

Title: **NEHEMIAH**
“Build Thou the Walls of Jerusalem”

Text: Nehemiah 6:3

Subject: *Building the Walls of Jerusalem—The Message of Nehemiah*

Introduction:

As the Book of Ezra describes the great work of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, the Book of Nehemiah describes the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. The Book of Nehemiah is really just a continuation of the Book of Ezra. **The theme in both books is the restoration of divine worship and the restoration of God’s people.**

These two things always go hand in hand. When there is a revival of true worship, there is revival in the hearts of God’s elect. And when the Lord sends revival to his people, the worship of God is restored and set in order. This is clearly set before us in David’s prayer of repentance in Psalm 51:18-19.

(Psalms 51:18-19) "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. {19} Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar."

SEPARATION

As the temple of God speaks of the place of divine worship and sacrifice, and represents the whole work of salvation, the salvation of God’s elect by the sacrifice, intercession, and grace of Christ, the walls of Jerusalem (the city of God—the church) represent another aspect of grace and salvation. The walls represent both the security of God’s elect in Christ and that which separates the people of God from all the people of the world (1 Cor. 4:7; Ex. 11:7).

(1 Corinthians 4:7) "For who maketh thee to differ *from another?* and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it?*"

(Exodus 11:7) "But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel."

What separates us from others? Grace, nothing but the free, sovereign, saving grace of God!

- Electing Grace
- Redeeming Grace
- Calling Grace
- Keeping Grace

Four times, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, the leaders of those who conspired against Ezra, Nehemiah and Judah sent word to Nehemiah to leave off the work of building the walls of Jerusalem to come down and meet them. Though their real purpose was to stop the work, their pretense was that they wanted to work out a plan whereby they could unite in the great work. Four times, Nehemiah gave them the same reply (Neh. 6:3).

(Nehemiah 6:3) "And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"

Proposition: Like Nehemiah, our concern in this world, the work to which we have been called, is the building of God's church; and we must not allow anything or anyone to turn us aside from that which our God has sent us to do.

There was an interval of about twelve years between the work of Ezra's reforms and the time that Nehemiah obtained permission from King Artaxerxes, to whom he was cup-bearer, to go up to Jerusalem.

ARTAXERXES

Reading the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, we frequently run across the names of Artaxerxes and Ahasuerus. But really, these are not the names of different kings, but the titles given to them. That fact gives us a little difficulty. But it really should not. Many years later, the rulers of Rome were called "Caesar," but there were several different Caesars. The title "Artaxerxes" means "the great king." "Ahasuerus" means "the venerable father." The titles Artaxerxes in Nehemiah and Ahasuerus in Esther refer to the same king, King Darius spoken of in the book of Daniel. Then, to add to the confusion, Artaxerxes in the book of Ezra is not the same Artaxerxes spoken of in Nehemiah. That Artaxerxes was opposed to the work Ezra and Nehemiah led the Judah to perform. He opposed the building of the temple (Ezra 4:21-24). He was probably Darius' son.

NEHEMIAH'S CONCERN

Nehemiah was deeply distressed by the news that his brethren gave him concerning the God's people in Jerusalem (1:1-4).

(Nehemiah 1:3-4) "And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province *are* in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also *is* broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. {4} And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven"

The rest of the first chapter (vv. 5-11) records his great prayer of intercession to God. Nehemiah was imminently a man of prayer. Throughout these 13 chapters, he interjects brief prayers. As he worked and labored in his great cause, he continually sought God's direction and help, depending upon him.

Nehemiah's heart was broken. His soul was stirred by the news of the desolate condition of the city with its broken walls. So much so that, as he served King Artaxerxes, the king asked him what was wrong with him (2:2-3).

(Nehemiah 2:2-3) "Wherefore the king said unto me, Why *is* thy countenance sad, seeing thou *art* not sick? this *is* nothing *else* but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, {3} And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?"

The king then asked him what he wanted and sent him to Jerusalem to build the walls of the city. To put it in Nehemiah's words, "*So it pleased the king to send me...And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me*" (vv. 6-8).

Nehemiah found things in horrible condition at Jerusalem. He gathered the elders together and told them of the good hand of his God upon him, and they said, "*Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work*" (2:18).

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

This book is full of lessons for us. It begins with Nehemiah's confession of sin and prayer to God on behalf of his people (chapter 1).

- His great concern is for the house of God, the people of God, and the worship of God (vv. 1-4).
- He ascribes to God the glory and praise of his greatness as God (v. 5).

(Nehemiah 1:5) "And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:"

- Throughout this prayer, he describes God's people in such a way as to move him to be gracious, seeking mercy on the grounds of God's greatness and the desperate need of his people.

(Nehemiah 1:6-11) "Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear **the prayer of thy servant**, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and **confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.** {7} We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. {8} **Remember**, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, *If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:* {9} But *if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, **yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.*** {10} Now these *are thy servants* and **thy people**, whom **thou hast redeemed** by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. {11} O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of **thy servants, who desire to fear thy name:** and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer."

