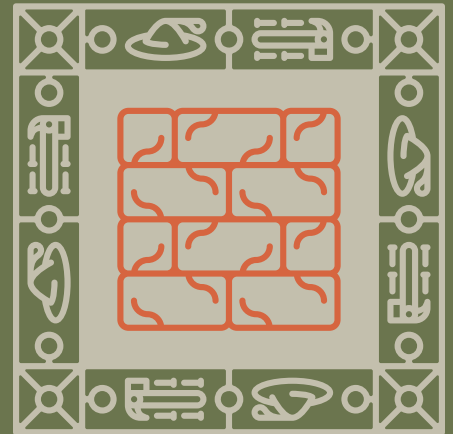
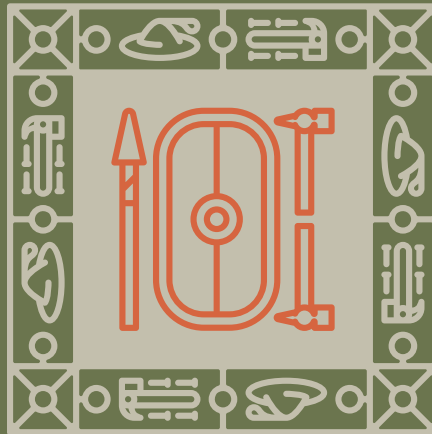
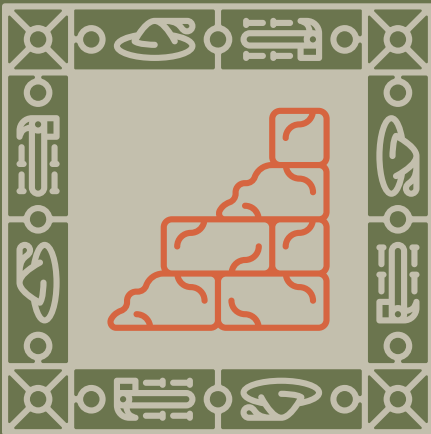
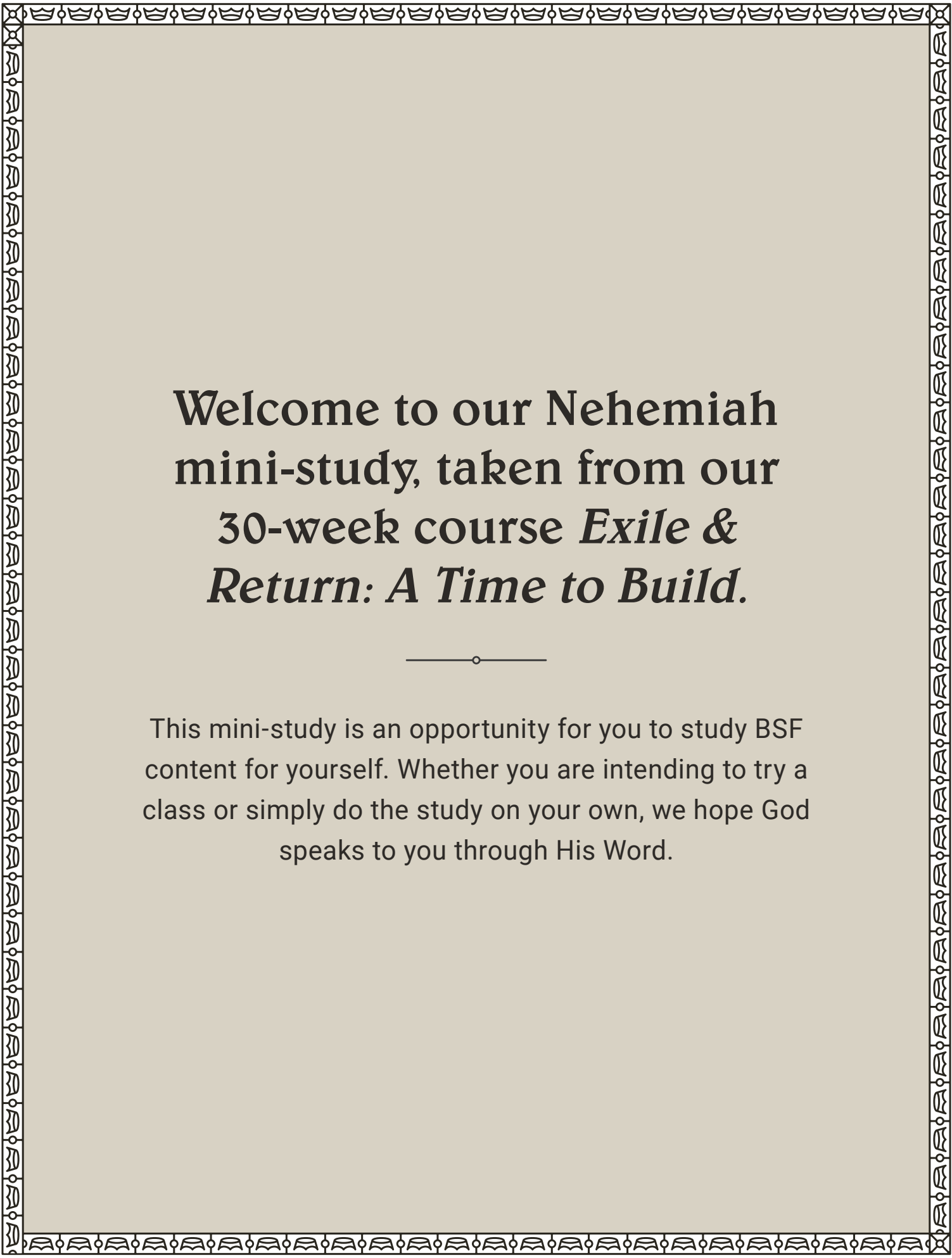


Exile & Return



Nehemiah

BUILD WITH PERSERVERANCE



Welcome to our Nehemiah mini-study, taken from our 30-week course *Exile & Return: A Time to Build*.

This mini-study is an opportunity for you to study BSF content for yourself. Whether you are intending to try a class or simply do the study on your own, we hope God speaks to you through His Word.



What is BSF?

Bible Study Fellowship is a global community of 450,000 men, women, students, and kids studying God's Word together. Each year, BSF groups study for 30 weeks, either in person or online.

How does the Bible study work?

This sample study includes three lessons. Each lesson takes one week to complete.

To get started:

1. Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
2. If completing the study in a BSF group, discuss your answers collectively each week.
3. Listen to the weekly teaching on the week's passage (with your group or via the recorded audio lecture).
4. Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

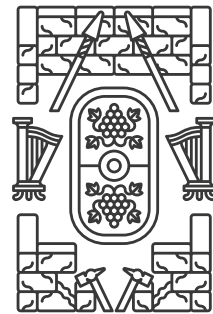
Repeat for each lesson!

How do I join BSF?

If a friend has invited you to join their group, simply attend with them. Otherwise, to find a class in your local area, or to join a BSF Online group, go to join.bsfinternational.org.

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others. Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!





Call to the Wall

Lesson 23 Questions

Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day. If completing the mini-study in a BSF group, answer the questions before the group meets to discuss the answers.

First Day

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help you anticipate and appreciate the coming kingdom of God?
2. In what ways did the notes bolster your understanding of the balance between God's judgment and restoration?

Second Day: Read Nehemiah 1.

Nehemiah, a Jewish cupbearer to the Persian king, received and responded to news from Jerusalem.

3. Describe the news Nehemiah heard from Jerusalem and his response.
4. a. In his prayer, what did Nehemiah say about the following?
 - God's character
 - God's people
 - God's promises

Nehemiah's desire

- b. What does Nehemiah's prayer say about his relationship with God and God's people? Why is this important?
-
- 5. Describe your confidence, desire, and motivation to seek God and serve His people. (See also John 15:5-17.) What might you ask God to change?

Third Day: Read Nehemiah 2:1-10.

Nehemiah sought and received permission to rebuild Jerusalem's wall and gates.

- 6. What prompted Nehemiah to make his request to Artaxerxes? Why was Nehemiah afraid?
-
- 7.
 - a. Describe the wisdom of Nehemiah's practical request in verses 7-9. (See also Ezra 4:7-24.)
 - b. Why are practical provisions a wise and necessary consideration when following God's will?
-
- 8.
 - a. What protection and strength did Nehemiah possess as he began his mission?
 - b. On what strength do you rely when undertaking work for God?

Fourth Day: Read Nehemiah 2:11-20.

Nehemiah inspected Jerusalem's wall before encouraging the people to start rebuilding.

- 9.
 - a. What might have led Nehemiah to survey the state of Jerusalem's wall at night?
 - b. How does it help God's people to understand the scope of a task before beginning work on it?
-
- 10.
 - a. In what ways did Nehemiah encourage the people to start rebuilding?

b. What helps you move forward on a new endeavor or into a new season of life?

c. How can you encourage others when facing a challenging task together?

11. a. In what ways did Nehemiah build strength and confidence in the face of opposition?

(See also Nehemiah 2:10.)

b. How does opposition impact the way you profess and practice your faith?

Fifth Day: Read Nehemiah 3.

Nehemiah delegated the work on the wall to all the people.

12. How did Nehemiah's delegation of work assignments develop unity and leverage diversity?

13. What significance do you see in work assignments being given to priests, Levites, and temple servants at the beginning and throughout the project (3:1-2, 17, 20, 22, 28)?

14. a. How does this chapter highlight the importance of a community of faith that is united and focused on God?

b. In what ways does this inspire you in your role in your local church and ministries?

Sixth Day: Review Nehemiah 1–3.

God rebuilds and transforms His people, unifying them in prayerful obedience.

15. What strengths of Nehemiah's leadership do you desire for God to build in you, and how will you pray accordingly?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Nehemiah 1–3

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

Lecture

Now that you have completed the daily questions, listen to the teaching based on this week's passage. If you are part of a group, you will hear the lecture during your weekly gathering. If you are doing this study on your own, listen to the recorded audio lecture.



There are two ways to listen to this week's audio lecture.

Option 1: Go to bsfinternational.org/trybsf.

Option 2: Scan this QR code.

Lecture Notes

[illegible]

Next step: Read the lesson notes.

Lesson 23 Notes

Dig deeper into this week's passage by reading the lesson notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

Nehemiah 1–3

Focus Verse

"Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.'" (Nehemiah 2:17)

Outline

- Overview of Nehemiah
- Nehemiah's Prayer – Nehemiah 1
- Nehemiah's Mission – Nehemiah 2–3

Engage

This world's permeating darkness and perpetual brokenness leave us in an unending pursuit of damage control. An illicit thought, a martyr's death, a broken relationship, an unconscionable war, a natural disaster, a seemingly unbreakable addiction, or the devastating consequences of an unwise choice can open the gates of mourning, remorse, and despair. We might ask, "What's the purpose in all of this? How can I survive in this messed-up world?"

For a person of faith, hope is never lost. How do you respond when challenges flatten you? What sends you to your knees before God in raw desperation? How does your heart break when you see others suffer or malign God? Darkness may seem to leave us paralyzed in hopelessness but also provides an opportunity to turn to the Light. **God rebuilds and transforms His people, unifying them in prayerful obedience.** Trusting God leads to bold requests and courageous actions grounded in His sufficiency and power.

Overview of Nehemiah

Timing

Following starts and stops in Israel's rebuilding of Jerusalem, God appointed and anointed Nehemiah to lead His people. God raised up Nehemiah to plan and complete the rebuilding of the city's protective wall and lead the people in covenantal devotion to God. **Regular worship at Jerusalem's temple depended upon the security of the city.** Nehemiah entered Jerusalem as part of the third and final wave of former exiles in 444 BC. The initial returning remnant had been back in Judea for more than 90 years, two decades longer than their Babylonian exile.

Who Is Nehemiah?

His role: Nehemiah, whose name means “Yahweh has comforted,” served as cupbearer to Persian king Artaxerxes. Appointed governor of Judah, Nehemiah was tasked to lead God’s people to rebuild Jerusalem and the city’s wall.

His message: God leads His people to trust Him as they accomplish His will and withstand the enemy’s persecution and schemes.

Image to remember: City wall

Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest led the first 50,000 exiles to Judah in 538 BC.¹ They worked on rebuilding the temple until they were stalled by opposition for 16 years. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached and encouraged the people, who set their hands to work again. They finished the temple in 515 BC.

After these events, Ezra the priest arrived in Jerusalem with a second group in 458 BC.² The people had not returned to idolatry, but the priests, rulers, and common people who settled in Jerusalem had intermarried with the surrounding Gentiles.

Circumstances in Jerusalem remained very discouraging in 445 BC, where this lesson begins.

Although the temple had been rebuilt and worship reinstituted, Jerusalem’s wall, gates, and city remained in ruins. Neighboring nations constantly harassed and oppressed the disheartened remnant living in and around Jerusalem. Wealthier Jews shackled the poor into debt and slavery.³ Commerce encroached upon Sabbath observance and other God-given obligations of God’s people.⁴ Ezra the priest rallied the people to reestablish God-glorifying civil, social, and religious lives. God also called Nehemiah to specific tasks.

The book bearing Nehemiah's name tells the story of his call and service to both God and his own generation. The events within this book’s pages cover approximately 13 years of Nehemiah’s leadership, from 444-432 BC, before he returned to Persia as promised. Nehemiah likely made several journeys between Persian capitals and Jerusalem during his governorship and beyond.

Purpose and Themes

With Nehemiah as the central figure, this book alternates between first- and third-person accounts. Theologians debate whether Nehemiah wrote as the book’s sole author or coauthored it with Ezra. In fact, the Hebrew Bible considers Ezra and Nehemiah as one book. **Today the book of Nehemiah is considered a sequel to Ezra.** Key themes of Nehemiah include the power of prayer; the nature of leadership; God’s purpose, provision, and protection of His people; God’s mercy and faithfulness to His people; and the necessity of worship in a believer’s life of faith.

1. **First wave:** Ezra 1–2

2. **Ezra’s return:** Ezra 7–10

3. **Debt:** Nehemiah 5:1-12

4. **Violating Sabbath:** Nehemiah 13:15-18

● Nehemiah's Prayer – Nehemiah 1

News from Home – 1:1-4

The book opens in late 445 BC with Nehemiah living in Susa, located southwest of present-day Iran, about 150 miles (about 240 km) north of the Persian Gulf. King Artaxerxes, the world's most powerful king at that time, made his royal winter home there.

Nehemiah, a Jew born in exile, had earned the Persian king's significant trust and served as his cupbearer.⁵ This most honorable and sought-after role involved tasting all of this king's wine before he drank, protecting him from treasonous poisoning. Always in the company of the king, the carefully selected cupbearer held a position of intimacy and influence.

It is unknown whether Nehemiah's brother Hanani and his comrades had returned to Jerusalem with the earlier waves of exiles or resided in Persia. Either way, they brought troubling news to the king's cupbearer. The "Jewish remnant"—faithful, covenant-keeping Jewish believers—had become disgraced, discouraged, and demoralized. **The city's wall and gates remained dilapidated and destroyed following Nebuchadnezzar's devastating attack 140 years earlier.**⁶ Perhaps earlier reconstruction attempts had never begun or had been thwarted by a previous king's decree.⁷ The broken-down wall and burned gates left inhabitants vulnerable to attack and plunder by surrounding hostile neighbors. Only the newly restored temple stood amid the ruins of God's chosen city.

Nehemiah's high position in the Persian court did not diminish his identification with his fellow people of faith. His comfortable circumstances only amplified his misery as he remembered Israel and Jerusalem as God's gifts to His people. **In deep mourning, Nehemiah began to pray day and night.**

Appeal to God – 1:5-11

God's people must always be people of prayer, but bad news heightens urgency. The state of Nehemiah's true homeland and people weighed heavily on his heart. After several days, he found words to articulate his heart's cry to the Lord. His prayer fell into a four-fold pattern of connection, confession, claim, and call.

Connection (1:5-6a) – Prayer brings connection with a personal God. Nehemiah recognized God as the all-powerful God of heaven and also as a living being who actually listens, as a man might bend down to hear his little child's request. **Our covenant-keeping God is a Father who loves steadfastly and desires His people's love in return.** God's people express their love through obedience to Him.

