

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, they 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."

- That story reminds us that all great men begin the same way: as babies
  - Today, we begin a new book, the Book of Nehemiah, but in reality, we're simply continuing in our study on Israel's restoration
    - Nehemiah tells the story of the third and final step of God's restoration of Israel
    - God reversing course in the first step He took in disciplining Israel
    - When Israel was in rebellion against God, He struck first against the nation's corrupt leaders
    - That first step cut the head off the snake, so to speak
    - And it was followed by two more steps of discipline on a path of descent into captivity
- In Ezra, we studied the first two steps of restoration, as the Lord brought a remnant back to Jerusalem
  - First, the Lord restored true worship in the hearts of His people
  - Then He delivered a teacher who could lead the people into maturity and obedience to the Word of God
  - So now comes the step of bringing the people together in service to the Lord under the authority of a leader
    - Heartfelt worship, study of the Word, service to God
    - These three steps are a concise description of every saint's walk of faith
- Broadly speaking, we find three themes in this book, each related to the restoration of Israel
  - First, Nehemiah completes the return of the exiles from captivity
    - After Nehemiah enters the land, the total number of Jews who returned from

Babylon will number about 100,000

- And this remnant shows little sense of national identity
  - And any previous anticipation of a coming Messiah is now completely absent
  - Interestingly, the books written during this time (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) make virtually no reference to the Messiah, except in pictures
  - But God was still preaching about the Messiah through Zechariah and Malachi
  - So the first theme is the reunification and nationalization of Israel in preparation for the Messiah's arrival, which was right around the corner, historically
- Secondly, the people are being brought back under the custody of the Law
    - They had lost their identity, because they had largely ceased practicing the Law while in captivity
    - The Law was a custodian given to guard Israel and keep her pure until the Messiah could come
    - Without the freedom to worship and without a temple, it was literally impossible for the Law to fulfill that purpose in the people
  - Finally, the third theme of Nehemiah is how the Lord brought purpose and unity to the people through the gift of a skilled leader
    - In fact, the book of Nehemiah is often approached as a study in leadership principles
    - More than a few Christian, and even business books, have been written using Nehemiah as an example of godly leadership
      - Teachers focus on Nehemiah's organizational methods
      - Or his people skills, oratory skills, negotiation skills, *etc.*
  - And the proof of his leadership acumen, they say, is found in the result
    - After lying in ruins for decades, the city walls are rebuilt in a few weeks
    - An astonishingly short period of time
  - Certainly, there are many good principles of leadership on display in the story of Nehemiah
    - And Nehemiah's accomplishments are obviously impressive
    - But I don't believe that's the reason (or at least not the main reason) this book is included in the canon
    - The main purpose of the Book of Nehemiah is to show how the Lord raises godly leaders to build up God's people
      - God doesn't care about brick walls, does He?
      - Or does He care about the people who are protected by the wall?

**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.

- The Book of Nehemiah is a continuation of the Book Ezra
  - They were originally a single work, written by Ezra
    - Though many chapters are written in the first person, it's likely Ezra wrote the book from Nehemiah's perspective
    - The events of Nehemiah span 15 years, but most of the events in the book occur in less than a year
    - Chronologically, it's the final book of the Old Testament
    - The next events recorded in the Bible are those of Matthew, a few hundred years later
    - The final prophet, Malachi, prophesied during the time of Nehemiah
  - Chapter 1 of Nehemiah picks up 12 years after the end of the book of Ezra
    - Nehemiah is still living in Persia with the rest of the exiles who have not chosen to return to Israel
    - The king ruling Persia is Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes, the king who married Esther
- In the late Autumn of 445 BC, Nehemiah is living in the capital city of the Persian Empire when he hears disturbing news
  - One of his brothers, Hanani, had traveled down to Jerusalem with Ezra, and now he has returned to see his brother in Susa
    - Naturally, Nehemiah is curious for any news for how the exiles were doing in rebuilding Jerusalem
    - We can assume that those stuck back in Persia were hopeful to hear that the city was rebuilt to its previous splendor
    - But when Nehemiah asked, his brother gave disappointing news
  - Hanani reports that the people in the city are in great distress and are a reproach to the surrounding people
    - In other words, Jerusalem is like a ghetto and is despised by the surrounding people
    - The city is probably raided at times by thieves

- It has no glory and displays no strength
- And whatever barriers the people might erect, they were incapable of ending their reproach
- Naturally, Nehemiah's response is weeping and mourning
  - But his reaction goes beyond what we might consider to be a normal degree of mourning
  - He is mourning for an extended period
  - Which then gives way to a period of fasting and praying
  - We remember from the Ezra study that this combination is an effort to hear clearly from the Lord without the interference of the flesh
- Next, we discover what Nehemiah was fasting and praying about

**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 appeals to the Lord in a heartfelt, earnest manner for the Lord's favor concerning a matter Nehemiah intended to bring before the king of Persia
  - Nehemiah is burdened by the news that his people and city are in distress
    - Nehemiah's prayer is directed toward one request: that the Lord should keep His promises

- He's referring to Lev. 26, where God declared that when Israel repented, He would restore them
- Who shouldn't expect a prayer like that to be well received?
- God will always keep His promises, so this request is a no-brainer
- Except that Nehemiah is appealing to God for two very specific outcomes that are not necessarily assured
  - First, Nehemiah is asking the Lord that this moment would be the moment when the Lord would choose to act in accordance with his promises
  - God has made promises, but He still controls the timing of the fulfillment
  - Many Jews prayed for the chance to see the Messiah in the flesh, but the Lord chose to grant that privilege to Simeon (Luke 2)
- So Nehemiah is praying for the opportunity to see God fulfill His promise to reunite and bless Israel in the land
  - So far, a regathering has begun
  - But Nehemiah reminds God that His promises in the Old Covenant included blessing Israel in that return
  - To Nehemiah's ears, that blessing hasn't come as yet, so he's praying for it to come now
- Secondly, Nehemiah is praying for the Lord to accomplish it through him and not someone else
  - The Lord has promised to bring about certain events in the life of Israel, but the question remains who the Lord will select to bring about these things
    - Nehemiah was praying for the chance to be that man who could accomplish the blessing God had promised
    - Nehemiah knew God would bless Israel someday, somehow...that's why he prayed confidently
    - Throughout the history of Israel, many young women prayed for the blessing to be the woman to give birth to the Messiah
      - But it was Mary who was chosen
    - Nehemiah wants to be chosen for that honor now
  - We might even wonder why Nehemiah is praying so desperately for this opportunity
    - After all, why not just leave and go to Israel like the other exiles?
    - If Nehemiah wants to serve God in Israel so much, what's holding him back?
- Then, in v.11, we discover why Nehemiah is praying so earnestly for the Lord to hear his plea and release him to serve in Jerusalem
  - Nehemiah is employed in a very unique role
    - And he doesn't have any vacation time
    - Nehemiah is the cup bearer for the king of Persia

- The role of cupbearer is an interesting one
  - Simply put, Nehemiah served the king his cup
  - But the role was much more important than that sounds
- The cupbearer was like the king's chief bodyguard
  - He had the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the king's food supply
  - He was like the head of the secret service
  - He was required to sample everything the king would eat and drink before the king ate or drank
  - Since the cup bearer knew he would eat and drink everything first, he made sure the entire food chain was safe 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
- But Nehemiah was burdened
  - He was inquiring about the welfare Jewish people long after most everyone else had forgotten them
    - Then, he mourns the bad news
    - And he's losing sleep, concerned with what to do about the situation
    - This is a godly burden, one a godly person cannot escape
  - Nehemiah also recognized that obedience to God's Word demanded action in the face of a burden
    - And in v.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?
- Immediately, we're confronted with a basic principle of how God brings godly leaders to guide His people
  - He doesn't cause them to audition for the part
    - He doesn't entice them with promises of personal fame or fortune
    - He doesn't lay out a career path, where each constituency is seen as merely another rung on a ladder of personal success
  - If these things had been the motivation for a man like Nehemiah, he never would have left the king's side in Susa
    - Nehemiah is already serving in arguably the highest position any Jew in that day could aspire to hold
    - There was nowhere to go but down for a man like Nehemiah

- And a job of leading the Jews in Jerusalem is about as low as you could imagine in that day
- So riches, fame and accolades were not the motivation for this job, and God doesn't seek for hearts motivated by those things
  - 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
  - The only way he could act upon his burden, was if God opened 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 March-April 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
  - Nehemiah spent every one of those 120 days in the company of a man who could have granted him his wish 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 v.4
    - Nehemiah began four months of praying to God for action
  - But what do you think was running through Nehemiah's mind at about the second or third month?
    - Do you 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 that either God isn't going to answer you, or 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 choose not to obey it, but you won't miss it
    - So often, the real test of prayer is in the waiting for God to answer
    - We can't assume that God's silence is equal to an answer
  - For obvious reasons, Nehemiah is often held out as a model of a praying man
    - He's a man who sought God's will before taking action
    - And that he certainly was
  - But don't 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 in prayer was his patience to do nothing apart from an answer from God
  - 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 upon him for his people in Israel
- But then, God opened that door for Nehemiah
  - In v.1, Nehemiah says "I had not been sad in the king's presence"
    - This was an important detail to the story
    - Part of a cup bearer's official duties was 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 they often were
    - The Persians were especially strict in enforcing their laws
    - And so Nehemiah has been careful to keep up the expectation that went with his duties, he says
  - But then in v.2, the king perceives Nehemiah's sadness, nonetheless
    - We have to assume that the king didn't come to know of Nehemiah's sad disposition through observation



- In other words, Nehemiah says he *wasn't* sad before the king'
  - Nehemiah doesn't mean he was trying not be sad, but it came through anyway
  - He means exactly what he said...he wasn't showing sadness; and yet, the king somehow perceived that Nehemiah was sad
  - He must have come to know it supernaturally
- In other words, God revealed to the king that Nehemiah was sad
  - Which causes Nehemiah great fear, because he knew the king could have him put to death
    - This was God opening a door
    - God selected this day to reveal to the king 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 chose to wait until today
      - And Nehemiah's patience in waiting on God was now being rewarded
  - When God moves to bring leadership to His people, He also moves to raise up men to fill that need
    - When God is ready to provide that leader, he will begin by preparing a leader who possesses a burden for the work that lies ahead
    - He probably won't have a burden for what the people want, but he's carrying a burden for what God knows they need
    - He will have 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
    - But when he senses the burden, his first response may be to pray and seek the Lord's intervention
    - Ultimately, that burden gives way in God's timing to taking action
  - A leader in God's economy is someone who answers a call, not someone who comes calling with all the answers
    - A godly leader knows that if God has brought the burden and the call, then God can be trusted to provide the means to answer it as well
- Equally important, God will usually raise a leader who doesn't fit the classic mold
  - Here, God is raising up a cupbearer to become a wall builder and a leader over 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 for the role
    - 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
- We can say that God does not raise up incompetent men, but he often raises up unqualified men
  - Because these men are the perfect representatives to bring God glory
  - Men like Moses, David, Peter
- So the king's question no doubt catches Nehemiah off guard
  - We know he asked it, because the Lord directed his attention to Nehemiah's burden
    - And Nehemiah must have sensed this as well, but he responds in courage, assuming the Lord had made this opportunity available

**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.

- 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 potentially 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 who's 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
  - Nehemiah has clearly been ready to give this answer for some time, so he lays it out for the king
  - When you are looking for God to do the impossible, then when the impossible happens, you won't be afraid to go with it
    - Even when it seems like the worst possible alternative
- When the king hears Nehemiah's request, he merely asks, "When will you be back?"
  - In other words, you can go, but I want you to return
    - His reply probably stunned Nehemiah, if for no other reason than it was such an unexpected answer to prayer
    - A moment earlier, Nehemiah hadn't a clue that his life was about to change
    - And then, the next moment, his life has completely changed
  - God is sending Nehemiah to attend to the needs of the city and the people, but the king's question is an important detail in God's plan
    - 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
- There is principle of biblical leadership at work here, 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 preferred Saul

**1 Sam. 8:4** Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah;

**1 Sam. 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."

**1 Sam. 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.

**1 Sam. 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 in response to a sinful peoples' request
  - They got what they wanted, not what they needed
- Throughout history, men have had a tendency to dismiss and overlook the leaders God brings to guide their walk with Him
  - The classic mistake is to repeat the actions 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 as 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 the judges
    - Our King has already been appointed by the Father to rule over the Church
    - He is Our Lord Jesus
    - He's looking for men like Nehemiah to be servant leaders under Him
    - And only for a time, not to replace Him on His throne

**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 should expect God to raise men into leadership positions, usually from within that same body
  - And we expect to submit to their authority for the sake of good order and effective ministry
  - For to do so, honors our Lord
  - We should expect these leaders to be, first and foremost, servants
    - Men who will place the needs of the congregation above their own
    - Like Nehemiah, they demonstrate a desire to assume responsibility because

they have a heart for the people

- So the Lord has found the right man for the job, and now, he prepares to depart
  - Nehemiah gives the king a return date of 12 years (we learn later)
    - And then, he asks the king for letters to the governors
    - The first letter allows Nehemiah passage to move through the kingdom unmolested
    - And the second letter allows Nehemiah to gain access to the king's forest
  - The king granted these requests quickly, it seemed
    - As with Ezra before, there are political happenings to explain his willingness to go along with this request
    - Inaros had led a revolt in Lower Egypt in the late 460s, aided and abetted by Athens
    - While Megabyxos had led a revolt in Syria
    - So having a strong ally leading the Jews in Judah was probably a shrewd political move for the king, hoping to keep Israel's neighbors in check
- So Nehemiah departs

**Neh. 2:9** Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.

**Neh. 2:10** When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel.

**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.

- Nehemiah is accompanied by a military escort as he makes his way from Persia to Jerusalem

- But not only was the military escort a source of protection, but it also served to provide Nehemiah with an impressive entrance into Jerusalem
  - It established credibility for Nehemiah, and authority
  - Nehemiah never asked for this as far as we can tell, but it seems the Lord was intent on providing it
  - Clearly, the Lord wanted to provide His chosen leader with an endorsement
- God still does this at times, as well
  - The Lord appoints men and women to hold positions that come with certain trappings
  - Not for the purpose of building up egos or elevating the importance of servants beyond what's helpful
  - But rather, to help establish credibility and authority among the people
  - So that God's people will see that God is moving in this person's life on their behalf
- Much could be made of the way Nehemiah arrived and the way he approached his task
  - He stayed in the city three days before surveying the wall
    - He seems to want to get to know the situation on the ground before rushing into action
    - That would seem a prudent move for any new leader
  - Then, we notice he goes out at night to do his surveying of the wall
    - Most assume he didn't want to attract undue attention until he was ready to announce his intentions
    - He didn't want to alert Israel's enemies to the change that was coming
    - Or perhaps he didn't want to alarm the people of Israel, who might suspect he was planning an attack on the city
    - Being sensitive to the situation he was entering was another wise move on his part
  - And then when he did go out, he only took a few trusted men
    - Limiting his circle of trust until he could know who were God's people and who were not
    - Once again, a shrewd move for a new leader
  - There might be numerous theories for why he did these things and how they contributed to his success as a leader
    - But we're not going to spend much time exploring those
    - We're looking beyond the details of leadership style for the sake of something more important
- 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
- Nothing he is doing is calculated to build an image
  - He isn't concerned with appearances, except to minimize unnecessary gossip or worry
  - He isn't trying to build allegiances or undermine challengers
  - In other words, he isn't overly worried about the politics of his situation, because he is confident that the Lord will clear his path
  - His only worry is being a diligent workman in the task God has given him
- Leaders in modern ministry are so often taught the opposite
  - In fact, the story of Nehemiah is ironically taught as a good example of a new pastor exhibiting a good sense of politics
  - He knows how to build the right kind of relationships in his new position
  - But it's apparent that Nehemiah's true focus is in the work itself
- We can see this clearly when we look at the way Nehemiah approaches the people after he's done his investigation

**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.

- Nehemiah faces the people and presents them with his call and argument to rebuild the city
  - Consider the appeal he makes to them
    - He says you see the facts
    - You see the situation
    - What do you say we fix it together?
  - 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 surely, 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 to agree and lend their support
    - But where in the world might Nehemiah expect to make an appeal on the basis of his qualifications or experience?
      - Or the genius of his ideas
      - Or the size of his bank account to fund the project
      - Or merely to order them to work, because he was in charge...
  - 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 us best by appealing to our own sense of 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 higher calling 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 serve God's purposes
  - On the other hand, they can't be opportunistic glory seekers who are obsessed with achieving something big and great apart from what God might assign
    - Those men will run a church into the ground in one major project after another,



trying to build an edifice to their own ego

- Few, if any, arise from God's direction or call under those terms
- We need to look past people like that and look for the godly leaders God has appointed around us
- Those people will always rise up, but that never stops God from raising up true leaders in some other context
  - And usually, these are the least likely ones we can imagine
  - Nehemiah is that least likely person, called with a burden and present to do the work of the Lord

- The restoration of Israel is in its final phase
  - The Lord has raised a godly leader to take Israel from the classroom to the field
    - The plan is for Nehemiah to lead the people into rebuilding the wall and gates of their precious city
    - But, the spiritual purpose goes far beyond brick and masonry
    - God's purpose is to build up a people who will follow Him truly
  - Last week, we saw Nehemiah leave Persia after bravely requesting permission to assist the people of God
    - The king permitted his departure because the hand of the Lord was upon him
    - So he left Persia and, as we'll learn later, he brings about 42,000 more Jews with him
- We ended last week at the end of Chapter 2, as Nehemiah conducted his inspection of the gates and rallies the people to build the wall
  - Let's take a second look at that passage, as we begin to move forward in the book

**Neh. 2:9** Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.

**Neh. 2:10** When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel.

**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.

- Our story of Nehemiah has moved into a new section, revolving around the completion of the work of building the wall
  - We'll see the challenges Nehemiah must face, the problems he must solve, the enemies he must contend with

- And if that weren't bad enough, he has to lead Jews
- Nehemiah's greatest task is moving the people of God together as one group, without having them tear each other apart in the process
- The point in this section of Nehemiah isn't to learn the intricacies of wall construction or even leadership in general
  - It's a study of the way God uses the accomplishment of a task as an opportunity to build up His people
  - And He does this work through the leadership of godly men like Nehemiah, who recognize that the physical work is secondary to the spiritual work
  - It's a laboratory setting in which sanctification can take place
- Notice in vs.9-10, we already see the opposition beginning early
  - Although Nehemiah traveled with letters of passage from the king, the other province officials aren't happy to hear Israel was receiving help
    - These two men are officials in Samaria and Ammon, neighboring territories of Judah
    - But there's nothing new in this moment
    - Anytime God's people are receiving grace from the Lord, the enemy and his followers are quick to notice and protest and scheme against it
  - A godly leader moving in to do the Lord's will, had better have a thick skin
    - Because the world isn't shy in sharing its opinion or trying to get its way
    - Had these officials had their way, Israel would never have been rebuilt
    - And we haven't heard the last of these two adversaries
- Nehemiah's decision to wait for three days in the city has intrigued students forever
  - Was there something specific Nehemiah was waiting for?
    - Did he want to avoid tipping his hand concerning his purposes too quickly?
    - Maybe his encounters with Sanballat and Tobiah left him concerned that his enemies might disguise themselves as thieves and attack him if he were in public
    - Maybe he wasn't sure where to start and needed some time to think about his plan
  - Perhaps all these reasons are true, but when the time to set out came, Nehemiah goes it alone and goes out at night
    - His travels proceed outside the city, by way of the Valley gate, headed south
    - Then he moves eastward around the southern end of the city, and then north up the east side of the wall
    - The southern portion of the city walls and their gates are still present, though in terrible condition and without wooden gates
    - This makes sense, since the attacks from Babylon came from the north, so the only portion of the wall that remained was on the south

