

The Book of Nehemiah

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The Building of the Wall and the Gates

In Nehemiah 2, 3 and 12, we read about several gates that have symbolic meaning for the reconstruction of the temple walls as Israel returned from her captivity. Let us look at how this building took place and under what circumstances. First, in Nehemiah 2:9-20, Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem. He rests for three days, and while resting physically, he is greatly exercised spiritually. In other words, “he conferred not with flesh and blood,” rather He only meets with the Lord and is filled by His presence at first. (See Nehemiah 2:12 and Galatians 1:16)

We see that despite the obvious destruction that has occurred in the city, and the devastating remains, Nehemiah is not deterred in purpose by the ruinous conditions of the city. Under the cover of darkness he reviews the devastation of the city of God. Nehemiah, perhaps a lonely man, keeps his midnight vigil, noting with deep sorrow and concern the ruin sin has made. While Nehemiah is praying and planning, the nobles and rulers are sleeping more or less unconcerned. Nehemiah’s soul is stirred to its depths as he views the scene, and from the sorrow and concern there arises an overwhelming desire to build up that which carnal ease and spiritual slothfulness has been allowed to remain in ruin. Nehemiah’s attitude identifies himself fully with the people of the city as he shares his burden with a few godly men, saying, “You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we

may no longer be a reproach.’ And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words that he had spoken to me.” (Nehemiah 2:17-18a) He is communicating his solidarity with them and proposing partnership this way. He cannot rebuild the walls alone, rather he is seeking total involvement from them and the others in the city. The people are clearly aroused and encouraged, telling Nehemiah, “Let us rise up and build.” (Nehemiah 2:18b) This is a deep spiritual exercise among the people as they join hands with God’s servant to do God’s work.

Let me apply this passage and make it relevant to us today. Every man with a shepherd’s heart knows something of Nehemiah’s experience whose heart God has touched with a vision to see the city restored. In Scripture, Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezra, and Paul are examples of those like Nehemiah who care for their churches very deeply, desiring to rebuild, whether spiritually, or physically, their churches. In every good assembly there should be a few spiritual leaders like Nehemiah, men who are intimately acquainted with the spiritual needs of the church and who use the gifts God has given them to build up the church. In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul teaches that “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” Men who are able to guide, inspire, and encourage others to do God’s work on earth are desperately needed in the church! Conversely, to make a ministry such as this effective, there must be receptive and responsive hearts among those who hear the

instruction, because it produces a deep spiritual exercise and complete abandonment of selfish interests. At this point a surrendered, captivated soul will cry out, "Not my will but thine be done" or "Here am I, send me" or "Lord, what will you have me to do?" (See Luke 22:42, Isaiah 6:8, and Acts 22:10) To arrive at this point is nothing short of a spiritual awakening. Then as one body, we work and strive, weep and pray, rejoice and worship, build and secure the precious truths of our godly heritage. Therefore, may our prayer be: "Lord send revival and begin it in me."

When the people resolve to build, the opposition begins to stiffen. For the first time, we hear of Sanballat and Tobiah, who upon hearing of Nehemiah's mission, are "deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel." (Nehemiah 2:10) In Nehemiah 2:19, they are joined by Geshem. This ungodly trio laughs, ridicules and despises God's servants, accusing them of a very serious crime of rebelling against the king. (See Nehemiah 2:19) We should view this as active spiritual resistance to a calling from God. Often, when a man of God comes with determination to restore God's principles, immediately there is active opposition. How does this affect Nehemiah? He says, "The God of Heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage, or right, or memorial in Jerusalem." (Nehemiah 2:20) Elders should act like Nehemiah here in defending truth and speaking against those "whose mouths must be stopped." (See Titus 1:9-11)

Let us move on to look at some of the symbolic meanings of the gates that Nehemiah and his Jewish allies begin to repair.

The Sheep Gate

This gate, mentioned in Nehemiah 3:1, speaks of atonement. On this gate, there were no locks or bars. This gate also both begins and ends the cycle in this chapter. (See Nehemiah 3:1 and 3:32) This gate was built for thousands of sheep, intended for sacrifice and offerings to the Lord, to enter through to the rebuilt city. This instantly should remind us of the Lamb of God, which John the Baptist labels Jesus in John 1:29 as the ultimate sin offering for the people of God. Isaiah also mentions this sacrificial lamb, saying, “He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.” (Isaiah 53:7) During the days of the Old Testament, before Christ had come to Earth, tens of thousands of sacrifices were required to atone for Israel’s sins. The Lord Jesus, in contrast, “made one sacrifice for sin” for all of the world, making “perfect forever those who are being made holy.” (See Hebrews 1:3 and 10:14) The Sheep Gate clearly symbolizes the Lamb of God, who was better than the angels, Moses, the High Priest, and was a better sacrifice than all the accumulated sacrifices from Adam to the Cross.