WORKERS TOGETHER (Chapter 3)

Nehemiah was sent by the king to do the work, but neither he nor the king thought that this great work would be the work of one man. The work involved all those who feared God. Nehemiah and the people of Judah labored side by side as “*laborers together with God*” (1 Cor. 3:9).

- Christianity is not a spectator sport. The work of the church is not the work of one man, but of many, working together with God. This is not my ministry, but ours—Yours, mine, and Christ’s! (Our Tapes, Our Books, Our Service).

As they built the walls of Jerusalem, they began at the Sheep Gate and completely enclosed the city (chapter 3). Priests, rulers, goldsmiths, apothecaries, and merchants, all worked side by side, brothers working together in the common cause of God. We are told exactly who set up the various gates, with the locks and the bars thereof.

No work done for God’s glory is overlooked by him no matter how small it might appear in our eyes. He delights to place on record the humblest service. It is written, “*And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them*” (Rev. 14:13).

That is what we are doing, laboring together for the glory of God, for the worship of God, to build the kingdom of God.

Let us be like “*Baruch, the son of Zabbai, (who) earnestly repaired the other piece, from the turning of the wall unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest*” (3:20).

OUR ENEMIES (Chapters 4-6)

But, in chapters 4-6, the descendants of the Samaritans, who had harassed Zerubbabel, were relentless in their efforts to hinder the work. First they mocked them: *“What do these feeble Jews? That which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.”* *“Hear, O our God; for we are despised,”* was Nehemiah’s prayer. *“So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work”* (4:1-6).

When their mockery could not stop the faithful from their work, Judah’s foes conspired to fight against Jerusalem. But Nehemiah says, *“We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch day and night.”* He armed the workers and gave orders that at the sound of the trumpet they were to run to the place needing help and defend the city.

That is when Sanballat and his crowd sent the messages to Nehemiah, asking him to meet them in the plain of Ono. His reply was, *“I am doing a great work: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?”* Then they accused Judah of rebellion (antinomianism), and sought to weaken their hands and make them afraid, but Nehemiah replied to Tobiah: *“There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart.”* And as a last resort, one urged Nehemiah to take refuge in the Temple, *“for they will come to slay thee.”* *“Should such a man as I flee?”* was Nehemiah’s steadfast reply. *“So the wall was finished in fifty and two days”* (6:15).

Those who oppose Christ and the gospel we preach will employ any means they can to hinder or discourage us from doing God’s work. Let us, like Nehemiah, ever remember who has

commissioned us, and praying and relying upon our God, completely disregard, utterly ignore their carpings.

CHRIST OUR PRIEST (Chapter 7)

The register of those who first came from Babylon under Zerubbabel is again repeated in chapter 7. Some of the priests names could not be found in the genealogy. could not be found, *“Therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. And the Tirshatha (Governor) said unto the, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim”* (7:63-65).

Here we have here one of those instances in the Old Testament when the Face of Christ suddenly shines forth in the most unexpected and unlikely places. This is only a register and a few priests who could not find their place in it. But it makes our hearts thrill with the consciousness that we have a great High Priest – the Lord Jesus Christ – who has the Urim and Thummim, who is the “Light and Perfection.” He settles the question as to our right to communion with God, symbolized in the eating of the most holy things. He declares that, as those who are made priests unto God by him, we are worthy to partake of the holy things. His blood and righteousness makes us worthy.

- To Approach God
- To Be Baptized
- To Receive the Lord’s Supper
- To Wear the Name “Sons of God!”

He has, by his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Heb. 9:12). And if we trust in his one great sacrifice for sins for ever, we also may draw nigh and have communion with God, not once a year, or once a month, or once a week, merely, but continually!

Christ is our great High Priest – not by genealogy from Aaron, but “*after the order of Melchizedek,*” who was “*without genealogy*” (Heb. 7:3 RV). Melchizedek’s genealogy was, no doubt, omitted to fit him all the more to be a type of Christ who had no earthly father. God has called us in Christ to be Priests unto him, and our right of priesthood depends upon whether we have been born again and have our names written, not in an earthly register, but in the Lamb’s Book of Life. He has, moreover, provided for our fitness in the present tenses of John’s Epistle. First, “*The blood cleanseth,*” so that there need never be any cloud between our souls and God. Second, “*The anointing abideth,*” so that there need never be any lack of the supply of His Spirit for service.

PLACE OF PREACHING (Chapters 8-12)

When we get to chapter 8 we see that the immediate result of the work of restoration was a great hunger for God’s Word. The people gathered themselves together as one man unto Ezra before the Water Gate, and begged him to bring forth the Book of the Law of Moses.