- Eventually, he gets stopped by an impasse and returns to the Valley Gate
- Once again, why did he go alone and at night?
  - Did he want to be free of other opinions as he considered his options?
    - Perhaps, but he doesn't seem like a man who worried about others' opinions
    - Was he was trying to conceal his plan from his enemies?
    - That doesn't seem like a good reason, since Nehemiah announced his plan publicly the very next morning anyway
  - In v.16, Nehemiah does mention that no official in Israel knew where he went or what he planned to do
    - It would seem that he was concealing his purposes from the Jews themselves, at least at first
    - The only logical answer is that Nehemiah wanted to control the message
      - He had one chance to make a first impression
    - If he had paraded around the city wall in the day time, and with an entourage, the word would get out that he was surveying the wall
  - That public display would then give rise to assumptions and gossip among the people concerning Nehemiah's plans and purposes
    - "He must be sent from the king to check on our work."
    - "He's here to make Israel slaves to finish the work."
    - "He's going to rebuild the walls and kick out the Jews."
    - Whatever their conclusions, Nehemiah faced the possibility of losing the PR battle long before he could make his case
- Instead, Nehemiah wants to assess the situation in private, develop his plan and then make his pitch without competition

**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.

- Nehemiah knew he must preach the call of God to the people without voices of dissent competing for the hearts and minds of the people
  - The spoken word is the powerful tool God uses to stir His people into action one way or another
  - But the Lord doesn't share His stage with anyone
  - Nehemiah couldn't afford to lose his one opportunity to preach the truth of God's call to rebuild the wall

- Throughout the ages, God has determined, by the mystery of preaching, to speak to His people through the mouths of men called to preach
  - And there is simply no substitute for the call of the spoken word
  - The Word made flesh by the voice of men echoing the words of God
- Nehemiah's address to the people of Israel must be a spoken call to action and obedience
  - Nehemiah doesn't send his appeal through messengers, or by letter
  - He assembles the people and delivers His call with God at the center of his argument
  - This technique is as ancient as Creation, and yet, it remains God's method to reach, exhort and inspire His people to know and follow Him
- It's no coincidence that even in this age of the Internet, smartphones, multimedia and the like, that people still find pulpit preaching compelling, essential and irreplaceable
  - These modern inventions have only served to make preaching more accessible and popular
    - We can read sermons
    - We can watch dramas
    - We can browse websites
    - But nothing stirs us to think and act differently as powerfully as a well-delivered sermon from the Word of God
  - And that's the way the Lord intends
    - Godly leaders in the Church can come in many shapes, sizes, personalities and with a variety of strengths and gifts
    - But the one universal ingredient is a gift of exhortation, combined with a grasp of God's Word
    - Call it teaching or preaching...
    - But the ability to communicate through the spoken word is essential to leading God's people
  - And when the time comes to exhort God's people, a godly leader understands that the enemy will be close behind, trying to disrupt and interrupt the preaching
    - Hoping to block or neutralize its effects
    - So Nehemiah stacks the deck in his favor as he determines the time and manner to reveal his plan
- And sure enough, the enemy responds in short measure

**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.”**

- The two officials who had been disturbed by Nehemiah’s arrival hear of the plan
  - Clearly, the word has spread fast, indicating that not everyone in the city of Jerusalem is a friend
    - As these enemies of Israel learn of the plan, they go down to the city to see what they can do to put a stop to it
    - They’ve seen the king’s letter, so they can’t oppose Nehemiah directly
    - So they try the next best thing: they look to undermine him in the eyes of the people
  - Notice, in v.19, these three men are said to mock and despise “us”
    - They aren’t speaking to Nehemiah
    - They are directing their derision against the people of Israel, hoping to discourage them or frighten them into disregarding Nehemiah’s call
  - The enemy rarely makes a frontal assault against the work of God
    - He is too crafty for that, preferring to attack at the weak spot
    - Nehemiah wasn’t going to be swayed by God’s enemies
    - But God’s people are fragile and vulnerable, which is why Nehemiah was sent to them in the first place
    - So these men try to place doubt in the people’s minds
- Once again, Nehemiah steps up to defend and encourage God’s people
  - Nehemiah bravely stands up to these men and states one of the more memorable one-liners in the Bible (and he has another one later)
    - Nehemiah tells them three important things
    - First, he says the success of the people doesn’t depend on their skill, bravery, wealth or even the king’s permission
    - They may have skill, they may feel brave, they may have wealth, and they may even have received permission from the king
    - But their success won’t come from these things...it will come from the Lord alone
  - Therefore, Nehemiah says, secondly, that the people will persevere in building the walls, because if the Lord is for us, who can be against us?
    - Knowing the Lord will bring success doesn’t mean we don’t have to work or contend with difficulties
    - It means we have every reason to persevere, despite those things
    - And that’s Nehemiah’s conclusion as well
  - Finally, Nehemiah informs the men that they have no portion, right or memorial in

## Jerusalem

- The word “portion” refers to having a tribal history in the land
    - So no portion of the land belonged to their ancestors
  - Therefore, they have no right to claim any of the land of Israel in their day
    - They had no standing to decide how the land might be used or what might take place with it
  - Finally, they have no memorial, meaning there will be no record of these men in any future Jerusalem
  - Said simply, these men have no past, present or future interest in this matter... so butt out!
- So the building begins, and Chapter 3 is the detail of who did what to accomplish the building of the wall
    - You have a map handout to help you follow the places where the work was taking place
      - So we’re going to read the entire chapter at once to see the entirety of the building process

**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.

**Neh. 3:3** Now the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars.

**Neh. 3:4** Next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz made repairs. And next to him Meshullam the son of Berechiah the son of Meshezabel made repairs. And next to him Zadok the son of Baana also made repairs.

**Neh. 3:5** Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters.

**Neh. 3:6** Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars.

**Neh. 3:7** Next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, also made repairs for the official seat of the governor of the province beyond the River.

**Neh. 3:8** Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah of the goldsmiths made repairs. And next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.

**Neh. 3:9** Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs.

**Neh. 3:10** Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs.

**Neh. 3:11** Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of Furnaces.

**Neh. 3:12** Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters.

**Neh. 3:13** Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and a thousand cubits of the wall to the Refuse Gate.

**Neh. 3:14** Malchijah the son of Rechab, the official of the district of Beth-haccherem repaired the Refuse Gate. He built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars.

**Neh. 3:15** Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, the official of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He built it, covered it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and the wall of the Pool of Shelah at the king's garden as far as the steps that descend from the city of David.

**Neh. 3:16** After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, official of half the district of Beth-zur, made repairs as far as a point opposite the tombs of David, and as far as the artificial pool and the house of the mighty men.

**Neh. 3:17** After him the Levites carried out repairs under Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, the official of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district.

**Neh. 3:18** After him their brothers carried out repairs under Bavvai the son of Henadad, official of the other half of the district of Keilah.

**Neh. 3:19** Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, the official of Mizpah, repaired another section in front of the ascent of the armory at the Angle.

**Neh. 3:20** After him Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the Angle to the doorway of the house of Eliashib the high priest.

**Neh. 3:21** After him Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz repaired another section, from the doorway of Eliashib's house even as far as the end of his house.

**Neh. 3:22** After him the priests, the men of the valley, carried out repairs.

**Neh. 3:23** After them Benjamin and Hasshub carried out repairs in front of their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, carried out repairs beside his house.

**Neh. 3:24** After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah as far as the Angle and as far as the corner.

**Neh. 3:25** Palal the son of Uzai made repairs in front of the Angle and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king, which is by the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh made repairs.

**Neh. 3:26** The temple servants living in Ophel made repairs as far as the front of the Water Gate toward the east and the projecting tower.

**Neh. 3:27** After them the Tekoites repaired another section in front of the great projecting tower and as far as the wall of Ophel.



**Neh. 3:28** Above the Horse Gate the priests carried out repairs, each in front of his house.

**Neh. 3:29** After them Zadok the son of Immer carried out repairs in front of his house. And after him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, carried out repairs.

**Neh. 3:30** After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah carried out repairs in front of his own quarters.

**Neh. 3:31** After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, carried out repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, in front of the Inspection Gate and as far as the upper room of the corner.

**Neh. 3:32** Between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants carried out repairs.

- The third chapter of Nehemiah provides a detailed (some might say tedious) list of all the workers and their assignments in the building of the wall
  - The list begins with Eliashib, the grandson of Jeshua and his brothers building the Sheep Gate
    - They filled in the wall between two towers that marked the center strongholds on the northern wall
    - This family had the help of at least two other families
      - In this context, a family means a clan, a large group
  - Then as we scan down the chapter, we find the same thing happening all around the city wall
    - Another clan rebuilds the Fish Gate also on the northern wall
    - Another clan builds the Old Gate on the extreme NW corner
    - Another team for the Valley Gate on the west side of the city
    - Another team worked on the Refuse Gate (Dung Gate) on the extreme southern end
  - Then, up the eastern wall, the Fountain Gate is repaired
    - Another man named Nehemiah works as well
    - And down the chapter, we see different families taking part at different places along the city
    - We even find the Levites and priests working in sections
    - By the time we reach the end of the chapter, we're back at the Sheep gate, having circled the entire city wall with workers
- What's most interesting about this chapter, is the diversity of people engaged in the project
  - Literally, there is no one in the city who isn't working on the wall

- They have put aside any other daily duty or pursuit
- Their regular labors have taken a backseat to pursuing the call of God
- Crops aren't being planted or harvested
- The expectation is the Lord will take care of those needs as Israel serves Him
- Isn't it remarkable how Nehemiah was able to engage so many different families in such a large project
  - 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
- Every member of the nation had a part to play in the work
  - The wall lay in ruins for decades as the people went about their daily lives
  - And then suddenly, the people were of one mind in responding to the call of the Lord
  - One godly man speaking a word from God can move a people to turn their priorities upside down
- For any aspiring leader, here's the secret to sanctifying God's people: let them do the work of ministry
  - Paul says that the path to Christ-like living is to serve, and that service is encouraged and enabled through the preparation of godly leaders

**Eph. 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,**

**Eph. 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;**

**Eph. 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.**

- These various leadership roles in the Church were given to the Body to ensure that the Body was properly equipped
  - That we are taught, that we are inspired, exhorted, and led
- And that equipping is intended to prepare us to serve in ministry
- And Paul says that ministry is service to the Body of Christ
- If our time spent in Bible study or in church doesn't ultimately lead us to serve in some capacity, then the equipping has been for nothing
- And then, Paul says in v.13, that the work of service is the means by which we attain to the unity of faith and to the knowledge of the Son
  - It is the path to becoming a mature Christian
  - So to put it simply, we are sanctified through service

- When the Nation of Israel responded to Nehemiah's call to serve, they experienced a measure of sanctification in their sacrificial service
- Nehemiah couldn't build a wall by himself, so he had no choice but to recruit the nation to work beside him
  - But pastors and other leaders have that choice today in many cases
  - We can look to the people to serve in the Church or we can look elsewhere
  - We can use the Church funds to hire people to perform many of the duties in the Church, rather than exhorting the people to serve
  - When we do this, we outsource sanctification
  - We go against the principle of Ephesians 4:11-13
- We have to be willing to allow a call to go unmet so that the pressure builds for the members of the Body to step up to meet the need
  - In Jerusalem, the walls sat in ruins for decades
  - That wasn't the best outcome, but it was better than letting someone else build it for Israel
  - In the day that Israel finally heard the call of the Lord and responded in unison, they received a great spiritual blessing
  - Not only were the walls built, but the people were edified...they were built up too
  - Which is the true mission of any godly leader: to build up the people
- And since the work has begun in such a dramatic way, then certainly God's enemies will step up their challenge as well
  - Once these walls are complete, the city will be in a position to defend itself from any attacker
    - At that point, they have respect and standing among their enemies
    - The world could no longer take advantage of an Israel that could defend itself
    - And so the prospect of the walls going back up is greatly disturbing to any who hated the thought of a strong Israel
  - So the protagonists return to the city and begin to mock the workers as they work at their tasks

**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!"

- Once again, Sanballat and Tobiah try their best to discourage the people by ridiculing them as they work
  - We're told he spoke in the presence of other influential men from the surrounding area of Samaria
    - The Hebrew word for "wealthy" also means "army", and that is probably the better translation in this case
    - Sanballat has come down from Samaria and brought his clan and army to intimidate the people as they build
  - And in a loud voice, they begin their mocking
    - They ask can this people restore a wall by themselves?
    - Can they finish in a day?
    - Can they sacrifice?
    - And if a little fox jumped on the wall, it would fall
  - The point in these questions is to imply the people are in a hopeless situation
    - First, they question the people's expertise and ability to construct a useful wall
    - Then, they ask if they can finish it quickly enough to avoid an attack from the army that stood watching them
    - And they ask if they can sacrifice, suggesting the people would need to pause their work sooner or later to conduct the normal sacrifices
      - Which would then leave the walls unguarded
    - Finally, even if the wall was finished, their army could tear it down easily
  - Each of these taunts were intended to drive doubt and fear into the people's hearts again
    - None of these people were likely expert wall builders, so the comments probably worked to a degree
    - But as Nehemiah has already said, their success wasn't dependent on their own abilities, but on the Lord
    - Moreover, the point in God's economy wasn't to build the world's strongest wall...it was to build the world's most godly people
    - They need not worry about the army...God was on their side
- Once again, when the enemy is working to discourage God's people, the response of a godly leader becomes all-important
  - He doesn't need to puff up his chest and fill the room with hot air, trying to fight words with words
    - Instead, the godly leader leaves the fight to God
    - And that's what Nehemiah chooses to do
    - He prays for the Lord to avenge the people and lead the enemy's tactics to fail

**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's response is to pray to the Lord for justice in the face of the enemy's work
  - He calls to the Lord for vengeance
    - This is the proper response for a godly man
    - We can fight only so far in our own power
    - But when the enemy begins to discourage our people, pray for the Lord to deal with His enemies in His own power
  - As Paul teaches

**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.

- The Lord is more than capable of handling these situations
- We need not worry...if our work is truly the work of the Lord, then nothing will prevail against the work He has ordained
- Nehemiah's prayer is a strongly worded condemnation of these people
  - At first, this might sound excessive and harsh, but it's really nothing more than asking that their own words come to rest upon their heads
    - Nehemiah asks that all they say about Israel would be brought back on their heads
    - Let their walls be felled
    - Let their cities be taken
    - Let them be plundered and taken in to captivity
  - Then he asks the Lord that their sin would not be forgiven for having demoralized the builders
    - We need to understand this statement as an inspired statement reflecting God's will for these men
    - God himself is speaking through Nehemiah to announce His own intentions
    - These men are not going to be counted among the saints when all is said and done
    - And their sin in this situation will be brought back upon them
- As a result of Nehemiah's prayer, the wall construction continued

**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.**

- The wall has now reached half its intended height
  - Now Israel's enemies can't deny that the city wall is well on its way to being built
  - If they can build it halfway, they can build it all the way
- So once more, they set out to stop the progress

**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.**

- After days and weeks of trying to discourage the builders, now the enemies of Israel decide it's time to take up arms to stop them
  - Sanballat and Tobiah are back, along with Arabs, Ammonites and Ashdodites, all long-time enemies of Israel
    - These four groups represent the four sides of Jerusalem
    - The attack would come from the north, south, east and west
  - Though Nehemiah doesn't record it in detail, we know an attack took place and it claimed many casualties
    - Josephus reports that many Jews were killed in the attack that followed
    - But the attack wasn't strong enough to capture the city
- Does it surprise you that the Lord allowed this attack to claim Jewish lives? Or that He allowed the attack at all?
  - Would you have expected that the Lord would have defended the city from its enemies entirely?
    - He certainly could have done so
    - But He doesn't for at least two reasons
  - First, the people are given a firsthand lesson in why the wall needed to be rebuilt, and why it should have been rebuilt in earlier decades
    - Obedience to God's Word is an imperative
    - God is a righteous judge, and if we run afoul of God's instructions, we can expect consequences
    - God allowed the enemy to succeed in a limited, measured way to teach Israel a lesson on the importance of finishing this wall
  - Secondly, the Lord has already declared through Daniel the prophet that Israel's past sins under the Old Covenant would result in a long period of Gentile oppression over Jerusalem – we call it the Age of the Gentiles

- It began in 605 BC
- And it will not end until the Second Coming of Christ
- And this attack is but one in a long history of attacks by Gentiles on the city of Jerusalem, as Jesus described

**Luke 21:23** “Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people;

**Luke 21:24** and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

- The times of the Gentiles is that time between the first attack of Nebuchadnezzar and the Second Coming of Christ at the conclusion of Tribulation
- Only at Christ’s return, will Jerusalem return to a period of eternal peace
- Once again, Nehemiah’s response is prayer

**Neh. 4:9** But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.

**Neh. 4:10** Thus in Judah it was said,  
“The strength of the burden bearers is failing,  
Yet there is much rubbish;  
And we ourselves are unable  
To rebuild the wall.”