The Fish Gate

This gate is described in Nehemiah 3:3-5, and brings to mind “the call to service” of Jesus’ disciples. (See Matthew 4:18-20) Peter and Andrew were casting a net into the sea, fishing, and James and John were mending their nets. Jesus called to them, “Follow Me and I will

make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19) Jesus was essentially saying to them, “I will teach you to catch men alive.” These disciples left everything to become fishers of men, yet we should not forget that this is the obligation and mission of every believer to become fishers of men. Each believer should be a fisher of men, striving to win others to Christ. Unfortunately, this is often not so, and consequently most assemblies have become aquariums where life is easy and demands are few. Do not be content to fish in the bath tub while all around us are men and women crushed and ruined by sin, waiting for someone to tell them of Jesus. We have seen the God’s mission, Christ’s passion, and should understand our part in this!

The Horse Gate

In Nehemiah 3:28 we learn about the Horse Gate, which speaks of soldiers’ service. In Nehemiah’s day, the horse is an animal of war. The believer is constantly at war with the world and all its factions. Jesus says, “In me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) But our warfare is also in the moral, ethical, spiritual sphere, as Paul teaches in Ephesians 6:12: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” In Jude 1:3, we are exhorted to “contend earnestly for the faith which was delivered to all the saints.” Paul also encourages believers to “fight the good fight of faith” and tells us he has “fought the good fight.” (1 Timothy 6:12 and 2 Timothy 4:7) We should always be aware of the armor at our disposal that is mentioned in Ephesians 6. Most of

all, however, it is important to recognize the different kinds of warfare very much present in our lives. First, there is the inward battle of the flesh and the Spirit, and secondly, there is doctrinal warfare for which we should “earnestly contend.” Thirdly, we see spiritual warfare that manifests itself in many ways, for example, against principalities. Lastly, there is external warfare, like suffering that exists with believers when they are persecuted as followers of Christ. The building of this gate should represent the presence of these types of warfare among us even now.

The East Gate

The mention of the East Gate in Nehemiah 3:29 should remind us of the coming of the Lord because of the symbolism of the Messiah to come. In Scripture, Jews know of a Messiah to come by way of the east. In Ezekiel’s temple vision, we learn that the east gate is reserved for the Lord. The Lord says, “This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.” (See Ezekiel 44:1-3) We also see that in Zechariah 14:4, Zechariah predicts the Day of the Lord, describing the Mount of Olives that He will go upon when He comes to Earth. He says, “And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east.” Beloved, this gate should remind us to live our lives as if Christ has been crucified yesterday and is coming tomorrow. Scripture tells us that “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the

air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

The Gate of Judgment

This gate, mentioned in Nehemiah 2:31, speaks to us of the judgment seat of Christ, where deeds are judged and we are held accountable for our actions. Many places in Scripture speak of this judgment before Christ in the final days. Paul tells us in Romans 14:10-12, “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” Paul also teaches, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10) Even unbelievers will appear before the great white throne of Christ. (See Revelation 20:11-15) Therefore, beloved, let us live our lives with an eternal perspective, according to this knowledge we have of the final judgment.

The Gate of Ephraim/Fruit-bearing

Now let us move ahead to Nehemiah 8 and 12 where the Gate of Ephraim is first mentioned. The naming of this gate is purposeful, for it means, “fruitful” or “doubly fruitful.” Let us consider the great principle of fruit-bearing that we learn of in Scripture. Jesus teaches a parable about a vine and branches bearing fruit in John 15 in order to illustrate this principle, because here the true source of fruitfulness is made known. We are introduced to the “branch” in John 15:2. A vine needs branches, because without branches it cannot bear any fruit. The “branch” is simply a piece of wood brought

forth by the vine for the main purpose of bearing fruit. What is this fruit then? First, fruit is something which the branch bears not for itself, but for its owner. Secondly, fruit-bearing is one thing for which we have been saved. Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in my name He may give you." Thirdly, the fruit the branch bears is the fruit of the vine. This means that in a Christian it is the fruit of Christ Himself, or Christ-likeness that illustrates fruit-bearing. There are many other kinds of fruit mentioned in Scripture that the Gate of Ephraim can represent. For example, there is the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. There is also the fruit of winning souls, which Paul speaks of in Romans 1:13. Thirdly, scripture speaks of the fruit of Christian character in Romans 6:21-22. Lastly, Paul teaches about the fruit of Christian conduct in Philippians 1:11. However, we should also note that if branches do not bear fruit, they are removed, purged, or pruned so that they may fulfill their purpose in fruit-bearing. (See John 15:2) This purging, pruning or cleansing of a child of God is the result of sin. The precious fruit that come from the vine must be used to produce more fruit, not to produce larger or stronger branches. The Lord may use various methods to cleanse or purge us, as branches. First, He may use Scripture to do so. (See John 15:3) Secondly, He may use specific circumstances to grow us in fruit-bearing capability. Thirdly, He will employ His servants to help each other bear fruit, and lastly, He helps us to see how to "abide" in Him in order to bear fruit. (See John 15:7-8) The secret of fruit-bearing is that the branch abides in the vine; this is the closest of all

