

Restoring Intro

Columnist Bob Green of the Chicago Tribune has a theory about what's wrong with the world. He blames it on what he calls the "Death of The Permanent Record."

He recalls that grade-school children once lived in fear of having their bad behavior noted on The Permanent Record. Because of this, people learned in their youth to stop before they did something deceitful or unethical. They didn't stop because they were so good but for fear of having their actions written down.

Today, according to Bob Green, people have come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a permanent record. In fact, they believe no one has a right to keep track. Green says that with today's emphasis on our rights of privacy, if a school child were ever threatened with something going on his permanent record, he would probably file suit under the Freedom of Information Act and gain possession of his files before recess.

Where there is no fear of a lasting record, people tend to do what they think they can get away with. The problem for mankind, however, is that a permanent record does exist--and it is kept by God.

- The world knows us one way, but God knows us truly
 - He knows what we think and what we do
 - For unbelievers, the errors of life, found in the book of deeds, will stand against them in judgment for their sin
 - But what about believers?
 - What does God do when His people are unfaithful and disobey?
 - Well, God's word tells us

[2Tim. 2:13](#) If we are faithless, He remains **faithful**, for He cannot deny Himself.

- But does it mean that God remains faithful?
 - Does He stand idly by while we live a disobedient life?
 - Does He look the other way?
 - Like the parents who welcomed their pastor home for dinner one Sunday

They had one of the cutest little toddlers the pastor had ever seen. Suddenly, the child got his fork and started shooting peas at the pastor. And they came very close--- closer and closer. The pastor was dodging. . . looking for a fox hole.

"Don't say a

word," his mother said under her breath. "We don't want to suppress him." "If one of those peas hits me," the pastor said, "I'm going to suppress him."

- Or does God go so far as to reward our disobedience?
 - To bless us despite our unfaithfulness?
- How would we know?
 - Well, we could begin with a simple verses of scripture

[Heb. 12:6](#) FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,
AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

[Heb. 12:7](#) It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?

[Heb. 12:8](#) But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

- So though God is faithful even when we aren't, we need to understand that faithfulness doesn't look like some people assume it looks
 - Faithfulness doesn't mean looking the other way
 - It doesn't mean rewarding the wrong behavior
- Faithfulness means God disciplines those who are His children, as a father would discipline his sons
 - Discipline is God's way of showing faithfulness in the face of our disobedience
 - And more than that, it proves our sonship
 - We can only discipline our own children
 - You can't discipline another's child
- So how does God's discipline manifest itself in our lives?
 - Can we recognize it? Does it follow a pattern?
 - I believe the answer is yes, though not without a few caveats

- The series we are beginning today will examine God's pattern of discipline in the lives of His people
- Obviously, before we can recognize God's pattern in our own lives and learn to respond to it, we must understand how God approaches the matter of discipline in general
 - And I believe that pattern is best understood by studying God at work across several centuries of the history in the nation of Israel
 - Specifically, in the history of their captivity and restoration back to their land
 - So our study begins with a bit of a history lesson
 - There is a handout I've provided which gives an overview of the various periods of kingship in the history of Israel beginning with Saul
 - We won't study the information on that sheet this morning
 - It's more of a reference for you as we go along
 - But I do want to highlight a couple of items
- Israel existed as a united nation under its first three kings
 - Saul, David and Solomon reigned over all twelve tribes
 - And of course each had his strengths and weakness, though all saw some measure of success
 - But in 926 BC, Israel splits in a civil war following the death of Solomon

[1Kings 11:1](#) ¶ Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, [1Kings 11:2](#) from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, *for* they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. [1Kings 11:3](#) He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away.

[1Kings 11:4](#) For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father *had been*.

[1Kings 11:5](#) For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites.

[1Kings 11:6](#) Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father *had done*.

[1Kings 11:7](#) Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon.

[1Kings 11:8](#) Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

[1Kings 11:9](#) ¶ Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice,

[1Kings 11:10](#) and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD had commanded.

[1Kings 11:11](#) So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant.

[1Kings 11:12](#) "Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, *but* I will tear it out of the hand of your son.

[1Kings 11:13](#) "However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, *but* I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen."

- Israel is about to be divided because of Solomon's disobedience and unfaithfulness
 - The 10 tribes is a reference to the Northern Tribes of Israel, which break off to form a separate kingdom after the death of Solomon
 - The remain tribe God holds back is the remnant in the South, Judah

- By this time, Judah had grown to incorporate the tribe of Benjamin, so geographically they were thought of as one tribe by this time
 - Leaving 10 in the north and one in the south
- This was the beginning of a long decline for the nation of Israel
 - It's important for us to note as begin this trek through Israel's history that the kingdom of Israel didn't split simply because of a geopolitical struggle
 - There was a geopolitical struggle Solomon's son and his father's enemies
 - It's didn't divide because Solomon's son, Rehoboam, was a poor ruler who couldn't hold the nation together
 - Though Rehoboam WAS a poor ruler who couldn't hold the nation together
 - The reason the nation of Israel split was because God split it
 - And the reason God split the nation of Israel was to discipline Solomon and Solomon's descendents as a result of Solomon's sinful practices
 - To put it simply, our sin has consequences
- Look at the pattern in 1Kings 11
 - Solomon's heart turned away from God in verse 9
 - The central problem in Solomon's life was a turning away from God
 - That turning away results in specific acts of disobedience
 - In Solomon's case, scripture tells us he allowed his many pagan wife's to influence him into worshipping foreign gods rather than to one true living God
 - 1Kings says he did not keep the covenant or God's commandments
 - Solomon allowed his heart to be drawn away by false worship

- And false worship led a putting aside of God's commandments, his instructions, his teaching
 - And without the foundation of undivided worship
 - And the absent the godliness that comes from an obedient walk in God's commandments and instructions
 - Then what will naturally follow?
- The product of our life will be corruption, dissipation
 - Our lives will lack any direction and eternal purpose
 - We will live in our flesh and according to the principles of this world
 - And our sinful choices will be bring consequences, both upon ourselves and upon others
- Consider the punishment God brought upon Solomon
 - The kingdom was to be split, but only after his death
 - And not because he deserved the reprieve, but because out of recognition of David's faithfulness and to honor promises God gave to David
 - And even before this time, Solomon's sin lay the seeds for the kingdom's future destruction
 - He raised a future king in his son who was petulant and disobedient himself
 - He burdened the nation with taxes to support his lavish lifestyle that helped fuel the rebellion after his death
 - Solomon's descent into a life of self-gratification brought about the ruin of the kingdom
 - And yet it was merely the beginning of trials the nation would endure as a result of disobedience
- I want to propose to you that Solomon's life – and in fact history of the nation of Israel after him – provide an important pattern for observing disobedience and discipline in our lives

- Consider how it began in Solomon
 - His heart turned away from God
 - He allowed something other than his love and devotion to God rule in his heart
 - I believe it's fair to say that in Solomon's life it began with his lust and desire for wives
 - And as he searched farther and farther for additional wives, he began to bring ungodly pagan women into his family
 - And the result was these women began to exert influence on Solomon to believe as they believed
 - And eventually, Solomon found these foreign gods competing the allegiance of his heart
- I believe the pattern of our own disobedience begins with a similar erosion in our heart of worship toward God
 - We allow something into our lives that competes for our devotion and praise
 - We allow something to gain a foothold in our lives, and it begins to dominate our attention and feed our desires
 - And it begins to push everything else out of our heart
 - Maybe it's the usual things
 - Career, money, kids, materialism
 - Maybe it's an addiction, or relationship
 - Maybe it's a bit less conventional
 - Even a pursuit of ministry can itself become a competitor for faithfulness and worship
 - Our participation in ministry becomes a goal in itself
 - And we no longer follow God's leading but become a slave to our own ambitions
 - Maybe's it's more insidious forms of unfaithfulness

- Like a growing fascination with the occult,
 - Or new age wisdom and humanistic teaching
 - Eastern mysticism, witchcraft, sorcery
- Whatever it is, it almost always starts small

[1Kings 3:3](#) ¶ Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

- Solomon was devoted to the Lord, except for one small flaw
 - He had married his second wife, Pharaoh's daughter
 - And under her influence, Solomon began to burn incense
 - Not a big deal
 - Light a candle, some incense
 - Inhale the aroma, may chant a few words
 - What harm could it do?
- Maybe a yoga class gives way to a transcendental meditation class
 - Which then leads to deeper association with eastern mysticism and paganism
- Now you may be saying to yourself that you would never repeat the sin of Solomon
 - First of all, you have no interest in multiple wives
 - Secondly, you may feel secure in assuming you will never bow before a foreign god as Solomon did
 - Take a second look at verse 9
 - God had appeared to Solomon twice
 - 1Kings 3 God appeared to Solomon and rewarded his desire for wisdom with both wisdom and riches
 - Later God appears during the consecration of the Temple

- Solomon had personal visitation for the almighty God
 - Have you received that?
 - In other words, if a man like Solomon, the wisest man to ever live
 - A man who personally spoke with the Lord
 - A man who had every reward and blessing imaginable from God
 - If this man could forsake the living God, are you and I to suppose we're too good to do the same?
- You see, our ability to stand in the face of a temptation to be unfaithful isn't based on our pedigree
 - It isn't based on our wisdom
 - It isn't based on our financial security
 - It isn't based on our sincerity nor even our desire to please God
 - Solomon exceeded all of us in every one of these categories
- No, sincere, lifelong faithfulness to God comes from something altogether different
 - Something Solomon never knew
 - Something we'll learn as we study how God brought the lesson to the nation of Israel many centuries later
- So step one in our descent into God's discipline is a wandering heart
- The second step is an erosion of our understanding and obedience to truth God's truth
 - Because Solomon's heart had turned away to idols, we're told he didn't keep God's commandments
 - He didn't keep the covenant
 - For all his wisdom, he thoughts weren't counseled by the truth of scripture

- Consider God's words to Solomon during the dedication of the temple

[1Kings 9:3](#) The LORD said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication, which you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

[1Kings 9:4](#) "As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you *and* will keep My statutes and My ordinances,

[1Kings 9:5](#) then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, 'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

[1Kings 9:6](#) ¶ "But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them,

[1Kings 9:7](#) then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

- There's a principle of scripture that's found from Genesis to Revelation and on virtually every page in between
 - Worshipping God is evidenced by obedience
 - We can't claim to worship God and then not seek to obey Him
 - And obedience is according to God's word
 - It's not an obedience of our own making
 - We don't get to decide what it means to obey God and then feel good about ourselves when we keep to our own plan
 - The expectations are set in God's word and ultimately made real in our hearts by the Holy Spirit

[Col. 1:28](#) We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

- Biblical illiteracy is probably the single most dangerous trend in the church today, because it undermines our ability to know and thus obey God
 - How does the universal church expect to worship in spirit and truth when we are so ignorant of the truth provided in God's word?
- Fortunately God is not limited in His ability to still His people to worship and obedience despite our ignorance
 - But His power to do so does not excuse nor mitigate our ignorance
- Solomon, for all his wisdom, failed in obedience to God's word and the commandments of the covenant
 - And as a result, he brought upon his nation the penalties of disobedience and the discipline of the Lord

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- Solomon's descent into idol worship influenced the nation under him, and eventually the nation paid the price
 - God left it to the prophet Jeremiah to declare the coming judgment

[Jer. 25:8](#) ¶ "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words,

[Jer. 25:9](#) behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and *I will send* to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

[Jer. 25:10](#) 'Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.

[Jer. 25:11](#) 'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

- You see the final step in the pattern of our disobedience is the failure of leadership in our lives
 - Our wandering heart begets an ignorant and disobedient mind
 - And a disobedient mind begets a legacy of sin and corruption
 - And that influence corrupts other and spreads and magnifies our sin
 - And while the degree of our influence will vary with our sphere of influence, the pattern remains the same
 - Solomon's reign was one of the mightiest in all history
 - His wisdom and wealth and power was unrivaled in his time
 - And therefore his responsibility brought tremendous opportunity for influence
 - So when he fell into disobedience and unfaithfulness, he corrupted an entire nation, and generations for centuries to follow
 - In our lives, perhaps the failure of godly leadership will corrupt a spouse
 - Or a family
 - Or a friend

- Or a business
 - Or a church
 - Or a even nation
- You seen the circumstances and the impact of our disobedience may vary
 - But the pattern doesn't
 - We allow our hearts to wander away from true worship
 - We allow our minds to decay and neglect God's truth
 - We allow our corruption to bring down others
 - And so the pattern repeats itself in others
 - But even when we are faithless, God remains faithful
 - And He disciplines those He loves
 - And when God acts to discipline and later restore His people, He likewise address the problem in three steps
 - We'll study the nation's judgment at the hands of the Babylonians as predicted by Jeremiah
 - And then we'll watch as God begins the restoration of Israel in a series of steps that address each of the three areas of disobedience
- But more importantly, we'll stop along the way to consider how God may be working in our own lives
 - To ask the question, are these patterns of disobedience and unfaithfulness evident in our own choices and decisions
 - And if so, do we also recognize the discipline of the Lord at work in our lives?

