The Book of Nehemiah

Introduction

We may read the book of Nehemiah and come away with a general appreciation for a man’s conviction and spiritual energy to get work accomplished and move on to another story. Yet if we do not pause and contemplate the historical events as a whole we may miss out on information that may encourages us today. Nehemiah is a story of a man who understood the concept of obeying God and performing duties. He was a man who truly cared about God and His people. The modern world we live in lacks people with genuine care. We may find a charity for every known cause and find many individuals who have dedicated their lives to helping the less fortunate in this world. Many are too busy to care about a neighbor’s soul. We as Christians often look to our own lives. We have bills to pay, investments to make, shopping to do, and entertainment to get us through this life. We look for encouragement from heroes on the big screen movies and novels of historical figures of years gone by that were viewed as successful in this world. A look at Nehemiah will not inspire me to achieve great strides in science, mathematics, theater, music, athleticism, and or financial success. The few years of Nehemiah’s life that are covered in this book will, however, help me to see that if I try in this life I can make a spiritual difference in the lives of others. Nehemiah was a man who recognized that when the duty of God’s laws call we have no recourse but to follow the divine instructions. The message of the book is that no matter who seeks to discourage me from doing God’s work I must perform my duty.

Date of Book

Nehemiah was a Jewish captive and served as the cup bearer to King Artaxerxes during the twentieth year of his reign (444 BC / see notes below at Kings of Persia) (Neh. 1:11; 2:1). We know that this is the same Artaxerxes as found in the book of Ezra due to Ezra and Nehemiah’s joint participation in Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 8:9; 12:26, 36). The dates add up as well. It took Zerubbabel approximately 44 years to build the temple (compare Ezra 1:1; 3:8; and 6:15) and Ezra spent one year correcting the erroneous marriages of the people (45 total years / i.e., from the first year of Cyrus to the sixth year of Darius) (compare Ezra 7:9 to Ezra 10:9, 17). Twelve years exists between the writing of Ezra and Nehemiah (compare Ezra 7:7-9; 10:9, 17 with Nehemiah 2:2). The date of Nehemiah is thereby 444 BC and encompasses a span of approximately twelve years (compare Neh. 2:2 with 13:6).

Consider the kings of Persia

- **Cyrus** (559 [536 over Babylon] – 530 BC) – Allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-2). The Jews efforts were frustrated all the days of Cyrus (Ezra 4:5).
- **Cambyses** (530 – 522 BC) (the Ahasuerus or Xerxes of Ezra 4:6-23) – Killed his brother Smerdis to secure his position as King of Persia. Cambyses received letters from the Samaritans in relation to the construction of the temple. He authorized a decree to cease the work on the temple due to the history of Jewish rebellion in Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 4:19-21).
- **Gomates (Pseudo-Smerdis)** (521 BC) – Laid claims to being the murdered brother of Cambyses and thereby usurped the throne of Cambyses while he was away in Egypt. Gomates was killed by a Persian officer and thus his rule lasts for only a few months.
- **Darius the Great** (521 -486 BC) – During the second year of Darius (i.e., 519 BC) Haggai and Zechariah prophesied unto the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem and encouraged them to return to the work of the temple (Ezra 4:24-5:1). Tattenai (the governor beyond the River / Ezra 5:3) questioned the validity of said work and wrote a letter to Darius requesting that a search be made in the Persian archives as to whether or not Cyrus ever gave a decree that the temple be constructed (cf. Ezra 5:17). Darius found that Cyrus did give
such a decree (Ezra 6:3) and thereby gave authority to Zerubbabel and the Jews to continue the work (Ezra 6:14). Four years latter, the sixth year of Darius, the temple was completed (Ezra 6:15).

- **Artaxerxes / Ahasuerus / Xerxes (485 - 465 BC)** – Persian king that reigned during the days of Esther and Mordecai (events that transpire between Ezra 6:22 and 7:1).

- **Artaxerxes I Longimanus (464 – 424 BC)** – During the year 457 BC (7th year of Artaxerxes) the King allowed Ezra to return to Jerusalem to inquire of the spiritual well being of the people (Ezra 7:7-9, 14). Within one year Ezra accomplishes spiritual reform in 100 families that had involved themselves in unlawful marriages (compare Ezra 7:9 with 10:9 and 10:17). The book of Ezra thereby ends during the 8th year of the reign of Artaxerxes (i.e., 456 BC). Twelve years latter we are introduced to Nehemiah (i.e., the 20th year of Artaxerxes [444 BC] / cf. Neh. 2:1). Nehemiah’s objective was to construct the wall around Jerusalem and he accomplishes this feat, with the help of God, in 52 days (Neh. 6:15). The wall is dedicated to Jehovah God (Neh. 12) and Nehemiah returns to the king to serve as cup bearer as he had promised he would (cf. Neh. 2:6). Nehemiah had remained in Jerusalem for 12 years (i.e., the 32nd year of Artaxerxes {432 BC} / cf. Neh. 13:6).

**Nehemiah the Man**

Nehemiah had gained word that the wall around Jerusalem remained in ruins after 57 years of the captives returning to Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 1:3) (i.e., 45 years to build the temple and spiritually restore the people plus 12 years between the writing of Ezra and Nehemiah). We are introduced to Nehemiah’s convictions when he responds to the news of the ruined walls with weeping, fasting, and prayer (Neh. 1:4-11). God had commanded that the walls be constructed (Ezra 6:14; 9:9) and after 57 years they remained in ruins. It is apparent from Ezra 5:3 that God’s people had been slowly working upon the wall yet with little progress (Neh. 2:16). With the providential help of God (Neh. 2:8) Nehemiah completes the wall project in 52 days (cf. Neh. 6:15). It is during this fifty two day period that we find much out about Nehemiah’s true Character. Though laughed at (Neh. 2:19), mocked (Neh. 4:1-3), threatened (Neh. 4:11), plotted against (Neh. 6:1ff), falsely accused (Neh. 6:5-8), and intimidated by the enemies of God (Neh. 6:9, 13, 19) Nehemiah remained determined to accomplish God’s will of building the wall (Neh. 4:14). A sense of duty and obedience to God were a great part of Nehemiah’s character (Neh. 2:5, 17-18; 4:6; 5:16; 6:3; 10:29). Nehemiah was a man of great faith (Neh. 2:20) and prayer (1:5-11; 2:4; 4:4, 9). He was confident in God’s providential care (Neh. 2:2-4, 8, 18), bold to do what is right (Neh. 2:5ff; 4:14), one who hated sin (Neh. 4:4-5), and exposed sin whenever it rose its ugly head (Neh. 5:6-7). Nehemiah was deeply concerned about the spiritual (Neh. 1:3-4) and physical (Neh. 5:10, 14, 17) well being of God’s people. Through all that transpired in the twelve years that Nehemiah was in Jerusalem it seems that the development of his own character comes to a climax at chapter 13. God’s people were guilty of three counts of disobedience. Nehemiah corrects each of their errors and ends each case with the common denominator phrase, “Remember me, O my God, concerning this... spare me according to the greatness of thy lovingkindness” (Neh. 13:14, 22, 31). Nehemiah had understood greater than ever that duties belong to the individual and each will be responsible for their own actions. If each of us as Christians would gain greater understanding of this fact then we may have a greater outlook on life and eternity. I cannot control what others do but I can control what I do. Duties belong to me as an individual. When others are angry at me, laugh, mock, or even threaten me I must press forward and perform my God ordained duties. Nehemiah was this kind of a person. One may say that the book of Nehemiah is a handbook for elders and those aspiring to be elders. Others may say Nehemiah is a book that encourages Christians of all gender and race to perform their God given duties no matter the consequences. The message of the book is clear and simple. When God gives a command let us do all within our power to achieve His will and thereby bring glory to the name of God (see study # 1; Nehemiah).
Outline of Nehemiah

Chapter 1

I. News regarding the walls of Jerusalem and the Affliction of the people reach the ears of Nehemiah
(1:1-3):

A. “The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it came to pass in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men out of Judah: and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, that were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem” (1:1-2).

1. The “twentieth year” was the time of Artaxerxes’ kingship in Persia (see Neh. 2:1). The month Chislev would be the ninth month of the year which corresponds to our December. Nehemiah was in the palace located in Shushan (or Susa). Shushan means “the fortress” or “citadel.” Susa was one of three principle or capital cities of the Persian Empire.

2. Nehemiah is identified as a Jewish “cup bearer” to the king of Persia at Nehemiah 1:11 and later appointed as governor over Judah (cf. Neh. 5:14; 12:26).

3. Hanani was Nehemiah’s physical brother in the flesh (see Neh. 7:2). Apparently Hanani and others had just arrived in Susa from Judah. Nehemiah is anxious to know about the conditions of his brethren in Judah and Jerusalem.

B. “And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire” (1:3).

1. The news Nehemiah receives is not favorable. The people of God are in great affliction and the wall of Jerusalem lay waste.

2. Nehemiah does not give us details as to what caused the walls to be laid waste or whether the people of God had suffered additional attacks from enemies and the walls further destroyed.

3. One thing we do know is that some efforts had been extended toward rebuilding the walls albeit unfinished (cf. Ezra 4:12-16).

II. Nehemiah’s Response to his brother’s Bad News (1:4-11):

A. “And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days; and I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” (1:4).

1. Nehemiah’s reaction to the news was threefold. First, he wept because his brethren were being afflicted and because the wall of Jerusalem lay in waste. Secondly, Nehemiah mourned certain days (for days he was in a state of depression due to this news). Thirdly, he fasted (i.e., he went without food for an unspecified time). Fourthly, he prayed to God. Such a reaction reminds us of Ezra’s response to hearing that the people of God had sinned by taking foreign women as wives (cf. Ezra 9:1ff). Sometimes it takes a few days for people to mourn over a painful situation and then a plan of action comes.

2. No doubt it saddened Nehemiah that the people were being afflicted yet why would the cup bearer pray to God in relation to sin in the next few verses? It seems apparent that just as it was a commandment to rebuild the temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem it was likewise a commandment to rebuild the walls (cf. Ezra 6:14). To leave off building the wall would not only cause Jerusalem to be vulnerable to their enemies but be guilty of violating God’s will.

B. “I beseech thee, O Jehovah, the God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keeps covenant and lovingkindness with them that love him and keep his commandments: let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee at this time, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, while I confess the sins of the
children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee. Yea I and my father’s house have sinned” (1:5-6).

1. A common knowledge among God’s people was the doctrine of the blessings of obedience and curses of disobedience (cf. Deut. 7ff).

2. Nehemiah asks the Lord to hear his prayers that he prays both day and night on behalf of the people of God.

3. Nehemiah confesses “the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee.” When one is a part of a people they too are held responsible for the sins of others though they are not the one’s performing the sinful act. The sin is in their tolerance of refusal to speak out. Nehemiah, like Ezra (cf. Ezra 9:6), includes himself in the sins of the people because he is one of the people.

4. Here is a model prayer for Christians today. When sin exists in one’s life let us make confession unto the Lord that He may forgive us (cf. I Jn. 1:8-10) (see study # 2; Pray for Forgiveness).

C. “We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances, which thou commandest thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses, saying, If ye trespass, I will scatter you abroad among the peoples: but if ye return unto me, and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts were in the uttermost part of the heavens, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen, to cause my name to dwell there” (1:7-9).

1. Nehemiah prays and identifies what has taken place according to the Law of Moses regarding the unfaithfulness of the people. God had warned the people, during the days of Moses saying, “And you will I scatter among the nations, and I will draw out the sword after you: and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste” (Lev. 26:33).

2. Secondly, he prays regarding God’s promise to those who would return to the Lord according to the same Law. Moses promised in Deut. 30:1-5, that once this scattering has occurred, God would not forget them and the faithful would once again be prosperous. Nehemiah thereby calls to God’s remembrance His promises.

D. “Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who delight to fear thy name; and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. Now I was cupbearer to the king” (1:10-11).

1. Nehemiah identifies the remnant who returned to Judah from Babylon as those the Lord has redeemed by His great power. Such events prove the reality of Jehovah God in that He declares the end of things from the beginning (cf. Isa. 46:9-10). All those who fear God and keep His commandments may expect to have God hear their prayers. Aside from the warnings given in Deuteronomy concerning disobedience, God had promised that a remnant would return before the seventy years of captivity had even began (Jer. 29:8-10).

2. Nehemiah gets to the point of his prayer. He plans to go before the king of Persia to make a request. Nehemiah desires that God’s favor and mercy would be with him.

3. Nehemiah’s identity afforded him an opportunity. He was the cupbearer to the king. The Persian “cupbearer” = “Heb. ‘one giving drink’. An officer of high rank at ancient oriental courts, whose duty it was to serve the wine at the king’s table. On account of the constant fear of plots and intrigues, a person must be regarded as thoroughly trustworthy to hold this position. He must guard against poison in the king’s cup, and was sometimes required to swallow some of the wine before serving it. His confidential relations with the king often endeared him to his sovereign and also gave him a position of great influence” (ISBE, v. 1, pp. 837). Nehemiah was therefore no stranger to the king of Persia.
Chapter 2

I. Artaxerxes Grants Nehemiah’s Request (2:1-8):

A. “And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, when wine was before him, that I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence” (2:1).

