

The Bible Notebook

NEHEMIAH

People
With a Mind to Work

Johnny L. Sanders, D.Min.

DEDICATION

In Honor Of

All The

Small Church Pastors

&

Bi-vocational Pastors

Whom God Uses to Bless America

INTRODUCTION

Americans, modern Americans in particular, are very susceptible to fads. Not just traditions. Fads. I remember hearing Dr. Leo Eddleman in revival services in a church where I was pastor, when he read the Scripture in which we are told that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was His custom. Worship was a tradition in His home. Dr. Eddleman stressed that individuals and families need to establish good traditions. There are bad tradition and it is important to distinguish between the two.

In recent years, Americans have shown that they can be easily addicted not only to cultural fads, but also to religious fads (or novel movements). Some of these movements may well have been used of the Lord to bless those who maintained their perspective, but when others let these individuals or movements get between them and the Scripture, the damage may be immeasurable in this world. When Henry Blackaby's *EXPERIENCING GOD* book came out it caught on and the book became a best seller. Many gave glowing testimonies as to how they were blessed by *EXPERIENCING GOD*, and the various spin-offs. Let me stress that I am not condemning Henry Blackaby. As a matter of fact, I am a member of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources and I have served my entire time on the Broadman and Holman Committee. It has been my privilege on a number of occasions to hear Ken Stephens, LifeWay Vice President over B & H, review how well the latest Henry Blackaby book did in various markets. Next, there was Beth Moore, who is not only a prolific writer, but a very popular conference leader. Testimonies about her books, workbooks, and conferences speak for the impact of this godly lady.

Then, there was Rick Warren, with his two best sellers, *THE PURPOSE DRIVEN CHURCH*, and *THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE*. I met Warren and received one of his big bear hugs at a LifeWay trustees meeting in Nashville. The man has some amazing gifts - he is a ten talent man while I struggle to find my one talent. He is not only popular among evangelicals, he is popular with many in the secular world. Rick Warren has trained thousands of pastors, who have gone back home and launched a Saddleback (his church) type ministry in their own churches. Some of those churches really "took off"; some ran the pastor off; and some split over the movement.

Rick Warren's approach to outreach and ministry dovetails very well with the modern contemporary worship style, which is very popular with some and very distasteful to others. Both Rick Warren and contemporary worship often featuring rock bands, which are especially popular with the "Me Generation." There are people who want to come to church feeling great and leave feeling even better. Some who have adopted this contemporary style of worship are careful not to offend their worshipers by mentioning anything unpleasant. One large church told a visiting choir that they didn't want to them to sing anything about the blood, or anything else that is gory which might "offend some of these people out here." For many, sin is out, repentance is never mentioned, and hell is taboo. Sadly, many will compromise as long as they can see the nickels and noses on Sunday.

There are those who speak fervently for either side of this issue, but that is not the purpose here. Most people remember when Promise Keepers attracted incredible numbers to their rallies. Again, the purpose here is neither to commend or condemn. The point is that people love to get in on something that is popular at the moment.

A close friend told me several years ago that he had found a book that had really been a blessing to him. THE PRAYER OF JABEZ was about the hottest thing on the market at the time. Not only did the book sell, children's books, t-shirts and jewelry sold, as they used to say, like hot cakes. Again, there is no criticism of this book here. The point is that there are many people who see something that is popular and they embrace it with great enthusiasm. Another fad is born. When I listened to some people talk about THE PRAYER OF JABEZ, I finally stated to someone that before some of them prayed the prayer of Jabez, they might do well to pray the prayer of Nehemiah.

It seems that, given enough publicity, American Christians will focus their attention and affection on an individual or a movement they are convinced is of God. They see a Henry Blackaby, a Beth Moore, or a Rick Warren and conclude that these individuals have their eyes on the Lord, so they focus their attention on the individual who has his or her eyes on the Lord, rather than on the Lord Himself. Remember that Jesus knew how to draw a crowd - but when He preached the truth, the masses turned and followed Him no more.

For several years, Americans were sporting WWJD bracelets, wrist bands, ties, shirts, stickers, bumper stickers, and well...you name it. Everywhere you went you saw WWJD, and I still see it on bracelets and bumper stickers. It is highly doubtful that all those who were wearing those WWJD emblems actually sought to do what Jesus would do under all circumstances. It would be interesting to know how many people wore those bracelets or wrist bands while committing acts they knew Jesus would never commit. Some even challenge the basic thesis - can we know what Jesus would do under every circumstance. Remember how often He took religious leaders by surprised when He was on earth? That may or may not be a valid argument, but there is one thing we must do, and that is to ask what would Jesus have us to do.

Nehemiah was not called to a pleasant ministry, he was called to a ministry, and assigned to the task God had for him. If you want to see how one gets to the bed rock foundation and builds upon it, study Nehemiah. Jesus did not promise His followers that when they placed their trust in Him their troubles would be over, and it may be time for the church to face that reality today.

I have known Dr. Jimmy Draper since he was pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas. I applauded his election to serve as president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay Christian Resources). Little did I realize at the time that I would have the opportunity to serve on the board of trustees for LifeWay and serve, work, worship, and fellowship with Dr. Draper for several years. In September, 2005 trustees elected Dr. Thom Rainer as the president elect of LifeWay. Dr. Rainer will be an outstanding president, and as Jimmy Draper has said, as LifeWay goes, so goes the Southern Baptist Convention, and as the Southern Baptist Convention goes, so goes America (not putting down outer evangelicals, but partnering with them).

Jimmy Draper was exactly the right man, God's man, to lead LifeWay for fifteen critical years. He is a man of character, humility, and compassion. Few would believe how far he goes to express his concern for those who are troubled, hurting, or grieving. He is also a man of practical wisdom. The late Dr. Jan Mercer was a member of First Baptist, Euless, and her husband Andy is a deacon there today. They were close to Dr. Draper when he was their pastor. When he prepared a sermon on creation, he took it to Jan and asked her to read it to be sure he had his facts straight. That kind of humility is not always seen, even among preachers - maybe we should say *especially* among preachers. Jimmy Draper has also been an effective writer, authoring a number of books, and numerous articles and newsletters. The Southern Baptist TEXAN (September, 26, 2005), carried an article written by Jimmy Draper with the following excerpt:

The interview was wrapping up when a reporter with the International Mission Board asked a prominent leader in the rapidly expanding Chinese house church movement how American Christians could pray for house churches in China. "Stop praying for persecution in China to end," he responded, "for it is through persecution that the church has grown."

"What astounding faith!" I thought when I heard the story. However, my admiration of his faith was quickly tempered by what he said next.

"We, in fact, are praying that the American church might taste the same persecution." he said, "so revival would come to the American Church like we have seen in China."

[Jimmy Draper in the Southern Baptist TEXAN, Sept. 26, 2005, p. 18]

What did it take for God to bring the people of ancient Judah to their knees before Him? He sent Ezra and Nehemiah with His message. What would it take for God to bring America to her knees? Two back to back category five hurricanes, Katrina and Rita devastated the coasts of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, and ripped a wide path of death and destruction for 150 miles through Mississippi. A year earlier, four hurricanes hit Florida. Did it bring American to her knees before God? No! It brought many of the victims before the government, for many, their replacement for God in this post-Christian era. When you bow before God you do so in humility and gratitude. When people look only to government they often do so arrogantly demanding more and more.

Before praying the prayer of Jabez, pray the prayer of Nehemiah. You will find the prayers of Nehemiah in 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4-5,9; 5:19; 6:9,14; and 13:14, 22, 29, 31. Humble yourself before God, confess your sins, receive His forgiveness, and walk with Him in righteousness. He promises to bless us when we humble ourselves before Him. He did not say that we will be able to inventory our blessings over the bank statement. How do you count your blessings?

BACKGROUND

NEHEMIAH. Nehemiah is both the name of the book which bears the name and the personal name of the main character of the book (Nehemiah, son of Hachaliah). The name means “Yah comforts or encourages.” Two other Nehemiahs appear in the Old Testament: one in the group who returned with Sheshbazzar (Ezra 2:2; Neh 7:7), and the other was the son of Azbuk, “the ruler of the half part of Bethzur” (Neh. 3:16), a helper with rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem” [Holman Bible Dictionary - HBD].

NEHEMIAH AND THE SCARLET THREAD. The late Dr. W. A. Criswell, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas for nearly half a century, held a strong, conservative view of the Bible and proclaimed it faithfully. When I was a student at Mississippi College, a friend and I attended the Mississippi Baptist Convention Evangelism Conference in Clarksdale, where we heard Dr. Criswell preach. He was followed by Dr. R. G. Lee, whom Criswell called the Prince of Preachers. I totally agreed. Dr. Criswell often referred to the Scarlet Thread that runs through the Bible. Of course, we understood that he had in mind the Messianic Covenant in the Old Testament and the shed blood of the Lamb of God in the New Testament. As I recall, Dr. Criswell said that there is “a scarlet thread” that runs through every page of the Old Testament. I will borrow his title and try to find Nehemiah’s place on that Scarlet Thread.

We begin with Creation, with special attention given to Adam and Eve, who were created in the image of God and given the privilege of fellowship with God, Who walked with them and talked with them in the cool of the day. Then came the Fall and everything changed. The Fall did not catch God by surprise because He had created man with intelligence, emotion, and volition. Adam and Eve chose to rebel against the specific command of God and when they sinned death entered the human experience. God made the first Messianic promise at that time, as recorded in Genesis 3:15. Mankind rejected God and created false gods until almost the whole human race lost sight of the true God, the Creator. Finally, God decided to destroy all human life on earth and begin all over again with Noah, whom He secured on the ark, along with his wife and his three sons and their wives. Noah is a key figure along that scarlet thread. The next person is Abraham, whom God called to leave the land of Ur of the Chaldees and to go to a Promised Land. God entered a covenant with Abraham, which is closely attached to the scarlet thread. God made Abraham specific promises, including descendants no one could number, the land itself, and a Seed, Who would be a blessing to all nations of the world. That Seed, of course is Jesus, the Agent of creation, and the hope of redemption.

The covenant continued through Isaac, Jacob (Israel), and through the tribe of Judah. God called out a number of special people to serve His purpose and protect His covenant over the thousand years that followed the call of Abraham. There was Joseph, whom God used to preserve His Chosen People. There was Moses, whom God chose 400 years later to lead His people out of Egypt. There was Joshua, whom He used to conquer the Land of Promise. Over the next several hundred years,

God would call out specific individuals (judges, like Samson, Gideon, and Deborah) through whom he would continue that scarlet thread of hope. Then, as the Lord prepared to move his covenant with His people to the next phase, he called out another transitional servant, Samuel, to move Israel from the Period of the Judges to the Period of the Kingdom. That scarlet thread is never brighter than when Samuel anointed David to be king over Israel. If you are following the scarlet thread, you may place an invisible thumb tack at Noah, then with Abraham (2000 B.C.), and David (1000 B.C.). God used David to establish the Kingdom of Israel, expanding her borders to cover the most territory in her history. Solomon was called out to build the temple, but before Solomon's reign was over he was serving himself more than he was serving God. Rehoboam followed Solomon, his father on the throne but his arrogance and insensitivity caused Jeroboam I to rebel and pull away ten of the twelve tribes, forming the Northern Kingdom, Israel. That left Judah and Benjamin as the Southern Kingdom.

The Northern Kingdom (Israel) never had a godly king, and in 722 B.C., God sent the ruthless Assyrians into Israel to conquer that land and scatter the inhabitants. Foreigners were then settled in the land. God had sent Amos and Hosea to warn the Northern Kingdom that if they did not repent He would destroy the nation. They refused. He did what He promised to do. Only a small remnant was spared. Isaiah and Micah were sent to warn the people of Judah that if they did not repent they would be judged severely by the Assyrians, and if they still did not repent, He would replace Assyrian with Babylon and cause Babylon to take the people of Judah into captivity for seventy years.

The light never shined more brightly on that scarlet thread than during Golden Era of Prophecy, when those four great prophets tried to call the nations back to Yahweh. They continued to reject God and finally, almost a century after the fall of Israel, God raised up the Babylonians, who overthrew Assyrian and began their own conquests as they established a new empire. The people of Judah could never plead ignorance - or innocence. They deliberately turned their backs on the one true God, even in face of two of the greatest servants the Lord ever singled out to refocus their attention on that Scarlet Thread - King Josiah, and the prophet Jeremiah. This is what God told Jeremiah to say to Judah:

“Has a nation [ever] exchanged its gods? (but they were not gods!) Yet My people have exchanged their Glory for useless idols. Be horrified at this, heavens; be shocked and utterly appalled. This is the Lord's declaration. For My people have committed a double evil: **They have abandoned Me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that cannot hold water**” (Jer. 2:11-13, HCSB, emphasis added).

They had rejected to true God and created for themselves false gods - gods who are no gods. They had forsaken the fountain of living water and hewn for themselves broken cisterns that could hold no water. There is more:

“For long ago I broke your yoke; I tore off your fetters. You insisted: I will not serve! On every high hill and under every leafy tree you lie down [like] a prostitute. I

planted you, a choice vine from the very best seed. How then could you turn into a degenerate, foreign vine? Even if you wash with lye and use a great amount of soap, the stain of your guilt is still in front of Me” (Jer 2:20-22).

“The Lord announced to me, “Unfaithful Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah” (Jer 3:11).

God used Assyria to destroy Israel, and His prophets warned that if Judah did not return to the Lord He would use Assyria to judge them - but Assyria would not be His ultimate instrument of judgment. He would break the power of Assyria like one snaps a twig between his fingers, and then raise up the Babylonian Empire to take Judah into captivity for seventy years. From 1400 B.C. until 606 B.C., God’s chosen people had continually turned from Him, the fountain of living water, to dig for themselves broken cisterns that could hold no water. Idolatry was always at the heart of their rebellion. When they returned from Babylonian Captivity, they returned without idols. From that time until we follow that scarlet thread to Bethlehem’s manger, the people of Judah would resist idolatry even to the point of death, which often happened under Antiochus Epiphanes and other rulers. They were much more likely to be guilty of the false worship of the true God than the worship of false gods after the return from Babylon.