Restoring Part 1

- The US has been a country for nearly 232 years
 - But only 85 years into our existence, we almost split into a northern nation and a Southern nation
 - The United States
 - And the Confederate States
 - Or Texas and a few other places
- Israel was a united kingdom for only a brief period of time – 112 years
 - At the end of that 112 years, Solomon died, and upon his death God had declared that the kingdom of Israel would become divided because of Solomon's idolatry
 - The ten tribes in the north would split off under the leadership of Jeroboam, a leader from the most power tribe in the north, Ephraim
 - In fact, God Himself appointed Jeroboam to be the king of the north in 1Kings 11
 - A prophet came to Jeroboam and declared that God had given him the authority to rule over the 10 northern tribes after Solomon's death
 - Meanwhile, in the South the remaining two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, would remain ruled by Solomon's heir, his son Rehoboam
 - So because Solomon sinned and followed after the idols of his pagan wives, the nation is split
- During the centuries that followed, both the North and the South generally went from bad to worse
 - For example, the Northern Kingdom of Israel last for 209 years after the split

- During that time they set up their capital in Samaria, establish a false temple, a false priesthood, and a distorted version of the Law
- And they were ruled by a succession of 18 kings, all of whom were considered to be bad kings - disobedient to the covenant and following after a long list of abominations
 - In fact, each king tends to be worse than the previous, inciting God's anger
- Eventually in 722 BC God scatters the 10 tribes altogether by bringing the Assyrians against Israel
 - The nation is taken captive, and the tribes are lost to history, even to today
- The Southern Kingdom of Judah also begins a long history of ups and downs - more down than up
 - They have 11 bad kings interspersed by 8 good kings
 - Many of the bad kings are as bad as any of the northern kings
 - And the precious few good kings can only stem the tide of disobedience for a time
 - Yet God deal differently with the Southern Kingdom
 - It takes 345 years before the nation is completely dispersed into captivity at the hands of the Babylonians under command of Nebuchadnezzar
 - Yet they are eventually restored to the land beginning 70 years later
- This raises an interesting question for us this morning
 - If both the North and the South suffered under disobedient kings with similar patterns of idolatry and corruption, why did God treat the North different from the South?
 - For example, the ten tribes in the north were scattered brutally under the conquering army of the Assyrians
 - And they have never been heard from since

- On the other hand, the Southern tribes were similarly brutalized by the Babylonians, but they remained largely intact
 - And after 70 years, God allowed them to return to their land and even rebuild the temple
 - Though they never return to their prior glory, they nevertheless rebuild Jerusalem and remain a distinct people until AD70
- So how do we explain the difference between how God responded to the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom?
 - The difference comes from the difference between judgment and discipline
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[1Kings 14:1](#) ¶ At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam became sick.

[1Kings 14:2](#) Jeroboam said to his wife, "Arise now, and disguise yourself so that they will not know that you are the wife of Jeroboam, and go to Shiloh; behold, Ahijah the prophet is there, who spoke concerning me *that I would be* king over this people.

[1Kings 14:3](#) "Take ten loaves with you, *some* cakes and a jar of honey, and go to him. He will tell you what will happen to the boy."

[1Kings 14:4](#) ¶ Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. Now Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were dim because of his age.

[1Kings 14:5](#) Now the LORD had said to Ahijah, "Behold, the wife of Jeroboam is coming to inquire of you concerning her son, for he is sick. You shall say thus and thus to her, for it will be when she arrives that she will pretend to be another woman."

[1Kings 14:6](#) ¶ When Ahijah heard the sound of her feet coming in the doorway, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam, why do you pretend to be another woman? For I am sent to you *with* a harsh *message*.

[1Kings 14:7](#) "Go, say to Jeroboam, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Because I exalted you from among the people and made you leader over My people Israel, [1Kings 14:8](#) and tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you—yet you have not been like My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only that which was right in My sight;

[1Kings 14:9](#) you also have done more evil than all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and molten images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back—

[1Kings 14:10](#) therefore behold, I am bringing calamity on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male person, both bond and free in Israel, and I will make a clean sweep of the house of Jeroboam, as one sweeps away dung until it is all gone.

[1Kings 14:11](#) "Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city the dogs will eat. And he who dies in the field the birds of the heavens will eat; for the LORD has spoken *it*."

[1Kings 14:12](#) "Now you, arise, go to your house. When your feet enter the city the child will die.

[Kings 14:13](#) "All Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he alone of Jeroboam's *family* will come to the grave, because in him something good was found toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.

[1Kings 14:14](#) "Moreover, the LORD will raise up for Himself a king over Israel who will cut off the house of Jeroboam this day and from now on.

[1Kings 14:15](#) ¶ "For the LORD will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; and He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the *Euphrates* River, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the LORD to anger.

[1Kings 14:16](#) "He will give up Israel on account of the sins of Jeroboam, which he committed and with which he made Israel to sin."

- Jeroboam had been awarded the Northern Kingdom by God
 - God told him to remain faithful
 - But he didn't
 - He was worse than all kings who had come before
 - And he took the rest of the ten tribes with him
 - So Jeroboam's son Abijah becomes deathly sick, the king sends his wife to ask the prophet of the northern kingdom to tell them if his son will live
 - Interestingly, Jeroboam tells his wife not to say who she was because he feared the condemnation of the prophet
 - The king knew he was guilty of great sin against God
 - He was aware of his sins against God
 - But rather than own up to them, he merely tried to deceive the prophet and hide from his judgment
 - But God sees through the plan, of course
 - So God uses the opportunity to pronounce a judgment against Jeroboam for his sinful ways
 - The judgment was to be the death of Jeroboam's son

- Then it was the cutting off of Jeroboam's entire family from the throne
- Finally, the nation itself would be scattered
 - In fact, the entire house of Jeroboam will perish
 - No restoration, only judgment
- But now consider Jeroboam's contemporary in the South, Rehoboam, Solomon's son

[1Kings 14:22](#) Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked Him to jealousy more than all that their fathers had done, with the sins which they committed.

[1Kings 14:23](#) For they also built for themselves high places and *sacred* pillars and Asherim on every high hill and beneath every luxuriant tree.

[1Kings 14:24](#) There were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel.

- Sound familiar?
 - The South didn't fare any better under Rehoboam's rule
 - In fact, the author of 1Kings specifically says that the South did all the same abominations as the northern kingdom of Israel
 - Verse 24
 - So what would you expect God to do to Rehoboam?

[2Chr. 12:1](#) ¶ When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong, he and all Israel with him forsook the law of the LORD.

[2Chr. 12:2](#) And it came about in King Rehoboam's fifth year, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem

[2Chr. 12:3](#) with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people who came with him from Egypt were without number: the Lubim, the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians.

[2Chr. 12:4](#) He captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem.

[2Chr. 12:5](#) Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the princes of Judah who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, 'You have forsaken Me, so I also have forsaken you to Shishak.'"

[2Chr. 12:6](#) So the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, "The LORD is righteous."

[2Chr. 12:7](#) ¶ When the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, "They have humbled themselves so I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some *measure* of deliverance, and My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by means of Shishak.

[2Chr. 12:8](#) "But they will become his slaves so that they may learn *the difference between* My service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries."

- As Rehoboam and the other leaders of Israel are engaged leading their nation in sinful worship, God intervenes
 - He sends up a Pharaoh from Egypt to conquer Judah
 - And then by the word of a prophet in Judah, God tells the leaders that this trouble was a result of their sin against God
 - They have forsaken Him, so He forsake them
 - The word for forsake is azab, which means abandon
 - They abandoned God, so He was showing them what it felt like to be abandoned by God
- Already we see a difference in God's approach in the South
 - In the case of Jeroboam in the north, God said you will be forever cut off
 - No opportunity to repent, no options
 - 1Kings 14:11 said the Lord has spoken it, so it will be done
 - God moved immediately to a final and irrevocable judgment that ultimately led to the complete scattering and destruction of Israel in the north
 - His words are spoken around 927 BC
 - But it takes over 200 years before the sentence is carried out
 - But in the case of the South, God seems to leave a door open
 - First, He merely says I have forsaken you because you had forsaken me

- He doesn't promise any particular outcome, although destruction at the hands of the Egyptians is certainly implied
 - Secondly, he leaves an opportunity for Rehoboam to respond
 - And respond they do
- Then the leaders see their opportunity and respond
 - They repent and so God relents
 - Remember how King Jeroboam in the North chose to approach the prophet when his son was dying?
 - He knew of his own guilt yet he tried to hide it
 - Rather than repent as the men in the South did, he persisted in his sin
- In this fact, we find the essential difference between the North and the South
 - All sin brings condemnation, but repentance brings opportunity for forgiveness
 - While a hardened heart can bring only destruction
- As a result of the South's repentance upon recognizing God's offense at their sin, God relents
 - The king of Egypt isn't permitted to destroy the people and the city
 - Instead, they suffer under a period of slavery to the Egyptian king
 - Which may not seem better to you and I, but God explains the logic in verse 8
 - In verse 8 God says that they will be slaves for a time so they might understand the difference between serving God and serving this king
 - This is discipline, isn't it?
 - God is at work to change their attitudes and their hearts

- For example, have you ever had a young child threaten to run away?
 - They object to your rules and to your expectations
 - Perhaps they didn't get their own way?
 - Perhaps they've even gone so far as to pack a small bag and walk out the front door
- What do you do?
 - In my family, you wave goodbye from the front porch
 - My wife even goes so far as to offer to pack a lunch
 - And as they walk slowly down the sidewalk with their bag, trying to look as pitiful as possible, we just let them go
 - Finally, they sit down on the curb just out of sight, feeling sorry for themselves
 - Eventually, we walk up the street and ask them if they would like to come home now
 - When they say yes, we tell them it's too late, we've already rented out their room
- The point is, the child quickly comes to see that living without the security of a family and its rules is far worse than living under those rules
 - Stepping out from under God's expectations may seem appealing to us at first
 - But then when we taste the other side, we realize how good we had it in the house of the Lord
 - So, God says I want to teach them a lesson
 - A lesson of how good it is to serve the living God
- You see the Northern Kingdom suffered God's wrath and experienced His judgment
 - There was no mercy, no reprieve
 - It wasn't intended to teach a lesson

- It was intended to blot them out
- For judgment is the only possible response to the unbeliever
 - Those who do not know God nor love Him nor follow His commands will be destroyed

[Prov. 15:29](#) The LORD is far from the wicked,
But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

- On the other hand, the Southern Kingdom didn't experienced God's judgment, but rather His discipline
 - God had no intention of destroying the Southern Kingdom
 - Instead, God desire to show them a lesson
 - And the arrival of the Egyptian king was intended to bring about that learning
 - Remember, Judah was the tribe that would produce the Messiah
 - Judah held the remnant of Israel
 - The group within the history of Israel who truly believed and trusted in the Lord
 - And they remain faithful even in Israel's darkest hours
 - Here, they respond to God's discipline as only His children can respond
 - They repent

[2Cor. 7:8](#) For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it— *for* I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—
[2Cor. 7:9](#) I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of God*, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.

- If we are to understand the lessons from Israel's history, then we must understand that discipline is something that God brings to benefit us

[Heb. 12:7](#) It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?

[Heb. 12:8](#) But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

[Heb. 12:9](#) Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

[Heb. 12:10](#) For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness.

[Heb. 12:11](#) All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- All discipline feels a little like judgment
 - It's easy to get them confused in our own life
 - The writer to the Hebrews even acknowledges that it doesn't feel joyful to receive God's discipline
 - But it trains us
 - And after the training is over, we have a peaceful fruit of righteousness
 - Discipline trains us to do the right things rather than the wrong things
 - And when we do the right things – when we are righteous – we will have a peaceful life
 - Peace in our days, since we will not find ourselves bearing the consequences of sin
 - Peace in our minds, since we will not have the guilt and conviction of knowing we are doing the wrong thing
 - Peace in our hearts, since we will know we have pleased the Lord, and gained His approval
 - A God Who loves us enough to discipline us
- Our study is a study of God's discipline, not His judgment
 - For as God's children in faith, we are subject to His discipline, but never His wrath

- So with that difference understood, we're ready to watch God's discipline re-emerge with full force against Judah
 - Because, unfortunately, the discipline of 1Kings 11 is not the end of the story, but only the beginning
 - God's discipline had only a momentary effect on Judah
 - As I mentioned already, the history of the Southern Kingdom was an up and down history
 - Altogether they had 8 good kings but 11 bad kings
 - Rehoboam was a bad king, a man who didn't follow God's commandments
 - He was followed by a good king, his son Abijah
 - And so it went, back and forth for 345 years
- Until 605 BC
 - By 605 BC, God had determined to bring the Southern Kingdom under even more severe discipline
 - The nation of Judah would be taken captive by Babylon
 - And the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed
 - And even worse, the temple of Solomon would be destroyed
 - Severe discipline indeed
 - Jeremiah was the first to inform the nation of this coming judgment

[Jer. 25:1](#) ¶ The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon),

[Jer. 25:2](#) which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying,

[Jer. 25:3](#) "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.