unions. If the branch is not in the vine then the sap of the vine does not circulate in the branch, and there can be no fruit. If this condition continues, the branch withers and dies. The secret then of fruit-bearing is to “abide in Him,” and “He in us...For without me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5-6) As we reflect upon what the Gate of Ephraim represents in our own lives, let us remember our call to bear fruit and reflect the Lord in all that we do!

The Prison Gate

Another gate mentioned in Nehemiah 12:39 is that named the Prison Gate. This gate specifically depicts those who are under the power of Satan, imprisoned by Him. In 1 John 5:19, we are told that “we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” The devil has power to convince people that they can have everything if they worship him and are pulled into his influence, as we see with the devil tempting Jesus Himself in Luke 4:1-13. Paul tells us, “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded.” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4) This gate reminds us that as believers we must keep watch for Satan working in and around us. In the holy city of Jerusalem, however, Christ reigns, and will protect his daughters and sons from the wicked influence of Satan.

Thank God many are hearing the Gospel from many other sources and are believing and living according to their knowledge and faith. Works and ministries are thriving numerically and God is being honored while young people are active in Gospel outreach. Many believers are gainfully employed as well. In Jerusalem,

“daily in the temple and in every house” the believers in the early church “did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” (See Acts 5:42) Thereby, the church grew and opposition arose. The church in Antioch preached the Lord Jesus to all, and the result was that “the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:21) They have a giving missionary church. Returning to the description of the Fish Gate in Nehemiah 3:3-5, let us consider each men and their gifts in constructing this gate. When we examine the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4, we see that there are often evangelists, pastors, and teachers. We should ask ourselves, where are the evangelists among us today? These fisherman in the rebuilt city left the city each day to go fishing through the Fish Gate and toiled into the black depth of the sea. As we consider what it means to be fisherman called to service as the first disciples were, let us be urged to be “fishers of men.”

Nehemiah 4

Please note that the incidents related in chapters 4-6 took place at the same time as the building of the wall as described in chapter 3. There were 8 open attempts to stop the work, 4 of them described in this chapter.

While God's work was going on, constant opposition was being endured by the workers.

The first onslaught was by ridicule. Sanballat's rage was kindled in verse 1. His rage found expression in making fun of or sneering at the work the Jews were doing for God.

Before his brethren (the Samaritans) and the local militia he openly scorned the Jews as weaklings. "What are these feeble Jews doing?"

Note his sarcasm in the questions he asks—v. 2:

1. Will they fortify themselves?
2. Will they sacrifice?
3. Will they finish in a day?
4. Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish which are burned?

v. 3—Sanballat is now joined by Tobiah. He continues the sneering. "That which they build, if a fox go up, it shall break down their stone wall."

Did this opposition stop the work on the wall? What recourse did Nehemiah take to fight this opposition? He resorted to prayer. See verses 4 and 5. "Prayer moves the hand of Him Who moves the universe."

They prayed and they built, the work never stopped.

Despite the ridicule and threats the work continued unabated until the wall was half completed, that is half its intended height.

Psalm 37:5—“Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.”

Note the reason for such rapid progress in verse 6 —“The people had a mind to work.”

This means that:

1. They had an appreciation of their commitment/responsibility.
2. They worked because they believed they were doing God’s will.
3. They worked because of the encouragement they received from Nehemiah.
4. Their love for God and their enthusiasm overcame all difficulties and opposition.

This is what the Lord needs in His church today. They were united in heart and purpose. Unity brings blessing. Psalm 133.

v. 7-8—Opposition by threat of open attack. Notice the lengthened list of enemies in verse 7. Since the work was progressing and every obstacle was being swept aside, the enemies reckoned that the only way to stop the work was an open attack upon the faithful workers. See Acts 4:31.

v. 10—No prayer here. Depression, discouragement, complaints, murmurings. This is the first note of discontentment from within.