Judah resisted the revival of Josiah and the prophecy of Jeremiah - often on religious grounds: we have “the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord” (Jer. 7:1ff). Finally, in 606, that boiling pot of Jeremiah’s vision (Jer. 2) spilled over onto the land and the first captives were taken away by Babylon, including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Obednigo. The second group of captives were taken away in 597 B.C. after Judah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The final invasion came in 586 B.C., and after a successful siege, the walls were breached, and the temple was looted and destroyed, along with much of the city. The Babylonian Captivity began in 606 B.C. and ended when the first captives returned under Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple in 536 B.C. (though permission was probably granted and plans made by 538 B.C.). God was never silent during the Captivity. He had called Ezekiel and Daniel to follow the prophetic messages of Jeremiah.

According to God’s plan, Babylon fell to Medo-Persia (Daniel 5). God used Daniel to reach the heart of King Cyrus so that he would permit Zerubbabel to lead the first captives back to rebuild the temple - just as God would touch the hearts of Darius to see that the people would resume the work of the temple (520 B.C.), and yet another king some 80 years later to permit Nehemiah to return for the first visit to carry out the work Yahweh had placed on his heart. Though Nehemiah may not have appreciated that “scarlet thread,” but God was using him to advance it through history.

THE BOOK. It may come as a surprise to some that the Hebrew Old Testament does not exactly parallel the modern English Old Testament. For example, Nehemiah and Ezra were one book in the ancient Hebrew, as well as the Greek Old Testament. They may have remained one unit until the Inter-biblical Period or perhaps later. “Jewish tradition says Ezra or Nehemiah was the author. Because of the close connection between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, one person might have written or compiled all three books. Those who follow this argument refer to the author as the

Chronicler. The literary style of Nehemiah is similar to that in Ezra. There are many lists (ch. 3; 10:1-27; ch. 11; 12:1-26). The author/compiler wove Ezra's and Nehemiah's stories together, Ezra being featured in Nehemiah 8" [HBD].

EZRA, NEHEMIAH, MALACHI CONNECTION

The student of the Old Testament is keenly aware of the connection between Ezra and Nehemiah, and Malachi. Comments in The Bible Knowledge Commentary highlight the relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah:

“Josephus (Against Apion 1. 8), Jerome (Preface to the Commentary on Galatians), and the Talmud (Baba Bathra 15a) considered the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah as one. Also the Hebrew Bible has the books together as a single work. However, there is evidence that the two books were originally separate. The lists in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 are basically the same. This would militate against the idea that the two books were originally one, for it would seem strange to repeat the same list in one volume. The name Ezra for the title of the first work comes from the major person in the second half of the book, who also appears in chapters 8 and 12 of the Book of Nehemiah” [BKC].

NOTE: I have decided to include an excerpt from my commentary on the Book of Malachi in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK Series at this point in order to keep this study within the historical context of Jeremiah, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. Dr. Mike Minnix, formerly the Vice President in Evangelism for the Georgia Baptist Convention, will have both THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK and THE SERMON NOTEBOOK on the PastorLife .com Website, beginning January 4, 2006.

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

Both Israel and Judah frequently found themselves caught up in a power struggle, if not war, between surrounding nations. A series of powerful kings led Assyria to a long period of world dominance, beginning with Tiglath Pileser III (called Pul) in 745 B.C. Interestingly, this falls right in between the prophecy of judgment upon Israel by Amos and the prophetic ministry of Hosea.

Assyrian control continued throughout that part of the world under his sons Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.) and Sargon II (722-705), his grandson Sennacherib (704-681), his great grandson Esarhaddon (681- 669), and his great-great grandson Ashurbanipal (669-631 B.C.). These were powerful, ruthless expansionists, bent on world domination.

For 16-17 years, Ashurbanipal's control of the empire was undisturbed, but in 652 B.C., Shamashsumukink, his brother whom Ashurbanipal made king over the city state of Babylon, rallied all the enemies of Assyria against Ashurbanipal. It took six years to put down the revolt and by the end of that war Assyria's decline had set in and she would never recover. This was exactly as God had promised. He would use Assyria to destroy the Northern Kingdom and to judge Judah. He would not, however, permit Assyria to do to Judah what she did to Israel. When the time came to judge Judah for her persistent rebellion against Him, God would raise up Babylon to break the power of Assyria. Babylon would defeat Judah and take her citizens into captivity for seventy years.

Nabopolassar and Cyaxares led, respectively, the combined forces of Babylon and Media against Assyria. Asshur fell in 614 B.C. and Ninevah in 612. Harran fell in 610. The next year, Pharaoh Neco (609-593 B.C.) came on a mission to relieve the faltering Assyrians and to halt Babylon expansion. Josiah, the godly king of Judah who sought spiritual revival with all his heart, was killed by Pharaoh Neco's forces when he moved to intercept him when his army marched, without permission, across his country. Josiah was killed in 608 B. C., ending the last hope and attempt at revival. Jeremiah was delivering God's message of judgment during this time. His ministry began about the time the City of Babylon began to flex her muscles, sometime around 626 B.C.

Pharaoh Neco arrived too late to aid Assyria. At the battle of Carchemish in 606 or 605 B.C., the issue between Babylon was settled. There, Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, won a decisive victory. Babylonian dominance continued through the three invasions of Judah and well into the years of Judah's exile into Babylon.

The world empires of that era were, Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia, followed by the mighty Greek Empire and then the even more powerful Roman Empire. Nothing happened among these nations and empires that was beyond the scope of God's vision and His determination. He promised the rise and fall of empires, and moved them like one moves a pawn on a chessboard. He raised up Assyria to judge the Northern Ten Tribes (Israel), Babylon to judge Judah and take her into captivity, Persia to return the remnant to the Holy Land, the Greek Empire to establish a common language throughout the world they knew at that time (and provide the perfect language for the writing of the New Testament). Then God raised up the Roman Empire to give the world the greatest highway system the world have ever known (with major population centers along those roads), the safest travel by land or sea in the history of the world, and the greatest postal system the world had ever known. The stage was set then for the coming of the long awaited Messiah.

INTERNAL SITUATION

The entire reign of the wicked king Manasseh (698-642 B.C. - some begin his reign in 696) was under the control of Assyria. Amon, his son (642-640), was assassinated in an anti-Assyrian coup. The rebellion of Babylon against Assyria brought a 16-17 year period of independence. Josiah became king in 640 at the age of eight and reigned until his death at the hand of Pharaoh Neco in 608 B.C. This pious young king instituted both political and religious reforms (2 Chronicles 34:3). The reform was really accelerated after the discovery of the Book of Law in 621. The first revival in Judah since the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah ended with the death of Good King Josiah.

Jehoahaz, Josiah's second son, was made king by Pharaoh Neco. Three months later, Neco summoned Jehoaz to Riblah and set his older brother, Jehoiakim, on the throne of Judah, where he reigned from 609 - 598 B.C.

Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of the Egyptian and Assyrian coalition at Carchemish in 606 meant that Judah's vassalage shifted to the Chaldeans. Jehoiakim withheld tribute and Judah suffered an invasion by Babylon. Jehoiakim refused to pay tribute again in 598 and Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. Jehoiakim died during the siege and was succeeded by his son Jehoichin, who surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar after only three months (597 B. C.). He was carried into captivity, where he was imprisoned until Evil-Merodach, Nebuchadnezzar's successor, released him and gave him preferential treatment.

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, as king in Judah to succeed Jehoichin. For ten years, he followed the Babylonian policy before finally yielding to a pro-Egyptian faction in Judah and withheld tribute to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar moved quickly and laid siege to Jerusalem in 588 B.C. A year and a half later, a breach was made in the wall and the city fell to the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar carried Zedekiah into exile and made Gedaliah governor of Judah. Judah would not see a king again until Jesus came and established His kingdom in the hearts of believers. Jesus is coming again at the end of the age as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, ultimately fulfilling all prophecies concerning His Incarnation, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, intercession, return and reign.

A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

Jeremiah was called to begin his ministry in 626 B.C., about the time of the revolt of Babylon against Assyria. Josiah's great reform movement following the discovery of the Book of Law began in 621 B.C. Judah was given 16-17 years (625-609 B.C.) to put her house in order - to return to a covenant relationship with Yahweh. We do not know what role Jeremiah played in Josiah's reform. Some believe he must have played a major role, but others question it. Some believe Jeremiah played a major role and that the first major period of his prophetic ministry coincided with the 16-17 years of reformation. Some writer declared that Jeremiah's reform thunders across the years.

JOSIAH'S REFORM

2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34:35

NOTE: Help may also be found by going to a series of 30 sermons this writer has posted on the PastorLife.com web site, a ministry of the Georgia Baptist Convention. The original series is entitled, JEREMIAH'S AMERICA, and it was originally included in The Sermon Notebook.

Tragically, the efforts of both prophet and king were futile. Judah rejected God. The wholesale repentance God demanded never materialized. This was an incorrigible people, a rebellious people who refused to repent. They openly defied God and dared Him to do anything about it, arrogantly declaring that they would not listen, they would not obey God, and that they would do what they wanted to do.

Events happened in rapid sequence from 609 to 586 B.C. Judah's 16-17 years of independence ended abruptly in 608 B.C. when Josiah was killed on the Plains of Megiddo. Once again, Judah found herself under the strong arm of Egypt. This time it was short lived. It ended with the Battle of Carchemish. Now, once again, Judah found her self under the domination of a nation from Mesopotamia. Jehoiakim, the expedient politician, accepted his lot, but was not happy about it.

Historians point out that when Nebuchadnezzar arrived at Jerusalem in 598 B.C. to deal with Jehoiakim's rebellion, he acted with a great deal of patience for a powerful monarch. After Jehoiakim's surrender he made Zedekiah king. Zedekiah's reign (598-597) was an unparalleled disaster. There was continual rebellion by a people who seemed bent on national suicide. The dates of the last five kings of Jeremiah's day are:

1. Josiah - 639-608 (or 609) B.C.
2. Jehoahjuz - 608 B.C. (Or 609)
3. Jehoiakim - 608-598 B.C.
4. Jehoiachin - 598 B.C.
5. Zedekiah - 598-597 B.C.

THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD

The people of Judah had spent seventy years in Babylonian captivity. Liberation came when Cyrus, the Persian king and founder of the Persian Empire (Medo-Persia), conquered Babylon and then issued a decree that permitted the Hebrew captives to return to Canaan (see Is. 44:28; Jer. 25:12-14; 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).

Cyrus ordered the people in all the provinces where the Jews "sojourned" to share their material possessions with the returning Jews. They were also ordered to give a freewill offering to finance the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:7). Cyrus also gave them a generous amount of money to be used for the construction of the temple and he restored the vessels which

Nebuchadnezzar's army had taken when they destroyed the temple in 586 B.C.

My Old Testament professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. T. J. DeLaughter, preached a revival in a church I served, and while he was there he gave me a copy of a commentary he had written on Malachi. In it he said, "The decree of the return of the people to their native land (ca. 538-535 B.C.) marked the beginning of the significant era which is commonly known as the post-exilic period. It extended to the close of the Old Testament time, including the inter-biblical period." [DeLaughter: 12].

We may want to remind ourselves that God had revealed that only a remnant of the Chosen People would return to the Land of Promise. Many elected to stay in the province or country in which they lived under the domination of the Persian Empire. They had businesses, homes, and families there and they did not want to leave them - and many, no doubt, did not look forward to the trials that faced the returning exiles.

The first group to return was led by Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:11), a son of Jehoiachin, exiled king of Judah, and therefore a prince of the Davidic line (Ezra 5:16). Almost no information is available concerning this group and their accomplishments. They returned, taking with them the vessels from the Temple that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar, and either laid the foundation for the new temple, or began the work on the foundation. We may assume that they began some kind of worship when they arrived back at Jerusalem.

A second group was led by Zerubbabel, who was appointed governor, and Joshua, the high priest (Ezra 2:1-2). Accurate records were kept, as we see from Ezra's account:

"The whole assembly numbered 42,360, 65 besides their male and female servants who numbered 7,337; and they had 200 singing men and women. Their horses were 736; their mules, 245; 67 their camels, 435; their donkeys, 6,720" (Ezra 2:64-67, NASB).

Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel, Jehoiachin's eldest son. He was also Sheshbazzar's nephew.

It is possible, based on Ezra's account, that the second group arrived shortly after the first group and joined them in laying the foundation of the temple (Ezra 3:1-11). The foundation may have been started by the first group and completed by the second group. The construction work of the first returnees may have been hindered by enemies, just as they tried to stop Zerubbabel's work (Ezra 4:1-6). Construction work was discontinued for fifteen years (Ezra 4:23-24; Haggai 1:2-3), but the enemy alone cannot be blamed for that. The people started the work on the temple and then became more concerned with their own houses.

"When Darius the Great assumed the throne in 521, the Jews themselves were more to blame for their inactivity than their angry opponents. Darius showed interest in religion throughout the empire, and the Jews should have sensed that the opportunity

to resume their labors was at hand. Instead, they were strangely satisfied to exist without a center for worship” [21: 8].

I grew up with the Word of God. I knew about Abraham and the covenant God made with him. I knew the stories about the great heroes of the faith: Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samson, Deborah, Gideon, Samuel, David, and the great prophets. Then, I read about the horrible atrocities committed against the Jews by Hitler, Stalin, and others. Later, I discovered that Anti-Semitism did not begin with Hitler. For some reason, in my youth I had assumed that they suffered for their faith. That being the case, I supposed I had assumed that, given an opportunity, all Jews would worship Yahweh - even if they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. There are many secular Jews who are not interested in religion at all. As my friend says, “I am a scientist, I am not religious.” He had served as chairman of the building committee when they built the local temple, but he never attends. If you listen to him you get the feeling that the closest he has come to religion in decades was when he recruited the rabbi for his weekly poker game. He recently called me off to the side and asked, “Johnny, do you play poker?” When I answered, “No,” he waved me off and said, “I was about to invite you to join a fifty years old poker club.” The rabbi had retired and moved to New York, and there was an opening.

I remember when American Christians went on tours of the Holy Land and came back with slides to show at church. Some of us were blessed with re-runs at home. Our friends would show us slides of the wailing wall and tell us that these poor, misguided Jews were going to the wailing wall to pray for the coming of the Messiah. One Jew corrected them, “We are not praying for the Messiah, we are praying for Israel.” Rejection of God and neglect of worship is not an ancient phenomenon.