Confession (1:6b-7) – In inclusive humility, Nehemiah recognized that as sinners, neither he nor his people deserved God's grace or help. **Instead of complaint, self-pity, or blame, Nehemiah acknowledged the basic underlying cause of this trouble.** The rebellious people had ignored God and His law and remained outside the sphere of His blessing. God's "commands, decrees and laws" rise as the centerpiece of this prayer and are prominent throughout the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.⁸

Claim (1:8-9) – Remembering God's promises and humbly pleading for God's grace, Nehemiah stretched to lay hold of those promises. Nehemiah recalled Moses, who had called on God and

5. Cupbearer: Nehemiah 1:11

6. Babylon's conquest: 2 Kings 25:10

7. Decree: Ezra 4:7-23

8. Prominence of Mosaic law: Ezra 3:2; 6:18; 7:6; Nehemiah 1:8; 8:1, 14; 9:14; 10:29; 13:1

remembered His promises after God rightfully judged His people's sin.⁹ **In faithful and full agreement with his sovereign Lord, Nehemiah acknowledged God's decree to scatter His disobedient people¹⁰ and bless their obedience.**¹¹ Nehemiah leveraged that promise. Exile had scattered God's disobedient people, but repentance would bring promised restoration.¹² Nehemiah's reference to the "farthest horizon" casts vision beyond the return of God's people to Jerusalem. Nehemiah reminds us that God's people will one day gather with everlasting joy in the new Jerusalem.¹³

Call (1:10-11) – Nehemiah's prayer incorporated a specific call to the Lord, not a vague request. **Nehemiah asked God to give him favor with King Artaxerxes so something might be done for God's people.** He remembered God's redeeming power and strength. As a secular king's cupbearer but also Holy God's faithful servant, Nehemiah asked the Lord to bless those who honored His great name.

The heart behind Nehemiah's humble appeal echoes throughout Scripture. Faithful leaders share his concern for God's people.¹⁴ **Most importantly, Nehemiah's selfless intercession foreshadowed Jesus Christ's intercession for His people before God the Father.**¹⁵

● Nehemiah's Mission – Nehemiah 2–3

Appeal to the King – 2:1-10

Distress (2:1-3) – Four months after hearing about Jerusalem's sorry state, Nehemiah could no longer hide his disquieted spirit from the king. Perhaps his role as cupbearer required him to be positive and encouraging. When the king noticed and inquired about his servant's dour countenance, fear gripped Nehemiah. He may have worried his request would seem disloyal or even put his life at risk. After all, Artaxerxes had once been lured into halting work in Jerusalem.¹⁶ Rather than cower or invent an excuse, Nehemiah laid out his respectful yet bold request. **While maintaining his loyalty, Nehemiah honestly and transparently revealed the source of his grief: his ancestral home remained in ruins.**

Request (2:4-5) – The king asked what his servant desired, indicating a high level of trust and respect for Nehemiah. Nehemiah demonstrated trust and respect for his Lord. He lifted a silent, urgent prayer for God's guidance. **Like Isaiah responding to the temple vision more than 300 years earlier,¹⁷ the honorable Nehemiah requested to be sent to Judah to help rebuild the holy capital.**

Documentation (2:6-9) – The queen's presence suggests the matter may have included her influence and approval. The king endorsed Nehemiah's request, asking only when he might return to his duties in Persia. **Like Daniel decades before, it is likely the faithful Nehemiah provided invaluable service and profound, godly witness to a secular king.**

Years of serving the king prepared Nehemiah. He understood the necessary documentation and supplies needed to navigate toward Judah. **Probably aware of previously ill-gotten decrees that had halted work,¹⁸ Nehemiah sought official letters to confirm passage and materials for his rebuilding**

9. Remembered promises: Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:27

10. Scattered for disobedience: Leviticus 26:27-33; Deuteronomy 4:25-27; 28:64

11. Blessed for obedience: Leviticus 26:3-13; Deuteronomy 28:1-14

12. Restoration: Leviticus 26:40-42; Deuteronomy 4:29-31; 30:1-6

13. Everlasting joy: Isaiah 35:10

14. Faithful leadership: Genesis 6:18-22; 12:1-3; Exodus 3:7-10; 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Matthew 16:13-19; Acts 9:1-16; Hebrews 11

15. Intercession: Hebrews 7:25

16. Decree to halt work: Ezra 4:12-13, 19-22

17. Send me: Isaiah 6:8

18. Previous decrees: Ezra 4:7-24

Called to Hard Things

The Doctrine of the Cross for a Believer

Like the heroes of faith before him—Ezekiel, Daniel, Ezra, Esther, Haggai, and Zechariah—Nehemiah discovered firsthand that a life of faith is not easy. Nehemiah's burden included leading the rehabilitation of Jerusalem's wall and gates and stoking the faith of God's people. Jesus later articulated His own burden of full obedience on His way to His death. **"Whoever wants to be my disciple," He declared, "must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."**¹

God calls every believer in every age to surrender their personal plans and seek His perfect will. Before, during, and after Jesus's days on earth, faithful men and women displayed personal sacrifice, unwavering devotion, and humble service to the sovereign, eternal God. God calls His people to seek His will and follow His lead, even when doing so involves difficulties or challenges. This is how believers deny themselves and take up Jesus's cross.

The refusal to take up one's cross reveals faulty faith, if not unbelief. Making comfort our primary pursuit may seem appealing. However, rejecting sacrifice means living for one's personal kingdom rather than God's eternal one. Putting ourselves first exhibits the sin of idolatry. A life dominated by self-interest stands on shifting sand rather than the unwavering rock of faith that Jesus offers.

To carry the cross of faith is to embrace holy, eternal vision. A true believer who lives a humble, sacrificial, God-first life possesses enduring joy, even amid life's struggles. Persecution comes with belief and indicates that the believer is progressing along God's righteous path. Hardship and suffering are never easy. However, any loss on earth for Christ's sake is worth the eternal gain.

1. Take up cross: Luke 9:23

efforts. Artaxerxes had earlier shown Ezra generosity regarding the temple's reconstruction.¹⁹ Now he not only granted Nehemiah's request but provided an armed escort for the journey. God clearly displayed His sovereignty over all His creation, as He had earlier through the generosity of Cyrus²⁰ and Darius.²¹ God wove Artaxerxes's imperial authority into His divine plan.

Hostility (2:10) – God's blessing almost always encounters opposition. Sanballat likely came from the Beth Horon region near Jerusalem²² and later became governor of Samaria. He and his ally, Tobiah of the Ammonites, longtime enemies of Israel,²³ could not stand for a potential rival power to rise in the region. These two men emerged as prime antagonists of the Israelites' efforts.

Appeal to the People – 2:11-20

Secret Inspection (2:11-16) – Until he arrived in Jerusalem in early 444 BC, Nehemiah relied on trusted third-person accounts of Jerusalem's condition. **Now he wisely sought to survey the damage**

19. Artaxerxes's generosity: Ezra 7:21-24

20. Cyrus: Ezra 1:1-4

21. Darius: Ezra 6:8-12

22. Beth Horon: Joshua 16:3, 5

23. Ammon's opposition: 2 Samuel 10:1-11

firsthand to discern what would be required to rehabilitate the city's wall. Not wanting to tip his hand to his enemies or alarm his already demoralized countrymen, Nehemiah set out on a secret mission to assess the damage.

Likely traveling by donkey, Nehemiah primarily surveyed the southern and eastern portions of the wall designed to protect the City of David, the oldest portion of Jerusalem. **Nehemiah's three nights of surveillance revealed the Fountain Gate area too heavily damaged to pass through.** This may have been the location of the Pool of Siloam,²⁴ where Jesus would give sight to a blind man. Nehemiah did not allow the rubble to become a stumbling block to his God-ordained mission.

Appeal and Reply (2:17-18) – Like an athletic coach imploring a team facing a formidable opponent, Nehemiah laid four truths before Jerusalem's community leaders, officials, priests, and nobles.

- **The problem:** The city and gates lay in ruins.
- **The potential:** Rebuilding would elevate the people from disgrace.
- **The power:** God's blessing was upon them.
- **The practicality:** The king had given them approval and provision.

As if stepping onto an athletic field with unquenchable confidence, the people replied, "Let us start rebuilding." And they began to work. **The people responded to Nehemiah's bold leadership with courageous confidence, embracing a new season.**

Similarly, Jesus Christ builds His Church by redeeming people ruined by sin. The gift of faith in Jesus Christ lifts us from darkness and shame, bringing His people together as the body of Christ.²⁵ **We come to Jesus broken, and He rebuilds our lives in Him, through Him, and for Him.**

Facing the Enemy (2:19-20) – God's enemies see only what the world sees. Blind to God and His ways, Sanballat, Tobiah, and another foe, Gesham the Arab, mocked the Israelites and accused them of rebellion against the king. Though he had proactively attained royal approval, Nehemiah pointed to his divine authority, not the royal edict. "The God of heaven will give us success," Nehemiah declared. **The gates of hell cannot overcome the Church;²⁶ neither can God's enemies defeat His sovereign purposes on earth.**

Delegating the Work – 3

Nehemiah designed, delegated, and distributed the people's work. They responded to their leader's charge in unity, believing God would bless them with success. Systematically focused on the wall's gates where enemies would most likely attack, Nehemiah's plan moved counter-clockwise. He began and ended at the Sheep Gate on the north side of the city.²⁷ Incredibly, and against significant opposition, Nehemiah completed the wall-building project within 52 days.

Sheep Gate (3:1-2) – Fittingly, the high priest set the example for the people, providing both physical and spiritual rehabilitation. Eliashib and his priests assumed responsibility for the Sheep Gate, near the temple and the Pool of Bethesda.²⁸ It is likely the sheep destined for sacrifice entered the city through this gate. The priests worked on the wall toward the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower

24. Pool of Siloam: John 9:7

25. Building of the Church: Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:11-16

26. Enemies thwarted: Matthew 16:18

27. Map of Jerusalem: See the map in the Preface of the book or in the Resource Library (keyword search: map).

28. Sheep Gate: John 5:2

of Hananel. The Tower of the Hundred may have been headquarters for a centurion with 100 men. The tower's height of 100 cubits or 100 steps could also have contributed to its name. The Tower of Hananel, which stood in the northernmost part of the city, probably was "the citadel by the temple" mentioned in Nehemiah 2:8.

Fish Gate (3:3-5) – One of the main entrances in the days of the First Temple,²⁹ the next gate may also have been known as the Ephraim Gate.³⁰ **In the northwest corner of the city, this gate was likely near the fish market.** Some of the workers named in these verses also appear in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, suggesting this project was one within a series. Perhaps resenting Nehemiah's leadership or manual labor, Tekoa's nobles refused to work. However, these men did not represent all associated with Tekoa, as some also worked near the Water Gate (3:27).

Jeshanah Gate (3:6-12) – The next section, on the west side, highlights the diverse workers, gifts, and talents within the city, including goldsmiths, perfume-makers, and administrators. The work also reveals the project's personal stake as workers such as Jedaiah "made repairs opposite his house." This reclamation became a family affair, shown by Shallum, who received help from his daughters.

Valley and Dung Gates (3:13-14) – The wall reconstruction assignments continued southward to the Valley Gate on the southwestern side. **Next came the Dung Gate, the opening toward the city dump at the southern tip of the wall complex.**

Fountain Gate (3:15-16) – The assignments continued to the east wall, which suffered the most severe damage. This explains why so many worked between the Fountain Gate and Water Gate, which opened to the Gihon Spring—the primary water source outside the city wall. This wall protected the City of David, the part of the city originally occupied by King David up to the Temple Mount. The House of the Heroes might have been the armory where David housed his mighty warriors.³¹

Levites and Priests (3:17-27) – Nehemiah's rehabilitation project not only attended to physical repair but also spiritual reformation. **Shoulder-to-shoulder, Jerusalem's spiritual leaders did their part to provide a hedge of protection for the people God had entrusted to their care.** The upper palace was Solomon's palace, higher up the hill from David's original palace. The hill of Ophel was the beginning of the hill that led to the temple, the primary concern of the first returnees.

Above the Horse Gate (3:28-32) – As the work assignments closed the loop back to the Sheep Gate, we are reminded of the proximity of the workers' living quarters and their primary vocations. **God called His people outside of their comfort zones—their homes and their crafts—to become unified in a common and holy cause.** Believers are strengthened when they minister side by side.

All the names listed in this chapter, in God's perfect Word, for posterity and eternity, were woven into the fabric of the community of the rebuilt Jerusalem. These lists also prefigure how all God's people are woven into the fabric of the new Jerusalem to come as kingdom ambassadors.

The Jewish remnant faced not only external opposition but also internal hurdles in completing their work. The people who had lived under the yoke of exile for 70 years were still not fully liberated in their homeland as they faced humiliation, frustration, and persecution from neighboring peoples. Even rebuilding required approval from a Persian power. God's people desperately needed His hope, blessing, and strength to rebuild the city devoted to Him. Led by Nehemiah and blessed by God, this

29. Main entrance: 2 Chronicles 33:14; Zephaniah 1:10

30. Ephraim Gate: Nehemiah 8:16

31. David's mighty warriors: 2 Samuel 23:8-39

community of believers saw beyond their struggle as God continued to refine their faith. **God rebuilds and transforms His people, unifying them in prayerful obedience.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Nehemiah remained faithful to God while humbly serving a secular king. News from Jerusalem revealed his primary and ultimate devotion to the eternal King and His people. Word of the decrepit state of his beloved and defenseless city sent Nehemiah into mourning. **Unable to restrain his emotions any longer, Nehemiah appealed to his Persian king, who granted permission, provision, and passage to rehabilitate a nation and a people.**

Facing persistent opposition only emboldened Nehemiah's resolve as he inspected the extensive damage. He mapped and delegated the workload, recruiting a diverse yet unified workforce to rebuild Jerusalem's wall. Every stone presented a burden and also an opportunity for countless countrymen and women to rebuild a new life in faith.

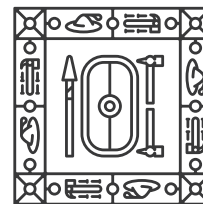
Apply It

Though born in exile, Nehemiah's heart belonged to Jerusalem, reflecting his faith and devotion to the one true God. Distance and favorable circumstances could not shield him from the devastating news of Jerusalem's vulnerable and debilitating condition. Faith and trust in God led Nehemiah to deep mourning, committed prayer, and bold action. How does the physical and spiritual state of the world impact you? **We must not allow our own comfort to blind us to the needs around us.** How do you respond to brokenness that abounds at global, national, local, neighborhood, and personal levels? God deliberately positions His people where they can represent Him. Consider where God has placed you. What burden has God placed on your heart? How will you follow His lead and take action?

Often we find God's answer to our prayers or the painfully obvious choice in front of us troubling. God's calls on our lives often begin with a burden we cannot shake. Nehemiah recognized the problem but knew opposition awaited him. He drew on God's strength, a king's permission, and a community of faith to courageously forge forward and tackle a daunting task. Regardless of our circumstances, we experience God's overcoming power when we trust Him, obey His will, and abide in Him.³² How has God opened your eyes and moved within you to recognize a specific need or issue? What fears do you need to surrender to God to boldly go forward in His power? What difficult conversations should you bravely initiate? From what sins do you need to repent as you step out for God? Whom is God calling you to forgive? **People who work for God learn to trust Him for what seems impossible.** God charts a course for His children that challenges their faith and proves His faithfulness.

God longs to redeem us from our old way of life and open our eyes to His plans for us. While we often desire to know and understand the full details of God's plans for our lives, obeying Him usually means trusting Him for the next right step forward. What intentional next step will you take to follow God's lead? How has God positioned you to meet a need you perceive? **When we abide in Christ, life will be constantly challenging but eternally rewarding.** Following God is worth whatever the cost. God gives immeasurable joy, even in dark times.

32. Abiding: John 15:5-17



Encountering the Opposition

Lesson 24 Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 23 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help you understand your need to seek God's direction and practical provision in serving others?

2. How did the notes unpack believers' responsibility to glorify God through serving His people?

Second Day: Read Nehemiah 4:1-6.

Nehemiah and the Jewish workers faced opposition as they rebuilt Jerusalem's wall.

3.
 - a. How did Nehemiah's enemies try to discourage the wall builders with their taunting questions?

 - b. What similar taunts do you hear against believers in the world today?

4. What do you learn from Nehemiah's response to his enemies' persecution?

5.
 - a. How did the people respond to the altercation with their enemies and Nehemiah's response?

- b. Where do you find encouragement and motivation in the face of persecution?