- Notice this time, it’s not just Nehemiah praying for the Lord to intervene
  - Now the whole of the people is praying together
    - This is a good example of the sanctifying effect of serving together
    - As the people join together to work on the Lord’s task, they begin to see the persecution that comes upon God’s people
    - As they face that persecution together, they are brought to a greater dependence on the Lord
    - As they sense that dependence, they pray together
  - Sanctification is a process of coming to the end of ourselves so that God may show us something better in us
    - These people are learning to follow the Lord in the face of adversity
    - They are learning to pray when faced with trials
    - They are learning to trust the Lord with their needs
    - And they are learning these things because a leader inspired them to join in the

work of the Lord

- Prayer is important and makes everything else possible
  - But there is also a time to act in keeping with God's instructions
    - Nehemiah tells the people to set up guards to protect the workers
    - This isn't an act of faithlessness
    - It's a recognition that God had given them the means to solve the problem
    - Even still, guards aren't going to be successful against an army unless the Lord grants that success
  - The point is, that a godly leader is a man who demonstrates dependence on prayer, combined with a willingness to act when God makes a way available
    - Nehemiah organizes these guard units, but the damage has already been done
    - The people are burdened now with the weight of the work, the fear of attacks, the mourning of the lost people, and the immensity of the task
    - At this point, the work is in jeopardy, and the outcome is in doubt
  - So it falls to the leader to respond yet again for the sake of the people



- The restoration of Israel is in its final phase
  - The Lord has raised a godly leader to take Israel from the classroom to the field
    - And they began to encounter the opposition of the peoples surrounding Israel

**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.

- As we learned previously, the enemies of Israel from among the surrounding nations are determined to stop the rebuilding of Israel
  - This opposition is more than merely political
    - It is a reflection of God's decree through the prophets Daniel and Jeremiah
    - That beginning with the Babylonian captivity, Israel had entered into a period when Gentile nations would persecute – and at times – overrun the nation
    - This period continues until the Second Coming of Christ
  - Here, we see but a small example of that endless Gentile persecution of Israel
    - Three men lead the opposition to the rebuilding and take up arms to stop Nehemiah
      - Sanballat and Tobiah are back, along with Arabs, Ammonites and Ashdodites, all long-time enemies of Israel
      - These four groups represent the four sides of Jerusalem
      - They attack would come from the north, south, east and west
    - Though Nehemiah doesn't record it in detail, we know an attack took place and it claimed many casualties
      - Josephus reports that many Jews were killed in the initial attack that followed
      - But the attack wasn't strong enough to capture the city
- The attack gives the people a firsthand lesson in why the wall needed to be rebuilt,
  - God allowed the enemy to succeed in a limited, measured way to teach Israel a lesson on the importance of finishing this wall
    - As we saw earlier, Nehemiah's response is prayer

**Neh. 4:9** But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.

**Neh. 4:10** Thus in Judah it was said,  
“The strength of the burden bearers is failing,

**Yet there is much rubbish;  
And we ourselves are unable  
To rebuild the wall.”**

- All the people pray together for the Lord to strengthen them for the work and to protect them from further attack
  - We remarked last time that prayer is always the first response of God’s people to any circumstances
  - Prayer recognizes God’s irreplaceable role in seeing us through our trials
- But having offered a prayer, the people move forward to do what they can to protect themselves and their work

**Neh. 4:11 Our enemies said, “They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work.”**

**Neh. 4:12 When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, “They will come up against us from every place where you may turn,”**

**Neh. 4:13 then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows.**

**Neh. 4:14 When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: “ Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses.”**

- Nehemiah tells us that the enemies of Israel conspired for another attack, one that would bring an end to the work
  - But Jews living outside the city overheard the conversations of Israel’s enemies
    - They reported those conversations back to Nehemiah and the people
    - Now, Nehemiah could have responded to these reports in one of two ways
      - He could have returned to prayer and asked God why He wasn’t intervening to stop the attack
      - Or Nehemiah could conclude that the reports from these Jewish spies were evidence of God’s divine intervention and take action
  - Nehemiah chose option #2
    - He reacts to the news by taking the necessary steps
    - Prayer is essential to walking in the will of God with His divine blessing
    - But prayer is a prerequisite to action, not a substitute for action
    - Oliver Cromwell said, “Trust in God and keep your gun powder dry”
    - Spurgeon said, “Pray as if everything depended on God, then preach as if

everything depended on you.”

- Nehemiah stations guards at various points to protect the workers
  - You might have wondered why he didn't do this in the first place
    - Clearly, he underestimated the degree of threat
    - And by using so many families to guard the work, he's losing valuable labor for the wall building
    - So until the threat was obvious, he hadn't wanted to remove any workers from the task
  - Also, Nehemiah responds to the people's fear
    - The guards must have looked pitiful compared to the strength of the surrounding nations
    - So Nehemiah doesn't try to pump them up by telling them they were strong or fearless or invincible
    - They knew better than to believe that flattery
      - They weren't strong enough and they were very vulnerable
      - They knew that
  - Instead, Nehemiah reminds them of God's power
    - The union of reliance on God and personal action has come full circle
    - Nehemiah began with an appeal to God through prayer
    - Then, he stood up and took every action he could to accomplish the work God had given him
    - Yet even as he went about the work, he recognized he was sustained by the power of God
    - His success was ultimately a product of God's strength, not his own
- Here is a secret to Christian maturity and success in personal ministry
  - Never see your partnership with God as an “or” partnership
    - God makes something happen or I do it myself
    - If that's how you see your relationship with the Lord, then over time, you'll often sit on your hands and go nowhere
    - Then, you'll get tired of seeing no progress, so then you try to do everything in your own power, never bothering to check back with the Lord to get His input
  - Instead, recognize it is an “and” partnership
    - It is God *and* us
    - He is the beginning and end of all things
    - So every good work begins and ends with God
    - But if He wanted to accomplish the work on His own, He never would have called us in the first place

- So He expects us to put our shoulders to the work, because He plans to accomplish His work through us
- Therefore, serving God is work, it requires sacrifice, it can be demanding, requiring we bear other's burdens
  - But that burden is light, because we're not working to earn the Lord's favor
  - Christ earned that favor for us
  - We serve in joy – just don't think it's going to be easy
- So now it's become apparent that defense is as important as construction, so Nehemiah adjusts the procedures and institutes new rules to guard the people

**Neh. 4:15** When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work.

**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."

**Neh. 4:21** So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared.

**Neh. 4:22** At that time I also said to the people, "Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day."

**Neh. 4:23** So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water.

- Notice, in v.15, that Nehemiah credits God with frustrating the plans of Israel's enemies
  - This was option #2
    - Nehemiah knew that the discovery of the impending attack was a work of God to protect Israel
    - But if God's move was to warn the people, then it stands to reason He expected the people to take the next move
    - God could have simply wiped out Israel's enemies, but instead, He allowed them to stand by and threaten the city

- Meanwhile, He sent the warning to Nehemiah
- And Nehemiah correctly recognized that the warning meant it was Nehemiah's turn to respond to God's move
- Nehemiah's move is quite impressive
  - First, he takes half his workforce and redeploys them to guard duty
  - That's the price he was willing to pay...slowing the work down by 50% for the sake of the people
- In Nehemiah's case, the need for protection is easy to see, but there is a lesson for leaders in ministry that may be easy to miss
  - We learned earlier that God gave Nehemiah a construction project
    - But that construction project wasn't building a wall
    - It was a call to build up the people of Israel
    - God provides leaders in ministry to shepherd His people, so the work of ministry is ultimately about building up people
    - The word edify means "to build up"
  - Often, leaders begin to confuse their purpose
    - They come to think they are supposed to build walls – or buildings or campuses or Internet and television empires
    - They see people as nothing more than the means to building walls
    - Instead, they should understand that walls are merely an opportunity to build up people
  - Nehemiah didn't care that he lost 50% productivity when he appointed half his workers as guards
    - What good would have been to finish the city walls twice as fast if in the end, there was no one left to live in city?
    - He knew the people mattered far more than the speed or efficiency of his project
    - Similarly, what use is our ministry, no matter what it accomplishes, if in its pursuit we disappoint, demoralize or discard God's people as the price of success?
- Secondly, notice that even with the actions Nehemiah has taken, victory isn't assured
  - He says to the trumpeter, "Stay nearby so you can warn the people"
    - There just weren't enough people to cover the entire length of the wall
    - So the plan was, if an attack came upon one part of the wall, Nehemiah would sound the trumpet to rally the people to the point of the attack
    - That way, the entire strength of the guard could be brought to bear in defense of the wall at a certain point
  - This is a sensible plan, given his limited resources, but notice also that Nehemiah points the people once more to God for victory

- Despite the planning, Nehemiah says in v.20 that God will fight for the people
- Here is another example of “and” theology
- God and the people will defend the wall
  - The people will rally together and God will fight for us
- Throughout all this, you can clearly see God’s wisdom in not solving this problem for the people directly
  - Rather than vanquish the enemy on His own, God has enlisted the people to defend the wall
  - But as Nehemiah says, God is working through the people to accomplish that outcome
  - The wisdom is requiring the people to work together in seeking an outcome that only God can bring
  - In a nutshell, that’s the point of any gathering of God’s people
- The Body of Christ is assembled to accomplish a work that only God can bring about
  - The people are united, encouraged, strengthened and edified when they come together in a common obedience to the will of God
  - In the end, the Lord will accomplish the work, but the unity of the Body makes that work possible

**Col. 2:6** Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,  
**Col. 2:7** having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him  
 and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

- The “you” in that passage is plural
- Paul says the Church as a whole is being built up and established in faith by walking together with Christ
- Therefore, the people have successfully weathered the storm of attack from outside, so now it’s time for the enemy to attack and divide from within

**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.”**

- As Paul wrote, the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil, and that truth is apparent here
  - In the days before and during the wall construction, the people had begun to take advantage financially of each other
- There are three types of complaints, representing three types of abuse within the camp
  - In v.2, we hear that larger clans were hoarding and consuming much of the available grain, leaving too little for the smaller families
  - As a result, in v.3, a second group of Jews was forced to mortgage their land to other Jews to pay for grain, since their own lands weren't yielding enough
  - Then, in v.4, we find a third group who borrowed money to pay taxes on their property because they didn't have enough income from their grain production
- So selfishness reigned in the land of Israel
  - Those who hoarded placed the rest of the camp into need
  - Those in need were required to borrow from other Jews
- And evidently, the Jews who lent were making a profit at the expense of their Jewish brothers
  - They were taking advantage of the misfortune of their brothers in the land by charging exorbitant interest (usury)
  - They took advantage of those in greatest need
  - Charging interest against another Jew was illegal under the Law of Moses, but the Jews did so nonetheless
- In v.5, the people complain to Nehemiah that some families have been forced to sell their children to other Jewish families as servants to pay their debt
  - The Law itself provided a means for families to send their sons and daughters as indentured servants to pay off family debt
    - Think of it like a family today that forces teenage children to work to help meet ends meet
    - Families in Israel could do the same, but within limits set by the Law
  - But now that the work of the wall is consuming so much of their time, families still need to eat
    - And with the debts are coming due, the families are suffering as they find themselves unable to repay
    - They complain to Nehemiah that they are returning to slavery again
    - Only this time, they are becoming slaves to one another
- Nehemiah's response follows

**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.

- Naturally, Nehemiah was angry with the people’s sin
  - And their behavior was sinful
  - First, the larger families were selfish and showed no regard for the needs of their brothers
  - Secondly, the families lending were robbing from their brothers and sisters, placing them in even greater financial hardship
- So he considers his next course of action carefully
  - He begins by consulting himself
  - The phrase simply means to give careful consideration
  - Then he consults with the nobles and rulers, which means the tribal and family leaders
- This is smart politics on Nehemiah’s part
  - Nehemiah may be the governor of the Persian province and the established leader in the city, but that doesn’t mean he can act unilaterally
  - He needs to lead in building a common perspective before he can expect to lead a unified response
- Every Christian leader faces this challenge sooner or later
  - No matter what authority we feel we have, that authority is never absolute
    - Only Christ’s rule is unchallenged
    - The rest of us need persuasion
  - Nehemiah likely knew the right thing to do from the very moment he heard the news
    - His time spent in consultation was more likely a process of building allies to his side
    - This is manipulation
    - This is politics
      - Politics isn’t a dirty word, even if most politics are dirty
      - Politics is the art of influencing people into agreement
  - Nehemiah’s role as a leader was to influence God’s people into an agreement with



## God's expectations

- And so it is for every godly leader
- We seek to influence God's people into agreement with the Word of God
- We want to influence them into an obedient walk and life lived for the Kingdom
- But a leader can't mandate those things
  - He can't order obedience or command faithful living and expect that to settle the matter
  - He must exercise skill in politics, in the best sense of the word
  - He must teach, exhort, correct, persuade, and admonish God's people, until they see the truth for themselves
  - Then, with the truth reigning in their hearts, God's people will obey
  - Then a leader will truly have led
- In v.7, Nehemiah has built his alliances and arrived at a consensus among the leaders, so then he begins to persuade the people
  - He begins with an accusation of misconduct
    - He says they are charging usury interest
    - In other words, he says the people are violating the Law of God
    - They are sinning
  - Then, he makes a teaching point from recent history
    - Nehemiah says he and the other exiles who traveled down from Persia were able to redeem some Jewish brothers owned by Gentiles
    - Most likely, when Nehemiah decided to go up to Jerusalem, he decided to bring as many Jews with him as he could
    - But many Jews remained slaves in Persia, and their Persian owners would not release them for free, of course
    - So Nehemiah and the others raised funds, probably from their own personal savings, to free as many Jews as possible
    - Like Oscar Schindler, Nehemiah purchased the freedom of as many Jews as he could
  - Then Nehemiah, takes this fact and uses it to convict the hearts of the people
    - He says if Jews were willing to pay for the freedom of their brothers and sisters in Persia, then why would these same Jews turn around and re-enslave their neighbors?
    - It makes no sense that these people would be so sacrificial and selfless in one moment, and then do an "about face" and become the oppressor the next
- In response, the people are silent, with no one able to respond
  - That is a sure sign of conviction
    - Conviction is a powerful tool of the Spirit

- Conviction is a feeling of self-condemnation
- The flesh is wired to reject conviction
  - If at all possible, we wiggle out from under its pressure
  - We seek excuses, we rationalize our choices, we blame others
  - We require convincing and we defend our position
- But when the Lord is working in our heart, conviction is inescapable
  - We may try to fight, but in the face of overwhelming evidence of our sin, we lose our strength
  - We may run, but we can't escape the reality of who we are
- So when Nehemiah speaks with spiritual authority, the conviction of the Spirit is present, working in the hearts of the people
  - They hear the truth, and in their hearts they sense their guilt
  - And there is no argument they can make to defend their actions
  - So they remain silent
- Hear again, leaders should learn the lesson from Nehemiah
  - Leading God's people into conviction requires a willingness to call sin "sin"
    - We can't avoid the hard moments
    - We must have the courage to call it like it is
  - Then, having named the sin, the leader needs to teach and exhort the people to see themselves as God sees them
    - Showing them their hypocrisy or their selfishness or stubbornness or whatever may be their personal stumbling block to obedience
    - In revealing these things, we give opportunity for the Spirit to speak truth to their hearts
    - And as the Spirit works, the heart is changed
    - Maybe not at first, but in time
- When conviction takes hold, then the leader moves to restore the people by offering a path to obedience

**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."

- Nehemiah asks a leading question: should not the people walk in the fear of the God so they may stand apart from the ungodly nations of the world?
  - In other words, shouldn't God's people look differently than the world?
    - Every man or woman of God under the conviction of the Spirit will agree with that truthful statement
    - Of course, we want to be a witness for the Lord
    - We want to stand for truth and righteousness, as the Lord expects
  - Next, Nehemiah offers himself as a model for the people
    - He says he and his servants have been lending money to the people in need
    - Yet Nehemiah isn't charging interest, we presume
    - And therefore, he concludes, the people should stop charging interest to one another
- Nehemiah's call to obey the Law addresses the sin of Israel, but there is still the matter of restitution
  - Ceasing to charge future interest doesn't correct for past injustice
    - So to rectify the situation, Nehemiah calls for a jubilee
    - In v.11, he asks that all debts be forgiven and all property be returned to its owner
  - Also, he asks that of any interest charged, that the "hundredth part" be returned
    - That was the interest rate, which amounted to 1/100th (1%) of the value per month (or 12% annual interest rate)
    - Everything was to be made right
  - Would we have the guts to make such a demand of God's people?
    - The ever-present dilemma of any leader is how to balance strength with popularity
    - On the one hand, God appoints leaders to move people where they won't go on their own
    - On the other hand, leaders are people too, so naturally they seek the people's agreement and admiration
      - But they can do this to a fault
  - Godly leadership isn't about building consensus
    - It requires taking people where they do not want to go
    - But doing it in such a way that they think it was their idea from the start
    - Margaret Thatcher once said:

**Consensus is the process of abandoning all beliefs, principles, values and policies. So it is something in which no one believes and to which no one objects.**

- Nehemiah's approach leads the people to make a very difficult, but absolutely essential conclusion
  - Yet they adopt it willingly in the end, as if it was their own idea
  - They made this decision based on the conviction of the Spirit, the example of their leader and his call to respond

**Neh. 5:12** Then they said, "We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say." So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise.

**Neh. 5:13** I also shook out the front of my garment and said, "Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" And they praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.

- As we see the people's response in v.12, it's obvious they have taken Nehemiah's words to heart and are willing to work the works of repentance
  - To ensure the people don't experience a change of heart later, Nehemiah makes them swear an oath before the priests
    - This is smart leadership as well
    - Believers who live in their flesh are easily swayed one way or the other
      - When they're alone, they do as their flesh desires
      - But when they are in the company of godly influences, they quickly agree to change their behavior
      - And then, just as quickly, they revert to sin when the influence is gone
      - The flesh offers no stability
    - Only when we live in the Spirit, when we grow spiritually mature through a practicing of the disciplines of our faith – only then, do we become stable in all our ways, as James says
  - Nehemiah knows this people are not stable, so he puts a fence around their flesh, so to speak
    - He calls them to promise before the priests
    - This meant they were bound under penalty of loss
    - Nehemiah names the loss that would result: the offender would lose all his own possessions
    - So that if any revert to their old behavior or fail to keep their promise, they lose far more than they might gain
    - And notice in v.13, all the people kept their promise
  - A godly leader must consider the need to enforce godliness through whatever

means necessary and proper

- Establishing rules that protect us from ourselves
- Avoiding even the appearance of impropriety
- Don't underestimate the flesh and its power to draw us into sin
- And the need for boundaries doesn't end with the people
  - The leadership must also guard against temptations and the schemes of the enemy
  - Many pastors and other leaders have fallen because they failed to respect the power of their own flesh
- Even Nehemiah set boundaries for himself

**Neh. 5:14** Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food allowance.

**Neh. 5:15** But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God.

**Neh. 5:16** I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

**Neh. 5:17** Moreover, there were at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us.

**Neh. 5:18** Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox and six choice sheep, also birds were prepared for me; and once in ten days all sorts of wine were furnished in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the governor's food allowance, because the servitude was heavy on this people.

