prayer here. There was maybe some fasting. There was probably making sacrifices, sin offerings before the Lord and so on. and they were gonna dedicate the wall, but before they did that, they wanted to cleanse themselves. And see, in the Old Testament, ritual purity symbolized the fact that our hearts need to be cleansed before the Lord.

IV. A Worshipful Heart – 12:27

And you know the kind of people that God wants to use? People that have a worshipful

heart, that want to celebrate the great things that God has done.

V. A Joyful Heart – 12:43

You just get this idea that they're just they're just having a wonderful time. They're just filled with joy.

VI. A Giving Heart – 12:43

That's what ministry is all about. It's just, we just keep giving. We give to those that have needs. We give of our time. We give of our substance. Whatever we see a need, we want to give because that's the heart of ministry.

TEXT: Nehemiah 12:27-47

TITLE: CELEBRATION OF SUCCESSFUL REVIVAL / REBUILDING – CELEBRATION OF MOTHER'S DAY

BIG IDEA:
THE DEDICATION OF THE REBUILT WALL INVOLVED AN ELABORATE CELEBRATION BEFITTING THE CULMINATION OF SUCH A SUCCESSFUL REVIVAL

INTRODUCTION:

Not many **Mother's Day messages** from our text today in Nehemiah 12. I am always amazed when preaching through a book of the Bible how we arrive at just the most appropriate text on various special days. So we can continue our progress in the book and still make application to the focus of the special day.

Matt Day: All of those examples of celebration were for a reason, in response to something significant, something good happening. Celebration is reactive, it's something that we want to do. It's human nature to want to mark special happenings and it's enjoyable, it benefits us, it feels like a 'right' response.
Dictionary – "holding of festivities to mark a happy event, public praising of something."
The bigger and better the event, the greater the celebration.
Fundamental to any celebration is 'thanks', giving 'thanks' to the person who has made the whole thing possible.

Reminds me of **2 Sam. 6** and the ark being brought into Jerusalem
BIG IDEA:
THE PRESENCE OF GOD SHOULD EVOKE HOLY REVERENCE AND EXUBERANT CELEBRATION – 2 KEY EXPRESSIONS OF WORSHIP

4 ELEMENTS OF CELEBRATION:

I. (:27-30) SIGNIFICANCE OF DEDICATION – A CELEBRATION OF VICTORY
[Most of emphasis on this first point]
Why are you holding the Celebration? What's the significance?
A. (:27) The Special Occasion
"Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem"
This was a big deal occasion; normally I am not much for elaborate celebrations;
Look at what God had accomplished for His people in such a short time --
We have baby dedication services – Why? Part of the celebration of motherhood – bringing new life into the world and nurturing it so that the life glorifies God
When men finish some great building project, they hold an impressive dedication ceremony to reflect on the enormity of the accomplishment and to look forward to the usefulness of the building – usually a big political event with everyone who thinks they are anybody there lined up with a shovel to get their picture taken; politicians are always looking to take the credit; here all of the credit goes to God

You might think that you have nothing to celebrate this morning .. Where is my great Victory? How does this apply to me? My walls of defense and protection don't seem to be built up?

- Wall was protecting the temple in God's holy city so that they could worship in safety
- Look at the tremendous access to free worship we all enjoy
    - Worship in spirit and truth – not bound by specific locality
    - Not tied to the ministry of the Levites and priests – we have been made a kingdom of priests; we have Christ as our great High Priest
    - No longer bound to offer animal sacrifices continually – Christ sacrificed Himself once for all and has sat down at the right hand of God – talk about Victory to celebrate!
    - Ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us
    - United with the very life of Jesus Christ who came as the fulfillment of OT types and shadows; we have the fulfillment; the substance

B. (:28-29) The Special Music – Lot of Planning and Preparation involved

"*they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps and lyres. So the sons of the singers were assembled from the district around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites, from Bethgilgal and from their fields in Geba and Azmazeth, for the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem*."

1. Designated Singers – special talents – not just everybody participating equally
   Later we will see that the whole congregation participates in the offering of praise and the singing and the thanksgiving

Brings up the question: How professional an approach should we take towards our special music? Never forget that it is a ministry with an orientation towards worshiping God and not an entertainment performance oriented towards pleasing men.

Brings up the question: Is there a different standard of participation for special music in NT times than in OT worship that was centered around the temple? Centralized worship vs decentralized – makes a difference in how much money we put into the splendor of the building; does it make a difference in terms of our approach to special music? Probably can't afford to pay a professional orchestra to be dedicated to playing top level music
Different contexts are going to call for a different level of quality control.

2. Devoted Spirit – No question that same spirit of love and devotion and passion still applies

   With gladness – Heart of Joy
   With hymns of thanksgiving – Heart of Thanksgiving
   With songs to musical accompaniment – Heart of Devotion

This is the essential aspect of worship – must be genuine, heart-felt; not just going through the motions
You definitely want someone who knows the Lord and can sing with conviction from the heart. God is never pleased with just an external show; He always looks at the heart.

Why do Christians get the reputation of being so glum – look at the exuberance that should be expressed in our worship. If our hearts are truly glad, we should do more than mumble the words of a song. Look at how excited we get when singing our college fight song at the football game. The triumph and victory of what Christ has accomplished for us should be reflected in our singing.

3. Diverse Musical Instruments – cymbals, harps and lyres

Why no mention of musical instruments in the NT??

Some church groups would argue that musical instruments should not be used for accompaniment in this church age; that Christ advocated a very simple style of worship; that the content of our singing should focus mainly on the Book of Psalms.
Seems that the Holy Spirit has given us a lot of freedom in this regard.

Certainly God is still giving out musical gifts and talents and abilities – these should be used to the glory of God

Ephes 5:19 *singing and making melody* – 2 different words used

Does instrumental music and accompaniment of our singing enhance our worship experience?

Raises the question of what type of musical instruments would be appropriate? Why not drums? As long as you follow certain principles of worship:

- Should be truth-based, not something where you check your intellect at the door
- Should be consistent with peace and harmony and orderly worship rather than some chaotic dissonance

Could say a lot more about principles of music related to worship – in this context, God is looking for the type of music that supports and encourage the celebration of this momentous occasion

Should we have different congregations oriented around different styles of music?? Traditional vs contemporary?? Our worship should be uniting us, not dividing us into different styles – but this seems inevitable

Maybe some of you have written a special Mother's Day song that you plan to surprise Mom with later today!

Kidner: Elaborate festivities can be hollow, but where the occasion is great, the demanding business of planning, proclaiming, assembling and rehearsing makes good kindling material for the emotions; not a substitute for the more searching preparations seen in verse 30 (where nobody and nothing was left unpurified), but not by any means to be despised. If the New Testament emphasizes what is inward and spiritual in worship, it has a place too for the natural means of encouraging and stirring us. Our Lord went to Gethsemane fortified not only by prayer but by a ceremonial meal and corporate singing, matters which engage not only the spirit but the body and the senses.

C. (:30) The Special Purification Rites – 4 areas of concentration
Purification is essential to Dedication and Celebration – Once again leaders must lead

"The priests and the Levites purified themselves; they also purified the people, the gates and the wall."

Different types of celebrations require different types of preparation. A spiritual celebration of God's activity in granting us victory requires spiritual preparation of the heart.

Gates / Wall -- Possibly involved the sprinkling of the blood of sacrificed animals on the gates and walls

Our Moms are coming over after church so we can celebrate and honor them with a nice cookout. We won't be setting the table with dirty dishes from last night – I'm sure they will be pleased to see that we will be eating off clean plates = purified plates

It is impossible to offer God praise and thanksgiving without first purifying our hearts and making sure we are confessing any sins and seeking to be pleasing to Him in how we live. Otherwise God says forget the charade – He does not want us to draw near with our lips if our hearts are far from Him.

Breneman: included fasting, abstaining from marital intercourse, making sacrifices, and perhaps bathing and using clean garments

Swindoll: In order to enjoy the city upon completion of the wall, their hearts had to be pure. By consecrating the wall, they consecrated themselves to the Lord. We, too, need to remember that to lead other people in a godly manner – whether in ministry, politics, the military, or business – our hearts must be clean before God. Holiness precedes happiness. Never forget that the firststep to a happy countenance is a clean heart.

So we have learned first of all that we celebrate when we have something significant that is worth celebrating.

II. (:31-39) SONGS OF THANKSGIVING – 2 GREAT MUSICAL PROCESSIONALS

Word for "*songs*" should be translated "choirs"

A. **(:31-37) First Great Choir** – led by Ezra the scribe

You thank all the people who made this great day possible; cf. Award ceremonies; Dedication of a new hospital wing – thank the donors – here all the thanks goes to God

I think God must like marching bands. I know Karen enjoyed her experience in high school back in San Antonia. Then when she got to Princeton she discovered that the football halftime show was just an excuse to exhibit irreverent behavior rather than musical class and precision.

Remember the march around the walls of Jericho in Joshua 6:1-5. Music has often been part of God's divine instructions to His people. He seems to especially like trumpets. If I had chosen to play anything when I was growing up, it would have been a trumpet. I loved that cavalry call on Rin Tin Tin that announced the troops arriving on the scene to save the day.

Most elaborate celebrations have some type of fancy processional involved:

- Weddings – as the bride comes down the aisle
- Graduation ceremonies – time of the year for those

You are drawing attention to the significance of the event and making a statement – It is also a

way for people to participate physically; get them out of just the spectator role; engage them

Here the purpose of the processional is explicitly stated to be the giving of thanks

Breneman: According to Kenyon's excavations, Nehemiah's wall was nearly nine feet wide.

Wiersbe: The enemy had said that the walls would be so weak that a fox could knock them down **(4:3),** but here were the people marching on the walls! What a testimony to the unbelieving Gentiles of the power of God and the reality of faith. . . It was a symbolic act by which they "*stepped out by faith*" to claim God's blessing. In that day, to walk on a piece of property meant to claim it as your own.

Getz: The choirs began near the Valley Gate, which interestingly is the place where Nehemiah began and ended his nighttime inspection of the ruined walls months earlier (**2:13-15**).

We have come full cycle – Enjoying the completion of the project

B. (:38-39) Second Great Choir – led by Nehemiah himself

Breneman: These villages were not all in the same area. Netopha was southeast of Bethlehem; Gilgal was near Jericho; Geba and Azmaveth were northeast of Jerusalem in the Benjamite area.

Whitcomb: For both groups the order of procession seems to have consisted first of Levitical singers *"that gave thanks*" (v. 31), followed by princes (vv. 32,33), then the priests with trumpets (v. 35; cf. 41), and finally Levites with stringed instruments (v. 36).