Third Day: Read Nehemiah 4:7-23.

Israel's enemies threatened violence, spreading fear among the Jews.

- 6. a. From verses 7-15, describe the following:

The enemies' reaction to the progress of building the wall

The Jewish people's response to the threat

Nehemiah's solution

The people's response to Nehemiah

- b. Describe similar threatening activity and responses today in your world, community, or family.

- 7. From verses 16-23, how do practical measures and dependence on God weave together to accomplish His work?

- 8. a. How does Nehemiah set an example of servant leadership in his handling of the enemy threat?

- b. How might you display this kind of godly witness and leadership in your daily life?

Fourth Day: Read Nehemiah 5.

While the wall was being built, Nehemiah faced an outcry from his people.

- 9. a. What problem did the people raise to Nehemiah?

- b. What was the potential larger problem?

10. a. In what ways did Nehemiah apply compassion, humility, wisdom, and maturity in how he addressed the crisis? How did the nobles and officials respond?
- b. How might you respond better when confronted with your own wrongdoing? (See also Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 55:7; and James 4:6-8.)
11. a. What godly values did Nehemiah demonstrate by refusing certain advantages as governor?
- b. How might you apply these lessons to your life? (See also John 13:14-15; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22.)

Fifth Day: Read Nehemiah 6:1-14.

Nehemiah received invitations to meet with his detractors.

12. a. In verses 1-9, what next step did Nehemiah's enemies take to hamper the rebuilding efforts?
- b. How did Nehemiah address this challenge, and what do you learn from this?
13. From verses 10-14, why might Nehemiah have rejected the offer for supposed safety?
14. a. In what ways did Nehemiah consistently rely on God as he faced his challenges?
- b. What does it look like to apply these principles and practices to your life?

Sixth Day: Review Nehemiah 4:1–6:14.

Enduring work for the Lord requires our prayerful planning and His protection.

15. Which attributes of Nehemiah would you like to see more of in your life as you serve others?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Nehemiah 4:1–6:14

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

[illegible]

Next step: Read the lesson notes.

Lesson 24 Notes

Nehemiah 4:1–6:14

Focus Verse

“So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.” (Nehemiah 4:6)

Outline

- Facing Foes, Fear, and Fortification – Nehemiah 4
- Unity of the Community – Nehemiah 5
- Standing Firm in Faith – Nehemiah 6:1-14

Engage

Any good and significant work encounters challenges. Pressing deadlines, changing priorities, and shortfalls in people and provisions are pitfalls that often arise between planning and completing a project. Serial setbacks lead many to believe the journey is impossible and the project insurmountable. Others embrace challenges as opportunities that stimulate and invigorate growth.

Genuine work for God faces even greater opposition that can make a task, project, or calling seem like a lashing tempest. Satan, a motivated spiritual enemy, fuels his forces with countless evil schemes and debilitating strategies at his disposal. Fallen humans can also launch a rogue wave of strident opposition. The enemy’s undercover work grows from an ominous ripple to a raging tsunami with an unseen undertow, attempting to drag victims into an overpowering sea. However, the battle belongs to the Lord. In His hands, currents that come against God’s faithful people become catalysts for growth and sanctification. **Enduring work for the Lord requires our prayerful planning and His protection.** As we turn to God, He equips, encourages, motivates, and matures those who steadfastly trust Him through trials and tribulation. Victory is assured, and the glory is His.

● Facing Foes, Fear, and Fortification – Nehemiah 4

Facing Foes – 4:1-6

Taunts of Opposition (4:1-3) – As the Israelites dispersed and undertook their work assignments throughout the perimeter of Jerusalem, opposition to their efforts began to intensify. When Sanballat heard that Nehemiah received Persian approval, authorization, and accompaniment to rebuild the wall

of Jerusalem, he became disturbed.¹ With the restoration well underway, the Samaritan's frustration turned to anger. **As rebuilding progressed, opposition to the project intensified.**

At this point, with Tobiah of Ammon beside him, Sanballat deployed ridiculing taunts as weapons designed to demean, demoralize, and defeat the Israelites. The enemy's auditory arrows targeted the Israelites' hearts with a staccato of five questions concerning their strength, will, and faith alongside their enormous task. In conspiratorial harmony, Tobiah joined the ridicule by exclaiming, "Even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!"

History reveals that these taunts were feeble. Mere words could not halt God's work. Archaeological evidence indicates that the 2.5-mile (4 km) completed wall may have been up to 9 feet (2.7 m) thick.

Appeal to God (4:4-5) – When scorned, Nehemiah turned to God in prayer. Similar to prayers of deliverance with which he was likely familiar,² Nehemiah opened his prayer by expressing honest vulnerability. He represented a despised people—not only in this current circumstance but throughout history.³ **Nehemiah recognized God's power and cried out to Him, asking that He would turn the enemies' insults back on their heads.** Rather than take matters into his own hands, Nehemiah understood and trusted that vengeance and judgment rightfully belong to the Lord.⁴

The People's Response (4:6) – The Israelites realized that the project was the Lord's and He had blessed their efforts, so they returned to the task at hand. **Righteous purpose fuels faithful people with supernatural power and patience against enemy taunts.** This wall's rebuilding took place not for the nation's pride but for the glory of the God they worshipped and served. Motivated by a determined leader, inspired by an eternal God, and unified for His glory, "the people worked with all their heart." The Israelites rebuilt the entire circuit to half of the finished height.

Facing Fear – 4:7-14

Battle Lines (4:7-9) – When the enemies found that their words fell far short of dissuading the Jews, who were making significant progress, they raised the stakes. **With frustration progressing from anger to fury, they plotted and threatened violence.**

Nehemiah had received King Artaxerxes's permission, provision, and protection to rebuild Jerusalem's wall when Nehemiah was in the Persian city of Susa.⁵ That city sat a distant 1,100 miles (1,770 km) away from the current conflict, a 55-day journey. Israel's opponents also surrounded the city, with Sanballat's Samaritans to the north, the Arabs to the south, the Ammonites to the east, and the Ashdodites to the west. **Israel's enemies thought they had the distinct advantage.**

In reality, the true advantage fell to Nehemiah. **God is always on the side of His people.** Reliance on God is essential in every threatening circumstance. As before, Nehemiah acted spiritually and practically. The people turned to God in prayer and posted a 24-hour guard to address the threat of attack.

The People's Response (4:10-12) – **Fear is a powerful force.** Anxiety can erode a faithful person's peace and confidence even when we know that God is on our side and we are doing His work. Having already achieved half of their material victory, the physical and spiritual seeds planted by

1. Sanballat disturbed: Nehemiah 2:10

2. Prayers of deliverance: Psalms 74; 79

3. Despised people: Genesis 12:3; Joel 3:2; Zechariah 12:2-3; Matthew 24:4-14; Luke 21:24

4. Vengeance is the Lord's: Romans 12:19

5. Nehemiah in Susa: Nehemiah 1:1

God's Purposes in Life's Hardships

The Doctrine of Suffering

In the Fall,¹ humanity surrendered lordship of our lives to the evil one by choosing to sin—and with sin suffering came into the world. **Rebellion against God resulted in separation from Him and brought incalculable pain to creation.** Whether persecution, poverty, wars, famine, abuse, neglect, or disease, suffering's groan of despair is now as natural to the world as childbirth.

We see from the experiences of Nehemiah and the people of Israel that suffering has been as consistent and freshly rotten throughout history as it is today. Taunts, threats of violence, selfishness, indifference, hunger, bullying, isolation, and scheming emerge as vividly today as they did during Jerusalem's days of rehabilitation. **Suffering comes as a consequence of sin's presence in our world, but God can accomplish His purposes through our suffering.** Whether a means of discipline or a call to prayer, suffering offers an opportunity to seek God and draw close to Him.

Discounting the doctrine of suffering requires ignoring the reality and result of sin in our lives. Whether a direct result of personal sin or an indirect result of sinful humanity, from a worldly perspective the inevitable and pervasive pain around us seems unfair and pointless.

Coming to terms with suffering's source and solution requires living in the hope only Jesus provides. Jesus Christ, humanity's Lord and Savior, suffered to overcome suffering. Jesus bore the pain of sin and death to conquer sin and death. All who believe in Him can live steadied by certain hope. One day there will be no more pain and loss, only glory in His presence. Meanwhile, believers continue to suffer, but we are not alone. Our loving, compassionate, and empathetic Lord walks with His children through our darkest valleys. And while we wait for His promised deliverance, we trust the purposes God intends, even if we do not fully understand His ways. Will you trust God's purposes in the hardest challenge you face today?

1. **Humanity's fall:** Genesis 3

the enemy appeared to have taken root. The task was difficult. Their enemy was real. Israel was outnumbered and surrounded. Though back in their promised land, the devastating ruin and rubble still overwhelmed God's beloved people.

Earlier, when the temple was rebuilt, opposition in every form took a toll on Israel's momentum.⁶

Not in complaint but with full transparency, the people here laid out their concerns.

- Their strength was waning.
- The task seemed insurmountable.
- The threat of violence was imminent.
- The enemy was everywhere.

6. **Mounting discouragement:** Ezra 4:6-24

The strenuous manual labor required to rebuild the wall took a physical toll on the people, and verbal attacks added mental anguish. Despite impressive progress, the project still awaited completion. Threats lingered—difficult to forget. God’s people faced the clear anger of their enemies, who wanted the project to fail. Meanwhile, fellow Jews living near Jerusalem also became targets of harassment. **Drudgery, doubts, and threats of death naturally bred thoughts of despair and defeat.**

Fortification of Faith (4:13-14) – God-honoring leaders empathize and take action when their people fall into despair. Whether by encouragement, correction, counsel, or provision, a faithful leader takes the initiative. **Responding to the deep, heart-rending concerns of his fellow Jews, Nehemiah bolstered them with physical and spiritual fortification.**

Physically, Nehemiah wisely reinforced the exposed portions of the wall with families armed “with their swords, spears and bows.” Spiritually, after surveying the surroundings, Nehemiah reminded everyone to not be afraid and remember that God was on their side.⁷ **The Lord would be their strength in the battle as they protected His Holy City.**

Nehemiah practiced in words and actions what the apostle Paul would profess centuries later to all believers in his letter to the Ephesians: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”⁸

Facing Fortification – 4:15-23

From Collapse to Confidence (4:15) – Nehemiah clearly trusted God and His sovereignty. Behind the wise and calculated planning and amid the fear, stress, and exhaustion of the laborers, God had frustrated the enemy’s plot in answer to prayer. **Confidence that God is with us builds momentum to accomplish His work.** Reminded of God’s power and presence, the Israelites resumed their assigned work on the wall.

Spreading Responsibility (4:16-20) – **Although God is behind His work, He also requires our practical steps.** Nehemiah moved the men forward with a workable plan. Half the men labored on the wall while the other half defended the city. Even those who were building worked with an armed weapon at their side. However, despite all the precautions, their finite manpower spread the workforce thin, leaving them vulnerable. Nehemiah would rally the people as needed with a trumpet blast as a traditional call to arms.⁹ Through it all, the battle belonged to the Lord, who would fight for His people.¹⁰

Working with Diligence (4:21-23) – **Constant work requires constant watchfulness.** Nehemiah understood that each moment counted. Every workday brought his people closer to finishing a protective wall that allowed the city to become fully inhabited. The work was important and urgent. To assure the fastest possible completion of the wall, Nehemiah required every worker to stay inside the city walls at night and remain armed, rather than returning home. Setting an example for the others, Nehemiah and his staff did not even change clothes. They remained on alert—always prepared to meet the enemy.

7. **God will defend:** Deuteronomy 1:21, 29; 7:21-22; Joshua 1:9

8. **Full armor:** Ephesians 6:10-13

9. **Call to arms:** Judges 3:27; 1 Samuel 13:3

10. **God’s fight:** Exodus 14:14; Deuteronomy 1:30; 2 Chronicles 20:15

● Unity of the Community – Nehemiah 5

Conviction of Need – 5:1-13

The Appeal of the Needy (5:1-5) – Nehemiah's attention turned to an internal conflict that threatened division among the people. Many of the Jews found themselves in desperate circumstances. Poverty and a lack of empathy from the more well-to-do nobles and officials threatened the unity of the people. The fact that the work on the wall had removed able-bodied people from their fields and vocations exacerbated the issue. This produced hardship for those who struggled to have enough to meet their basic needs even in the best of circumstances. Certainly, the selfish traits of fallen humanity had become a problem.

The returning Jews had populated the region surrounding Jerusalem, leaving insufficient land to provide food and other needed resources. The constant burden of taxes to the Persian king further complicated the matter. Instead of those with more means generously helping those in need, the wealthy profited from the distress of others. Those without enough to live on were forced to mortgage their homes and their inherited land. Those who already had money even took Jewish daughters and sons as slaves in lieu of payment. **This desperate situation seemed impossible to resolve.**

The Righteous Admonition (5:6-11) – The intolerable discord and sinful greed threatened Jewish solidarity and faithfulness to their own flesh and blood¹¹ and offended God.¹² **The slavery of their own people reflected humanity's slavery to sin.**¹³

Unlike his enemies' anger when their sinful scheming failed, Nehemiah's response reflected righteous anger. Nehemiah channeled his anger into a redeeming course of action. As Jerusalem's governor, he would ease the financial burdens of the needy while upholding generosity and social responsibility. When the time came, his confrontation with Jewish nobility was met by their convicted silence.

Not only were the more wealthy Israelites harming their own, they offered a poor witness to the surrounding people. This defied God's intent for His people to bear a holy witness to the world.¹⁴ Avoiding hypocrisy, Nehemiah even implicated himself as one who was charging interest, giving him credibility in commanding the return of property and prior proceeds. Nehemiah called out a disregard of God's ways and a lack of concern for fellow Israelites. Especially in a time likened to war, God's people needed to be conduits of grace to one another. In the spirit of the Sabbath year and the Year of Jubilee, Nehemiah commanded general amnesty rather than a return of the investment.¹⁵

The Righteous Response (5:12-13) – Nehemiah's charge resonated with his audience. They fully agreed. **Nehemiah summoned the priests to cement the agreement of the nobles and officials in an oath.** His shaking the folds of his robe illustrated the curse that should follow any breaking of their vow, further compelling their commitment.

Setting the Example – 5:14-19

Breaking the Precedent (5:14-16) – Nehemiah proved he was not a worldly governor but a godly one. Apparently, previous administrations received the right and privilege to extract food and funds from the

11. Sin against their own: Exodus 22:22-27; Leviticus 25:35-37, 39-42; Deuteronomy 23:19-20; 24:10-13

12. Contempt for God: Proverbs 14:31

13. Slave to sin: John 8:34

14. God's people's witness: Isaiah 43; 1 Peter 2:12-15

15. Jubilee: Leviticus 25

people for their personal use. **Nehemiah declined such privileges, though he had every right to claim them.** While his people suffered, he certainly could not justify living in luxury. Nehemiah's righteous actions demonstrated his unwavering focus on the work to be done over any advantage to be gained. Nehemiah remained committed to his God and his mission to build the wall of the city of God.

Practicing Hospitality (5:17-19) – Governing a region included hosting visiting dignitaries. **As a witness to unbelievers, Nehemiah reflected God's generosity with gracious hospitality.** The bountiful provision afforded to his guests from this earthly kingdom reflected the great banquet awaiting God's people in the new kingdom to come. On that day, struggles will cease and all who believe in the Savior will be welcome at the table.¹⁶ Nehemiah looked forward to this and called on God to remember the righteous care and service he rendered to God's people.

● Standing Firm in Faith – Nehemiah 6:1-14

Response to a Scheme – 6:1-9

A New Tactic (6:1-4) – Nehemiah's enemies resorted to entrapment when their angry taunts and threats of war failed. With false humility, the Arab Geshem joined Sanballat and Tobiah in proposing a meeting. The suggested summit site—Ono—was hardly a neutral location. Near Sanballat's Samaria, Ono provided an ideal place to capture or kill the Jewish leader. **Humanity's manipulative deceit manifests the deceit perfected by Satan, the master of lies.**¹⁷

Nehemiah recognized the obvious scheming behind this request. With the wall nearing completion, the gates' installation would soon close off the best access for an enemy attack on Jerusalem. Nehemiah did not directly decline the invitation. Instead, he pointed to the work at hand. He would not pause his responsibility. Four consecutive invitations were met with the same reply.