Students of The book of Nehemiah find four major sections in the book:

1. The rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls (chs. 1–7),
2. The Great Revival (chs. 8–10),
3. Population and census information (chs. 11–12),
4. The reforms of Nehemiah (ch. 13).

The book covers Nehemiah’s two visits from King Artaxerxes to Jerusalem (2:1-6; 13:6-7). On his first visit (445 B.C.), he challenged the people to repair the walls of the city, which they had sadly permitted to deteriorate into a state of disrepair some 90 years after Zerubbabel led the first returnees back from exile in Babylon (536 B.C.). The second visit was a problem-solving trip in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes (13:6), 432 B.C.

It is noteworthy that Nehemiah was a contemporary of both Ezra and Malachi. It is interesting that he was also a contemporary of Socrates in Greece (470-339 B.C.), and only a few decades later than Gautama Buddha in India (560-480 B.C.) and Confucius in China (551-479 B.C.).

D. C. Martin, who graded for one of my professors at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote the article on Nehemiah in the Holman Bible Dictionary. Martin writes that:

Nehemiah's Memoirs include first person accounts (1:1–7:5; 12:27-47; 13:4-31), and the other material uses the third person pronoun (chs. 8–10). Thus his story is both autobiographical and biographical. Visitors to Susa informed him of the delapidation of Jerusalem's walls. He was so upset that he cried and mourned for days" (1:4). He prayed a confession (1:5-11). His grief became apparent to Artaxerxes who permitted him to go to Jerusalem [HBD].

After arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah's first step was to inspect the walls at night (2:15). After that, he called an assembly and challenged the people of Jerusalem to commit themselves to a building program aimed at repairing the wall, the primary defense of the city. The cupbearer to the Persian king proved himself an outstanding leader of the people, and he also demonstrated both the gift for organizing the workers and the engineering skill necessary to get the job done (see ch. 3).

Martin summarizes chapters 4-6:

Trouble arose from without and from within. Sanballat and his friends tried to stop the work, but without success (ch. 4). Trouble from within was economic. Building the walls caused a labor shortage; farms were mortgaged, and high rates of interest were charged. Nehemiah said, "The thing you are doing is not good" 5:9 NRSV). He corrected the problem and even gave financial aid to those in need (ch. 5). Again Sanballat and other non-Jews made several attempts to lure Nehemiah away from the job and shut it down. They failed. Nehemiah proved to be a person of strong will and unusual boldness. "So the wall was finished... in fifty and two days" (6:15). The dedication of the wall is described later in 12:27-43 [HBD].

Theologically speaking, the great climax of the Book of Nehemiah and of the life of Ezra is the Great Revival described in chapters 8-10. As stated in the introduction, we would do well to pray the prayer of Nehemiah - or at least to pray as he prayed. We can go beyond that to study the revival that took place during his ministry in Jerusalem. It warrants close study for outreach ministries, evangelists, and for preparation for revival today.

People assembled. They requested Ezra to read from the book of the law of Moses (8:1). The book was probably the Pentateuch (Torah) or some part of it. Ezra read, and others helped by giving "the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (8:8 NRSV). This probably included translating the Hebrew scripture into Aramaic, the commonly spoken language [HBD].

A great celebration occurred and the Israelites observed the Feast of Tabernacles. Observe the response of the people:

"Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the guilt of their fathers. While they stood in their

places, they read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day and [spent] another fourth of the day in confession and worship of the Lord their God” (Neh 9:2-3).

Their separation “from all foreigners” involved divorcing their foreign wives. They prayed confessing their sin (9:6-37) and concluded it by writing a covenant: “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement in writing on a sealed document containing the names of] our leaders, Levites, and priests” (Neh 9:38). Those who signed the “binding agreement: are listed in 10:1-29, and the terms of the covenant are detailed in 10:30-39.

When Nehemiah saw that the population of Jerusalem was inadequate for the protection of the city, he came up with an ingenious plan. He would repopulate Jerusalem with minimum cost to villages and towns across the country.

“Now the leaders of the people stayed in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots for one out of ten to come and live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the other nine-tenths remained in their towns. The people praised all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem” (Neh 11:1-2).

The last chapter of Nehemiah deals with the reforms made during his second visit to Jerusalem in 432 B.C. He threw out a Gentile who had been permitted to live in the Temple. He restored the principle and practice of bringing the tithe to support the Levites. He challenged the people to stop violating the Lord’s Sabbath by bringing their produce into the city on the Lord’s Day and doing business on the Sabbath. He also laid down the law on marriage to foreigners.

We will observe that:

- 1) Nehemiah’s theology was very practical and applicable.
- 2) His prayers, were down to earth and practical (1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4-5,9; 5:19; 6:9,14; 13:14,22,29,31).
- 3) His faith was practical: (2:8; 2:18; 2:20; 20).

Nehemiah was indeed an unusual person. Martin calls Nehemiah “the father of Judaism. Because of Nehemiah, Judaism had a fortified city, a purified people, a dedicated and unified nation, renewed economic stability, and a new commitment to God’s law” (HBD). Martin outlines the Book of Nehemiah as follows:

I. God’s Work Must Be Done (1:1–7:33).

A. God’s leaders must be informed of needs in God’s work (1:1-3).

B. God’s leaders must be responsive spiritually to needs in God’s work and must pray (1:4-11).

C. God's leaders must enlist the aid of others, sometimes outside the family of God (2:1-9).

D. God's leaders likely will encounter opposition (2:10).

E. God's leaders must exercise caution and discretion along with careful planning (2:11-16).

F. God's leaders must inform and challenge God's people to work (2:17-20).

G. God's work demands hard work, good organization, plenty of cooperation, and good records to give credit where credit is due (3:1-32).

H. God's leaders will pray in the face of ridicule and insult (4:1-9).

I. God's leaders may expect opposition from within as well as from without (4:10-12).

J. God's leaders must encourage weary workers with practical, prayerful faith (4:13-15).

K. God's work gets done by hard work and committed workers (4:16-23).

L. God's work is slowed by internal problems of unfairness (5:1-5).

M. God's leaders must confront profiteering problem causers (5:6-13).

N. God's leaders at times can be sacrificially generous to meet a pressing need (5:14-19).

O. God's leaders know opposition can be very personal and must deal with it head on (6:1-14).

P. God's help and the cooperation of many workers bring success (6:15-16).

Q. God's work can have traitors within (6:17-19).

R. God's leaders will enlist others and give them clear instructions (7:1-5).

S. God's leaders need to keep and use good records (7:6-73).

II. God's Way Must Include Revival and Reformation (8:1-13:31).

A. God's people want to hear God's Word (8:1-3).

B. God's Word must be read and then interpreted (8:4-8).

C. God's way calls for joyous celebration (8:9-12).

- D. God's way prescribes formal expressions of joyous worship (8:13-18).
- E. God's way elicits confession (9:1-5).
- F. God's people give practical expression to prayerful repentance (9:6-37).
- G. God's people are willing to commit themselves (9:38).
- H. God's people will sign pledges of commitment (10:1-27).
- I. God's people must give practical expressions of commitment (10:28-39).
- J. God's people must be willing to make some changes (11:1-2).
- K. God's work requires good records (11:3–12:26).
- L. God's work should be dedicated and celebrated (12:27-47).
- M. God's people must be a separated people (13:1-9).
- N. God's work, including His finance program, must not be neglected (13:10-14).
- O. God's day must be respected (13:15-22).
- P. God's way demands purity in marriage and in ministers (13:23-31).

[D. C. Martin, Holman Bible Dictionary, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources].

Chapter 1

NOTE: All Scripture will be from the Holman Christian Standard Bible unless other notations are made. I love the KJV and the NKJV, but when I began my studies at Mississippi College we were told to get the 1901 American Standard Bible. We stayed with it through seminary. When the New American Standard Bible came out I adopted it as my primary study Bible, and stayed with it for years. I love it because it is a sound translation, not simply a version of an earlier translation. The NIV, for example, is the New International Version, is a phrase for phrase rendering. The Holman Christian Bible is not a "version" but a word-for-word translation. I have been on the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources for several years, and I discovered that those on the trustees Nominating Committee who had studied my biographical sheet, nominated me to serve on the Broadman and Holman Committee. I have remained on the B & H Committee ever since and do not want to move to another committee. The first significant vote I cast as a member of the B&H

Committed was to stay the course on the HCSB. We had met with General Editor Dr. Ed Bloom for a lengthy Q & A and I was convinced. I received the hard copy of individual books as they were completed. It is readable and accurate, and for the first time in history a new translation has been checked by computer for consistency, and translators could consult with each other any time there was a question. It is not only accurate, it is readable.

1:1 - WORDS OF NEHEMIAH. *“The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: During the month of Chislev in the twentieth year, when I was in the fortress city of Susa...”* Nehemiah identifies himself as the author of this material, and as one would expect, he identifies himself with his father. He goes on to offer the date and location. Compare this with the way other OT books were introduced:

1) HAGGAI: “In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest” (Hag 1:1).

2) ZECHARIAH: “In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo...” (Zech 1:1).

So, what is the point? Francis Schaeffer focused my attention on an important point when I began reading his work a quarter of a century ago. He stressed that the Bible is truth. What we are reading in Nehemiah is real history, not myth or legend. We are reading about real people at a real time, in a real place. When we read the miracles of the New Testament, or the miracles God granted during the days of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, we are not reading myths generated by members of a particular faith to try to top the religious stories of their neighbors who worshiped a false god.

1:2 - I QUESTIONED THEM. *“Hanani, one of my brothers, arrived with men from Judah, and I questioned them about Jerusalem and the Jewish remnant that had returned from exile.”* The logical conclusion here is that Hanani was one of Nehemiah’s siblings, rather than a “brother Israelite”, or fellow captive.

The initial remnant of the captives who returned in 536 B.C. (Some have 538, but the Captivity began in 606 B.C. and they returned 70 years later. Do the math). Actually, there were two returning groups, with the return under Zerubbabel following an earlier one. The edict authorizing the return may have been issued in 538, but they arrived back in Jerusalem in 536, according to my calculations).

SUSA. Susa was the winter palace of Ancient Persia, located in what is now modern Iran. King Cyrus made Susa one of three capital cities, along with Ecbatana and Babylon. When Alexander the Great defeated Persia and captured Susa, he found a large treasure, which he confiscated, no doubt to finance his campaigns. Some Bible students believe Susa may have been the place where King

Ahasuerus ruled, and if so, it would have been from the palace at Susa that Esther was used to deliver the Chosen People from Haman's planned genocide of her people.

1:3 - THE SURVIVORS.....ARE IN GREAT TROUBLE. *"They said to me, "The survivors in the province, who returned from the exile, are in great trouble and disgrace. Jerusalem's wall has been broken down, and its gates have been burned down."* When Hanani and other Jews arrived at the Palace at Susa from Jerusalem, Nehemiah "debriefed them", as we would say today. The report was not good: "The survivors", were the descendants of the remnant that had returned from exile under Zerubbabel in 536, as well as those who had returned later. The news could hardly have been worse, without the annihilation of the colony. The survivors, Hanani reported, "are in great trouble and disgrace." Great trouble may well have meant that their survival was in question. Disgrace has to do with the way they were viewed by their enemies who looked upon this Jewish colony in much the same way as the Palestinians and other Islamic people in the Middle East look upon Israel today. There is hatred, wild demonstrations in the streets, murder, suicide bombs, and enough radicals to keep them stirred up against the Jews.

I have known Anis Shorosh since my freshman year at Mississippi College, where I enjoyed a very rewarding fellowship with Anis and his fellow Palestinians, Sam, Philip, and Nadia Matalka. I still find it difficult to believe that the small young man with an effervescent, animated personality had so recently been filled with hatred for Jews. That, of course was before he had come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. His father had been killed by Jews in the battle for Nazareth when he was a child and he says that he lived for one thing: to get old enough to start killing Jews.

I have heard Anis tell about his struggle with Hebrew under Dr. Olen Strange at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I was at Mississippi College with Dr. Strange's daughter, Deede, and looked forward to knowing him when I got to seminary. As it turned out, I never had Dr. Strange in a class, but I knew his reputation and observed his spirit. Anis was an excellent student until it came to Hebrew. Dr. Strange counseled with him and finally, Anis was able to confess, "It is hard for me to try to learn the language of my enemy, the people who killed my father." When he admitted that he was able to pray for forgiveness - his and theirs.

On a tour of the Holy Land, Anis would listen to an officer announce to the American tourists that he had commanded the attack on Nazareth. When Anis spoke to the officer, he looked at him and recognized a young Palestinian man, who might be seeking vengeance. Instead, Anis stepped up to the officer and told him that he had forgiven him. Then he proceeded to share his faith in Jesus with him. Anis says, "When I stand on the streets of Jerusalem and look at a Jews and love him, it is a miracle from God."

When you read that they were living in disgrace, recall those film clips showing the intense hatred for Jews, as well as all the attempts to kill Jews, men, women, and children. Though they were not Muslims, they hated with the same fervor, sought to hinder,

humiliate, and destroy them as the occasion presented itself.

JERUSALEM'S WALLS. The Jewish colony that sought to survive among bitter enemies had one main defense, and that was the walls of the city. The walls of an ancient city was far more than the cypress fence your neighbor builds around his back yard. It is said that four chariots could have raced side by side on top of the wall of ancient Babylon. The walls around Jerusalem may not have been that thick, but they were formidable. Yet, they had been broken down by their enemies.

THE GATES. The gates had been burned by fire. It is possible that the gates were burned to allow access to the city so that the enemy could attack the wall from within and without. What was the purpose of the gates? Defense. When were they closed? At night. Why? Because that was when an ancient city was most vulnerable.

Fast forward for a moment to Revelation 21, where we find a description of the New Jerusalem which John saw being lowered down from heaven. The city was surrounded by walls that were 1500 miles long on each side, 1500 miles high, and 216 feet thick (and made of solid diamond!). There were three gates on each side of the city and they will never be closed. Why? There will be no night there, and there will be no threat from any enemy.

The news that the walls had been broken down and the gates burned was devastating. What was Nehemiah's response? He might have gone into a rage. He might have asked the King of Persia to send an army against the enemies of his people in Jerusalem. He might have organized a gorilla warfare against the enemies. What did he do? He prayed. It is his praying to which I referred earlier. I remember well the time hearing R. G. Lee preaching about prayer, when he said, "And I don't mean any Polly-wants-a-cracker kind of praying either."