[Jer. 25:4](#) "And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear,

[Jer. 25:5](#) saying, 'Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever;

[Jer. 25:6](#) and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm.'

[Jer. 25:7](#) "Yet you have not listened to Me," declares the LORD, "in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.

[Jer. 25:8](#) ¶ "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words,

[Jer. 25:9](#) behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and *I will send* to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

[Jer. 25:10](#) 'Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.

[Jer. 25:11](#) 'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

- This is the discipline of the Lord
 - You should note how that passage ended
 - The captivity would only last 70 years
 - It's not judgment, it's not destruction
 - It's a temporary step of discipline that eventually results in the nation returning to their land
 - But before He can bring them back and restore them, God must first bring them down to size
 - Remove their corrupt leaders
 - Banish their false teachers
 - And destroy their opportunity to worship with false and deceptive hearts – to profane true worship
 - To accomplish this, God goes out of His way to deal with each area independently
 - And he does it by bringing Neb into Jerusalem on three separate occasions

[2Chr. 36:5](#) ¶ Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD his God.

[2Chr. 36:6](#) Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him and bound him with bronze *chains* to take him to Babylon.

[2Chr. 36:7](#) Nebuchadnezzar also brought *some* of the articles of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon.

[2Chr. 36:8](#) Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and the abominations which he did, and what was found against him, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin his son became king in his place.

- As we conclude for this week, we see the beginning of God's elaborate plan to bring discipline to the nation of Judah
 - The seventeenth king on the throne in Judah is yet another evil king
 - And he has the dubious distinction of being the king to welcome the first of Neb three attacks on Jerusalem
 - He's dragged off to Babylon
 - We're told that Neb also began to raid the Temple
 - And he carries off some of the articles of the house
 - What 2Chr doesn't tell us is that Neb subjugation of the Jews also involved stripping them of their noblemen
 - Not only was the king taken, but so was Daniel and his friends

[Dan. 1:1](#) ¶ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

[Dan. 1:2](#) The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.

[Dan. 1:3](#) ¶ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles,

[Dan. 1:4](#) youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of* wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

- God is beginning a process of bringing down the nation of Judah

- And He's doing very methodically
 - Step one is leadership
 - The nations ills were directly related to the will and faithfulness of its leaders
 - Remember there have been multiple good and multiple bad kings
 - And as the kings went, so went the people
 - Therefore, if God is going to discipline the people and eventually restore them in a new form
 - He must begin with the corrupt leadership
 - So Neb is directed by God's hand to remove the king and all the noblemen who rule with him
 - Of course, in any operation like this, there is bound to be collateral damage, which is why Daniel is caught up
- So today, we see just the beginning of God's discipline
 - And we note that it starts with the those leading God's people
 - As God brings His discipline among and to His people, He will often bring it first to the leaders who are responsible for the poor state of affairs
 - And in our lives, when we are deserving of God's discipline, God may work in our lives to eliminate our opportunities to lead or direct God's people
 - We may be exiled, so to speak
 - We may see our desire to lead or initiate frustrated
 - We may find our idea falling on deaf ears, and our best efforts failing
 - Maybe we need to give attention to those situations by asking God where our own walk has departed from Him?
 - Because it's not too late
 - We don't necessarily have to see Step 2 & 3...like Judah did

Restoring Part 2

There were two small country churches located on a quiet country road just outside the big city. The road was barely traveled during the week, but on the weekends it became a popular route for folks from the big city looking for a pleasant weekend drive. At a particular point along that road happened to be two small churches that sat opposite one another at the edge of the road.

The two pastors of these churches often enjoyed working together, and so one Friday afternoon they were both standing in front of their churches at the edge of the road holding large signs for the passing motorists to read. One sign said "The end is near. Turn yourself around while you still can." The other sign said, "You're on a road to destruction. We can show you a better way."

As they stood holding their signs, the first car of the weekend approached and as the driver zoomed by, he yelled out the window "Leave us alone, you religious nuts!"

As the car continued on around the bend and out of sight, there came the sound of screech tires followed by a loud splash.

At this point, one of the pastors yelled across the road to the other, "You think maybe the signs should just say 'Bridge out?'"

- You see how important it is that we understand the warning signs in our life?
 - If we see the signs but don't understand what they are telling us, we're likely to drive right past them and into destruction
 - For that reason, we've been pursuing our case on the Lord's discipline and renewal
 - It's a case study of Israel
 - Of how they disobeyed, were disciplined and then patiently restored by God
 - The thesis I presented to you over the past two weeks was that God moved in a particular way to bring discipline to the people of Israel
 - And furthermore, that God often works in a similar if not identical pattern in our own lives

- And that if we observe and understand that pattern, then we will be better positioned to respond to it in the right way
- Last week we studied the difference between judgment and discipline
 - Judgment is God's wrath poured out on unbelievers
 - It is irrevocable and intended to result in destruction
 - We saw evidence of God' judgment at work in the northern kingdom of Israel
 - Discipline was God's means of correcting and maturing believers
 - It is a loving response of a Father to his children
 - It brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness
 - Though it is sorrowful for a time, according to Hebrews
 - We saw God's discipline last week begin to play out in the southern kingdom of Judah
- We read a lot of passages from the OT last week on the history of Israel
 - Hopefully the handout you have will help keep some of that history straight in your memory
 - The final passage I read began our story of how the Lord acted to discipline Judah after nearly 400 years of ups and downs
 - Of disobedience followed by repentance followed by more disobedience
 - That discipline played out in the lives of Judah's final three kings
 - Last week we ended with the passage from 2Chr 36, where the first of those three kings saw God's discipline begin
 - The king was Jehoiakim
 - Let's turn to 2Chr 36 and re-read his short story in verses 5-8

[2Chr. 36:5](#) ¶ Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD his God.

[2Chr. 36:6](#) Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him and bound him with bronze *chains* to take him to Babylon.

[2Chr. 36:7](#) Nebuchadnezzar also brought *some* of the articles of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon.

[2Chr. 36:8](#) Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and the abominations which he did, and what was found against him, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin his son became king in his place.

- This young king reigned until he was 36, doing evil the whole time
 - He was the first king to see discipline
- King Neb is an important figure in Biblical history
 - Neb is covered in detail in the book of Daniel
 - We are told he was raised up by God precisely for the purpose of becoming an instrument against the nation of Israel to exact God's punishment upon them
 - And in his day, he was the most powerful man on earth
 - When he conquered a new land, he did so with ruthlessly, and with great destruction
 - He left no resistance and tolerated no defiance
 - And he understood how to subjugate a people
 - When he took Jehoiakim, he also removed the noble class from Israel
 - As we studied last week briefly in the book of Daniel, tthis first attack left the nation without the best and brightest of the nobles
 - The ruling class that led the people at all levels
 - Not only was the king gone, but so were any who had the ability and position to take his place
 - Only Jehoaikim's son is left behind, and he is rather young and without much power apart from the nobles and military leadership

- More to the point, God had ensured that the people of Judah would understand His disappointment and anger at the leadership
 - First, on the corporate level God removed the evil ruling class, the leadership responsible for bring His people down
 - The Kings of Judah – like the Kings of Israel – were the one God entrusted to rule in His place
 - And as such, they are called to give an account for the spiritual health of the people under their charge
 - The kings in this day had authority to enforce the Law of God and ensure that the people were conforming to its demands and honoring God throughout the nation
 - But as the kings turned to evil, so went the people
 - And they were called to account for their actions
- The principle hasn't changed
 - God still calls leaders among His people to account for their leadership in directing the sheep into spiritual maturity and godly living

[Heb. 13:17](#) ¶ Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- Your leaders will give an account to the Lord Himself for how they handled their charge over you
 - And we have an obligation under scripture to make their jobs easy, not more difficult than it already is
 - But when the leaders fail to steer the ship correctly, and God decides to bring discipline, he often will begin at the top
 - As He did with Judah under Jehoiakim
- Secondly, God began to break down their protections
 - By removing their evil leaders, God had left the nation vulnerable
 - Without strong effective leadership, the people no longer could depend on an uninterrupted way of life

- They had to worry about outsiders, not the least among them, Neb and his army
 - Life became more difficult and more uncertain
 - They had to re-evaluate their disobedient way of life, or at least they should have
- This pattern is mirrored in our personal life
 - First, God may remove the leading influences in our lives that are bringing us harm and leading to disobedience
 - Whether those influences are friends, families, hobbies, financial obligations, time obligations
 - Perhaps a relationship ends abruptly
 - Perhaps a business fails
 - Perhaps a client withdraws his business
 - Perhaps our health declines suddenly
 - These negative influences in our spiritual life can take on a million forms because the enemy is crafty and he will use anything he can to bring us down
 - But God loves us too much too much to ignore those mistakes, and so He removes our protections
 - Like the high paying job or the carefree lifestyle or good health
 - And He brings us face to face with the vulnerability we each have before Him and His holiness
 - This is the discipline of the Lord
 - Are we ready to consider the possibility that sometimes, those difficulties we face in our life are not random chance, and they are not the product of the enemy
 - Sometimes they are God dealing with us where it hurts the most, so he can bring us to our knees
 - This is what He tried to do through Jehoiakim and the nobles of Judah
 - But it didn't work

- Let's read about Step 2 in God's discipline of Judah

[2Kings 24:8](#) ¶ Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem.

[2Kings 24:9](#) He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.

[2Kings 24:10](#) ¶ At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon went up to Jerusalem, and the city came under siege.

[2Kings 24:11](#) And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it.

[2Kings 24:12](#) Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his captains and his officials. So the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign.

[2Kings 24:13](#) He carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, just as the LORD had said.

[2Kings 24:14](#) Then he led away into exile all Jerusalem and all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.

[2Kings 24:15](#) ¶ So he led Jehoiachin away into exile to Babylon; also the king's mother and the king's wives and his officials and the leading men of the land, he led away into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

[2Kings 24:16](#) All the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all strong and fit for war, and these the king of Babylon brought into exile to Babylon.

[2Kings 24:17](#) Then the king of Babylon made his uncle Mattaniah king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

- So here again is a familiar pattern
 - The king does evil according to all his father had done
 - And this time he's reigning three months before God decides to take action against him
 - And so in the eighth year of Neb rule, the king returns to Judah, takes Jehoiachin captive and continues to ransack the city
 - He takes more treasure from God's house
 - He removes more men of valor, the fighting men of the army

- And he removes all the craftsman and smiths
- All that remained were the poorest people of the land
- And then Neb places Jehoiachin's uncle in his place and changes his name to Zedekiah as a sign of domination
- And so God continues with the stripping away, with the discipline of Judah
 - But there's clearly a new level of discipline in step 2
 - First, God removed all the treasure in the House of God
 - The house was standing, but the contents were gone
 - Not much could happen in the empty building now
 - Second, God has stripped away the artisans and craftsman
 - Commerce stops and building stops and daily life now is at risk
 - Poverty is the natural result
 - And he left behind only the poorest
 - God removed all source of privilege and honor
- And I would add, knowledge
 - God removes their sources of spiritual knowledge
 - I won't read the verses to you, but Ezek 11 gives us a description of God's anger burning against the evil teachers and prophets of this time
 - And how they were responsible for leading the people astray
 - So as Neb returns, God uses him to kill many of these evil men, so that the people are without teaching and spiritual direction

- So what does Step 2 look like in our lives
 - Well, consider what Step 1 meant
 - It was God removing the protected comfort of our disobedience lives
 - He removed those things in our life that we used to build and sustain our disobedient way of life
 - Those things that provided leadership, whether personal or material
 - We find ourselves searching for answers and new meaning
 - Questioning why life has thrown us a curveball
 - What happens if we don't use that opportunity to seek God and find answers in His word and through His Spirit?
 - Well, usually we turn elsewhere for answers
 - Our world loves to give us answers for why life is hard or why our circumstances are not to our liking
 - For why bad things happen to good people
 - And so we seek answers in the world's wisdom
 - It reminds me of former first lady Nancy Reagan

In *Leadership in the Reagan Presidency* Donald T. Regan famously revealed Ronald and Nancy Reagan's "most closely guarded domestic secret":

"Virtually every major move and decision the Reagans made during my time as White House Chief of Staff was cleared in advance with a woman in San Francisco who drew up horoscopes to make certain that the planets were in a favorable alignment."