Open and Idle Threat (6:5-9) – Nehemiah received a fifth letter, which was unsealed. This likely meant Sanballat wanted the lies and innuendo within to become public knowledge. Perhaps the Samaritan wanted these false claims to circulate or sow confusion among the Israelites. **Nehemiah vigorously denied the claims.**

- Sanballat alleged the Jews were plotting a revolt. To the contrary, the Jews were building the wall with the Persian king's blessing.¹⁸
- A co-conspirator, Geshem, was named to add credibility. Because the charges were lies, this was false witness.¹⁹
- The letter claimed Nehemiah would be named king. However, there was no evidence of that desire or that Nehemiah's family lines connected him to King David.²⁰
- Sanballat said prophets had been appointed to announce Nehemiah's claim to a throne.²¹ Again, this lie would have been deemed as false witness.
- Sanballat said the claims would circulate to the Persian king and proposed to help mediate them. Because the accusations were false and the king trusted Nehemiah, the threat remained idle.

16. **Eternal banquet:** Luke 13:29; 14:15; Revelation 19:9

17. **Satan's deceit:** John 8:44; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; Revelation 12:9

18. **King's blessing:** Nehemiah 2:6

19. **False witness:** Proverbs 14:5

20. **David's line:** Jeremiah 23:5-6

21. **Prophets and kings:** 1 Samuel 9–10; 16; 2 Kings 9

Nehemiah recognized the language of lies²² and exposed his enemies' deceit. "Nothing like what you are saying is happening," the Jewish governor replied. "You are just making it up out of your head." Nehemiah surmised Sanballat would abandon this phase of his plot. **He continued to trust God and prayed for strength.**

A Plot to Kill – 6:10-14

Attempted taunts, threats, and entrapment failed, so Nehemiah's enemies launched a final attack to thwart his progress. **Proclaiming false commitment to protect Nehemiah's life, an alleged prophet named Shemaiah invited Nehemiah to Jerusalem's temple to take refuge.** Accepting the invitation would have drawn Nehemiah away from supervising the work on the wall and certainly would have made him vulnerable to abduction or assassination.

Nehemiah easily saw through Shemaiah's deceptive invitation. He knew immediately that Tobiah and Sanballat had hired Shemaiah to prophesy against him. Perhaps the schemers thought a meeting at the temple would have fooled Nehemiah into believing the supposed prophet's motives were pure. Instead, Nehemiah, a righteous man of God, understood that the proposal misused holy ground. **In blunt refusal, Nehemiah responded that seeking refuge in the temple would be selfish, cowardly, and sinful.**

Throughout the rebuilding project entrusted to him, Nehemiah turned to God, asking Him to remember his enemies' actions. Nehemiah's mention of other prophets who attempted to deceive him confirms the layers of unrelenting opposition he endured. Nehemiah fervently understood his work, leadership, and encouragement would be impossible without complete dependence on God. In response to His people's pleas, the Lord would provide the method, means, and might to get the job done. God's enemies always oppose His purposes. **Enduring work for the Lord requires our prayerful planning and His protection.** God goes with His people and fights for them as they diligently work for His cause.

● Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Nehemiah secured permission and delegated the workforce to rebuild Jerusalem's wall. Even so, Nehemiah faced external and internal challenges as he sought God's purposes. **First, a Samaritan administrator's anger manifested into ugly taunts and violent threats.** Always dependent on prayer, Nehemiah turned to God. He wisely prepared his people with plans to protect themselves from the Satan-induced schemes of their enemies and encouragement to continue working. Always on the prowl, Satan wants to devour God's people and thwart God's plans.²³

The next threat came from within the camp of God's people. The desperation of the poor and the apathy of the wealthy put the Israelites' unity in peril. With compassion and conviction, Nehemiah boldly, clearly, and sacrificially addressed the crisis and turned the people's attention back to God and the important task of building the wall.

22. **Father of lies:** John 8:44-47

23. **Satan seeks to destroy:** Genesis 4:8; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 22:31

Finally, Nehemiah addressed a personal threat. Spurning dubious invitations to lure him away from Jerusalem or seek safety in the temple, the Jewish leader remained focused on his God and the responsibility entrusted to him. Nehemiah's faith in God never wavered. As he consistently and constantly trusted the Lord, Nehemiah steadfastly led his people in accomplishing a significant project to protect God's people and glorify God. Nehemiah never prioritized his personal safety. Because he bowed before God on His throne, Nehemiah compassionately, obediently, courageously, wisely, and boldly served God's people in righteousness.

Apply It

Because the world hated Him, Jesus warned the disciples, and us, that His people would also be hated.²⁴ **All true work for God will receive opposition.** When you overcome the scorn of others, be prepared for further direct attack on your work for God. Through both stealth and direct attack, Satan will try to make you fear continuing to obey God. Nehemiah's strategy for victory demonstrates what we should do. First, pray. Second, put off fear²⁵ and trust God's purposes.²⁶ Third, be practical. Expect attack, being watchful and prepared for strikes from every side. Do not give the enemy any opportunities.²⁷ Take your weapons—the belt of truth, the helmet of assured salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes of peace, the sword of the Spirit (the Bible), and the shield of faith.²⁸ Stand and do not give way until the work God has entrusted to you is finished. As you do this, you cannot be overcome, for God has promised to bring you through.

God enabled Nehemiah, a man of prayer, to discern sinful schemes and Satan's lies. A believer's strategy remains the same today. Satan's unscrupulous methods know no bounds. You may hear the enemy's whispers: "How can such a weak person have any impact on others or make any difference anywhere?" "Why would you waste time with that particular child from that particular background with any hope that God would transform them?" "You will never overcome your personality or past." Reject any thought not rooted in God's truth. Allow His Word to shed light into your life and your world. Fill your mind with Scripture and listen to music that exalts God. Recite and believe what is true about God. Pray honestly and humbly for God's help. Stand with others who look to God for strength. **Believers overcome fear not because they are strong but because God is mighty.**²⁹ What fearful thought is God asking you to entrust to Him today?

How do you treat those in need or peril? Do you turn away, claiming their problem is not your concern? How do you model generosity toward those in need and hospitality toward your neighbors? When injustice pierces your heart, how do you redirect your righteous anger? **Nehemiah responded to every need with diligent prayer, a soft and empathetic heart, and bold action.** God's ways and the welfare of others mattered more than his own comfort or ease. Nehemiah gave astounding witness to those around him and to us today. How might your biggest problem be God's plan for you to show His glory to others? In what ways might you serve God and His people and experience His blessings—a fruitful, flourishing life of joyful obedience?

24. **World's hatred:** John 15:18-25

25. **Put off fear:** 2 Timothy 1:7

26. **Trust God:** Proverbs 3:5-6

27. **Be righteous:** Ephesians 4:27; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 5:22

28. **Armor of God:** Ephesians 6:11-17

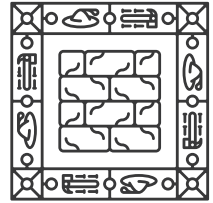
29. **God is greater:** 1 John 4:4

Reading and Responding to the Law

PEOPLE OF
THE PROMISE:
EXILE & RETURN

LESSON 25

SCRIPTURE:
NEHEMIAH
6:15–8:18



Lesson 25 Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 24 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. In what ways did the lecture encourage you and help you encourage others to remain steadfast in the Lord's work?

2. What portions of the notes helped fortify your awareness of and defenses against worldly opposition to your faith?

Second Day: Read Nehemiah 6:15–7:3.

The Israelites completed Jerusalem's wall.

3.
 - a. How did Nehemiah's enemies respond when they learned Jerusalem's wall was completed with God's help?

 - b. What do you learn from these verses about the persistence of the enemies of God's people? (See also Nehemiah 4–5.)

 - c. How has the Lord led you to respond to enemy attacks in your life?

4. What was Nehemiah's next step after the wall was rebuilt? Why was this important?
5.
 - a. Why was integrity an important quality for the men in charge of Jerusalem?
 - b. How does this motivate you to be a trusted person of integrity?

Third Day: Read Nehemiah 7:4-73.

Nehemiah ordered a census of the people. (This list is nearly identical to the count in Ezra 2.)

6.
 - a. Why was it important for Nehemiah to call for a registration of his fellow Jews?
 - b. What guidance did Nehemiah receive in developing his census?
7.
 - a. What do the groupings in the list show you?
 - b. How do verses 63-65 indicate the desire for purity in the spiritual life of the people?
8.
 - a. What part has your family lineage played in your spiritual life?
 - b. In what roles do you serve your church community? How is God stirring you to serve?

Fourth Day: Read Nehemiah 8:1-12.

The people listened to a reading of the law.

9.
 - a. Describe the people's actions and responses in these verses.
 - b. What do you find most interesting or compelling about this scene?

10. a. What qualities do you find in the leadership of Ezra, the Levites, Nehemiah, and other leaders on this day the law was read?
- b. Why was this God-glorifying leadership important?
11. a. In what ways have reading, understanding, and applying God's Word brought joy to your life?
- b. How might you make God's Word more accessible to those around you?

Fifth Day: Read Nehemiah 8:13-18.

The people responded with celebration.

12. a. What did the people discover in the law, and what did they do about it?
- b. Read Leviticus 23:33-44. What did this celebration commemorate? Why might it have been especially significant at this specific time?
13. What does verse 18 reveal about dedication to God's Word?
14. In what ways do you celebrate God's provision and His gift of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ?

Sixth Day: Review Nehemiah 6:15-8:18.

God's Word and sincere worship unite His people.

15. How does your worship of God and devotion to His Word bring you closer to Him and His people?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Nehemiah 6:15-8:18

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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Lesson 25 Notes

Nehemiah 6:15–8:18

Focus Verse

“Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.” (Nehemiah 8:18)

Outline

- Completing the Wall – Nehemiah 6:15–7:3
- The People Gathered – Nehemiah 7:4-73
- The People Celebrated – Nehemiah 8

Engage

What are your first thoughts, feelings, and actions when you have successfully accomplished a significant task or reached a monumental goal? Do you feel relief? Exhaustion? Do you exclaim, “I’m glad that’s over. I’m never doing that again!”? Are you filled with confidence and start looking to the next horizon or a new frontier? What do you do to celebrate? To whom do you show appreciation for helping you along the way?

Overcoming nearly every sort of obstacle, the Israelites rallied in unity, faith, and renewed trust in God and one another as they worked to complete the protective wall surrounding their beloved Jerusalem. This marked the beginning of a new era in the promised land. Prayerfully propelled by God’s power, provision, and their personal persistence, the people Nehemiah led now set their sights on rebuilding and cementing their community of faith. God’s people entered another chapter revealing His faithfulness and sovereignty. They longed to hear God’s law, and understanding what God had revealed ignited corporate celebration for who He is, all He had done, and all He promised. **God’s Word and sincere worship unite His people.**

● Completing the Wall – Nehemiah 6:15–7:3

The Final Push – 6:15-19

Mission Accomplished (6:15-16) – In a mere 52 days, less than six months after he spoke to the king, Nehemiah led God’s people to complete the full 2.5-mile (4 km) circumference of Jerusalem’s wall that had laid in ruins for 140 years. Despite enemy taunts, threats, and evil scheming, the Israelites placed their full trust in the Lord, their leaders, and the unity of their community. **The swift, dedicated work overcame worldly odds, bearing testimony to God’s power and sovereignty.** God’s support of this prayer-fueled work struck fear in Israel’s enemies and sapped their confidence. Perhaps they

thought that if God could bring such stunning success to a construction project, He would rebuild Israel into a powerful and threatening nation.¹

Seeds of Discord (6:17-19) – Though defeated, God’s prowling and crouching enemies cling to futile hope.² Throughout Nehemiah’s building campaign, his foes’ previous efforts of taunting, violence, lies, and entrapment had failed. Now Israel’s enemies attempted to sow misinformation among the Jewish community through family ties. Tobiah the Ammonite had married the daughter of a returned exile, Shekaniah. Tobiah’s son Jehohanan married a Jewish woman—Meshullam’s daughter. Shekaniah’s son, Shemaiah, and Meshullam helped rebuild the wall.³ These ties appear to have given Tobiah an influential foothold among some of Israel’s nobility. Tobiah’s rebellious seeds and their potential damage likely led Ezra to prophetically warn against marriage with the unfaithful.⁴ The Israelites’ past failure to obey God’s commands led to their exile, but Ezra’s warning offered an opportunity for the people to choose to obey God and recognize His faithfulness despite their sin.

Despite Tobiah’s intimidating letters to Nehemiah and the people’s praise of Tobiah, Nehemiah steadfastly refused to bow to enemy pressure. **God’s servant remained determinedly committed to the work God had commissioned him to do.**

Protecting the City – 7:1-3

With the wall completed, Nehemiah’s next priority was to maintain protection from opposition at the city’s door. He chose men of integrity to oversee the necessary role of watchfulness. Nehemiah’s brother, Hanani, who originally brought him the news of Jerusalem’s state earlier in the year,⁵ and Hananiah, the citadel’s commander, had proven themselves trustworthy. **Integrity and faithfulness are the backbone of godly leadership.**⁶ Character matters.

Involving the gatekeepers, musicians, and Levites⁷ in the guarding of Jerusalem’s wall likely revealed Nehemiah’s priority to protect the reestablishment of regular worship. The gatekeepers, who typically guarded the temple gates,⁸ had been instructed to not open the city gates until the sun was hot. Normally, city gates would open at dawn. This precaution may have been a security measure against a surprise attack. The limited hours also may have been necessary because the city did not yet have an adequate workforce to watch the gates at normal hours. **Regardless, previous threats made caution essential.** For godly leaders, trusting God includes acting with discernment and making wise decisions to lead others.

● The People Gathered – Nehemiah 7:4-73

God’s Call to Count – 7:4-5

Nehemiah had overseen the wall’s reconstruction and the protection of the city gates. He turned to face his next challenge—repopulation. A godly and diligent leader, Nehemiah listened to the Lord and

1. **Terror among nations:** Genesis 35:5; Exodus 15:16; 23:27; Deuteronomy 2:25; Joshua 2:9; 1 Samuel 7:10; 13:7; 14:15; 2 Chronicles 14:14; 17:10; 20:29; Psalm 9:20; Isaiah 19:17; Zechariah 14:13

2. **Enemies of God:** Genesis 4:7; Psalms 17:10-12; 52:1-7; 59:5; Lamentations 5:18; 1 Peter 5:8

3. **Helped rebuild the wall:** Nehemiah 3:29-30

4. **Intermarriage:** Ezra 9–10

5. **Hanani:** Nehemiah 1:2-3

6. **Integrity and faithfulness:** Luke 19:17; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Galatians 5:22

7. **Grouping:** Ezra 2:40-42

8. **Temple guards:** 1 Chronicles 9:17-19; 26:12-19

organized the work to accomplish God's redemptive priorities. The people first rebuilt the temple⁹ and then the city wall before considering the conditions within the city. Jerusalem had not yet recovered from Babylon's devastating conquest in 586 BC. **Israel's population was significantly smaller than before the Babylonians attacked, sacked, and conquered the nation.** Those who had returned from Babylon had typically settled outside Jerusalem.¹⁰

God put the need for a census within Nehemiah's heart. While this step certainly makes practical sense, Nehemiah did not come up with this plan merely through deep thinking or by consulting trusted associates. He maintained an intimate relationship with God. Consistent prayer guided his obedient response to his Lord. He responded to the Lord by registering the families of Israel. Nehemiah called the tiny nation to assemble. Then he found help from "the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return" from the exile, initiated by Cyrus's decree more than a century earlier.