1. The month Nisan corresponds to our March and is three months after Nehemiah had received news regarding the walls of Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 1:1).
2. One who personally serves the king of the great Persian Empire would not want to appear before the king in a state of sadness. Such a king had the affairs of the Empire and at times his own life to worry about much less the individual troubles of a servant. To be sad before the king may prove detrimental to the servant. Nehemiah had previously been of a joyful spirit when around the king; however, there were things now that deeply bothered him.

B. “And the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid. And I said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father’s sepulchers, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven” (2:2-4).

1. The fact that the king of Persia was personally asking Nehemiah a question indicates the high level of importance in relationship to his job as a cupbearer. Not many of us today could say that we have conversations with the president of the United States.
2. The king took notice of Nehemiah’s sad state. Nehemiah’s sadness was obviously not due to any sickness. The king concludes that the cupbearer’s sadness must be due to “sorrow of heart.” The prayer of Nehemiah’s at chapter 1:6-11 is already being answered. Nehemiah has the attention of the king albeit it is a dangerous situation and so he is fearful. Nehemiah must have concluded that if the walls of Jerusalem were to be built the people needed to be moved to do so. If he did not decide to be the motivator then who would it be (see study # 1)? The king’s cupbearer takes advantage thereby of his close association with the king and puts himself in a position where such a request might be made. Nehemiah was depending upon the providence of God to see to it that his request might be given an approval. Nehemiah was confident that God would providentially provide Israel with a way to fulfill the command to build a wall around Jerusalem (see study # 3; Providence).
3. Note the great faith in Nehemiah as he said a quick prayer before answering the king of Persia. We may learn a valuable lesson here regarding the state of one’s faith. When dealing with God’s commandments and the souls of men we ought to take the time to pray to God that conditions might be made favorable so that the saints may repent and do those things necessary for salvation. The spiritual and physical condition of God’s people was in jeopardy and so Nehemiah prayed (see study # 4; Prayer).

C. “And I said unto the king, if it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchers, that I may build it” (2:5).

1. Nehemiah addresses the king of Persia with respect for the position he held and made a request to return to Jerusalem and build the city.
2. If Nehemiah could go to Jerusalem by the authority of Artaxerxes surely the antagonistic enemies would not be allowed to bother the Jews.
3. Note that Nehemiah’s request was that he alone be the man in charge of such an endeavor. Nehemiah, like so many faithful men before him, was God’s man of the hour.

D. “And the king said unto me (the queen also sitting by him), For how long shall thy journey be? And when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Moreover I said unto the king, if it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the River, that they may let me pass through till I come unto Judah; and a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the castle which appertaineth to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me” (2:6-8).
1. Artaxerxes was no stranger to the proceedings at Jerusalem. The king had earlier written a decree on behalf of Ezra that the priestly scribe would go to Jerusalem and “inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thy hand...” (Ezra 7:14). Ezra recognized such actions on the part of the king of Persia to be nothing more than the providence of God (cf. Ezra 7:27).

2. Once again, the king of Persia grants permission for a multitude of Jews to leave the area of Mesopotamia and Persia that they may improve the conditions in Judah. Nehemiah, as did Ezra before him, recognized these grants to be in accordance with the providence of God (cf. Neh. 2:8 compared to Ezra 7:27) (see study # 3).

3. The king grants all of Nehemiah’s requests:
   a. Nehemiah asks to be sent to Jerusalem of Judah to rebuild the city (2:5).
   b. Nehemiah asks the king to provide letters that may be given to the governors beyond the Euphrates River that they may know that permission has been granted for such a journey (2:7).
   c. Nehemiah asks the king for letters to give to Asaph (the keeper of the king’s forest / an OT timber manager) so that materials may be supplied to build gates for the temple of Jehovah, the wall around the city of Jerusalem, and for a house that he shall dwell in.

II. Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem and Assesses the Job at Hand (2:9-16):

A. “Then I came to the governors beyond the River, and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent with me captains of the army and horsemen. And when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly, for that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel” (2:9-10).

1. Not much is said of the journey to Jerusalem other than the fact that as Nehemiah reached the governors west of the Euphrates River, he delivered the letters from Artaxerxes to them for safe passage.

2. Secondly, we are told that Nehemiah, unlike Ezra (Ezra 8:22), had a military escort (vs. 9).

3. Upon hearing news that Nehemiah came seeking the welfare of Jerusalem, Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite were annoyed.
   a. “Sanballat is called the Horonite either after his birthplace or place of residence, yet certainly not from Horonaim in Moab, since he would then have been called a Moabite, but from either the upper or nether Beth-horon, formerly belonging to the tribe of Ephraim (Josh. 16:3-5, 18:13), and therefore in the time of Nehemiah certainly appertaining to the region of the Samaritans.”

b. “Tobiah the Ammonite is called, the servant, probably as being a servant or official of the Persian king. These two individuals were undoubtedly influential chiefs of the neighboring hostile nations of Samaritans and Ammonites, and sought by alliances with Jewish nobles (6:17, 13:4, 28) to frustrate, whether by force or stratagem, the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah for the internal and external security of Judah.”

4. There is an apparent connection between Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Samaritans. The Samaritans hatred for the Jews continues from the days that Zerubbabel refused to let them take part in building the temple of Jehovah (cf. Ezra 4:3).

B. “So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God put into my heart to do for Jerusalem; neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon” (2:11-12).

1. Upon arrival in Jerusalem, Nehemiah takes a three day rest from the journey as did Ezra (Ezra 8:32). Having told no one of his resolution to rebuild the city walls, he takes an opportunity to access the condition of the walls by night. Obviously, Nehemiah wanted to know the magnitude of his project in which he was to soon reveal to the people.

2. Note that Nehemiah states that his work in Jerusalem was due to God putting it into his heart to do. Nehemiah was a man of great faith. He knew God’s will regarding the city of Jerusalem.

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1 Keil and Delitzsch. Commentary on the Old Testament; vol. 4, pp. 108
2 Ibid. Pg. 108
Knowing the command of God and seeing the great need for the people’s obedience Nehemiah, like Isaiah (see Isa. 6:8), volunteered for the job (see study # 5; If not you then Who?).

C. “And I went out by night by the valley gate, even toward the jackal’s well, and to the gung gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. Then I went on to the fountain gate and to the king’s pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall; and I turned back, and entered by the valley gate, and so returned. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work” (2:13-16).

1. Nehemiah travels first to the “valley gate” (vs. 13).
2. From the valley gate, he went to the “dung gate” (vs. 13).
3. From the dung gate, he went to the “fountain gate and to the king’s pool.”
4. All the while, he was viewing the walls and taking note of the destruction and work that would be required to complete the task. (Compare journey with the map below. Nehemiah obviously viewed only the Southern portion of the walls).
5. Why did Nehemiah do this in the night? Why didn’t he tell any of the Jews, priests, nobles, rulers, or any who did the work on the wall? The reason is very clear. Verse 16 reveals that the work of the wall was ongoing even as Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem.
   a. Note the Lord’s original objective for the returning remnant was to rebuild the temple, city, and its walls (cf. Ezra 9:9). Zerubbabel had returned to Jerusalem during the year 536 BC by permission of Cyrus to begin the work. After 21 years the temple is finally finished (compare Ezra 1:1; 3:8; and 6:15) (i.e., the year 515 BC). Ezra comes on the scene 57 years latter (i.e., During the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia (cf. Ezra 7:1) (458 BC). One year latter Ezra completes his work of religious reforms (compare Ezra 7:9 with Ezra 10:17) (457 BC). Approximately 12 years latter the walls are still not built as the Word of God introduces Nehemiah (Neh. 1:1ff) (445 BC). A total of 91 years have passed without the wall around Jerusalem being completed.
   b. Note that according to Nehemiah 2:16 the work of the wall was in progress. The conclusion is simple. The people of God were piddling around with the building process. A plausible reason for the slow progress is the clear antagonism on the part of the Samaritans. They had been successful in completely halting the building of the temple for 15 years during the days of Zerubbabel (cf. Ezra 4:24) and are apparently now succeeding in at least slowing the work on the wall.
   c. Nehemiah would have the same work as Haggai and Zechariah in that he must motivate the people to do that which they know needs to be accomplished.
III. Nehemiah Reveals his plan to Build the Walls of Jerusalem (2:17-20):

A. “Then said I unto them, Ye see the evil case that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. And I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me, as also of the king’s words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work” (2:17-18).

1. Nehemiah was now ready to reveal his purpose for coming to Jerusalem to the Jews, priests, rulers, and nobles of Jerusalem. He has assessed the task and is now ready to motivate the people to do the work of building the wall. Notice the incentives for working:
   a. God would be with them during this good work because He has providentially provided for all provisions that the work may be done (see study # 3).
   b. The Persian Empire has delivered a building permit by decree of the king and will provide all materials necessary to accomplish the tasks.
2. No doubt such news would have been refreshing to the Jews. God is with them and has put into the hearts of the Persians to provide all materials needed to accomplish the tasks. The people respond, “Let us rise up and build.”

3. Note that Nehemiah states in relation to not having the wall constructed 91 years after their release from Babylon as a “reproach” upon all including his self. The word “reproach” means, “to blame for something... to bring shame upon... something that causes rebuke or blame” (AHD 1049). Clearly it was a violation of God’s word that the wall had not been built (cf. Ezra 6:14; 9:9).

B. “But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughter us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king?” (2:19).

1. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem laugh at Nehemiah’s proposal to build the wall. The very thought of making improvements to Jerusalem caused the Samaritans to “despise” the Jews. They were jealous and filled with hatred against Jerusalem and what the city represented.

2. They thereby bring an old Samaritan accusation against the Jews efforts by claiming that they only want to rebuild the city and walls so that they may rebel against Persia (cf. Ezra 4:15-16).

C. “Then answered I them, and said unto them, the God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem” (2:20).

1. Nehemiah’s proposal to build the wall of Jerusalem and thus fulfill the commandment of God brings immediate friction between the Jews and the surrounding peoples. Nehemiah’s response to the discouraging response is very similar to Zerubbabel’s when the Samaritans wanted to help build the temple (cf. Ezra 4:2-4).

2. It would have been easy for the Jews to continue in their state of apathy and peace. Nehemiah’s proposal meant friction, discomfort, and hostility directed at them. A universal principle is established regarding suffering for doing God’s commands is given at II Timothy 2:12 when the apostle Paul stated, “All those who live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” The Christian today may seek peace at the expense of keeping God’s commandments, however, it is a short lived peace in relation to eternity (see study # 6; The Persecuted Christian). God’s people have a command to expose (Eph. 5:11) and be separate from sinners and their sin (II Cor. 6:14 – 7:1).

Chapter 3

I. Construction begins on the wall of Jerusalem (3 all):

A. “Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Hammeah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananel. And next unto him builded the men of Jericho. And next to them builded Zaccur the son of Imri” (3:1-2).

1. Starting at the Sheep Gate and going geographically counterclockwise, Nehemiah describes the whole construction process. Because of these details, we are given a description of the outer city of Jerusalem. There are twelve Gates mentioned in the book of Nehemiah, which surround the city (cf. diagram on previous page).

2. The priests rebuilt the Sheep Gate.

B. “And the fish gate did the sons of Hassenaah build; they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the bolts thereof, and the bars thereof. And next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz. And next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel. And next unto them repaired Zadok the son of Baana. And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their lord” (3:3-5).

1. The fish gate was repaired by the sons of Hassenaah.

2. The wall between the fish gate and the old gate was repaired by Meremoth, Meshullam, Zadok, and the Tekoites.
C. “And the old gate repaired Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah; they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the bolts thereof, and the bars thereof. And next unto them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon, and of Mizpah, that appertained to the throne of the governor beyond the River. Next unto him repaired Uzziel the son of Harhatah, goldsmiths. And next unto him repaired Hananiah one of the perfumers, and they fortified Jerusalem even unto the broad wall. And next unto them repaired Rephaiah the son of Hur, the ruler of half the district of Jerusalem. And next unto him repaired Jedediah the son of Harumaph, over against his house. And next unto him repaired Hattush the son of Hashabneiah. Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hashub the son of Pahath-moab, repaired another portion, and the tower of the furnaces. And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Hallohesh, the ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, he and his daughters” (3:6-12).

1. The old gate was repaired by Joiada.
2. Between the old gate and the valley gate many repaired the wall to the “broad wall” and the “tower of the furnaces.”

D. “The valley gate repaired Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah; they built it, and set up the doors thereof, the bolts thereof, and the bars thereof, and a thousand cubits of the wall unto the dung gate” (3:13).

1. Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the valley gate.
2. These same people repaired the wall between the valley gate and the dung gate.

E. “And the dung gate repaired Malchijah the son of Rechab, the ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem; he built it, and set up the doors thereof, the bolts thereof, and the bars thereof” (3:14).

1. The dung gate was repaired by Malchijah.

F. “And the fountain gate repaired Shallun the son of Colhozeh, the ruler of the district of Mizpah; he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the bolts thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Shelah by the king's garden, even unto the stairs that go down from the city of David. After him repaired Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, unto the place over against the sepulchres of David, and unto the pool that was made, and unto the house of the mighty men. After him repaired the Levites, Rehum the son of Bani. Next unto him repaired Hashabiah, the ruler of half the district of Keilah, for his district. After him repaired their brethren, Bavvai the son of Henadad, the ruler of half the district of Keilah. And next to him repaired Ezer the son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, another portion, over against the ascent to the armory at the turning of the wall. After him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired another portion, from the turning [of the wall] unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. After him repaired Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz another portion, from the door of the house of Eliashib even to the end of the house of Eliashib. And after him repaired the priests, the men of the Plain. After them repaired Benjamin and Hasshub over against their house. After them repaired Azariah the son of Maaseiah the son of Ananiah beside his own house. After him repaired Binnui the son of Henadad another portion, from the house of Azariah unto the turning of the wall, and unto the corner. Palal the son of Uzai repaired over against the turning [of the wall], and the tower that standeth out from the upper house of the king, which is by the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh repaired” (3:15-25).