- In Judah's day, the nation had long been under the direction of false teachers
 - And when God decided to bring discipline, He started with the leadership in removing their negative influence
 - And then He progressed to the nobleman
 - Then to the craftsman

- Then to the teachers and spiritual advisors
 - Each step was intended to discipline the people by removing their comfort and protection and earthly blessings
 - But each step also had the beneficial effect of removing the negative influences of evil leadership, selfish pursuits and false teaching
- Remember, God's purpose in discipline is not to destroy but the rebuild
 - He is systematically dismantling the elaborate system that had been built over the centuries within Judah
 - A system of leadership, commerce and teaching and worship that was false and deceptive and contributed to disobedience
 - The nation stopped following God and turned to follow evil leaders
 - They stopped pursuing holiness and became absorbed in pursuit of personal wealth and pleasure
 - They stopped learning God's commandments in his word and turned their ears toward false teachers and sorcerers who brought a more appealing message
 - So the Lord tore these things down
 - Have you seen some of these patterns in your life or in the life of someone close to you?
 - Remember, the point of this study is to recognize these patterns in our own lives and learn to respond in faith rather than in continued disobedience
 - So when you seen your security torn down and your personal plans disrupted and your opportunities to grow and learn shot down, where do you turn?
 - Do you seek the Lord and even praise Him in the midst of your circumstances?
 - Are you prepared to accept the Father's correction?
 - Or will you continue to rebel against it?

- Well, the people of Judah didn't get the message, and they continued to rebel
 - And so Neb returned once more

[2Chr. 36:11](#) ¶ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.

[2Chr. 36:12](#) He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the LORD.

[2Chr. 36:13](#) He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear *allegiance* by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel.

[2Chr. 36:14](#) Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful *following* all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the LORD which He had sanctified in Jerusalem.

[2Chr. 36:15](#) ¶ The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent *word* to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place;

[2Chr. 36:16](#) but they *continually* mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy.

[2Chr. 36:17](#) Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave *them* all into his hand.

[2Chr. 36:18](#) All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought *them* all to Babylon.

[2Chr. 36:19](#) Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles.

[2Chr. 36:20](#) Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia,

[2Chr. 36:21](#) to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

- This was God's final act against the nation of Israel
 - More evil, more disobedience
 - So God acts to bring His stiffest penalty
 - A remnant would be preserved, the rest destroyed and the nation and city devastated

- God were told brought messengers, prophets, to try to and turn the people one last time
 - But they would not listen
 - It's remarkable to me that after all they had experienced with the prior Kings
 - Neb having been there twice already
 - Having put down earlier rebellions
 - Having hauled away family members, leaders, craftsman, teachers, etc.
 - Still, they have a heart to rebel against God and Neb, whom God had appointed to judge the nation
 - It just goes to show us how deceitful sin can be
 - It drives us to ignore all the facts
 - It can cause us to set aside all the warnings and truth spoken to us by God through His messengers – through His word
- So God's anger burned against the people
 - Look at verse 16 – no remedy
 - And He brought the final step of discipline that He warned the people would come
 - If we think that because we are saved that God will overlook our sin indefinitely, we need only remember verse 16
 - Neb returns one last time, angry at yet another rebellion against his rule
 - So this time he is determined that there will be no further Jewish rebellions
 - Everything is taken and destroyed
 - And most notably, the city walls are destroyed and the Temple is burned and destroyed

- The effect is devastating
 - Judah is gone from the land
 - The people of Judah have lost the monarchy
 - They have lost their land
 - And they have lost their temple
 - And all three were taken by God because they had long ago left His word
 - And so it goes anytime God's people ignore the counsel of His word
 - When we obey God in our own lives, we can expect to receive a spiritual blessing in our work and in our obedience
 - And we also enjoy earthly blessings as well
 - But both these blessings are at risk when we allow our flesh to rule in our lives
 - But if we do, our heavenly Father will work in our lives through discipline to bring us into conformity with His word and His expectations
 - Judah paid a heavy price for disobedience
 - And in the coming weeks, we turn our attention to how God brought them back from captivity and began a work to restore them
 - Because His discipline isn't complete without restoration
 - He will restore us, but only after He has stripped away the crutches and distractions that are standing in the way of our obedience

Restoring Part 3

- For the past three weeks, we've been establishing the reality of God's discipline among His people
 - We first contrasted judgment with discipline
 - Judgment was the fate of the tribes in the north who did not receive God's mercy
 - Discipline was God's response for the southern tribes, who God purposed to save
 - And we also saw the lengths that God went to while waiting patiently for their return
 - In how He sent prophets time and time again calling upon the nation to repent
 - And then how God began to act in deliberate ways to teach the nation of Israel a lesson of the importance to follow Him fully
 - When it was time to act, God began by removing the corrupt leadership
 - He used Neb to exact punishment on the southern kingdom of Judah
 - Neb's army comes to Jerusalem three times
 - And in the first time, he removes the king of Israel
 - In fact, he removes the king in each of the three times he subdues the kingdom
 - In the first visit, he also takes the noblemen and educated class
 - Men like Daniel, who formed the highest levels of society in Israel
 - So that new leadership couldn't re-establish itself without Neb approval
 - In the second visit, Neb removes everyone artisan and educator in the city
 - The only men he leaves behind are the poorest

- The city is left without leaders or teachers
 - None who could direct the nation into the wrong sinful practices that had come to mark them up to this point
 - Then, after a final rebellion, Neb sent a third army against the city and utterly destroys it
 - Most notably, he removes the walls and the temple itself
 - Reducing them to their foundations
 - Finally, God's punishment on Israel had resulted in the loss of any opportunity to worship in the temple
- So God's discipline on the nation began as an assault
 - Against false leaders, false teachers, and then false worship
 - Leaving nothing for 70 years, until restoration

[Ezra 1:1](#) ¶ Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying:

[Ezra 1:2](#) ¶ "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

[Ezra 1:3](#) 'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem.

[Ezra 1:4](#) 'Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.'"

- In the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia
 - In other words, there is a new sheriff in town
 - While the Jews are in captivity, the Babylonian empire has given way to the Persian empire
 - And at the appointed time (70 years), God stirs Cyrus to release the Jews

- To show you how through God's planning has been toward Israel, I need to point out a small detail
 - The chronicler says that Cyrus was acting to fulfill the word of the Lord
 - According to Jeremiah 25
 - Jeremiah predicted that the nations captivity would last for 70 years at which time they would return
 - And then it was Isaiah who predicted the rebuilding of the southern kingdom:

[Is. 44:26](#) Confirming the word of His servant
 And performing the purpose of His messengers.
It is I who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited!'
 And of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built.'
 And I will raise up her ruins *again*.

[Is. 44:27](#) "*It is I* who says to the depth of the sea, 'Be dried up!'
 And I will make your rivers dry.

[Is. 44:28](#) "*It is I* who says of Cyrus, '*He is My shepherd!*
 And he will perform all My desire.'
 And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,'
 And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"

[Is. 45:1](#) ¶ Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed,
 Whom I have taken by the right hand,
 To subdue nations before him
 And to loose the loins of kings;
 To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:

- But did you notice that God even predicted who it was who would permit this rebuilding?
 - It was Cyrus of Persian
 - Isaiah mentions this man by name nearly 200 years before he was even born
 - Cyrus sends out a message saying that the Lord had appointed him as ruler of the earth, and he was to build a house for the Lord in Jerusalem
 - This is a pagan ruler of a pagan empire
 - Yet he responds to God with an obedient decree

- Cyrus even uses the traditional Jewish way of reckoning importance
- He says up to Jerusalem
- So often God seems to do this same thing with us
 - When He is determined to get our attention, God may use the world around us to affect his will, including using unbelievers to make his point
 - I think of the policeman who writes us a ticket for speeding
 - Or the stranger who reminds us to pick up the trash we leave behind at our seat in the movies
 - Times like that when we are supposed to be the ones living a Christ-like life and setting the example for others
 - But instead, we slip and fall
 - And then God seems to delight at times in using the obedience of an unbeliever to highlight our mistakes
 - How much more difficult is it for us – or anyone else – to preach the gospel to these observers when their only memory of Christians is one of sin
 - In the case of Cyrus, what did it tell the world that a pagan king was more concerned about following God's commands and decrees than were his own people?
- Turning our attention to the decree itself, God issues the decree in a very interesting way
 - Through Cyrus, God declares that Cyrus is supposed to build His House
 - And that whoever was among the people of God, let him go up to build it
 - This statement is fascinating
 - The king doesn't order anyone to do anything specifically
 - He says may God be with you and let anyone go up to Jerusalem to build the temple

- This is a free invitation
- The decree seeks men and women stirred by God in the same way Cyrus himself was stirred
- God is about to do a work of restoration in the nation of Israel
 - But it's a work that must begin with a desire to hear and follow the Lord
 - We might be tempted to think that this is a forgone conclusion
 - We might assume that anyone who had the opportunity to leave captivity would do it, right?
- When God begins to restore His people from a time of discipline, He opens doors but he doesn't shove
 - He is looking for faithful followers
 - And after 70 years of captivity, He's looking for those who were ready to follow Him
 - So he has Cyrus issue a decree inviting those stirred by God to go up to Jerusalem
- We know later in Ezra's account that only a little less than 50,000 Jews elected to return to Jerusalem
 - And this makes some sense when you consider what it meant to go back
 - First, they were leaving home
 - Second, they were going to a wilderness
 - Nothing there
 - Vulnerable
 - In other words, it was a real test of determination and faith for these Jews to return
 - It's usually the case that when God has brought about discipline, He will ask us to take a step of faith and trust in Him if we are to return to a walk with Him
 - None of these 50K had to leave

- They could have continued to live in Babylon, as many more Jews did
- But if these people had their hearts stirred to go up to Jerusalem
 - In other words, God had placed it on their hearts to respond to His kindness and take this step of faith
 - If you have this calling to return to obedience and you don't, you will continue to feel the call and the pressure to respond
 - We'll see that clearly when we look at Nehemiah
- Today, some of us may have felt as though we've been through those three steps of discipline
 - We may seen the sting of our disobedience at times past, and now we feel like we're in exile
 - Waiting for God to call us home as it were
 - Has God begun to call for you to return in a more faithful walk
 - Do you feel that tug on the heart?
 - Have you begun to go up as these Jews did?
- Finally, I want to point out what I believe is the most important piece of this call
 - It goes out to everyone but to no one in particular
 - There is no leader appointed
 - No one is directed to gather the Jews and take them home
 - The decree places the responsibility on each person individually to make a decision
 - The heart of each individual is clearly the issue here
 - Remember the first thing to be addressed in God's discipline of His people
 - It was the corrupting and sinful leadership of Israel
 - God systematically destroyed the kings of Israel because they had brought such great apostasy upon the nation

- Now when the time came to bring the nation back into the land, how would you and I supposed God would begin that restoration?
 - We would assume God would begin by raising up a great leader
 - But He doesn't
 - Consider the history of the nation of Israel
 - There was a time once before when the nation was without kings
 - The time of Judges
 - God ruled the people by speaking and ruling through the judges
 - But the people cried out for a king and God permitted Samuel to anoint a king, though He warned them it would lead to much misery
- And of course, God was right
 - Since the people were not content to be ruled by God to follow His decrees faithfully, they turned to kings
 - And these kings failed them
 - Only God is our perfect and righteous King and Judge
- So as He begins to bring the people back to the land, He isn't rushing to place men in positions of leadership over the people
 - His first priority is to establish faithful men and women who will follow God before they ever think about following a man
 - Because if God had replaced their leadership before the people were ready and willing to follow Him personally, then they might never follow God
 - Their loyalties would be with the new king, not God
 - Someday they may again be confronted with unrighteous leadership
 - But if their hearts are true to God, then they will never lose their way

- So the people assemble and prepare for the long trip back to Jerusalem
 - And each is to bring a freewill offering collected from among those who remain behind
 - Because rebuilding the temple is not free
 - I love how God finds provision for his faithful few even from among the many who didn't personally feel the call to return
 - You know, it may be that way for us at times
 - As we retreat from exile and return to where God has called us to be
 - The sacrifice that obedience requires may ultimately be met by a provision that comes from the most unlikely of places
 - Just as we might feel the conviction of the HS brought upon us through the unbelieving world
 - Likewise, God may choose to bless our subsequent obedience by making provision through others who lack the conviction or courage to walk with us
 - Our God is a mighty God, Jehovah Jirah – Provider
- We've heard of revivals in scripture
 - I think you're seeing a revival here
 - The people stirred by God's call
 - And in response to that call, they set their minds and hearts on a difficult walk of faith
 - A walk that demands sacrifice
 - Ultimately, it's a walk toward worship
 - They are returning to rebuild the house of the Lord
 - And the house of the Lord is a place of prayer and worship
 - These are people who feel called to worship God, and the call is so strong in their lives, they are willing to risk everything else

[Ezra 3:1](#) ¶ Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

[Ezra 3:2](#) Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

[Ezra 3:3](#) So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening.

[Ezra 3:4](#) They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and *offered* the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required;

[Ezra 3:5](#) and afterward *there was* a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the LORD that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the LORD.

[Ezra 3:6](#) From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, but the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.