Throughout the Bible, genealogies of Israel are all-important. Many Gentiles, such as Ruth, had been incorporated into the nation. Genealogies dated from the time of Joshua provided proof of land inheritance. These records were also carefully preserved in light of the promised lineage of the Messiah.¹¹

A Public Accounting – 7:6-69

The list of households found in Nehemiah is nearly identical to the census recorded by Ezra.¹² Several possible reasons help explain the slight discrepancies between the two lists. Nehemiah may have been working from an older list or from Ezra's list, making corrections or updates to account for births, deaths, or people who had arrived after the first returnees. Perhaps scribal errors needed correction. Regardless, this edited and possibly imperfect manmade list sits within God's perfect Word to remind us of how God preserves His Word and knows all His people. He gathers them in saving faith—secure in His presence for all eternity.¹³

Nehemiah's roster consisted of nine categories, highlighting diversity within this unified remnant.¹⁴

- **The original leaders (7:6-7)**—While most of the original leaders are unknown to us today, Zerubbabel and Joshua stand out. They shepherded the first wave of exiles out of Babylon.¹⁵ Both rise as prominent figures in the prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah.
- **Named citizens (7:8-38)**—The longest portion of the list is divided into two parts. The first 18 names are listed according to their ancestry; the second portion identifies the 20 towns where the returnees settled.
- **Priests (7:39-42)**—These descendants of Aaron, Moses's brother, rotated in serving the temple, supporting worship and Israel's holy feasts. The priests constituted about one-tenth of the total census.
- **Levites (7:43)**—The descendants of Levi, one of the original patriarchs, assisted the priests in temple service.
- **Singers (7:44)**—Taken from among the Levites, the singers assisted in temple worship.

9. **Rebuilding the temple:** Ezra 3, 7; Haggai 1-2

10. **Outside Jerusalem:** Ezra 2:1; Nehemiah 11:1

11. **Messiah's lineage:** Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-28

12. **Census:** Ezra 2

13. **Salvation of God's people:** Ephesians 1:4-14; Revelation 13:8; 17:8

14. James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 83.

15. **First wave:** Ezra 2:2; 3:2; 5:2

- **Gatekeepers (7:45)**—These temple workers held responsibility for the city's security. Cited along with the Levites and singers at the opening of this chapter, they also came from among the Levites.
- **Temple servants (7:46-56)**—These Gibeonites assisted the Levites in the temple work. Their ancestors had been given this role after deceiving the conquered Israelites.¹⁶
- **Descendants of Solomon's servants (7:57-60)**—This group descended from those who served King Solomon, David's son. They were also linked to the temple servants.
- **People of questionable ancestry (7:61-65)**—The final group consisted of two groups: regular citizens and those who claimed they descended from Aaron's line but could not prove their ancestry. The priests' pedigree caused the most concern because the people's purity depended on the priests' purity. Therefore, until their legitimacy could be discerned through the casting of sacred lots, these men were banned from performing priestly duties.

The Final Tally (7:66-69) – Like Ezra's census, Nehemiah's registry accounts for the Israelites, servants, singers, and animals. The total of 49,942 heads of household, male and female slaves, and male and female singers certainly represented a major decline from Judah's population before the exile. Many Jews chose to remain in Babylon and adapt to life there. Nehemiah led this faithful remnant that returned to the promised land and would continue to build a new life of faith centered around a rebuilt Jerusalem.

Temple Provision – 7:70-73

The People Gave (7:70-72) – The temple work depended on the generosity of the people who benefitted from the service that pointed them to God. Nehemiah, Jerusalem's governor, led the way and set the example, donating 50 bowls, 530 garments, and nearly 19 pounds (8.4 kg) of gold to support the temple work. The heads of families and rest of the community responded abundantly. With more detail than Ezra provided, the total addition to the temple treasury was nearly 770 pounds (nearly 350 kg) of gold and more than 2½ tons of silver, estimated by some to be about \$7 million in today's currency.

The People Returned (7:73) – Because Israel suffered significant losses in Babylon's conquest and many remained in exile, Jerusalem's population, like the temple, existed as a shadow of its former self. Many exiles who did return and contributed to the wall's rehabilitation did not live in Jerusalem but returned to their hometowns when the work was completed. **At this time, Jerusalem remained underpopulated.** While the census began to address this challenge, Nehemiah would start bringing people into the city in chapter 11.

● The People Celebrated – Nehemiah 8

God's Word plays a critical role in reorientating His people's priorities to know and surrender to Him. In Nehemiah 8–10, Israel's faithful remnant intently listened, took to heart, and responded to the Book of the Law of God. Ezra again entered the scene—nearly 13 years after his arrival in 458 BC. With the wall built and the temple established and funded, the Mosaic law took its rightful place at the center of Jewish life. The law God gave His people defined the foundation for living faithfully before Him. As

16. Gibeon's deception: Joshua 9

the narrative shifts from a first-person to third-person account, Nehemiah's care for the hearts of his people stands out in the second half of the book.

Ezra Read the Law – 8:1-8

Unity that is centered on God and His Word powerfully binds a community. In apparent spontaneity, the people came together desiring to better know and understand the God who had delivered them from exile and empowered them to successfully rebuild the wall around the Holy City. They likely sought to hear the Pentateuch, which consists of the first five books of the Old Testament in today's Bible. Deuteronomy, in particular, may have been the book most people wanted to hear.¹⁷

Ezra received permission from the Persian ruler Artaxerxes,¹⁸ but more importantly, authorization to teach the law to the people came from God Himself.¹⁹ Men, women, and children ("others who could understand") listened to Ezra. **Surrounded and supported by community leaders and elevated on a high wooden platform so all could see and hear, Ezra read and taught God's Word to his attentive audience for a full six hours.**

Most people in Nehemiah's day could not read for themselves, which made public reading imperative so all could understand God's Word. Intentional teaching of the law had likely been missing from the regular spiritual diet of the Jews since their exile. **This spiritually starved nation hungrily craved the necessary nourishment of God's Word.**

Standing and in unison, the people responded in praise with the resounding "Amen!" of corporate agreement. They took to heart all they had heard. They humbly bowed and offered further worship to their great God. To assure complete understanding among all who gathered, the Levites roamed the crowd to explain Ezra's exhortation. This was especially important with Aramaic as the primary language spoken in Jerusalem, while the law was written in Hebrew. God's Word did not fall on deaf ears, distracted minds, or cold hearts. At this moment, God's people soaked, steeped, and simmered in every drop of God's precious Word to understand it completely.²⁰

The People Responded – 8:9-12

Great Sorrow (8:9) – The reading of God's Word elicited deep grief because the law revealed the people's sin and God's condemnation of their sin. They wept because they realized the many wasted years of their lives. They and their families had missed God's blessings while living outside of His will through willful ignorance. They had ignored God and His commands. **The people recognized their need to repent.** Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites understood God's grace to sinful people.

Greater Joy (8:10-12) – At the same time the people grieved, their spiritual leaders reminded them they would be strengthened by God's holy joy through their repentance and experience freedom in His forgiveness. On this Sabbath day, reserved for the Lord and designed to center on Him, Nehemiah led the call to celebrate with great joy. **The people not only heard but appropriately understood, took to heart, and responded to God's holy and precious Word.** Nehemiah's call to "go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks" did not promote self-congratulatory acts of indulgence but invited remembrance of God's sweet provision for all His community²¹ and the great banquet yet to come.²²

17. **Desire for God's Word:** Deuteronomy 28:58, 61; 31:9

18. **Artaxerxes's decree:** Ezra 7:25-26

19. **Teach the law:** Deuteronomy 33:10

20. **God's Word:** 2 Timothy 3:16-17

21. **Celebrating God's provision:** Deuteronomy 12:12; 14:23, 27-29

22. **Great banquet:** Isaiah 25:6; 55:1-2; Joel 3:18; Matthew 8:11; 22:4; Revelation 19:9

Created to Worship and Flourish

The Doctrine of Humanity—Creation and Purpose

God had a purpose for Israel. His chosen people had received God's law, the privilege of knowing who God is, and the responsibility to carry His message to the world. Israel experienced their highest and best purpose as a nation when they yielded to God and sought Him wholeheartedly. They suffered horrendous consequences when they rebelled and refused to repent.

God made all people in His image—designed for eternal fellowship with Him.¹ An inner sense of our eternality and desire for a purpose beyond mere survival rises from the very core of every person.² Only God can satisfy the deepest yearnings of the human heart.³ Sin broke our fellowship with God and represents humanity's greatest tragedy. **Through Christ alone, our fellowship with God and our highest purpose can be restored.** Glorifying God and walking with Him is life's most enduring treasure.

To dismiss God's purpose means living for our own purposes—controlled by selfishness. Stripped to its essence, living apart from God becomes survival of the fittest. Any perceived benevolence from God becomes transactional rather than sacrificial. With this mindset, the enduring question behind everything becomes, "What's in it for me?"

To embrace God's purpose requires seeking and walking with Him. Life's highest honor and greatest joy comes through God's provision, not human effort. God equips every believer, whom He saves from slavery to sin, to flourish in this life and for eternity.⁴ Surrender to God means trusting His faithfulness and sufficiency. A Christian can thrive spiritually even amid intense suffering.⁵ Resiliency in life comes when your daily experience fulfills the purpose for which God created you. The wisest and most fulfilling pursuit of your life is to know and walk with God.

1. **Humanity's purpose:** Genesis 1:27; Acts 17:24-28; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Colossians 1:6; 1 John 1:1-7

2. **Eternal awareness:** Ecclesiastes 3:11; Romans 2:14-15

3. **Desire for God:** Psalm 73:25

4. **Flourishing:** Psalms 1:1-3; 92:12-13; Proverbs 11:28

5. **Thriving in suffering:** 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 3:7-11; 1 Peter 3:14

A Great Celebration – 8:13-18

A Festival (8:13-15) – Nehemiah arranged for Ezra to teach the family leaders and the Levites so they could explain God's Word to the spiritually ravenous people. **These men and Ezra discovered Moses's instructions about the Feast of Tabernacles written in God's law.** Also known as the Feast of Booths, the occasion commemorated God's gift of the abundant land along with rest and joy in Him.²³

Great Joy (8:16-17) – **God designed the Feast of Tabernacles to remind the people how He faithfully had guided their ancestors as they wandered in the wilderness during the days of Moses.** They constructed temporary shelters of tents and booths as a reminder of their nomadic days when God's people followed the tabernacle, the Lord's movable shelter at the center of the Jewish community.²⁴

23. **Feast of Tabernacles:** Exodus 13:16; Leviticus 23:33-44

24. **Tabernacle:** Exodus 25-27; 40

Along with Passover and Pentecost, this seven-day festival also celebrated the land's harvest, gathering all Jewish men to Jerusalem.

The former exiles' joyous, historic celebration commemorated God's protection from their enemies, the completion of the Jerusalem wall, and the people's rededication to God's Word. Like a second exodus, their freedom from Babylon mirrored their entry into the promised land under Joshua after their Egyptian bondage and wandering in the wilderness. While the Festival of the Tabernacles certainly had been celebrated between the days of Joshua and Nehemiah,²⁵ the festival probably was not conducted regularly or with the same passion Nehemiah and Ezra witnessed. The great joy may be compared to the people's glee expressed when Hezekiah²⁶ and Josiah²⁷ renewed the Passover celebration.

Daily Bread (8:18) – Through Moses, God commanded the Israelites to read the law every sabbatical or seventh year.²⁸ Daily reading was not required. This festival, however, marked a renewal of intentional, regular worship and rededication to God's will for His people. **Living faithfully for God requires hearing, knowing, and understanding God's Word.** Ezra prayerfully read and explained the law. The people listened to God's Word, grieved their sin, rejoiced over God's loving provision, and worshipped their Lord.

Nehemiah and Ezra led the community of faith to spiritual rejuvenation. As in the past, commitment to God would not guarantee the people an easy path or perfect future. Yet God would remain faithful to His people. He would continue to patiently and persistently call them to remain faithful to Him. Only as God's people abide in Him can they aptly bear a vibrant witness to the world. **God's Word and sincere worship unite His people.**

● Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Led, empowered, and equipped by God, the returned exiles of Judah completed Jerusalem's wall in a mere 7½ weeks! Despite oppressive opposition surrounding them and with a finite number of workers, Nehemiah led God's people to put their trust in God and the leadership He provided. The wall protected the Holy City and the precious temple that was dedicated to God. The foundation to rebuild a community of faith had been established.

After accounting for all the households, servants, singers, and livestock, the people gave sacrificially to support the rebuilt temple. Attention then turned to God's Word. **As a united body of believers, the people listened intently as Ezra exhorted and the Levites helped explain the Book of the Law of God.** As God's Word exposed their sinful hearts and rebellion against God, the people wept over their inborn depravity. But Nehemiah highlighted God's grace that is embedded in His Word. He encouraged the people not to mourn but to rejoice and celebrate God's goodness and love for them.

Continuing to feast on God's Word like the daily manna in the wilderness, the people remembered the approaching Feast of Tabernacles. In joyful obedience to God's Word, the freed exiles gathered branches, built temporary shelters, and remembered God's faithful deliverance of their ancestors from Egyptian bondage. This season of persevering faith provided another stepping stone in the

25. **Celebration:** 1 Kings 8:65; 2 Chronicles 7:9; Ezra 3:4

26. **Passover under Hezekiah:** 2 Chronicles 30:26

27. **Passover under Josiah:** 2 Kings 23:22; 2 Chronicles 35:18

28. **Reading the law:** Deuteronomy 31:10-13

story of salvation leading to the Messiah to come. **Jesus Christ provides ultimate freedom from sin's presence and introduces the perfect and pure fellowship with God that will dominate the eternal heavenly city to come.**

Apply It

The restoration of Jerusalem's wall by God's people illustrates the life of a faithful Christian today. The Bible reveals how God made a way to restore the spiritual vitality that humanity lost following Adam and Eve's Fall in the garden.²⁹ Only faith in Christ brings hope to our desperate situation and calls us back into relationship with God.³⁰ Christians still encounter God's enemies and must protect their hearts and minds against fierce spiritual battles.³¹ **God equips believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit and³² with His full armor³³ to sufficiently fend off the enemy's schemes and attacks.** How do you face your battles? We cannot stand strong in our own strength. When we trust in, obey, and worship God, we find Him faithful—no matter what we face in this world.

God prompted Nehemiah to list the people who reinhabited Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. **God's people are not a nameless throng to Him; He intimately knows each one.** Revelation confirms that the Lamb's Book of Life records every one of God's children.³⁴ God wants us to share His heart as we travel through this world that often seems crowded with faces and names. How actively do you invest your life in people? Can you pray for your neighbors by name? When you meet someone who looks or lives differently than you do, what helps you recognize their deepest needs and respond appropriately? Only God knows who truly belongs to Him, but He calls us to focus beyond ourselves and share His love with others.

God's Word deeply impacted the Israelites who took God's law to heart. With their sin exposed, they turned to God in repentance and experienced overwhelming joy as they committed to walk in God's ways. The Holy Spirit exposes our sin, not to overwhelm us with hopeless shame but to call us to experience God's grace and forgiveness. How do you respond when God reveals your sin? **Acknowledging specific sin and experiencing God's forgiveness demonstrate the Holy Spirit's work within us.** What helps you view repentance as God's gracious gift?³⁵

While believers await Jesus's return, they continue to draw close to God, eagerly listening to Him speak through His Word. The Bible records Jesus's finished work on earth and promises eternal life to all who trust Him for salvation. These truths do not represent dead facts but life-giving hope for God's people. Jesus has come and will return to establish the new heaven and new earth with His eternal people in resounding glory! Let us rejoice and be glad in Him! This reality is worth celebrating today and forever!

29. Fall: Genesis 3

30. Saved: John 3:16-17

31. Guard your heart: Proverbs 4:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16; Philippians 4:7

32. Holy Spirit: Romans 8:9

33. Armor: Ephesians 6:10-18

34. Book of Life: Revelation 20:12; 21:27

35. God's kindness in repentance: Romans 2:4



Confession and Obedience

Lesson 26 Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 25 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture show God's guidance, provision, and care for His people and His worthiness of our worship?
2. In what ways did the notes help you appreciate the importance of hearing, knowing, and understanding God's Word?

Second Day: Read Nehemiah 9:1-21.

The Israelites gathered to confess their sins and praise God for His faithfulness.

3.
 - a. As chapter 9 opens, why was it essential for the people to gather in sackcloth and ashes and separate from foreigners?
 - b. From what practices considered acceptable by the world is God calling you to separate?
4.
 - a. From today's passage and your knowledge of the Bible, describe the historical events and truths the Israelites recalled.

b. Why is it important to remember the history of God's people? (See also Romans 15:4.)

5. a. As you reflect on your past, what sins has God led you to acknowledge and repent of?

b. How will you seek God's forgiveness, accept His grace, and receive His freedom?

Third Day: Read Nehemiah 9:22-38.

The Israelites continued to recall their sin-filled history and God's loving grace.

6. a. Recounting their history, the people looked back to their ancestors' entrance into the promised land. Compare God's faithful provision with the people's rebellion.

b. What attributes of God appeal to you regarding His care for His people throughout this history?