Psalm 48:12-14 *"Walk about Zion and go around her; count her towers; consider her ramparts; go through her palaces, that you may tell it to the next generation. For such is God, Our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death."*

Heb. 13:15 *"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."*

That is one of the main reasons not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together; but it is not enough just to come; did we come with thankful hearts? Are we actively expressing our thanksgiving?

III. (:40-43) SACRIFICES OF JOY – EMOTIONAL EXTENSION OF OUR THANKSGIVING

A. (:40) United Worship in the House of God

> "*Then the two choirs took their stand in the house of God. So did I and half of the officials with me*"

Worship should bring God's people together – because the focus is on God; in our sinfulness we have much more in common than we might think; where the great gulf exists is between our sin and God's holiness

Kidner: Every inch of these ramparts had its special memory for one group or another. Nevertheless, the destination was *the house of God* (40), for the walls were, appropriately, the circumference not the focal point of the celebrations, and it was the choirs, not the officials, who led the way.

B. (:41-42) Worship Leaders -- Priests with Trumpets and Leading Singers
Key individuals singled out

C. (:43) Universal Rejoicing on the Part of all the People of God

> "*and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar*."

2 Main activities described on this day of celebration

I would have expected feasting – while that was probably included, it was not the emphasis here

1) offered great sacrifices – came at a cost to the people – but a happy price to pay
2) rejoiced – Set aside inhibitions

Our joy must come to us as a gift from God in association with the victory over sin that He provides; the deliverance from bondage and futility; the enjoyment of our redemption and of our fellowship with Him through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Note how the entire community fully participated – including the women and children

Note the testimony that extended to both saved and unsaved who might have been afar off, but still impacted by this celebration of joy

To what extent is your life characterized by joy … not just joy, but great joy that has been given to you by God?

What other lives are you impacting by the joy of your testimony regarding what God has done for you that has been so special?

Review: Significance of the celebration / Thanksgiving and Joy Involved
Now we are going to address some practical matters that ensure the ongoing support for future worship; how are we going to sustain this worship?

IV. (:44-47) SUPPORT FOR LEADERS – SUPPORT FOR MINISTRY

3 Key areas of Administation: (just touching on this section – then we want to move to our application today of Celebrating Mother's Day)

A. (:44) Administration of Gathering and Distributing the Contributions

> "*On that day men were also appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions required by the law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served.*"

Spiritual leaders give themselves to ministry; to service
The People express their appreciating and rejoice in supporting these essential efforts

Giving in the context of privilege and joy – not grudgingly or of necessity
It was not a burden to support their spiritual leaders

Getz: The storerooms to which the people were to bring their contributions, firstfruits, and tithes that were required by the Law were side rooms on the temple (cf. 1 Kings 6:5; 1 Chron. 28:11; 2 Chron. 31:11; Neh. 10:37-39; 12:25; 13:4, 12-13).

B. (:45-46) Administration of Worship Leaders – Praise and Thanksgiving to God

"For they performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command of David and of his son Solomon. For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, there were leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God."

Many details of worship to take care of; elaborate sacrificial system
Importance of the Book of Psalms in worship – role of Asaph

C. (:47) Summary: Overall Administration of Giving

"So all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah gave the portions due the singers and the gatekeepers as each day required, and set apart the consecrated portion for the Levites, and the Levites set apart the consecrated portion for the sons of Aaron."

We come now to our special day of celebration = Mother's Day

APPLICATION TO MOTHER'S DAY: 5 AREAS OF FOCUS:

- **Time to Express Appreciation and Support to Mom** – Day of Great Celebration
  - How are you going to do that today with your family?
  - Have you considered how much Moms need your encouragement? Consider how unselfishly they labor for such long hours at repetitive tasks where there is very little intrinsic satisfaction in order to provide for your needs
  - Don't lose sight of the significance of this special day
  - Maybe we should have our own procession from room to room in our house as we relive the memories of all of the good things we have experienced at the hand of our Mom

- **Tradition of Family Unity** – drawing everybody together for time of celebration; in our culture it is so easy for the family to get split up and move away to far geographic corners; at least on Mother's Day we make an effort to come together and celebrate the family unit

- **Teaching Moment for Ourselves** – Reminding us of the Goodness of God
  All the ways in which God has provided for us; think of how helpless we were as infants; how little encouragement we gave our Mom when we were young; time to make up for that

- **Thanksgiving to God**
  - Do you think of your Mom as a gift to you from God? I can assure you that they

consider each child to be a gift to them from God
  - You don't get to choose your Mom; God sovereignly placed you in the home of His choosing for His divine purposes

- **Testimony to Others** – of the Power and Majesty of God – what He can accomplish
  Many homes where Mom is not appreciated and honored and respected

CONCLUSION:
Are you whole-heartedly participating in celebration today?
Enjoy this special Mother's Day with a genuine spirit of Celebration!

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How can we make sure that our special days of celebration don't lose sight of the significance of what we are celebrating?

2) How do we express our thanksgiving and joy to God?

3) How can we enhance our celebration of Mother's Day?

4) What type of issues relating to music in worship do you find controversial?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Matt Day: **Towards a Celebration Lifestyle**
1. Significance of celebrating God
<u>It's our chief end</u>
v.43 *"and on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy"* Here are a people wrapped up in God. They've left their homes to work on this thing, they've witnessed God's work in their lives, helping them accomplish this massive feat in an incredible 52 days.
This wasn't party emotion turned on just for the day and forgotten about the next.
Celebrating God means living our lives in worship of him. It's more than singing songs on a Sunday. It is the total submission of all that we have and are, to everything that we know of God.
William Temple described adoration as 'the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable, and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centredness which is our original sin, and the source of all actual sin' (William Temple, Readings in St. John's gospel, 1950)
We are made to be beings that celebrate God that enjoy God, that thank God, and when we do, we're fortified, like those walls.
"*Be joyful always, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*" 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

We celebrate, thank and praise God because it's our chief end!

It's required
Levites were the teachers of the time, they were busy people.
And yet, not only was this an all inclusive act of thanksgiving, but they brought people in from the surrounding countryside too!
v27 "*..the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication*"

2. Process for celebrating God

Planned
The Levites were brought to Jerusalem from the surrounding region for this day, the singers were brought in from the villages, the people the gates and the wall are purified before the two choirs march in opposite directions around the walls.
This celebration of God was very well planned.

Confession
v.30 '*When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall*'.
Before anyone sang a word in thanks, there was purification.
The people were cleansed first, then the project was cleansed.
This would have been through a sacrifice where a sacred animal suffered death in the place of the people. Remember how we see the leper? That's how God sees our heart when we come before him, sin is vile, and it's the thing that God wants to deal with.
Before these believers could stand before a holy God, they had to have a clean heart.

It's important to start from that place of forgiveness, as it focuses our thanks on God when we celebrate , not on us. When God has done a work in our lives, or if we're thanking him simply for who he is, there is a temptation to celebrate ourselves as if we had a bigger part to play than our simple obedience. '*Apart from me (says God) you can do nothing*' John 15 v 5.

The Psalmist wrote – '*you do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart*." Psalm 51 v16-17'
External ritual achieves nothing when un-confessed sin lurks in the heart.

Someone said that 'holiness precedes happiness'.
It's hard to celebrate even God when our sin hasn't been dealt with first.
And yet when we confess our sins they're removed '*as far as the East is from the West* '(Psalm 103 v 12)
What a glorious starting point ! Makes you want to praise God doesn't it?
Confession first

From the heart
v43 '*on that day they offered great sacrifices , rejoicing because God had given them great joy'*
It's superlative, these people were giving their best to God, and I don't thin

3. Fruits of Celebrating God

God is always seeking to do good things in us.
When we are obedient, because of his graciousness, he heaps blessings back on us. When we thank him, we benefit!

There are lots of benefits to celebrating God's work – I've picked up on just a few.

There's Unity
Giving praise to God is a profoundly unifying experience.
In Jerusalem the priests, Levites, leaders singers and masses join together in worship of God, there's no distinction as to which ones are rejoicing with great joy – they all are!
When we come together before God, we become aware of our equally deep need for God's forgiveness, and stuff that might divide us can only fade into insignificance compared to the wonder of what Jesus has done for us all.
It's very hard to hold on to a sinful thought or habit, when we expose ourselves to God in humble adoration.

There's empowerment for future works
This celebration we read about was not only marking the end of the building project, but the start of a new era for the Jews, through the celebration, they were dedicating themselves to future works.
v. 44 '*At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes'*, v. 47 '*..all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers*'

As we celebrate what God has done in our lives, it's inevitable that we dedicate ourselves to future works. By looking back at what God has done , we're encouraged at what he's going to do.
Whether that's celebrating a key event, celebrating the daily working of God in our lives, or simply celebrating who God is.

A lifestyle that celebrates God, equips us wonderfully for the trials of life.
We are empowered.

Brings us Life
Hebrews 13 v 15 "*Let us continually offer a sacrifice of Praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name*"
It's only plants that are alive and healthy that bear fruit. Praise is the fruit of a heart that knows Jesus.

As we glorify God, so life in all fullness is released in us, even if we don't start off feeling very alive on a Sunday morning.
The spirit of God is a spirit of life.

Scott Hippler: **The Joy of Celebration**
The latter part of Chapter 12 that we will be using as our focal passage this morning, tells the story of the dedication of the wall around Jerusalem. It describes a wonderful event which was evidently postponed for a while until the city had been repopulated. Over the past four weeks we have been looking at the book of Nehemiah and his works for God in the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem.

In today's portion we find that the wall is built. The gates are hung. The city is well defended and it is filled with people. There is an air of excitement and great joy seems to be bursting forth from every person regardless of age. There is a great celebration taking place and I think that we can learn a great deal about our God, about His desires for our joy and enjoyment, and learn much about ourselves along the way.

Celebration of and celebration before our God should be something that is well planned and well carried out. Most of the time when we get together to celebrate we simply allow what ever happens to happen. We don't give the celebration much thought or planning and don't stop to consider that in the book of Colossians 3:23-24 we are directed to, "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Jesus Christ that you are serving.*" You see even when we celebrate we are to honor God with our best effort.

The workers of Nehemiah had reason to celebrate and they had reason to do so with great joy. God had provided strength with which to complete the wall. He had afforded them protection from the opposition that we learned about a few weeks. God brought them back to their ancestral city, one that had not been inhabited for 160 years. And most importantly, God had provided a means by which a great spiritual awakening could and did happen for the people of Israel.