The work was getting to them. The working and the watching was wearing them thin. To these disheartening words Nehemiah gave no answer save to continue building. See Joshua 1:6-7. Nehemiah's faith was in God not in the arm of flesh. He had a firm conviction that they were engaged in the Lord's work, and although the people's hearts grew faint he continued to count on the living God. Galatians 6:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:13; Isaiah 40:28-31.

v. 11-12—Opposition from the threat of secret attack. News came to Nehemiah ten times concerning this attack. But instead of discouraging him, the man of faith counted on God to deliver. Prior to this, all the people had labored and watched.

v. 13—They must be prepared for conflict.

First attack—ridicule.

Second attack—open attack.

Third attack—discouragement.

Fourth attack—secret attack.

Fifth attack—disruptions within.

Sixth attack—man's cunning.

Seventh attack—scandal.

Eighth attack—infiltration of evil.

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood."

Nehemiah set guards, fully armed, at the most vulnerable points. While he did this, his confidence was not in weaponry, but in the living God.

v. 14—"Be not afraid of them."

v. 15—When the enemies heard that their counsel was known to the Israelites they gave up their plan of open warfare. And the building of the wall continued.

But Nehemiah was more careful than ever despite his victories. Our most vulnerable period is in the wake of spiritual victory. Nehemiah took his own personal servants and bodyguards and divided them into two companies. One company helped in the building of the wall. The other, heavily armed, stood guard. Thus they worked and watched, one hand held a trowel, the other a sword.

The trowel is the Word used for edification—Ephesians 4:12. The sword is the Word used in contending for the faith—Jude 3.

v. 18—“And he who sounded the trumpet was by me.” The trumpet speaks of the sounding forth of the Word. The trumpeter received his message directly from Nehemiah. The servant of the Lord who would sound the trumpet must abide by the Lord so that he may speak as the oracle of God. If we abide in Him then the trumpet will not give an uncertain sound.

The voice of the trumpet was the authentic voice. It had to be obeyed. When the trumpet was blown the people gathered together in one mind and spirit ready to do God’s will, to build or to fight, and to lay down their life if necessary.

As it was then so it is now. God’s word must be obeyed. There is much work to be done and time is short. Who, then, is willing?

v. 21—“So we labored in the work.” Nothing could deter them from the rising of the morning until the stars

appeared. No unemployment nor idle time in God's service. The work was so pressing that no one left the city at night. Think of the effort these people made, of the sacrifice.

v. 23—The example of Nehemiah and the guard. They were so busy in the Lord's work that they never took off their clothes except to wash them.

This was a trying time; they did this to build a wall. We are building the Church, dealing with living stones. What sacrifice are we making to send forth the Word to build up the Church and protect it from the world?

Personal witness, giving, prayer, supporting the meetings, keeping out evil. 1 Corinthians 15:58; Acts 2.

Nehemiah 5 & 6

Nehemiah 5

v. 1-5—The poorer folks raised a cry against their wealthier brethren, with good reason. Their work on the wall brought them no wages. They were financially hard pressed. Their families were large and food must be provided for them. There had been a drought and famine. This forced them to mortgage their lands to obtain provisions. They also had to pay taxes to the king of Persia. Though they loved their children they were forced to sell them in bondage to pay their debts. The rich brethren were obtaining possession of both their lands and children. The money-lenders were taking advantage of this situation. They were charging interest at the rate of 12% annually or 1% per month.

Nehemiah was appalled and angry. He brought them to judgment and asked them to restore that which they had taken away, which they did. Note the curse which would come on any who broke their oath.

v. 14-19—Nehemiah's example. For twelve years he had taken nothing from the people, the power of example.

Nehemiah 6

We hear nothing from the enemies outside in chapter 5. There is strife within, as long as God's people are quarrelling among themselves, the enemy without can afford to rest.

Chapter 6 introduces us to a renewed attack from the outside. Some of their strategies.

v. 2—They tried to lure Nehemiah to the plain of Ono. 1 John 2:15-17. The assemblies were never stronger than when they were separated from the world's system.

v. 3—Nehemiah's reply. "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." The Lord's work was all-important.

An elder's responsibility and privilege is to care for Christ's most precious possession on earth. This includes care, protection, leading, anything for its welfare.

Elders do not necessarily need to be old. Sometimes maturity comes with age, sometimes it doesn't. Maturity comes as we attend St. Mary's College at Jesus' feet. Maturity comes through searching the Word, finding God's purpose, and obeying implicitly God's instructions. Allowing the Holy Spirit to control you.

Should be examples to the flock. For those faithful elders there is reserved a crown of glory.