7. a. Although freed from exile, what might have been the reason for the people's lament in verses 36-37?

b. How does this condition of distress and slavery reflect the state of the world today?

8. Considering humanity's persistent rebellion against God, what does His persistent grace and faithfulness mean to you?

Fourth Day: Read Nehemiah 10:1-29.

The people made a binding agreement with God.

9. a. Why did the Israelite leaders, beginning with Nehemiah, record their names on a binding agreement with God, and why was this important?

b. How have you expressed your personal commitment to God?

10. What would be the result if the Israelites failed to fulfill their promise to keep God's law? What makes this meaningful?
11. The people sealed their binding agreement with God by name. How are God's people sealed in Him today? (See also Ephesians 1:13-14 and Revelation 21:27.)

Fifth Day: Read Nehemiah 10:30-39.

The people promised to abide by God's law, citing specific ordinances.

12. a. Why was it essential for God's people to separate themselves from surrounding peoples in marriage and in celebration of the Sabbath? (See also Leviticus 23:3 and Deuteronomy 7:3-4.)
- b. What efforts do you make to maintain purity in your personal life, home, and family?
13. a. What promises did the Israelites make to maintain the service in God's temple?
- b. How do you contribute your time, talent, and possessions to help maintain your place of worship or build fellowship among God's people?
14. a. What practical and spiritual purposes do these promises and provisions represent?
- b. How might your practices in your life, family, and church reflect what matters most to you?

Sixth Day: Review Nehemiah 9–10.

God's Word compels His people to confess sin, repent, and obey God.

15. How has God led you this week to recognize and repent from sin?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Nehemiah 9–10

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

Lecture Notes

[illegible]

Next step: Read the lesson notes.

Lesson 26 Notes

Nehemiah 9–10

Focus Verse

“They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God.” (Nehemiah 9:3)

Outline

- From Confession to Commitment – Nehemiah 9
- Rebuilding a Life of Faith – Nehemiah 10

Engage

Honestly recalling our personal history or family’s genealogy never reveals a perfect or pristine past. Embarrassing missteps, indelible gaffes, secret sins, arrogance, habitual harm, rebellion, and injustice deeply pockmark our unique timelines and family trees. We often forge or revise much of our life story. We learn from our frequent mistakes and live with sin’s consequences. Our paths, carved through a swamp of our own iniquity, have damaged our lives and harmed others. **Yet, a more horrifying fact remains: We sin directly against God Himself.**

God never turns His back on His people. In mercy and grace, He calls us home. Consistent and caustic sinfulness led the Israelites to 70 years of exile. However, God fulfilled His promise. He orchestrated their return and the rebuilding of their homeland. God’s people, chastened and stripped of arrogant pride, had to trust God for every stone laid while they reconstructed Jerusalem’s temple and the city wall. Hungering for God’s Word, the people listened, turned back to God, and promised to obey Him. They recalled their past sins and the Lord’s consistent faithfulness. The people rededicated their lives to the God who created, redeemed, and restored them. **God’s Word compels His people to confess sin, repent, and obey God.**

● From Confession to Commitment – Nehemiah 9

Nehemiah recorded another holy day that played an integral part in rebuilding a community of faith among his people. Before moving forward, the Israelites needed to remember their history, recognize God’s design, and realize their own disorder. God’s sustaining and redeeming devotion pursued them despite their worst efforts. **God’s Word must remain central to the lives of His people.** Through Scripture we can know God more fully, understand His will, and center our worship on Him. On this day, Israel would receive a panoramic view of God’s glory, humanity’s wickedness, and the Lord’s incalculable grace.

Turning Back to God

The Doctrine of Repentance

The Israelites faced decades of persecution as they returned to the holy land to rebuild their lives. A reflective community of Israelites gathered to sincerely and publicly confess their collective sin. Turning their backs on God had taken them down a dark and deadly road. **Only after generations upon generations of stumbling in a spiritual wilderness did the Israelites come to grips with the depths of their depravity.** Humbled, the people turned to their only hope—the God who created, called, chose, guided, and saved them. Fasting in sackcloth and ashes symbolized their sincere remorse. The people repented of their sin.

Repentance involves turning away from sin and to God, accepting His forgiveness, and living in freedom from sin's penalty and power. Repentance includes conviction of sin,¹ contrition for sin (sorrow),² and conversion from sin (turning away).³ Believers continue to struggle with sin while living on this earth—until they die or Jesus returns. The Holy Spirit lovingly continues to extend grace, revealing specific sin to believers. When we confess and turn from our sin, we grow in spiritual maturity and better reflect God's Son, the only sinless one.

Failure to repent means ignoring the Holy Spirit's prompting and refusing to yield to God. This is costly. We may falsely believe we are strong enough to clean up the damage caused by our sin, which merely buries the problem or makes matters worse. When we do not repent, we carry the guilt of our sin rather than allowing Jesus to pay sin's debt on our behalf. Jesus died to set us free from sin's tyranny. Without repenting and seeking His forgiveness, we remain slaves to sin.

Repentance from sin brings new freedom in Christ. The Holy Spirit reveals specific sin we need to acknowledge and address as we walk through life. God's Word opens our eyes to recognize the many ways our desires and actions do not align with God's righteous standards. When we confess and repent from our sin, we immediately experience the deliverance Christ won for us on the cross. We are no longer paralyzed in sin's deadly trap, awaiting deserved judgment. Instead, we share in Jesus's resurrection and victory over sin and death. Repentance demonstrates God's kindness to us.⁴

1. **Conviction:** John 16:8-11

2. **Contrition:** 2 Corinthians 7:10-11

3. **Conversion:** Acts 20:21; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 2 Peter 3:9

4. **God's kindness in repentance:** Romans 2:4

Commitment to Confess – 9:1-2

After reestablishing and celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days, a solemn assembly convened on the eighth day.¹ The people regathered in Jerusalem for deliberate repentance. Undoubtedly gratified by their monumental success in rebuilding Jerusalem's protective wall, the people committed time to remember and reflect. They realized nothing would have been accomplished without God's grace, guidance, and mercy. Israel's past revealed the people's consistent waywardness—before, during, and after their exile. **The people needed to recognize their**

1. **Feast and assembly:** Nehemiah 8:16-18

stark rebellion against their holy God—their Creator, Lord, and Redeemer. After Ezra’s prayerful edict, the people separated themselves from the influence, worship, and detestable practices of their unbelieving neighbors.²

Remembering God – 9:3-4

Ezra may have been the designated leader who guided the people to listen for three hours to reading from the Book of the Law. For another three hours, they confessed corporate sin and then responded with corporate worship. Recognizing God’s order in worship, appointed Levites led the people in prayer acknowledging their eternal, sovereign God. God remains faithful to His children from generation to generation, century to century, and millennium to millennium, even when they turn their backs on Him. **From the beginning of time, God has called His people back to Him.**

Remembering Genesis – 9:5-8

The Levites began their proclamation where our Bible begins—in Genesis. They acknowledged God as the sole creator of the richness and diversity displayed in His majestic universe. **God is the author of life.**³ From angels to sea turtles, all that has been made comes from God and is designed to give Him glory.⁴ Because God is our creator, all are accountable to Him.

After celebrating God’s work in creation, the people praised God for choosing Abram, calling him from his homeland to an unknown territory, transforming him, and changing his name to Abraham. **Through His covenant with Abraham, God promised to raise up a holy people who would become a nation, live in a holy land, and bless the entire world.**⁵ Jerusalem—the very place where these worshippers now stood—would become the heart of this promised land.

Called as God’s people, the Israelites enjoyed their renewed commitment to Him. They would reflect God’s righteous⁶ character as they remained holy and distinct from other nations. **With lives transformed through faith in Jesus Christ, God’s people today reflect His goodness, grace, and power to a watching world.**⁷

Remembering the Exodus – 9:9-21

A people relatively fresh from exile would naturally relate to their ancestors’ exodus from Egypt.⁸

Like the shackles of Babylonian captivity, the centuries of Egyptian bondage were woven into the fabric of every Israelite’s heritage. Even while incarcerated in a foreign land, God’s people experienced His compassion, empathy, and mercy. God preserved His people and heard their cry for help. Through His servant Moses, God displayed His supernatural power multiple times to Pharaoh. God also provided a miraculous escape route; He parted the Red Sea and freed His people from slavery.

Four hundred thirty years of captivity in Egypt⁹ gave way to Israel’s 40 years of wandering in the parched desert wilderness.¹⁰ God led His people by day with a pillar of cloud and by night with a

2. Separation: Ezra 9–10

3. Author of life: Genesis 1–2; Exodus 20:11; Isaiah 40:12

4. Creation worships God: Psalm 148

5. Covenant: Genesis 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–17; 15:4, 13–21; 17:1–14

6. Righteous: Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 119:137

7. Reflect Christ: 2 Corinthians 1:20–22; Ephesians 1:3–14

8. Exodus from Egypt: Exodus 2–15

9. Egyptian captivity: Exodus 12:40

10. Wilderness wandering: Numbers 32:13; Deuteronomy 8:2; Joshua 5:6

pillar of fire “to give them light on the way they were to take.”¹¹ God not only provided direction but also spoke His law to Moses on Mount Sinai. He gave the people commands defining righteousness and Sabbath rest. Every day, God gave them manna, “bread from heaven,” to eat.¹² He quenched their thirst with water from a rock¹³ and provided durable clothes.¹⁴ Despite their wandering hearts, God led His people toward His promised land.¹⁵

This entire passage contrasts God’s consistent goodness to His people with their sinfulness. The Israelites hearing this message reflected not only the heritage of their ancestors but also their chronic hard-heartedness. Their self-centered pride and stiff necks persistently refused to bow to God. They frequently grumbled while in the desert. They fearfully resisted moving forward and rebelled against God’s leadership. The Israelites **habitually turned their backs on God, forgot His wonderful works, and failed to obey His commands.** Yet, God remained faithful to the people He loved even when their idolatrous hearts led them to fashion and worship a golden calf.¹⁶

God sustained His people in the wilderness despite their unreasonable demands to return to slavery in Egypt.¹⁷ **God’s enduring presence gave the Israelites all they needed to reach Canaan’s border.** His Spirit spoke through Moses and led His people through the wilderness. God empowered Ezra and Nehemiah to restore Jerusalem. And by His grace, the same Holy Spirit speaks to and leads God’s people today.

Remembering the Promised Land – 9:22-28

Israel’s history continued to unfold as the people recalled Joshua’s conquests and the occupation of Canaan. God’s people refused to step out in faith and move into the land under Moses’s leadership.¹⁸ But four decades later, God would raise up a new generation led by Joshua into the fertile promised land.¹⁹ This nation would grow in population, territory, and power as they looked toward God and obediently followed Him.

The people rebuilding Jerusalem recalled their nation’s bondage to sin. Israel had repeatedly received God’s abundant and undeserved provision. They repaid God with blasphemous rebellion. Desiring to rule themselves and live independently from God, the stiff-necked Israelites killed God’s prophets²⁰ in idolatrous hedonism. Alongside His promise of provision,²¹ God had also cautioned His people regarding sin’s consequences.²² God fulfills all His promises, including those that speak of judgment. Israel’s history repeatedly cycled through rebellion, judgment, repentance, and deliverance.

Remembering the Exile – 9:29-31

Israel’s cycle of sin escalated through a cascade of kings who led the divided nation into eventual exile.²³ Asherah poles, false prophets, and marriages to pagan queens littered the history of God’s people, whom He anointed as ambassadors of His holiness. Assyria took the northern 10 tribes of Israel captive. The remaining southern remnant of Judah and Benjamin was transported into captivity in Babylon.²⁴

11. Pillars: Exodus 13:21-22

12. Manna: Exodus 16:4-5, 14-36

13. Water: Exodus 17:1-7

14. Clothes: Deuteronomy 8:4

15. Near the land: Deuteronomy 11:31; 34:1-5

16. Golden calf: Exodus 32:4-6; Acts 7:39-43

17. Pleas to return: Exodus 16:3; 17:3; Numbers 14:2; 20:3

18. Refusal to enter the land: Deuteronomy 1:19-46

19. Fruitful land: Deuteronomy 8:7-10

20. Killed prophets: 1 Kings 19:10, 14; 2 Chronicles 24:20-22; Jeremiah 26:20-23; Matthew 23:31; Acts 7:52

21. Promise of provision: Deuteronomy 6:10-11; 8:7-10

22. Consequences: Deuteronomy 6:12-15; 8:11-20

23. Israel’s kings: 1 Kings; 2 Kings

24. Exile: 2 Kings 17; 24-25

These dramatic events did not surprise God. Rather, the Lord had promised and orchestrated this necessary judgment to sanctify His people.²⁵ The Israelites did not yet fully realize their desperate need to obey their loving heavenly Father. While God would temporarily separate His people from His land, He would never abandon them.²⁶ **God persistently and patiently pursues and woos sinners to return to Him.**

Remembering God's Faithfulness – 9:32-37

Fully reminded of God's faithfulness and Israel's penchant for rebellion through the generations, the people of Nehemiah's day surrendered to God's covenant of love. They did not ask Him to forget their evil ways or the hardship they brought upon themselves. **Rather, echoing Ezra's prayer,²⁷ God's people appealed to His righteousness, goodness, and mercy and yielded to Him.**

Though released from exile, Israel remained a nation under the yoke of Persian rule. They recalled their nation's bondage to Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. Although they were back in their land, they had not yet experienced the harvest of their fruitful homeland as their own. Recognizing they remained under the fickle mercy of a worldly ruler, they appealed to the faithful mercy of the eternal King, who rules all creation.

Similarly, the world today remains in bondage to Satan, who rules over all who have been born into sin.²⁸ **Except for those set free through faith in Christ,²⁹ the global population remains in allegiance to the evil one.** Satan's domination will end in the last days. One day, Jesus will reign without rival and eternally condemn all who have not turned to Him. God's Son—our Savior—will introduce and reign over His eternal kingdom, which includes all who have declared Jesus Christ as their Lord.³⁰

Remembering Commitment – 9:38

In transparent admission, repentance, and surrender, the people recommitted themselves to a covenantal relationship with God. By name, Israel's leaders personally sealed their promise of commitment to God. Their intentional pledge foreshadows the personal commitment through faith in Jesus Christ that brings people into a renewed, eternal relationship with God.³¹

● Rebuilding a Life of Faith – Nehemiah 10

Affixing Their Promise – 10:1-29

Promises mean little without a commitment to stand behind them. **Like a binding contract, the people responded to their confession and the law's exhortation by affixing their names to their promises.** Beginning with their leader, Nehemiah, and cascading through the priests, Levites, and leaders, these 84 recorded names represent a nation committed to honoring God with their hearts and actions.

By name and vocation, the people sealed their promise to abide in God's holy ways as revealed in His holy Word. They would forgo their sinful ways and trust God to guide them through their days,

25. **Promised judgment:** Deuteronomy 30:16-18

26. **God's faithfulness:** 2 Chronicles 36:22-23

27. **Ezra's prayer:** Ezra 9:5-15

28. **Satan's rule:** 2 Corinthians 4:4

29. **Saved from darkness:** Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 1:13-14; 2 Timothy 2:22-26

30. **Eternal reign:** Revelation 21-22

31. **Personal commitment:** Acts 2:38-41

according to the Mosaic law. They bound themselves to “a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God” and acknowledged they would deserve judgment if they rebelled.³²

History reveals the imperfect allegiance of God’s faltering people to this “binding agreement” and “seal.” However, God’s declaration of righteousness upon His redeemed people remains perfectly binding and sealed for eternity. **Through faith in Jesus Christ, God justifies His people, seals them with His Spirit, and promises them an eternity with Him.**³³ Saved believers still sin and receive the Lord’s correction.³⁴ Even so, God’s people belong to Him eternally. He will never remove them from His promises and favor. Their names are forever etched in the Lamb’s Book of Life.³⁵

Marriage – 10:30

Like his contemporary Ezra, Nehemiah stressed God’s true and timeless standard of oneness in faith within marriage.³⁶ Then and today, God’s people are not to conform to the world’s patterns but to be transformed through faith as they surrender to the one true God.³⁷ **No child of God can experience full unity with a spouse if they are not of one mind concerning the things of God.**³⁸ When this command is disobeyed and a believer marries an unbeliever, confusion and challenges follow—sometimes with disastrous results. Yet, in God’s grace and through the Holy Spirit’s work, a spouse who comes to faith can win over the unbelieving spouse and family through their winsome witness of the Lord’s radiance.³⁹

Sabbath – 10:31

God’s people were to remain distinct from the world around them as they interacted with those not associated with God. God’s command for His people to keep the Sabbath made the Israelites different from their neighbors and signified His covenant with them.⁴⁰ **Honoring the Sabbath not only provided a day of rest but also brought God’s people joy and delight.**⁴¹

Engaging in commerce on all seven days was tempting.⁴² **Obedience to God’s command led the Israelites to promise to refrain from trade on the Sabbath or any holy day, trusting His provision not their efforts.** They also committed to allowing their land to rest every seventh year,⁴³ trusting God to provide during the year of no cultivation and canceled debts.