Four Directives as to How to Celebrate:
1. Set aside time, calendar your celebration!

2. Set aside time, get clean!
It is interesting to look at what order they cleansed and purified. The priests and the Levites first cleansed themselves. They knew that in order to anything great for God or to truly celebrate before His throne that they must be cleansed. This cleansing is what we would call today a "sin offering". They sacrificed sacred animals and washed themselves both with water and also had ceremonies with the animals blood and prayed and beseeched God through the confession of what they had done wrong or the sin that they had in their lives. We cannot come before the throne of God and truly celebrate until we get rid of the sin and get rid of the filth and cleanse the stench that is within us!

Next, they purified the people. They purified the others around them. And finally they purified the gates and the walls, they purified the project or today what we would call the ministry that we are attempting for God!

3. Set aside inhibitions, get joyful!
In Nehemiah 12:43 we read, *"Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.*"

How can you, How can I tell when and if we truly invest in the things of God? I think that we can ask ourselves some honest questions like:
1. What do I truly treasure?
2. What do I do that makes my heart beat faster?

3. What event would I sacrifice everything just to be there?
4. What is it that grabs my allegiance in uncontrollable ways? Is it Jesus Christ? Or is it something else?

4. Set aside self, get thankful!
Who made everything possible? Who created the heavens and the earth? Who created you and who created me?

Ray Stedman: **The Sound of Rejoicing**
The two divisions of this chapter are **the great procession** and **the great offering**.

The Holy Spirit has been careful to include in this account the three aspects that make up true celebration. I hope you caught them as I read the verses to you. The first one is in Verse 27, "*The Levites were ... brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully*." One of the primary elements of true celebration is the expression of joy. A general attitude of joy ought to characterize all Christians.

There is another clue hidden in this paragraph that tells us what celebration should be based on. Verse 30, "*When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall*." Purification is necessary to celebrate. You cannot do it with a hypocritical heart. You cannot celebrate with your life in ruin. It becomes a festival of empty words. There is a need for purification.

There is still a third element in this that is found in Verse 31: *"I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks.*" {Neh 12:31 NIV} Thankfulness is always part of true celebration. These people were thankful. You can well imagine what they were thankful for. They must have been grateful indeed for the godly leadership of Nehemiah. They were thankful for God's moving of the king of Persia's heart that permitted this whole project to come into being. They were grateful for angelic protection that watched over them as the wall was being rebuilt. They were grateful for the wisdom of God that allowed them to overcome their enemies, for the spirit of unity and cooperation that prevailed, for strength to labor, and for the supply of food and shelter. I think primarily they were thankful for the will to work, which enabled the project to be carried through to completion. This raises the question: Are we properly thankful?

Dr. Drew Conley: **Serving God in Song**
Songs of praise should naturally come from our hearts; Culmination of Nehemiah's ministry in his first term; repeated reference to singing and thanksgiving; we need to be able to biblically define the role of music in worship

1. The Mandate for Music in Worship –

a. music being a part of worship is God's idea, not man's; God had appointed and commanded for musicians to take part in worship services; false dichotomy of traditional vs contemporary music in worship – not that one is less holy than the other;

b. God has jurisdiction over music in worship – look up every reference to music in the Bible

c. Music is not an unimportant component in worship; we don't have music just to warm you up so you are prepared to listen to the message; false distinction sometimes made: that OT worship is external and NT worship is internal; God has always looked on the heart

2. The Scope of Music in Worship – what kinds of music are appropriate?

a. Both vocal and instrumental

b. includes both trained participants and untrained

c. both choirs and congregation

Reference to Asaph = wrote a number of the psalms; 1 Chron. 15:12-17; 16:4 – played the cymbals; Ps. 33:2; 98:5-6; 1 Chron. 25:1 prophecying with instruments; movement that emphasized simplicity in worship: in NT our worship is to be in spirit and truth, nothing elaborate, no instruments; Ephes. 5:19 – *singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*; two different words; second word going beyond just singing with the voice = play on musical stringed instrument or singing with instrumental accompaniment; We are commanded to sing songs; Psalms is a model of what praise to God is supposed to be;

3. The Character of Music in Worship – what is its purpose, main theme, how does it function

a. Association of music with the prophet (the Word) = one who hears message from God and delivers it to men; music involved in delivering the Word of God and inculcating it in our heart; very powerful when truth is married to a tune; 2 Chron. 5:12ff; 35:15; Col. 3:16; today we see so much music that fails in terms of having any connection with doctrine; too fuzzy; too distorted; must have doctrinal clarity; don't sing man-concocted ideas

b. association of music with priests and service of worship (from us to God) --
Idea of Holiness; purification was essential; an expression of what is true on the inside; our worship must come from our life; otherwise God does not even want to hear from us; Ephes. 5:18-20; danger of music being driven by man-centered entertainment and popularity rather than directed towards God; Amos 5:23-24; only a godly person should be doing the singing

4. The Message or Content of Music in Worship – 3 key words used

a. Thanksgiving – to confess and affirm what is true about God – Who He is and what He has done

b. Praise – to exalt in God; builds on that affirming; the emotional response to that; when I know what God is like and see what He has done, I must be moved by that in my heart; leaping for joy in God; need to use the Book of Psalms more

c. Rejoicing – gladness; joy – was heard afar off; not a mumbling bunch of worshipers; jubilant heart-felt singing to God

TEXT: Nehemiah 13:1-14

TITLE: DEALING WITH SPIRITUAL SLIPPAGE – PART1: CORRUPTION OF WORHIP – THE BOASTFUL PRIDE OF LIFE

BIG IDEA:
CORRUPTION OF WORSHIP REQUIRES CONSTANT VIGILANCE AND GODLY LEADERSHIP TO PURIFY AND RESTORE PRACTICES TO BIBLICAL NORMS

INTRODUCTION:

Godly Worship is constantly under attack by the enemy. Satan wants to obscure and corrupt the biblical model of worshiping the One True God in spirit and in truth. Despite impressive revival and dedication to obedience, God's people quickly slip back into sinful patterns of behavior. Spiritual leaders need to be alert to the necessity of reforms when such spiritual slippage occurs.

Nehemiah had every reason to expect that Israel was serious about its rededication and commitment. Look at all they had been through together. Look at the victory God had given over all the challenges and obstacles they faced. Yet as a spiritual leader, Nehemiah understood the heart of people. He understood that we are prone to wander, prone to leave the God we profess to love, prone to slip back into spiritual decline. The last chapter of the Book of Nehemiah deals with the necessary reforms due to such spiritual slippage. It would have been nice if there were a storybook ending and it could be reported that the nation of Israel lived happily ever after … but that was not the case. You know the history of Israel … that was never the case.

Cf. **Circle Back training** in the business world; you discover what process needs to be changed; you provide the training; you determine that behavior has changed; but you can never stop there; you must come back a month later . . . six months later and make sure that the change has stuck; Implementation is difficult; Making change stick is even more difficult; we are all creatures of habit; that old man is still with us

Two Images to keep in mind – from illustrations from other commentators:
1) Warren Wiersbe: General William Booth, founder of The Salvation Army, once said to a group of new officers, "I want you young men always to bear in mind that it is the **nature of a fire** to go out; you must keep it stirred and fed and the ashes removed."

2) Steve Zeisler: moral failure and spiritual decline are a great deal like a **flat tire**. Most flat tires don't occur as the result of a blowout. They occur because air leaks out over time, often imperceptibly. We're not aware that they exist until perhaps the car is difficult to steer.

The decline of one's spiritual life, the loss of one's vitality for the things of God, may very well be the same. It may happen over a period of time, perhaps somewhat imperceptibly. We may not be aware of what's happening.

Start with the **Prayer Refrain** (:14) that divides the three main sections of Chap. 13

CORRUPTION OF WORSHIP REQUIRES CONSTANT VIGILANCE AND GODLY LEADERSHIP TO PURIFY AND RESTORE PRACTICES TO BIBLICAL NORMS

I. (:1-3) PURIFYING THE WORSHIP PARTICIPANTS – EXCLUDING GOD'S ENEMIES

Why would you ever invite the enemy inside the camp?
Why would you think it appropriate for light to fellowship with darkness? **2 Cor. 6**
Is the church impacting the heathen world or is the heathen world impacting the church?

A. Catalyst of Scripture: Investigating God's Standards

"*On that day they read aloud from the book of Moses in the hearing of people;*"

Def. of a Catalyst: an agent that provokes or speeds significant change or action; something that stimulates progress (could be positive or negative) – some type of movement; Listening to the Word of God should never be a static experience; something that causes an important event to happen

Things get moving in your life when you submit to the Word of God;
Didn't waste any time – "*on that day*"
Every encounter with the Word of God should be significant

Went to the right source to evaluate their conduct
Look at the accountability factor here
- *read aloud*
- *in the hearing of people*

No confusion about the message – not some type of moral relativism – Oh, the passage might mean this to you and maybe it means something else to another person … NO … God said what He said and it applies to me

B. Conviction of Sin: Identifying Specific Neglected Requirement

1. Clear Command – Protect the Sanctity of the Temple Worship
   "*and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God,*"

Derek Kidner: We can identify the passage from the book of Moses, since verses 1 and 2 faithfully summarize **Deuteronomy 23:3-5**. True to the Old Testament's style, the prohibition is stark and unqualified, to make the most powerful impact, but the reader knows that elsewhere there are balancing considerations. It is the Ammonite or Moabite in his native capacity as the embodiment of Israel's inveterate enemy and corrupter who is in view: the son or 'daughter of a foreign god' (**Mal. 2:11**), burrowing into the life and even the language of Israel (**verses 23ff**). But let him come as a convert, like Ruth the Moabitess, and he will be entitled to a very different reception.