1. The fountain gate was repaired by Shallun.
2. Between the fountain gate and the water gate and horse gate there was repaired the wall of the pool of Shelah, to the city of David, the sepulchers of David, the ascent to the armory, to the house of Eliashib the high priest.

G. “(Now the Nethinim dwelt in Ophel, unto the place over against the water gate toward the east, and the tower that standeth out.) After him the Tekoites repaired another portion, over against the great tower that standeth out, and unto the wall of Ophel. Above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one over against his own house. After them repaired Zadok the son of Immer over against his own house. And after him repaired Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the east gate. After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, another portion. After him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah over against his chamber. After him repaired Malchijah one of the goldsmiths unto the house of the Nethinim, and of the merchants, over against the gate of Hammiphkad, and to the ascent of the corner. And between the ascent of the corner and the sheep gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants” (3:26-32).

1. Between the water gate and the east gate was the great tower, wall of Ophel, and horse gate.
2. There are twelve gates in all mentioned by Nehemiah. We have to move to chapter 12 to find the gate of Ephraim and the guard gate (cf. Nehemiah 12:39).
3. One may count as little as eight gates and as many as 12. See diagram above taken from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 2, pp. 1020.

Addendum Study on Gates and their Significance:

“The gate, generally an arched entrance with deep recesses and seats on either side, was a place of meeting in the ancient towns of the East, where the inhabitants assembled either for social intercourse or to transact public business.” Consider these events in the history of God’s people:

- Shechem loved Dinah, Jacob’s daughter (Gen. 34:3). Shechem and his father Hamor met with “the men of the city at the gate” (Gen. 34:20). It was determined that the Hivites be circumcised so that Shechem and Dinah may be married (Gen. 34:18ff).
- Deut. 21:19; Amos 5:12 etc.; the gate was a place of elders giving judgment and making decisions for the affairs of the city.
- Boaz is found conducting business at the city gate (Ruth 4:1) regarding Ruth with the elders (Ruth 4:11).
- Absalom tried to usurp his father David’s authority at the gate of the city by giving judgment over matters that belonged to his father (II Sam. 15:2).
- Jeremiah 26, the men of the city gathered at the gate to decide the fait of Jeremiah.
- Jeremiah laments over the fact that the elders had stopped gathering at the gates (Lam. 5:14).
- The gate of a city obviously had many other uses such as a place of buying and selling grain (II Kings 7:1; Neh. 13:19-21). No doubt the gate was the market place that the worthy woman sold her goods she made.

Lessons Learned from Chapters 1-3

- Nehemiah: cupbearer to the king ( Neh. 1:11), man of faith (Neh. 2:20), man of prayer (Neh. 1:5-11; 2:4), deeply concerned about the physical and spiritual well being of Israel (Neh. 1:3-4), confident in the providential care of God (2:2-4, 8, 18), bold (Neh. 2:5ff), God’s man of the hour (Neh. 2:12), and a natural leader (Neh. 2:5, 17) [if not me then who will get this work going?].
- When a spiritual work is lagging someone needs to stand up and motivate others to get the job done (preferably the elders of the congregation) (According to Nehemiah 2:16 the work of the wall was ongoing but with little to no progress). Neither the existing rulers, priests, nobles, nor general people were getting the job done. It was time for a change in leadership. When elders of the body of Christ are not performing the work of elders, when deacons are not performing the work of deacons, and when preachers are not preaching truth and evangelizing its time for a change.

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3 Ibid. Vol. 1 pg. 148
• **The work of God** must proceed even in the face of discouraging remarks from those of little to no faith (Neh. 2:10, 19).

• **Fellowship:** Once again we find Nehemiah (like Zerubbabel / Ezra 4:1-3) rejecting the Samaritans based upon the condition of their spiritual standing with God (Neh. 2:20). Said rejections have always aggravated sinners (cf. Jn. 7:7; 15:19-21).

**Chapter 4**

I. **The Enemies of Jerusalem band together to halt the Progress of Building the Wall and Nehemiah Prays (4:1-6):**

A. “But it came to pass that, when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, seeing they are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they are building, if a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall” (4:1-2).

1. We have already been introduced to Sanballat and Tobiah at Nehemiah 2:19. Sanballat had heard of Nehemiah’s proposal to build the walls of Jerusalem and responded by “laughing the Jews to scorn and despising them” (Neh. 2:19). This man’s scorn moves to anger and great indignation once the Jews began the work and so he mocks them. When all else fails to detour a good work the fool resorts to mocking and derision.

2. Sanballat addresses his brethren and the army of the Samaritans regarding the building of the walls of Jerusalem. Apparently Sanballat was a high ranking officer of some sort in the Persian Empire and had the capability of demanding an ear by the Samaritan army. Sanballat’s connection with the Samaritans is made apparent in his reaction to hearing that the walls of Jerusalem were being constructed. At first, Sanballat and Tobiah view the work on the wall as an impossible task and so they make fun of the workers.

3. Sanballat’s scornful comments regarding the Jews shows hatred and prejudice:
   a. Sanballat considered the Jews “feeble.”
   b. He accuses them of trying to fortify the city against the Persian Empire.
   c. Sanballat, in a spirit of derision, mockingly states, What will they do, sacrifice in the morning and have the wall finished that night? His comments indicate that the Jews have no idea as to the enormity of such a project and they may as well not even begin. Tobiah chimes in and says that even if they were able to build the wall it would be so insufficient that a fox walking upon the wall would cause it to crumble down. There is not a lot of confidence in the Jew’s abilities.
   d. Sanballat’s accusations are that the Jews are incapable of completing such a task. He now tells the army that they don’t have the sufficient materials to make such a wall.

4. The church of Jesus Christ often faces such derision and scorn today. Our denominational friends have pet labels for the saints of God, i.e., legalists, pattern(ist), Campbellites, those who think their the only one’s going to heaven... etc. The cause of such hateful and derogatory language is both ignorance and arrogance. Said individuals do not know the truth, claim that others cannot not know the truth, and proclaim that any who do say they can know all truth are dogmatic and arrogant. The real issue is their ignorance of the scriptures and subsequent arrogance. The individual who does not understand truth and then turns to those who do and claims, “If I cannot know then you cannot possibly know,” exercises the height of arrogance (see study # 7; The Church under Fire).

   **B. “Hear, O our God; for we are despised:** and turn back their reproach upon their own head, and give them up for a spoil in a land of captivity; and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee; for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders” (4:4-5).

1. Note that Nehemiah did not “turn the other cheek” in this incident. Someone today might remark that Nehemiah’s prayer was hateful and that he was only practicing the same spirit that
the Samaritans exercised toward them. What makes it right for Nehemiah to do so and not the Samaritans?

2. First, note that it was not Nehemiah or any of the building Jews who brought a quarrel to Sanballat it was he who brought the ridicule and scorn to the building Jews. Under the Mosaic system it was an “eye for an eye and tooth for tooth” society. You do me wrong and I will be looking to do you wrong for payment. Sanballat’s scorn apparently hit deep within Nehemiah and caused him to pray a prayer of doom upon Sanballat and Tobiah. These two men did not represent the Lord of Host and thereby they were enemies.

C. “So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto half the height thereof: for the people had a mind to work” (4:6).

1. We are not told how high the wall was to be; however, half the height was constructed. These seemingly feeble and foolish Jews were accomplishing the impossible in a short amount of time.

2. When brethren have a “mind to work” there is no limit to the amount of good that can be accomplished.

3. A “mind to work” will do the following (see study # 8; A Mind to Work):
   a. Purpose to do that which is right no matter the consequences.
   b. Put aside other’s ridicule and perform the task at hand.
   c. Will accomplish much work.

4. When brethren in the church have a mind to work souls will be saved and saints edified.

II. Nehemiah’s enemies Response to seeing half of the Wall Completed (4:7-9):

A. “But it came to pass that, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward, and that that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth; and they conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to cause confusion therein” (4:7-8).

1. Jerusalem was surrounded by their enemies (The Samaritans to the North, Arabians to the South, Ammonites to the East, and Ashdodites to the West).

2. Another power in the region would be unacceptable. Prejudice and hatred moved Sanballat and Tobiaih to muster up the surrounding enemies of the Jews and form a coalition force to attack Jerusalem.

B. “But we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them” (4:9).

1. Nehemiah and the working Jews gain intelligence of the purpose of their enemies.

2. Two reactions are recorded: First, Nehemiah and the people pray to God and secondly they set up a watcher to warn them of the coming enemy.

3. When the Christian faces the greatest difficulties in this life let us too watch and pray (see study # 4 and 6).

III. The People take stock in all that is happening and begin to loose their Desire to build the Wall (4:10-14):

A. “And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come into the midst of them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. And it came to pass that, when the Jews that dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times from all places, Ye must return unto us” (4:10-12).

1. The men doing the work on the wall were becoming exhausted. They looked around at all the trash and concluded that the task is just to great to accomplish. Furthermore there were rumors of the enemies attacking them and killing them so that the work of the wall would stop. Additionally, some of the Jews who lived by the neighboring enemies had heard that attacks were eminent and thereby encouraged the workers to return home.

2. A shift in mentality has now taken place due to external circumstances. At the beginning of the work the people were excited and “had a mind to work” (Neh. 4:6). What happened? (see study # 9; The Power of Discouragement):
a. After working a while they looked around at all the trash and got discouraged. They knew that much more work would be required to accomplish the task. Exhaustion has a way of changing the mode of thinking. Sometimes it’s better to take the proper rest needed to accomplish a task rather than trying to accomplish it all in one setting (i.e., pace one’s self). Here, as in other situations, there may not be time for rest. We must, with a sense of urgency, keep the axe to the root and continue hard work until the task is done.

b. They allowed their enemies to discourage them.

c. They were ready to throw in the towel and go home (the plan of the enemy was working).

B. “Therefore set I in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in the open places, I set there the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses” (4:13-14).

1. Nehemiah had delivered a motivational speech at Nehemiah 2:17-18, regarding building the wall, and the people responded by saying, “let us rise up and build.” Even after the discouraging words of derision delivered by Sanballat and Tobiah on two different occasions (i.e., Neh. 2:19 and 4:1-3) the people continued to work because they “had a mind to work.” Exhaustion and fear now settle into their hearts and they are ready to quit.

2. Nehemiah responds to the people’s dejected spirit by strategically placing the workers according to their families all around Jerusalem armed with weapons. Nehemiah then stands before the people and delivers a motivational speech of optimism and great faith:

   a. Nehemiah encourages the people to rid themselves of the fear the enemies have caused to settle on their hearts.

   b. Secondly, Nehemiah tells the people to fight against their enemies remembering that God is with them, they have sons and daughters to protect, they have their wives to think of and their property as well.

   c. Now is not the time to give up! There comes a time in every man’s life when he must take a stand for what is right. Nehemiah is calling upon the people’s faith that they may make that proper stand (see study # 10; Stand up even when exhausted, fearful, and discouraged).

IV. The People respond to Nehemiah’s Speech (4:15-)

A. “And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work” (4:15).

1. The results of Nehemiah’s speech were immediate.

2. The people respond by getting back to work.

B. “And it came to pass from that time forth, that half of my servants wrought in the work, and half of them held the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the coats of mail; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They that builded the wall and they that bare burdens laded themselves; ever one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other held his weapon; and the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me” (4:16-18).

1. Great determination is once again displayed in the people of God. They knew the dangers that were in front of them yet with their weapon in hand they continued to build.

2. What caused this motivation? While Nehemiah has brought out the obvious; i.e., they must protect their sons, daughters, and wives from the enemy, it seems obvious that the real reason the people are doing this work is because God has commanded it (cf. Ezra 6:14; 9:9).

3. While we may see the need to take a stand in truth today to protect our families and loved ones from being swayed away, we too know that this is commanded of the Lord (Jude 3). That which motivates us to have a resolve to take such a firm stand is eternity.

C. “And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers and to the rest of the people, the work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another: in what place soever ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us; our God will fight for us” (4:19-20).

1. Nehemiah makes a plan of action in case of attack. Due to the enormity of the wall project the people were scattered all over the city.
2. Nehemiah tells the people to gather at his location if they hear the alarm trumpet sound and God would fight for them.

D. “So we wrought in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and may labor in the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard that followed me, none of us put off our clothes, every one went with his weapon to the water” (4:21-23).

1. The wall project turned into a 24 hour a day affair. The work went on during the day and an overnight guard watched over the city during the night. Every one kept their weapon by their side.

2. The chance of attack was real yet the people continued to work.

Chapter 5

I. A financial depression sets in due to the hard work of building the walls of Jerusalem (5:1-5):

A. “Then there arose a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews. For there were that said, We, our sons and our daughters, are many: let us get grain, that we may eat and live” (5:1-2).

1. The wall project took priority over all else in life. The people worked on the wall in the day time and slept within the walls during the night. Consequently, no one was able to go to their farms to work and make wages to pay their every day expenses.