- Soon after reaching the land, three men rise to the foreground to organize the people
 - Jeshua, and his brothers, and Zerubbabel, and his brothers
 - These men are mentioned prominently, but yet it is still a group
 - The building committee
 - And they begin the work
 - They set up the simplest of stone altar on what remained of the temple's foundation
 - And even as they worked, they were terrified of the peoples in the land
 - The word means dread
 - What a pitiful scene, isn't it?
 - The group is small
 - It's leaderless
 - It's vulnerable
 - It's in fear from attack

- The setting for worship is crude and completely stripped of anything magnificent or even suitable
 - The only things present are the people themselves, a rough stone altar, and the sky above them
 - Oh, and God Himself
 - And so everything is just as God wanted it
- This is a worship service stripped clean of all the things that might have been mistaken for worship or of God Himself
 - They have been brought back to the heart of worship
- First, they are at the place God appointed
 - They have come to His place on His terms
 - They have built the altar He required
 - And they are without all the trappings of religious practice that men so often come to mistake for true worship
 - They have only a heart to approach Him and bless His name
 - Secondly, they are vulnerable, and completely dependent on God
 - That's not to say that they weren't always 100% dependent on God
 - But these circumstances make that dependence utterly clear
 - It's so easy for all of us to forget that worship is not a once-a-week activity
 - We should worship everyday with our very lives
 - Occasionally, I believe God needs to bring us back to basics so we can understand that worship isn't about what's going on around us
 - It's about what's going on inside of us
 - Example in home church...

- Finally, what is the basis for Judah's new found worship?
 - Where did they go as a community of believers in learning how to worship God
 - To learn of His expectations and seek His will?
 - Verse 2 tells us
 - They did what they did according to the word of God
 - And verses 3 & 4 continue to describe how they observed the things God had prescribed in the Law
 - And they rejoiced in those things
 - So if we are feeling called to return to God in a new and heartfelt way
 - Having experienced His discipline and now ready to follow Him anew
 - Where do we go to learn what that kind of life will look like
 - We go to God's word

[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.

[Rom. 12:2](#) 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.

[Eph. 4:1](#) ¶ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

[Eph. 4:2](#) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

[Eph. 4:3](#) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

- In other words, the worship that defines a true, heartfelt walk with the Lord is not a worship of Sunday mornings attendance
 - Though our attendance in worship is an important element
- And our worship is not faithful practice of rituals or ceremonies

- Though many of these things can be useful to enhance our experience
- And worship is not something performed by musicians and pastors
 - Those our leaders have been raised up by the Lord to encourage our faithfulness
- Worship begins with a heart's response to God's call to walk with Him in a self-sacrificial attitude
 - And to put nothing before Him and His call
 - And to strip away all the barriers and distractions to such a life,
 - Even if we feel vulnerable and helpless and even foolish
 - For then we come to depend on Him and abide in Him
 - And then He can do great things through us
- Just as God is not prepared to do in the life of Judah, having brought them back to the heart of worship

Restoring Part 4

- Last week we studied the first step of God's restoration for the nation of Israel
 - God stirs the heart of the King of Persia to release the Jews from captivity
 - While simultaneously stirring the hearts of nearly 50,000 Jews to answer the call to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple
 - And as this first band of refugees arrived in what was left of Jerusalem
 - They made a crude altar and began to worship God
 - And in last weeks' study, we saw God's wisdom at work
 - In how He took a small, vulnerable band of Jews who were willing to step out in faith and obedience
 - And God brought them back into the land
 - And he showed the heart of worship
 - No frills, no distractions
 - Just the people, with hearts to worship and thank God
 - With a total dependence on God
 - And with the people showing a true heart to worship, God was pleased
 - And we noted that this is the natural beginning for every good work of God
 - He desires our obedient worship before anything else
- So the first step of restoration was the restoration of worship
 - Today we study the second step of restoration for God's people
 - We continue our study in Ezra

[Ezra 7:6](#) This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God *was* upon him.

[Ezra 7:7](#) Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

[Ezra 7:8](#) ¶ He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

[Ezra 7:9](#) For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God *was* upon him.

[Ezra 7:10](#) For 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.

- The original group of exiles to return to Jerusalem consisted of approximately 50,000 men, women and children
 - That group had been escorted by Zerubbabel and Jeshua along with other men
 - There was no clearly defined leader within the nation
 - No king, no judge, no prophet
 - Just the people who had chosen to follow the hearts back to the city
 - So they could worship God there
 - Then about 63 years goes by
 - During that time, the original ragtag group of Jews manages to finish rebuilding the temple
 - Though it's nothing like the magnificence of Solomon's original temple
 - It still demonstrated the obedience of the Jewish nation to answer God's call and rebuild his house in Jerusalem
 - And at this point, God is ready for step 2
- Before we look deeper into the second step of restoration, we need to pause long enough to note one detail
 - God waited 46 years before taking step two

- That's a long time
- The events of the book of Esther take place during this period of time
- In fact, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the last events of the Old Testament chronologically
- God waited patiently while the refugees set about the work of rebuild the temple
 - And if you know the story, their work didn't go smoothly
 - At one point, the encounter objections from the surrounding people who protested to the new king of Persia
 - That resulted in a delay until the new king verified that the rebuilding was authorized
 - Another time, the nation of Israel because lazy and complacent in building their own homes rather than God's house
 - We studied a little bit about that when I taught here last November
- All in all, it required 20 years to rebuild the temple
 - And then God waited another 43 years before sending He began to work again
 - God is looking for sustained performance
 - He had set this nation back on a course of faithfulness
 - And He began by establishing a new heart to worship
 - But He wanted to ensure it was true and lasting
- It's so important to remember that God doesn't measure our faithfulness to His commands in moments but in lifetimes
 - It wasn't enough that the temple was rebuilt, even though that was the basis for God calling them to their return to the land
 - God waited another 40+ years to know if their hearts were still true to Him in worship

- Were they task-oriented or God-oriented?
- But now God is ready to send Ezra
 - Ezra we're told decides he too must join the rest of the nation that has returned to the land
 - So Ezra receives permission from the new king of Persia, Artaxerxes to accompany the latest band of refugees to return to the land
 - Ezra is a fascinating character in scripture
 - His full name is Azariah, which means Yahwek has helped
 - He was a descendent of Aaron, the first High Priest of Israel
 - He's a scribe
 - A scribe was a person who copied or wrote or communicated documents
 - It was specialized skill in that day, since most men didn't write
 - Scribes were usually important people, in that they held important roles in the king's court
 - They were often secretaries or messengers for the king
- Ezra however established an entirely new role for scribes in the nation of Israel
 - Verse 10 says that Ezra set his heart to study the Law of the Lord
 - More specifically, Ezra has a heart to study God's word
 - To practice it
 - To teach the statues and ordinances to Israel
 - Wow...would that we could be like Ezra
 - Wouldn't' it be a fantastic note for our headstone if it could read
 - Dear old Dad set his heart to know God's word, to live God's word, to teach God's word
 - Our sweet mother set her heart...

- That was Ezra
 - And the way Ezra made God's word a priority in his life made him the perfect man for the job when God was ready for step two of Israel's restoration
 - God wanted a teacher
 - Look at the commission that God gave Ezra through the king of Persia
 - It comes a little later in chapter 7 of Ezra in verse 25

[Ezra 7:25](#) ¶ "You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in *the province* beyond the River, *even* all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant *of them*."

[Ezra 7:26](#) "Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment."

- Like He did earlier with Cyrus, God places a burden on the heart of the new king of Persia, Artaxerxes
 - And this king gives Ezra a mission
 - Ezra is to return to Israel
 - But this time the commission is to do two things
 - First, Ezra is to appoint magistrates and judges to judge the people of Israel
 - But if there are to be judges, then the people must know what is expected of them
 - They need to be taught
 - And so Ezra's second purpose
 - Teach the people who are ignorant of God's laws
 - And the king is so serious about seeing God's law observed, he grants Ezra the authority to impose capital punishment against anyone who refused to obey the laws

- Remember the way brought discipline to the nation of Israel?
 - First he removed leadership, then instruction , then worship
 - And so far, God has restored worship
 - And now He is restoring teaching
 - But with teaching comes accountability
 - Ezra will travel back to Jerusalem bringing God's word
 - But he also comes with authority to hold the nation of Israel accountable should they fail to hold to it
 - As we see God's purposes play out in Jewish history, give a moment to consider how God will bring this same pattern to bear in your own life
 - We've already said that God will discipline His children so that we might be rebuilt in a new way according to His desires
 - And that God's first priority is to seek a heart of worship within His people
 - That God will place us in a position where we can fully appreciate our dependence and reliance on Him
 - Then as our heart seeks Him, we come to appreciate what worship looks like in our lives
 - We understand it's not just a weekly gathering with singing and study
 - It's a daily life of living in praise and service to God
 - Then comes step 2 in our lives
 - At some point after we return to a heart of worship, God is ready to engage our minds
 - In other words, our desire to worship God must be matched with a commitment to know God
 - And not just know Him according to our own desires,
 - But truly to know Him according to how He has revealed Himself

- If you want a simple picture of how God's call to worship is always followed by a command to know and follow His word, consider your own salvation
 - When God called you into faith and gave you the Holy Spirit, I'm willing to bet that brought the expected response in your life
 - You praised His name
 - You called out to the Lord in repentance and thanks
 - You began to understand and appreciate the amazing work of the cross, where God would bear your punishment in your place
 - And your heart responded in worship and thanks
 - And this state may have been the extent of your Christian walk for some time
 - But then God placed new expectations on your heart
 - Having come to faith, you were then challenged to study God's word
 - Perhaps you were taught this or discovered yourself while in the Bible

[Eph. 5:15](#) ¶ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,
[Eph. 5:16](#) making the most of your time, because the days are evil.
[Eph. 5:17](#) So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

- The proper and expected course of development for any Christians is a careful disciplined study of God's word
 - Combined with a diligence to obey that word
- And it's no different for the nation of Israel
 - God is bringing Ezra to educate them on His word and then gives him authority to ensure it is followed
- A knowledge of God's truth combined with a commitment to follow it are essential to a godly life that pleases God
 - What if God hadn't sent Ezra to Israel?
 - They might have continued to worship for a while longer

- But it wouldn't have lasted
- In time their hearts would grow cold, their worship would be silenced
- This happens a lot in the church today
 - Too often Christians depend on emotion and feels for their Christian experience
- They seek experiences
 - Dynamic worship
 - Power messages from the pulpit with just enough humor
 - The emotional rush of a compelling testimony
- None of those experiences are wrong or bad in and of themselves
 - The problem comes when that's all we have to show for our faith
 - When the meat of God's word isn't a staple in our spiritual diet, we are subsisting on junk food, and eventually it will catch up with us
- When God send Ezra to teach, the expectation is that that nation of Israel would learn
 - And here's the lesson for us this morning
 - God restores his children patiently, carefully
 - And once the heart is has begun to worship, it's time to work on the mind
 - And so God will send us teachers
 - But the teachers can't learn for us
 - We must decide for ourselves that we will engage upon a life of learning in God's word
 - Because consider what's still remains in God's plan for restoration
 - There is still no leader within the nation
 - Ezra isn't the leader

- He is at best the caretaker
 - Ezra will appoint men to enforce the laws of God, but judges and magistrates are hardly leaders in the true sense of the word
 - The nation is still waiting for the last step of restoration
 - Which suggests that like the first step of worship, God is waiting to see if His people are faithful in their commitment to Him
- Perhaps this is where some of us remain even now
 - Perhaps some of us have gone through the valley with God
 - We've experienced His discipline in our lives
 - Then He called us back and we restarted our walk with Him
 - We returned to church or a small group
 - We turned away from things in our life that pulled us way from God
 - But then God was ready to take the next step in our lives
 - He brings us to a place where we can be taught His word
 - Maybe we received an invitation to a Bible study that we turned down
 - Or perhaps someone gives us a self-study course, but we tossed it aside
 - Maybe we just had a chance to hear the Bible taught at church on the Sunday service, but we never seem to make it
 - We seem stuck at step one
 - Remember how long God waited for the nation of Israel to be ready to move beyond step 1
 - Do you think you can outlast God in your life?
- Brothers and sisters, the Bible says we all face God's discipline as a child of God
 - And therefore we all will experience His restoration in some form and to some degree

- But when we fail to mature forward as God directs, you can be sure that God won't give us a free pass
- And if we don't devote ourselves to the step of maturing in the study of His word, we are going to slip and fall back eventually
- Consider the warning the writer of Hebrews offered his readers when they failed to mature in their study of God's word

[Heb. 5:12](#) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

[Heb. 5:13](#) For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

[Heb. 5:14](#) But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

- These readers were mature enough in their faith that they should have been prepared to teach other Christians
 - Instead, they were still babes in their own spiritual understanding
 - They needed to be retaught in fact
 - They were partaking only of milk, and so they weren't accustomed to the word of righteousness
 - They hadn't graduated to solid food
- If we fail to take up the challenge to study and know and live God's word, we cannot discern good from evil
 - We are ready for a new fall
 - And sooner or later, that fall will happen
- God is restoring the Israel in a patient and wise way
 - Before God brought Ezra the teacher to the nation of Israel, God called them to worship Him with a pure heart
 - Because what good was knowledge without a heart to follow and obey it

- And before God will bring Nehemiah the leader for his people, God called them to know and follow His word
 - Because what good is a leader if God's people remain ignorant of right and wrong in their spiritual walk
 - No leader can lead a group that won't follow
- But if they will worship God and follow His commandments, then God will do great things with that people
- And so it is with us
 - God waits for us to show a heart to worship Him and not our idols
 - Then God waits patiently for us devote ourselves to a study of His word
 - And if we do these things, God will delight to send us leaders to direct us into great works to His glory
- And in a few decades, God will raise up a man by the name of Nehemiah
 - And as we study next week, Nehemiah will arrive just in time to contend with a people who still show signs of a wandering heart
 -

Restoring Part 5

George was 28 years old, single, and still living with his parents. One Sunday morning, George told his mother he wasn't going to church. "First," he said, "I'm tired. Second, the people there don't like me. And third, the sermons are dull." But George's mother wouldn't take no for an answer. "George," she said, "you have to go. First, we always worship on Sunday. Second, it doesn't matter whether they like us or not. And third, you are the pastor!"