Warren Wiersbe: Ammon and Moab were born from the incestuous union of Lot and two of his daughters (**Gen. 19:30-38**), and their descendants were the avowed enemies of the Jews. Somehow this "mixed multitude" had infiltrated the people of Israel in spite of previous purgings (9:2; 10:28). . . The "mixed multitude" is composed of unsaved people who want to belong to the fellowship of God's people without trusting the Lord or submitting to His will. They want the

blessings but not the obligations, and their appetite is still for the things of the world.
Not talking about individual salvation here; not saying that someone like Ruth cannot repent and be knit into the family of God; talking about the privilege of worship in the temple in Jerusalem

Might sound like a harsh judgment to us; but we must understand what was at stake and how these enemies of God opposed His purposes at such a strategic point in time

2. Righteous Reason: Harmful Obstruction with Evil Intentions
   "*because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them.*"

Moabites feared for their lives; chose not to support the Jews with even the basic necessities of life; instead King Balak sought out Balaam a false prophet to try to get him to curse Israel; Balaam wanted the money that would come from pleasing King Balak – but despite his attempts, God would not let him curse Israel

Steven Cole: The reason He did not want Israel accepting these foreigners into their midst was that they would corrupt Israel from following the Lord alone. The insidious counsel of Balaam (**13:2**) was for the king of Moab to get his people to intermarry with Israel, and pretty soon Israel would be just like the Moabites, following their gods. The same thing happened with King Solomon, whose foreign wives led him into idolatry (**13:26**). I should point out that repentant Moabites, like Ruth, were not only accepted into Israel, but even included in the genealogy of David and Jesus Christ. But those who would not give up their foreign gods would only serve to pollute Israel spiritually. They had to be excluded.

Practice of Deceit

Warren Wiersbe: Balaam was a hireling prophet who tried to curse Israel but each time saw the curse turned into a blessing (Num. 22-24). Finally, however, he hit upon a scheme to defeat Israel: He encouraged the Moabites to be "neighborly" and invite the Jews to share in their religious feasts, which involved immorality and idolatry (**Num. 25**). Balaam knew that human nature would respond to the opportunity for sin and the Jews would disobey God. As a result of their sin, Israel was disciplined by God, and 24,000 people died.

3. Divine Reversal – Bringing Good out of Evil
   "*However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.*"

But still those who did evil must suffer the consequences

Cf. **Mal. 2:2** same God can turn blessing into a curse – written during same period of time; spells out how the people had slipped into mere external religion and were not honoring God

C. Correction of Separation: Implementing Required Behavior Change – Hear . . . Act
"*So it came about, that when they heard the law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel*." Maybe they overdid it??

Who have we let into the tent of worship; into the assembly of believers without confronting

them with their sin and making them uncomfortable?

1 Cor. 6:9-11 "*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, not the covetous, nor drunkards* (Did you see any of these in the infield yesterday at the Preakness? How many of these are back in our churches this morning?), *nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God*."

We don't want to offend unbelievers, so we have watered down the message; don't talk directly about sin but about how you can have a fulfilling life. If you are a fornicator … God's message to you is Repent. If you are covetous, God's message to you is Repent.

For all believers, circle back training is needed. How are we doing in our commitment to follow and obey the Word? Where have we been getting sloppy in our spiritual life? Where do we hear the Word but fail to act on it and obey it?

II. (:4-9) PURIFYING THE PRIESTLY POLITICS -- EXCLUDING COMPROMISING CONNECTIONS

A. **Abuse of Stewardship** Based on Family Connections

"*Now prior to this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being related to Tobiah, had prepared a large room for him, where formerly they put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils, and the tithes of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.*

Why would Eliashib do this? Didn't he know who Tobiah was??

Rich Cathers:

- He was one of the guys who opposed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.
- He had accused Nehemiah of rebelling against the Persians (**Neh. 2:19**)
- He had ridiculed the work of the wall (**Neh. 4:3**)
- He had conspired to attack the city (**Neh. 4:7-8**)
- He had been part of the conspiracy to get Nehemiah out of the city so they could kill him (**Neh. 6:1-2**)
- He had hired false prophets to prophecy against Nehemiah and scare him (**Neh. 6:12**)
- He was connected to some of the Jewish leaders through marriage (**Neh. 6:17-19**)
- And now, he's got this connection with the high priest and even moved into the Temple.

Obviously, Eliashib did not view Tobiah the same way that Nehemiah did.

- Did not want to be too harsh
- Driven by the ecumenical spirit – let's see where we can benefit from this man of influence
- Saw advantages to the political connections and business connections of Tobiah

Leadership involves a very serious stewardship responsibility

Eliashib had become a traitor because one of his relatives was married to Sanballat's daughter (**13:28**), and Sanballat and Tobiah were friends.

Nepotism often creeps into church leadership and corrupts God's standards
Examples of ways we show **favoritism** . . . This was no small cubbyhole; a palatial suite where they catered to Tobiah's lust for power and prominence

Steve Zeisler: I think Eliashib was a practical man who knew he didn't have the clout that Nehemiah had. He didn't have the armies of the Persian Empire at his disposal. He realized that he was going to have to be neighbor to the Horonites of Sanballat and the Ammonites of Tobiah for years to come. It seemed much better to make an alliance with these enemies, to consolidate, to mollify and placate them, in order to go forward. "Let's get them on our side. Let's reduce the tensions. It's good strategy." I think he was more or less a good man who desired to do the right thing but who found himself making deals instead of drawing firm lines where they needed to be drawn.

B. **Absentee Issues** Impacting Effective Governance
"*But during all this time I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had gone to the king. After some time, however, I asked leave from the king. And I came to Jerusalem*"

Thomas Constable: Nehemiah could legitimately call Artaxerxes the king of Babylon in 539 B.C. Artaxerxes was, of course, a Persian king, not one of the kings of the Babylonian Empire. However in 539 B.C. Persia ruled Babylon.

Probably Eliashib was none too happy to discover that Nehemiah was back in town; the gig was up; was he so foolish to think that he could get away with such compromising back scratching?

C. **Angry Intervention** in Order to Cleanse God's Holy Temple – Bold, Direct Action
"*and learned about the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. And it was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the room. Then I gave an order and they cleansed the rooms;*"

Nehemiah was so upset, he handled the eviction on his own

Illustration: Dumpster Day in our neighborhood – once a year event –
My motto: "When in Doubt, Pitch it Out" – I don't live very consistently with that motto . . .
Best part of hiring a contractor to renovate our kitchen – we had our own dumpster in the driveway – Jenny has one at her condo location – love dumpsters

Illustration: Christ's cleansing of the temple; Bookends in His ministry: Beginning: **John 2**; End: **Matt. 21**; throws their tables over and drives them out; righteous indignation; hating evil and taking a stand for righteousness; nothing out of line here with this sudden eviction; didn't serve notice; didn't worry about hurting Tobiah's feelings
Evil creates quite a stink; complete fumigation required

God's governing hierarchy should operate in the fashion illustrated here: order is given and it is immediately carried out

D. **Appropriate Corrective Measures** to Restore Proper Worship Procedures and Priorities
"*and I returned there the utensils of the house of God with the grain offerings and the frankincense*."

Warren Wiersbe: Eliashib is the first one named in the list of workers (**3:1**), and yet he had become a traitor. Why? Because one of his relatives was married to Sanballat's daughter (**13:28**), and Sanballat and Tobiah were friends. They were all a part of the secret faction in Jerusalem that was fraternizing with the enemy (**6:17-19**).

Chuck Swindoll: Having Tobiah in the house of God was a violation of the worst kind. His questionable heritage cast doubt on his being a Jew, to say nothing of being a Levite. He was an Ammonite who married into the community and had numerous political connections, including the royal house in Babylon. . . He made it sound as though they fumigated the place. Nehemiah didn't want even the smell of Tobiah hanging in the air of God's house. . . In so many words, Nehemiah said, "Leadership is not a popularity contest. I won't pander to political pressure from the nobles, and I'm not afraid to face Artaxerxes. My priority is cleansing God's house of evil's contamination."

Derek Kidner: Tobiah never lacked audacity. Where even a toe-hold in the temple would have been a conquest, he obtains a room the size of a small warehouse, and has it cleared for him by the religious authorities themselves (**7**). It was doubtless a special satisfaction to see his personal belongings take precedence over the very frankincense for God and the tithes for His ministers; but best of all he was at the nerve-centre of Jerusalem, ideally placed for influence and intrigue.

Today might be your Spiritual Dumpster Day. Are you being conformed to this world or transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you are making progress in your spiritual life? Where are you adopting the world's value system? Treasuring what the world treasures? What sins are holding you back? What compromising friendships or connections do you have with the flesh and with the world?

Heb 12:1-2 "*let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith*"

III. (:10-13) PURIFYING THE GIVING – RESTORING THE SUPPORT OF THE WORSHIP LEADERS AND OF THE OVERALL MINISTRY

Spiritual decline often reflected in our checkbook; where our heart is there our treasure will be also

A. Lack of Financial Support Impacts Availability for Ministry Leadership and Service
"*I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given them, so that the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field.*"

B. Lack of Financial Support Reflects a Low View of God's Kingdom Purposes
"*So I reprimanded the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?*""

What is really important to you?
Are you seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?

C. Spiritual Ministry Takes Priority Over Financial Support for the Leadership Roles

"*Then I gathered them together and restored them to their posts.*"

Notice he did not pay them first; he had them recommit to their proper roles for spiritual leadership and ministry; then he had the people perform their financial obligations

D. Financial Support Depends on Faithful Giving on the Part of All of God's People

"*All Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses.*"

E. Financial Support Requires Reliable Administration

"*And in charge of the storehouses I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered reliable, and it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen.*"

Looking for faithful men who could be trusted

(:14) CONCLUSION: PRAYER REFRAIN – SOLICITING GOD'S FAVOR

"*Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.*"

"*Remember me*" – this refrain occurs at the end of each of the three rebukes in **Chap. 13** (v**. 22, 31**) = basis for outlining the chapter

Appropriate to expect God to show favor and reward such faithful behavior; not expressing any pride here; Nehemiah has put his life on the line in many situations and taken decisive action to further God's kingdom purposes

[Ruth 2:12 – encouraging verses]

CORRUPTION OF WORSHIP REQUIRES CONSTANT VIGILANCE AND GODLY LEADERSHIP TO PURIFY AND RESTORE PRACTICES TO BIBLICAL NORMS

Do you have a **tire** going flat in your Christian life? Is the air of your passion and love and devotion leaking out slowly"
Is the **fire** burning lower? Is your life cluttered with ashes and with the furniture of Tobiah?
Do you need a spiritual **Dumpster Day**?

- Purifying the Worship Participants
- Purifying the Priestly Politics
- Purifying the Giving

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do we respond to the Word of God in a direct fashion like we see in this story?

2) Where has God turned something evil into good in our life?

3) Where are we tempted to show personal favoritism or to compromise our stewardship?