2. Some of their own brethren were taking the wall project as an opportunity to get gain from the workers. Seems odd how some wait for disaster to hit and find a way to prophet from those affected by the tragedy.

B. “Some also there were that said, We are mortgaging our fields, and our vineyards, and our houses: let us get grain, because of the dearth” (5:3).

1. The problem of hunger sets in and the people do what is necessary to gain grain to eat. Apparently the workers were not being paid for the work on the wall... it was more of a spiritual duty.

2. One of the necessary things to do for food was to mortgage their land to the wealthy. What a wicked thing to do to God’s people. While they worked on the wall and grew hungry a brother says, “hey, I’ll give you some money for food if you turn over your house to me.”

C. “There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king’s tribute upon our fields and our vineyards. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought into bondage already: neither is it in our power to help it; for other men have our fields and our vineyards” (5:4-5).

1. Behind the scenes of doing the work on the wall and avoiding danger from the enemies was the fact that the people had needs that needed to be met. They were in need of food and had the obligation of paying tribute to the king of Persia. Apparently this was a monthly due and they were not able to meet it because they were working on the wall.

2. To keep themselves fed and out of trouble with the Persian government some of the people borrowed money from others who had more and sold their sons and daughters into slavery.

II. Nehemiah responds to the news of Hunger, Tribute, and Slavery (5:6-13):

A. “And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. Then I consulted with myself, and contended with the nobles and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I held a great assembly against them” (5:6-7).

1. The “them” were the wealthier Jews. The wealthy exacted “usury” i.e., “the act or practice of lending money at an exorbitant or illegal rate of interest” (AHD 1331).

2. Nehemiah calls together an assembly to expose the wicked behavior of these opportunistic Jews.
B. “And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, that were sold unto the nations; and would ye even sell your brethren, and should they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found never a word” (5:8).

1. Usury was a violation of the Mosaic Law (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35ff; Dt. 23:19). Secondly, the Jews have recently come out of captivity from Babylon.

2. Nehemiah is angered at the fact that the rich had no problem taking slaves of their brethren for money at such a time.

C. “Also I said, the thing that ye do is not good: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the nations our enemies?” (5:9).

1. The sin of the rich was that they did these things not to help their brethren in time of need, as was the lawful design of loans and selling a daughter or son into slavery under the Mosaic Law, but they did these things for self gain.

2. They saw the unfortunate situation of their own brethren and took advantage of them.

D. “And I likewise, my brethren and my servants, do lend them money and grain. I pray you, let us leave off this usury. Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their fields, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the grain, the new wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them” (5:10-11).

1. Nehemiah request that they do three things:
   a. Restore the people’s property without delay.
   b. Secondly, the rich were to cancel any debts and interest owed by the working people.
   c. Thirdly, return the “hundredth part of the money.”

2. “The hundredth taken as interest is probably, like the centesima of the Romans, to be understood of a monthly payment. One percent per month was a very heavy interest, and one, which, in the case of the poor, might be exorbitant. The law, moreover, forbade the taking of any usury from their brethren, their poor fellow-countrymen (Ex. 22:25 and Lev. 25:36ff).”

E. “Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do, even as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they would do according to this promise” (5:12).

1. The rich Jews agreed to pay back the money and property they had exacted from their brethren.

2. Nehemiah confirms their promise with an oath involving the priest. “Nehemiah obtained the attendance of the priests, partly for the purpose of giving solemnity to the oath now taken, and partly to give to the declaration made in the presence of the priests legal validity for judicial decisions.”

F. “Also I shook out my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labor, that performs not this promise; even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the assembly said, Amen, and praised Jehovah. And the people did according to this promise” (5:13).

1. Secondly, Nehemiah confirms the oath by a symbolical act of shaking his garments.

2. “The symbolical action consisted in Nehemiah’s gathering up his garment as if for the purpose of carrying something, and then shaking it out with the words (stated in vs. 13), which declared the meaning of the act.”

III. Nehemiah’s good character revealed (5:14-19):

A. “Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor” (5:14).

1. Nehemiah had been governor for 12 years when he had pinned this portion of the text.

2. During all this time he had not taken a salary as the governor of Jerusalem and Judah though he was legally due it.

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4 Keil and Delitzsch; “Commentary on the Old Testament;” Vol. 4, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther and Job; pg. 134
5 Ibid. Pg. 134
6 Ibid. Pg. 134
B. “But the former governors that were before me were chargeable unto the people, and took of them bread and wine, beides forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God” (5:15).
1. The former governors had taken wages from the people, however, Nehemiah had not thus acted due to a great “fear of God.”
2. “Nehemiah was a man of considerable means who could afford to live on his income as a Persian official without ever drawing his salary as governor of Judah, for himself or his assistants.”
C. “Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and al my servants were gathered thither unto the work” (5:16).
1. Nehemiah’s good character is furthermore seen in that he helped the people instead of adding to their burdens.
2. He actually worked on the building of the wall with the people. He never bought up any of the land of his suffering brethren so that he might make an investment to benefit his own cause.
3. Nehemiah even had his own personal servants help with the building of the wall.
D. “Moreover there were at my table, of the Jews and the rulers, a hundred and fifty men, besides those that came unto us from among the nations that were round about us. Now that which was prepared for one day was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this I cemanded not the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. Remember unto me, O my God, for good, all that I have done for this people” (5:17-19).
1. Nehemiah regularly fed the 150 heads of Jewish households at his own expense. He never took a salary as their governor. He did the work because he loved God and his people. This is what Nehemiah wanted to be remembered for by God.
2. Nehemiah was a man of compassion and cared nothing about getting self gain.

Lessons Learned from Chapters 4-5

- Let us recognize the tactics of the ungodly and have “a mind to work.” When the ungodly cannot defeat the teachings of truth they often resort to name calling and mockery (Neh. 2:19). God commanded the children of captivity to build the wall (cf. Ezra 6:14). The work was not progressing as it ought to have (Neh. 1:3; 2:16). Nehemiah motivates the people to do the work (Neh. 2:17-18). Wicked men try to discourage the godly from performing the task God has given them. The wicked view such tasks as impossible (Neh. 4:2). When the wicked see God’s people doing His work they become angry (Neh. 4:7-8). They may even threaten the people of God (Neh. 4:11). At times the scorn, laughing, mocking, threats, and discouraging words may affect the people of God (cf. Neh. 4:10-12). During these times we need one to remind us that we are not to fear man but rather God (Neh. 4:14). We need to pray to the Lord who will hear us during our time of distress (Neh. 4:4, 9). Above all let us be determined to do God’s will as were the children of captivity (Neh. 4:6, 17). Some today may call Christians legalists or pattern(ist) when trying to do God’s will. They may tell us that living by God’s authority is impossible (Col. 3:17) (how can one possibly be required to be here every first day of the week? Partake of the LS every first day of the week? Give of our means every first day of the week? Using the church treasury for only those things we read of those in the NT doing... Etc.). When they see us doing God’s will in this area it convicts them of their wrong and so they may resort to calling us names, mocking us, laughing at us, and at time we may be threatened. So was the life of the apostles (cf. I Cor. 4:9ff). Paul was accused of being deranged (II Cor. 5:13), a coward (II Cor. 10:1, 10), and even called an idiot (II Cor. 11:5) by the Corinthians yet he continued in faith (see study # 11; Christian Determination).
- Note that in order for a work to be accomplished by the people of God there must be unity (cf. I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3). Those of Nehemiah’s day were together in this project of doing God’s will (cf. Neh. 4:15-16, 21-25) (see study # 12; Bible Unity).

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7 Bible Study Textbook; College Press, Ratzlaff and Butler (Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther) Pg. 166
• There comes a time in every Christian’s life when they must **take a stand in truth** against the enemies of God (Neh. 4:10-12, 17; 5:6-7 compared to Eph. 6:10-13; Jude 3) (see study # 10).

• More on **Nehemiah’s character**: hated sinful characters (Neh. 4:4-5), a man of prayer (Neh. 4:4, 9), one who encouraged brethren to do the work they knew needed to be done (Neh. 4:14), exposed his brethren’s sin of usury (Neh. 5:6-9), lent money to those in need to help them (Neh. 5:10), refused to take wages from the people in their time of need even though he could have (Neh. 5:14), he labored diligently in the wall project (Neh. 5:16), he never took advantage of one in need (Neh. 5:16), he fed many at no charge at his table (Neh. 5:17) (see study # 1).

**Chapter 6**

**Events leading up to Chapter 6**

God had commanded that the walls of Jerusalem be erected upon the return of the captives to Judah (cf. Ezra 6:14; 9:9; Neh. 2:17). The captives return under the leadership of Zerubbabel and rebuild the temple of Jehovah over a period of 18 years. Ezra restored lawful order in approximately 1 year. During this twenty year span the wall of Jerusalem had been under construction yet not whole heartedly (cf. Ezra 5:3; Neh. 2:15-16). Nehemiah was a Jewish cupbearer to Artaxerxes, King of the Persian Empire, during the 20th year of his reign. Nehemiah receives word from his brother that the walls in Jerusalem remain destroyed at this late date. God had fulfilled His promise to return the Jews to Judah, however, the remnant had not done their part (cf. Jer. 29:8-10). Nehemiah is moved with deep sorrow over the news that the wall remained in ruins. Being the cupbearer to the king of Persia presented Nehemiah with the opportunity to make a request for a return visit and restoration of the city walls. Nehemiah does so and the king grants his request (cf. Neh. 2:1ff). Upon arrival in Jerusalem, Nehemiah secretly assesses the work to be done on the wall and then presents his proposal, along with his authority to do so, to the people (Neh. 2:17-18). The people agreed to do the work yet it would not go unchallenged. Nehemiah records that Sanballat and Tobiah “laughed us to scorn, and despised us...” upon hearing that the city walls were being erected (Neh. 2:19). Though laughed at (Neh. 2:19), made fun of (Neh. 4:2-3), threatened (Neh. 4:11), exhausted (Neh. 4:10), and hungry (Neh. 5:2) the people pressed on in the project because they “had a mind to work” (Neh. 4:6). The work on the wall went on at the expense of the people’s property and freedom (Neh. 5:3-5). Lessons learned to this point are that with proper motivation the Lord’s people can accomplish any thing they put their minds to do. We also see that at times some spiritual work must take precedence over our own lives we live (see study # 8).

I. **Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem try to lure Nehemiah out of the City (6:1-4):**

A. “Now it came to pass, when it was reported to Sanballat and Tobiah, and to Geshem the Arabian, and unto the rest of our enemies, that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein (though even unto that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me saying, Come, let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief” (6:1-2).

1. The wall was now complete and the only remaining work to be done was on the doors and gates. The impressive work did not go unnoticed. The enemies of the Jews had gained word that the wall was nearing completion and once again it turned them to anger.

2. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian attempt to lure Nehemiah out of the city’s protective walls that they might do “mischief” to him. These men were not merely frustrated (cf. Neh. 4:2) but they were murderously angry (cf. Neh. 4:7-8). The enemies of the Jews were ready to kill Nehemiah for his part in leading them to rebuild the city walls.

B. “And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to You? And they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner” (6:3-4).

1. Nehemiah answers his enemies request by stating that he will not come to them because he has too much work to do.
2. Four times Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem write letters to Nehemiah trying to lure him out of the city and each time Nehemiah replies that he is too busy.

C. “Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand, wherein was written, it is reported among the nations, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel; for which cause thou art building the wall: and thou wouldest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take council together” (6:5-7).

1. After four failed attempts to get Nehemiah out of the city that they may do him harm, possibly assassinate him, Sanballat and his fellows write a fifth “open letter.” The open letter would be assessable to all to read and know its contents. Sanballat and his fellows were openly charging Nehemiah with rebellion against the Medo-Persian Empire. Secondly, they charged that Nehemiah was spreading word by the prophets that he was to be king of Judah.

2. Sanballat states that he is reporting these rumors to Artaxerxes and that Nehemiah needs to come out of the city to talk these charges over.

D. “Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart. For they all would have made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. But now, O God, strengthen thou my hands” (6:8-9).

1. The open letter did not work for Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. Nehemiah responds to their letter saying that they have dreamed these things up in their “own heart.” Nehemiah exposes their purpose. These enemies were willing to go to any length to cause the work on the wall to stop.

2. Here is an example of the tactics of wicked men. When attempts to discredit one’s character fail they resort to lying.

3. Nehemiah responds to these wicked attempts at his life with prayer.

II. Sanballat and Tobiah try another stratagem to discredit Nehemiah (6:10-14):

A. “And I went unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabel, who was shut up; and he said, let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? And who is there, that, being such as I, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. And I discerned, and, lo, god had not sent him; but he pronounced this prophecy against me: and Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him” (6:10-12).

1. Tobiah and Sanballat hire a false prophet, Shemaiah, to seduce Nehemiah into going into the holy place of God’s temple to seek protection from advancing assassins. Nothing further is known of this prophet Shemaiah. From what is here related we learn, “that false prophets were again busy in the congregation, as in the period preceding the captivity, and seeking to seduce the people from hearkening to the voice of the true prophets of God, who preached repentance and conversion as the conditions of prosperity.”

2. Their design was to have Nehemiah go into the holy place, a place in which he was not authorized to enter (Num. 18:7). If Nehemiah did this, his enemies would have occasion to spread the news of his unlawful deed. Surely we see the unscrupulousness of their actions and for modern false teachers as well. They should have seen by this time that Nehemiah was a man of faith and would in no way fall for such a destitute plan. Nehemiah figured this out quickly. What kind of prophet of God would tell him to violate God’s commandments?