Nehemiah's Prayer

1:4 - FASTING AND PRAYING. *"When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven."* Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. He did not ask him to teach them **how** to pray!

I know how to pray, but I find it incredible when I realize that I am not praying. I cannot believe it when I look back and see that I have been too busy to pray! Of course, this will come as a shock, but only to those who have never been guilty of the same sin. And sin it is!

My purpose here is not to teach you how to pray, but I will praise the Lord if both you and I practice what we already know more consistently and more effectively. I am not talking about "kicking it up a notch" emotionally (those who watch Emeril LaGasse on the Food Network will understand).

I will be even more specific. Do you remember when the PRAYER OF JABEZ hit the

books stores? I alluded to that in the introduction. Praying the prayer of Jabez is positive and uplifting. That was a great book and many were blessed by it - but there is a danger in taking any book about the Bible, prayer, or God, and becoming so engrossed in it that we are distracted from the Bible itself. Yes, the prayer of Jabez is wonderful, beautiful, inspiring. I am so impressed with the book, and the prayer, that I am tempted to ask the Lord to please let me pray the prayer of Jabez and keep me away from the prayer of Nehemiah. I don't want to sit down and weep. I am not very good at weeping in the first place. In the second place, I don't think my weeping would be especially inspiring to others. I don't want to mourn. I have tried it a few times and I don't like it! I had rather not mourn - but the more I study conditions in America today, the closer I come to mourning. I don't want to fast. I have never been very good at fasting. My specialty is feasting, not fasting. In case you are wondering, I am not trying to be funny, I am confessing something that I had rather not face. I am confessing sin, which of course is essential to praying as Nehemiah prayed.

How long has it been since you wept and mourned for days or weeks as you prayed for someone? Believe me, many are praying for children , siblings, friend, or a spouse like that today.

There is one more thing we should observe in this verse. Nehemiah knew but one God to go to in prayer, and that is the God of heaven. We live in a culture that is at war with the God of heaven. Liberal politicians and educators are not at war with Islam or Buddhism, they are at war with Christianity. John Gibson of Fox New has written a book, AMERICA'S WAR AGAINST CHRISTMAS, in which he concludes, according to what I heard him say in an interview, that American's attack against Christmas is really against Christianity. As we move deeper and deeper into the post-Christian era, Christians everywhere ought to be in mourning and in prayer.

1:5 - LORD GOD OF HEAVEN. *"I said, Lord God of heaven, the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant with those who love Him and keep His commands..."* Nehemiah is inspired by the Holy Spirit to record the prayer he prayed after hearing about conditions in Jerusalem. A logical question might well be, is this a prayer he prayed only after he had wept, mourned, and fasted for "a number of days"? Or, was an essential part of the prayer he prayed over and over during that time? Are we seeing a man who persisted in prayer over many days, or is this someone who could only pray this prayer after mourning and fasting? It is doubtful that he mourned for many days without prayer, and at the same time it seems logical that his prayer would become more focused as he continued in prayer, fasting, and mourning.

He began his prayer "Lord God of heaven, the great and awe-inspiring God..." When His disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray He gave them the Model Prayer, which begins, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." There is no prayer that does not begin with a humble acknowledgment of the One to whom we are praying as "Our heavenly Father," the "Lord God of heaven." He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer - we are

the creation, we are the redeemed, we are the beneficiaries of His grace and mercy. We must humble ourselves before the one living God, acknowledge Him, submit to Him, and praise Him.

We live in a day in which a lot of emphasis is placed on praising God. Sadly, in some cases about which we hear, there are people who wave their arms, clap their hands, pray rhapsodic, ecstatic prayers, and then leave and continue a life that does not praise God during the week. Many years ago, my neighbor, C. C. Cornish came over and visited with me while I was doing some work in my yard in Bastrop, Louisiana. After some time, Mr. Cornish said, "You have one man in your church who is the same person Monday through Friday at the (International Paper Company) mill that you see every Sunday at church, and that is Robert Craig." Every pastor loves to hear a comment like that. Robert Craig praised the Lord in song every Sunday but it would have been meaningless if he had not praised him with his life every day. No, it would have been worse that meaningless, it would have been hypocritical. I have known Robert and Mary Craig since 1965. Their daughter Susan is married to my younger brother Mike. Susan was our pianist in Bastrop and she is an outstanding soloist today. However, if she did not praise the God of heaven with her life, she would be better off not to try to praise Him in song.

God is praised by those who find Him "the great and awe-inspiring God" and he is praised by those who recognize Him as the One "who keeps His gracious covenant with those who love Him and keep His commands." Nehemiah recognized Him as the God of the covenant. I always pay attention when I am driving down the Interstate and see an eighteen wheeler with the bold letters across the back, down the sides, and on the doors: COVENANT. I always look to see if there is a verse of Scripture printed somewhere on the truck, or a pro-life message. What a wonderful way to acknowledge God, and at the same time place emphasis on the fact that the our God is still the God of the covenant. I would congratulate our Presbyterian friends for placing emphasis on our covenant relationship with our Creator.

1:6 - LET YOUR EYES BE OPEN. *"Let Your eyes be open and Your ears be attentive to hear Your servant's prayer that I now pray to You day and night for Your servants, the Israelites. I confess the sins we have committed against You. Both I and my father's house have sinned."* Nehemiah makes a heartfelt appeal to the God of heaven to see him and to give His attention to His servant's prayer. We would do well to follow his example in intercessory prayer. He prayed for Israel, just as Moses had prayed for the Children of Israel in the wilderness.

I CONFESS THE SINS. Now we come to an essential ingredient in true prayer. This is a timely reminder today at a time when some preachers have ceased to preach against sin, proclaim God's demand for repentance, and warn of the judgment to come for those who do not repent. One popular young Television preacher has reportedly stated that he does not like to preach on sin or repentance. He just "wants everybody to feel good." When Paul stood before Felix in Caesarea, he reasoned with him about righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come. Felix knew nothing of the first two, and by the time he found out about the third it was too late.

A lady told my mother what it was like growing up in the home of her older sister. She had gone to a movie and when she returned her older sister demanded, “When are you going to repent?” She replied, “When I am convicted.” These elements are critical and essential: conviction, confession, and repentance. We do not confess our sin until we are convicted, and if we are confess our sin, we must then repent. I have seen some people walk down the aisle during the invitation which follows the sermon and stand there while the pastor tries to figure out why they are standing there. Under those conditions the individual will often say whatever he thinks the pastor wants to hear. I am convinced that some come forward under conviction, but do not confess their sin or repent. I am also convinced that there are some who come forward under conviction and confess the fact of sin, but do not repent. In the New Testament the word confess means to “say the same thing.” In other words when you confess your sins to God you are saying that you see your sins as God sees them. If a lost person abhors his sin, he should repent. If a believer is under conviction of sin, and confesses to God that he is guilty of evil thoughts and deeds against God, he must repent. Repentance denotes a change of mind and heart that is reflected in one’s life. In military terms, it means an about-face. One is going in one direction and he does an about face and goes in the other direction. The motivation to confess your sins is never stronger than that which John proclaimed:

If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10, bold for emphasis).

1:7 - WE HAVE ACTED CORRUPTLY. “*We have acted corruptly toward You and have not kept the commands, statutes, and ordinances You gave Your servant Moses.*” In confessing sins of Israel, he uses the first person plural, not the third person. He confesses, “We have acted corruptly toward You.” He does not say “they”. This is not generic confession, like we sometimes hear in church: “Father, forgive us of whatever sins we may have committed this past week.” While one should not always confess sins publically, when praying in private we must remember that asking the Lord to forgive us for envy, jealousy, lust, or deceit, or for blowing your top in traffic.

As David confessed sin, transgression, and iniquity, Nehemiah confesses, “We have **acted corruptly** toward You and **have not kept the commands, statutes, and ordinances** You gave Your servant Moses.” He covers all bases. They are guilty of sins of every kind, sins of commission and sins of omission. They had broken the “thou shalt nots” and they had not obeyed the “thou shalt.” There is more. They had not violated the Code of Hammurabi, they had broken the law of God, given through Moses. There could be no question as to what he confesses here.

Every word of the Bible was miraculously inspired by the Holy Spirit; it was miraculously preserved by God; and it is miraculously discerned by those whose hearts and minds have been illuminated by the Holy Spirit. It is there, not only for our information, but also for our inspiration. Dr. H. Leo Eddleman was preaching from Isaiah 40:1ff in a revival service for the church I served, either in the

early seventies. He read those words, “Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people...”, and then he made a profound statement, “The Word of God is so designed as to comfort the afflicted - and to afflict the comfortable.” If we read the law of God handed down through Moses and amplified countless times in both the OT and the NT, it should certainly do both - comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable.

If we are honest, every Christian in America would confess fact that we have violated the commandments, principles, ordinances, and statutes of God. All you have to do is to look at what America has done with the Ten Commandments to see that. If the spirit filled Christian will take a serious look at America we will weep over America as Nehemiah wept for his people, as Jesus wept over Jerusalem. And if all Christians confessed the sin of which the Holy Spirit will surely convict us, confess it and repent, I am convinced that God will hear our prayers, forgive our sins and bless our country.” I would like to confess “our” sins to God and seek His forgiveness:

1) I confess that we turned our schools over to the world following the Scopes trial in 1925. The goal of the evolutionists at the time was to have evolution taught in public schools as an alternate theory. Within 10 years in some parts of the country, possibly 20 or more in the Bible Belt, you could not teach creation as an alternate theory. This has impacted America in ways neither the schools nor the church could have imagined. It may seem like an over simplification, but if you want to sell a nation on homosexuality, abortion, embryonic stem cell research, or euthanasia, sell them first on evolution. If you do not have a Creator at the beginning, how could you have a Judge at the end. Let me be quick to add that all pro-choice (or pro-death) people are not atheists, and accepting evolution does not automatically make one an abortionist any more than it will make him endorse a homosexual life-style.

2) I confess that America has become a profane society. The mayor of New Orleans shouted God’s name in vain in a televised news briefing following Hurricane Katrina. Clarke Gable used one four letter word in GONE WITH THE WIND, and Hollywood has been “pushing the envelop” every since. My grandfather told me about a cousin of his, John P. Cofer, whom he described as a drummer and a Hard Shell Baptist preacher. He said that if someone walked up to him and started cursing or using vulgar language, “he would just knock them down.” Today, they would lock him up and protect the profane person, insisting that the freedom of speech clause covers all kinds of speech.

I once read about a trial in which a man was convicted, following his arrest for using the four letter word “d__n” in public. The court concluded that only God can damn anyone and to use that word was to take God’s name in vain, and to take God’s name in vain struck at the very foundation of America’s laws.

3) I confess that America is a vulgar society. Language that people were careful to keep out of the hearing of children when I was growing up, is used freely by children - from Christian homes - today. The language of our children is laced with references to body parts and body functions, as well as sexual innuendos.

4) I confess that America had become a more immoral society. Adultery is portrayed as normal by Hollywood, and parents take their children to movies or watch television programs that present immorality as normal and chastity as outdated.

5) I confess that the liberal news media knew about Bill Clinton's immorality when he ran in 1992. We learned later that they had the information but would not print it. Even though his immorality was well known, America elected him a to a second term, with many professing Christians voting for him. When his immorality was disclosed, he denied that oral sex is sex - and had trouble defining both "sex" and "is". The liberal media paraded out guests who explained, "It was only sex." When Clinton lied to the prosecutor, his defenders declared the it was only sex and he took the moral highroad and lied to protect his family.

This week I had a conversation with my older son John, who prosecutes juvenile crime. I asked if their office was having more work to do because of the evacuees from Katrina in the area. He assured me that there are a lot of young thugs from New Orleans in the area and they are keeping law enforcement offices and his office busy with a variety of crimes. Then he said something that he was obviously not too comfortable bringing up with his father. He said that you cannot imagine how Bill Clinton's legacy has impacted young people. I caught on, aware of the fact that he must be dealing with a lot of oral sex issues among children and youth.

John assures me that parents do to know what is happening among young people, and pastors have no idea how bad it has gotten. Frustrated parents take rebellious children and young people to him to see he can get their attention. In truth, they hope he can scare them into better behavior. Imagine an innocent five-year old going to school and either telling or acting out what an older child has done to him. And what about the child who was acting out something for his grandparents, and when they questioned him, they learned that he was acting out what his mother and her boyfriend had been doing in his presence - inviting him to watch!

6) I confess that America is watching the family fall apart, and I might add, with devastating consequences. When my wife Becky started teaching, the child from a broken home was the exception. Today, it is the norm. Students asked her how long she had been married and when she told them, some were totally amazed "To the SAME man?" Oh, God, I confess that we are destroying the hearts and minds of our most precious gift.

7) I confess that American politics have taken a dive from a high board into a deep cesspool of immorality, dishonesty, deception, graft and corruption. Forgive us, Lord, we have acted corruptly. There have always been politician who played the religion card while they were running and then legislated as though they have never heard of God. President George Bush has been called the most spiritual president since Lincoln, but he is attacked viciously for anything and everything - and many in the church believe everything the media says about him. The media was incensed that President Bush would discuss the Bible and pray with the head of state from one of the European nations - in the White House, which is supported by tax payers!

8) I confess that America is engaged in a war against God. If, as Francis Schaeffer said, we entered the post-Christian era in our history in 1935, it did not take long for a godless evolutionary humanism to make its move against Christianity. The world hates Christ, why would it not hate Christianity? In 1948, there was a statement about “a wall of separation between church and state. In 1962, prayer was taken out of public schools - and my Systematic Theology professor applauded that decision. The following year, the Bible was taken out of public schools. I have heard pastors speculate that we entered the post-Christian era at that time, but I have stressed that those decisions would never have been made if we had not already been in a post-Christian culture for a generation.

I remember stating, probably 20 years ago, that we are never more than a generation away from paganism, but, I added, “I never thought it would be this generation.” I talk with people who assure me that we have no idea what is happening out there in the world today.

Those who cannot win at the polls, or get a bill through congress, are going before liberal judges who do not hesitate to legislate from the bench. If you doubt that the ACLU and other liberal groups are at war against Christ and Christianity, read the book written by former chief justice Roy Moore of Alabama and see how the courts forced the removal of a display of the Ten Commandments from the foyer of the court building. The Rev. Barry Lynn, of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, praised the decisions handed down by judges against Moore because it would be sad if an atheist walked by that display and saw those Ten Commandments - just think how he might feel!