Great illustration of leadership: In serving God, we don't seek out positions of leadership, they seek us.

- And today we turn our attention to the final act in God's three-part process for restoring His children
 - The final step of restoring leadership, through a man named Nehemiah
 - Last week we examined step 2, restoring teaching
 - Our central conclusion was that God desires to bring about in His people a full knowledge of Himself through a study of His word
 - We remember the writer of Hebrews saying unless we devote ourselves to the practice of studying God's word
 - We will not have the ability to discern good from evil
 - So if His people are to move forward in pleasing their Lord, then they must walk in the knowledge of Him
 - The reason for addressing teaching separately from leadership is simple
 - A godly leader must lead according to God's word
 - He must give direction and place expectations on the people trusting that those people will follow his command
 - And if the leader is going to exhort the people on the basis of God's word
 - Then he must expect that those people have a similar respect and appreciation for God's word
 - Ex: Our president can command authority in our land because the people he leads agrees that the Constitution rules over us all

- Similarly, the leader God appoints is called to rule according to the word and the people must receive him on that basis
- Sadly, a knowledge of God's word won't eliminate the schemes of the enemy
 - The enemy and the world he controls never ceases in their attacks against God's people
 - Even when we are taught God's word, our flesh is still capable of being draw away from a walk in that truth
 - This is exactly what began to happen to refugees who had returned to the land of Israel
 - And the story of that stumble sets us our studies in Nehemiah

[Ezra 9:1](#) ¶ Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, *those* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites.

[Ezra 9:2](#) "For they have taken some of their daughters *as wives* for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness."

- Remember when the first group of Jews returned to the land under Zurababble how they felt?
 - They were afraid for the people living around them
 - They were surrounded by the pagan cultures that had re-established themselves in the land after the Israelites had been taken away
- Now, some 60-70 years after they've returned to the land, here they are intermarrying with these culture
 - At first, we might be tempted to dismiss this as a minor indiscretion
 - After all, it's just a marriage

- Do you remember why the nation of Israel had received God's punishment in the first place?
 - God brought Neb and took the nation into captivity because they had played the harlot in worshipping false idols and gods
 - And that idol worship began with Solomon taking foreign wives
 - Those women brought a corrupting influence into the kings court and the nation
 - And when a leader becomes unfaithful, it's only a matter of time before those under him follow
- In verse 2 we hear that this particular offense included the princes and rulers of the clans and tribes
 - Here again, the pattern of sin that had been responsible for the previous stumbling of the nation seems to be repeating itself yet again

[Ezra 9:3](#) When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled.

[Ezra 9:4](#) Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me, and I sat appalled until the evening offering.

- Ezra steps into the gap
 - And he shows his immense displeasure and astonishment and fear of the Lord for the sake of the sinning Jews
 - Ezra knew what this meant
 - It was an act that would almost certainly provoke God's anger
 - They had just been restored to the land not 70 years earlier, and here they are starting the very same mistake again
 - What do you think God was prepared to do in response to this offense?
 - Ezra doesn't want to find out

- And when the people see Ezra's response, those who feared God's wrath gathered to Ezra
 - And they all sat perplexed
 - Finally, Ezra speaks to the people

[Ezra 9:5](#) ¶ But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God;

[Ezra 9:6](#) and I said, "O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens.

[Ezra 9:7](#) "Since the days of our fathers to this day we *have been* in great guilt, and on account of our iniquities we, our kings *and* our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity and to plunder and to open shame, as *it is* this day.

[Ezra 9:8](#) "But now for a brief moment grace has been *shown* from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage.

[Ezra 9:9](#) "For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

[Ezra 9:10](#) ¶ "Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments,

[Ezra 9:11](#) which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end *and* with their impurity.

[Ezra 9:12](#) 'So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good *things* of the land and leave *it* as an inheritance to your sons forever.'

[Ezra 9:13](#) "After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited *us* less than our iniquities *deserve*, and have given us an escaped remnant as this,

[Ezra 9:14](#) shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape?

[Ezra 9:15](#) "O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as *it is* this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this."

- Ezra gives an impassioned speech to the people calling them to repent and return to following God's commands
 - If you were to read into chapter 10, you learn how the people repent at hearing Ezra's words
 - And he commands them to separate from their foreign wives and seek God's forgiveness
 - Which they do
 - But this whole episode is likely to repeat unless two problems are solved
 - First, Israel needs a wall to separate itself from the peoples living around them
 - Secondly, they need a leader to direct them according to the ways of righteousness
- As our series moves into our final book, the book of Nehemiah
 - I invite you to study with me the pattern God uses to raise up godly leadership for his children as He restores them out of discipline
 - The book of Nehemiah is often taught as a study in leadership principles
 - And there are many good examples of leadership principles at work in the story of Nehemiah
 - But that's not the true purpose of this account
 - The real purpose is to demonstrate how a godly leader will be raised up and called to work among God's people to complete His restoration

[Neh. 1:1](#) ¶ The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

¶ Now it happened in the month Chislev, *in* the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol,

[Neh. 1:2](#) that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped *and* had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

[Neh. 1:3](#) They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

[Neh. 1:4](#) ¶ When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

- Nehemiah is employed in the service of the king of Persia
 - Look down at verse 11
 - He's a cupbearer for the king
 - And in the month of Chislev, roughly Nov-Dec
 - He hears about the plight of his people in Jerusalem
 - Now consider that this news comes fourteen years after Ezra had been sent down to Jerusalem
 - Nehemiah is still asking about the people who went down to the city
 - And then when he hears the news of how they city was still vulnerable
 - Basically, it's still a wreck
 - He is overcome with grief for days
 - If you ever wanted to know what a godly burden looks like, here it is
 - Nehemiah is carrying a burden for his people and the city
 - And here he is still asking about them 14 years later
 - Hoping to hear good news
 - But when he doesn't, it crushes him
 - That's a reaction that can only be explained as a burden laid on his heart by God
 - In fact, Nehemiah carries a burden for God's glory and His word

[Neh. 1:5](#) I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,

[Neh. 1:6](#) 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, on behalf of the

sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned.

[Neh. 1:7](#) "We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

[Neh. 1:8](#) "Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples;

[Neh. 1:9](#) 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.'

[Neh. 1:10](#) "They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.

[Neh. 1:11](#) "O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man."

¶ Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

- Nehemiah is so distraught over the circumstances in the city that prays for God to honor His word concerning the people
 - He's referring to Lev 26, where God declared that when Israel repented, He would restore them
 - Nehemiah is asking that God would be true to His word at this time
 - Immediately, we're confronted with a basic principle of how God brings leaders to guide His people
 - He doesn't cause them to audition for the post
 - He doesn't entice them with promises of personal fame or fortune
 - He doesn't lay out a career path where each group is merely another rung on a ladder
 - When God wants a man to move into a position of leadership and restore His people
 - He gives that man a burden
 - An unshakable, unmistakable calling to serve God's people

- And to do so for God's glory and for the fulfillment of His word
 - The people are important, but it's God glory that matters most
- Nehemiah was burdened
 - Hw was asking about these people long after most everyone else had forgotten them
 - He mourns the bad news
 - And He immediately appeals to God for a solution
 - He was a leader who recognized that obedience to God's word demanded action
 - And in verse 11 Nehemiah begins to contemplate that solution
 - Nehemiah begins to wonder if he might be the one God will use to accomplish that plan
 - But how can Nehemiah be the one, since he was the cupbearer for the king
- The role of cupbearer is an interesting one
 - Ostensibly, he served the king his cup
 - But the role was much more important than that
 - He was much like a body guard
 - He had the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the king's food supply
 - He was like the head of the secret service
 - Since he knew he would eat and drink anything before the king did, he made sure the entire food chain was free from enemies
 - He commanded a great deal of respect and authority
 - And he naturally became one of the king's most trusted advisors
 - In other words, Nehemiah served in a role where you couldn't just up and leave anytime you wanted

- The only way he could fact upon his burden was if God open a door for him to leave
- And so God brings about that opportunity

[Neh. 2:1](#) ¶ And 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. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

[Neh. 2:2](#) So the king said to me, “Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.” Then I was very much afraid.

- The second chapter begins with the month of Nisan
 - This is roughly Mar-Apr on our calendar
 - This is significant because it means that between chapter 1 and chapter 2 of Nehemiah, roughly four months have passed
 - For about 120 days, Nehemiah went into the work and into the king’s presence with this burden on his heart
 - He was standing in the company of a man who could have released him to join his brethren with just a word
 - He must have thought time and time again about how he could raise the topic or ask the question of the king
 - His desire to press the issue and receive a response must have been eating away at him
 - And yet he didn’t say anything to the king for four long months
 - What was Nehemiah doing during that time?
 - Remember verse 4
 - Nehemiah began four months of praying to God for action
 - Now as we read this story, it’s easy to connect the dots
 - Too easy in fact
 - We see Nehemiah pray and then we see God act

- But what do you think was running through Nehemiah's mind at about the second or third month?
 - Do think he was growing impatient with God?
 - Have you ever had that same tendency in your walk
 - You feel you've done your Christian duty to pray to God for an answer
 - You've been praying for some time
 - But eventually, you decide either that God isn't going to answer you
 - Or that you need to do something instead of nothing
 - So you get busy
- When God is ready for us to act, I am convinced that God is fully capable of making His will known to each of us
 - When God wants you to know it's time to act and when He's ready to show you where and how to respond, He won't hesitate to do it
 - And you won't miss it
 - You might not like the answer, and you might not obey it, but you won't miss it
 - So often the real test of prayer is in the waiting for God to answer
 - And in not assuming that God's silence is equal to an answer
- Nehemiah is often taught as a man of prayer
 - A man who sought God's will before taking action
 - And that he certainly was
 - But I think we often overlook the real lesson in Nehemiah's prayer life
 - Nehemiah was going to wait on God to open a door and direct his steps
 - Nehemiah's real virtue with respect to prayer was his patience

- If God had not opened the door for another 4 months or 4 years, I believe Nehemiah would have waited
 - And all the while, his burden would have continued to be there for his people in Israel
- But then God opened that door for Nehemiah
 - In verse 1, Nehemiah says I had not been sad in the king's presence
 - This was an important detail to the story because part of Nehemiah's official duties were to never show any sadness in the presence of the king
 - In fact, no one in the king's court could show any sadness or unpleasant emotion before the King
 - Under Persian law, anyone who would dare show themselves unhappy before the king could be executed, and usually were
 - The Persians were especially strict in enforcing their laws
 - And so Nehemiah has been careful to keep to that expectation in his duties, he says
- But then in verse 2, the king perceives Nehemiah's sadness nonetheless
 - Now, if we are going to take Nehemiah at his word, and I believe we should,
 - Then it's necessary to assume that the king didn't come to know of Nehemiah's sad disposition through observation
 - He must have come to know if it supernaturally
 - In other words, God revealed to king Darius that Nehemiah was sad
 - Which causes Nehemiah great fear, because he knew the king could have him put to death
 - This is God opening a door
 - God selected this day to reveal to the king of Nehemiah's burden
 - And though Nehemiah did nothing different on this day, God intervened to open this conversation

- God could have created this opportunity on any day, but He choose to wait until today
 - And Nehemiah's patience in waiting on God was now being rewarded
- When God opens up a need for leadership for the sake of His people, He also raises up men to fill that need
 - I believe the scriptures teach us that when God is ready to provide that leader, he will begin with a man who's burdened for the work that lies ahead
 - A burden for God's people and for God's word and for God's glory
 - And that man will often be someone who isn't looking for the opportunity
 - At least not at first
 - And when he senses the burden, his first response will be to pray and seek the Lord's intervention
 - But ultimately, that burden must be combined with patience to ensure that God's timing and purpose lead the way
 - Leader is a man who answers a call, not a man who calls with all the answers
 - And he knows that if God has brought the burden and the call, then He can be trusted to provide the means of answer as well
- Finally, God will often raise a leader who doesn't fit the classic mold
 - Here, God is raising up a cupbearer to become a wall builder and leader among a nation
 - Nehemiah didn't go to wall building school
 - More than that, he had no background in building at all, as far as we know
 - In other words, in the eyes of men, he was wholly unqualified
 - And yet he was God's man for this job

- To be fair, Nehemiah was someone who had already developed leadership expertise in his role as cupbearer
 - So it's not that God had done nothing to prepare the man
 - It just might not look like the way the world would expect
- As we leave the study today and look ahead to next week, consider the effort God is willing to go to bring the right man to the task of restoring His people
 - He draws someone from a great distance
 - And at great personal risk he gives that man a deep burden for His people
 - And He orchestrates events within the halls of the most powerful man on earth
 - All so that a cupbearer might be appointment to this important task
 - What is God willing to do for you when the time comes to restore you with godly leadership?
 - While we could draw comparisons easily for the sake of the church
 - Don't forget to make a personal application
 - What kind of man or woman will God bring you when the time is right to lead you forward in your walk of obedience
 - Are we going to be ready to accept them when that time comes?