The Samaritans pretended to worship God. Apply this today.

v. 4—The Samaritan's insistence. Their conciliatory methods failed, they resorted to scandal.

v. 5-7—An open letter. Nehemiah's reply—a servant of the Lord can expect opposition. Examples are the Lord, Paul, and Joseph.

v. 9—Nehemiah's prayer, "O, God strengthen my hands." Satan has not finished with the servant of God yet.

v. 10—The former opposition was found without the city. Now the enemy has an agent within the city. This man tried to intimidate Nehemiah. They are after your life,

and will probably seek it tonight. Let us go into the holy place in the temple—there we shall be safe. This would have been a serious sin to desecrate the holy place. It also would have been cowardice under pressure.

v. 11—Nehemiah's reply.

v. 12-13—God reveals the evil scheme to His servant.

v. 14—Brings the whole matter to God.

v. 15-19—The wall is finished.

v. 16—The enemies are defeated and they saw God working. Despite this great feat, there were those within who were friendly with "Brother Tobia". There was outward separation, but no heart separation.

Nehemiah, unlike some of his brethren, did not buy up the land from the poor people who were in financial straits in order to make high profits.

v. 17—Rather he was generous in entertaining people at his own table.

Verse 18 tells us the amount of food he used for this purpose.

v. 19—He did all this, not for the plaudits of men, but for the reward of God. "Think upon me, my God for good."

Nehemiah 8 & 9

Nehemiah 8

The chapter opens by telling how Ezra read the law to the people. Verses 1-3. The name of Ezra is not mentioned in the first six chapters of Nehemiah. It is hard to imagine him being in Jerusalem during the time of the building of the wall without being mentioned. It is also hard to imagine him living in Jerusalem and spiritual conditions to have reached such a low ebb as Nehemiah found when he came to the city.

The theory is probably correct which supposes that Ezra was recalled to Persia shortly after the events with which his book concluded. He seems to have returned to Jerusalem after the wall was completed.

It was quite natural then that the assembled people would ask their former leader to read the Scriptures to them. The reading began on the first day of the seventh month. He read from the law of Moses, the Pentateuch—
v. 1.

v. 2—Men, women and all children who could understand were present. See 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:15. Consider also Samuel, who was nurtured for God.

Please note that the people “were attentive unto the book.”

v. 4—A special pulpit was built, large enough to hold Ezra and 13 others. These men apparently assisted Ezra in the long periods of reading.

v. 5—When Ezra opened the Book, the people showed their respect and reverence for the Word by standing up.

v. 6—Then Ezra blessed the Lord, and the people answered “Amen, Amen.” Then they bowed their hearts, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

v. 7—Another 13 men are mentioned in this verse, and they also assisted Ezra and caused the people to understand the Law. As the Word was being explained the people stood.

v. 9-12—When the people heard the law they wept, realizing how they had broken it. However, at this point, Nehemiah and Ezra urged them not to weep. The day was the Feast of Trumpets, an occasion for rejoicing, not of sadness.

v. 13-18—The Feast of Tabernacles is restored. This was the second day of Bible reading. In their reading they had advanced to Leviticus 23. They learned there that the Feast of Tabernacles was to be observed by their dwelling in booths. It was decided to keep the feast just as the law prescribed.

Those who dwelt in the city made booths on the flat tops of their houses. The country folks placed their booths in the streets and courtyards. There was great gladness. Ezra continued to read the Word for eight days. The people did not ask for anything else.

On the eighth day a solemn assembly was held. Now let us go into the chapter and make it applicable to ourselves.

The Great Bible Reading

Revival is generally preceded by a renewed interest in the Word of God. See revival under Josiah in 2 Kings 22:23, and under Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18.

The Reformation of the 16th century.

There are seven important truths in this chapter:

1. They were a united people waiting upon God—v. 1. They met before the Water Gate—the cleansing, refreshing, reviving power of the Word of God. “They were gathered together as one man.” This condition, unity and desire for the Word was accompanied by great power and revival. The exhortation then is that we should return to the Word if we would experience revival. We must read, study, meditate upon, memorize, and obey it.

2. The people said, “Bring the Book.” It was scarce and precious. They were united in purpose and desire.

3. Ezra brought the Book and read therefrom—v. 3. They were attentive to the Book. They listened from morning to midday. Josiah had a tender heart.

4. Notice their subjection to the Word—v. 5-8. As they listened to the Word “they lifted up their hands and answered, “Amen, Amen.” Then they bowed their heads and worshipped.

5. The Word of God was a source of joy and strength—v. 9-12. They were a happy people. They were right with God. They sang Israel’s song. As we sing we are priests unto God.

6. Obedience to the Word. On the second day everyone came together again, and the reading of the Word continued. They read of the Feast of Tabernacles and at once obeyed its injunctions. They built booths with branches and lived in them 7 days. This reminded them of the wilderness journey and future blessings.