4) Are we patient to wait for God's future reward as He remembers our faithful service to Him or do we demand immediate gratification?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacArthur: Heartfelt passion and sincere devotion is often short-lived. Nehemiah left Jerusalem in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, about 433 B.C. (see **5:14; 13:6**), and returned to Pesia as he had promised (see **2:6**). During his absence, the people returned to their former ways, led by the high priest Eliashib (**vv. 4, 5**). In violation of their earlier promises, they failed to separate themselves from their pagan neighbors. They also failed to support the Levites and priests. . . It was during Nehemiah's absence that Malachi wrote his prophetic book indicting both priests and people for their sinful defection. Possibly having heard of Eliashib's evil, Nehemiah returned (**vv. 4-7**) to oversee the needed reforms. His response to the waywardness of the people was swift and severe, reminding us that we must be ruthless in our dealing with sin.

Redpath: Nehemiah was a man of clear vision. He saw clearly God's purpose for His people. He saw that God's intention was to reach the multitude through the few, that God is not concerned with crowds, but with channels, and that the channels must be clean and pure.

Three problems: In the first place, there was the mingling with other nations – failure in <u>separation</u>. In the second place there was a desecration of the Sabbath day – failure in <u>service</u>. And in the third place there were marriages with heathen people – failure in <u>sanctification</u>.

What Tobiah has wormed his way into the center of your life and sits there comfortably enthroned where the Lord Jesus ought to be? What furniture is cluttering up the temple which the Holy Spirit ought to fill, and causing loud cheers in hell? Is it not a fact that in so many instances Christian people have so little room for the Holy Spirit because they have allowed so many other things to crowd into their lives?

David Bissett: **Dealing with Spiritual Decline** –
Problem: Tanorexic: people addictive to using tanning machines; binges and purging of tanning; issue of skin cancer; They might think their skin looks good and not be facing the problems down the road; Spiritually people often don't perceive the danger of what they are doing; Slowly they begin to disregard God and go their own way; one of the head priests sets up his buddy in the temple; we'll throw God's stuff out and move you in; Levites left the city to find and forage for themselves; silent singers, disobedient traders and ungodly merchants plying their trade on the Lord's day; Neh gone for 3-6 years; God calls Neh back to the city; begins this work of reversing this spiritual decline

<u>4 Steps to Reversing Spiritual Decline:</u>
1. Nehemiah Sees – perceives the significance of sin; if you can't tell the healthy skin from cancerous skin you are in trouble; there's a problem here

- with Eliashib the priest; suite with a master bath; Tobiah was an opponent of the work of God under Nehemiah; merely favoritism or influence peddling or something more serious? Neh calls it evil; a sin against God; a public, shameful disregard for the worship of God; everybody going to the temple would know that Tobiah was housed there; Raymond Brown: every believer needs a great sensitivity to sin; gradual lowering of standards; sin becomes known by another name; we end up accommodating what previously would have been totally unacceptable; going through a stage, growing up or disobeying God by not honoring parents; our culture is in the business of camouflaging sin: "You deserve a break today" instead of you are living for self; Can you perceive the dangers? Can you see where God's Word is being violated?

2. Nehemiah Speaks to Confront the Sinners – not just sharing his opinion but speaking the mind of God; warns, reprimands, rebukes, chides; he wants to see sin moved out; he doesn't just lash out in a tirade; he addresses those who have responsibilities and have neglected those responsibilities; he speaks to those who need to hear

3. Nehemiah Acts to Reprove (Remove) the Sinful Men – biblical discipline in NT always directed towards reconciliation and restitution; these are most likely unrepentant people; Tobiah doesn't belong in the temple; spoke sternly and acted firmly; didn't he go overboard?? Wasn't he out of control?? No. He had a call from God to address this situation; he also had civic authorities as the designee of the king; he had powers that individual Christians today do not have; but principles still apply; other spiritual leaders had turned a blind eye; Is he too bold, too strong? Look at language of **Mal. 2** – "*I will send the curse upon you and curse your blessings*" Strong words for those in leadership who would not respond; sounds like a fistfight ensued; probably has some officials to work on his behalf; public beating was appropriate; may have pulled out hair from their beard and had them shaven to shame them; need to be zealous for the purity of the local church; our culture tolerates everything – including what is wrong and sinful

4. Nehemiah Acts to Restore (to Recognize) Spiritual Men – names some reliable men to positions of responsibility; qualifications for leadership in NT are primarily spiritual; orderliness – **1 Cor. 14:40**;

What does a spiritual leader (deliverer) look like? Lessons we can learn from Nehemiah's leadership --
1) **He knows the Scripture** – he has the mind of God; May the mind of Christ my Savior live in me … not just enough to read a passage in a devotional booklet every day
2) **He knows his Duty** – retired in some sense but responded to the call; you are always a parent
3) **He knows History** – understands its lessons; do you want to get sent to Babylon again? Know the history of heresies and how the church has addressed them; read biographies
4) **He knows the Times** – the present; what needs to be said; understand what is going on; Martin Lloyd Jones has book on this subject;
5) **He knows Courage** – Nehemiah was a brave man; God had been his strength all along; knew that God was on his side; it is cowardice to avoid unpleasantness

Brian Bill: In our passage for today, we come face-to-face with some backsliders. The dictionary defines the verb "backslide" this way: "To relapse into bad habits, sinful behavior, or undesirable activities." You would think that the last chapter of this great book would contain encouraging and compelling stories of how God's people took their spiritual commitment to the next level. Frankly, this script does not have a happy ending. Within a relatively short period of time, the children of Israel went spiritually flat and returned to their old ways of doing things – violating

God's laws and allowing the world's system to press them into its mold. That leads to one of the lessons of the book of Nehemiah: **Good beginnings are no guarantee of happy endings. . .**

There is a literary link between chapter 10 and chapter 13. In chapter 10, the people made 4 vows or promises. First, they pledged to **submit to God's Word**; second, they vowed to **live separate from the world**; third, they promised to **keep the Sabbath**, and fourth, they agreed to **support God's work**. Sadly, by the time we get to chapter 13, each of these promises is broken. This reminds us that the most spiritual person, and the best church, can find its standards subtly eroded as we gradually accommodate to the pressures of contemporary worldliness. At the dedication in chapter 12, the builders celebrated their moral victory in a battle against secularism and materialism, but they had certainly not won the war. . .

As we wrap up this chapter, and our series on Nehemiah, I want to give you my top ten lessons from this very practical book.

1. It's never too late to do what's right. Even though God's people had messed up pretty bad, it didn't disqualify them from service or ruin their relationship with God. Don't let your past keep you from doing what is right. It really doesn't matter what you've done. What matters is that you begin right now to renew your walk with God.

2. Don't play around with sin. Nehemiah dealt with sin decisively and abruptly. Most of us underestimate our sinfulness and overestimate our goodness. Friend, don't flirt with sin. Don't get cozy with compromise. Be vigilant. As Romans 12:9 says, ***"Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good."***

3. Remember who God is. He is *great* and awesome. That means that He is large and He is in charge! He is also *good*…all the time. Even when bad things happen to us, He is good. And, He is *gracious*. He doesn't treat us as we deserve but always grants us grace and fresh starts.

4. Cultivate a lifestyle of praise and prayer. God desires for each of us to worship Him with reverence and with joy, both individually and corporately. As we do, we'll also cry out to Him in confession and supplication. When we pray, we should pray doctrinally and also be ready to shoot up "popcorn prayers" throughout the day.

5. Move out of your comfort zone. Most of us are way too comfortable with the way we're living. We tend to default to what is predictable and easy. God wants us to be available to Him. When He asks us to do something that stretches us, let's be ready to move!

6. Don't let difficulties derail you. When hard times come, and they will, don't bail on God. God allows tough times in our lives for a purpose. Use them to get closer to Him and ask Him to develop your character through the process.

7. Seek to resolve relational ruptures. As we spend time with people, we are bound to have conflict and disagreements. Each of us sin against others, and others sin against us. Don't allow this conflict to go underground. Meet face-to-face and seek resolution.

8. Say "yes" to God's priorities and "no" to the devil's distractions. God wants us to live purposeful lives, focused on those things that matter to Him. The evil one seeks to get us off track through busyness and selfishness. Commit yourself to God's priorities, specifically as it relates to your time, your talents, and your treasures.

9. Believe the promises of God and act upon them. While it can be helpful to make promises, or vows, to God, it's more important to believe the promises of God and act accordingly. We don't have to perform for God. Instead, claim what God has promised to do for you and ask Him to give you the tenacity to take Him at His Word.

10. Allow God to use you. God takes great pleasure in using people who are available to Him. You don't have to be a super saint or a spiritual giant. God delights in using ordinary people like us so that His extraordinary power can be unleashed in our lives.

Ray Stedman: **Looking For a Few Good Men**

The story reveals clearly the way evil works. It invades us quietly. Before we are aware of it we have compromised ourselves and gone along with standards widely accepted around. We find the people of God have often been corrupted and polluted by this kind of thing. There are many instances of it today. When it comes down to individuals this is a picture of our struggle with our flesh. What this story depicts is the times when we must take a strong stand against evil in ourselves. We must be prepared to be drastic and take often painful action to clear up the things that are wrong in our own affairs. This is certainly true today when people have gone along with the world's attitudes toward divorce, or pornography, or the use of drugs or alcohol. Many Christians shrug their shoulders and allow evil to take root in their own lives. This story pictures the way these false forces can invade our lives and take up rooms in the very temple of our spirit, polluting and destroying us in the process. Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: "If your right hand offends you, cut it off. If your right eye offends you, pluck it out," {cf, **Matt 5:29-30** KJV}. Take action. Do not allow these evil things to remain. Even if it takes painful effort to do so, end it! If you have allowed your heart to be involved with something that is evil and it is painful to give it up -- you must give it up. That is what Jesus is saying. Bear the pain and stand firm. That is also what this great story teaches us. . .

I have learned through the years to look for **four qualities in leaders**, whether they be men or women. Let me share them with you:

I look first for **a searching mind**: a person who is mentally alert, who has curiosity about life, who wants to learn all the time, who never gives up learning. Such a person is always reading, always listening, always thinking about what he or she hears and trying to reason out what is behind it. A searching mind has an innate curiosity. It is aware of its lack of knowledge and keeps hoping to remedy the problem by learning more all the time. That is the first thing I look for.

Then, second, I look for **a humble heart**: someone whose ego is not on the line all the time, who must be praised and honored and encouraged in order to get them to do anything at all; who gets disgruntled and turned off if they do not get recognized. I look for someone who understands that service is a privilege; that power is not conferred upon you by an office but by serving people; that becoming a servant to others is the means of awakening a sense of gratitude on their part that makes them willing to follow what you suggest. People who learn how to lead that way are always tremendously useful in God's work and in God's kingdom. Jesus himself taught us that. "He who would be greatest among you" {cf, **Luke 22:26**}, he said, "let him become the servant of all," {cf, **Mark 10:44**}. So a humble heart is a very necessary qualification.