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Restoring Part 6

Leonard Ravenhill, Christian Evangelist and author tells about a group of American tourists visiting a picturesque village in his home country of Great Britain. The Americans had been overwhelmed by the rich history of England, and especially the number famous and notable men who been born or buried in the small towns that dotted the countryside.

At one point in their tour, walked a short distance along a quaint country road in one of those little towns, and they happened upon an old man sitting beside a fence. It was obvious that this man was a local, who wasn't particularly impressed by the group of foreigners.

One tourist asked the man, in a rather patronizing tone, "Were any great men born in this village?"

The old man replied, "Nope, only babies."

- Great men all start the same way
 - As babies
 - This was an apt description of Nehemiah's start
- We ended in our Nehemiah study in chapter 2,
 - Just as Nehemiah had been surprised by the king with the question of why he was sad
 - Sadness was = the death
 - Had not been sad though
 - We're watching how God calls and prepares a man to become a leader for the sake of His people
 - And today we begin to watch that man as he assumes the role God had called him to assume
 - I said last week that Nehemiah is ultimately a study in how God raises up godly leaders over His people
 - Told through the experiences of Nehemiah

- For our purposes today, we're going to concentrate on certain aspects of this story as they apply to our theme
 - How God will bring godly leaders into our lives and into our church in order to propel us forward toward greater righteousness
- Start back in the King's court listening to Neh response to the king's question

[Neh. 2:2](#) So the king said to me, “Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.” Then I was very much afraid.

[Neh. 2:3](#) 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?”

[Neh. 2:4](#) Then the king said to me, “What would you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.

[Neh. 2:5](#) I said to the king, “If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.”

[Neh. 2:6](#) Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, “How long will your journey be, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time.

[Neh. 2:7](#) 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,

[Neh. 2:8](#) 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.” And the king granted *them* to me because the good hand of my God *was* on me.

- The king catches Nehemiah off guard when he asks his question
 - And we know he asked it in the first place because God directed his attention to Nehemiah’s sadness
 - But Nehemiah feared for his life
 - But look at his response
 - Nehemiah speaks boldly and truthfully in response to the King’s questions
 - He says that his sadness was because his people were suffering in Jerusalem
 - Even in the face of a potential life threatening situation, he doesn’t lie
 - Obviously, this tells us that the man had integrity – a godly leader
 - But it goes deeper than that
 - He’s a man whose looking for God to answer his prayers
 - He’s been praying for 4 months

- But it hasn't stopped looking for God to answer that prayer
- So when this unexpected, dangerous question comes from the king, Nehemiah may be surprised but he's not unprepared
 - He recognizes it as the moment he's been praying for
 - So he steps up to answer the king
- When you are looking for God to do the impossible, as was the case here
 - Then when the impossible happens, you aren't afraid to embrace it
 - Even when it seems like the worst possible alternative
- When the king hears Nehemiah's request, he asks when will you be back
 - In other words, you can go, but I want you to return
 - God is sending Nehemiah to attend to the needs of the city and the people
 - But before he gets any wrong ideas, God makes clear that this isn't going to be the start of another monarchy
 - In fact, Nehemiah will be called governor of Judah
 - And he will be there for a term or two
 - But God is going to reserve the place of king for himself in Christ
- I see a principle at work in this fact, one that carries over into the church today
 - God's idea of leadership usually isn't man's idea
 - People tend to prefer to have leaders with impressive titles and power and authority
 - Israelites with Samuel and Saul

[1Sam. 8:4](#) ¶ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah;

[1Sam. 8:5](#) and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations."

[1Sam. 8:6](#) But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD.

[1Sam. 8:7](#) The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.

- Until that moment God had provided leadership through judges like Samuel who enforced God's law
 - But then God allowed the monarchy to come into being
 - So that the nation could appreciate how much better it was to have God as their king
- I talked last week about our tendency to overlook the leaders God brings us to guide our walk with Him
 - Probably the classic ways to overlook leaders is to repeat the mistake of Israel in the day of Samuel
 - We are so busy looking for someone mighty and impressive that we forget what the Bible teaches
 - It is God who leads and guides all His children
 - And He is capable of working through a small child as He is working through a mighty preacher or king
 - We need to be careful not to reject God and demand leaders of our own making
 - Leadership for the church is no different today than it was in the time of judges
 - Our king has already been appointed by the Father to rule over the church
 - And it is His Son, Our Lord Jesus
 - And the Father isn't interested in sharing His power with men

- He's looking for men like Nehemiah to serve Him for a time

[Luke 22:24](#) ¶ And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest.

[Luke 22:25](#) And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.'

[Luke 22:26](#) "But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.

[Luke 22:27](#) "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.

- When we gather as a body, we expect men to be raised into leadership as God may appoint
 - And we expect to submit to their authority for the sake of good order and effective ministry
 - And because to do so honors our Lord
 - But we expect our leaders to be first and foremost servants who will place the needs of the congregation above their own
 - And like Nehemiah, they have a desire to assume responsibility because their heart is for the people
- So Nehemiah sets out for the city

[Neh. 2:11](#) ¶ So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.

[Neh. 2:12](#) And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. 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.

[Neh. 2:13](#) So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and *on* to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire.

[Neh. 2:14](#) Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass.

[Neh. 2:15](#) So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned.

[Neh. 2:16](#) 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.

[Neh. 2:17](#) ¶ Then I said to them, “You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach.”

[Neh. 2:18](#) 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*.

- Much has been made about the way Nehemiah arrived and the way approached his task
 - Of how he stayed in the city three days before surveying the wall
 - Of how he took a few trusted men and surveyed the wall at night to avoid attracting attention and stirring up the people
 - And there are numerous theories for why he did these things and how they contributed to his success as a leader
 - We're not going to spend much time exploring those themes
 - We're looking beyond the details for the sake of something larger
 - Nehemiah goes about his business in the way he does because he is acutely aware of his purpose and mission
 - He's not running for office
 - He's not trying to impress people
 - He's not doing this for himself
 - He's serving God
- When he does face the people and presents them with his call to rebuild the city
 - Look at the appeal he makes
 - He says you see the facts
 - You see the situation
 - He appeals to their shared interest in the problem and to a shared solution
 - But didn't these people know this already

- You think they would have noticed the desolation already
 - And then having noticed it, you would think they would have done something about it
 - Perhaps they lived by the motto

Tomorrow' is the excuse of the lazy and the refuge of the incompetent

- Whatever the reason for their past inaction, now here's Nehemiah telling them what they already know
 - Why would it make a difference?
- Because Nehemiah tells them the one thing that can make a difference
 - Nehemiah says that the God of Israel had been favorable to him
 - Meaning that God was working behind the scenes to make all this possible
 - And if God had been working to bring Nehemiah here and to appoint him to this important work,
 - Then sure God was going to see it accomplished through the people
 - Nehemiah knew the key to his plan and to his success was not to turn God's work into his work
 - Nehemiah had received a calling and appointment to do a work for God by serving God's people
 - But he's not going to be able to do it alone
 - He will need to people in agree and lend their support
 - But where the world might have expect Nehemiah to make an appeal on the basis of his qualifications and experience
 - Or the genius of his ideas
 - Or the size of his bank account to fund the project
 - Or whatever

- No, he appeals on the basis that God was prepared to do a work
 - He established that the call was from God and he asks God's people to join in that work
- Friends, that's all we should expect from a godly leader
 - Leaders are servants in the church
 - We look for them to serve the needs of the congregation
 - But they serve best us by appealing to our own sense responsibility in serving the Lord
 - And then calling us to join in that work
 - They aren't sent to do all the work for us
 - We don't want leaders who give us no call and lay no expectations on us
 - We should expect a godly leader to demand we use our gifts and participate in the work of the church to service God's purposes
 - On the other hand, they can't be opportunistic glory seekers who are obsessed with achieve something big and great apart from what God might assign
 - Those men will run the church to death in one major project after another
 - With few if any coming from God's direction and call
- So if the first thing God goes to raise up a godly leader is to lay a burden
 - And the second thing was to determine the manner and timing of that man's appointment
 - And then third was to appoint as a caretaker for a limited time, not as the king and ruler
 - Then the fourth was that a godly leader isn't appointed to do it alone
 - But instead, he calls those he leads to share in his own call
 - To participate with him in serving the Lord

- Like Paul who asked the Corinthian church among others to be imitators of him even as he imitated Christ
- Of course, then what's our responsibility when God does send this kind of leader
 - Remember what we said about godly teaching
 - The nation had been given poor teaching before God brought discipline
 - And then God removed that false teaching
 - Then when He was ready, He restored truthful teaching through a man named Ezra
 - But we said that as important as godly teachers are to God's plan of restoration
 - They can't learn for us
 - We have a responsibility to do the work of learning and receive that training
 - And until we do, God may not bring us to the next step of a godly who will propel us into the next step
- Well, if God brings a godly leader appointed and equipped with a call to do God's work among the people
 - Then the people have a responsibility to receive and then support that leader in doing God's work
 - But did you notice what support looks like?
 - It's not just a pat on the back and welcoming handshake
 - It's not just writing a check or an invitation to dinner
 - It's a roll up of the sleeves and a recognition that there is work to be done
 - And not because you feel inclined to help this leader
 - It's not a personal favor
 - It's a response to God's call for a live of devoted to Him

- So just like a teacher can't learn for us
 - A leader can't follow for us
- And if we give heed to what Bible teachers tell us out of our respect for God's word rather than an admiration for the teacher
 - Likewise, we need to get behind the work of those godly leaders appointed to direct our service to God because we desire to serve God and not because we admire the leader
- These differences are so important, because sooner or later the teacher will slip and let us down
 - And sooner or later a leader will leave us disillusioned
- But we don't lose faith in God's word because of a teacher's failings
 - And we can't use the mistakes of any past or present leader as our rationale for withholding our support and participation in the godly work of the church
 - We serve God, not men
 - But we join with men and respect their leadership because God has called them to lead us
- Now anytime we see God's people called by God's appointed leaders to rise up and do a work to glorify Him
 - What can we naturally expect to happen?

[John 15:19](#) "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world **hates** you.

[John 17:14](#) "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

- The enemy and the world he controls will never stand idly by and watch God's work through His people
 - The enemy and the world will always oppose that work
 - Always
 - So we should always expect opposition and trials

- Nehemiah's situation was no different

[Neh. 2:19](#) 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?"

[Neh. 2:20](#) So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem."