**Neh. 5:19** Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

- Nehemiah says that for the entire 12 years he served as governor over the province, he set strict boundaries for himself
  - Neither Nehemiah, nor anyone employed by him, accepted the governor's food allowance
    - The allowance for the governor was a tax upon the people whom a governor ruled
    - The tax was paid in grain and livestock
    - As a result, the governor usually enjoyed a lavish lifestyle at the expense of the people
  - But Nehemiah was determined not to repeat the sins of prior governors who

profited from their service at the people's expense

- The prior leaders not only took an exorbitant allowance for themselves, but they also took more for their servants
- Nehemiah chose a different course
- He applied himself to the work of the people
  - Initially, it was the work to build the wall
  - Later, it would have been other work in the city
  - Furthermore, he insisted that his servants work alongside the people as well
  - And Nehemiah never bought land
- Nehemiah states these things to make clear they earned their keep by their work
  - Both Nehemiah and his servants made a living through working in the same way as the people
  - He didn't accept an allowance of food
  - Nor did he earn his living by become a land baron, lording over the people
  - He did it the old fashioned way...he earned it
- Finally, Nehemiah says he was generous with what he had
  - He regularly invited 150 other Jews to share the food at his table, along with Gentiles from the surrounding area
  - Inviting others to the table was a Persian custom, which partly justified the governor's allowance
  - Still, Nehemiah carried on the tradition without taking the allowance he was due, he says
- It's not hard to appreciate the example Nehemiah was setting by his sacrifice
  - He demonstrated a love and concern for the people above himself
    - He didn't want to burden them anymore than necessary
    - Godly leaders should be a source of refreshment to the people they serve
    - People should see us coming and be encouraged by our presence, rather than feel added stress
    - We all know how many pastors and other religious leaders have made godliness a means to gain, despite Paul's warning in 1 Tim. 6
  - Secondly, Nehemiah set the example of working to provide for oneself
    - Ministry is not a profession, ministry is a service
    - And while one may make his living from the proclaiming of the Gospel, the focus should always remain on proclaiming the Gospel, not on making a living
    - And in many cases, it is better for all concerned that a leader make his own living so that those he serves will benefit from both his words and his example
      - It's easy for our flesh to dismiss godly counsel when it comes from someone

we resent

- If our leader burdens us financially, then we may use that burden as excuse to ignore what they say
- Nehemiah set an example every day of his 12 years of service by never taking his allowance, while showing diligence to work alongside the people
- Finally, Nehemiah didn't wear that sacrifice on his sleeve or find ways to remind the people how much sacrifice he was making on their behalf
  - On the contrary, he was generous with what he had
  - Furthermore, he continued in the expected traditions of hosting men at his table, even though he was doing it on his own dime
  - If it's possible for a leader to burden his people financially by taking too much, it is also possible for a leader to burden his people emotionally by reminding them of his sacrifice
  - Nehemiah took nothing and lived like he had everything
  - No doubt, the people saw him as a refreshing change from past leaders
- Why did Nehemiah make these sacrifices? We know he cared for the people, but that wasn't his only motivation
  - In v.19, Nehemiah asked the Lord to remember his decisions and sacrifices as he served the people without burdens
    - When Nehemiah says "remember me Lord", he doesn't mean remember to bring me to Heaven
    - Nehemiah was a man saved by faith alone, just as you and I are today
    - So if Nehemiah wasn't asking God to remember him for the sake of entering Heaven, what was he asking from God?
  - Nehemiah was asking God to reward him in the Kingdom for his faithfulness and sacrifice
    - Nehemiah wasn't interested in receiving his reward on earth
    - To be rewarded on earth means to forfeit reward in Heaven
    - And the Heavenly rewards for service will far outshine any reward we could possibly receive on earth
    - Nehemiah understood that, so he willingly gave up a reward on earth so that he could be eligible for greater reward in Heaven
  - This should be the motivation of every Christian, and especially every godly leader
    - This is why Paul says

**1 Tim. 6:6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.**

- The great gain Paul is speaking about is the eternal gain that godliness will yield

- But if we are to see that eternal reward in its fullness, we have to be content with what we have here and now, however meager it may be
- In fact, the more meager our life today, the more opportunity we have to earn eternal treasure
  - Because it means we aren't spending a lot of time trying to gain the world's treasure
  - Instead, we should be putting our time toward earning eternal treasure
  - Like Nehemiah, who spent his days working with the people, living on less so that he might be rewarded with more



- Nehemiah has successfully defended the city and the people from attacks, both from those outside the city and those inside
  - The neighboring Gentiles attacked the city with military might
    - They did some damage
    - But the people regrouped under Nehemiah's leadership
  - Then the enemy began to stir up strife and discord among the Jews inside the city
    - Complaints arose over the unfair treatment of wealthier Jews of poorer Jews
    - But once again, Nehemiah stepped in, righted the wrongs, and brought the people back together again
  - So then, the work resumed
    - This operation is a triumph of focus and determination
    - Nehemiah and the people aren't merely challenged to rebuild a wall
    - They are challenged by the enemy and the world in their walk with God
- So it goes when the Lord works to restore us in fellowship
  - It will be a battle from start to finish
    - If it's not our flesh drawing us away into sin, it's the world tempting us to replace the Lord's priorities with their own
    - If it's not the world, it's the enemy's schemes and temptations
    - And if it's not the enemy, it's our brothers and sisters in the faith contending with us, or our leaders disappointing us...or something else
  - The fact that restoring fellowship with the Lord can be so difficult is a lesson in itself of the importance of abiding in Christ at all times
    - Last week, we ended in Chapter 5, with the people refocused and the enemies of Israel still seeking a way to defeat the plan
    - In Chapter 6, we move into a new set of lessons for how godly leaders must respond in leading God's people to obedience

**Neh. 6:1** Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and that no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, **Neh. 6:2** then Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono." But they were planning to harm me.

**Neh. 6:3** So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"

**Neh. 6:4** They sent messages to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way.

- With the wall finished, Israel's enemies are running out of options
  - The walls are up, but the city gates have yet to be put in place
    - This means the enemies of Israel can still enter the city as they please
    - So they use this limited opportunity to pay a visit to Nehemiah inside the city
  - Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem send a message to Nehemiah by way of a messenger asking for a meeting
    - They ask Nehemiah to travel to Ono
    - Ono is a plain about 25 miles west of Jerusalem, near the sea
    - It was a no man's land between Judah and Samaria, a remote place of lawlessness
  - They tell Nehemiah to meet at Chephirim
    - The word "Chephirim" is the plural word for "village", so it may just describe a collection of towns in the area of Ono
    - Interestingly, it might also be translated "with the lions", which would be an apt description of what would happen to Nehemiah should he go
- Naturally, Nehemiah knows this is a trap
  - He says they were planning to harm Nehemiah
    - If he went to this place, he would likely never return
  - Furthermore, even if Nehemiah did manage to escape their grasp, by the time he returned from his four day trip, the enemies of Israel would have likely attacked and destroyed the city
    - Without Nehemiah sustaining and leading the people, they would crumble in the face of an attack
    - So Nehemiah wisely avoids the trap
    - He says, "I'm too busy to meet you"
  - The enemies of Israel recognized that Nehemiah was the key to the people's success
    - Leaders exist in the Body of Christ for a reason
    - While we might like to think that because every Christian is led by the same Spirit, therefore, we are equally capable of leading ourselves
    - But if that were true, the Lord would never have designated 12 of his disciples to be apostles
  - The truth is, God makes distinctions among men and women for good reason
    - He assigns some the responsibility to shepherd His sheep, feeding them so they will grow spiritually
    - They also guard the flock, making them to pass under the rod and leading them to an eternal reward
    - While we may rightly avoid men who attempt to lord over us by assuming too much power in the Body of Christ...

- Then, let's also acknowledge that we do have need for strong servant leaders who model Christ by calling us to follow and obey the Word
- The enemy certainly understands this truth
  - So he makes a point to attack the head of every congregation as often as he can
    - Those attacks will be all the more severe and persistent if that leader is particularly effective in carrying out God's commands
    - It's a brilliant strategy, and one the enemy has long used: attack at the strongest point first
    - If the strongest defender falls, then you won't even have to fight the weak points
  - This strategy worked perfectly in the first battle, in the Garden
    - The enemy set his eyes on defeating Woman, rather than Adam
    - Woman put up a fight, defending the Lord with His Word, though without sufficient understanding to recognize the enemy's deception
    - Once the enemy had defeated woman, he didn't even bother with Adam
    - Adam was clearly the weak link in the chain, as we see when he accepts the fruit from woman without argument
  - Unfortunately, over the centuries, many men (and women) leaders in the Church have fallen to the enemy's schemes, like Woman
    - They've fallen for the same reason Woman fell
    - Because they didn't recognize the enemy's techniques and learn how to defend against them
    - In this chapter, we'll see three ways the enemy works to defeat a leader and thereby bring down God's people
- In vs.1-4, we see the first of these attempts: the enemy seeks to distract or deceive Nehemiah into letting his guard down and making a misstep
  - In Nehemiah's situation, the deception was to lead him to think that a compromise with the enemy was possible
    - Perhaps Nehemiah was tiring of the fight
    - Perhaps he had a weak spot for being liked and honored and flattered
    - If he accepted their overture, he would be deceived and distracted from the task
  - If we had a dollar for every church leader who succumbed to the enemy's deceptions and distractions, we could buy the temple
    - Pastors have traded the pulpit to run for public office, to run corporations, to promote best-selling books or campaign for social causes
    - Others have remained in the pulpit, but been distracted in their message
      - Preaching prosperity, social equality, health and healing, or just entertaining the crowds became more attractive than preaching Christ and Him crucified

- Elders and deacons and teachers and Sunday school leaders have likewise set aside their calling and diligence because the enemy dangled some shiny object in their path
- A promotion at work, a new girlfriend, a midlife crisis
- The defense to distraction and deception is focus and understanding
  - Our leaders must be men and women who wake up every day reaffirming their commitment to the hard work of ministry
  - And when something intriguing comes along, they need to be wise enough to expect the enemy to throw such things in our path
  - And the Lord allows the enemy a degree of freedom to test our hearts
- We need to be in prayer for our leaders that they not take the exit ramps that the enemy places in their path
  - We want leaders who will make the kind of sacrifices that serving the Lord requires, because they make those sacrifices on our behalf
  - So it's in our best interest to pray for them to stand strong
- Now, we move to the enemy's second common technique: dishonoring and discrediting leaders

**Neh. 6:5 Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand.**

**Neh. 6:6 In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports.**

**Neh. 6:7 "You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'A king is in Judah!' And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together."**

- Once again, Sanballat uses a letter to thwart Nehemiah's leadership, but this time, it's an open letter
  - In this day, an open letter was literally what it sounds like
    - It was a written instrument that hadn't been sealed closed
    - Usually, a letter was sealed with wax or some other way to ensure the contents of the letter remained private until read by the intended recipient
    - The courier was tasked with ensuring the integrity of the seals
  - But in this case, Sanballat doesn't seal his letter to Nehemiah
    - He sends an open letter precisely so that the courier and all whom the courier encounters will eavesdrop on the conversation
    - Sanballat's purpose is to discredit Nehemiah as a leader before the people
  - In the letter, Sanballat impugns Nehemiah's motives and purposes in assuming

leadership over the city rebuilding

- He says it's been reported among the nations that Israel is planning to rebel against Persian authority
  - Furthermore, Nehemiah has designs on becoming king of Israel
  - And the prophets are walking around declaring that a king is in Judah
  - Finally, Sanballat says that these things will be reported to the king in Persia
  - The implicit threat is clear: the people of Israel are in jeopardy because of the reckless schemes of Nehemiah
- Breaking down the elements of the deception, we can see the enemy's thinking clearly
    - First, Sanballat lends credibility to his accusations by creating the impression of multiple witnesses without actually having multiple witness
      - He says, "others are saying..."
      - No one else is saying anything, but it sounds like there are multiple sources, which makes the accusation seem more credible
    - That's the danger with gossip
      - No matter how many people repeat a lie, it's still a lie
      - But because many people repeat it, more people are likely to believe it, making it all the more dangerous
      - That's why we must not contribute to gossip, and in doing so, giving truth to the lie
      - This is also why Paul commands that we not accept an accusation against our leaders without independent confirmation of the accusation

**1 Tim. 5:19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.**

- Secondly, the enemy attacks the motives of the leader
  - He doesn't attack the actions, since the actions are self-evident
    - But he takes the godly, righteous actions of a leader and calls them something else
    - He fills in details, assumes motives, and creates a narrative to fit his view of the facts
  - There is no substance to his comments, and there is another story that fits the same facts
    - Instead of rebellion, Nehemiah is rebuilding the wall to strengthen the king's power in Judah
    - Instead of wishing to be king, Nehemiah is content to serve as governor for only a time

- This illustrates the danger of interpreting a leader's motives, or heart, based on someone else's interpretation of their actions
  - If the people of Israel agreed with Sanballat's assessment, they would have been rejecting their leader without cause
  - And that was the enemy's hope and the reason he made sure his letter was open
  - Don't participate in such speculation
  - And pray that the truth will reign in your church
- Thirdly, Sanballat misuses the Word of God to support his attempts at discrediting Nehemiah
  - He says he's heard the prophets saying a king is in Judah
    - The prophets of Nehemiah's day were Haggai and Malachi
    - Both these men walked around, declaring the Word of the Lord concerning the future, including the future of the Messiah
    - That one day, Israel's king would reign in Judah as promised
  - Sanballat took that truth and twisted it to fit his lie about Nehemiah
    - This is literally the enemy's oldest tactic
    - To twist the Word of God to indict those who lead God's people
    - In the first case, it was Satan indicting the Word God spoke to Adam, asking if indeed He forbade eating of any fruit in the Garden
    - That was a distortion of God's Word, leaving the impression that God's Word brought negative, destructive outcomes to God's people
  - Likewise, here Sanballat twists God's Word to cause the people of Israel to fear that Nehemiah's leadership will bring them destruction at the hands of the Persian army
    - Nothing could be farther from the truth
    - God's people must know God's Word so that when the enemy distorts it in an attempt to tear down our leaders – or to tear down the Word itself – we are prepared to defend it
    - As a teacher, I've endured occasions when my teaching of God's Word has been twisted with an intent to discredit me or the ministry
    - Usually, the point is to accuse me of mishandling the Word of God in a malicious way
    - But if we know the Word well, then we won't fall for that discrediting tactic
- Nehemiah responds to these reports with a timeless response

**Neh. 6:8** Then I sent a message to him saying, “Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind.”

**Neh. 6:9** For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking, “They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

- Nehemiah calls it like it is
  - He says nothing you are saying is true
    - The NIV captures the sense of this even better

**Neh. 6:8** I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.” [NIV]

- Besides being an awesome retort, Nehemiah’s statement serves as a great example of not playing the game on the enemy’s turf
- Nehemiah didn’t engage in a debate over his motives
  - He didn’t try to argue Sanballat’s lie with a different story
  - To do so lends even more credibility to the accusations
  - And it would look defensive and weak
- The enemy doesn’t deserve a response to his schemes
  - The Bible tells us to resist the enemy, but it doesn’t tell us to engage with him on his terms
  - When the enemy brings voices to impugn the motives of our leaders, we need to follow the instructions of Scripture and wait for multiple, independent witnesses before passing judgment
  - In the meantime, don’t expect your leaders to answer the accusations with a defense
  - Instead, expect Nehemiah’s response
- After calling it a fraud, Nehemiah appeals to the Lord for a defense
  - He knows the people might not be so strong in the face of this scheme
  - So he asks the Lord not only to stop the attack
  - But also to strengthen the people to resist the temptation to believe the slander and turn on Nehemiah’s leadership
  - Nehemiah’s return to prayer each and every time he is challenged is such a great example for all of us
  - But once more, after the attack, they get back to the rebuilding of the city

**Neh. 6:10** When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night.”

**Neh. 6:11** But I said, “Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.”

**Neh. 6:12** Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered his

**prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.**

**Neh. 6:13** He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me.

**Neh. 6:14** Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me.

- Finally, the third tactic of the enemy plays out, a plot to disqualify Nehemiah
  - On this occasion, Nehemiah visits the home of a Jew by the name of Shemaiah
    - Nehemiah says he was “confined” in his home
    - He may have been confined for health reasons, like a shut-in
    - But the word “confined” usually means “being detained”, as in a prisoner, suggesting he was under house arrest
    - The point is, he’s not an upstanding member of Jewish society
  - We don’t know Nehemiah’s reason for visiting, but it appears Shemaiah summoned Nehemiah to hear a “prophecy” he wanted to deliver
    - He suggests that both of them flee into the temple for protection from the enemies of Israel, who wish to kill Nehemiah
    - Shemaiah wants Nehemiah to believe this is a word from the Lord, and therefore Nehemiah must heed the warning
    - He tells Nehemiah to enter the temple, past its doors and shut himself in
      - Given the state of the city at that time, the temple was easily the most secure and defensible structure in the area
      - Much like the Texans retreating to the chapel in the Alamo against the Mexican army
- In v.11, Nehemiah responds by asking, “Should a man like me flee, and could I go into the temple?”
  - Nehemiah recognized the two aspects of this plot to disqualify him from leadership
    - First, by fleeing from a threat, he loses his standing before the people as an example of faith and reliance on God
    - While there is a time to flee, Nehemiah has based his position of authority on calling the people to stand firm, fulfill their duty to God and trust in God to defend the city
    - How many times have we heard Nehemiah praying to God for defense?
    - And how many times has Nehemiah appealed to the people to wait on God, expecting Him to come to their aid in a time of distress?
    - So what would the effect be if Nehemiah turned tail and ran at the suggestion that God’s enemies might attack?



- It calls into question everything he has said
- This is why leaders are called to the highest standards of conduct in their service to God's people
  - A leader has no power to compel godliness in others while he is modeling sin in his own life
  - A teacher can't persuade others to obey God's Word while failing to obey it himself
  - No one can accomplish anything for the Lord through hypocrisy
- It would have been the height of hypocrisy for Nehemiah to lock himself up in the temple, having just exhorted Israel to stand firm in the face of threats
  - And of course, had Nehemiah taken this advice, he would have eliminated himself from the action
  - He would have been neutralized by his absence
  - And this is exactly what dishonor and disqualification brings
  - It removes a soldier of God from the battle
    - It creates a casualty on the battle field
  - The war continues on, but the casualty is left behind
- The second way this plot would disqualify Nehemiah is by leading him into a very public sin, resulting from pride and arrogance
  - Nehemiah asks, "Who am I to enter the temple?"
    - He is referring to the limits imposed by the Law on who may enter the Holy Place of the temple
    - When Shemaiah suggests Nehemiah enter past the doors, he is speaking of the Holy Place of the temple
    - Only the Holy Place was secured by a set of doors
  - Yet, the Law stipulated that only the priests could enter into the Holy Place
    - Nehemiah is not of the tribe of Levi, so he has no right to enter the Holy Place
    - If he had taken Shemaiah's advice, he would have been knowingly violating the Law of God without cause
      - We know there are times when men cross boundaries established in the Law with the approval of God
      - As when David ate the show bread reserved for the priests
    - But in this case, Nehemiah would be acting in sin, since he has not received permission from the Lord to enter the temple
  - Notice, in v.12, Nehemiah realizes that the prophecy of this man was no prophecy at all, but rather a lie intended to entrap Nehemiah
    - Were Nehemiah gullible enough to accept this advice, he would have been sinning in a very serious and public way

- And the people would have rightly interpreted his sin as a reflection of his arrogance and pride
  - “What kind of man thinks he can walk into the Holy Place on his own initiative?” they would have asked
  - At that point, Nehemiah would have lost all support among the people
  - He would have been disqualified as a leader
- It’s important to note the order of events in vs.11-12
  - Only after Nehemiah rejects this suggestion does he then come to understand that the prophecy is no prophecy at all
    - The order of these events demonstrates an important principle of how God works in us in the face of the enemy’s schemes
    - God waited for Nehemiah to make the right choice, based on the knowledge already available to him, before the Lord revealed the backstory
    - Even before Nehemiah was made aware that the prophecy was a trick, he knew enough to understand Shemaiah was giving bad advice
    - Nehemiah’s knowledge of God’s Word, combined with his own common sense, was enough to reject this suggestion
  - Once Nehemiah had come to the right conclusion, the Lord confirmed his choice by giving him the insight to know this man was hired to trick him
    - The Lord wanted Nehemiah to be confident in his decision, knowing the Lord was behind him
    - But God typically allows us to work through these tests without special revelation, or burning bushes or voices from Heaven
    - He has already given us all that’s required for godliness in His Word and through His Spirit