Third, I look for **an evident gift**: God's people are gifted people. There is not one of the members of the body of Christ who has not been equipped by the Holy Spirit with a special

ability to do something. When they know what it is, they always enjoy doing it. It is their delight. It is not a burden any more than wings are a burden to a bird. It is a delight to them. I look for people who have the gift for what we are asking them to do because they will stay with it and enjoy it to the end.

And then, fourth, undergirding all the others and making them possible, is **a faithful spirit**: someone who will not quit; someone who sees his work as a ministry of service to the Lord himself; who has undertaken it out of gratitude in his own life and heart and no matter how tough it gets and how rough it gets, will not quit. That is what Nehemiah found.

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Confronting Spiritual Decline**
Introduction: The second law of thermodynamics states that in a closed system, things move from a maximum state to what they call a state of entropy or disorder. Things are constantly moving downward or into a state of decline or disorder. I would just say that there's kind of a parallel principle in the spiritual realm.

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, you know what? He was disappointed. Because all of the spiritual reforms that had taken place years prior were now gone. And the people were in a state of spiritual decline. Nehemiah does not give up. And this is the quality of a real, true spiritual leader. They do not give up. They persevere.

Big Idea: **We can learn some things from Nehemiah about how we confront spiritual decline.**

I. Be Aware of the Causes of Spiritual Decline
A. Neglect of God's Word
Nehemiah comes back, and what do they do? They start reading the scripture again, and guess what they find out? That there are certain things that they're doing that they shouldn't be doing.

B. Too Much Reliance on Man
They were too reliant on Nehemiah for their spiritual life. I think the Apostle Paul was concerned about that when he wrote to the Philippians. He said this, *Wherefore, beloved, as you've always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but much more in my absence, work out your salvation.*

As believers, we need to learn to live in what is called with a *Coram Deo* mindset. Coram Deo is just a Latin expression that means before the face of God. We live our life as if God is constantly watching. We are living before His face and knowing that He will bless us. We live in His presence for His glory. And if you live that way, you'll never go into spiritual decline.

C. Wrong Relationships – 13:4
Eliashib, the priest, having the oversight of the chambers of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah. Who is Tobiah? He was an enemy of Nehemiah. If you remember right, he was an Ammonite. Get that right. an Ammonite, he was threatening Nehemiah constantly. He was writing threatening letters against him. He criticized him. He verbally assaulted Nehemiah. He was opposing him at every turn. And if you remember, Nehemiah wouldn't let him near the wall, let alone inside the wall. He always kept him away. because he was such a vicious enemy of the people of God. Now Nehemiah leaves for a few years and he comes back and guess what he

finds? Tobiah is not just inside the walls. He's inside the temple. And not only is he inside the temple, he has an apartment there in the temple.

Be careful who your friends are. Be careful who you call your friend and your associate.
1 Cor. 15:33

D. Failure to Support God's Word – 13:10
The Levites are not being supported, and so you know what they have to do? Rather than these full-time ministers being in the temple, taking care of temple business, they have to go out into the field and work.

1) They weren't honoring the Lord first
2) There was permissiveness in their homes – **13:23**

II. Be Angry at the Condition
He saw it and he compared it to what the scripture says. You know what he called it? He said, this is evil. He said, this is sin. This is disobedience against the word of God. The first thing you have to do is you have to be honest about the problem. You have to look at it and say, this is the problem. This is against God. Don't excuse yourself.

III. Be Aggressive in the Correction -- Take Decisive Action
You have to take action. You have to deal thoroughly with whatever's causing your decline, whatever's causing you to backslide, don't compromise with it, deal drastically with it.

TEXT: Nehemiah 13:15-22

TITLE: SPIRITUAL SLIPPAGE -- PART 2: SECULARIZING THE SABBATH – GREEDY MATERIALISM – THE LUST OF THE EYES

BIG IDEA:
SPIRITUAL SLIPPAGE REQUIRES GODLY LEADERSHIP AND BOLD CONFRONTATION TO PURIFY AND RESTORE PRACTICES TO BIBLICAL NORMS

INTRODUCTION:

God's people are famous for breaking their promises; for failing to fulfill their commitments; for backsliding and slipping away from their spiritual moorings. Yet God is patient and gracious with us – giving us opportunity to repent and rededicate ourselves to simple faith and obedience. But we must wake up to the reality of the spiritual decay and recognize that we are slowly being boiled alive.

Raymond Brown: "All too easily, an ugly thing becomes tolerated, even viewed as the possibly useful thing, then the permissible thing, and finally the attractive thing. It does not happen in a moment. Standards are lowered gradually and imperceptibly. Sin becomes known by another name. We accommodate at one stage of life things which earlier would have been totally unacceptable."

Nehemiah shows us how to deal very directly with spiritual decline. Not weary in re-fighting old battles. Like continually re-weeding the garden – keep popping back up

You could take the same pattern of response that we are going to stud y today and apply it to any area of dealing with sin.

Last Week: Corruption of Worship
This Week: Secularizing the Sabbath -- Greedy Materialism
Next Week: Mixed Marriages -- Fleshly Lusts

I. HEART ISSUES RELATED TO SECULARIZING THE SABBATH – GREEDY MATERIALISM

A. Faithless -- No Satisfaction in God or Trust in His Provision – No Spirit of Thanksgiving – But Covetousness . . . Leading to Self Righteousness

"*In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the sabbath day.*"

Secularizing the Sacred; Profaning the Sabbath
Six days were more than sufficient for the transaction of business – that would still hold true today; no law … but still no good reason to devote seven days to commerce
Remember the model of collecting manna in the wilderness – don't do any collecting on the sabbath

Piper: I know of no other way to triumph over sin long-term than to gain a distaste for it because of a superior satisfaction in God.

Kidner: Before the exile there was a growing impatience with the Sabbath law. Amos in the 8th century BC could see the merchants chafing at the weekly shut-down of business (Am. 8:5); and sure enough, by Jeremiah's time they had had their way. Load after load of merchandise poured in and out of the city on the Sabbath. Jeremiah's warning of what must follow (Je. 17:19-27) was clearly in Nehemiah's mind as he saw the forbidden burdens in transit (15, cf Je. 17:21, etc.) and spoke of history repeating itself (18).

Steven Cole: No doubt the Jews had excuses (they would have called them "reasons") for violating the Sabbath. "If I don't tread my grapes that day, they will rot!" "Everyone else is doing business then. I can't compete if I close up shop!" "All those imported fish will just rot and go to waste if we don't buy them! It wouldn't be right, to waste all that good food."

Byron Harvey: We must see all time as a gift from God, and use it to glorify Him, not merely in functional ways to gain advantage for ourselves. Sunday is the Lord's Day; I do not believe it is the Christian Sabbath, though good people differ with me on that point. At the same time, perhaps we ought to consider, not from a legalistic standpoint, but out of a desire to honor God, treating Sunday differently than other days. The Puritans, from whom we could learn a lot, called Sunday "the market-day of the soul", when the soul's business was to be done, with that taking precedence over all other business. We could do worse.

B. Fearless -- No Fear of God

> "*Also men of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them to the sons of Judah on the sabbath, even in Jerusalem.*"
>
> "*What is this **evil thing** you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day?*"

Law of supply and demand – men of Tyre would not be engaged in such business on the Sabbath unless there was sufficient demand for their merchandise

Def of profaning – look at profanity – taking something sacred and treating it as casual and ordinary – depriving it of its sacred purposes = holy day that was supposed to honor God

How do we do that in our lives today?

John Gill: indeed, the law of the sabbath was not binding on these Tyrians, but then they tempted the Jews to break it, by bringing their ware to sell.

Prov. 1:7 "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*" 9:10 "*of wisdom*"
Prov. 8:13 "*The fear of the Lord is to hate evil*"

C. Foolish -- No Wisdom from Lessons of History

> *"Did not your fathers do the same so that our God brought on us, and on this city, all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath."*

1 Cor. 10:1-13 – Why study the OT?

Cf. Babylonian Captivity – **Psalm 79** – What did we learn?
Noah's Flood – What did we learn?

Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD – What did we learn?
Ananias and Sapphira – What did we learn?

II. CORRECTIVE ACTION RELATED TO SECULARIZING THE SABBATH – GREEDY MATERIALISM

Very Practical action items

A. Confrontation: Verbal Rebuke

"*So I **admonished** them on the day they sold food.*"

Warn, admonish, call to witness against

"*Then I **reprimanded** the nobles of Judah and said to them, 'What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day?*'" (5:7, 13:11) strive, contend

B. Confinement: Closing Off Opportunity

"*And it came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates that no load should enter on the sabbath day.*"

Examine the circumstances that facilitate the sinful action and take aggressive action to make it more difficult to commit the sin

Knew that the regular gatekeepers would be subject to bribes; trusted his own servants to fulfill this responsibility

Jer. 17:21ff – "burden"

C. Consequences: Threat of Force

"*Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem. 21 Then I warned them and said to them, 'Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you.' From that time on they did not come on the sabbath.*"

Thought that maybe Nehemiah would not enforce the new rules – testing his resolve

Getz: Even so, some merchants stayed all night outside the walls, perhaps hoping people would slip outside in the darkness to purchase their goods.

D. Consecration: Purification and Refocusing

"*And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the sabbath day.*"

Yamauchi: The Sabbath was sanctified, not just by a negative cessation of ordinary labor, but by a consecration of that day to joyous gatherings. Fasting and mourning were not to be observed on the Sabbath. . . God meant the sabbath to be set apart from other days not only by the things that were not done on it, but by what was done, that it was a day for men to enjoy themselves on, and in accordance with the notions of feast days in the Scriptures, gave a front place in this enjoyment to more sumptuous eating and drinking than on other days.

III. (:22) REFRAIN OF SEEKING GOD'S FAVOR FOR COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP

"For this also remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness."

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are the indicators of whether or not I find my u ltimate satisfaction in Jesus Christ?

2) What are the areas of covetousness that cause me the greatest temptation?

3) Does this support lend any support to the validity of corporal punishment for family discipline?

4) What steps do I take for consecration, purification and rededication when I need to repent and return to following the Lord?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Swindoll: Passivity is an enemy. Look at how Nehemiah took passivity by the throat:
1) Nehemiah faced the wrong head -on.
2) Nehemiah dealt with the wrong severely.
3) Nehemiah worked toward a permanent correction.
4) Nehemiah always followed up the wrong with prayer.