B. “For this cause was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me. Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and also the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear” (6:13-14).

1. Nehemiah knew that such an act of entering the temple would be a matter of “sin.” Tobiah and Sanballat figured that if they could have Nehemiah charged with sin then the people would loose confidence in him and the wall project would go undone.

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8 Keil and Delitzsch; “Commentary on the Old Testament;” Vol. 4, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther and Job; pg. 139
2. Nehemiah again prays to God. His prayer is that God would remember these wicked attempts to cause him to sin that the walls of Jerusalem would go undone. Who would like to be in Sanballat and Tobiah’s shoes on judgment day?

III. The wall is completed (6:15-16):
A. “So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days” (6:15).
   1. Due to the organization and determination of workers, the wall was completed in 52 days; {25th day of the month Elul; the sixth month}.
   2. Now that the project was complete the people could get back to their every day responsibilities restoring assured that they had done the right thing.
B. “And it came to pass, when all our enemies heard thereof, that all the nations that were about us feared, and were much cast down in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God” (6:16).
   1. Knowledge of Jehovah God existed in the hearts of the other nations. The surrounding nations considered God’s hand to be in the work when it was completed.
   2. The result of such diligent and faithful work was that God was glorified and His enemies put to shame.

IV. More Difficulties (6:17-19):
A. “Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah; and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah to wife” (6:17-18).
   1. Tobiah presented somewhat of a difficult problem for Nehemiah:
      a. Tobiah was related to Shecaniah, the keeper of the East gate (cf. Neh. 3:29). Shecaniah’s family had come to Jerusalem with Ezra (cf. Ezra 8:3). He was a spokesmen for those who had sinned against God’s marriage laws and repented (cf. Ezra 10:2). He and his family worked side by side with other Jews in restoring the walls (cf. Neh. 3:29).
      b. Secondly, Tobiah was related to Berechiah (another worker on the wall / cf. Neh. 3:4, 30).
      c. Latter we read that Tobiah was allied to Eliashib the priest (cf. Neh. 13:4).
   2. Here was an individual with strong inside relationships. God’s people make a grave error when they choose to support a family member or relative in error over the truth (see study # 13; Bible Fellowship).
B. “Also they spake of his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear” (6:19).
   1. Nehemiah just finished a hard fought battle against the enemies of God that the walls would be complete. The wall was God’s objective for His people (again cf. Ezra 6:14). While trying to complete this task, Tobiah tried to halt it. Now, many rulers of the Jews actively supported Tobiah simply because of their relationship to him.
   2. The rulers spoke well of Tobiah in the hearing of Nehemiah and reported anything negative said by Nehemiah to Tobiah. Tobiah would respond by writing threatening letters to Nehemiah that he may be put in fear.
   3. The Lord’s people could not see through their relationship with Tobiah because of their hard hearts. They elevate their family above God and thereby greatly err. Many in the church today will gladly exercise church discipline on anyone, however, when their family member is affected they throw the word of God to the wind (see study # 13).

Lessons Learned from chapter 6

- The enemies of the people of God are persistent (I Pet. 5:8-9): Note that from the beginning (cf. Neh. 2:19), midway point (Neh. 4:1-3), end (Neh. 6:1ff), and even after the wall was constructed (cf. Neh. 6:19) the enemies of God pressed against His people. Their tools have been to question Nehemiah’s motives for doing God’s work (Neh. 2:19 / compared to the Corinthians questioning Paul’s motives for collecting funds for the needy saints II Cor. 12:16-18), laughing the people of God to scorn and viewing
them as foolish (Neh. 2:19 / The Romans mocked (Matt. 27:29-31) and spat upon Jesus (Lk. 18:32; The Corinthians called Paul an idiot II Cor. 11:5), discouragement (Neh. 4:1-3), threats (Neh. 4:11), wickedness from within the people themselves (Neh. 5:6-7; 6:10-12, 19), craft and deceit (Neh. 6:1-4 / II Cor. 2:11; 4:1-2), false accusations (Neh. 6:5-8 / Jesus (Mk. 15:3) and Paul (Acts 26:2) were falsely accused), and intimidation to fear (Neh. 6:9, 13, 19 / II Tim. 1:7) (see study # 14; Satan’s Tools and Workers).

• The Christian’s response to said persistent vices (a further study of Nehemiah’s Character): (strengthened by the Lord / Eph. 3:16; 6:10): Nehemiah responds to the wicked man’s vice by saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down” (Neh. 6:3). The disciple of Christ will too repel the works of wicked men with conviction (Neh. 2:20; 6:9 / compared to I Cor. 4:9-13; II Tim. 3:6-8), Courage (Neh. 4:14; 6:11 / Acts 7:51), prayer (Neh. 4:4, 9 / I Thess. 5:17-18), determination (Neh. 4:6 / Phil. 3:13-14), expose the wicked man’s plans (Neh. 5:6-7; 6:8 / Eph. 5:11), and ever cautious of the evil workers that may be within the church (cf. Neh. 6:10ff / comp. to II Pet. 2:1ff).

Chapter 7

I. Nehemiah prepares for his return to his duties in Persia (7:1-7):

A. “Now it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed, that I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the governor of the castle, charge over Jerusalem; for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many” (7:1-2).

1. Nehemiah had accomplished what he set out to do in fifty two days. He had promised Artaxerxes that he would return to his duties as cup bearer after the wall was completed (cf. Neh. 2:6).

2. Nehemiah hands over all civil authority in Jerusalem to his brother Hanani (see Neh. 1:2) and Hananiah the governor of the castle (both feared God).

B. “And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand on guard, let them shut the doors, and bar ye them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house. Now the city was wide and large; but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded” (7:3-4).

1. Extra precautions were to be made by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They had been threatened and were not to take this lightly (cf. Neh. 4:11). Nehemiah instructs them to not open the gate until the sun is hot and to keep it shut all night with bars. Watchmen were to ever be on the walls.

2. Though the city was wide and large there were only but a few residents. Their houses remained in ruins and there was much work to do. All of these types of statements help us to envision the extent that Nebuchadnezzar laid waist the city some 100 years earlier.

C. “And my God put into my heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of them that came up at the first, and I found written therein: These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and that returned unto Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city: who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel” (7:5-7).

1. How God put into Nehemiah’s heart to gather all Jerusalem for the records of genealogy are not told. The Lord apparently communicated His request to Nehemiah and he responded with obedience.

2. Nehemiah assembled the people and Ezra was to read the Law of Moses to them all (cf. Neh. 8:1ff).

II. A Lists of all who originally returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel (7:8-73):

A. Consider the following registry from Nehemiah 7:8-73:

• “The children of Parosh, two thousand a hundred and seventy and two.
• The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two.
• The children of Arah, six hundred fifty and two.
• The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand and eight hundred [and] eighteen.
• The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.
• The children of Zattu, eight hundred forty and five.
• The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore.
• The children of Binnui, six hundred forty and eight.
• The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and eight.
• The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty and two.
• The children of Adonikam, six hundred threescore and seven.
• The children of Bigvai, two thousand threescore and seven.
• The children of Adin, six hundred fifty and five.
• The children of Ater, of Hezekiah, ninety and eight.
• The children of Hashum, three hundred twenty and eight.
• The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and four.
• The children of Hariph, a hundred and twelve.
• The children of Gibeon, ninety and five.
• The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, a hundred fourscore and eight.
• The men of Anathoth, a hundred twenty and eight.
• The men of the other Nebo, fifty and two.
• The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.
• The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty.
• The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five.
• The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and one.
• The children of Seraiah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty.
• The priests: The children of Jedediah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three.
• The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two.
• The children of Pashhur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven.
• The children of Harim, a thousand [and] seventeen.
• The Levites: the children of Jeshua, of the house of Kadmiel, of the children of Hodevah, seventy and four.
• The singers: the children of Asaph, a hundred forty and eight.
• The porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hattil, the children of Shobai, a hundred thirty and eight.
• The Nethinim: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbath, the children of Keros, the children of Sia, the children of Padon, the children of Lebana, the children of Hagaba, the children of Salmis, the children of Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reiaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Alaph, the children of Gazzam, the children of Uzza, the children of Paseah. The children of Besai, the children of Meunim, the children of Nepusheshim, the children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, the children of Bazlith, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, the children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Temah, the children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha.
• The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Perida, the children of Jaala, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, the children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth-hazzebaim, the children of Amon.
• All the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred ninety and two.

• And these were they that went up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer; but they could not show their fathers' houses, nor their seed, whether they were of Israel:

• The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred forty and two. And of the priests: the children of Hobaiah, the children of Hakkoz, the children of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name. These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they deemed polluted and put from the priesthood. And the governor said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim.

• The whole assembly together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, besides their men-servants and their maid-servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and they had two hundred forty and five singing men and singing women” (7:8-67).

1. A total of around 50,000 people returned with Zerubbabel.

C. “Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; their camels, four hundred thirty and five; [their] asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty. And some from among the heads of fathers' houses gave unto the work. The governor gave to the treasury a thousand darics of gold, fifty basins, five hundred and thirty priests' garments. And some of the heads of fathers' houses gave into the treasury of the work twenty thousand darics of gold, and two thousand and two hundred pounds of silver. And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand darics of gold, and two thousand pounds of silver, and threescore and seven priests' garments. So the priests, and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinim, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities. And when the seventh month was come, the children of Israel were in their cities” (7:68-73).

1. There are minor discrepancies in the numbers as compared with Ezra two. This is especially so with the numbers of material and supplies.

2. Through the process of time this document was kept preserved.

Chapter 8

I. Ezra Reads the Law of Moses to the People (8:1-8):

A. “And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the broad place that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which Jehovah had commanded to Israel” (8:1).

1. The remnant of God’s people assembled at the request of God by the mouth of Nehemiah so “that they might be reckoned by genealogy” (cf. Neh. 7:5).

2. The time was the “seventh month” (Neh. 7:73b). Chapter six left us at the Hebrew month Elul (the sixth month of the twentieth year of Artaxerxes) (cf. Neh. 6:15). The wall was now complete after 52 days of intense labor and stress from the enemies.

3. The location of their gathering was near the water gate (southeast of the temple / see map above).

4. While assembled, the people speak unto Ezra requesting that the Law of Moses be read to them. It is probable that the reason for this request was their faith in God’s providential care and help in the wall building project.

B. “And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the broad place that was before the water gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women, and of those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law” (8:2-3).

1. Where has Ezra been throughout this study? Apparently Ezra has remained in Judea for the past 20 years and took no real important part in rebuilding the wall (at least that is recorded).
2. Ezra reads the Law of Moses in the hearing of all the people from “morning until midday” (about six hours). While Ezra read the people were attentive unto the Laws of God.

C. “And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Uriah, and Hilkiiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchijah, and Hashum, and Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people (for he was above all the people); and when he opened it, all the people stood up” (8:4-5).
   1. A pulpit of wood was prepared for Ezra and this special occasion that elevated him above all the people so that they could all see him.
   2. To Ezra’s right were six priests and to his left were seven.
   3. Ezra approaches the pulpit in the sight of the people and opens the books of the law. Upon opening the books all the people stood upon their feet probably as a show of respect and reverence for the Word of God.

D. “And Ezra blessed Jehovah, the great God; and all the people answered Amen, Amen, with the lifting up of their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped Jehovah with their faces to the ground” (8:6).
   1. An act of worship occurs here on the part of the people. Ezra blesses the name of Jehovah God and the people respond by saying, Amen, Amen while lifting their hands.
   2. Secondly, the people respond to the event by bowing their faces to the ground in humble submission to the Lord.

E. “Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and they read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly; and they gave the sense, so that they understood the reading” (8:7-8).
   1. Apparently Ezra would read some of the law and priests and Levites would give an interpretation or explanation.
   2. The people were left with a clear understanding of the law of God.

II. The People respond to the reading of the Law of God (8:9-12):
   A. “And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, this day is holy unto Jehovah your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law” (8:9).
      1. Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites pronounce to the people that this be a holy day unto Jehovah for much good has come of it. The people, however, are deeply grieved and wept after hearing the Law of God read.
      2. No doubt Ezra read sections of the law that exposed their sin and the punishing consequences thereof. They heard God’s warnings and saw that the state that they were in was due to their sins and their fathers before them.

B. “Then he said unto them, God your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye grieved; for the joy of Jehovah is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them” (8:10-12).
      1. Jewish feasts, as revealed in the Mosaic Law, were designed to bring joy not sadness (cf. Deut. 12:7). Nehemiah thereby encourages the people to remove their sadness and participate in a joyous feast unto Jehovah God.
      2. Nehemiah also encourages the wealthier people to provide a feast for the poorer among them that all may be joyous.

III. Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (8:13-18):
   A. “And on the second day were gathered together the heads of fathers houses of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to give attention to the words of the law. And they found written in the law, how that Jehovah had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month; and that they should publish and
proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and branches of wild olive, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written” (8:13-15).

1. The heads of the fathers’ house assembled together with Ezra the next day for further inquiry of the Mosaic Law. Upon close examination, they found that they were to be keeping the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles at this time of year. By the reading of vs. 14 it appears as though they read this and were surprised. It appears that their prior knowledge of the feast of Tabernacles must have driven them to seek out the particulars of this feast. Thus they endeavor to study with Ezra, the priest, over the matter.