- Among the crowd were these three men
 - Notice their nationalities
 - There was a Horonite and an Ammorite and an Arab
 - In other words not Jews
 - Not God's people
 - Strangers
 - And they give the expected natural reaction
 - They mock the prospect of building the wall
 - They despise the people, they show them contempt
 - And look at their statements
 - Are you rebelling against the king?
 - Their statement is carefully worded to bring fear to mind
 - Fear that the Persians will return to destroy the nation again for taking such a presumptuous step of building a wall
 - A wall was the equivalent of putting a navy to sea or building a missile program
 - It signaled an intent to defend the city from attackers
 - Most cities were city states
 - So it could be seen as an act of independence

- Now we know that the Persian king has authorized it
 - But all the people knew that
 - And these outsiders want to bring fear and dread into their minds
- When you remember that the Bible tells us that the world will oppose and hate us, then how should we react to opposition?
 - We're not talking about opposition from within (that's a different problem)
 - We're talking about opposition from outside
 - It will come
 - And we don't care
 - Because it can't stop God
- Nehemiah says God will take care of those things
 - If God has truly called this leader to this people
 - And if He's appointed this group to rebuild the city, then He will handle the details
 - There is no reason to doubt
 - And we certainly have no reason to give attention to the world's attacks, especially knowing they are bound to come no matter how desperate
 - The final words of Nehemiah in this chapter are so important to understanding how godly leadership must approach their appointed task
 - Those who are not a part of God's people and His anointed group simply have nothing to say to about the work
 - Set them and their opinions aside
 - Place your trust in God and follow Him

Don't take counsel of your fears or of appearances. Do your full duty, and you can safely leave the results to God. - B.H. Carroll

Restoring Part 7

- Our study of how God restores His people is coming to end
 - Over the past seven weeks, we watched as God's fury burned against the idol worship in one part of the nation of Israel
 - And we learned the reality of judgment for unbelief
 - Then we saw God take the other half of Israel into captivity in Babylon over their repeated sins against him
 - And we learned about inevitability of God's discipline for his children
 - And we discovered three stages to the discipline
 - The removal of ungodly leaders
 - The elimination of false teachers
 - The destruction of unholy worship
 - But then we saw God patiently and mercifully begin to restore the nation of Israel, just as He promised He would
 - First, God sent Zerrubable and other men to lead the nation back into the land
 - And they rediscovered true worship with an honest heart and utter dependence on God
 - Secondly, God sent Ezra, a man with a heart to know God's word, to live according to it, and to teach others the same
 - And through Ezra, the nation grew stronger in their obedience and their devotion to righteousness
 - Though not without stumbles and shortcomings
 - Finally, God brings new leadership
 - A man named Nehemiah
 - A man burdened and called to defend and lead God's people

- Yet one who comes as a representative of God's leadership
 - Not to Lord over the people, but to serve them
- And last week we watched him call the people to work along side him to accomplish the Lord's work
- At this point in our study, we could easily begin an extended walk through the text of Nehemiah
 - If we did, we would learn a great deal about how godly leadership does it's work
 - But in the interests of our study, I want to end our study today focusing on one final question
 - What does God expect godly leadership to accomplish for the sake of his people?
 - In Nehemiah's case, he was drawn to travel back to Israel because the city lacked a wall
 - But was a new wall God's primary focus?
 - When God brings new leadership to us today, what purpose can we expect Him to accomplish for us?
 - Let's examine 4 clues in the story of Nehemiah to answer that question

[Neh. 3:1](#) ¶ Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred *and* the Tower of Hananel.

[Neh. 3:2](#) Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.

- The third chapter of Nehemiah begins with an interesting (some might say repetitive) list of all the workers and their assignments
 - These are the teams joined to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem
 - The list begins with Eliashib, the grandson of Jeshua and his brothers building the Sheep Gate
 - Northern gate (about 12 o'clock)

- And they filled in the wall between two towers that marked the center strongholds on the northern wall
- And we also learn that this family had the help of at least two other families
 - Family meant a clan, a large group
- Then scan down the page
 - Verse 3 another clan rebuilt the Fish Gate also on the northern wall
 - Verse 6 has another clan building the Old Gate on the extreme NW corner
 - Verse 13 the team for the Valley Gate on the West side of the city
 - Verse 14 handled the Refuse Gate (Dung Gate) on the extreme Southern end
 - Just a little up the eastern wall the Fountain Gate in verse 15
 - Verse 28 has the priests lending a hand on the Horse Gate on the NE corner
 - And so on
- What's most interesting about this chapter is the large number and wide variety of people working in this project
 - Isn't remarkable how Nehemiah was able to engage so many different families in such a large project
 - Remember, we noted that Nehemiah's first act in Jerusalem was the call the people to join in the work God had given him
 - And evidently, they responded
 - I admire him because I have trouble getting my entire family to participate in an afternoon of yardwork
 - He had thousands of family members working together
- So it seems that our first clue concerning God's true purpose in bringing new, godly leadership is
 - Teaching God's people the importance of working together

- Of getting involved and lending a shoulder to the hard work of serving the Lord
- We don't know if everyone helped
 - Maybe some stood by
 - Maybe they said it's not my job
- But the real story here is how many did join in
 - No one was an expert wall builder
 - But God doesn't need our expertise
 - He wants workers
- Clue #2 begins chapter 4

[Neh. 4:1](#) ¶ Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews.

[Neh. 4:2](#) He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy *men* of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore *it* for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?"

[Neh. 4:3](#) 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!"

- As the work begins in earnest, the voices of the enemy rise up again
 - This time it's a local tribal leader and his armies
 - The word for wealthy in verse 2 is *chayil*, which means army
 - They bring their show of force and they try to intimidate and discourage the people
 - Now the intimidation and threats weren't a surprise
 - As a man of God, Nehemiah knew what to expect
 - And he responds as a godly man should

[Neh. 4:4](#) ¶ 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.

[Neh. 4:5](#) Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders.

- Nehemiah prays to God for protection from these men and for God to exact vengeance

[Rom. 12:19](#) Never take your own revenge, beloved, but **leave room** for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.

- Prayer is always our first and best defense against the enemy and His attacks
- But I love this chapter because it demonstrates an important Biblical principle
 - There is a time for prayer
 - And there is a time for action

[Neh. 4:6](#) ¶ So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work.

[Neh. 4:7](#) ¶ Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, *and* that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry.

[Neh. 4:8](#) All of them conspired together to come *and* fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it.

[Neh. 4:9](#) But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.

- The men decided to prevent the construction by force
 - So Nehemiah prayed and then set up a rotating guard
 - Prayer and action working side by side
 - Confident of their task and God’s direction, and willing to use all the means God has given them to accomplish God’s work
 - Not passive, not discouraged, not letting anything stop God’s work
 - So it must be with us
 - When God gives us a leader with a purpose in serving Him, we will see opposition, you can bet on it
 - And against that opposition we will pray
 - But we must also strive and continue to press forward
 - Not by taking revenge ourselves

- But by focusing on the task God has given
 - Nehemiah set up a guard, not an attack force
 - But Nehemiah took the defense a step further

[Neh. 4:16](#) 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; and the captains *were* behind the whole house of Judah.

[Neh. 4:17](#) 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.

[Neh. 4:18](#) As for the builders, each *wore* his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter *stood* near me.

[Neh. 4:19](#) 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.

[Neh. 4:20](#) "At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

- Nehemiah knew that the workers were too spread out to be an effective defense force against a superior army
 - But if they brought their numbers together, they could withstand the enemy's attacks
 - So they devised a plan to mass at one point on the wall anytime there was a call for help with the trumpet
 - The point was that God's people could defend themselves best when they came to one another's aid and acted to protect one another
 - If one group had failed to defend the wall and allowed the enemy to penetrate the city,
 - The entire wall would have been in jeopardy and the whole nation would have been at risk
 - Under those circumstances, it would have been foolish for anyone to say to his brothers, I'm sorry I'm too busy to help you defend your part of the wall
 - I have my own part
 - So they were ready at a moment's notice to lend a hand to one another
 - Because they were all engaged in the same work

- So clue #2 seems to be that God brought a godly leader to Israel so he could lead them into a new perspective
 - They weren't individuals serving their own interests
 - They were a part of a single family of brothers and sisters in Israel united in a shared work against a common enemy
 - And they must at all times be ready to lend a hand to defend the walls without parochialism
 - Our leaders will expect no less
 - God's people ready to share the burden and defend one another and come to each other's aid in prayer and in works of one kind or another
 - No one can be too busy to answer the call for help
 - Because if one falls to the enemy, the entire family of God is weaker as a result
- The next clue takes us to chapter 5

[Neh. 5:1](#) ¶ Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.

[Neh. 5:2](#) 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."

[Neh. 5:3](#) There were others who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine."

[Neh. 5:4](#) Also there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax *on* our fields and our vineyards.

[Neh. 5:5](#) "Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage *already*, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others."

- This is a somewhat complicated situation, but it's not surprising
 - Verse 2 mentions three groups pitted against one another in a dispute over grain during a time of limited supply
 - Verse 2 describes one large clan who is hoarding and consuming much of the available grain

- Verse 3 a second group that has been forced to mortgage their land to pay for grain since their lands aren't yielding enough
- Verse 4 describes another group who also borrowed money to pay taxes on their property
- Evidently, the effect has been that some Jews have profited at the expense of their brothers
 - And they were taking advantage of the misfortune of their brothers in the land by charging exorbitant interest (usury) on those money lent to pay for grain and taxes
 - Charging usury interest against another Jew was actually illegal under the Law of Moses
- So Nehemiah hears of the complaints and recognizes a threat from within
 - The family of God is undermining each other by treating one another unfairly
 - And taking advantage financially of one another
 - And simply not sharing their wealth and blessings with one another

[Neh. 5:6](#) ¶ Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words.

[Neh. 5:7](#) I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, "You are exacting usury, each from his brother!" Therefore, I held a great assembly against them.

[Neh. 5:8](#) 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*.

[Neh. 5:9](#) 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?"

[Neh. 5:10](#) "And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Please, let us leave off this usury.

[Neh. 5:11](#) "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."

- In our materialistic, capitalistic, self-reliant culture, any thought of sharing resources or lending without interest seems un-American
- Yet that's what Nehemiah called for

- Within the body of Christ, we should be prepared to show the highest degree of charity and self-sacrifice for the sake of our brothers and sister in the Lord
 - We never look at another's need as an opportunity to profit
 - We never seek to place new financial burdens on top of existing ones
 - We share of our wealth to comfort those in the Body of Christ who have need

[Acts 2:44](#) And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;

[Acts 2:45](#) and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

[Acts 2:46](#) Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,

[Acts 2:47](#) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- So clue #3 is how a godly leader inspires charity and brotherhood within God's family
 - Because the leader appreciates the necessity of Gods people supporting one another in supplying the basic needs of life
 - Our work in ministry is difficult
 - The enemy is untiring in his efforts to undermine that work
 - The last thing we can afford is to undermine one another in our dealings or neglects of one another
 - No brother or sister in the Lord should be left without hope of their provision and the church stands as God's instrument in the world to care for those needs
- If you were to move forward from this point in Nehemiah, you would learn a great deal more about the man and his wisdom in leading the nation
 - In chapter 6, you can read how he deals with slanderous statements made by Israel's enemies concerning him and the people
 - And how the wall was finished in a stunning 52 days

- Which utterly demoralized Israel's enemies
- In chapter 7 you can watch as Nehemiah assembles the people and brings them into the city to dwell in safety within the walls
 - And what a joyous tearful moment that must have been for God's people
 - Recognizing God's goodness and mercy to have restored them to the city in this way after so long
- And the final clue for our question to end the series is found in chapter 8

[Neh. 8:1](#) ¶ 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.

[Neh. 8:2](#) 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.

[Neh. 8:3](#) 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.

[Neh. 8:4](#) 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.

[Neh. 8:5](#) 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.

[Neh. 8:6](#) 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.

[Neh. 8:7](#) 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.

[Neh. 8:8](#) They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

[Neh. 8:9](#) ¶ 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.

- What a remarkable scene
 - Could Israel of ever imagined such a scene a hundred years earlier while still in Babylon?

- Or even 75 years ago when the first group arrived?
- Or even 20 years ago as the city walls lay in ruins?
- Cannot God do more than we are even capable of imagining?

[Eph. 3:20](#) ¶ Now to Him who is able to do far more **abundantly** beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,

- This is the God Israel serves
 - And now the pieces come together
- Nehemiah leading the people into a remarkable rebuilding of the walls
- Ezra commanding their respect and faithfulness to God's word
- And the people gathered to worship God with a heart of truth and their faces bowed to the ground
 - Weeping in joy and a recognition of their own unworthiness before a mighty and holy God
 - Oh how God restores!
- Clue #4 is the product of the work
 - A leader comes to God's people with a burden and a calling and a mission
 - But His burden wasn't for a city, it was for the people
 - And his calling wasn't to achieve a goal, but to stir hearts
 - And his mission wasn't to build a wall, but to build up a people
 - In this moment we see the true purpose of godly leadership in the restoring God's people
 - A godly leader is the one who calls, and leads, and inspires and corrects and teaches
 - And he does all these things not so that great buildings may be constructed
 - Or impressive programs will be established

- Or world famous ministries might be founded
- He does whatever he does so that God's people may be built up in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
 - To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity
- For the church is the people,
 - And therefore the work of a leader within the church is to build up the people into ministers of the gospel through their very lives
- When we look at the four clues together, the true purposes of restoring godly leadership becomes apparent
 - A godly leader will draw God's people to share one another's burdens and get involved in God's work
 - A godly leader will inspire God's people to band together in fellowship and unity of the Spirit to defend one another and the faith against the enemy
 - To see a brother's failure as their own failure
 - A godly leader will remind the faithful of their responsibility to care for one another and meet each other's needs as every family should
 - Finally, a godly leader recognizes that his true work is not the work of building a wall or an empire or a legacy or a career
 - It's a calling to build up God's people