**2 Pet. 1:2** Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

**2 Pet. 1:3** seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

- Before the Lord will move to give us more, He waits to see if we are willing to use what He has already provided
- Meanwhile, notice how the enemy works to undermine our trust in God’s Word
  - Shemaiah called to Nehemiah claiming to have “a word from the Lord”
  - How often has the enemy pulled that trick out of his bag?
  - The enemy makes an appeal to our flesh by enticing us with something special, miraculous, mysterious

- He knows that if our choice is between heeding the Word God delivered over the centuries through His prophets...
  - Or receiving an exciting, divine revelation delivered by special delivery from God to you
  - Then our flesh will always prefer the special new thing
- But our flesh is self-destructive and easily manipulated by such nonsense
  - We must be trained by Scripture itself to turn aside from special revelation or “a word from God”, especially when it goes against what we know in Scripture
  - When we do this, we become trained in how to distinguish truth from nonsense, as Hebrews tell us

**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.

- Nehemiah was trained, and so he rejected this bad advice, and as he did, the Lord revealed to him that this man could not be trusted at all
  - Notice, in v.13, Nehemiah correctly concluded that this tactic was intended to cause Nehemiah to act out of fear, rather than faith
    - Acting out of fear is a sin in Scripture
    - Because acting out of fear is the antithesis of walking in faith
    - The Bible doesn't say that being afraid is sin, but it condemns allowing fear to rule our hearts and decide our actions
  - Secondly, Nehemiah understands that the scheme hoped to drive Nehemiah into sin, and thereby discredit him before the people
    - Now you can see why it's so important that our leaders remain vigilant against schemes that might discredit them
    - Notice also in v.14, Nehemiah mentions other prophets and prophetesses who must have tried to trip him with other so-called words from the Lord
    - This wasn't an isolated attack, so imagine all the ways the enemy must have tried to create fear or give a false word from God
    - The fact that a woman was involved as well, might indicate that a sexual trap was among the schemes the enemy tried
      - We need to pray for our leaders to be wise and brave in the face of this nonsense
      - And we need to be prepared for the attacks ourselves for the day when

we're called into a leadership role ourselves

- Nehemiah places all this in God's hand, asking Him to remember the evil deeds of these people
  - In other words, Nehemiah didn't take revenge himself
  - He let it go, trusting God to take revenge in the proper time
  - Don't become distracted by the scheme, nor by a pursuit of the guilty
  - Leave it all to God, and get back to work doing what He has called you to do

**Neh. 6:15** So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.

**Neh. 6:16** When all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

**Neh. 6:17** Also in those days many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.

**Neh. 6:18** For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

**Neh. 6:19** Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. Then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

- Remarkably, the people completed this project in only 52 days
  - Even under ideal circumstances, that was a remarkable feat
    - Considering how long it sat in disrepair, the speed of this work is both a testimony to God's power and an indictment of Israel's disobedience
    - They have been living in the city for about 100 years since the first return from exile
    - All this time, they have suffered attacks and harassment and fear
    - And they were always just 52 days away from having their wall
  - The speed of the effort testified to God's power, as the people of the land acknowledged
    - In v.16, the people around the city declared the greatness of Israel's God
    - Here's the point of the whole exercise in one verse
    - God's people are called to accomplish a great work and are given a leader, so that the result would be a witness to God's power
    - And as a result, the world testifies to God's glory
    - This must always be our aim in serving God
  - Nehemiah ends this chapter with a footnote on another adversary, Tobiah

- The name “Tobiah” is a Jewish name
- And this man appears to have been working all the while to drive a wedge between the nobles of Israel and Nehemiah
- They were writing letters back and forth
- Though we don’t know the contents of the letters, Nehemiah does tell us that these nobles were beholden to Tobiah through family connections
- Tobiah used those connections to compel the nobles to commend him to Nehemiah, so that Tobiah might have greater influence over him
- Ultimately, that effort failed as well, but it goes to show the immense pressure Nehemiah experienced throughout the project
  - Not only from outside the camp
  - But also from compromised members of Israel who did the enemy’s bidding
- Reading this account causes me to wonder what accomplishments for God lie just “52 days away” for me?
  - What impossible task and seemingly insurmountable challenge is more achievable than I imagine?
    - Where has the Lord brought leadership into my life to spur me onward so that I might finally achieve the thing that’s been waiting for me for too long?
    - What an encouragement it can be to know that when we take a step of faith in a new direction, the outcome doesn’t depend upon us
  - Are we hesitating to serve God in some way because the enemy has succeeded in distracting, deceiving or discrediting us along the way?
    - Are we sidelined because of fear, doubt or weariness?
    - If so, consider you may be closer than you think to the success God has in store
    - You may be 52 days away from living in peace and security
    - You need only take a step of faith
  - As with priests who crossed the Jordan carrying the heavy Ark

**Josh. 3:14** So when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people,

**Josh. 3:15** and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest),

**Josh. 3:16** the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho.

**Josh. 3:17** And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry

**ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.**

- With the wall finished, it comes time for the people to celebrate and enjoy the fruit of their labor by moving into the city

**Neh. 7:1** Now when the wall was rebuilt and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed,

**Neh. 7:2** then I put Hanani my brother, and Hananiah the commander of the fortress, in charge of Jerusalem, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

**Neh. 7:3** Then I said to them, “Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot, and while they are standing guard, let them shut and bolt the doors. Also appoint guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each at his post, and each in front of his own house.”

- First, Nehemiah gives instructions on how to secure the city and control the gates
  - After living in an un-walled city for so long, the people needed training on how to operate the gates
    - Nehemiah says the gates remain closed at night and don't open them until the sun is high enough to be hot
    - Only in daylight hours is the city open for business
  - And Nehemiah appoints trustworthy men to guard the city walls and control the gates
    - What a shame it would be to lead a great project and achieve great progress only to place the work into the hands of untrustworthy men
    - Many a great work of God's people has come to ruin when a great builder was followed by an incompetent steward
- With the city walls built and the security of the city established, Nehemiah now needs a way to determine who will occupy the city
  - Just as with the original exile under Zerubbabel, the Jews wanted to ensure that only those who were truly Jewish could receive a portion of this land
    - So Nehemiah searches and finds the list of names from the original exile
    - The list is almost identical to the list given in Ezra 2
    - And this list is the list of those who are eligible to enter the city
    - We will read it as a single unit, mangling names as I go

**Neh. 7:4** Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built.

**Neh. 7:5** Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials

and the people to be enrolled by genealogies. Then I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up first in which I found the following record:

**Neh. 7:6** These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city,

**Neh. 7:7** who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah. The number of men of the people of Israel:

**Neh. 7:8** the sons of Parosh, 2,172;

**Neh. 7:9** the sons of Shephatiah, 372;

**Neh. 7:10** the sons of Arah, 652;

**Neh. 7:11** the sons of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,818;

**Neh. 7:12** the sons of Elam, 1,254;

**Neh. 7:13** the sons of Zattu, 845;

**Neh. 7:14** the sons of Zaccai, 760;

**Neh. 7:15** the sons of Binnui, 648;

**Neh. 7:16** the sons of Bebai, 628;

**Neh. 7:17** the sons of Azgad, 2,322;

**Neh. 7:18** the sons of Adonikam, 667;

**Neh. 7:19** the sons of Bigvai, 2,067;

**Neh. 7:20** the sons of Adin, 655;

**Neh. 7:21** the sons of Ater, of Hezekiah, 98;

**Neh. 7:22** the sons of Hashum, 328;

**Neh. 7:23** the sons of Bezai, 324;

**Neh. 7:24** the sons of Hariph, 112;

**Neh. 7:25** the sons of Gibeon, 95;

**Neh. 7:26** the men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188;

**Neh. 7:27** the men of Anathoth, 128;

**Neh. 7:28** the men of Beth-azmaveth, 42;

**Neh. 7:29** the men of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah and Beeroth, 743;

**Neh. 7:30** the men of Ramah and Geba, 621;

**Neh. 7:31** the men of Michmas, 122;

**Neh. 7:32** the men of Bethel and Ai, 123;

**Neh. 7:33** the men of the other Nebo, 52;

**Neh. 7:34** the sons of the other Elam, 1,254;

**Neh. 7:35** the sons of Harim, 320;

**Neh. 7:36** the men of Jericho, 345;

**Neh. 7:37** the sons of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 721;

**Neh. 7:38** the sons of Senaah, 3,930.

**Neh. 7:39** The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973;

**Neh. 7:40** the sons of Immer, 1,052;

**Neh. 7:41** the sons of Pashhur, 1,247;

**Neh. 7:42** the sons of Harim, 1,017.

**Neh. 7:43** The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodevah, 74.

**Neh. 7:44** The singers: the sons of Asaph, 148.

**Neh. 7:45** The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, the sons of Shobai, 138.

**Neh. 7:46** The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,

**Neh. 7:47** the sons of Keros, the sons of Sia, the sons of Padon,

**Neh. 7:48** the sons of Lebana, the sons of Hagaba, the sons of Shalmal,

**Neh. 7:49** the sons of Hanan, the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar,

**Neh. 7:50** the sons of Reaiah, the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda,

**Neh. 7:51** the sons of Gazzam, the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah,

**Neh. 7:52** the sons of Besai, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephushesim,

**Neh. 7:53** the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur,

**Neh. 7:54** the sons of Bazlith, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha,

**Neh. 7:55** the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah,

**Neh. 7:56** the sons of Nezhiah, the sons of Hatipha.

**Neh. 7:57** The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Perida,

**Neh. 7:58** the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel,

**Neh. 7:59** the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth-hazzebaim, the sons of Amon.

**Neh. 7:60** All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.

**Neh. 7:61** These were they who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon and Immer; but they could not show their fathers' houses or their descendants, whether they were of Israel:

**Neh. 7:62** the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, 642.

**Neh. 7:63** Of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was named after them.

**Neh. 7:64** These searched among their ancestral registration, but it could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood.

**Neh. 7:65** The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest arose with Urim and Thummim.

**Neh. 7:66** The whole assembly together was 42,360,

**Neh. 7:67** besides their male and their female servants, of whom there were 7,337; and they had 245 male and female singers.

**Neh. 7:68** Their horses were 736; their mules, 245;



**Neh. 7:69** their camels, 435; their donkeys, 6,720.

**Neh. 7:70** Some from among the heads of fathers' households gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold drachmas, 50 basins, 530 priests' garments.

**Neh. 7:71** Some of the heads of fathers' households gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,200 silver minas.

**Neh. 7:72** That which the rest of the people gave was 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,000 silver minas and 67 priests' garments.

- Since we commented on the list in Ezra 2, I will not take time to do that here again
  - Instead, we need only briefly note the purpose in the retelling of the list
    - First, this list established which families in Nehemiah's day had right to enter the city and live there
    - So by re-reading the list, Nehemiah demonstrates that God's Word will reign in the city
  - Secondly, he is reflecting the faithfulness of God
    - These people are the children and grandchildren and perhaps great-grandchildren of the first exiles
    - And yet here, they are experiencing the faithfulness of God to fulfill His promise that the people would re-inhabit this city with walls and a temple
    - What was once rubble has returned
  - The time required for that fulfillment was a result of the people's delay, not the Lord's
    - His faithfulness never waned
    - He remained true to His Word, sending prophets and teachers and leaders to ensure the work was done
    - And He even foretold the delay in the Book of Daniel, when we counted out the years that would be required to rebuild the city with a wall in Daniel 9
  - But for now, the people can see the power of God to keep His promises over time and distance, from generation to generation
    - Not even the disobedience of people will thwart the will of God and His faithfulness

**Neh. 7:73** Now the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants and all Israel, lived in their cities. And when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel were in their cities.

- From the beginning, we've said that Nehemiah's task was not to build a wall or secure the city
  - He was drawn to Jerusalem to accomplish those tasks, certainly
    - He has focused his efforts there since he arrived
    - And at the end of Chapter 7, Nehemiah had achieved what he had come to Jerusalem to do
  - But these tasks were just the backdrop for the real purpose in Nehemiah's call
    - The Lord called this man to minister to His people
    - When Nehemiah came to Israel, the city was still in ruins, the people were living a meager existence, under attack and lacking purpose
    - The Lord freed Israel and returned them to their land for a purpose
    - But they were failing in that purpose, and so He sent them a leader
  - As we've said, Nehemiah's mission wasn't to build a wall
    - He was there to build up a people
    - So with the temple constructed, the wall finished and the city inhabited again, it's time for Nehemiah to return, right?
- As we'll see today, the answer is "no", because the mission hasn't been accomplished yet
  - All the pieces are in place, yes, but a temple and a wall and even a bustling city are not the measures of success in God's economy
    - Those things are at best means to an end, and the end is restoration in worshipping God through a life of obedience to His Word
    - Loving God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength
    - While loving one another
  - So with the pieces in place, Nehemiah begins leading the people into a proper relationship with the Lord, Who has brought them back to the land
    - At the conclusion of Chapter 7, we're told the people were settled in the city and it was the seventh month of the year
    - The mention of the seventh month is significant
    - The final feasts of the Jewish calendar are conducted in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar
    - The Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles all occur in the seventh month
  - The events of Chapters 8-10 will take place during this important month of the year
    - In Chapter 8, Nehemiah assembles the people for a reading of the Torah to the people and explaining its meaning
    - Then, in Chapter 9, we'll witness the people joyously celebrating what they learn in a moment of corporate prayer and worship

- And in Chapter 10, the people declare a corporate commitment to obeying God
- Across these chapters, we'll see the true mission for godly leaders: edifying God's people for service

**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.

- The Law of Moses required that the people of Israel hear the reading of the Law once every seven years
  - Moses stipulated the requirement in Deut. 31, near the conclusion of the Law

**Deut. 31:10** Then Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths,

**Deut. 31:11** when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing.

**Deut. 31:12** "Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law.

- These gatherings were Covenant renewal moments in the Nation of Israel
- Renewal was not optional, but these moments were to be repeated so the people knew the Law
- The renewal was not prescribed for a specific day in the seventh month
  - It simply must take place at the time of year of the remission of debts and the Feast of Booths
  - The remission of debts refers to the Feast of Atonement, which came early in the month, while the Feast of Booths came later
  - So the requirement was to read the Law sometime early in the seventh month
  - Ezra chooses to waste no time, reading the Law on the first day of the month
- This is Ezra's first appearance in the story of Nehemiah
  - I said at the outset of the book that Nehemiah and Ezra were contemporaries
  - In fact, it's my belief that Ezra was the scribe who penned the Book of Nehemiah, though he wrote it in Nehemiah's voice
  - And here we see Ezra is still acting as the teaching leader over the people, even after Nehemiah's arrival
- Take note that Nehemiah's arrival didn't mean the end of Ezra's leadership role
  - It seems clear that the Lord raises up men with different skills to perform different roles in the Body of Christ
  - Ezra was a gifted teacher, and he led the people from a position of intellectual strength
  - But when Nehemiah arrived on the scene, Ezra yielded authority over the people, yet he retained his teaching responsibility
  - Men like Nehemiah and Ezra need to understand how to work together as the Lord appoints
    - The leader of a congregation need not be the teacher of the flock
    - And the teacher of a flock need not be the chief administrator of a church
  - In fact, it's rare to find a man who is the best at both roles
    - More often, the roles will be split – unless ego gets in the way
- Looking at the scene, Ezra gathers the people in front of the Water Gate on the first day of the seventh month
  - In v.1, it's interesting to see that the people themselves asked Ezra to bring the book of the Law out to read to them
    - The people were eager to hear the Word of God
    - They were looking forward to the instruction
    - To the chance to grow closer to God through His Word
  - What follows has become the basis for Jewish synagogue service
    - The pattern was probably established during the exile, when the people lacked

- access to a temple
  - It's still the common order of worship among orthodox Jews today
- And the pattern is instantly recognizable for Christians today
  - The people gather for a service
  - Readings of God's Word takes place
  - The people stand, a leader offers praise, people respond
  - Finally, the people receive instruction through an oral explanation of the Word and an exhortation to live by what they have learned
  - After the gathering, the people go away to share a fellowship meal
- This is a common pattern – or should be – in the Christian gathering
  - New ideas come from time to time, but the basic formula hasn't changed
  - Where it has changed, it's largely been diminished by a de-emphasis on the Word of God
  - In many churches, it isn't even read
  - And even when it is read, it's not explained properly
  - Explaining God's Word is no longer the highlight of many services
  - Let's revisit the formula in this chapter to see why it was so valued in Israel
- First, in v.2, Ezra brought the Law before everyone in the nation who could listen with understanding
  - Only children at an early age were excluded from the gathering and from the teaching of God's Word
    - If families were separated, it's only because the youngest are too little to value the instruction
    - Because they are likely to be an interruption to others
    - Apart from these youngest ones, everyone else should be gathered to hear the Word
  - Secondly, he read the Law as required from early morning to midday
    - Roughly, Ezra read for 5 hours or more
    - Ezra stood and read and the people stood to listen for this entire time
    - Their standing was a sign of respect and attentiveness
    - Can you imagine something like this happening today?
      - Christians fidget in the pews when they're made to sit for a sermon longer than 20 minutes
      - And Heaven forbid children are required to sit still that long
      - Have children changed that much – or just our expectations?
  - People say it's unreasonable to expect Christians to listen to a 60-minute sermon or attend a 2-hour church service

- Yet those same people gladly sit through a 3-hour Hollywood blockbuster without a second thought
- How important is the Word of God to us?
- Next, we find Ezra standing behind a wooden podium
  - Around him, stood elders or leaders of the people of Israel
  - Here's another instantly recognizable scene
  - Don't let anyone tell you that the tradition of a preacher teaching from a pulpit from the Word of God is a modern invention or a dispensable anachronism
  - From the beginning, God has chosen to communicate His truth from the mouths of preachers to the ears of His people

**1 Cor. 1:21** For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

- Next, the people are drawn to a heart of worship through the reading of the Word
  - The people bow to the ground, cry “Amen” and worship
  - The people give an objective lesson in worshipping in spirit and truth
  - The truth of God's Word is a powerful tool to bring the heart closer to God
  - In fact, there is no greater tool
- Finally, the elders of Israel follow the reading of the Word with an explanation
  - The five-hour reading of the text gives way to sermons concerning the meaning of what was written
  - I wish I could hear what these leaders said
  - What insight did God give them about the stories of Genesis, the experience in Egypt and the time of wandering?
  - I wonder if any of the stories in the Law gave the exiles a sense of déjà vu, having just left their own period of captivity, wandering and now security in the land?
- This is the moment we want for every child of God, whether the one being restored or the one who never strayed
  - We want to be drawn by our leaders into a moment of sincere fellowship and worship
    - We want men who lead by, and through, the Word of God
    - We need men to call us to sacrifice and to exercise discipline, so we can have the patience to hear God's Word
    - We need to be moved by the Word to humble ourselves before God
    - And we need men to give us instruction and explanation from the Word so we can understand and follow what we've been given

- God is faithful to give us these things, and He always will
  - The problem has never been God's willingness to supply
  - It's our willingness to seek for them
  - Because Nehemiah and Ezra have come and done their part, the people have been blessed
  - And when we do our part in obedience, we make it easier for other believers to do theirs
- The entire day was so moving for the people, they were weeping in response to their sermons and readings
  - The tears were probably tears of thankfulness and regret
    - Thanks for God's faithfulness
    - Regret for the way they and their ancestors had tested the Lord's patience so often
  - Most of all, they are moved by the presence of the Lord's Spirit
    - But Nehemiah responds with a call to joy

**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.

**Neh. 8:10** Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

**Neh. 8:11** So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved."

**Neh. 8:12** All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

- Nehemiah tells the people that this day is a holy day for the Lord, to honor His faithfulness
  - So therefore, he tells the people to feast, celebrate and know the joy of the Lord
    - In fact, Nehemiah says their joy in the Lord has been their strength in the days of their trials
    - So the people respond with a fellowship meal to celebrate the end of the day in joy
  - The words Nehemiah speaks in v.10 are especially important to understanding the prophetic significance of this passage
    - He says, "the joy of the Lord is Israel's strength"

- The phrase, “joy of the Lord” is a reference to Christ, Who is the joy of the Father
- This phrase is a description of Christ
- It’s also our clue to see this entire scene as a picture of another moment in a future restoration of Israel
  - Another time when Israel will encounter the joy of the Lord bringing strength to Israel
  - A time when Israel persevered through trial
  - A time when mourning turns to joy, culminating in a period of restoration and feasting
- On that future day, Israel will experience great distress because of attacks brought by the nations of the world that surround Jerusalem
  - The attack comes at the hands of the antichrist, at the end of Tribulation

**Zech. 12:3** “It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it.

**Zech. 12:4** “In that day,” declares the LORD, “I will strike every horse with bewilderment and his rider with madness. But I will watch over the house of Judah, while I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness.