7. The Word is sufficient. They read the Word for seven days and asked for nothing else. The all-sufficiency of the Scriptures. For His people today God has provided for our every need.

Nehemiah 9

In chapter 8 when the law was read to the people, and the enormity of their sin gripped their hearts, they wept. V. 9.

But because of the nature of the season and the feasts involved they were instructed not to weep but rather rejoice.

v. 1-3—Now the Feast of Tabernacles was over, they met once again, this time for fasting and confession of sin. In connection with their grief, sack-clothes and earth are mentioned. Sack-cloth is a coarse material made of goat's hair and was worn in that day to indicate mourning.

v. 1—Also in extreme cases of repentance dust or earth was put on the head.

v. 2—The picture now is of a nation sorrowing, mourning, fasting, and confessing their sin and the sins of their fathers, separated from those who were not God's people.

v. 3—Once more there was a time of Bible reading, lasting for three hours. Then there was a similar period devoted to confession and worship. Confession comes before worship.

At the close of this time of confession a number of Levites "stood upon the stairs." These were raised platforms at various places in the assembly.

v. 4-38—These men led the people in a most beautiful prayer. This prayer was probably a prepared prayer. Very likely composed by Ezra. (See the prayer in Ezra chapter 9.) this is the longest prayer in the Bible. It covers the history of the nation from the call of Abraham through to the days of judges and prophets.

v. 31-35—After the recounting of Israel's history there is a confession of sin.

v. 36-37—Then there is an appeal to the Lord for help in their distress.

v. 38—Then finally the long prayer closes with them making a "sure covenant" with the Lord, and to show their sincerity they said that the princes, Levites and priests would sign it for them.

The relationship between the Word of God and prayer came out vividly in these first verses. The seven days of reading the Word had a wonderful effect on the nation.

Verses 1 through 3 give a most instructive order. First the Word, then prayer, then confession, then worship. What the Word judged they judged. What the Word commanded they sought to do. In so doing this remnant probably reached the highest moral state they ever occupied from the Babylonian captivity to the coming of Messiah. Their separation was complete.

The above is full of instruction for us.

Then note the first quarter of the day was given to Bible study. Following this another quarter was given to prayer. The Word and prayer should always go together.

Anyone who reads the Word, neglecting prayer becomes intellectually proud, occupied solely with theoretical Christianity. On the other hand, anyone who gives

himself much to prayer and neglects Bible study tends to become introspective, mystical and sometimes fanatical.

He who reads the Word, seeking to know God's will, and then gives himself to prayer, confessing and judging what the Word condemns in him, he will grow in grace and in the knowledge of God, and become a well-rounded follower of Christ.

The prayer itself is a masterpiece.

v. 5—It exalts God to the highest.

v. 6—It acknowledges Him as the Creator of heaven and earth, and One who is worshipped by the host of heaven. He is extolled as the faithful God, who never changes. He is praised as the God of miracles.

Sometimes it is good to take a retrospective look at our past lives. It eventually leads to an introspective look, then finally to a prospective look. All necessary in the process of growing more like Christ.

Nehemiah 10 & 11

Nehemiah 10

The final verse in chapter 9 makes reference to a covenant. In chapter 10 the signers of this solemn agreement are listed.

First there comes the name of Nehemiah, who is described as the Tirshatha, or Governor. After him come the names of the various heads of families—v. 1-27.

Verses 28-29 sum up the balance of the people. Those who had separated themselves unto God and all who were old enough to understand. All these supported their brethren in the signing of the covenant, and promised to keep the agreement and to walk in God's law.

Let us focus our attention on what they had promised to do:

1. They promised to walk in God's law, to keep His commandments, ordinances, and statutes. In other words they promised to be subject to the Holy Scriptures.
2. They promised to maintain separation from the people's of the land, and that there would be no unequal yoke.
3. They promised to observe the Sabbath day and to keep it holy.
4. They promised to let the land lie fallow every seventh year. The reason for the Babylonian captivity was that they had disregarded the Sabbatic year.

5. They also promised to forgive all debts at this time.

I believe that there are some weighty lessons for us in these pledges.

1. They put themselves under the authority of the Scriptures. There never was a day in the Church's history when it was more necessary to put ourselves under the authority of the Scriptures.