2. As they studied the Law, they found that the whole congregation was to participate in erecting booths of branches to dwell in for seven days (cf. Lev. 23:39-43).

3. While it may surprise us that God’s people had obviously not been keeping His set feasts we might want to look to our present day. Scores of people today have no clue as to what day to worship God on (i.e., the day to sing, pray, preach, give of our means, and partake of the Lord’s Supper). When the Book of Law is not opened it is not known.

B. “So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the broad place of the water gate, and in the broad place of the gate of Ephraim. An all the assembly of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and dwelt in the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness” (8:16-17).

1. The results of their research and resolve to comply are impressive. The whole congregation obeyed and thus kept the feast of Tabernacles making themselves booths of branches and dwelling in them for seven days. These were days of restoration.

2. So impressive was the universal keeping of this feast that the inspired writer records, “for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so.” One problem with this statement is that II Chron. 7:9 and I Kings 8:65 record the people of God keeping the feast of Tabernacles after the dedication of Solomon’s temple. Then again, we read in Ezra 3:4 that the people kept the feast of Tabernacles. The explanation is a simple one yet impressive. Since the days of Israel entering into Canaan, God’s people as a whole had not kept the feast of Tabernacles. Obviously bands of people did throughout the years, however, here we find the whole congregation submitting to this law.

3. While it may be our tendency to lay blame at Ezra’s feet (i.e., why didn’t he initiate this sooner??) let us remember that he was but one man and that which brought all Israel together was the miraculous completion of the wall around Jerusalem in 52 days. God had His hand in these events (cf. Neh. 7:5). A national gathering gave way to an opportunity to reunite the people of God as one and to restore spiritual laws and goals in the minds of the people.

C. “Also day by day from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the ordinance” (8:18).

1. Ezra appears to have read the Law of Moses for seven or eight straight days in the people’s hearing.

2. The chapter clearly brings out a renewed interest in the people of God for His law.

Chapter 9

I. The people assemble again in Jerusalem to make Confession of Sins (9:1-5):

A. “Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackcloth, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of Jehovah their God a fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped Jehovah their God” (9:1-4).
1. Just two days after the feast of Tabernacles the people once again assemble at the temple for reading of the Law, worship, confession of sin, and prayer.

2. What is impressive about this assembly is that it was on a day when they were not required to do so by Law. They were simply worshipping due to their sincere love of God and desire of his mercy in light of past sin. They were obviously convicted of sin by the reading of the law and wished to do something about it.
   a. They fasted.
   b. They put sackcloth and dirt upon them which was an outward show of their inner grief.
   c. They separated themselves from all foreigners. Only those who were in covenant relationship with God were present.
   d. They worshipped and confessed both their sins and the sins of their fathers for a “fourth part of the day” (probably around 4 – 6 hours).
   e. They read the book of Law for a “fourth part of the day.”

B. “Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, stand up and bless Jehovah your God from everlasting to everlasting; and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise” (9:5).

1. Eight Levites stand praising God before the assembly.
2. The word “bless” here indicates an expression of great honor bestowed upon God on the part of the prayers.

II. Ezra’s Prayer (9:6-38):

   A. “Thou art Jehovah, even thou alone: thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavnes, with all their host, the earth and all things that are thereon, the seas and all that is thereon, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worships thee. Thou art Jehovah the God, who dist choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name of Abraham, and foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite, and the Girgashite, to give it unto his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous” (9:6-8).

   1. It is generally agreed that Ezra uttered this prayer though the text is somewhat obscure as to its author.
   2. The prayer begins with an acknowledgement of Jehovah God’s awesome creative power and the selection of Abraham to bring forth His promises through.

   B. “And thou sawest the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heard their cry by the Red Sea, and showed signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and an all his servants, and on all the people of his land; for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them, and didst get thee a name, as it is this day. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persuers thou didst cast into the depths, as a stone into the mighty waters. Moreover in a pillar of cloud thou leddest them by day; and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spake with them from heaven, and gave them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and madest known unto them thy holy Sabbath, and commandest them commandments, and statutes, and a law, by Moses thy servant, and gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and commandedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them” (9:9-15).

   1. The prayer of Ezra is divided into four parts. This first part (i.e., verses 9-15) is a prayer that reviews many of God’s mighty works against Egypt, His mercy upon the Hebrews coming out of Egypt, the giving of the Law at Sinai, and preparations for His people to enter into the land that He had promised them.
   2. The prayer illustrates a point that when we pray today we may review some of God’s great works in the history of man such as His creation and mighty works in Egypt.

   C. “But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their neck, and hearkened not to thy commandments, and refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them, but hardened their neck, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their
bondage. But thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and forsookest them not. Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, this is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations; yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of cloud departed not from over them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go. Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and peoples, which thou didst allot after their portions: so they possessed the land of Sihon, even the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land concerning which thou didst say to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it” (9:16-23).

1. The second part of Ezra’s prayer is from verse 16 to 23. Ezra reviews what transpired as the people of God wandered in the wilderness for forty years due to their disobedience. Many lessons are learned from this period.

2. Ezra acknowledges the sin of those in the wilderness wanderings as twofold. Note that in each case God had given a commandment and the people decided to do something different (said conduct is referred to as hardening the heart against the Lord in the Bible; see study # 16; Hard Hearts).
   a. First, the people sinned in that they “hardened” their hearts against God’s commandments. God had instructed His people to march on to Canaan to possess the land flowing with milk and honey, however, when the people saw how great the enemy appeared they concluded that they were but grasshoppers in their sight (cf. Numb. 13:33). The people began to murmur and then sought to appoint a captain to lead them back to Egypt to serve in bondage (Numb. 14:1-5).
   b. Secondly, God had instructed the people not to worship idols (Ex. 20:1-4) and yet they set aside God’s instructions when they built the calf in the wilderness (Ex. 32:1ff).

3. Note too the character of God. Ezra reviews the merciful and loving works (cf. 9:17b) of Jehovah God against a hard hearted people (see study # 18; God’s Character Traits):
   a. God did not forsake them in the wilderness but rather lead them by the pillar of cloud in the day and pillar of fire in the night.
   b. God gave them His “Spirit to instruct them” (i.e., teaching of the inspired prophets / cf. Neh. 9:30; Numb. 11:16ff) (see study # 17; Inspiration of Bible).
   c. God continued to feed them with manna and provide water for their thirst.
   d. The people’s clothes did not wear out and neither did their feet swell from walking.
   e. God delivered into their hands kingdoms and peoples.
   f. God brought them to Canaan to possess the land of milk and honey.
   g. Surely the people “lacked nothing” (9:21).

D. “So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they took fortified cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all good things, cisterns hewn out, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit-trees in abundance: so they did eat and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their back, and slew thy prophets that testified against them to turn them again unto thee, and they wrought great provocations. Therefore thou deliverest them into the hand of their adversaries, who distressed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou hearest them from heaven; and according to thee manifold mercies thou gavest them savours who saved them out of the hand of their adversaries. But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee; therefore leftist thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou hearest from heaven: and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies, and testified against them, that thou mightest
bring them again unto thy law. Yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thine ordinances (which if a man do, he shall live in them), and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear. Yet many years did thou bear with them, and testified against them by thy Spirit through thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the peoples of the land. Nevertheless in thy manifold mercies thou didst not make a full end of them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God” (9:24-31)

1. Third part of Ezra’s prayer: By God’s great care for the people they came into Canaan and possessed lands, homes, vineyards, and olive groves that they did not construct or plant. They became fat and ungrateful. The Israelites went through cycles of sin, servitude, and sorrow in repentance. God would send a deliverer because he cared for them (book of Judges).

2. The people’s sin (see study # 16; Hard Hearts):
   a. They were disobedient and cast God’s laws behind their backs (i.e., they forgot God in their wealth).
   b. God sent prophets to straighten them out yet they only killed them (Neh. 9:26).
   c. The people “dealt proudly... did not listen to the commandments of God... but sinned against thine ordinances... hardened their neck, and would not hear” (Neh. 9:29).
   d. God revealed His will for them by His Spirit through the prophets (process of inspiration) (see study # 17; Inspiration of God’s Word) (Neh. 9:30).

3. Note the character of God is “goodness” (Neh. 9:25), “mercy” (Neh. 9:27, 28, 31), “patient” (Neh. 9:30), and “gracious” (Neh. 9:31).

E. “Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and lovingkindness, let not all the travail seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. Howbeit thou art just in all that is come upon us; for thou hast dealt truly, but we have done wickedly; neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies wherewith thou didst testify against them. For they have not served thee I their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works. Behold, we are servants this day, and as for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it. And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have power over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress. And yet for all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, our Levites, and our priests, seal unto it” (9:32-38).

1. Ezra’s prayer indicates a humbled heart at the acknowledgment of hundreds of years of disobediences to a merciful and patient God. The people of God are in a current state of servitude to the Medo-Persian Empire because of their disobedience.

2. Ezra thereby makes a final plea to God for His great mercy upon a sinful and disobedient people. While they deserve the punishment they have received he pleads for mercy.

3. Ezra, on behalf of the people, enters into a covenant with God that expresses their desire to keep His laws and remain faithful to him.

Lessons Learned from Nehemiah 8-9:

- The world’s perception of God’s providential help in building the walls of Jerusalem caused God’s people to seek Him out (cf. Neh. 6:15-16). The result of Israel’s seeking after truth was an exposure of their sin and consequential guilt. We ought to learn from our past sins (and or mistakes) and have a greater purpose to do better in the future. The following are the traits displayed by the people of God in Nehemiah’s day after learning of their error:
  o Desire to serve God (Neh. 8:1).
  o Respect for the Lord (Neh. 8:5).
Reverence toward the Lord (Neh. 8:6).
Understanding of God’s Word (Neh. 8:8).
Convicted of Truth (Neh. 8:9).
Determined to do better (Neh. 8:13).
Interested in spiritual matters (Neh. 8:17-18).

- When I knowingly sin against God’s Laws it is due to a hardening of my heart (Neh. 9:16-18, 26, 29 as compared to Rom. 2:4-5; II Cor. 3:12-16; Eph. 4:17-21; Heb. 3:12-14) (see study # 16).
- Nehemiah 9:18-25 confirms the overall message of the book of Exodus that God is a God of mercy (cf. Ex. 19:4-6) (see study # 18).

**Chapter 10**

**Prelude to Study of chapter 10**

At the completion of the city of Jerusalem’s walls, Nehemiah records, “Now the city was wide and large; but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded” (Neh. 7:4). With the sparse populace of Jerusalem before us the Lord moves Nehemiah to cause all Israel to assemble at Jerusalem to “be reckoned by genealogy” (Neh. 7:5). When they are all together in Jerusalem the people make a request that Ezra read the Law of God to them (Neh. 8:1ff). Ezra does so for seven straight days (8:18). They find, during the reading, that they are supposed to be keeping the feast of Tabernacles during this time and so they do (Neh. 8:13-18). At the completion of the feast, Ezra prays on behalf of the people (Neh. 9). Ezra reviews a history of God’s mercy and the people’s hard hearted disobedience. Ezra ends the prayer with a request that God’s people sign a covenant with God that they would agree to set their heart on knowing and following God’s laws (Neh. 9:38). Chapter 10 illustrates the resolve of the people to serve God and keep His commandments. This resolve is evidenced in that they entered into a covenant agreement with God to keep His laws.

I. **The People Seal a Covenant with God to Illustrate their Resolve to Follow His Laws (10:1-27):**

A. “Now those that sealed were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremia, Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Gimmethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these were the priests” (10:1-8).

1. A list of all those who signed and sealed the covenant agreement with God (detailed at Neh. 10:28ff) is now given. “Two methods of sealing official papers are known from this period: (1) the imprint of the thumbnail, or (2) the impression of the person’s private seal on a ball of moist clay, which is then attached by a string to the document.”

2. The first to sign was Nehemiah the governor. Following Nehemiah’s signature was 22 priests.

B. “And the Levites: namely, Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; and their brethren, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Bani, Beninu” (10:9-13).

1. The Levites that signed the document were numbered at 17.
2. These Levites were probably heads of their families.


1. The chiefs of the people were the heads of the other non-Levite families.
2. There are a total of 44 chiefs named.

II. **The Covenant Agreement (10:28-39):**

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9 Bible Study Textbook; College Press, Ratzlaff and Butler (Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther) Pg. 214
A. “And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinim, and all thy that had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one that had knowledge and understanding; they entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God’s law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of Jehovah our Lord, and his ordinances and his statutes;” (10:28-29).

1. The people show great resolve to follow God’s laws by entering into the covenant agreement as did the governor and nobles mentioned above.
2. Said people separated themselves from the surrounding peoples (i.e., from their practices that violated God’s laws).
3. The people gave an oath that they would “walk in God’s law” (i.e., “observe and do all the commandments of Jehovah our Lord”).

B. “and that we would not give our daughters unto the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons; and if the peoples of the land bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy of them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and that we would forego the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt” (10:30-31).

1. While reading the law the people no doubt ran across Ex. 34:14-17 and Deut. 7:3 which command that the Israelites do not intermarry with the Canaanites. Ezra had found the people guilty of this sin and straightened the matter out (cf. Ezra 9-10).
2. The people resolved not to buy grain from foreigners on the Sabbath day (infers that they did have business dealings with them on other days of the week) (see study # 19; Examples of Bible Inference). The Sabbath was a holy day that was to be kept sacred (i.e, no work but rather rest and worship) (cf. Ex. 20:8-11).
3. The Law of Moses also revealed a command to allow those who owed debts to be released of their pay back responsibilities on the year of “Jehovah’s release” (cf. Deut. 15:1-2).