9) I confess that what America once called vile and evil, it today calls entertainment. I have seen new network personalities smile and joke about actors and actresses who make their living polluting the airwaves, while campaigning for clean air and clean streams.

10) I confess that America is filled with people who are materialistic, covetous, greedy, dishonest, and violent. People everywhere are installing security systems. When I was growing up many people did not even lock their doors at night. Where I lived, seven miles west of Sledge, Mississippi, the surest way to be sure you didn't lose your car keys was to leave them in the ignition. Today, that is the surest way to have your car stolen.

11) I confess that America uses the war against terrorism as a political tool. Every things is a political issue today. Shepherd Smith of Fox News, I believe it was, in introducing a new segment announced that he would take a look at the politics of hurricanes.

12) I confess what America witnessed following the flooding of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Even though some reports may have been exaggerated, there were reports of violence and rape in the Super Dome. Looters ran through the streets with ecstatic expressions on their faces - and the liberal media defended them, saying that they were only looking for something to eat. We watched them break into stores and steal guns, televisions, basketball shoes, and jewelry. Dr. Charles Simmons returned to the medical clinic he had served as chief of staff, to find that looters had broken in and stolen all drugs, all medication, before vandalizing the place. Snipers shot at doctors and nurses who were trying to evacuate patients.

A black Muslim declared that whites had blown up the levy to kill black people. Some even accused President Bush of causing the hurricane. In Louisiana, the president was criticized because he did not visit soon enough; in Texas, because he visited too soon.

13) I confess that while America is trying to shackle Christianity, it is giving a free pass to Islam - a religion that would take away freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom to worship as believers feel led. There has already been a report that someone wants a new bill that will prohibit military chaplains from praying in Jesus' name because that name offends some people. Needless to say, Jesus has always been offensive to Satan and his followers.

14) I confess that America has become a dangerous country. There are many places in the inner city where one would be taking his life in his own hands to walk through a community late at night, and sometimes during the day. America was shocked when snipers were shooting at doctors who were trying to evacuate patients from hospitals after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. There were reports that many who drove to New Orleans to try to help rescue flood victims were turned away because it was too dangerous. School buses were driven from north Louisiana to try to move evacuees out of the flooded area. One of the drivers, according to what his cousin told me, said they were told that it was too dangerous to go into that area. He said that he did not hear gunfire, but he saw bullet holes in an ambulance.

While we are confessing that America has become a very dangerous place to live, let me stress here that the most dangerous place to be in America is in a mother's womb! Instead of thanking God for the sacrifice of two thousand of our troops in Irak to free and oppressed people and to try to stop terrorism on foreign soil, many liberals celebrated that milestone. Instead of mourning over the death of the first one thousandth soldier to die, they were waiting for the new and when it came they seemed to celebrate if because of the political leverage they thought it gave them. These same people are not grieving over 47 million unborn babies who have been killed in a mother's womb since Roe v. Wade. They campaign on promises to protect Roe v. Wade. They fight the president's nominations of judges and Supreme Court justices for fear that Roe v. Wade will be overturned. That battle may be drawing near. It has been announced (March 6, 2006) that four states are considering legislation that could potentially reach the Supreme Court, possibly changing the abortion rulings.

When Scott Pederson killed his pregnant wife, he was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death for killing two human beings. America was horrified at the evil deed. Yet, millions will vote to give mothers, and their doctors, the right to keep on killing unborn babies. Can they not understand the message of Psalm 139:

“For it was You who created my inward parts; **You knit me together in my mother's womb** (life begins at conception). I will praise You, because I have been **remarkably and wonderfully made** (skeletal system, nervous system, blood system, etc). Your works are wonderful, and I know this very well. My bones were not

hidden from You when I was made in secret (the womb), when I was formed in the depths of the earth (the womb). Your eyes saw me when I was formless (the earliest cells); **all my days were written in Your book** and planned before a single one of them began God's written book or DNA?" (Psalms 139:13-16, emphasis and notes added).

15) I confess that America is not confessing sin. We do not acknowledge sin, and many people are looking for a church where the pastor never mentions sin, repentance, or the eternal consequences of sin. I confess that we desperately need a revival today.

"If we say, **"We have no sin,"** we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say, **"We have not sinned,"** we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10).

1:8 - WHAT YOU COMMANDED. *"Please remember what You commanded Your servant Moses: "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples."* God did not need to be reminded, but Nehemiah did. The people needed to be reminded, just as we do today. The entire Period of the Judges reveals a cycle of rebellion, judgment (defeat and subjugation, tribute), deliverance, and peace as long as that judge (deliverer) lived. Then the cycle started over again - more than a dozen times during that period.

Jeroboam I led ten of the twelve tribes in rebellion against the harsh rule of Rehoboam, son of Solomon. The Northern Kingdom and Syria were defeated in the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis by Assyria in 734 B.B. Israel was destroyed in 722 B.C. by Sargon II of Assyria, and the people scattered among the nations, with only a remnant spared when they fled to Judah. Judah had rebelled against the Lord and He used the Babylonians to take Judah into captivity for 70 years. The ones for whose sins Nehemiah was confessing were the descendants of the remnant God had returned. They had indeed been scattered among the nations - but not like they would be scattered following the fall of the temple to Titus in A. D. 70.

1:9 - IF YOU RETURN TO ME. *"But if you return to Me and carefully observe My commands, even though your exiles were banished to the ends of the earth, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I chose to have My name dwell."* Nehemiah is reviewing what God had promised. Even though He would scatter His chosen people among the nations, if they would repent and return to Him, He promises, "I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I chose to have My name dwell."

Though the kinsmen of those whose sins Nehemiah was now confessing had been scattered among the nations that had made up the Babylonian Empire, and now were scattered among the nations that made up the Persian Empire, God promised to return them to Jerusalem if they would return to Him, meaning that if they repent of their sins and seek His forgiveness and restoration. There was no mystery here. God told Jeremiah to tell the people of Judah that when they returned from the Captivity, they were not to rebuild the Ark of the Covenant, because from that time forward the city of Jerusalem would be the

symbol of His presence among the people - the reminder that He lived among them.

1:10 - THEY ARE...YOUR PEOPLE. *“They are Your servants and Your people. You redeemed them by Your great power and strong hand.”* They had rebelled and their rebellion had led to their being scattered among the nations, but if they would return to Him He would restore them. Nehemiah is confident of that because these, he says, are “Your servants and Your people.” Here the HCSB renders it “servants” because this is a word for word translation. In the NT, many will be surprised to see the word slave rather than servant. This had apparently concerned a Hispanic trustee from Miami who was sitting at my table during our lunch break on a very long Tuesday meeting of the LifeWay Christian Resources board of trustees. Those of us on the Broadman and Holman Committee had spent a good part of the morning with the General Editor of the HCSB, Dr. Ed Bloom, as mentioned elsewhere. Dr. Jimmy Draper, president of LifeWay Christian Resources at that time, brought Dr. Bloom to our table and told him that this trustee had a question. He was concerned by the use of the word slave and wanted to know why they had translated the Greek word slave when the KJV and others had servant, or bond servant. Dr. Bloom explained that this is the literal rendering, and while the word slave brings back ugly memories of stories we have read and pictures we have seen, this is the correct word. He explained that we really are His slaves, bought with a price.

After thinking about it, I could appreciate it more. If you are a Christian, you are not your own, you are bought with a price, You do not belong to yourself, you belong to God. Your service is God’s choice, not yours. When He saved you, you became His slave. I have read that John Wesley used to pray, “Oh Lord, I want you to have all of me.” God has chosen that all His children serve Him. Your only choice is whether you are going to be a faithful slave or an unfaithful one. Here the word is servant. That is the metaphor he chooses to use here. If you have been redeemed, you should live to please Him.

YOU REDEEMED THEM. “You redeemed them by Your great power and strong hand.” God had delivered the Children of Israel for Egyptian bondage by His strong right hand. He had returned the remnant to Jerusalem by His mighty hand and preserved them by His great power. Nehemiah is not telling God something he does not know, he is acknowledging God’s redemption and recognizes His mighty hand in all He had done.

1:11 - BE ATTENTIVE TO THE PRAYER. *“Please, Lord, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and to that of Your servants who delight to revere Your name. Give Your servant success today, and have compassion on him in the presence of this man. At the time, I was the king’s cupbearer.”* Nehemiah is praying with a sense of extreme urgency, pleading with God to hear the prayers of those who “delight to revere Your name.” He appeals to the Lord for compassion for himself and for the people.

CUPBEARER. Nehemiah’s position as cupbearer to the king was a position of honor and trust. The king’s cupbearer literally stood between the king and death as he tasted both wine and food before the king ate it. That Nehemiah was both a Jew and a captive made his

position even more remarkable. His position is a testimony to the character of the honored servant, but there is another possibility that there is another factor which we should not overlook. Just as Esther was raised up for such an hour when the extermination of all Jews was being planned - and the plan about to be implemented - Nehemiah may well have placed him in this position for him to serve the purpose that became the greatest work of his life.

Chapter 2

Nehemiah Is Sent to Jerusalem

2:1-2 - SAD IN HIS PRESENCE. *“During the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was set before him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had never been sad in his presence...”* This is history - real people at a real place, at a real time. Nehemiah had gained the trust of King Artaxerxes, but his position as cupbearer placed him in the cross hairs of any inspection or investigation. Any question and he would have, at the very least, been dismissed, and at the worst, executed. The news about conditions in Jerusalem had left Nehemiah sad and he was not able to cover up his anxiety and worry. His face betrayed him.

2:2 - WHY ARE YOU SAD? *“So the king said to me, “Why are you sad, when you aren’t sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.” I was overwhelmed with fear.”* That the king would address the cupbearer must have been a surprise. That he would mention his visage was shocking. It is interesting the king paid enough attention to Nehemiah to observe that his sadness was not the result of illness: “This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Nehemiah’s confession is obviously an honest one here: He was “overwhelmed with fear.” We may recall Esther’s position when she entered the king’s presence. A Persian king held the power of life and death over his subjects. The cupbearer did not dare offend the king.

2:3 - THE CITY OF MY ANCESTORS. *“(A)nd replied to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should I not be sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”* Nehemiah responded simply, honestly, and to the point. The city of his ancestors was the most important city in the world to a devout Jew and he had just learned from his brother that “the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins and the gates have been destroyed by fire.” The king would understand both his grief for the city and the graves of his ancestors. He would also understand the significance of the burning of the gates.

2:4A - WHAT IS YOUR REQUEST. *“Then the king asked me, “What is your request?”* When we read this we must remember that God had planned to use empires to judge Israel, and then return them, and protect them. The king might have reacted in any number of ways, and the fact that he permitted Nehemiah to make a request must be indicative of the confidence he had in his cupbearer.

2:4B-5 - SO I PRAYED TO THE GOD OF HEAVEN. *“So I prayed to the God of heaven and answered the king, ‘If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, send me to Judah and to the city where my ancestors are buried, so that I may rebuild it.’”* Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king of Persia, an empire filled with the kind of religion Paul describes in the first chapter of Romans. There was but one nation on earth that professed to worship the God of heaven, and they had often turned from the true God to worship before pagan altars and images. Nehemiah distinguishes between the God of heaven and the false gods of the day. Like King David, Nehemiah worshiped the one true God, not the gods who are no gods.

SEND ME TO JUDAH. This was a bold request. Remember that this servant of Yahweh had said, “I was overwhelmed with fear.” He makes an especially bold request for one who had been overwhelmed by fear. He had prayed for guidance and the Lord had given him both courage and guidance.

2:6 - IT PLEASSED THE KING TO SEND ME. *“The king, with the queen seated beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you return?” So I gave him a definite time, and it pleased the king to send me.”* How do you explain this? First, there is the fact that the king noticed a difference in Nehemiah. Second, that he inquired as to the reason. Third, he asked Nehemiah, “What is your request?” Fourth, there is the fact that a man who had been overwhelmed with fear had the courage to make such a bold request. We must surely see that hand of Yahweh in this. He is not the first king the Lord used to accomplish His purpose (Sargon II of Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Cyrus of Persia), nor would he be the last (Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Caesar August, Herod).

The king asked how long the journey would take and Nehemiah gave him a definite time. He had obviously calculated the time required for the journey, either during, or after he prayed. It is obvious that God is moving to accomplish His purpose.

2:7 - LET ME HAVE LETTERS. *“I also said to the king: ‘If it pleases the king, let me have letters written to the governors of the region west of the Euphrates River, so that they will grant me safe passage until I reach Judah.’”* The wisdom Nehemiah shows here is indicative of the wisdom that put him in the position to make the request in the first place. He was a highly respected and trusted servant of the king, and he had the attention of the king, the one person on earth who could give him permission to go to Judah, offer him protection on his journey and in Jerusalem, and the financing he would need for his trip. The Lord had heard Nehemiah’s prayer and He is answering it. The letters to the governors of the different regions west of the Euphrates River would grant safe

passage all the way to Judah.

2:8 - STRENGTHENED BY MY GOD. *“And let me have a letter written to Asaph, keeper of the king’s forest, so that he will give me timber to rebuild the gates of the temple’s fortress, the city wall, and the home where I will live. The king granted my requests, for I was graciously strengthened by my God.”* Not only did the king write the letters requested for safe passage, he also wrote a letter to Asaph so that lumber would be furnished to rebuild the gates of the temple’s fortress, the city wall, and the lumber necessary to build a house for Nehemiah. He gives God credit for both the protection and the provisions. There are three things every child of God should recognize and thank Him for daily: a relationship with Him, provisions and protection. A faithful earthly father loves his children, teaches them, disciplines them, protects them, and provides for them. And he is careful to provide the relationship that is essential to normal growth and development.

2:9 - THE KING HAD ALSO SENT...INFANTRY AND CALVARY WITH ME. *“I went to the governors of the region west of the Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent officers of the infantry and cavalry with me.”* The king had asked what Nehemiah requested, and they he provided much more than he requested. The Lord was obviously preparing his heart for this occasion. We have to remember that travel conditions in ancient Persia were much different from travel today. The man in the story of the Good Samaritan fell among thieves who robbed him and left him for dead - and this was just between Jerusalem and Jericho. There would be many opportunities for thieves and robbers between Susa and Jerusalem.