**Zech. 12:5** “Then the clans of Judah will say in their hearts, ‘A strong support for us are the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the LORD of hosts, their God.’

**Zech. 12:8** “In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them.

**Zech. 12:9** “And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

- The people of Israel were under attack, fearful and driven to desperation
  - With the Lord’s strength, the people will defend the city
  - They succeed in defending the city against terrible odds
  - Just as Nehemiah’s Israel defended the walls from attacks with the strength of the Lord
  - Once again, their ability to defend the city comes from the Lord
- Then in that day, the people will be moved by the Word of God, delivered by the Spirit

**Zech. 12:10** “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a



**firstborn.**

- The people of Israel living in Jerusalem will come to understand that Jesus was the Messiah
- The people look into the Word of God by the Spirit and come to a recognition that they disobeyed the Word, that is Christ
  - Their ancestors crucified their Lord
  - And they all mourn the revelation
- And this recognition will lead them into a mourning for the sins of their fathers and their own sins in rejecting Jesus
- Just as the Israel in Nehemiah's day was moved to tears at the recognition of their own sin under the Covenant
- This future Israel will be humbled by what they learn in the Word, to the point of weeping and tears
- But just as Nehemiah called the people to cease weeping and find joy in the Lord, so will the future Israel trade tears for joy

**[Zech. 14:2](#) For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.**

**[Zech. 14:3](#) Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.**

**[Zech. 14:4](#) In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.**

**[Zech. 14:8](#) And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter.**

**[Zech. 14:9](#) And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.**

- The Lord's return for Israel will bring great joy to the nation
  - They are rescued from the antichrist and brought to faith in Him
  - The Lord establishes His kingdom on earth and the people of Israel are at the center of it
  - This story is explained in greater detail as part of the [VBVMI Revelation study](#)
- And just as we see in Nehemiah 8, the concluding act in this moment of restoration is a celebration feast, the Feast of Booths

**Zech. 14:16** Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

- The Feast of Booths memorialized Israel's wanderings in the desert upon reaching the promised the land
- It was to be celebrated by those who had received their permanent home to remind them that they had to wandering in a temporary place first
- That feast symbolized the wandering of the desert prior to crossing the Jordan
- And it represents the Jews' life on earth prior to entering the Kingdom
- The final celebration of the feast will happen when the nation enters the Messianic Kingdom
- But here, in Nehemiah's day, is a moment when Israel experiences a lesser version of that celebration
  - The nation has returned from a new exile and is enjoying a new life in their land
    - And so they are ready to celebrate the feast anew

**Neh. 8:13** Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law.

**Neh. 8:14** They found written in the law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month.

**Neh. 8:15** So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written."

**Neh. 8:16** So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.

**Neh. 8:17** The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing.

- Following the long day of hearing the Word taught at the Water Gate, the heads of the households are intrigued to learn more about the Word
  - Specifically, they remembered hearing something the day earlier about a feast in the seventh month of the year
    - They returned to Ezra to ask questions and to know more about the words of

the Law

- With his help, they found in the Law the Word of the Lord commanding that the sons of Israel should celebrate the Feast of Booths
- Having confirmed what they heard, they know what to do
  - They go out into the people and circulate a proclamation to everyone that the day for the feast is coming quickly and they must get ready
  - They are commanded to collect the branches and leaves that are used to make the booths they occupy
  - A booth was essentially a tent made of natural materials
  - For this feast, the Jews essentially abandoned their homes for a week to camp out in these temporary structures
  - The booths reminded them of living in the desert, wandering without a home
    - While it appears Israel did celebrate the Feast of Booths (Ezek. 3:4), they were not previously making and living in booths as was commanded by the Law
- Everywhere they could fit these structures, the people made the booths and occupied them
  - And notice, it's a time of great joy for the people
  - The feast is joyful, because it is celebrated by people who have finally received their permanent homes
  - They remember the Lord's faithfulness to deliver them through a period of wandering and trial
  - This was true in the time of Exodus, as the people knew the joy of Canaan
  - It's true again for Israel that returned from exile and occupied the city in joy under Nehemiah
  - And it will be true for the future Israel that enters the Messianic Kingdom in joy under the leadership of Christ

**Neh. 8:18 He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance.**

- The celebration of the feast included Ezra reading from the Book of the Law daily to the people
  - They couldn't get enough of God's Word
    - The love of God's people is an eternal truth
    - When Heaven and Earth have passed away, the Word of the Lord will remain
  - The feast lasted the required seven days, and on the eighth day, the nation holds another solemn assembly

- It seems that the celebration of this feast brought people to a realization that the Word of God was to direct their lives in an even deeper way
- They had heard a single reading of the Word of God, and they had discovered the Feast of Booths
- That discovery completely changed their lives for seven days
- And it led them to ask more fundamental questions about the power of God's Law to change their lives
- If one reading could produce so much enlightenment, could later the course of their week so dramatically, then what more must they do?
  - Clearly, they needed to redirect their entire lives according to what was written in the Word
  - They had been living their entire lives without the guidance of the Word of God
  - And it had been generations since the people had the freedom and opportunity to live by the Word
    - And even longer since they had even tried
  - So now, on the first day after the feast, they are ready to recommit in prayer and repentance to living according to God's Word

**Neh. 9:1** Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them.

**Neh. 9:2** The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

**Neh. 9:3** While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

**Neh. 9:4** Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Chenani, and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God.

- Following the feast, a great spiritual revival takes hold in Israel
  - The word "revival" gets thrown around too often in the Church
    - A revival can't be manufactured and it can't be timed to suit our desires
    - It's a work of the Spirit that comes only when the Lord desires
    - And it's evidently happening in Israel here
  - In this case, we can understand why it's happening now
    - The Lord has been leading Israel to this moment over the past 100 years, and even earlier
    - This is the work of restoration reaching its climactic end
    - The people seeking the Lord with all their hearts in humility

- In this moment, they are also picturing that moment of Jewish repentance that precipitates the Lord's return for Israel at the end of Tribulation
  - The Jews in this day heard Ezra read Leviticus 26, and in particular, this promise

**Lev. 26:40** 'If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me —

**Lev. 26:41** I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies — or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity,

**Lev. 26:42** then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.

- The Lord promised to Israel that in a future day, when the whole nation turns to Him with their hearts humbled
- When they confess their sins and the sins of their forefathers, then the Lord will remember His covenant with Abraham
- The covenant that promised to send a seed to bless Israel
- The seed of Christ
- At this moment, the people are responding in faith to the promises they heard in Leviticus 26
  - And in response, the Lord will send Israel Her Seed
  - The first coming of Christ comes a few hundred years following this confession
  - Not as a result of the confession, but as a result of God's promise to honor His Word to Israel
  - Only when the final generation confesses Christ, will the Kingdom be made available
- Then, the prayer of repentance and worship ensues, beginning with a beautiful retelling of what they have learned in God's Word

**Neh. 9:5** Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah, said, "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever!

O may Your glorious name be blessed  
And exalted above all blessing and praise!

**Neh. 9:6** "You alone are the LORD.

You have made the heavens,  
The heaven of heavens with all their host,  
The earth and all that is on it,

The seas and all that is in them.  
You give life to all of them  
And the heavenly host bows down before You.

**Neh. 9:7** “You are the LORD God,  
Who chose Abram  
And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees,  
And gave him the name Abraham.

**Neh. 9:8** “You found his heart faithful before You,  
And made a covenant with him  
To give him the land of the Canaanite,  
Of the Hittite and the Amorite,  
Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite —  
To give it to his descendants.  
And You have fulfilled Your promise,  
For You are righteous.

**Neh. 9:9** “You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt,  
And heard their cry by the Red Sea.

**Neh. 9:10** “Then You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh,  
Against all his servants and all the people of his land;  
For You knew that they acted arrogantly toward them,  
And made a name for Yourself as it is this day.

**Neh. 9:11** “You divided the sea before them,  
So they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground;  
And their pursuers You hurled into the depths,  
Like a stone into raging waters.

**Neh. 9:12** “And with a pillar of cloud You led them by day,  
And with a pillar of fire by night  
To light for them the way  
In which they were to go.

**Neh. 9:13** “Then You came down on Mount Sinai,  
And spoke with them from heaven;  
You gave them just ordinances and true laws,  
Good statutes and commandments.

**Neh. 9:14** “So You made known to them Your holy sabbath,  
And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law,  
Through Your servant Moses.

**Neh. 9:15** “You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger,  
You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst,  
And You told them to enter in order to possess  
The land which You swore to give them.

**Neh. 9:16** “But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly;  
They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments.

**Neh. 9:17** “They refused to listen,

And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them;

So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt.

But You are a God of forgiveness,  
Gracious and compassionate,  
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness;  
And You did not forsake them.

**Neh. 9:18** “Even when they made for themselves

A calf of molten metal

And said, ‘This is your God

Who brought you up from Egypt,’

And committed great blasphemies,

**Neh. 9:19** You, in Your great compassion,

Did not forsake them in the wilderness;

The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day,

To guide them on their way,

Nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go.

**Neh. 9:20** “You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,

Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth,

And You gave them water for their thirst.

**Neh. 9:21** “Indeed, forty years You provided for them in the wilderness and they were not in want;

Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell.

**Neh. 9:22** “You also gave them kingdoms and peoples,

And allotted them to them as a boundary.

They took possession of the land of Sihon the king of Heshbon

And the land of Og the king of Bashan.

**Neh. 9:23** “You made their sons numerous as the stars of heaven,

And You brought them into the land

Which You had told their fathers to enter and possess.

**Neh. 9:24** “So their sons entered and possessed the land.

And You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites,

And You gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land,

To do with them as they desired.

**Neh. 9:25** “They captured fortified cities and a fertile land.

They took possession of houses full of every good thing,

Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves,

Fruit trees in abundance.

So they ate, were filled and grew fat,

And reveled in Your great goodness.

**Neh. 9:26** “But they became disobedient and rebelled against You,  
And cast Your law behind their backs  
And killed Your prophets who had admonished them  
So that they might return to You,  
And they committed great blasphemies.

**Neh. 9:27** “Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who  
oppressed them,  
But when they cried to You in the time of their distress,  
You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion  
You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their  
oppressors.

**Neh. 9:28** “But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You;  
Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled  
over them.

When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven,  
And many times You rescued them according to Your compassion,

**Neh. 9:29** And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law.

Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned  
against Your ordinances,

By which if a man observes them he shall live.

And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not  
listen.

**Neh. 9:30** “However, You bore with them for many years,  
And admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets,  
Yet they would not give ear.

Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

**Neh. 9:31** “Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of  
them or forsake them,

For You are a gracious and compassionate God.

- This retelling competes with Stephen’s testimony in Acts for the most thorough, yet concise, retelling of Israel’s history leading up to Christ
  - Many of the phrases included in this retelling can be found in the Psalms, or elsewhere
    - It’s clear that the people have learned something in the days of listening to the Law
    - And what they’ve heard has influenced their thinking
    - Not only have they come to understand their own history in a new way
    - They have also come to appreciate God more
  - And that’s the purpose of learning Scripture, in the end
    - We learn about God



- We see His long-suffering character in the face of our sin
- We also see His willingness to act eventually, to discipline His children
- And we see His faithfulness to restore
- Having seen His faithfulness, the people make an appeal for mercy in light of their continued slavery under Persia

**Neh. 9:32** “Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness,  
Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You,  
Which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people,  
From the days of the kings of Assyria to this day.

**Neh. 9:33** “However, You are just in all that has come upon us;  
For You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly.

**Neh. 9:34** “For our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers have not kept Your law  
Or paid attention to Your commandments and Your admonitions with which You have admonished them.

**Neh. 9:35** “But they, in their own kingdom,  
With Your great goodness which You gave them,  
With the broad and rich land which You set before them,  
Did not serve You or turn from their evil deeds.

**Neh. 9:36** “Behold, we are slaves today,  
And as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty,  
Behold, we are slaves in it.

**Neh. 9:37** “Its abundant produce is for the kings  
Whom You have set over us because of our sins;  
They also rule over our bodies  
And over our cattle as they please,  
So we are in great distress.

**Neh. 9:38** “Now because of all this  
We are making an agreement in writing;  
And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests.”

- Their prayer ends in a confession of sin and a request for mercy
  - The people ask the Lord to recognize and remember that the people still suffer in significant ways
    - Life in Jerusalem still not an easy existence
    - They have the worry of attack by the surrounding people

- They are not ruling over their own land
- They are under the rule of Persians
- And according to the prophecy of Daniel, it won't end there
  - In the near future, Persian oppression will give way to Greek oppression
  - And Greek oppression will give way to Roman rule
  - And Roman rule has evolved over the millennia and continues today, in a modern form
  - Still, Israel is in oppression, unable to live in peace and ruling over her promised land
- The people in Ezra and Nehemiah's day appear to recognize the seriousness of their situation
  - They appeal for God's mercy
  - But they also acknowledge that they are where they are because of sins that require God's response
  - Just as the Lord promised in Leviticus and Daniel, the people of Israel will see an extended period of curses
  - Until one day, when the Lord returns to fulfill His promises of blessing
- In the meantime, the people of Israel are moved by a sober appreciation of their past mistakes to vow never to repeat them
  - In the next chapter, the people recommit to living according to God's Word
    - To never repeating the mistakes of their forefathers
    - They mostly keep their word
    - Never again does a generation of Israel participate in pagan worship or idolatry of the sort practiced prior to the captivity
    - On the other hand, they commit an even more serious error
    - They reject the Messiah
  - So the judgment continues until the moment of Zechariah 12
    - Nevertheless, we see their intentions expressed in Nehemiah 10

- Last week I offered the structure that united Chapters 8-10
  - Chapter 8 saw the people assembled for a reading of the Torah
    - Perhaps for the first time, they all heard the entirety of the Law
    - They came to understand the Covenant their forefather's agreed to on their behalf
    - They now recognize the way this Covenant regulates every aspect of their life
  - Then, in Chapter 9, we saw the people gather in a joyous celebration of prayer and worship
    - They were so moved by the reading of God's Word that they initially wept
    - But Nehemiah said this occasion was one of joy in the faithfulness of the Lord
    - So the people moved from mourning to feasting, celebrating the Feast of Booths, as required in the Law they only recently learned
- At the end of Chapter 9, their joyful celebration of the feast gave way to an awareness that Israel was still suffering under the Lord's chastisement for past sins under the Covenant
  - The nation was still under Gentile authority, which the Lord promised would be their punishment for breaking this Covenant
    - In the Law, the Lord proclaimed this outcome would come to pass for disobedient Israel

**Lev. 26:14** 'But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments,

**Lev. 26:15** if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant,

**Lev. 26:16** I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up.

**Lev. 26:17** 'I will set My face against you so that you will be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you.

- If the nation rejected the Law, then it would see itself suffering under a variety of curses, including being struck down by enemies
- The nation in Nehemiah's day was still experiencing the consequences of those curses
  - Every generation of Israel would experience the consequences of the Covenant, regardless of individual performance
  - Because the Covenant was a national agreement that bound the entire nation to its terms
    - If the entire nation met the requirements of the Law, then they would see

blessings

- But if even one member of the nation failed in keeping the Covenant, then the entire nation would suffer the penalties
- And this Covenant bound not only the generation of the exodus, but also every generation that follows
  - Once again, we see this in the Law itself

**Deut. 29:14** “Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath,  
**Deut. 29:15** but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here today

- Every generation of Israel has been under the requirements of the Law
- Which means that they are all suffering under the penalties of the Law as well
- So here in Nehemiah’s day, the people are still bound by the Covenant
  - During the reading of the Covenant, the people came to learn that every facet of their daily lives was under the jurisdiction of the Law
    - They knew the burdens
    - They understood the blessings for obedience
    - And they realized the penalties that were promised for disobedience
  - This new awareness introduced the third and final phase of restoration
    - The people recommit to obedience under the Covenant
    - They know of their ancestors’ failings
    - But they are determined not to repeat them
  - So the people, through their leaders, sign a pledge to obey the Law
    - In Chapter 10, we’ll begin reading the names of those who signed on behalf of the people of Israel
    - And in the latter half, we hear their personal summary of the Law’s requirements

**Neh. 9:38** “Now because of all this  
 We are making an agreement in writing;  
 And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests.”

**Neh. 10:1** Now on the sealed document were the names of: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah,

**Neh. 10:2** Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,

**Neh. 10:3** Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah,

**Neh. 10:4** Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,

**Neh. 10:5** Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,  
**Neh. 10:6** Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,  
**Neh. 10:7** Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,  
**Neh. 10:8** Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah. These were the priests.  
**Neh. 10:9** And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel;  
**Neh. 10:10** also their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,  
**Neh. 10:11** Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,  
**Neh. 10:12** Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,  
**Neh. 10:13** Hodiah, Bani, Beninu.  
**Neh. 10:14** The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,  
**Neh. 10:15** Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,  
**Neh. 10:16** Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,  
**Neh. 10:17** Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,  
**Neh. 10:18** Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,  
**Neh. 10:19** Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,  
**Neh. 10:20** Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,  
**Neh. 10:21** Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,  
**Neh. 10:22** Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,  
**Neh. 10:23** Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,  
**Neh. 10:24** Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,  
**Neh. 10:25** Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,  
**Neh. 10:26** Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,  
**Neh. 10:27** Malluch, Harim, Baanah.  
**Neh. 10:28** Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding,  
**Neh. 10:29** are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes;  
**Neh. 10:30** and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.  
**Neh. 10:31** As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.  
**Neh. 10:32** We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God:  
**Neh. 10:33** for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the

holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God.

**Neh. 10:34** Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law;

**Neh. 10:35** and that they might bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the LORD annually,

**Neh. 10:36** and bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God.

**Neh. 10:37** We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns.

**Neh. 10:38** The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse.

**Neh. 10:39** For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers. Thus we will not neglect the house of our God.