Breneman: Nehemiah reminds us that the tolerance of evil leads to spiri tual stagnation, which leads to indifference on doctrinal matters; the final result is moral and spiritual degeneration. In order to have lasting results, reform and revival require constant renewal and constant courage. It takes work to maintain the correct priorities.

Steve Lawson: The real enemy to the Christian today is not "the liberals", abortion, or no prayer in school. The real enemy to the Christian today is subtle sins like pride, envy, jealousy, selfishness, lust and greed, that infiltrate the Christian's life and the church like a virus and produce ineffective, apathetic, complacent and lazy Christians who have no idea what it means to die to self and live for God.

David Silversides: **Not Weary in Well Doing**
Nehemiah refought to recover ground that had been lost again while he was gone; but he did not give up but persevered in leading the people to rededicate themselves

1. Concern for the Word of the Lord (:1-3)
Public reading of the Word of God; give it reverence and attention without distrac tion; don't

minimize this part of the worship service; not just some preliminary activity; Word coming with Power (vs. 3); Holy Spirit caused the people the heed the Word and take the necessary action to conform to it

2. Concern for the Worship of the Lord (:4-14)

Room the size of a warehouse set aside for residence of Tobiah, the Ammonite, during absence of Nehemiah; Eliashib disregarded the honor and worship of the Lord and gave preference to his friend to the detriment of the worship of God and of the m aterial support of the Levites ; without Nehemiah's strong godly presence and leadership, Eliashib showed his lack of zeal for truth; our zeal for truth must not depend on others; Grief but not inertia (:7 -9); took action; example of constancy on the part of Nehemiah; not defeated by this setback; the encouragement of biblical order (:10-13); restored confidence in the system being administered biblically so people once again were willing to give; prayer for remembrance (:14); "kindnesses" = good deeds; pray ing that God would treat him as a covenant keeper

3. Concern for the Sabbath of the Lord (:15-22)

(:15-16) the Sabbath market –
(:17) contention – cf. vs 11; the nobles were the rulers and had allowed this practice; tolerated it;
(:18) warning from the past – driven into captivity because they were idolaters … but also because they did not keep the Sabbath day
(:19-20) authoritative action – "burden" – Jer. 17: 21 ff – no wonder Nehemiah warned them of the judgment of God; as a governor he acted; didn't just wring his hands; he did something about it; those in positions of authority must take corrective action; honor of God involved; he upheld the Word of God within the legitimate sphere of his authority
(:22) Cry for Remembrance – covenant love and faithfulness; **Ps. 18:25**

4. Concern for the Church of the Lord (:23-31)

(:22-24) corruption of the church – mixed marriages with pagan women; children spoke in the language of Ashdon
(:25) cursing of the people for their disobedience – pronounced curse of God upon them if they would not repent of their wickedness
(:26) example of Solomon – great and godly king; yet he fell so badly in this area; made provision for their idol worship; was dragged into sin; his mixed marriages not an isolate d sin but led to other problems ; brought trouble to Israel for generations; Nehemiah was no respecter of persons; chased out the grandson of the high priest; Lev. 21:13

Lessons:

1) need for resolution in the ways of God
2) not to be weary because we have to re-fight old battles; kept contending and commanding and correcting and testifying for God; each generation has to be taught and re -taught the ways of God
3) dangers come from within; the walls were built by now and dedicated; city well inhabited; the danger from outside had largely subsided

Dr. Keith Gephart :

We are serving the Lord in what we do in enforcing His standards for ministry and worship;

I. (:15-22) Profaning the Sabbath

The impatience, selfishness and greed had led to desecration of the Sabbath; Tyre city on Med coast just N of Israel; merchants with ships; "*he testified against them*" = legal action; "*he contended with them*" = also legal ter minology; you are making the holy profane; we talk about people using profanity; take something sacred and make it secular – something that is intended to honor and glorify God, has special purposes; taking holy name of God and using it in common, ordinary way; repeating the sins of your forefathers; takes very practical measures to solve the

problem; Ushers need to be godly men as well – consecrated; purified themselves before they watched the gates;

II. (:23-29) Problem with Defilement of Marriage

Ashdod – nation of Philistines – one of five main cities; Ammon and Moab on the east side; surrounding the little nation of Israel; Moabite ladies are cuter than the Israelite girls …. Unequal yoke; not even Solomon could live however he pleased; high priest's son had married the daughter of Israel's main enemy; Israel's purity and distinctiveness at stake here; this is not prejudice against other races; not a knock against knowing a foreign language; will lose distinctive theological knowledge and blessing; you are always only one generation away from extinction; no time for delicate diplomacy; exploded against them; governmental type discipline; why didn't he initiate divorce proceedings like under Ezra? Can only conjecture

TEXT: Nehemiah 13:23-31

TITLE: SPIRITUAL SLIPPAGE – PART 3: MIXED MARRIAGES – FLESHLY LUSTS

BIG IDEA:
SPIRITUAL SLIPPAGE REQUIRES GODLY LEADERSHIP AND BOLD CONFRONTATION TO PURIFY AND RESTORE PRACTICES TO BIBLICAL NORMS

INTRODUCTION:

Memorial Day Mes sage – Our nation today knows very little of the significance of Memorial Day. It has become another three day weekend devoted to pleasure and the kickoff of summertime activities. Those from a military background probably have some stronger emotions abo ut this issue than most Americans. It was designed to be a **day of Remembrance** – of giving special recognition to those who have given their lives in defense and support of our nation so that we can enjoy our present freedoms. Our liberty has come at a gr eat cost and will only be maintained by similar courage and sacrifice.

As we come to our last message on the Book of Nehemiah, we see that this theme of **Remembrance** is foremost on the heart of this great and effective, godly leader. Chapter 13 with its attention to 3 specific areas of reform due to the spiritual slippage of the nation is structured around the repetition of this theme of Remembrance.

- Dealing with the **Pride of life** – Corruption of Worship (:14)
- Dealing with the **Lust of the eyes** – Profaning the Sabbath – Greedy Materialism and Covetousness (:22)
- Today: Dealing with the **Lust of the flesh** – Mixed Marriages (:31)

1 John 2:15-17 – "*Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever*."

But don't miss the contrasting reference in **vs. 29** – God will remember those who have opposed His work as well; those who have rejected the path of holiness and defiled themselves and set a bad example for others. We all will be rem embered by God in one way or another. As we finish our study this morning on this Memorial Day weekend, let's reflect on how we will be remembered for our life here on this earth.

I. HEART ISSUES RELATED TO MIXED MARRIAGES – FLESHLY LUSTS

A. Faithless -- No Satisfaction in God or Trust in His Provision – No Spirit of Thanksgiving – But Covetousness . . . Leading to Fleshly Lusts and Idolatry

"*In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people.*"

Problem here was not one of racism – but issue of believers marrying unbelievers

These were the very surrounding nations that had been causing so much difficulty for Nehemiah back in chap. 4

Clear biblical command: **Deut. 7:3, 4** – Repeated in the NT in **1 Cor. 6** – no confusion

You might end up in that situation if one partner subsequently is saved – in that case **1 Cor. 7** gives some guidelines – stay married as long as the unbelieving spouse will have you; there is some sanctifying benefit to the other spouse and children of their association with a true believer;

But you are not to enter into a mixed marriage situation

What was the motivation resulting in such unions?
Certainly not putting the emphasis on a spiritual union – but the lusts of the flesh
She's a looker

People kid themselves when they think they can date unbelievers but still not put themselves in danger; difficult to act on biblical conviction once your judgment is clouded by emotional involvement

Or people rationalize: This is how I will be used by the Lord to save this person; don't kid yourself; Why are you setting your standards so low anyway?? What d oes that say about your spiritual commitment?

Kidner: The babble of languages among the children (:24) was not only a symptom but a threat; it meant a steady erosion of Israelite identity at the level of all thinking and expression, and a loss of access to the Word of God which would effectively paganize them. A single generation's compromise could undo the work of centuries.

Fensham: If we take the view that everything was under control when Nehemiah left Jerusalem, we may deduce from the fact that the children spoke a foreign dialect that quite a time had elapsed between his departure and arrival.

David Moore: Five Common Problems In Marrying The Wrong Person – Nehemiah 13
A. The Unequal Yoke often results in Ignorance of the Scriptures – vss 23-24
B. The Unequal Yoke often results in Incompatibility between loved ones – vs. 25
When you marry an unbeliever it often sets you at odd s with your family
C. The Unequal Yoke often results in Impurity in the heart – vs. 26
D. The Unequal Yoke often results in Impediment to the Truth– vs. 27-28
E. The Unequal Yoke often results in Indifference to Worship – vs. 29

B. Fearless -- No Fear of God

"*Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this **great evil** by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?"*

Characterized not just as evil or wickedness; but a great evil

C. Foolish -- No Wisdom from Lessons of History

"Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations

there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin."

Look at all of the warnings we have from Solomon recorded in Proverbs and book of Ecclesiastes – why do we want to repeat his mistakes?

Do we think we are wiser than Solomon and will somehow involve negative consequences from such sin?

Look at how costly his sin was for the nation – led to a divided nation and all sorts of compromise and entanglement

Balance: Reminder of God's Grace, Mercy, Compassion, Love – despite our sinfulness

II. CORRECTIVE ACTION RELATED TO MIXED MARRIAGES – FLESHLY LUSTS

A. Confrontation: Verbal Rebuke

"*So I contended with them and cursed them*"

Legal terminology – as civil leader, Nehemiah acting as judge and executor here; not a model for how we would act today

Kidner: The rest of Nehemiah's onslaught used the leverage of divine sanctions (the curse; the promise under oath), physical pain, shame (cf. 2 Sa. 10:5; Is. 50:6 with the plucking of the hair) and an appeal to loyalty (27). It was a fearsome attack, but a crucial issue.

Swindoll: Cursing in this context does not mean he used coarse profanity. Rather, it means "to be disrespectful, to dishonor." It's a severe term, implying "to treat with contempt, to revile."

Paul Decker: Illustration: Need to Confront Sin, Reject Compromise, take stand for Righteousness

A hunter raised his rifle and took careful aim at a large bear. When about to pull the trigger, the bear spoke in a soft soothing voice, "Isn't it better to talk than to shoot? What do you want? Let's negotiate the matter."
Lowering his rifle, the hunter replied, "I want a fur coat."
"Good," said the bear, "that is a negotiable item. I only want a full stomach, so let us sit down and negotiate a compromise."
They sat down to negotiate and after a time the bear walked away, alone. The negotiations had been successful. The bear had a full stomach, and the hunter had his fur coat!
Well, that goes to show that compromise is not always ideal, right?