Keil and Delitzsch make the point that Ezra had been ashamed to request a military escort from the Persian monarch (Ezra 8:22):

“but the king gave to the high dignitary called Pecha a guard of soldiers, who certainly remained with him in Jerusalem also for his protection (4:17). Besides these, there were in his retinue his brethren, i.e., either relations or fellow-countrymen, and servants, comp. Neh 4:10; 5:10. That this retinue is not mentioned in the present verses, is owing to the fact that the journey itself is not further described, but only indirectly alluded to.” [Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament Vol. 4: Ezra-Job, Author: Keil, C.F. & Delitzsch, F. In QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library, Parsons Technology - K&D after this].

2:10 - GREATLY DISPLEASED. *“When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard that someone had come to seek the well-being of the Israelites, they were greatly displeased.”* Sanballat was an Akkadian whose personal name means, “Sin (the god) has healed.”

“According to the Elephantine Papyri from the reign of Darius I, Sanballat was governor of Samaria around 407 BC. He had sons whose names included the term *Yahweh*, for the God of Israel. Although addressed by his

Babylonian name (probably acquired during the Exile), Sanballat was a practicing Jew. His daughter was married to the grandson of Jerusalem's high priest (Neh. 13:28), indicating harmonious relations between Judah and Samaria at that time" [HBD].

Nehemiah referred to Sanballat as the "Horonite," which some Bible students hold may have had a connection with either Upper or Lower Beth-horon (Neh. 2:10). The interesting thing here is that these two towns controlled the strategic highway between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible, however, identifies it as Horonaim, a town in Moab, which would suggest that Sanballat was a Moabite [NCWB]. Keil and Delitzsch note that older interpreters believed this referred to Honoraim in Moab, but refute that claim, holding that if that had been the case Sanballat would have been called a Moabite. What we should consider is that:

"If Sanballat had influence with these towns, he could greatly affect Jerusalem's economy. Sanballat, in league with Tobiah and Shemiah, opposed Nehemiah's rebuilding of Jerusalem. If the Holy City regained prominence, it would erode the powers of the surrounding cities. The struggle appears to have been more political than racial or religious. Papyri from Wadi Daliyeh appear to indicate two later Sanballats also served as governors of Samaria" [HBD].

TOBIAH. When Sanballat and his associate Tobiah, an Ammonite, heard that Nehemiah had arrived in Jerusalem, they became agitated and immediately began to make plans to stop Nehemiah from achieving his goal. One source suggests that they may have been planning to take control of Judah.

"In fact in the Elephantine papyri written in 407 B.C., 37 years after this event, Sanballat was called "governor of Samaria." But Nehemiah's motivation remained undaunted. He knew that God had brought him to this moment in Israel's history and he was about to tackle a project that others, for almost 100 years before him, had been unable to complete. [The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament, QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library - BKC]

NEHEMIAH MAKES PLANS TO REBUILD THE WALLS

2:11 - IN JERUSALEM. *"After I arrived in Jerusalem and had been there three days..."* Nehemiah quietly studied the situation for three days before formulating a plan and enlisting the people to do the work.

2:12 - WHAT GOD LAID ON MY HEART. *"I got up at night and took a few men with me. I didn't tell anyone what my God had laid on my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the one I was riding."* God is in control and He is leading Nehemiah, just as He had revealed His will and plans to Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and David. He says

that he got up at night and, with a chosen group of men, he survey the damage to the walls and the gates, and to make plans for the work.

2:13- 14 - I INSPECTED THE WALLS. *“I went out at night through the Valley Gate toward the Serpent’s Well and the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.” I went on to the Fountain Gate and the King’s Pool, but farther down it became too narrow for my animal to go through. So I went up at night by way of the valley and inspected the wall. Then heading back, I entered through the Valley Gate and returned.*” Some commentaries have tried to identify the various gates by their NT designations, and some admit that they cannot be sure. One commentary reveals the difficulty in identifying the gates and the well:

“In his nighttime inspection he rode his horse or mule (mount, 2:14) from the Valley Gate in the southwest wall east to the Jackal Well, the site of which is unknown, and to the Dung Gate in the southeast part of the city. Possibly this is the same as the Potsherd Gate (Jer. 19:2). The Fountain Gate was north of the Dung Gate on the eastern wall. The King’s Pool may be the same as the Pool of Siloam which was near the King’s Garden (Neh. 3:15), or the King’s Pool may have been south of the Pool of Siloam. Apparently the rubble there kept him from proceeding on his mount so he went up the valley (probably the Kidron Valley east of the city). Either he went all round the entire wall or, more likely, he retraced his steps from the eastern wall. He went back into the city at his starting place, the Valley Gate” [BKC].

It is interesting to read the OT scholars here because some will admit that no matter how they identify the gates and the well, the fact is that their speculations are uncertain. Some hold that the well is the well of Gihon in the Valley of Gihon. Keil & Delitzsch offers a brief summary:

Having arrived at Jerusalem and rested three days (as Ezra had also done, Ezra 8:32), he arose in the night, and some few men with him, to ride round the wall of the city, and get a notion of its condition. His reason for taking but few men with him is given in the following sentence: “I had told no man what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.” Although he had come to Jerusalem with the resolution of fortifying the city by restoring its circumvallation, he spoke of this to no one until he had ascertained, by an inspection of the wall, the magnitude and extent of the work to be accomplished. For, being aware of the hostility of Sanballat and Tobiah, he desired to keep his intention secret until he felt certain of the possibility of carrying it into execution. Hence he made his survey of the wall by night, and took but few men with him, and those on foot, for the sake of not exciting attention. The beast on which he rode was either a horse or a mule”[K&D].

2:16 - I HAD NOT YET TOLD THE JEWS. *“The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, for I had not yet told the Jews, priests, nobles, officials, or the rest of those who would be doing the work.”* He rode out at night to inspect the broken walls and the burned gates,

saying nothing to any of the leaders of the city, including the Jews, priests, nobles, officials, and the rest of the people. Only the small group that accompanied him knew why he was there. That brings to mind a question not addressed in many of the commentaries. Who were the men who rode with Nehemiah? We are not told, so any attempt to name them would fall under the heading of conjecture. If I were to speculate, I would say that they may have been some of those who accompanied him from Susa. A large group would have attracted the attention of citizens, and the world would almost certainly have reached some of the officials. A small group might be viewed as traders, depending upon the Persian security force that accompanied Nehemiah. They were subjects of the King Artaxerxes, so the presence of a military detachment would probably have caused extreme caution, or even fear.

2:17 - YOU SEE THE TROUBLE YOU ARE IN. *“So I said to them, ‘‘You see the trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned down. Come, let’s rebuild Jerusalem’s wall, so that we will no longer be a disgrace.’’* They were well aware of the fact that they were in trouble, they just didn’t know what to do about it. Any action they took to restore the walls and rebuild the gates would have prompted opposition from forces as determined as they. Nehemiah pointed to the problems of which they were already aware. The Jerusalem, he said, lies in ruins and the gates have been burned down. The people already knew that, but they lacked the courage and will to rebuild them.

COME, LET’S REBUILD JERUSALEM’S WALLS. They needed a leader who was not afraid to act, and in Nehemiah they had one. They needed someone who knew what to do, was willing to undertake the task, and not afraid to confront the enemies of Jerusalem. In part, the key to their response is that he did not simply say, “You ought to rebuild the walls” - what he said was, “Let’s rebuild Jerusalem’s walls.”

SO THAT WE WILL NO LONGER BE A DISGRACE. Why were they a disgrace? Was it the sight of the burned gates? Did visitors look at the gates and wonder if they didn’t have enough civic pride to rebuild them? Was it the unsightly piles of rubble from the crumbled walls of the city? That, too, would have been an eyesore, but that is secondary. The broken walls and burned gates spoke volumes about the ability of the residence of Jerusalem to defend themselves. They had not been able to prevent the burning of the gates and the destruction of the walls, both of which shouted to the world, “These Jews are without defense. They are at the mercy of the world.” It was a national disgrace that must have burned in every Jewish heart.

2:18 - THE GRACIOUS HAND OF MY GOD. *“I told them how the gracious hand of my God had been on me, and what the king had said to me. They said, ‘Let’s start rebuilding,’ and they were encouraged to do this good work.”* Nehemiah would have told them about receiving the report, that he had wept and mourned in prayer for days. In response, God had prepared the heart of King Artaxerxes for Nehemiah’s revelation, and used him to equip his cupbearer with everything he needed to return and supervise the rebuilding of the walls and gates of the disgraced city.

LET'S START REBUILDING. They did not have to be convinced. They now had a leader with authority from the king to rebuild the walls and gates, so now they are ready to begin the task. He adds, "They were encouraged to do this good work." Who encouraged them? Nehemiah, for one. They would have encouraged each other, but it seems that the Lord is the One who gave them the courage, motivation, and will to undertake the task.

2:19 - SANBALLAT..., TOBIAH..., AND GESHEM. *"When Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about this, they mocked and despised us, and said, 'What is this you're doing? Are you rebelling against the king?'"* When their adversaries heard about this, they derided their resolution and mocked them. We have already met two of the leaders of the opposition, Sanballat and Tobiah (vs. 10), and now we are introduced to a third, Geshem the Arabian, who was probably the chief of some Arab tribe dwelling in South Palestine, not far from Jerusalem (as the Arabians in 4:1). "These enemies ironically exclaimed: What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? The irony lies in the fact that they did not give the Jews credit for power to build fortifications, so as to be able to rebel. Comp. 6:6, where Sanballat, in an open letter to Nehemiah, again reproaches them with rebellion" [K&D].

2:20 - THE GOD OF HEAVEN. *"I gave them this reply, 'The God of heaven is the One who will grant us success. We, His servants, will start building, but you have no share, right, or historic claim in Jerusalem.'" With the power and authority of Persia behind him, Nehemiah might have appealed to the king's military. Instead, he affirmed his faith in the God of Heaven: "the One who will grant us success." Nehemiah had a plan to succeed, not fail. When competition between the National Football League and the upstart American Football League was still in its infancy, the Dallas Cowboys were about to play the Kansas City Chiefs. The Cowboys, with their great coach Tom Landry, and their outstanding players, should have won the game, but when they were preparing run out onto the field for introductions, a Kansas City player saw a Cowboy he knew and began joking with him. He looked at his friend and saw that he was uptight. The Kansas City player was loose, relaxed, not nervous himself. The Cowboys had a great reputation to lose if they did not win. Kansas City was in a win/win situation. He continued to talk but the Cowboys did not want to talk. He realized that they were all tense, so he declared, "We are gonna' beat you!" What did the Cowboys fear? Being beaten by an inferior team would leave them in disgrace.*

On another occasion Tom Landry explained a disappointing loss by saying that the opponents played to win, "We played to keep from losing." Fear of losing often carries consequences with it. Nehemiah had no plans to lose. He had assurance from the Lord that they would succeed. Boldly, he declared, "We, His servants, will start building, but you have no share, right, or historic claim in Jerusalem."

Muslims everywhere claim that God's promise to Abraham would be passed down through Ishmael, not Isaac, based on the ludicrous claims found in the Gospel of Barnabas. A leader in Iran announced recently that their goal is the total destruction of Israel. The

Palestinians claimed all they wanted was a Palestinian state, when in reality, they want to force every Jew into the sea and claim every foot of the land for themselves. Nehemiah said, “you have no share, right, or historic claim in Jerusalem.”

One scholar provides us with a forceful summary of this confrontation: “The Jews, God’s servants, would rebuild, but the three opponents had no share or claim (present) or historic right (past) to the city. Once again Nehemiah brought the task—both in the eyes of Judah and his enemies—into clear focus. Their dependence was not to be on their abilities, human resources, or personal genius. Their hope was in the God of heaven!” [BKC].

Many sermons have been preached and Bible lessons taught on the prayers of Nehemiah. Some have wisely listed some of the characteristics necessary for effective leadership demonstrated by Nehemiah. The Bible Knowledge Commentary has copied a list of 21 characteristics of effective leadership from Donald K. Campbell (Nehemiah: Man in Charge, p. 23):

1. He established a reasonable and attainable goal.
2. He had a sense of mission.
3. He was willing to get involved.
4. He rearranged his priorities in order to accomplish his goal.
5. He patiently waited for God’s timing.
6. He showed respect to his superior.
7. He prayed at crucial times.
8. He made his request with tact and graciousness.
9. He was well prepared and thought of his needs in advance.
10. He went through proper channels.
11. He took time (three days) to rest, pray, and plan.
12. He investigated the situation firsthand.
13. He informed others only after he knew the size of the problem.
14. He identified himself as one with the people.

- 15.He set before them a reasonable and attainable goal.
- 16.He assured them God was in the project.
- 17.He displayed self-confidence in facing obstacles.
- 18.He displayed God’s confidence in facing obstacles.
- 19.He did not argue with opponents.
- 20.He was not discouraged by opposition.
- 21.He courageously used the authority of his position.

Chapter 3

Rebuilding the Walls

The Sheep Gate

3:1-2 - THE SHEEP GATE. *“Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests began rebuilding the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and installed its doors. [After building the wall]to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel, they dedicated it. The men of Jericho built next to Eliashib, and next to them Zaccur son of Imri built.”* The Sheep Gate was apparently so named because it was through this gate that sheep or lambs were brought for temple sacrifices. It was probably in the northeastern corner of the wall of the city of Jerusalem, near the Pool of Bethesda: “By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Hebrew, which has five colonnades” (John 5:2).

The Fish Gate

3:3-5 - THE FISH GATE. *“The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They built it with beams and installed its doors, bolts, and bars. Next to them Meremoth son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz, made repairs. Beside them Meshullam son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel, made repairs. Next to them Zadok son of Baana made repairs. Beside them the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not*

lift a finger to help their supervisors.” The Fish Gate may well have gotten its name from its identification with the fish market. It is mentioned by Zephaniah: “On that day— the Lord’s declaration— there will be an outcry from the Fish Gate, a wailing from the Second District, and a loud crashing from the hills” (Zeph 1:10). This gate may have been included in the work on the wall by Manasseh (2 Chron, 33:14). The wall was being rebuilt by Nehemiah and those who worked with him. It is interesting that “the nobles did not lift a finger to help.” The designation, “nobles”, ended right there - with the title.