- The chapter begins with the names of the heads of 21 priestly families
  - Then, it continues to the names of 17 Levites who are not priests
  - Then it moves to 44 heads of other families, probably elders in the nation at that time
  - All together, these names represent the whole of Israel, terms of leadership
    - This is representative governing, which is something that has existed in Israel since the beginning of this Covenant
    - A few leaders were responsible in the time of Exodus for binding all Israel to the Covenant
    - Later, in Jesus' time, a few religious leaders are responsible for condemning all Israel for rejecting their Messiah
    - All through the history of the nation, the Lord has allowed the leadership to speak for the nation when it comes to the Mosaic Covenant
    - So it happens here again
- Then, in v.31, the people as a whole summarize the Law they jointly intended to keep
  - Notice Nehemiah describes them as a people who had separated themselves from the Gentiles and to the Law of God

- This is a rededication to being the people of YHWH
- They recognized that keeping the Law was a means to keeping them separate
- And so, if they are to achieve that purpose, their obedience must not waiver
- Because they've already experienced how the world hates them
- In their restatement of the Law, it's interesting what they choose to focus on
  - Their concerns centered on three general issues
  - Not intermarrying with the Gentiles
  - Observing the Sabbath requirements, both of the Sabbath day and the Land Sabbath
  - And the needs for worship
    - Caring for the needs of the priests
    - And supporting the operation of the temple
- Why did they focus on these issues? Because these were the chief sins that brought judgment to prior generations
  - First, past generations made the mistake time and time again of intermarrying with surrounding peoples
  - They would offer their daughters to these cultures and receive their sons
  - These relationships quickly introduced idolatry into the nation
  - The Northern Kingdom was taken by Assyria for this sin
- Secondly, as their hearts grew greedy over time, the nation set aside the Sabbath observances
  - The nation ceased observing the Sabbath day, preferring to work the extra day for more income
  - And the nation ceased leaving the land fallow every seventh year, as required
  - God provided a double portion in the sixth year, yet the people preferred to take an extra year of harvest in the seventh year as well
  - This is the reason God cited when He sent the Southern Kingdom into slavery in Babylon for 70 years
    - One year for every Land Sabbath they failed to observe over 490 years
- Finally, the nation became so corrupt that it introduced pagan idolatry into the temple, setting up pagan idols and employing priests of Baal to serve in the temple
  - These abominations were just the final stage of a descent into pure idolatry for Israel
  - Occasionally, a good king would come along to rescue the nation for a generation, but the die was cast
  - The nation had walked away from a true worship with the Lord
- So now, the people have learned the lesson of why the Lord brought Israel into Babylon

- And now they're determined not to repeat that mistake in their own generation
  - This is the true repentance that we expect to see in response to the Lord's kindness
  - He has been exceedingly kind to restore the nation back to its land
- And as we've watched, He's been teaching them all the way through
  - Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah each played a role in bringing the nation to this point
    - Escorting exiles, teaching laws and building walls
  - But at the end of the day, the key was developing a heart of repentance in the people
  - That was the mission
- Repentance isn't a feeling or attitude or even a statement
  - It's an action
  - To repent is to turn, so there must be an action consistent with repentance before we say it's present
  - And this is that moment when we see that movement away from the sins of Israel's past, at least on these issues
  - And truly, the nation never again falls prey to these particular sins
- The restoration of any child of God must eventually reach this point
  - Once we've been brought back under true worship, good teaching and godly leadership, the question is: how will we walk?
    - Will we repeat the sins that brought us under discipline in the first place?
    - Or will we walk in repentance?
  - Consider the three areas that entrapped Israel, and notice how they relate to our own walk as Christians
    - First, Israel decided they would rather be friends with the world, rather than to remain separate and apart as God intended
    - Friendship with the world is always our first step away from obedience
    - James said:

**James 4:4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**

- If we are truly intent on walking with the Lord, then we have to make up our minds not to seek for what the world says is valuable or important
  - That's what it means to make friends with the world
  - Israel wanted to make friends with the neighboring people, so they established that



- friendship by establishing family connections
- And in doing so, they became an enemy of God
- And so will we, if we continue to allow the world to set our priorities
- True repentance means forsaking the world
- Secondly, the people became greedy
  - Specifically, they began to rely upon themselves,
    - In particular, they sought to provide for themselves at the expense of their relationship with the Lord
    - The Sabbath has always been a picture of resting in Christ
    - So when Israel traded the rest of a Sabbath for the chance to earn more wealth, they were trading Christ's work for their own
  - If we are truly going to walk with the Lord, we must learn how to rest in Him and His promises and His goodness and power to provide
    - But more than simply financial provision, we need to be ready to rest in Him for everything that the world throws our way
    - When the world is in a panic about economic collapse, environmental disasters, disease or drought
    - No matter the circumstance, we need not worry, for we rest in Christ
      - Not that we assume no calamity will befall us
      - But because no matter the calamity, it can't do worse to us than kill the body, which is destined to die anyway
    - As Jesus said:

**John 12:25** “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.

- Finally, Israel fell because they placed no importance on the house of the Lord and the proper means and meaning of worship
  - They profaned the chance to assemble and meet with the Lord
    - In the place of spending time in God's presence, they substituted pursuits of the flesh, idolatry and other indulgences
    - They enjoyed living for themselves only
    - They reveled in the lack of accountability
    - And the more things change, the more they stay the same
  - Today, a Christian's walk with the Lord is directly proportional to their personal diligence to assemble and worship with God's people on a regular basis
    - Attendance at a church service isn't the requirement
    - Participation in the Body through some kind of spiritual service is the key

- I've seen far too many believers wander away from the faith because, in part, they lacked a true commitment to the gathering
- When Sundays or Wednesdays rolled around, they always found something more important to do
- And that something was usually flesh-bound
  - Something to indulge the flesh
  - Anything to avoid the inevitable sense of conviction and accountability that hearing the Word of God produces
- If we are to show the works of repentance, then we must remain committed to the house of God, which means remaining committed to the gathering
  - More than attendance, we must invest ourselves in that gathering
  - As Paul says in Romans 12:

**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.**

- Worship means service within the context of the Body gathered
- Neglect our responsibilities to worship through our service and we're moving away from the Lord, which isn't repentance
  - It's regression
- Now to finish the lesson, we move through Chapter 11
  - The scene in this chapter also runs into Chapter 12, but we'll only look at this one chapter tonight

**Neh. 11:1 Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine-tenths remained in the other cities.**

**Neh. 11:2 And the people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.**

- At the time that the wall was complete, the city of Jerusalem was occupied by just the leaders of the people
  - The leaders have remained in the city to hold the ground and protect the walls
    - Until the walls were complete, no one would have lived in the city under any circumstances
    - There was simply no reason to be there
      - It was dangerous
      - And there was no commercial purpose for being there

- The people would rather live on the plot of land they received after they returned
  - They are raising flocks and raising crops
  - Apart from the temple, the city of Jerusalem holds no interest for them
- Now, the walls are repaired and the city is ready to be reoccupied
  - Nehemiah needs the city to be repopulated so it may flourish and survive
    - He wants the best Jewish families to occupy the city
    - But there isn't much room in the city
    - Jerusalem is a relatively small town
      - At best, it could probably house 8,000 people
  - In v.1, we're told that Nehemiah solves the problem by holding a lottery
    - Most interpreters read vs.1-2 as a lottery to see who gets to go into the city
    - But the language of the text suggests a different possibility to me
    - It reads as though this was a lottery to see who *must* go into the city
      - Notice it says that the lots were to select who must be "brought" out of the land and into Jerusalem
      - And then, those who are selected are blessed by the rest for volunteering to live in the city
  - The word choice in vs.1-2 suggests that this is a hardship duty for those who move into the cramped and undeveloped city
    - They are the pioneers, giving up the comforts of their present home to live in the city as a sacrifice for the nation
    - I'm sure they saw the opportunity as an honor, but perhaps in the same way that a soldier is honored to die for his country
  - Then, in vs.3-24, is a list of the new residents of Jerusalem

**Neh. 11:3** Now these are the heads of the provinces who lived in Jerusalem, but in the cities of Judah each lived on his own property in their cities — the Israelites, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants.

**Neh. 11:4** Some of the sons of Judah and some of the sons of Benjamin lived in Jerusalem. From the sons of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, of the sons of Perez;

**Neh. 11:5** and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of the Shilonite.

**Neh. 11:6** All the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were 468 able men.

**Neh. 11:7** Now these are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the

son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah;

**Neh. 11:8** and after him Gabbai and Sallai, 928.

**Neh. 11:9** Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer, and Judah the son of Hassenuah was second in command of the city.

**Neh. 11:10** From the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin,

**Neh. 11:11** Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the leader of the house of God,

**Neh. 11:12** and their kinsmen who performed the work of the temple, 822; and

Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah,

**Neh. 11:13** and his kinsmen, heads of fathers' households, 242; and Amashsai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer,

**Neh. 11:14** and their brothers, valiant warriors, 128. And their overseer was Zabdiel, the son of Haggadolim.

**Neh. 11:15** Now from the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni;

**Neh. 11:16** and Shabbethai and Jozabad, from the leaders of the Levites, who were in charge of the outside work of the house of God;

**Neh. 11:17** and Mattaniah the son of Mica, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, who was the leader in beginning the thanksgiving at prayer, and Bakbukiah, the second among his brethren; and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun.

**Neh. 11:18** All the Levites in the holy city were 284.

**Neh. 11:19** Also the gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon and their brethren who kept watch at the gates, were 172.

**Neh. 11:20** The rest of Israel, of the priests and of the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, each on his own inheritance.

**Neh. 11:21** But the temple servants were living in Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of the temple servants.

**Neh. 11:22** Now the overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica, from the sons of Asaph, who were the singers for the service of the house of God.

**Neh. 11:23** For there was a commandment from the king concerning them and a firm regulation for the song leaders day by day.

**Neh. 11:24** Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the sons of Zerah the son of Judah, was the king's representative in all matters concerning the people.

- Just a quick summary of the list is appropriate
  - The residents included members of the tribe of Judah, Levi and Benjamin
    - This makes sense, since these were the tribes occupying the Southern Kingdom

- when it was taken away to Babylon
  - Any other tribes were prohibited from living in the city
  - They were allowed to live in the surrounding lands
- The reason other tribes were excluded, was to ensure that only pureblooded Jews occupied the city
  - The other tribes were taken in the earlier invasion of Assyria
  - And many of the Jews of the northern tribes intermarried with the Assyrians and other Gentiles in the years that followed
  - Only the Jews from Judah, Levi and Benjamin were sure to be pureblooded Jews
- Notice, in v.21, a place was made available inside the city for the temple servants
  - In fact, a significant part of the city is devoted to the Levites and those who served the temple
  - That was a key purpose in the city inhabitants
  - To support the operations of the temple
  - The Lord's temple didn't exist for the city; the city existed for the temple
- Finally, a representative of the king of Persia, Pethahiah, also entered the city
  - Apparently, Artaxerxes wanted a man on the ground to check out the happenings in the city
  - All together, about 5,000-8,000 people moved in at this time
- The next section describes those who remained outside the walls

**Neh. 11:25** Now as for the villages with their fields, some of the sons of Judah lived in Kiriath-arba and its towns, in Dibon and its towns, and in Jekabzeel and its villages,

**Neh. 11:26** and in Jeshua, in Moladah and Beth-pelet,

**Neh. 11:27** and in Hazar-shual, in Beersheba and its towns,

**Neh. 11:28** and in Ziklag, in Meconah and in its towns,

**Neh. 11:29** and in En-rimmon, in Zorah and in Jarmuth,

**Neh. 11:30** Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, Lachish and its fields, Azekah and its towns. So they encamped from Beersheba as far as the valley of Hinnom.

**Neh. 11:31** The sons of Benjamin also lived from Geba onward, at Michmash and Aija, at Bethel and its towns,

**Neh. 11:32** at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah,

**Neh. 11:33** Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim,

**Neh. 11:34** Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat,

**Neh. 11:35** Lod and Ono, the valley of craftsmen.

**Neh. 11:36** From the Levites, some divisions in Judah belonged to Benjamin.

- This group is described in terms of the cities they occupied
  - The name places mentioned here stretch north to south throughout Judah
    - Looking south, they range from the Hinnom Valley south of Jerusalem to the southern border of Israel, at Beersheba
    - And in the north, they go as far as the border with Samaria
    - There are 17 towns for the tribe of Judah and 15 towns of the tribe of Benjamin mentioned in this list
  - The Levites lived among the general population, since the Levites were not given a portion in the land
    - This explains why the other tribes were required to care for the Levites
    - The priests were a part of Israel, yet a special class, set apart
    - By having them live among the other tribes, they became a source of good influence in the culture
    - They were the local pastor, as it were, for the other tribes
  - All in all, the society of Israel has been restored to a structure they haven't seen since the time of Joshua
    - This is a remarkable transformation, when you consider the state of Israel immediately prior to the captivity
    - Instead of idolatry, the nation has pledged obedience to God's Law
    - Instead of mixing with the culture, the people are living to serve the Lord
    - Instead of profaning the house of God, they are protecting it
    - Instead of living for themselves, they are making sacrifices for each other and for the Lord
    - Restoration is a beautiful thing when accompanied by a willing, humble heart

- Nehemiah has been living and working in Jerusalem for 12 years
  - He's returned Israel to a place of obedience and spiritual strength it hasn't known since the time of Joshua
    - The wall is rebuilt
    - The city is occupied
    - The temple is operating
    - And the people are working and living in submission to God's law under the Covenant
  - In less than 400 years, the Messiah will be sent to Israel
    - Which is just enough time for this reborn nation to strengthen
    - To spread out and repopulate the land
    - Though always under the authority of Gentile nations God sends in fulfillment of His promises to Daniel
    - That Israel would be held under Gentile authority until the Messiah's Second Coming
- So as we conclude the text of Nehemiah tonight, we first read through an accounting of the authority of the priestly line in Israel
  - It's important to establish for future generations of Israel that the line of Aaron is still presiding over the temple activities
    - Arguably, these people were the most important exiles to return to Israel
    - Remember, Ezra stopped during his return to Jerusalem because he noted he didn't have enough priests among the exiles
    - So he recruited more to join him
  - The priests were the one irreplaceable group of individuals within the people of Israel
    - Without this tribe, the temple services would be impossible to conduct according to the Law
    - And so the Lord has ensured that the exiles that returned to Jerusalem included not only Levites, but also those in line for priest
    - Including the reigning high priest of Israel
- So Chapter 12 begins with an accounting of priests who lived in Jerusalem
  - This list can be compared to 1 Chronicles, which lists the generations that went into captivity
  - With that cross reference, we can know that the high priest of Israel was the legitimate successor to the high priest in the days before captivity

**Neh. 12:1 Now these are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Neh. 12:2 Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,**

**Neh. 12:3** Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,  
**Neh. 12:4** Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah,  
**Neh. 12:5** Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah,  
**Neh. 12:6** Shemaiah and Joiarib, Jedaiah,  
**Neh. 12:7** Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah and Jedaiah. These were the heads of the priests and their kinsmen in the days of Jeshua.  
**Neh. 12:8** The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah who was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving, he and his brothers.  
**Neh. 12:9** Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brothers, stood opposite them in their service divisions.  
**Neh. 12:10** Jeshua became the father of Joiakim, and Joiakim became the father of Eliashib, and Eliashib became the father of Joiada,  
**Neh. 12:11** and Joiada became the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan became the father of Jaddua.  
**Neh. 12:12** Now in the days of Joiakim, the priests, the heads of fathers' households were: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah;  
**Neh. 12:13** of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan;  
**Neh. 12:14** of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph;  
**Neh. 12:15** of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai;  
**Neh. 12:16** of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam;  
**Neh. 12:17** of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai;  
**Neh. 12:18** of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan;  
**Neh. 12:19** of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi;  
**Neh. 12:20** of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber;  
**Neh. 12:21** of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.  
**Neh. 12:22** As for the Levites, the heads of fathers' households were registered in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan and Jaddua; so were the priests in the reign of Darius the Persian.  
**Neh. 12:23** The sons of Levi, the heads of fathers' households, were registered in the Book of the Chronicles up to the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib.  
**Neh. 12:24** The heads of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers opposite them, to praise and give thanks, as prescribed by David the man of God, division corresponding to division.  
**Neh. 12:25** Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub were gatekeepers keeping watch at the storehouses of the gates.  
**Neh. 12:26** These served in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest and scribe.

- In vs.1-7 are listed 22 leaders among the priests who returned with the exiles under Zerubbabel in 537 BC



- And in vs.8-9 are priests with special duties for singing songs of thanksgiving
  - These names match those provided by Ezra in Chapter 2
- The high priests are listed in vs.10-11
  - Five successive generations of high priests are listed, tracing back to the high priest that left Israel in captivity
  - The genealogies of these men were especially important to validating the legitimacy of the priests who served in the temple
- The genealogical records of Israel were protected with tremendous care throughout the history of the nation
  - The records were housed for protection in the temple
  - And these records were updated when sons were registered
- Israel's emphasis on genealogies was instituted as a consequence of God's covenants
  - The nation of Israel inherited the promises of God by birthright
    - Just as the U.S. assigns the privileges of citizenship to anyone born inside our borders
    - Israel extended that honor to those born into the family
  - So keeping accurate genealogies was critical for knowing who to acknowledge and who to reject
    - God was working in this fastidiousness to ensure the nation could accurately identify the Messiah when His day came
    - Jesus fit all the genealogical requirements given in the OT
    - And the Jews were able to verify this identity
  - From His genealogy, we know Jesus was not of the priestly tribe of Levi, according to the Law of Moses
    - He was of the tribe of Judah, the tribe of Kings
    - Nevertheless, Jesus is our High Priest, Scripture says
  - And Hebrews explains that He can be our priest, though He doesn't descend from Aaron, because He comes in a better order than that created by the Law

**Heb. 7:23** The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing,

**Heb. 7:24** but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.

**Heb. 7:25** Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

**Heb. 7:26** For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;

**Heb. 7:27** who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices,

**first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.**

**Heb. 7:28** For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

- Jesus belongs to an eternal priesthood, one that never had a beginning and will never end
- Unlike the Aaronic priesthood that began with the Law and ends with the end of the Law in Christ
- In AD 70, the temple was destroyed just as Jesus said would happen
  - The destruction of the greatest structure of its day also resulted in the Jews losing all their genealogical records
    - Today, the Jews are unable to trace their ancestry or identify the priests accurately
    - Priestly surnames can still be identified, but that is not a perfect measure
  - The Lord has ensured that the Jewish people lost their ability to follow the Law, once the Messiah had come and put an end to the Law
    - They lost their ability to sacrifice in the temple
    - They lost their priesthood
    - They lost their ability to trace their lineage back to Jacob
    - This is why Paul said the Law held Israel in custody until the coming of the Seed, that is Christ
    - Once the Messiah came, the nation lost their custodian
  - Still, the Covenant that put them under judgment is still in effect
    - Only after they meet its terms as a nation will the nation be relieved of its obligations
    - That day itself comes as a result of the Messiah's work, at the moment of His Second Coming
  - Finally, Christians also have a genealogy to be concerned with, but ours is very simple
    - We once traced our genealogy back to Adam
    - But once we were born again by faith, we were adopted into a new family, the family of God
    - And we trace our genealogy to Christ, and no one else

**Neh. 12:27** Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps and lyres.

**Neh. 12:28** So the sons of the singers were assembled from the district around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites,

**Neh. 12:29** from Beth-gilgal and from their fields in Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem.

**Neh. 12:30** The priests and the Levites purified themselves; they also purified the people, the gates and the wall.

**Neh. 12:31** Then I had the leaders of Judah come up on top of the wall, and I appointed two great choirs, the first proceeding to the right on top of the wall toward the Refuse Gate.