C. “Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God; for the showbread, and for the continual meal offering, and for the continual burnt-offering, for the Sabbaths, for the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin-offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God” (10:32-33).

1. To pay the yearly half shekel for the service of the temple (Ex. 30:13). At Exodus 30 the price was ½ while here the price is set at 1/3 shekel.
2. Said contribution would pay for the necessary things for worship such as the various daily and yearly offerings, new moons, and set feasts.

D. “And we cast lots, the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood-offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers’ houses, at times appointed, year by year, to burn upon the altar of Jehovah our God, as it is written in the law; and to bring the first-fruits of our ground, and the first-fruits of all fruit of all manner of trees, year by year, unto the house of Jehovah; also the first-born of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God” (10:34-36).

1. According to Leviticus 6:12ff the wood upon the altar was to burn continually.
2. The people of God were also commanded to give of the first-fruits of the land (Deut. 26:2), trees (Lev. 19:23), sons (Numb. 18:16 / i.e. sanctified), and cattle (Numb. 18:15) and so they resolve to do.

E. “and that we should bring the first-fruits of our dough, and our heave-offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, the new wine and the oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites; for they, the Levites, take the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure-house. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the heave-offering of the grain, of the new wine, and of the oil, unto the chambers, where are the
vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God” (10:37-39).

1. These offerings served to support the priests in their work at the temple of God (cf. Numb. 4:15; 18:17).
2. The offerings were taken to the chambers of the temple and there stored for the priests.
3. Additionally, the people were to pay a tithe (tenth) of all their goods annually to the priests and these goods were also stored in the chambers of the temple.
4. Note the resolve statement: “and we will not forsake the house of our God.” The people had resolved to do better in the future than what they had done in the past. A noble resolve for any today.

Chapter 11

I. Repopulating Jerusalem (11:1 – all):

A. “and the princes of the people dwelt in Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts in the other cities. And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem” (11:1-2).

1. We must remember that at Nehemiah 7:5 God had placed into Nehemiah’s heart to gather the people to Jerusalem so that an accounting of their genealogies might be made. We now see what this is all about. It was God’s plan to repopulate Jerusalem and if left to the people it may not have happened (cf. Neh. 7:4). It was determined that lots would be cast and one family out of every ten from each of tribes of Israel would remain within the city of Jerusalem. Some people made the decision to live in Jerusalem willingly and thereby they were blessed.
2. The two verses appear to infer that it was not a desirable thing to live in Jerusalem. The stigma of past horrors that occurred there may have steered many clear (cf. Jer. 19:9).

B. “Now these are the chiefs of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon's servants. And in Jerusalem dwelt certain of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children 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 children of Perez; and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Colhozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of the Shilonite. All the sons of Perez that dwelt in Jerusalem were four hundred threescore and eight valiant men” (11:3-6).

1. Nehemiah gives an account of the residents of Jerusalem from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (whether these are the families whose lot it was to now dwell in Jerusalem or current residents we are not told... at any rate these are the families that dwelled in Jerusalem).
2. The children of Judah appear to be headed by the household of Perez and numbered 468 in valiant men.

C. “And these are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiath, the son of Kolata, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiah. And after him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred twenty and eight. And Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer; and Judah the son of Hassenuah was second over the city” (11:7-9).

1. The children of Benjamin living in Jerusalem numbered 928.
2. The city manager was Joel and he was assisted by Judah.

D. “Of the priests: Jedaiath the son of Joiarib, Jachin, Seraia the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the ruler of the house of God, and their brethren that did the work of the house, eight hundred twenty and two; and Adaia the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah, and his brethren, chiefs of fathers' houses, two hundred forty and two; and Amashzai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshilemoth, the son of Immerson, and their brethren, mighty men of valor, a hundred twenty and eight; and their overseer was Zabdiel, the son of Haggedolin” (11:10-14).
1. The priests in Jerusalem numbered 822.
2. Chiefs of father’s houses numbered 242.
3. Amashsai’s descendants numbered 128 mighty men of valor.

E. “And of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; and Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chiefs of the Levites, who had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God; and Mattaniah the son of Mica, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, who was the chief to begin the thanksgiving in prayer, and Bakkukiah, the second among his brethren; and Abda the son of Shammau, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred fourscore and four. Moreover the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren, that kept watch at the gates, were a hundred seventy and two” (11:15-19).

1. Levites dwelling in Jerusalem numbered 284.
2. There were porters dwelling in Jerusalem too and were responsible for keeping watch at the gates of the city.

F. “And the residue of Israel, of the priests, the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, every one in his inheritance. But the Nethinim dwelt in Ophel: and Zilha and Gishpa were over the Nethinim. The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica, of the sons of Asaph, the singers, over the business of the house of God. For there was a commandment from the king concerning them, and a settled provision for the singers, as every day required. And Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, was at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people” (11:20-24).

1. Other priests and Levites dwelled in other parts of Judah.
2. “Uzzi was overseer of the Levites in respect of their business in the house of God, i.e., of those Levites who had the charge of this business. The reason is thus given in vs. 23; ‘a command of the king was over them’ means: the king had commanded them.” The king had charge of their everyday affairs (King Artaxerxes vs. 24). The individual who was in charge of informing Artaxerxes and receiving commands from the king is given in vs. 24. His name is Pethahiah.

G. “And as for the villages, with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt in Kiriath-arba and the towns thereof, and in Dibon and the towns thereof, and in Jekabzeel and the villages thereof, and in Jeshua, and in Moladah, and Beth-pelet, and in Hazar-shual, and in Beer-sheba and the towns thereof, and in Ziklag, and in Meconah and in the towns thereof, and in En-rimmon, and in Zorah, and in Jarmuth, Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, Lachish and the fields thereof, Azekah and the towns thereof. So they encamped from Beer-sheba unto the valley of Hinnom. The children of Benjamin also dwelt from Geba onward, at Michmas and Aija, and at Beth-el and the towns thereof, at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen. And of the Levites, certain courses in Judah were joined to Benjamin” (11:25-36).

1. Towns of Judah and Benjamin that were occupied.

Lessons Learned from chapters 10-11:

- **Resolve** = “To make a firm decision about... to decide or express by formal vote...” (AHD 1052). Nehemiah, Zedekiah, the 22 priests, 17 Levites, and 44 chiefs of the people signed a covenant agreement with God that gave an oath of their purpose to “walk in God’s law” (Neh. 10:29). Furthermore they had resolve regarding God’s holy temple. The people said, “and we will not forsake the house of our God” (10:39). We learn that when a greater faith in God is a part of our being we will be more resolved to walk in His commandments. We sing the song, “I am Resolved” in our song books by J. H. Fillmore. The song is based upon John 6:68 when Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” Peter and the other disciples of Jesus had the opportunity to turn away from the Lord after His sermon of hard sayings; however, they had resolved to follow the Lord because they had seen His miracles and heard His authorized words. The disciples had concluded that there was none other to turn to than Jesus. The

10 Ibid. Pg. 164
The apostle Paul illustrated resolve in his life too (cf. II Cor. 4:16-18; Phil. 3:12-14; II Tim. 4:6-8) (see study # 11).

- The road to hell is paved with **good intentions**. The people sign a covenant agreement with God to keep all of His commandments (cf. Neh. 10:29). They proclaim, “and we will not forsake the house of our God” (Neh. 10:39). Not long after the events of this chapter we find the people of God doing exactly what they said they would not do. Nehemiah writes, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” (Neh. 13:11) (see Exodus 24:1-11 for a similar situation) (see study # 20; The Road to Hell is often Paved with Good Intentions).

Chapter 12


A. “Now these are the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Gimmehoi, Abijah, Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedediah. Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, Jedediah. These were the chiefs of the priests and of their brethren in the days of Jeshua. Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, [and] Mattaniah, who was over the thanksgiving, he and his brethren. Also Bakbukiah and Unno, their brethren, were over against them according to their offices. And Jeshua begat Joiakim, and Joiakim begat Eliashib, and Eliashib begat Joiada, and Joiada begat Jonathan, and Jonathan begat Jaddua. And in the days of Joiakim were priests, heads of fathers' houses: of Seraiah, Meraiah: of Jeremiah, Hananiah: of Ezra, Meshullam: of Amariah, Jehohanan: of Malluch, Jonathan: of Shebaniah, Joseph: of Harim, Adna: of Meraioth, Helka: of Iddo, Zechariah: of Ginnethon, Meshullam: of Abijah, Zichri: of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai: of Bilgah, Shammua: of Shemaiah, Jehonathan: and of Joiarib, Mattenai: of Jedaiah, Uzzi: of Sallai, Kallai: of Amok, Eber: of Hilkiah, Hashabiah: of Jedediah, Nathaniel. As for the Levites, in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, there were recorded the heads of fathers' houses; also the priests, in the reign of Darius the Persian. The sons of Levi, heads of fathers' [houses], were written in the book of the chronicles, even until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. And the chiefs of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brethren over against them, to praise and give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, watch next to watch. Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, were porters keeping the watch at the store-houses of the gates. These were 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 the scribe” (12:1-26).

1. The above list of names is a compilation of those that had come up from Babylon with Zerubbabel and Jeshua the high priest. Most of these same names were given at Nehemiah 10:1-9 as those who had signed the agreement to keep all of God’s commandments.

2. Twenty two heads of the priests are enumerated in verses 1-7 and the heads of the Levites are given in verses 8-9, 22-24.

3. Notice that the gathering of the priests, Levites, and singers for the dedication of the wall was in accordance with the “commandment of David the man of God” (12:24).

II. The dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (12:27-47):

A. “And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps. And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites; also from Beth-gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves; and they purified the people, and the gates, and the wall” (12:27-30).

1. All the Levites were sought out and brought to Jerusalem for the dedication of the wall (a ceremony indicating that the wall of Jerusalem is to be set apart as holy). God had providentially cared for the people as they constructed it and to indicate their acknowledgment of God’s help they dedicate the wall unto Jehovah God.
2. According to the “commandment of David” the singers were to sing with “cymbals, psalteries, and with harps” (12:27). David had commanded this type of activity when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem and placed in the city of David (I Chron. 15:16). David had commanded that a portion of Levites be numbered and assigned to singing praises to God with instruments (I Chron. 23:1-6) (this is apparently the “singers” under consideration here in Nehemiah). David had also commanded that specific prophets were to “prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals” (I Chron. 25:1ff).
   a. Some today would say that this is their authority for using musical instruments in worship. Notice; however, that as Israel is back in their home land they are fulfilling the written “law of Moses” (cf. Ezra 3:2).
   b. Jesus nailed the Mosaic Law to the cross and thereby it has no authority over New Testament Christians (cf. Col. 2:14 / Gal. 5:4). Notice that the apostle Paul says that this law was “against us” in that it could not remove man’s sins (cf. Heb. 7:18-19; 10:1ff).
   c. The only Mosaic laws that are binding on man today are those that have been brought over into the law of Christ by Jesus or other NT inspired men. Jesus and the apostles revealed new covenant truths that included some Mosaic ordinances (such as the sin of murder, stealing, obeying parents etc.), however, it excluded others (giving of oaths, divorce for any cause, sacrificing animals on altars, etc.). When it comes to singing praises to God, the New Covenant under Jesus Christ simply states that we are to sing with our hearts (the text says nothing about instruments) (cf. Eph. 5:19) (see study # 21; Musical Instruments). A great lesson is learned throughout a study of God’s word in relation to how I am to interpret His word. When God tells us what He wants He does not express endless other options. For example, the Lord reveals to us first day of the week worship at Acts 20:7. God does not have to say though shalt not partake of the Lord’s Supper in worship on Monday, Tuesday, etc. He tells us what we need to know about a subject and we are not at liberty to change His commands (cf. Heb. 7:11ff when the author of Hebrews tells us that God ordained the priest to be of the tribe of Levi and that HE DID NOT HAVE TO SAY, “THOU SHALT NOT MAKE PRIEST OUT OF THE TRIBE OF GAD, REUBEN, ETC... again, when one examines God’s commands against idolatry at Exodus 20:24-26 and then compares these statements with Deuteronomy 4:15 one gains a better understanding of God’s methods of commanding. God said do this and he does not have to say, in relation to that law, don’t do this, that, and all else. Let us learn to respect God’s authority) (see study # 22; Bible Authority).

3. The priests, Levites, all the people, and gates of the wall were purified. “This was probably done, judging from the analogy of II Chron. 29:20, by the offering of sin-offerings and burnt-offerings, according to some special ritual unknown to us, as sacrifices of purification and dedication.”

B. “Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies that gave thanks and went in procession; whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall toward the dung gate: and after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, and certain of the priests’ sons with trumpets: 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; and his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God; and Ezra the scribe was before them. And by the fountain gate, and straight before them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water gate eastward” (12:31-37).

1. After the purification, Nehemiah divided the people into two groups. The two groups were to march in opposite directions on top of the city wall. Ezra, the priest and scribe, led one group and Nehemiah led the second group. “The starting-point of both companies and processions is

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11 Ibid. Pg. 172
not expressly stated, but may be easily inferred from the points mentioned, and can have been none other than the valley-gate, the present Jaffa gate.”