2. Are we as separated from the world as God's Word exhorts us to be? Some of us have separated ourselves ecclesiastically from the world church. We are hyper-sensitive in this respect. But what of our business relations and our social contacts? What of our homes, the books we read, the clothes we wear, the company we keep, and the language we use? Brethren, if these things are practiced in our lives, what value is there in mere ecclesiastical separation? Many hyper-separationists have made the sad mistake of separating themselves from believers more godly than they. Then there is the unequal yoke. "Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

3. The Israelites promised to observe the Sabbath day and to keep it holy. We in this dispensation are not under law but under grace. The Sabbath rest and holiness is fulfilled in Christ. Resting in Him and realizing His holiness should so control our life that greed of gain and lust for earth's pleasant things should not spoil our rest or fellowship, or mar our holiness that we cannot enjoy communion in Him.

4. They promised not to cultivate their ground every seventh year as God had directed—Leviticus 25:4-5. After six years of sowing, pruning, and harvesting the land lay fallow for one year. God promised that if they

did this He would give them enough for 3 years on the sixth year. When Israel complied with this law it showed two things: (1) That they were a people confiding in God; (2) They were assured of God's blessing. Their failure to implement this law had brought upon them 70 years of captivity.

These people were called to a life of faith and dependence upon God. We today are called upon to live a life of faith and trust in God. What would this mean?

1. A seventh of our weekly or monthly earnings.
2. Plus the tenth of our income.
3. Plus our freewill offerings.

According to the Word of God, God's blessing will rest upon any believer so living.

5. They promised to forgive all debts at this time. Life began anew every seven years. See Deuteronomy 15:2-18. Debts were forgiven, slaves were set free and did not go out empty. It was a wonderful time for Israel. It was a new beginning, a time of renewal, a time when the blessings of God were released upon His obedient people.

The lesson here as I see it is that we should forgive them that trespass against us. Each day should be a time of renewal. Hard and bitter feelings should be repented of and put away. Each of us should have a clean sheet, because the Judge is standing at the door. He is about to call us home. How can we have an abundant entrance if these things are not taken care of?

From verse 32 thru 39 the people committed themselves to maintain and provide for the service of the house of God.

1. They promised to pay the temple tax (1/3 part of a sheckle).
2. They promised to supply wood for the temple altar.
3. They promised to give the priests and Levites their due.
4. They promised never to forsake God's house.

What a happy scene is this. These people were giving their tithes, offerings and first-fruits to the Lord and for support of His work and workers.

I believe that when the Lord's people get right individually His work will be maintained and will flourish. Lack of spirituality closes up hearts and purses. Godliness opens both.

Nehemiah 11

We could be tempted to hurry over this chapter. If we succumbed to this temptation we would miss a blessing. Broadly speaking the chapter is concerned with the repopulation of Jerusalem.

In 7:4 this statement is made, "Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded."

To offset this weakness Nehemiah numbered all the people, then decided that 10% of those living in the country should come and live in Jerusalem. From this number some were chosen by lot, others volunteered to come willingly. These received the praise of all the rest of the people.

Verses 3-19 contain a list of some of the chief families who lived in Jerusalem at that time. Verses 20-24

mention other inhabitants of the city. The chapter closes with a listing of the towns and villages outside Jerusalem in verses 25-35.

v. 2—“And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem.”

This is interesting, a free-will offering was made. Not of money, but men who were so devoted to the Lord, who offered themselves willingly to God and His service. In chapter 10 they had tithed their produce and possessions, and now they willingly offered themselves.

This was not conscription. Each one responded with a free heart. They loved Jehovah, they loved the place where God’s honor dwelt.

I see a principle which has evolved here. The purifying experiences of chapters 8-9 are essential to the free-will offering of chapter 11.

These men had had an experience with God which fitted them to consecrate themselves to the Lord.

There are numerous examples in Scripture: Abraham, Joshua, Gideon, Paul, and Jacob.

The reason why the Macedonian believers were able to give out of their poverty sacrificially, willingly, eagerly, and spiritually was because “they first gave themselves unto the Lord.”

The question is asked in Malachi 3:8, “Will a man rob God?” The people replied, “How have we robbed Thee?” In tithes and offerings. This condition brought the displeasure of God upon them.

v. 10—“Bring in all the tithes into the storehouse, and test Me now herewith, if I will not open for you the

windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

Most of us here have in the past given our souls to God. Most of us give a portion of our possessions. But if we stop here we have fallen short of God’s ideal. God wants you.

Nehemiah 12 & 13

Nehemiah 12

There is something unique in the first 27 verses of this chapter. Reverence is made again to those who came to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in the first return. While no specific reason is give, it would seem that God would have these men in remembrance because they fulfilled their service with true-hearted devotion. They are now held up to their offspring as examples, encouraging them to walk in their fathers' footsteps.