B. Confinement: Closing Off Opportunity

"*and made them swear by God, 'You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.'*"

Nehemiah got them to make a commitment to change their actions

Illustration: confinement efforts in the Gulf by BP to try to control the spread of the oil spill;

important not to minimize the damage; not to cover up the problem; be truthful

C. Consequences: Corporal Punishment and Shame

"*and struck some of them and pulled out their hair,*"

"*Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me.*"

"chasing" him off

Not exactly a model for parental nurturing

D. (:30) Consecration: Purification and Refocusing

"*Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task, and I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits.*"

III. (:31) REFRAIN OF SEEKING GOD'S FAVOR FOR COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP

"*Remember me, O my God, for good.*"

Theme of Remembrance

CONCLUSION:

What kind of a leader did Nehemiah prove to be? Much more than a wall builder

7 Key Traits of an Effective, Godly Leader Modeled by Nehemiah:

- 1) A man of **Vision** – understood God's kingdom purposes for his times
  - "*I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down*!" (6:3)
  - Rare when you combine a visionary with a man of practical implementation

- 2) A man of **Courage** – would not be intimidated or discouraged – understood the tactics of the enemy
  - "Success is never final and failure is never fatal: It's courage that counts."
  - Would not back down despite strong opposition; strengthened himself in the Lord

- 3) A man who could **Motivate** others – get them to stay on task and use their gifts
  - He led and others followed
  - "Leadership is the art of getting others to do what you know needs to be done because they want to do it."

- 4) A man of **Decisive Action** and **Hard Work**
  - Servant mentality
  - Led by example

- 5) A man who had a **High View of the Word of God and a Low View of Sin**

- Led to righteous indignation and confrontation of sin

- 6) A man who could Accomplish Great Things for God through **Commitment** and **Determination** and **Perseverance**
  - Wiersbe: President of Wheaton College, Dr. Raymond Edman, used to remind his students, "It's always too soon to quit."

- 7) A man of **Prayer** who looked to God alone for His **Reward** – "*Remember me*"

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How important is it for a country to maintain a singular national language?

2) On this Memorial Day weekend, what are some of the lessons from our nation's history that we seem to be ignoring today?

3) Does this example of corporal punishment lend any support to the validity of corporal punishment for family discipline?

4) How did the Lord Jesus Christ exemplify all of these same leadership qualities when He was here on earth?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Moore: **The Unequal Yoke**
The Word of God plainly declares that a child of God is not to be united in marriage with an unbeliever. To God's ancient people Israel the following command was given, concerning the nations around them: "Neither shalt thou make marriage with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son, for will turn away thy son from following Me" (Deut. 7:3, 4). To the N.T saint Word is equally clear: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2Cor. 6:14); and according to 1Cor 7 we are to be "Married...only in the Lord" (1Cor. 7:39). These are clearly the commandments of the Lord to us.

This aspect of the "Unequal Yoke" is a snare into which many mighty men have fallen. As we shall see, Solomon, the wisest of men fell into this snare, and the "outlandish women" of the Ammonites and Moabites turned away his heart from God, and caused him to sin. Samson, the strongest of men, was also caught in it, and shorn of his strength.

If the wisest of men, and the strongest of men can fall into such a snare, and that to their ruin, what makes you think that you can entertain the unequal yoke in marriage and somehow be unaffected by this unscriptural partnership?
Joshua said of such a relationship that it prove to be "snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes."

This morning I want to warn you against allowing your affections to go after an unbeliever . You see, it happens all the time, the Christian allows himself or herself the luxury of engaging their affections toward a lost man/woman, an unsaved boy/girl and though the link is slender at first, and may be readily broken, inevitably it grows stronge r; and once Satan gets the "Yoke" securely fastened upon your neck, it will cost you something to get rid of it. How many tears and broken hearts might have been saved had the wrong been checked at the beginning.

F B Meyer: Thrice in this chapter this hum ble man asks to be remembered. We cannot think that he expected to purchase God's favor because of his sacrifices and endeavors. Of this he was already assured. But being a redeemed soul, he desired that his works might come up in remembrance before God, a nd secure a reward. There is no harm in keeping the eye fixed on the reward for faithful toil in the Lord's service. It was a constant incentive in the life of the great Apostle that he might so run as to obtain; so finish his. work that he might win the c rown.

Note the three departments of service mentioned in this chapter, in connection with which Nehemiah breathed this petition. He had turned all Tobiah's household stuff out of the temple, so that the whole structure should be given up to the service of God. He had secured the Sabbath from desecration, so that its holy rest and calm were preserved intact. And he insisted on the purity of the holy seed being untainted by foreign alliances. Consecration to God, the Rest of Faith in the inner life, and the separation of God's children from the world, are the counterparts of these in our own time.

Shall we not humbly set ourselves to seek them for the professing Church? Nehemiah was an ungifted, simple-hearted man, but he was able to secure them as the instr ument and channel of God's purposes. Why should not God work through us for the same ends. But, first, let us see to it that each of these particulars is being realized in our own personal character and life. Let every room of the heart be for God; let no voice break the inner peace. Then what God has done, for us, we may confidently plead as within His scheme for others.

Ray Stedman: **Preventing Burnout and Preserving Power**
It was true then as it is today that when the fathers disobey, it is the children w ho suffer. These children were forgetting how to communicate in the language of Judah. Pagan tribes in the Old Testament portray the world and its ways of operation. The parallel in the church is very plain. When Christians begin to adopt the world's value s and the world's ways, we invariably turn our children away from the things that make for stability and strength. . .

This is a picture of the foolishness of trying to mix the world's ways and God's ways. That is what is portrayed by intermarrying with f oreign women. When a church tries to run itself, not according to the teaching of the New Testament but by business processes and by the philosophies of the world around, seeking honor and prestige and perhaps installing a hierarchy in its leadership, etc., it is doing exactly what this warns us against. God's work is to be done in God's way, and to borrow from the world is to introduce confusion into the camp. . .

The key here, of course, is these words, " *because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood*." The priestly office was to be a picture of the ministry of Jesus. He is the great High Priest who has come to meet man in his lostness and weakness and to restore him. The church is called to the same work and the same ministry, as the Body of Christ.

Jesus himself defined the work of the church for us in that wonderful scene in the synagogue of Nazareth, recorded in Luke 4, where he quoted from Isaiah these words, " *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to give liberty to the captives, and freedom to the oppressed, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord*," {cf, Luke 4:18-19 KJV}. That is the work of the church: to preach to people the good news of the gospel, to minister to people's hurts, to lift the burden of guilt in their lives, to teach them how to be free from sinful habits, how to oppose the powers of darkness and the occult world, to understand that God is in control of life, a nd to give hope to the hopeless. That is the work of the church, and that is always what suffers when the church begins to operate in the ways of the world.

I want to close by reading a brief quotation from John R. W. Stott who puts this very well. He says of the church,

> Our motive must be concern for the glory of God, not the glory of the Church or our own personal glory. Our message must be the good news of God, as given by Christ and His apostles, not the traditions of men or our own opinions. Our ma npower must be the whole Church of God, and every member of it, not a privileged few who want to retain certain ministry as their own prerogative. Our dynamic must be the Spirit of God, not the power of human personality, or organization or eloquence. Without these priorities we shall be silent when we ought to be vocal.

So Nehemiah ends his book on a very practical note.

This is the way Christians change the world. This is the way we affect the times in which we live. We are not here to be a tightly kn it, quiet community, operating for our own benefit. We are here to change the world!

Steve Bradley: **The Fruit of Unholy Matrimony**
Consequences of sin as it relates to marriages between believers and unbelievers. Why should anyone worry themselves about a private matter of who chooses to marry whom? Can have a very strong impact on others – either positively or negatively. Many will think biblical principles are outdated for our times; but they are timeless for all generations. Marriage can be a great blessing or a great curse to the partners and to society as a whole. From Gen. 3 – 6 the godly line had been almost totally corrupted. God took extreme measures to preserve Noah and his family. Satan used this tactic of unequally yoked marriages throughou t history. Proven to be a successful method.

v. 23 Description of the problem– should be a noticeable difference between people of the world and people of God. Way they talk, interact, live, entertain themselves, world views; etc. Not dealing with racism here but matters of faith and religion. These foreigners were to have no place among the people of God (unless they were to bow the knee). Not the word normally used for marriage – but take up residence with and dwell with in God's holy city; the world takes residence in the church; broke explicit commandment as well as violated their covenant oath in chap. 10. Yesterday's enemies (chap. 4) had become today's lovers – this is a *great evil* in God's sight. Supposed to be enmity between the world and the church.

2 Cor. 6 – no compatibility between light and darkness – the two have nothing in common together; Some will claim: "People can't help who they fall in love with." But you control who

you hang out with. We are all susceptible to the lust of the flesh. Be careful not to live in a way that fulfills the desires of the flesh. Marriage is hard enough between 2 people who share a common faith in Christ.

Far reaching implications of sin of Solomon on the nation; simply not worth it; far bett er to remain single your whole life; life filled with heartache and grief

v. 24 Consequences of Sin – God's people are known as the people of the book = central to their faith; Hebrew = language used in the covenant community; these children were not bein g raised in the faith; the children suffer in unequal marriages; too many Christians are fluent in the language of the world; get rid of your worldly accent; must learn the language of heaven; have a duty to pass this language on to our children; look how quickly God's children fall into backsliding; good intentions are not enough; must be doers of the Word; compromise of just one generation can undo the faithfulness of centuries; damages the witness of Christ and the church; shows God's people to be hypocr ites because we don't live by God's Word

v. 25ff Nehemiah's reaction – "*contend*" – legal term – bringing a charge against them as in a civil court ; he pronounces and carries out sentence of judgment; not out of control here; guilty party is to be struck (Deut. 22); shaving of their heads – act of humiliation and shame; great amount of zeal for God and purity of His people; much in common with zeal of Christ in cleansing the temple; priests were also guilty of this sin of unequal marriages (not just the common people); nobody is exempt from this temptation
http://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=329091443156

John E. Bode (quoted by Redpath):
O Jesus, I have promised to serve T hee to the end;
Be Thou forever ne ar me, my Master and My Friend;
I shall not fear the battle if Thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway if Thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel Thee near me! The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear:
My foes are ever near me, around me and within;
But Jesus, draw Thou nearer, and shield my soul from sin.

O Jesus, Thou hast promised to all who follow Thee,
That where Thou art in glory there shall Thy servant be;
And, Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend.

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