Temple Tax – 10:32-33

Mosaic law included an atonement offering that supported the place and practices of worship prescribed by God.⁴⁴ Because service in God’s house required support, the people assumed responsibility to financially support their worship, festivals, and ceremonial offerings, as well as duties within the temple.

32. **Consequence of rebellion:** Jeremiah 24:8-10; Ezekiel 20:13

33. **Sealed:** Ephesians 1:13-14

34. **Lord’s discipline:** Hebrews 12:7-11

35. **Lamb’s Book of Life:** Revelation 21:27

36. **Marriage to unbelievers:** Ezra 9–10; Nehemiah 13:23-27; Malachi 2:10-16; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

37. **Transformed:** Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:20-21

38. **Unequally yoked:** 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

39. **Witness to an unbelieving spouse:** 1 Peter 3:1-7

40. **Sabbath:** Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15

41. **Delight of the Sabbath:** Isaiah 58:13-14

42. **Temptation:** Nehemiah 13:16-22

43. **Sabbath year:** Leviticus 25:2-7

44. **Atonement offering:** Exodus 30:11-16

Temple Work – 10:34

Although no specific law required a tax for the contribution of wood, Leviticus required a continual fire on the altar.⁴⁵ Therefore, Nehemiah ensured the needed supply of wood through a rotation system determined by casting lots.

Tithing – 10:35-39

This chapter's closing verses summarize the law's requirement to supply the land's produce for the priests and temple servants.⁴⁶

- The firstfruits (10:35) consisted of the first and best of the land's harvested crops. God's law required the firstfruits to be given back to Him. He is the one who provided the fruitful land and crops. Firstfruits also have symbolic meaning. Throughout the Bible, firstfruits refer to the nation of Israel, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Christians, and the believing remnant of 144,000 in Revelation.⁴⁷
- Because the Lord deserves the first and the best, the firstborn sons and animals (10:36) were to be offered for temple service. They could be "redeemed," or bought back for secular use, by sacrifice or monetary offering.⁴⁸
- The first of meal, grain, fruit, wine, and oil (10:37) likely means the best, along with a tenth of the crops for the Levites.⁴⁹
- The temple treasury (10:38) received a portion of the tithe to the Levites. Even those called to serve the Lord vocationally were required to give to God from what they had received. This was supervised by a descendant of Aaron, likely the current high priest.
- "We will not neglect the house of our God" (10:39). The people promised to bring their best, knowing God had seen their worst.

Honoring the temple and those who worked there reflected the people's honor, respect, and reverence toward their God. People who had rebelled against God were redeemed by Him. They would offer a portion back to God out of the blessings He gave. Their painful journey involved remembering His law, recounting and repenting of their sin, and rebuilding a devastated temple, wall, and city. Most importantly, the Lord sustained and guided them. God fulfills His promises, protects His people, and calls them home. **God's Word compels His people to confess sin, repent, and obey God.**

● Take to Heart

Hold Fast

The Israelites celebrated God's faithfulness through the weeklong Feast of Tabernacles. Appropriately stripped of self-righteous and self-sovereign pride, the people sought another opportunity to devote themselves to the God who had delivered them. They fasted in sackcloth and ashes and confessed their sin as they remembered God's faithfulness throughout the generations. **The people recalled their**

45. **Burnt offering:** Leviticus 6:12-13

46. **Offerings:** Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Numbers 18:12-13; Deuteronomy 26:1-11

47. **Firstfruits:** Jeremiah 2:3; Romans 8:29; 11:16; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; James 1:18; Revelation 14:4

48. **Redeemed:** Exodus 13:13; 34:20; Numbers 3:46-47; 18:15-18; Deuteronomy 12:5-6; 15:19-23

49. **Tithes:** Numbers 15:20-21; 18:21-24; Deuteronomy 18:4

wickedness while they remembered God's holiness, righteous judgment, and loving redemption. The people must have winced at their rebellion and wept with joy at God's gift of redemption.

In response to God's faithfulness, the Israelites pledged their allegiance to the God who saves.

Remembering the Mosaic law, they promised to obey God in purity of heart. They would remember the Sabbath and worship as He commanded. They would joyfully give back to God, who had provided for them so abundantly generation after generation. They promised to no longer "neglect the house of our God." The people of Jerusalem embarked on the road to recovery.

Apply It

As the Israelites celebrated God's goodness, they mourned their sin and confessed the ways they had failed as a nation to honor God. This conscious awareness did not bring debilitating paralysis but an opportunity to repent and move forward in obedience. The sacrifices practiced by God's people foreshadowed the sacrifice of the perfect Lamb to come. **Jesus Christ's death on the cross provides salvation from sin's bondage and penalty for all who believe in Him.** The Holy Spirit activates truth within God's Word and awakens us to recognize our need for God's intervention. When sinners turn from sin and to Christ for salvation, God frees them from sin's guilt and empowers them to rebuild their lives in His strength. How has recognizing your own debt of sin led you to look to Christ for salvation? Repentance demonstrates a faith-filled response to God's kindness, grace, and authority to forgive our sin. If you have not turned to Christ, why not today?

God's provision of salvation in Christ makes repentance a welcome posture for God's children. A believer's spiritual growth requires an ongoing battle with personal sin. As believers walk through life, the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work combats sin's residual appetites lodged in the heart and mind. While this seemingly ceaseless struggle often feels discouraging, recognizing and repenting from specific sins reveals God's grace. Confessing sin regularly allows us fresh experiences with God's compassion and unconditional love. As you reflect on your past sin, do you wallow in regret or confess, repent, receive, and accept God's offer of forgiveness? Do you view repentance as a painful necessity or a gracious blessing? When God reveals your specific sins against Him and others, how readily do you repent? God longs for us to forsake our sin and seek Him.

Living a redeemed life means being set free to live for God, not self. Right standing with God, facilitated through repentance, empowers and stirs a believer's desire to follow Christ and obey God. The Bible reveals God's will, ways, and plan for His creation and children. The Bible is not a book of rules for people to follow to earn God's favor but God's revelation of Himself to the people He created. If you have been redeemed through faith in Jesus Christ, ask your Lord to guide you through His Word. In what ways are you experiencing the joy of a redeemed life through salvation in Christ? Whether through your BSF study, personal devotions, church community, or Christian fellowship, unpack God's personal charge to you through His perfect, unchanging, life-giving Word. Follow what He says. The Holy Spirit, who indwells all believers, makes this possible.⁵⁰ **Obeying God brings freedom to experience a flourishing, satisfying life, serving others and glorifying God.**

50. Work of the Spirit: Romans 8:3-8



Dedication and Renewal

Lesson 27 Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 26 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What new thoughts did the lecture give you about God's goodness and faithfulness toward His people?

2. How have the notes stirred your desire to receive freedom through repentance?

Second Day: Read Nehemiah 11:1–12:26.

Nehemiah led the effort to bolster Jerusalem's population and commitment to worship.

3.
 - a. How did the people determine who would settle in Jerusalem? (See also Numbers 26:55 and 1 Samuel 10:20-21.)

 - b. Why was populating Jerusalem important? (See also Galatians 4:26-28; Hebrews 12:22-24; and Revelation 3:12; 21:2, 10.)

4.
 - a. What groups of people do you see in this week's passage?

b. As you scan your list, what do you learn about God and what He desires for His people?

5. How do you seek to honor God wherever you are in this season of your life?

Third Day: Read Nehemiah 12:27-47.

Nehemiah led a ceremony to dedicate Jerusalem's wall.

6. a. Describe the dedication of Jerusalem's wall.

b. Why do you think this dedication ceremony was important?

7. As you think about this ceremony, particularly the description in Nehemiah 12:43, what do you learn about what wholehearted dedication and holiness look like in believers' lives? (See also Psalm 90:16-17 and Ephesians 2:8-10.)

8. In what ways do you celebrate what the Lord has done through you, around you, and in the world?

Fourth Day: Read Nehemiah 13:1-14.

Nehemiah took corrective action in response to people's sin.

9. a. According to today's passage, what happened in the absence of Nehemiah and his leadership?

b. What corrective actions did Nehemiah take?

10. What does this passage show you about the pervasiveness of sin and the necessity of holiness? (See also Genesis 4:6-7; Luke 22:31; Ephesians 2:1-3; and 2 Timothy 2:25-26.)

11. a. What lessons do you learn from Nehemiah's actions?

b. How might you apply these lessons to your daily life?

Fifth Day: Read Nehemiah 13:15-31.

Nehemiah instituted final reforms in Israel.

12. What problems did Nehemiah confront concerning the following, and how did he handle them?

The Sabbath (See also Exodus 20:8-11 and Nehemiah 10:31.)

Intermarriage with unbelieving foreigners (See also Deuteronomy 7:3-4 and Ezra 9-10.)

13. Why do you think Nehemiah responded to and addressed these problems so passionately?

(See also John 2:13-17.)

14. What intentional measures do you take to maintain holiness in your personal life, your home, and your church?

Sixth Day: Review Nehemiah 11–13.

Devotion to God requires dedicating every aspect of life to Him.

15. How does Nehemiah's passion encourage you to address areas of your life you have not fully dedicated to the Lord?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Nehemiah 11–13

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

[illegible]

Next step: Read the lesson notes.

Lesson 27 Notes

Nehemiah 11–13

Focus Verse

“Remember me for this, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.” (Nehemiah 13:14)

Outline

- Dedication to Home – Nehemiah 11:1–12:26
- Dedication of the Wall – Nehemiah 12:27-47
- Dedication to Reforms – Nehemiah 13

Engage

When have you sought or embarked upon a fresh start? Perhaps you developed a list of resolutions at the dawn of a new year to make the next 12 months better than the past. Maybe in the wake of a drastic mistake, you humbly expressed your sorrow, asked for forgiveness, and vowed to do better. Or you may have entered a fresh season of life—a new job, school, city, or relationship—and celebrated a new opportunity for growth. **We all yearn for new beginnings.** But what—or who—motivates us?

Reality inevitably falls short of our vision, hopes, and dreams. When we depend on our own efforts or set worldly goals, we often emerge with even less hope than before. As residents of this fallen world, we continue to falter. However, God remains committed to His people. What causes us to turn to Him? How can we commit to Him and allow Him to mature us through our challenges? Nehemiah led the Israelites to rebuild Jerusalem’s wall, respond to God’s Word, and dedicate their lives to Him. Despite these victories, the people easily slipped back into their former ways. Consistent commitment to God requires persistent dependence on Him and His restorative grace. **Devotion to God requires dedicating every aspect of life to Him.**

● Dedication to Home – Nehemiah 11:1–12:26

Leading the Way – 11:1-2

While the Israelites were in exile for 70 years, Jerusalem lay in ruins. The returned exiles rebuilt the temple, but without walls, Jerusalem remained defenseless and desolate. Few desired to live in the vulnerable capital city, which remained the vital heart of the Holy Land. So the people built their homesteads outside Jerusalem.

Historically, the strength of a nation rests in its capital city. This was especially true for Jerusalem, considering its unifying spiritual and eternal significance.¹ Home to the temple, the Holy City stood at the heart of Jewish worship.² The future new Jerusalem—whether symbolic or physical—will also be central in the new heaven and earth to come.

Returning Jewish leaders sought to stabilize and rebuild the Holy City for all God's people. **To repopulate Jerusalem, specific families needed to sacrifice everyday comforts and settle there.** The people cast lots to discern the Lord's will regarding who would move to the city.³ Some also volunteered, feeling a sense of privilege and duty as if called to battle.⁴ Whether chosen by lot or acting on personal choice, the people commended the tangible obedience, willingness, and sacrifice of all who volunteered to honor God's will and seek His blessing as they lived in Jerusalem.

Leaders of Jerusalem – 11:3-24

Introduction (11:3-4a) – Some current residents of Jerusalem, along with priests, Levites, temple servants, and descendants of Solomon's servants, led these pioneers. The apparently selective list of Jerusalem's leaders recorded by Nehemiah parallels the list of Jerusalem's first returned residents in 1 Chronicles.⁵ This bears witness to God's providence over the details of His people.

Judah and Benjamin (11:4b-9) – The tribes of Judah and Benjamin comprised the Southern Kingdom⁶ that had been exiled to Babylon. **God remembered His people and called them home—back to Himself.** “Men of standing” (11:6, 14) means “men of valor.” A military inference, the designation of a “chief officer” (11:9, 14, 22) acknowledges the defensive posture required for rebuilding the Holy City.

Priests (11:10-14) – The Old Testament prominently records the genealogies of priests.⁷ **Only those descending from Aaron, Moses's brother, could serve in the crucial role of priest.**⁸ Those who could not prove their Aaronic lineage were disqualified from the priesthood.⁹

Levites (11:15-18) – Descendants of Levi¹⁰ attended to worship and care of the temple. Nehemiah's list includes two groups responsible for “outside work of the house of God.” This probably involved providing materials for temple upkeep. Jerusalem's new residents included leaders focused on prayer and thanksgiving, one of whom descended from Asaph, who led the temple choirs in David's day.¹¹

Gatekeepers (11:19) – While the priests attended to the spiritual well-being of the people, the gatekeepers kept them physically secure. Mentioned 16 times in Nehemiah and Ezra, gatekeepers guarded the city,¹² the temple,¹³ and the temple's treasures.¹⁴

Beyond the Walls (11:20) – As Jerusalem's population became established, the rest of the people reinhabited their “ancestral property.” These God-granted inheritances reached back generationally to before the exile.¹⁵ The priests and Levites served all God's people throughout the land.

1. **Jerusalem's significance:** Galatians 4:26-28; Hebrews 11:10; 12:22-24; 13:14; Revelation 3:12; 21:2, 10

2. **Worship in Jerusalem:** Psalms 132:13-14; 137:5-6

3. **Casting lots:** Numbers 26:55; 1 Samuel 10:20-21

4. **Joyful willingness to serve God:** Judges 5:2; Psalm 110:3

5. **Jerusalem's returnees:** 1 Chronicles 9:2-21

6. **Southern Kingdom:** 1 Kings 12:21-23

7. **Genealogies:** 1 Chronicles 6:1-15, 49-53; 9:10-13; 24:1-19; Ezra 7:1-5

8. **Aaron and his descendants as priests:** Exodus 4:10-17; 7:1; 28:1; Leviticus 8:2; 21:1; Numbers 18:1-7; Deuteronomy 18:5; 1 Samuel 2:28

9. **Disqualified:** Ezra 2:62; Nehemiah 7:64

10. **Levites:** Numbers 3; 8:5-26; 1 Chronicles 24:20-31

11. **Asaph:** 1 Chronicles 25:1-2; Psalms 50; 73-83

12. **Guarding the city:** 2 Samuel 18:26; 1 Chronicles 9:17-18

13. **Guarding the temple:** 1 Chronicles 9:19-32; 15:23-24; 23:5

14. **Guarding possessions:** 1 Chronicles 9:26; 26:20-22; Nehemiah 12:25

15. **Inheritance:** Genesis 31:14; Numbers 18:21; 27:7; 1 Kings 21:3-4

Other Responsibilities (11:21-24) – Nehemiah included the temple servants, who diligently rounded out the responsibilities for maintenance of the temple and encouragement of the people. Uzzi, a descendant of Asaph and chief officer of the Levites, served specifically as leader of the temple singers. Pethahiah likely acted as a liaison between Israel's leaders and the Persian king's court.

Further Settlements – 11:25-36

Settlements of Judah (11:25-30) – Under Joshua's leadership, the Israelites had first entered the promised land and grown roots there.¹⁶ Returning from Babylonian exile with Jerusalem virtually uninhabitable, the people resettled in surrounding villages that had been established generations earlier. **The expanse of land “from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom” stretched south of Jerusalem.** Beersheba was the southernmost city, and the Valley of Hinnom bordered the southern edge of Jerusalem.