Here Ezra, perhaps an old man now, comes forward again, and we see him and Nehemiah uniting in God’s service. We are given a striking picture of Ezra’s preaching. Already we have seen him as a reformer, and as a man of prayer, and now all his skill in the Law of the Lord comes out as he stands on that pulpit of wood – “*made for the purpose*” – with thirteen of the leaders of the people standing beside him, and all the people thronging round. **He opened the roll of the book, and having prayed, read the Law distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused the people to understand it.** Hour after hour, and subsequently day after day, they listened, men and women and children, “*all that could understand.*”

His preaching stirred Jerusalem as Savonarola's preaching stirred Florence. The people wept as they found how far short they had come of God's will. But Ezra and Nehemiah and the Levites stilled the people, and **told them not to weep**, and their weeping was turned into joy by the preaching of God's great goodness revealed in his work, that which is recorded in his Word. "*And the people went their way...to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them*" (8:12). "*Great peace have they that love Thy law.*"

- Kept the Feast of Tabernacles
- Made a Covenant, Renewed Consecration

The children of Israel sealed themselves under a solemn covenant to keep the Law, especially with regard to marriages with the heathen, to keeping the Sabbath, and to maintaining the worship of God.

The dedication of the walls was a joyful occasion, for "*God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced; so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off*" (12:43).

MORE DECLINE (Chapter 13)

Yet, in spite of all the grace and goodness they had experienced, these blessed people show us again that God's people in this world are but sinners saved by grace.

Once more twelve years have passed, and Nehemiah, who had been back at the Court of Shushan, returned to Jerusalem, to find all the terms of the covenant broken and the Law disregarded. He dealt with all these abuses firmly. Eliashib, the priests, because he was allied unto Tobiah the Ammonite, had given a chamber in

the Temple to this enemy of the Lord. Nehemiah turned him out immediately. Again, Nehemiah contended with the rulers because he found that the service of the house of the Lord was neglected. Next he found a wholesale disregard of the sabbath.

Such contempt for the things of God, his honor, his worship and the blessed rest of faith symbolized in the sabbath day must not be tolerated. If it is, it will inevitably lead to utter apostasy. It is a sign of the perilous times of these last days, when *“Men shall be lovers of their own selves...loves of pleasure more than lovers of God”* (2 Tim. 3:1-4).

COMPROMISE

Nehemiah found that the Jews had married among the heathen, violating God’s express command is both an act of defiance and idolatry (Ex. 34:14-17). Great evil is sure to follow. The result here was that their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and half in the Jews’ language. In other words, their children learned by their compromise to be idolaters.

Believers are to marry *“only in the Lord.”* We must *“not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers”* in any area of life, but most particularly in marriage. Those who disobey God’s revealed will in this matter, marrying unbelievers, can expect nothing but sorrow as a result.

The argument (excuse) is frequently used that the believer will be able to win the unbelieving to Christ. But we must never expect God’s blessing upon our disobedience. I have often seen the Lord graciously intervene; but, more often than not, the result of such a union is that the person professing to be a believer is gradually drawn, (It may be almost imperceptibly.), to love the things of the world, and is found – together with the children of such a marriage – speaking *“half the speech of Ashdod,”* and

unable to speak as a citizen of the heavenly city. The spirit of compromise with the world mars the usefulness for Christ of many homes and churches, just as it did in Solomon's.

In all these breaches of God's law Nehemiah "*contended with the Jews,*" whether they were nobles or rulers or the common people, he dealt with them pointedly. He did not rest till all was put right. This was no lack of love on his part, but just the opposite. He was willing to spend and be spent for his people. It is an evidence of true love to deal faithfully with compromise, false doctrine and rebellion of any kind. Any church today blessed of God with a pastor who has the boldness, love and faithfulness Nehemiah had to deal with such things, has reason to give thanks to God for his goodness in giving his church pastors according to his own heart (Jer. 3:15).

GOD'S PEOPLE STILL

Having said all that, let us not set ourselves up as judges over one another when the Lord's people are overtaken in a fault, condemning them as unbelieving and reprobate. Evil must be reproved by God's servants, by the faithful exposition of holy Scripture, as it was by Ezra and Nehemiah. But when our brothers and sisters in Christ are overcome in a fault, let it be ours to fulfill the law of Christ, bearing their burden, doing what we are able to restore them in meekness, considering ourselves (Gal. 6:1-4).

The Holy Spirit specifically illustrates the fact that those who are truly beloved of the Lord are yet subject to such evils, by using Solomon as an example both of the sins of the Jews on this occasion and of the immutability of God's mercy, love and grace to his elect (Neh. 13:26; Mal. 3:6).

The fall of another reminds us that we are all sinners saved by grace. None of us are beyond temptation. None of us are beyond weakness. None of us are beyond sin. There is nothing we would not do, and completely justify ourselves in doing it, if the Lord left us to ourselves for a moment.

The falls of others give us opportunity to love and help. These sad events in the lives of God's saints in this world should serve as reminders that salvation is altogether the work of God's free grace, that our only righteousness before God is the righteousness of God in Christ, and that the only thing that makes one to differ from another is God's goodness and grace in Christ. Therefore, it is written, in Ephesians 4:32-52—"*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.*"

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