2. Note again that the “musical instruments of David the man of God” were to accompany them. The phrase, “of David” specifically indicates that he is the source of their authority for doing such a thing. David did this and even commanded it (cf. statements above) (see study # 21).

C. “And the other company of them that gave thanks went to meet them, and I after them, with the half of the people, upon the wall, above the tower of the furnaces, even unto the broad wall, and above the gate of Ephraim, and by the old gate, and by the fish gate, and the tower of Hananel, and the tower of Hammehah, even unto the sheep gate: and they stood still in the gate of the guard. So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me; and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; and Maaseiah, and Shemaiaih, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. And they offered great sacrifices that day, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy; and the women also and the children rejoiced: so that they joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off” (38-43).

1. As the two groups went along, the singers sang loud and offerings were made to God in a spirit of happiness and joy.

2. Nehemiah lead one group and Ezra the other.

D. “And on that day were men appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the heave-offerings, for the first-fruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them, according to the fields of the cities, the portions appointed by the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited. And they kept the charge of their God, and the charge of the purification, and so did the singers and the porters, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. For in the days of David and Asaph of old there was a chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God. And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers and the porters, as every day required: and they set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron. Finally, the people are determined to keep all of God’s commands” (12:44-47).

1. Verse 45 indicates, once again, the people’s resolve to keep God’s commandments (this included supporting the Levites, priests, and even singers in their work).

2. Nehemiah continues to press the point that the reason the singing with singers and musical instruments occurred was due to the “commandment of David, and of Solomon his son.” During the days of David and Asaph a chief of singers was appointed so that songs of praises with musical instruments would be offered to Jehovah God as a show of “thanksgiving” (see study # 21).

Chapter 13

I. The Levites are Neglected (13:1-14):

A. “On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that an Ammonite and a Moabite should not enter into the assembly of God for ever, because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, to curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. And it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude” (13:1-3).

1. “On that day” is an uncertain date but can be broadly confined to a time between the “twentieth year of Artaxerxes” (Neh. 2:1) and the “thirty second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon” (Neh. 13:6).

2. The people were prompted to request another public reading of the Law of Moses that commanded Israel to keep separate from the Ammonite and Moabite. Upon hearing the law, Israel remains resolved to keep all God’s laws and so the foreigners are separated from them.

12 Ibid. Pg. 173
B. “Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being allied unto Tobiah, had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meal-offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the grain, the new wine, and the oil, which were given by commandment to Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the heave-offerings for the priests. But in all this time I was not at Jerusalem; for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went unto the king: and after certain days asked I leave of the king, and I came to Jerusalem, and understood the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God” (13:4-7).

1. After the reading of Nehemiah 6:17ff we knew that we had not heard the last of Tobiah.

2. Let us recall that Tobiah was the individual who laughed God’s people to scorn for even attempting to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 2:19) and teamed up with Sanballat in an attempt to cause the work of the wall to stop (cf. Neh. 4:7-8). Tobiah was also an Ammonite (cf. Neh. 4:3). When the people saw that this foreigner was given a place in the house of God that was reserved for priests they were not happy. It is thereby most probable that Eliashib’s wicked works were the cause for the public reading of the law.

3. Nehemiah had been away in Babylon (back to his duties as the cupbearer to king Artaxerxes). Nehemiah asks leave of the king to return to Jerusalem to see how God’s people fared only to find that they had transgressed God’s laws. It is likely that after the reading of the law and Tobiah was found to be an Amonite in unlawful relationship with Israel that a scout returned to Babylon and told Nehemiah of the on goings in Jerusalem.

4. The great chamber that Eliashib gave Tobiah was probably the chamber which held all the offerings that the congregation was to give to the priest (one tenth of their sustenance; Deut. 18:3). Of this tenth, the priests were to receive a tenth of and it was known as the “heave-offering.”

C. “And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meal-offerings and the frankincense” (13:8-9).

1. Nehemiah finds Tobiah dwelling in the chamber of the house of God upon arrival in Jerusalem.

2. Nehemiah is filled with grief. Tobiah is cast out of the temple along with all his belongings. Nehemiah then commands that the chambers be cleansed from this defiled guest.

D. “And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them; so that the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. Then brought all Judah the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries. And I made treasures over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were counted faithful, and their business was to distribute unto their brethren. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the observance thereof” (13:10-14).

1. During the time that Nehemiah was back in Babylon, the tithes of the people had halted. The Levites were forced into the fields to labor for their food to sustain themselves and their families. No Levites to do the ministry of the temple meant that there was no following of God’s ordinances regarding the daily, monthly, and annual sacrifices.

2. Nehemiah shames the rulers by contending with them saying, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” The rulers and people had not long back vowed to “not forsake the house of our God” (Neh. 10:39b), however, after a little time passes they turned their backs on God’s commandments.

3. Nehemiah quickly corrects the problem and asks the Lord to remember this good work.

II. Nehemiah finds Israel Profaning the Sabbath (13:15-22):

A. “In those days saw I in Judah some men treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses therewith; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, who brought in fish, and all
manner of wares, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath” (13:15-18).

1. The Sabbath day was to be a day of rest. Absolutely no labor was to take place on this day (cf. Ex. 20:8-11). Nehemiah observed Jerusalem on the Sabbath and found that it looked no different than any other day of the week in that people were working and trading.

2. Said violation of God caused Nehemiah to contend with the nobles once again saying, “What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day?”

3. Nehemiah calls to the noble’s remembrance the fact that Israel suffered at the hands of Babylon for such offenses (cf. Jer. 17).

4. Again, Nehemiah illustrates the character of action when God’s laws are set aside.

B. “And it came to pass that, when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut, and commanded that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath: and some of my servants set I over the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day” (13:19).

1. Nehemiah was a man of actions when it came to God’s laws being violated. He takes matters into his own hand and commands that the gates (where trade and commerce took place) be closed the night before the Sabbath and not opened until after the Sabbath.

2. Nehemiah was so adamant about the keeping of the Sabbath that he set guards over the gate so that no one would enter with goods to trade.

C. “So the merchants and sellers of all kind of wares lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the Sabbath” (13:20-21).

1. Nehemiah had a zero tolerance policy when it came to men violating God’s laws. When the merchants came to Jerusalem and found the gates closed they decided to camp out until the Sabbath was over.

2. Nehemiah took offense to this in that it was clear that the merchants cared nothing for the Laws of God and their very presence was a temptation to the people of Israel to violate God’s Sabbath laws.

D. “And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember unto me, O my God, this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy lovingkindness” (13:22).

1. The Levites were just as guilty as the others who violated the Sabbath. Nehemiah commands that they purify themselves and get back to keeping God’s laws regarding the Sabbath.

2. It is interesting to note Nehemiah’s remarks after each of the transgressions of the people in this chapter. Three sins are identified (i.e., house of God is forsaken, Sabbath is profaned, and the people had intermarried foreigners). Nehemiah writes three times, “remember me O my God...” (Neh. 13:14, 22, 31). Note at verse 22 he adds, “and spare me...”

3. It seems as though Nehemiah realizes that the people will do sin as they so choose. God’s people often need spiritually minded convicted men to continue an onslaught of Bible teaching and correction for the sake of their souls. Nehemiah realized, however, that no matter how convicted he may be some of the people were always going to choose the wrong. Nehemiah thereby asks the Lord to remember his good works in these areas of the people’s error.

4. Today, the church of Christ needs strong and convicted elders to keep the people of God motivated to do those things that are surely commanded in God’s word to do. Note that Nehemiah identified the problems, warned the guilty involved, and took action to solve the problem.

II. A Third Evil Act Detected and Dealt with Sharply (13:23-31):

A. “In those days also saw I the Jews that had married women of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people” (13:23-24).
1. Nehemiah found that God’s people had once again polluted themselves with foreign wives (cf. Ezra 10:10-12).
2. The children of these marriages could not even speak the Hebrew tongue. Their language was that of Ashdod (Philistia), the Ammonites, and Moabites.

B. “And I contended with them, and cursed them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, and he was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did foreign women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to trespass against our God in marrying foreign women?” (13:25-27).

1. The zeal of Nehemiah toward God’s laws is depicted here. Once again some of God’s people had violated the laws of marriage given at Ex. 34:14-17; Deut. 7:3. Though the Law of Moses specifically forbid intermarriage with the Canaanites it is apparent that others (such as the Ashdodites, Ammonites, and Moabites) were included as those who had the potential of causing God’s people to sin. Nehemiah uses the example of Solomon in that he married many foreign women and they caused him to worship other gods.
2. Nehemiah terms the marrying of foreign women a “great evil” because it affronted God’s laws of marriage. Again, Nehemiah is one who illustrates great love and respect for God’s laws.
3. Nehemiah’s love for God’s laws are illustrated in 6 ways in relation to the people marrying foreign women:
   a. Nehemiah contended with them over the matter.
   b. Nehemiah cursed them for their wicked works.
   c. Nehemiah plucked out the hair of some of them.
   d. Nehemiah even executed some.
   e. He makes the survivors swear by God that they will no longer violate the Lord’s marriage laws by marrying foreigners.
   f. Lastly, Nehemiah gives the survivors an example (i.e., Solomon) regarding what can happen when one so sins against God.

C. “And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and the Levites” (13:28-29).

1. Nehemiah runs off Sanballat’s son-in-law Joiada (who was the son of the high priest Eliashib). In this particular case of inner-marriage, “Nehemiah was obliged to interfere with authority. For this marriage was a pollution of the priesthood, and a breach of the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.” (Cf. Lev. 21:6-8). Herein we see the importance of keeping the genealogies in these days.
2. Nehemiah asks the Lord to remember the wicked works of the people in that they defiled the priesthood. Again, such statements indicate a zeal for God’s laws.

D. “Thus cleansed I them from all foreigners, and appointed charges for the priests and for the Levites, every one in his work; and for the wood-offering, at times appointed, and for the first-fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good” (13:30-31).

1. Nehemiah was successful in cleansing the guilty parties of their wrongful marriages. To further see to it that God’s ordinances, regarding the burnt-offerings and thank offerings, be kept Nehemiah appoints people in charge of those things to see to it that they are done.
2. Lastly, Nehemiah once again asks the Lord to remember his good work in relation to His laws.
3. One may ask, “Where was Ezra during these events?” The fact of the matter is that we are not told. He could have died or traveled to another land. Worse yet he may have tolerated the wicked deeds that transpired at the end of Nehemiah. Previous studies of Ezra’s love for God’s laws seem to militate against the conclusion that he tolerated their wicked works.

13 Ibid. Pg. 184
Lessons Learned from chapters 12-13

• Nehemiah gathers the Levites and general population together that the wall of Jerusalem may be dedicated, in a spirit of joy, unto the Lord (Neh. 12:27, 30). David had commanded that singers be selected from the Levites to praise God with musical instruments in times past (cf. I Chron. 23:1-6; Neh. 12:27, 36, 45). Note that “the commandment of David” (Neh. 12:24) regarding singing with the “musical instrument” (Neh. 12:36) was “the charge of God” (Neh. 12:45). Nehemiah is careful to prove that their singing with “musical instruments” was by the authority of God. Likewise, we do not use musical instruments under New Testament law by the authority of God (cf. Eph. 5:19) because the old law has been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14; Gal. 5:4). Ezra 3:10-11 teaches the same lesson (see study # 21).

• Ezra leads a procession one way on the wall and Nehemiah leads another in the opposite direction singing and playing their instruments aloud that they may “give thanks” to God (Neh. 12:38). The lesson: The people were thankful for God’s providential care in accomplishing the work of the wall. Let us be ever thankful for God’s care for us (I Thess. 5:18) (see study # 23; Thankfulness).

• We cannot afford to overlook the enemies of God. Tobiah cared nothing about the spiritual side of Israel (cf. Neh. 2:10, 19; 4:1-7; 6:1-14, 17-19). Let us beware of such individuals (Phil. 3:17-18).

• The last lesson we learn may have the ring of selfishness, however, when one considers the fact that each of us will stand before the judgment seat of God alone we must make sure that we are right. Nehemiah found the people guilty of sin on three counts after returning to Jerusalem from his duties to Artaxerxes twelve years latter. The Lord’s people had “forsaken” the house of God in that they had not given the Levites and priest their dues and thereby forcing them into the fields to work for their sustenance (Neh. 13:10-14). Secondly, the people of God had forsook the Sabbath day in that they were working (Neh. 13:15-22). Lastly, Israel had once again involved themselves with foreign women (Neh. 13:23-30). Nehemiah took actions to correct each of these sins and appears to be very successful. What seems interesting is that after each of these sins is enumerated there is a common denominator statement made by Nehemiah; i.e., “Remember me, O my God, concerning this... spare me according to the greatness of thy lovingkindness...” (cf. Neh. 13:14, 22, 31). Lesson: No matter how much good and zealous works I may do to help others walk the right path in life the final decision belongs to the individual. The book of Nehemiah only covers a span of about 12 years, however, it is a story of the ups and downs of God’s people in relationship to keeping His laws. It seems that Nehemiah’s conclusion was that he had a duty to perform, he did so, and most everyone else was going to do what they really wanted to do (cf. II Tim. 2:15). Each and every Christian has individual responsibility and duty in relation to spiritual life. The best we can do is to observe those duties. Unfortunately, we may preach our hearts out yet the ungodly will often continue in their unlawful ways (see study # 24; The Christian’s Duty).