Settlements of Benjamin (11:31-36) – The tribe of Benjamin established their towns to the north and west of Jerusalem. Prior to exile, Levites had been assigned settlements throughout Israel and Judah.¹⁷ Their mention here likely establishes that the Levites did not exclusively serve the tribe of Judah.

Priests and Levites – 12:1-26

The first half of chapter 12 lists the priests and Levites who served during the time Zerubbabel led the first group of people to return to the Holy Land. **Despite persistent opposition, the priests and Levites continued to serve the Lord and His people through the years.**

From First Return (12:1-9) – Joshua, the high priest, joined Zerubbabel in the first wave of exiles returning to Jerusalem. Also mentioned in Zechariah's vision,¹⁸ Joshua was responsible for the priests listed in verses 1-7 and the Levites.

Since Joiakim (12:10-24) – Joshua's son Joiakim succeeded him as high priest. The book of the annals stored in the temple recorded these names.¹⁹ Through King David, a man after God's heart,²⁰ the Lord had established and appointed divisions of priests and Levites to lead worship.²¹ **God deserves all the glory, honor, and praise of His people.**

Gatekeepers (12:25-26) – The list closes with Israel's gatekeepers and one of the few explicit references to Israel's two most prominent leaders—Nehemiah and Ezra. In unity, these faithful men of God led Israel through a challenging season to encourage, guide, and protect God's people for His glory. **A right view of God enabled each person listed to fulfill a specific role that maintained the sanctity of His people.**

Dedication of the Wall – Nehemiah 12:27-47

Nehemiah understood that all aspects of civic life, not only the temple, should be dedicated as holy to the Lord—the wall, city, and its people. The wall's completion and the people's commitment to the Lord culminated Nehemiah's work as governor.

16. **Settlements:** Joshua 15:20-63

17. **Levites across the land:** Joshua 21

18. **Joshua:** Zechariah 3:1-10

19. **Book of the annals:** Ezra 4:15; Esther 2:23; 6:1; 10:2

20. **David:** 1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22

21. **Priestly appointments:** 1 Chronicles 25:1; 2 Chronicles 8:14

Preparation and Purification – 12:27-30

To properly dedicate the wall, Nehemiah called the Levites and musicians from the surrounding communities. The people celebrated the Lord's holy work with glee.²² This joyful and right posture reminds us of the celebration at the temple's completion.²³

The Levites joined the priests in purifying themselves as they prepared for worship. Personal purification may have included washing their bodies and clothes, giving a sin offering, fasting, and sexual abstinence. This purification of the people, gates, and wall reflected a desire for sanctity in the Lord's presence. Jerusalem, home to the temple, represented a place of reverence and worship.

Pomp and Procession – 12:31-43

Nehemiah orchestrated a procession of priests, Levites, musicians, and leaders flowing in opposite directions atop Jerusalem's reconstructed wall. Each group of singers, accompanied by an orchestra of cymbals, harps, and lyres, sang songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Ezra's Choir (12:31-37) – Ezra led one large, music-bathed group that began southwest of Jerusalem and moved counterclockwise around the city.²⁴ This path followed Nehemiah's early scouting route before the wall's reconstruction.²⁵ Now, with a rebuilt wall estimated to be 9 feet (2.7 m) wide, musicians could walk in columns of three.

Nehemiah's Choir (12:38-39) – Nehemiah led the second procession, which started northward and went clockwise around the wall. The two groups flowing in opposite directions both proceeded toward the temple as their ultimate destination. Worship enveloped God's Holy City. Imagine the intense joy of such a day! Surely the people experienced deep and glorious emotions when, after extreme difficulty and opposition, this significant work had been accomplished.

Worship at the Temple (12:40-43) – When the procession's tour completed the circuit of the rebuilt Holy City and met at the temple, they united to lift their voices in thanks to God. **There would be no wall without God's enabling.** As a means of prescribed purification, "they offered great sacrifices." Animal sacrifices pointed to the work of Christ. His perfect sacrifice on the cross carried sin's weight of guilt for all who trust Him for salvation. Christ's atoning sacrifice allows our work to be acceptable in God's sight as an expression of our faith in Him.

Promise of Provision – 12:44-47

With a high view of God bolstered afresh by joyous worship, Nehemiah turned to the practical matters of temple maintenance. Doing God's continued work within a city, church, home, or life often incorporates careful planning. Nehemiah established clear priorities regarding offerings and provisions for the Levites. The people contributed to the practical needs of God's servants, whose sacred duties left no opportunity for them to earn a living.

22. Gladness: Deuteronomy 12:18; Nehemiah 8:9-12

23. Temple celebration: Ezra 3:10-13

24. Map of Jerusalem: See the map in the Preface of the book or in the Resource Library (keyword search: *map*).

25. Nehemiah's survey: Nehemiah 2:12-16

Saved by Grace, Empowered by God

The Doctrine of Works

As impressive as the rebuilding of the wall and the sacrificial repopulation of Jerusalem seem to us, they did not earn the Israelites right standing with God. The history of God's people confirms how we persistently falter and fall far short of God's perfect standards. "There is no one righteous, not even one," God proclaimed through Paul.¹ **Only God, who is perfect in all He does, can declare a person righteous.** What, then, is the purpose of trying to act righteously?

The people of God are saved by grace through faith.² In Nehemiah's day, the people's faith was embedded in the promised sacrificial redemption of the Messiah. Their ritual sacrifices and worship pointed to Jesus Christ. Because redemption is God's gift, the works of His people rise as a grateful, worshipful response, giving glory and honor to their Savior. Christians today do not earn God's favor by what they do but worship God through loving commitment and obedience empowered by His Spirit. Faith, then, is professed not just in words but in actions that demonstrate God's grace.³

Dependence on works to earn God's favor results in ongoing frustration and failure. Unable to measure up to God's perfect standards, people reject the idea that their actions even matter. They may even wrongly believe they're good enough as long as the good outweighs the bad.

Trusting Christ for salvation brings contentment. Knowing they remain in God's grasp and care, believers are eternally secure—despite their ongoing struggle with sin. As believers grow in faith in Christ, their desire to serve God matures. God's Spirit increasingly frees them from self-focused pursuits. Maturing believers progressively and rightly realize that everything belongs to God. He deserves our devotion in everything we do and our dedication of everything we own. God blesses and empowers every work that glorifies Him.⁴

1. **No one righteous:** Romans 3:10

2. **Saved by grace:** Ephesians 2:8-10

3. **Works of faith:** Romans 11:6; Galatians 2:16; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4-8; James 2:14-18; 2 Peter 1:5-11

4. **Blessed work:** Psalm 90:16-17

● Dedication to Reforms – Nehemiah 13

Reformation calls for but does not guarantee holiness. With the temple and wall rebuilt and a community reestablished, Jerusalem began forging ahead in day-to-day routines. Though reminded of God's will through His Word and promising to live according to His ways, the weeds of sinful human nature found a way to germinate within the wheat of the faithful. God's faithful correction progressively hones His people to righteousness that honors Him.

Remembering the Law – 13:1-3

Some time after the wall's dedication, the people listened to a reading of the Book of the Law, customary in a religious ceremony. The reading included the prohibition of Ammonites and Moabites within the assembly.²⁶ Centuries earlier, the king of Moab had followed Balaam's advice and caused

26. **Prohibition:** Deuteronomy 23:3-5

Israel to fall into idolatry by enticing Israelite men through alliances with Moabite women.²⁷ The disastrous result required unusually drastic actions.²⁸ Nehemiah did not want this situation repeated.

Corruption and Renewal of the Temple – 13:4-9

In a vacuum created by the absence of godly leadership, sin seeps in and fills the void.²⁹ Nehemiah's completed mission in Jerusalem had taken more than a dozen years, and he had been called back to the Persian court in Babylon. While he was away, the people fell back into compromise with the secular world. They needed a leader willing to admonish and correct a series of misdeeds.

The Problem (13:4-5) – The first issue again involved Nehemiah's nemesis, Tobiah. **Ironically, this man who had earlier taunted Nehemiah over the sorry condition of Jerusalem's wall now considered the temple storerooms worthy to house his possessions.** Space originally designated for storing provisions for worship and the temple staff³⁰ became Tobiah's personal warehouse.

Sin is a pervasive and persistent part of fallen human nature. Tobiah's actions illustrate the resilience of God's enemy and his duplicity in seeking any weakness in the armor of God's people. In this case, the enemy's foothold was Tobiah's association with the priest, Eliashib, who allowed God's holy house to be desecrated by selfish pursuits.

The Solution (13:6-9) – The holiness of God leaves no room for compromise. **God's people must remain constantly on guard against the enemy's corrupting schemes.** Nehemiah secured permission to return to Jerusalem, where he learned of Tobiah's alliance. He promptly rid the large storeroom of the defiling goods, purifying and restoring the space to God's intended purpose.

Corruption and Renewal of Responsibility – 13:10-14

The Problem (13:10) – **The next corrective measure involved the people's delinquency in providing for temple operations as God commanded.** The sin of greed had reared its head earlier during Jerusalem's reconstruction.³¹ Long before God gave the law to Moses, the practice of giving one-tenth of one's possessions had been practiced.³² The Levites could not earn a living through normal means and spend their time *and* energy working in the temple. The people's withheld tithes forced the Levites to return to their fields for survival, which left God's work neglected.

The Solution (13:11-14) – Nehemiah sternly called the Levites and musicians back to their stations and reinstituted the people's commitment to tithing. He assigned trustworthy men to oversee the storerooms and the distribution of supplies to the Levites. With a heart consistently focused on loyalty and gratitude to God, Nehemiah lifted a prayer of praise and remembrance. **Grateful believers praise God not for their own achievements but for His intervention in their lives.**

Corruption and Renewal of the Sabbath – 13:15-22

The Problem (13:15-16) – The people's promise to keep the Sabbath³³ clashed with secular pressure to maintain trade on every day of the week. Nehemiah especially indicted people from Tyre who led

27. **Moab's scheme:** Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16

28. **Disastrous results from Moab's deception:** Numbers 31:16-24

29. **Absence of leadership:** Exodus 32

30. **Storerooms:** Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 2 Chronicles 31:9-11; Nehemiah 10:37

31. **Greed:** Haggai 1:1-9; Nehemiah 5:1-13

32. **Tithing:** Genesis 14:20; 28:22

33. **Sabbath:** Exodus 20:8-11; Nehemiah 10:31

the way, among other nations, in merchant relationships with Israel.³⁴ **God commanded one day a week to be set aside exclusively to honor Him.** The Sabbath day of rest reminded God's people of their covenant with God,³⁵ His creation,³⁶ and their redemption.³⁷

The Solution (13:17-22) – Nehemiah reminded the nobles, who most likely benefitted the most from trade alliances, of the consequences of violating God's Sabbath command. With Israel's exile and Jerusalem's destruction in their recent history, these Israelites should have known better.³⁸ They and the entire nation had much to lose—not just material wealth, but God's favor.

Nehemiah did his best to protect his people from sin. He literally shut the doors to temptation and threatened to arrest merchants camped outside the gate. He commanded the Levites to purify themselves and guard the gates, maintaining the city's holy state. He prayerfully pleaded with God for His loving protection and mercy. Resisting sin is not a passive exercise. **Maintaining holiness requires vigilance, intentionality, and accountability within the sacred community.**

Corruption and Renewal of Unity – 13:23-28

The Problem (13:23-24) – Nehemiah revisited the problem of intermarriage, which was forbidden in the Mosaic law.³⁹ God designed people from all nations for devotion to Him. The law's prohibition did not universally forbid marriage crossing ethnic borders but sustained the identity and sanctity of God's people.⁴⁰ Marriages to spouses mired in idolatry impugned the identity of the Israelites, weakened devotion in the home, and confused the Hebrew language.

The Solution (13:25-28) – Nehemiah's violent response reflected the gravity of the crisis. He reminded the people that even a highly respected, renowned, and wise leader such as Solomon could sin grievously and lead a nation into moral decay through marriage that compromised faith and godly conviction.⁴¹ Solomon amassed 700 wives and 300 concubines, including women of Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite heritage. Solomon followed his father David's footsteps in building a mighty kingdom. However, he also set forth a trajectory of sin, rebellion, division, devastation, and eventual exile from which Israel had just begun to emerge. Nehemiah feared that if God had banished Israel from the land for unrepentant sin, why would He not do it again?

Amplifying his concern, Nehemiah cited a marriage of a son from the high priest's family to the daughter of another nemesis of Israel, Sanballat.⁴² Mosaic law prohibited the high priest from marrying a foreigner.⁴³ **For the sake of the community's holiness, this unnamed priest was driven away.**

Renewal of Purity – 13:29-31

As his narrative closed, Nehemiah recorded his purification of the priests and Levites. He had assigned them specific duties and provided for their needs. He sought God's favor in all his work. God answered Nehemiah's last prayer, "Remember me with favor, my God." His work for the Lord encourages leaders to this day. Many find courage by listening to Nehemiah's counsel and following

34. **Relationship with Tyre:** 1 Kings 5:1-12; Isaiah 23:2-3; Ezekiel 27:12-25; Ezra 3:7

35. **Covenant:** Exodus 31:12-17

36. **Creation:** Exodus 20:11

37. **Redemption:** Deuteronomy 5:15

38. **Sabbath warning:** Jeremiah 17:19-27; Amos 8:4-6

39. **Intermarriage:** Deuteronomy 7:3-4; Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 10:30

40. **Allegiance to God:** Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 14:26-33; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

41. **Compromised faith:** 1 Kings 11:1-8

42. **Sanballat:** Nehemiah 2:10, 19; 4:1-9; 6:1-15

43. **Marriage prohibition:** Leviticus 21:10-15

his example. When people work to honor God, the fruit of their labor leaves a legacy of faithfulness. **Devotion to God requires dedicating every aspect of life to Him.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

As Nehemiah's story draws to a close, Jerusalem's community was not yet reestablished within its rebuilt wall. The people cast lots to determine who would sacrificially move from nearby settlements into the desolate confines of the Holy City. As the chosen were commended and accounted for, Nehemiah and Ezra organized a procession led by two large choirs that encircled the city atop the reconstructed wall. They celebrated the monumental achievement and dedicated their work to the God they believed, trusted, and proclaimed.

However, in their leader's absence, the reason for celebration faded and the people receded into sin. The temple grounds endured desecration and tithes were withheld. The Sabbath became just another day of business, and pagan impurity infiltrated marriages. When Nehemiah returned, he reinstituted reforms with righteous anger. **He reminded the Israelites that their holy God required the holiness of His people.** In prayer, petition, admonishment, and dedication, Nehemiah continued the necessary work of returning the peoples' devotion to God—who created, restored, and loved them.

Apply It

With lots cast to determine which Israelites would settle in Jerusalem, mixed feelings undoubtedly permeated the chosen. Some may have felt honored, while others likely lamented the loss of a more familiar and comfortable life. **How do you respond when God's call for your next step becomes clear?** Throughout Scripture and today, God's path for His people—individually and corporately—often weaves together overwhelming challenges with blessings. What helps you look beyond the tangible difficulties of following God to grasp the blessings of obedience? To what do you foolishly cling when God calls you forward? How do you encourage others as they respond to God? God will guide, guard, and bless those who walk with Him. Wherever God calls you, He will go before you and always be with you.

How do you determine what is menial and what really matters? **Everything we do on earth, from the mundane to the monumental, should be dedicated to the Lord.** God's people completed Jerusalem's wall with incredible expediency, coordination, and collaboration—in only 52 days! Yet, they did not herald their noteworthy accomplishment with self-centered pride. Instead, they dedicated their work to honor their God. Whether we deem our contributions as small or great, we do nothing that counts for God in our own strength. As we trust God with everything before us, we realize our utter dependence on His power and provisions. How will you dedicate yourself to the Lord and His service?

Even a life dedicated to the Lord must navigate the day-to-day routines and challenges of earthly existence. Relentless pressure to conform to the ways of the world tempts us to violate God's will and ways. A desire to honor God should permeate every aspect of our lives. How do you honor God in your marriage? Are you supporting God's work through your church by investing your time, talent, and financial resources? Do you honor God in your workplace and neighborhood? **The work of our hands expresses the reality of our faith.** As we surrender to the Lord, our lives reflect the holiness of the God we worship.

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