Old Gate, Broad Wall, and Tower of the Ovens

3:6-12 - THE OLD GATE. *“Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate. They built it with beams and installed its doors, bolts, and bars. Next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, and the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, who were under the authority of the governor of the region west of the Euphrates River. After him Uzziel son of Harhaiah, the goldsmith, made repairs, and next to him Hananiah son of the perfumer made repairs. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.”*

(9-12) - *“Next to them Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler over half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. After them Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs across from his house. Next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs. Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab made repairs to another section, as well as to the Tower of the Ovens. Beside him Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler over half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs—he and his daughters.”* This gate probably led from the old city into the new city. Some identify it with the Corner Gate, mentioned in 2 Kings 14:13.

Valley Gate, Dung Gate, and Fountain Gate

3:13-14 - VALLEY GATE...DUNG GATE. *“Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and installed its doors, bolts, and bars, and repaired 500 yards of the wall to the Dung Gate. Malchijah son of Rechab, ruler over the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and installed its doors, bolts, and bars.”* Little is know about the Valley Gate, other than the designation. The Dung Gate was well known in Nehemiah’s day (Neh. 2:13; 3:13-14; 12:31). It was located at the southwest corner of the wall. It was through this gate that garbage was taken to be dumped into the Valley of Hinnon. It is called the Refuse Gate in the KJV and the NAS.

3:15-22 - FOUNTAIN GATE. *“Shallun son of Col-hozeh, ruler over the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it and roofed it. Then he installed its doors, bolts, and bars. He also made repairs to the wall of the Pool of Shelah near the king’s garden, as far as the stairs that descend from the city of David.”*

“After him Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler over half the district of Beth-zur, made repairs up to [a

point]opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool and the House of the Warriors. Next to him the Levites made repairs [under]Rehum son of Bani. Beside him Hashabiah, ruler over half the district of Keilah, made repairs for his district. After him their fellow [Levites]made repairs [under]Binnui son of Henadad, ruler over half the district of Keilah. Next to him Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler over Mizpah, made repairs to another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the Angle.” The Fountain Gate was probably so named because people brought water from the Gihon Springs into the city through this gate in the southeast corner of the wall.

The Angle, Water Gate, Tower on the Ophel

3:23 - THE ANGEL - *“After him Baruch son of Zabbai diligently repaired another section, from the Angle to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. Beside him Meremoth son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz, made repairs to another section, from the door of Eliashib’s house to the end of his house. And next to him the priests from the surrounding area made repairs. After them Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite their house. Beside them Azariah son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house.”* Nehemiah simply records a summary report on the work.

3:24-27 - OPHEL...WATER GATE. *“After him Binnui son of Henadad made repairs to another section, from the house of Azariah to the Angle and the corner. Palal son of Uzai [made repairs]opposite the Angle and tower that juts out from the upper palace of the king, by the courtyard of the guard. Beside him Pedaiah son of Parosh, and the temple servants living on Ophel [made repairs]opposite the Water Gate toward the east and the tower that juts out. Next to him the Tekoites made repairs to another section from [a point]opposite the great tower that juts out, as far as the wall of Ophel.”* The name Ophel, meaning bulge or swelling, was the name given to the portion of the hill on which the city of David was built (2 Chron. 27:3). The Holman Bible Dictionary provides additional information:

“The Ophel was just south of Mount Moriah, on which the Temple was constructed, joining the old city with the area of Solomon’s palace and Temple. The hill has been inhabited since pre-Israelite times by peoples such as the Jebusites from whom David took the site. David and later kings further fortified Ophel. It served as the living quarters for those who rebuilt the ramparts following the Exile (Neh. 3:26-27).” [HBD].

Horse Gate, Inspection Gate, Sheep Gate

3:28 - HORSE GATE. *“Each priest made repairs above the Horse Gate, opposite his own house.”* Unlike the nobles, the priests participated in the work on the walls and gates.

3:29-30 - EAST GATE. *“After them Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house. And beside him Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, guard of the East Gate, made repairs. Next to him Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph made repairs to another section.*

After them Meshullam son of Berechiah made repairs opposite his room.” The designation, East Gate, has been identified with three different gate in the walls of Jerusalem. (1) The KJV uses it to refer to the gate leading to the valley of Hinnon (Jer. 19:2). (2) It has been used to designate the outer gate of the court of the temple complex, since the temple faced east (Ezekiel 47:1). (3) It has been used of the inner gate of the temple (Ezekiel 46:1).

3:31-32 - INSPECTION GATE. *“Next to him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs to the house of the temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate, and as far as the upper room of the corner. The goldsmiths and merchants made repairs between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate.”* The Inspection Gate may have been so designated because men drafted into the military assembled here. Some identify it with the Benjamin Gate.

SUMMARY: We can appreciate the fact that the nobles, vs. 5, who “the nobles did not lift a finger to help” rebuild the walls, would want an accurate accounting, as would the high priest and other leaders. In one sense, this account is little more than an official record of the work done by various individuals or groups, along with their particular contribution. It is understandable Nehemiah would want an accurate and detailed account of the work to submit to King Artaxerxes, king of Persia.

There is more: what we are reading here is history: not myth or legend, but history. This record is consistent with the account of the work on the Tabernacle, the Conquest, the division of the Land of Promise, and the work of the Temple.

Chapter 4

Against All Odds

4:1-2 - SANBALLAT HEARD. *“When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious. He mocked the Jews before his colleagues and the powerful men of Samaria, and said, ‘What are these pathetic Jews doing? Can they restore it by themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they ever finish it? Can they bring these burnt stones back to life from the mounds of rubble?’”* News reached Sanballat that the Jews were in the process of rebuilding the walls of the city, which would provide them with protection against their enemies. Sanballat did not learn of plans to rebuild the walls, he heard that they were already in the process of building the wall when it was reported to him [K & D].

HE MOCKED THE JEWS. Sanballat brought his colleagues and associates with him from Samaria and when they saw the workmen, he began taunting then and mocking him to his friends.

“At first, they confined themselves to insults and mockery. Their leaders took a conspicuous role in this, seeking to increase opposition against the Jews

among their fellow Samaritans. The Jews were vulnerable to such attack. They were weak in both money and numbers and Sanballat commanded an army of some sort (4:2). Judah appears to have had no such counterpart. It was absurd to think of raising the new walls upon their old foundations; they were using charred stones pulled out of heaps of ruins, and they hoped that such a wall would be strong enough to defend against their enemies. They were thus an easy target for mockery” [NCWB].

It may help to recall the intense hatred that exists today between the Jews and Palestinians in Israel. Only recently, the prime minister of Iran called for the total eradication of all Jews. This is consistent with the feelings of millions of Muslims. Roots of hatred for the Jews in that part of the world run very deep. The contempt behind the mockery of Sanballat and his Samaritan friends is angry, vitriolic, and satanic.

4:3 - TOBIAH. *“Then Tobiah the Ammonite, who was beside him, said, ‘Indeed, even if a fox climbed up what they are building, he would break down their stone wall!’* The contempt of Tobiah, reflects the hatred of an ancient enemy of the Jews, even as he allied himself further with Sanballat. He insists that the weight of a fox climbing up the wall they were building would beak it down. Ammon, located to the northeast of the Dead Sea, often fought with Israel over the fertile Gilead. The Ammonites were a Semitic people. The hatred between the people of the region was more religious than racial in nature.

4:4 - LISTEN, OUR GOD. *“Listen, our God, for we are despised. Make their insults return on their own heads and let them be taken as plunder to a land of captivity.”* A desperate situation calls for desperate prayer, for perseverance in prayer, for praying without ceasing. Nehemiah was a trusted servant of the king, seeking to please him when he served at court. He was also a dedicated servant of Yahweh, and as such he was never more than a breath away for Him in any situation. When he heard the news from his brother about the desperate and deplorable conditions in Jerusalem, his first response was to call go to the Lord in prayer. When evil enemies confronted them as they were working on the wall, his immediate response was to call on the Lord. One might have expected Nehemiah to pray, “Save us, Lord, from this horrible enemy.” Instead, He prayed that God would destroy them and plunder their land! That does not sound like what Jesus taught in the Model Prayer. It does, however, sound like a prayer David might have prayed.

Sometimes we hear the statement, “The prayer that gets to heaven is the prayer that starts in heaven.” This means that the individual prays as he is led by the Holy Spirit, desiring God’s will, submitting to His sovereignty. Is it not possible that this is what Nehemiah is doing here? There is no indication that he is rebuffed for his prayer. He is praying as the Spirit of God moves him.

4:5 - DO NOT COVER THEIR GUILT. *“Do not cover their guilt or let their sin be erased from Your sight, because they have provoked the builders.”* Nehemiah understood what we are taught in the Scriptures today: “Be sure your sins will find you out.”

The question may still be asked, how could one who loves Yaweh pray the He will not forgive the

sins of those who are mocking him? As noted, we can be sure that Nehemiah is not praying from a heart of hate and he is not praying for personal vengeance. These people have set themselves against God and it was critical that they not succeed in their mission to stop what God was doing through these people. Various considerations offer further insight:

“How should a Christian interpret this kind of praying, especially in view of what Jesus Christ said about praying for one’s enemies? (Matt. 5:44; cf. Rom. 12:14, 20) Several facts need to be noted. **First**, in opposing the Jews, Sanballat “and company” were actually opposing God. **Second**, God had already pronounced judgment on Israel’s enemies. Nehemiah was praying according to God’s will—that God would deliver Jerusalem from her enemies (Josh. 1:5). **Third**, Nehemiah was praying that God would bring about what He had promised Abraham regarding those who curse His people (Gen. 12:3). **Fourth**, vengeance belongs to God, not to Nehemiah or other believers (cf. Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19)” [BKC, bold added for emphasis added].

There is one other point that should be underscored here. You will remember that when Nehemiah returned, he said nothing to the people or the leaders until after he had spent three nights inspecting the walls of the city to determine what needed to be done, and until he had a plan. When we see the hostile opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and their friends, we can appreciate the wisdom of Nehemiah, and the providence of God.

4:6 - THE PEOPLE HAD A WILL TO WORK. *“So we rebuilt the wall until the entire wall was joined together up to half its [height], for the people had the will to keep working.”* It is worth all the time and effort one puts into a serious study of this moving book to read it, meditate upon it, and appreciate the significance of these words: **“the people had a will to work.”** They succeeded in building the entire wall and joining it all “together up to half its height” because these people had **a will to work**. Some amazing thing happen when God’s people have a will to work. When they become complacent and cease to work God’s work suffers.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the southern coasts of Mississippi, Louisiana, southeast Texas and southwest Alabama in the summer of 2005, leaving over one thousand people dead, and perhaps a million people displaced, some for an extended period of time. Some will never return. Tens of thousands of people lost everything they owned. In addition to the homes and businesses that were destroyed, hundreds of churches were destroyed. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary sustained serious damage. As a matter of fact, Baptist Press ran a story early in November, 2005, that power and just been restored to the front quad of the campus, and water to the entire campus.

My good friend, Fred Luter, with whom I served on the Louisiana Baptist Convention’s Executive Board in the nineties, and the Board of Trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources since 2000, was pastor of the Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans. When he became pastor nineteen years ago there were 65 members there and when Katrina hit there were 8,000 members. We grieved with Fred on September 12 (2005) when he shared his experience with trustees and leaders at LifeWay who were in Nashville for the trustees meeting. Fred said, “I have worked since I was in

the seventh grade to help my mother and others. I have worked and helped others all my life, and no one has ever given me anything. I worked for others. Right now, I am standing here in clothes someone else gave me. A pastor bought this suit for me. This shirt was given to me at a shelter.” Fred wept as he added that he had found fewer than 200 of his members - “they need me and I don’t know where they are.” Fred assured us they will build back. If his people have a will to work, they will build back. (UPDATE: As of October, 2006, Fred is now living in Atlanta, preaching to his people in New Orleans and Baton Rouge on first and third Sundays; and traveling to Houston to preach on second and fourth Sundays.)

Thousands of Christians with a will to work will rebuild their churches. Thousands of volunteers will do all they can to help. While at the trustees meeting in Nashville, Dr. Jimmy Draper, president of LifeWay Christian Resources, asked us to approve a gift of six million dollars for the stricken areas. LifeWay will help churches with books, literature, computers, and furniture as they rebuild. Southern Baptist disaster units has served over 10 million meals as of the first week in November (2005) - often two days ahead of FEMA and the Red Cross. Chain saw crews were on the scene and soon as possible to help with the cleanup. SBC efforts come in right behind the Salvation Army. In a Baptist Press release in October, 2006, it was reported that First Baptist Church, Covington, LA, has given \$200,000 to churches in the New Orleans area. They had given \$10,000 to twenty different congregations to help them rebuild. Wise leadership from my long-time friend, Pastor Waylon Bailey, and the compassion of his people are a challenge to others. I sat in many meetings with Dr. Bailey when were served on the executive board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, and he is the kind of person who would lead his church to provide such practical support in a crisis.

We see churches, homes, and business rebuilt by people with a will to work. However, not all those who evacuated had a will to work. Some could not work to help themselves. Others were physically able but had never been producers. They need help in learning to provide for themselves. They need a will to work. Throughout south Mississippi, a hard-working, industrious people, with a will to work, they have set an example for the world in their commitment to rebuild homes, businesses, and churches.

There is another point that we should consider. There are a lot of people who are willing to work but they do not know what to do. Others work hard, and they are skilled, but they do not see great success. In this situation, God blessed the work of the people who had a will to work under God’s man and fulfill God’s plan.

4:7 - SANBALLAT, TOBIAH, AND THE ARABS. *“When Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the repair to the walls of Jerusalem was progressing and that the gaps were being closed, they became furious.”* Enemies as strong and bitter as these would have had spies watching everything that was going on in Jerusalem. Restriction have been placed on the CIA preventing them from enlisting unsavory characters to do their spying for them, which places them at a disadvantage in gathering intelligence in the Middle East. The average American would stand out like a sore thumb in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, or Iran. In a recent Oliver North program, WAR STORIES, there was a report on the wall between East and West Berlin. Former

agents told Oliver North that the Soviets and East Germans has spies everywhere, spying on West Germans and Americans. America started out behind and then after investing a lot of time and money into a tunnel from which they planned to tap into communication lines, before discovering that their tunnel had already been compromised.