From verse 27 to the end of the chapter we have the account of the dedication of the now completed wall of Jerusalem. This was a time for rejoicing, the city and the temple were now separated from the heathen nations around.

v. 27—Note the joy which accompanied this occasion.

v. 30—A solemn truth has been impressed upon me. Before service was engaged in, the priests and Levites purified themselves, then those who were pure, purified the people, the gates and the wall. God can only use sanctified vessels. His blessing can only come in its fullness when the whole company of believers is holy.

v. 31—After the ceremony of purification was completed, then the dedication began. Nehemiah and Ezra led companies around the wall. Trumpets blazed, musical instruments played, and the people sang and gave thanks.

This was a day long to be remembered. They offered great sacrifices and rejoiced. God made them rejoice

with great joy. The women and children joined in, and the joy of Jerusalem was heard at a great distance.

v. 44-47—The servants of the Lord were not forgotten, for the people brought their tithes and offerings into the storehouse.

One is reminded here of the two-fold offering of Hebrews 13:15-16.

These two offerings should never be divorced—thanksgiving going up to God from grateful hearts and fellowship in kind flowing toward men, the practical expression of that gratitude.

Nehemiah 13

After the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem Nehemiah went back to Persia for a considerable time. When he left there was great rejoicing, possibly after the events of chapter 12.

During Nehemiah's absence things deteriorated. Certain sins crept in which grieved Nehemiah.

Vigilance versus declension. In this chapter we have the striking contrast between the spiritual vigilance of Nehemiah in detecting and dealing with various forms of declension, and the ever-present tendency to drift away from obedience to the written Word on the part of many people.

Sanctification on the other hand, in its practical aspect, is the result of reading the Word and applying the revealed truth to our lives. 2 Corinthians 3:18.

v. 1—"On that day" refers to the day of Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem.

When he saw the sinful condition of things he called the people together for another reading from the Word. The reading was from Deuteronomy 23:3-4. There is nothing that I know of that corrects wrongs quicker than the reading and application of the Word to the life.

The nation who in chapter 9 had separated themselves from all foreigners were once more intermarrying the heathen around. Some had sinned more grievously than others, and they had married Ammonites, Moabites, and women of Ashdod. All this in flagrant disobedience to the Word of God.

Consider how spiritual verities were disregarded. Eliashib the priest (v. 4), probably the same man mentioned in verses 7 and 28, had allied himself to Tobiah the Ammonite, one of the chief hinderers to the building of the wall. He had brazenly provided a large room in the courts of the temple for him.

v. 8—When Nehemiah heard of this “it grieved him very much.” He cast everything out.

v. 9—Then he purified the chamber from the desecration. After this total expulsion and cleansing we never read of Tobiah making any effort to gain a foothold in Jerusalem. 1 Corinthians 5:6-7.

v. 10—Nehemiah’s further investigation revealed that the tithes had not been collected. Consequently the Levites and the temple workers had not been supported. This forced them to leave their service in the house of God and return to their fields. See 10:39. Nehemiah contended with the rulers regarding this.

v. 11-14—In the final analysis, withholding our substance affects not only the work of God, but God Himself.

- v. 15-22—Nehemiah detected another abuse, the desecration of the Sabbath, the Lord's holy day. Treading grapes in the winepress, bringing grain, wine, grapes, and figs into the city to sell.
- v. 16—Gentiles also were bringing in fish and all kinds of goods to sell. They obviously found ready buyers. Nehemiah warned them that violation of the Sabbath was one of the sins that had brought captivity upon their ancestors.
- v. 19-22—Nehemiah turned his attention to the gates. It is important to watch the gates. The Levites cleansed themselves.
- v. 23—The tragedy of mixed marriage. They may have excused themselves, as many are doing today, on the plea that they might lead them to know and worship the one true God. It was all a delusion. The children were a mixture of heathen and Israelite, and they could not speak in the Jewish language.
- v. 25—Nehemiah was indignant at such conditions.
- v. 26-27—He warned them of how Solomon was led into sin by the same practice.
- v. 28-31—One case of especially flagrant character was uncovered by Nehemiah. A grandson of Eliashib had actually married one of Sanballat's daughters. The grandfather's failure and example influenced the conduct of his grandson. Nehemiah was filled with righteous indignation and "I chased him from me." Probably exiled him.
- v. 29—He commits them to God for retribution.
- v. 30—"Thus cleansed I them from all foreigners."

We leave the book of Nehemiah in the midst of the eternal conflict between good and evil.

The fight continues today. May the spiritual among us emulate the example of Nehemiah. May we keep ourselves unspotted from the world. James 1:27.

This should be our attitude in doing the work of the Lord. We should be uncompromising to the world and worldling on one hand, and on the other, we should be separated and obedient to God's Word.