**Neh. 12:32** Hoshaiah and half of the leaders of Judah followed them,

**Neh. 12:33** with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam,

**Neh. 12:34** Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah,

**Neh. 12:35** and some of the sons of the priests with trumpets; and Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph,

**Neh. 12:36** and his kinsmen, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them.

**Neh. 12:37** At the Fountain Gate they went directly up the steps of the city of David by the stairway of the wall above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east.

**Neh. 12:38** The second choir proceeded to the left, while I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the Tower of Furnaces, to the Broad Wall,

**Neh. 12:39** and above the Gate of Ephraim, by the Old Gate, by the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped at the Gate of the Guard.

**Neh. 12:40** Then the two choirs took their stand in the house of God. So did I and half of the officials with me;

**Neh. 12:41** and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah, with the trumpets;

**Neh. 12:42** and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Ezer. And the singers sang, with Jezrahiah their leader,

**Neh. 12:43** and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.

- Finally, the time comes for the dedication of the wall
  - The events described here probably occurred soon after the renewal of the Covenant
    - Dedications are events intended to celebrate an accomplishment
    - And formally declare it finished

- In this dedication, the people are going to use two choirs who will stand on the wall and sing praise to the Lord
  - They will use priests to accomplish the singing
  - They will stand along the entire length of the city wall, as if they were a part of the wall itself
  - They will sing their praise in unison, accompanied by instruments
  - In other words, the entire procession will be big, grand and bound to catch the attention of the surrounding peoples who may be working nearby or passing through
- The entire assembly met at the temple for a period of ritual cleansing under the Law to ensure all the priests were eligible to serve the Lord
  - They then separated into two great choirs
  - The first choir climbed to the top of the wall at the Valley Gate and walked around it counterclockwise, forming a ring of voices
  - Then a second group mounted at the same place, but proceeded clockwise around the other side of the wall
  - This is the same wall that Israel's enemies said couldn't hold the weight of a fox
  - But it's plenty strong enough to serve its purpose, so they sang as they went in great joy
- This must have been quite a sight
  - I wonder how long they sang on that day
    - I wonder how many eyes were tearing up as they looked around and saw this marvelous scene
    - I wonder what it sounded like to have so many thousands of voices singing from atop that wall?
  - Besides being a remarkable scene, this moment gives us a beautiful picture of the fruit of God's restoration
    - When God takes rebellion, breaks it and brings it back to Himself, He does so to produce fruit
    - And the fruit He expects is of a particular kind
    - He expects us to become instruments of praise for the sake of His Name before the nations of the world
  - First, consider the setting for this moment of praise
    - The priests are declaring the faithfulness of the Lord in building this wall of stones
    - And they declare this from the temple of God, the home of the glory of Israel
    - And they declare it in every direction, North, South, East & West
  - Can you see the picture that is fulfilled in us and anyone who is restored by the Lord's kindness?

- Remember the words of 1 Peter

**1 Pet. 2:5** you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

- We are called living stones, by Peter
  - Just as those singers stood atop that wall and became living stones
    - We are called to be living evidence of the restorative work of God
    - Nehemiah didn't come to rebuild the wall, but instead to rebuild a people
    - And as that project came to a close, the people became instruments of praise to the Lord
    - In the same way, the Lord has come to do a work in us
    - So we're called to be instruments of praise to the Lord as we live
  - The Peter goes one step further

**1 Pet. 2:9** But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

**1 Pet. 2:10** for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

- Peter tells us we are all priests to the Lord
- We are set apart to serve the Lord by interceding on behalf of the world
- We are the people of God, and as we were called out of darkness,
- Now we call others out of darkness as well
- Finally, we gain our audience by standing up, being willing to stand out and making the most of that opportunity by praising God as we go
  - Some of us may turn to the left while others turn to the right
  - But no matter where we go, the Spirit of God will live in our midst, in our very bodies
  - And we stand as a city on a hill, as Jesus calls us
- You see, God's plan of restoration was never about Israel
  - It was about declaring the Lord's greatness before the nations of the world
    - For Israel to be a city on a hill, declaring the wonder of His works
    - To call the world out of darkness
  - But the people were too distracted by their own sin to truly fulfill that purpose

- Except for perhaps this one moment
- There is simply no better moment in Israel's history than this one
- When all the city was singing to the world of the Lord's glory
- So as v.43 says, "the joy of Jerusalem is heard from afar"
- The next time something like this happens in Israel won't come again until the Lord is living and reigning over the world in Jerusalem
  - Then once again, the people of Israel will serve as a beacon on earth, celebrating the Lord's goodness

**Zech. 14:9** And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

**Zech. 14:10** All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses.

**Zech. 14:11** People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security.

- Following the celebration, Nehemiah thought it was probably the right time to ensure the people kept their responsibility to care for the priests, as the Law required

**Neh. 12:44** On that day men were also appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions required by the law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served.

**Neh. 12:45** For they performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command of David and of his son Solomon.

**Neh. 12:46** For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, there were leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God.

**Neh. 12:47** So all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah gave the portions due the singers and the gatekeepers as each day required, and set apart the consecrated portion for the Levites, and the Levites set apart the consecrated portion for the sons of Aaron.

- These are the temple services David instituted to support the work of the priests
  - The change from tabernacle to temple brought the need for additional support, since the number of those serving necessarily increased
    - As government grows, so do the taxes to support it
    - So these demands were in keeping with the Law

- But David and Solomon established the rules for how to accomplish the requirements of the Law
- These verses are important because they represent the final duties Nehemiah presided over before leaving to return to his duties under the king
  - It was important for Nehemiah to return after being away so long
  - If he waited longer than the time he promised, then he would be judged a rebel to the king
  - The king would naturally be concerned that a man in his position might entertain delusions of grandeur
  - So his return was his duty, and it had to come about
- But when the cat's away, the mice...well, we know the rest

**Neh. 13:1** On that day they read aloud from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God,

**Neh. 13:2** because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.

**Neh. 13:3** So when they heard the law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel.

**Neh. 13:4** Now prior to this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being related to Tobiah,

**Neh. 13:5** had prepared a large room for him, where formerly they put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

**Neh. 13:6** But during all this time I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had gone to the king. After some time, however, I asked leave from the king,

**Neh. 13:7** and I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God.

- To understand this section, we need to read it backwards, in a sense
  - Nehemiah left the city after 12 years, to return to king Artaxerxes
    - He originally arrived in 444 BC
    - Then after 12 years, Nehemiah leaves in 432 BC
    - He is gone for about a year, before returning to the city again in 431 BC
  - While he was away, the people began to slide back into disobedient behaviors, especially as it related to the corrupting of leaders
    - First, Eliashib the high priest begins to show favor to one of his relatives in a way that violated the David's instructions for the temple

- The relative is a man we've heard before, Tobiah
- He is a Jewish Ammonite
  - He was a Jew who had married into an Ammonite family
  - And he became a ruler over the Ammonites, and therefore, an enemy of his own people in Israel
  - We've seen him already working to stop the rebuilding of the wall
- But now that the wall has been built, and the city is an attractive place to be, he has wormed his way in by using his family connections
  - And the high priest seems willing to allow it, perhaps to build a stronger alliance
    - But space is tight in the cramped city
    - And a foreigner living among the Jews would not be tolerated by the people
    - So the high priest clears out a storeroom in the temple to make a small apartment for Tobiah
  - Formerly, this space was used for grain storage and other materials and tools used by the priests
    - If Tobiah is now living in the space, then those other items must be stored elsewhere
    - Reducing the space available for the priests to store their food and necessities
    - Clearly, this is not a good situation
- So then, Nehemiah returns to the city to discover Tobiah living in the temple
  - And he is not pleased, of course
    - On that day, he commanded a reading of the Law concerning the prohibition against associating with Ammonites and Moabites
    - This is found in Deut. 23

**Deut. 23:3** “No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD,

**Deut. 23:4** because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

**Deut. 23:5** “Nevertheless, the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you.

- The Law recounts how on two occasions the Ammonites and Moabites conspired against the Jews while they wandered in the desert
  - In the first case, the people of Israel wished to pass through the land of Edom, but Edom refused



- This forced Israel into a long and dangerous journey around the Red Sea
- In the second case, King Balak of Moab feared the people of Israel and tried hiring a prophet, Balaam, to curse the people of God
- Instead, God turned Balaam's curse into a blessing
- Despite these prohibitions, we know Ruth, a Moabitess, was brought into Israel and into the line of Messiah
  - Ruth was a Moabite, barred by Law from becoming part of Israel
  - By her faith in Israel's God, Ruth was redeemed by Boaz when he married her
  - Her faith removed the curse of the Law against her, and by her marriage to Boaz, she could become a member of the nation
- The prohibition in the Law uses masculine nouns when describing Ammonites and Moabites
  - Women could be allowed in, if they accepted the God of Israel and married a Jewish man
  - Since we know Boaz is a picture of Christ, then the book of Ruth teaches that what Law could not achieve in redeeming the Gentile, faith made possible
  - Ruth was redeemed by Boaz when he made her his wife
  - And the Gentile Church is redeemed by Christ when, by faith, we are made His Bride
  - That's why Paul says to us

**Eph. 2:12** remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

**Eph. 2:13** But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

**Eph. 2:14** For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

**Eph. 2:15** by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

- But in this moment, we do not see that kind of redemption and reconciliation
  - We see an illegitimate attempt to assemble in conflict with the Law
    - So at the re-reading of this Law, Nehemiah brings the people's mind back to the requirements of God's Word
    - And so they act to remove all the foreigners from in the city
    - Apparently, Tobiah wasn't the only interloper
  - Nehemiah personally takes care of the Tobiah problem

**Neh. 13:8** It was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the room.

**Neh. 13:9** Then I gave an order and they cleansed the rooms; and I returned there the utensils of the house of God with the grain offerings and the frankincense.

**Neh. 13:10** I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given them, so that the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field.

**Neh. 13:11** So I reprimanded the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" Then I gathered them together and restored them to their posts.

**Neh. 13:12** All Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, wine and oil into the storehouses.

**Neh. 13:13** In charge of the storehouses I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered reliable, and it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen.

**Neh. 13:14** Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.

- He literally threw Tobiah out and all his stuff with him
- Then, all the proper material was returned to the store house
- Once again, Nehemiah is instrumental to gaining the people's obedience
- Besides Tobiah, Nehemiah learns that the people had begun to retreat from their promise to support the priests
  - The priests who served the people in the temple were not receiving their promised support from the people
  - As a result, they had no choice but to return to the fields to make a living for themselves and their family
  - This is the inevitable result of God's people muzzling their spiritual ox
  - They are only hurting themselves in the long run, by preventing their appointed ministers from devoting their time to that service
- So Nehemiah issues a reprimand against the officials of Israel
  - This was a failure of leadership in the nation
  - The people are sheep, and they need their leaders to direct them into obedience
  - With Nehemiah gone, obedience waned
  - So Nehemiah changes out the leaders, finding men he felt were more trustworthy to enforce the rules
  - Notice, the people go back to tithing without complaint – it's not as though the people rebelled against the idea of tithing
- What lesson can we draw from this incident?

- Notice that the offense is one of the things the people specifically said they would avoid doing in the future
  - When they renewed the Covenant, they said they wouldn't forsake the priests and temple
  - They wouldn't abuse the Sabbath
  - And they wouldn't intermarry with the Gentiles
  - Yet here, we see them doing the very thing they promised not to do
- Is obedience in Israel a hopeless goal?
  - Until faith comes in the heart, obedience to Law is always a challenge, certainly
  - But the bigger lesson is the need for God's leaders to keep God's Word ever-present before God's people if obedience is to stand a chance
- Notice that the people were not unwilling to obey the commandment
  - When they heard what the Law said, they immediately recognized what they had to do in removing the foreigners
  - And they seem to fall into line in supporting the priests when the new leaders are appointed
- But earlier, when the high priest neglected to live according to the Word and failed to teach it, the people drifted
  - This happens anytime leaders set aside the Lord's Word
  - Men will inevitably return to doing what is right in their own eyes
- A key barometer of whether the Word is sufficiently valued and understood among God's people is their degree of tolerance for assembling with the world
  - When we can feel comfortable assembling with the world, then we have lost sight of the Word's call for us to stand apart
    - To be clear, the Bible doesn't command us to cease associating with the world
    - Paul makes clear that we are to associate, so that we may bring the message of the Gospel
    - But associating and assembling are two different things
  - Scripture says that in the last days of the Church, it would fall away from the Word of God, and as a result, the Church would begin to assemble with the world
    - Jesus says

**Matt. 13:31** He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field;

**Matt. 13:32** and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."

- As the Kingdom of God has grown over the centuries, in the form of the Church, it has begun to attract the birds of the air
- Birds are often used as a picture of believers and unbelievers
- The sense is, that the tree is big enough to allow both types to rest in its branches
- This is the apostasy of the last days that Paul says will come upon the Church
- How can this be? When the Word of God has become so diminished that it doesn't call us out for who we are

**1 Tim. 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,**

**1 Tim. 4:2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,**

- Furthermore, Paul says a few verses later, that the solution is the same antidote that Nehemiah applied

**1 Tim. 4:6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.**

- Constant nourishment on the Word of God and sound doctrine are essential
- This scene also presents a picture of Christ, to a degree
  - If we consider Nehemiah as a picture of the Lord for the sake of this moment, then we can find parallels to Christ's First and Second Coming
    - Just as Nehemiah's first coming was in secret and for the purpose of building a wall of living stones, as we said
    - Then Nehemiah's departure gave opportunity for the leaders of God's people to wander away from the truth
    - And the people were allowed to drift away from God's Word
  - But then at his return, Nehemiah sets all things straight
    - He throws out those who are not his people
    - He restores all things to the proper order
    - He is an exacting judge in his return
  - Consider these statements by Christ regarding his return

**Matt. 24:46 "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.**

**Matt. 24:47 "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.**

**Matt. 24:48 "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a**

long time,'

**Matt. 24:49** and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards;

**Matt. 24:50** the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know,

**Matt. 24:51** and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**Matt. 13:27** "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?'

**Matt. 13:28** "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?'

**Matt. 13:29** "But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them.

**Matt. 13:30** 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

**Matt. 25:31** "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

**Matt. 25:32** "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

**Matt. 25:33** and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

- The Lord's return will be met by leaders taking advantage of the people
  - And the people are abused by these leaders
  - The abuse is a failure to feed Christ's sheep
  - For as He said, if you love the Lord, then you will feed His sheep
- But at Christ's return, the world will be separated from among God's people
- As you might expect, the people haven't just forsaken the first promise
  - They have gone back on all three of them
    - Next, they are violating the Sabbath

**Neh. 13:15** In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sold food.

**Neh. 13:16** Also men of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them to the sons of Judah on the sabbath, even in Jerusalem.

**Neh. 13:17** Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day?"

**Neh. 13:18** “Did not your fathers do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath.”

**Neh. 13:19** It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so that no load would enter on the sabbath day.

**Neh. 13:20** Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem.

**Neh. 13:21** Then I warned them and said to them, “Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you.” From that time on they did not come on the sabbath.

**Neh. 13:22** And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the sabbath day. For this also remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness.

- The people of Israel were working on the Sabbath day, despite promising to respect it
  - They were doing manual labor and conducting commerce
    - These things were prohibited by the Law
    - Also, the merchants of the surrounding people were allowed to work within the city on the Sabbath
    - But the Law required that the sojourner also cease from working
  - So once again, Nehemiah steps in to stop the abuse of the Law
    - He rebuked the people and the merchants
    - He barred the doors of the city on the Sabbath and arranged for priests to guard the doors
    - And he threatened the traders who collected outside the city on the Sabbath, for they posed a temptation for the people
  - In the earlier example, Nehemiah was intent on restoring the people’s respect for the holy places God has established
    - Here he is intent on restoring the holy times He had appointed
    - The people were allowing worldliness to erode their commitment to the Lord in these matters
    - And once again, we can blame the leaders who allowed the people to drift away from the Word of God
- Finally, they people disobeyed their third promise against intermarriage

**Neh. 13:23** In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from

Ashdod, Ammon and Moab.

**Neh. 13:24** As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people.

**Neh. 13:25** So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.

**Neh. 13:26** “Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin.

**Neh. 13:27** “Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?”

**Neh. 13:28** Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me.

**Neh. 13:29** Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

**Neh. 13:30** Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task,

**Neh. 13:31** and I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

- Some of the Jews had begun to marry Gentiles
  - And as they married these Gentiles, they began to speak the Gentiles’ language
    - In fact, some families were raising kids who lacked the ability to even speak Hebrew
    - This behavior would be the beginning of the end of Israel were it allowed to continue
  - So Nehemiah takes his strongest stand yet
    - He physically attacks those who have violated this law
    - He curses them, strikes them and pulls out hair, a painful act designed to cause shame, but it’s relatively harmless
    - Finally, he makes them swear by God not to give more family to the Gentiles
    - This kind of promise was punishable by death, so it settled the matter
- Nehemiah uses the example of King Solomon to remind the people that greater men than they have made this same mistake and paid dearly for it
  - So if Solomon couldn’t prevent the harm that came from marrying foreign wives, then how could they expect to do so?
    - They should understand the dangers and run from them

- In fact, we see once more that the high priest had allowed his own son to marry the daughter of one of their chief enemies
- We can safely assume Sanballat had arranged the marriage to corrupt the people by absorbing them into their own culture
- The enemy never gives up the fight against God's people
  - He will try force, guile and intimidation
  - And if all that fails, he will tempt us to walk away from obedience to God's Word so that we might become weak, and eventually, we look like a tare
  - It takes leaders who remind us of the Word of God and enforce its provisions to save us from that outcome
- As we reflect on the story of Nehemiah, and its place in the history of the canon, we can see it fit into a familiar pattern
  - Often, when God moves in Israel to accomplish a good purpose, He brings a new Word through a new Leader
    - He brought Noah
    - He brought Moses
    - He brought David
    - He brought Nehemiah
  - But, He also wants us to understand these men aren't bringing the full solution
    - These men are not the Messiah, though they point to the coming Lord
    - And that point is made in each case by showing how the people failed to turn from their sin, despite the leader's influence
    - Noah's son sinned after the flood
    - Israel in the desert sinned, despite Moses' leadership
    - The people of Israel fell into sin time and time again after David and Solomon
    - And they do that here as well, under Nehemiah
  - There is no solution for sin apart from Christ Himself
    - Yet still, the Lord is good to send us leaders like Nehemiah who can call us to live in pleasing ways
    - So that we may receive the blessing of restoration and reward