THEY BECAME FURIOUS. Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs has been there a long time and the people of the weakened city were intimidated by the greater numbers, as well as the intensity of their opposition. In order to appreciate just how furious these people must have been all we have to do is to look at the Middle East today - in fact, we should look at the descendants of some of these very people. On Nov. 8, 2005, there was rioting in the streets of Paris. The media reported around the clock that “youths” are rioting, throwing fire bombs that have destroyed thousands of automobiles, as well as houses, and businesses. Many people have been injured. The violence then spread to Germany. These two countries have a significant Muslim population and they apparently profited from business with Saddam Hussein and therefore they refused to help America in the war on terrorism. Instead, many of their citizens have shown intense hatred for America. And how does the media report the terrorism that is going on in France and Germany today? Youths, the say, not Muslims, are destroying neighborhoods.

During the first week of November, 2005, all the networks carried the news around the clock: a cruise ship had been attacked by pirates. Over and over, we heard about pirates attacking a cruise ship with rockets and heavy rifles. Rush Limbaugh stopped at one point and took the media to task for using the term “pirates.” He pointed out that they were off shore from a country filled with Al Queda members. They are radical Muslims, not pirates! Muslim terrorists have become very skilled in manipulating the media, at times a very willing media.

Sanballat and friend may not have had the media we have today, but you can be sure they had a spy network. When they discovered that the Jews, under a very wise leader, had built the walls “half-way up”, closing the breaches, they were “furious.” Anyone who has watched film clips or tapes of riots in the Middle East can appreciate what the word “furious” denoted.

The following is an e-mail message I sent to a number of friends. I did not save it, but my good friend, Phillip Robertson, who has done an outstanding job as president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, sent a response from which I was able to copy the comments. Based on what the media is telling us:

Youths are trying to burn Paris - not Muslims.
Youths are throwing firebombs - not Muslims.
Youths are killing people - not Muslims.
Youths are attacking cops - not Muslims.
Pirates are attacking cruise ships - not Muslims.
Pirates are intercepting ships - not Muslims.
Pirates are firing rockets at passengers - not Muslims.
The question is, why? Is it that the media is afraid of Muslims?

Is it that they do not understand how Muslims monitor the news? Is it that they are in love with Islam?

I don't think so. I believe their courtship with Islam can be explained in a sentence: The world hates Jesus Christ, and Satan uses whatever is there in the battle of the ages - his war against God. He will use Islam, socialism, the ACLU, liberal politicians, educators, media talking heads, or liberal theologians.

Youths? They are Muslims! Young, but Muslims.
Pirates? They are Muslims! Radical, but Muslims.

4:8 - THEY PLOTTED. *“They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw it into confusion.”* To appreciate this, all we have to do is to look at the situation in Israel today between the Israelis and the Palestinians. There has never been a homeland for these Palestinians anywhere in the world. They are Arabs there from various nations, supported by various Islamic nations in an effort to destroy Israel. The new Prime Minister of Iran had called for the eradication of all Jews. If you cannot appreciate that kind of hatred, or the furious opposition carried out by Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs here, remember nine-eleven - September 11, 2001. Look at the attacks by radical insurgents who are determined to keep America from training an Iraqi army that can take over its own defense. They fought furiously to keep Iraq from adopting a constitution. They are fighting furiously and planning attacks to throw the country into confusion - even bombing Iraqi soldiers, policemen, and health care providers. What they were doing during Nehemiah's day, they are still doing today, and still the liberal media does not get it - any more than many politicians.

4:9 - WE PRAYED. *“So we prayed to our God and stationed a guard because of them day and night.”* I was in Nashville for the meeting of the LifeWay board of trustees, September 10-12, 2005. I met and visited with a very interesting man in the restaurant of the Renaissance Hotel. We were able to visit a second time before we left town. Jim Pipkin is a Story Song writer from Mesa, Arizona. He and I have stayed in touch since the meeting. He has a sister who has very impressive credentials with the Navy, and national security. She leads seminars on wireless security all over America. They have a sister who had only recently moved to Lafayette, Louisiana and they had been concerned for her during Hurricane Katrina. When Hurricane Rita hit, I e-mailed Jim, asking for prayer for my friend, Charles Roberts and his church in Lufkin, Texas, as they tried to minister to evacuees from the Golden Triangle (Beaumont, Port Arthur, Oranges, and all the towns in between). Jim e-mailed me that we need to pray, and “they need some boots on the ground.” He called the Texas National Guard to report the need at Charles' church. Sadly, FEMA and the Red Cross did very little to help in this situation. There was an emergency in ancient Jerusalem and Nehemiah prayed, and “put some boots on the ground.” They stationed guards to defend the walls and the city.

4:10 - IN JUDAH, IT WAS SAID. *“In Judah, it was said: The strength of the laborer fails,*

since there is so much rubble. We will never be able to rebuild the wall.” If all doubters lived in a democracy and voted on a plan of action, many great victories would be compromised. There is no way the children of Israel should have been able to escape the Egyptians, especially when they came to the Red Sea. There is no way they should have been able to conquer the Holy Land. There is no way Israel should have survived during the period of the Judges. There is no way Judah should have been able to survive an invasion by Assyria, but in 701 B.C. God sent His death angel through the camp of Sennacharib and 185,000 soldiers were killed in a single night. These people knew their history - but, doubters never sing the Gospel song, “What He’s done for others, He’ll do for you.” Victory has often come when a courageous leader was not influenced by a sea of doubters. Judas Maccabees should never have been able to defeat a pagan enemy determined to pollute worship and destroy the nation - but by the grace of God he did. George Washington experienced a bitter winter while witnessing his soldiers desert in great numbers. He never gave up, and against all odds, God gave him the victory.

When America went to war against the terrorists in Afghanistan, I thanked God that George W. Bush was a man of faith, and that he instilled faith in his army. When his father put together the coalition that started Desert Storm, liberals in the media were predicting that we could never defeat Saddam Hussein’s ferocious Republican Guard, with their Soviet tanks. We would be there one hundred years! The battle, for all practical purposes, could be measured in hours, not years.

4:11 - THE ENEMY. *“And our enemies said, ‘They won’t know or see anything until we’re among them and can kill them and stop the work.’*” These are the machinations of “furious” people, driven by hatred for the Covenant People. The intensity of the hatred of people like these for Jews throughout the centuries - no, the millennia - defies reason. It is unreasonable. This intensive hatred is not primarily racial, it is not primarily ethnic. These people knew who the Jews were, just as the Edomites, Ammonites, and many of the inhabitants of Canaan at the time of the Conquest knew who the Israelites were and why they had been delivered from Egypt. They hated them even more for it because the prince of this world had given them religions that fostered Satan’s hatred for God’s Messianic Covenant. We should not overlook the work of Satan in worldwide terrorism.

4:12 - THEY ATTACK US. *“ When the Jews who lived nearby arrived, they said to us time and again, ‘Everywhere you turn, they attack us.’*” This describes gorilla warfare - attacking Jews in isolated or unprotected farms and villages. It would then become urban gorilla warfare, as they concentrated on Jerusalem.

To appreciate this, all we have to do is to follow the attacks by the insurgents in Iraq. Remember the attacks by Palestinians on Jews in Israel in recent years. The world in which Nehemiah lived was a violent world and the entire region had known violent warfare since the days when Nimrod established both the city of Babylon and the city of Nineveh. The Bible tells us that Nimrod was a mighty hunter, a note that provides sufficient information for modern outdoorsmen to use his name as a synonym for hunters today. Many Old Testament scholars are convinced, however, that Nimrod was a mighty hunter of men, an expression that would apply to men like Genghis Kahn.

4:13 - I STATIONED. *“So I stationed [people] behind the lowest sections of the wall, at the vulnerable areas. I stationed them by families with their swords, spears, and bows.”* Nehemiah had not spent all that time in the court of King Artaxerxes without learning something about intrigue, military strategy, and defensive warfare. But there is more here. Nehemiah implements a bold plan for these desperate times. We must understand that they were fighting for their very existence and against a cruel enemy that would kill women and children along with the men. It could not have been an easy decision to place whole families together. This placed unusual pressure on the men.

“In case of outright attack, they would have no choice but to stay and fight for and with their family members. But Nehemiah knew it was the only decision he could make if they were to survive and succeed in rebuilding the walls. Obviously fear gripped these people. So Nehemiah gathered them together and charged them to face the situation courageously (don’t be afraid) and to remember the great and awesome Lord (cf. 1:5) who was on their side, and to fight to save their families. When their enemies heard that their plot had been discovered, they did not attack and the people resumed their construction work” [BKC].

4:14 - AN INSPECTION. *“After I made an inspection, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, ‘Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the great and awe-inspiring Lord, and fight for your countrymen, your sons and daughters, your wives and homes.’* Nehemiah knew the history of God’s providential care for His Covenant People. He was convinced that God would give them the victory. This is not wishful thinking on his part. He addressed the nobles, officials, and the rest of the people, only after a thorough investigation of the situation.

Sword and Trowel

4:15 - WE KNEW THEIR SCHEME. *“Then our enemies realized that we knew their scheme and that God had frustrated it, every one of us returned to his own work on the wall.”* How had Nehemiah learned their scheme? In the first place, Jews fleeing to the city of Jerusalem had brought news that Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs were attacking them everywhere they turned. Nehemiah had prayed for God’s help and He has revealed their battle plan. We remember the words, “Shock and Awe” from the initial invasion of Iraq. The strategy was to crush the Iraqi army and to instill fear in both the army and the people. As soon as the coalition troops took a city, they immediately let the people know they were there to liberate them, not to harm them. These enemies of the Jews had no desire to free people, they wanted to shock, conquer, and control them. They also probably wanted to force them to pay tribute.

GOD FRUSTRATED IT. There was no doubt in their minds that it was God who had frustrated these “furious” enemies. When this became obvious, Nehemiah says, “every one of us returned to his own work on the wall.” The breaches had been closed, but the wall had been rebuilt only half-way as high had needed to be. Those walls, in order to provide protection, would have to be thick enough to withstand battering rams and high enough to defend against flaming arrows or attacks by those who would use ladders to try to get into the city.

4:16-17 - HALF OF MY MEN DID THE WORK. *“From that day on, half of my men did the work while the other half held spears, shields, bows, and armor. The officers supported all the people of Judah, who were rebuilding the wall. The laborers who carried the loads worked with one hand and held a weapon with the other.”* From that day the enemies backed off after they realized their scheme was known to Nehemiah and the people. They had their assignments and they returned to their place of work on the wall.

There was one major difference. He says, “half of my men did the work while the other half held spears, shields, bows, and armor.” I have never served in any branch of the military, but I cannot begin to express my appreciation for those who have served, in war and in peacetime, to keep America “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” I grew up knowing that Walter Cost had gone into WW I a whole man and returned to live with the effects of poison gas the rest of his life. He told me that he was one of many who gathered up bodies of American soldiers who had paid the ultimate price for their country, threw them onto mule drawn wagons, and then dumped them into common graves. That may have impacted his life as much as the poison gas.

I remember when my father, uncles, cousins, and my father’s friends fought in WW II. I was a young child, but I remember how families poured over the news of the war, and watched the mail box daily for a letter from their loved one. My own family was uprooted when my father was drafted, one of the last and one of the oldest at age 29. Our farm had been rented out, so we had to find a place to live. My mother and my brother James stayed with her sister near Calhoun City, MS, and I lived with my Great Aunt Effie, who had helped raise my father after the death of his father. My father was orphaned when he was four or five years old.

I remember when it was announced that the war was over and the troops would be coming home. We had moved back into our home seven miles west of Sledge, MS. I will never forget the day I looked up and saw two men walking toward our house, one in civilian clothes, the other in uniform. My daddy was home! Many were not so blessed.

I respect the military, but my knowledge of military organization, strategy, and missions is limited to what I have read and heard veterans discuss. When I was in college and seminary, I understood that those elderly men on campus were veterans. Some had to be at least 35 years old! Why they would go back to school when so much of their life was over I had no idea (from a freshman’s perspective). I always listened when those WW II

vets talked, but I soon discovered that they only opened up to fellow veterans, unless it was to tell some amusing story or talk about training. They did not dwell on the gory details.

Jesse Sabastian was one of the few who talked with me about the fear he lived with all through the war, beginning as an eighteen year old recruit. Jesse told us about the time his sergeant sent him down a street to reconnoiter the next block. He said, "The closer I got to the corner of a build at the intersection of two streets, the surer I was that when I looked around corner I would see a street full of Germans. So, I got down on my stomach and crawled up to the corner, my carbine and helmet in my hand by my side. I got within inches of the corner, and with my face flat on the side walk, I stuck my head forward enough to get my eyes around the corner, knowing I was going to see Germans everywhere. As soon as I poked my head forward I almost butted heads with a young blond haired German soldier about my own age. We both jumped up and ran back to our squad."

Hollis Bryant, but for the providence of God, should have been killed on three occasions. First, he was stuck in deep mud and could not run when he heard the mortar shell that fell within four feet of him. He threw himself away from it, but it was a dud. Within minutes, another mortar shell fell within three feet of him. Again, it was a dud. Hollis said, "That just does not happen!" The second time, they were ambushed in a small hollow, the fire so heavy that smoke limited vision to the point that he could not see anyone else. He did not know where the Americans or Germans were. He dropped down on his knees and began to crawl. Somehow, he managed to go in the right direction to escape. It seems that he may have been the only one to escape. The third miracle occurred when he was with a platoon (or squad) that was ambushed. Hollis said that he saw a levy and ran and dived over it and hid by a pond. He was the only one to escape. God brought Hollis Bryant back to serve him in another war, a spiritual war.

These stories illustrate the horrors of war. I began to learn a little about strategy when I began asking my friend, Dutch Shoffner, a retired three star general, questions. Dutch explained that from the beginning of military action until sometime around the fourteenth century, military strategy focused on siege and defense (I hope I got that right). Dutch told me the military leader who changed all of that, and for the next several hundred years, the focus switched to a campaign strategy, with army moving against army, as the history of European wars reveals. The last half of the twentieth century has witnessed innovations and technology ancients could not imagine. But war is still horrifying.

4:18 - EACH OF THE BUILDERS. *"Each of the builders had his sword strapped around his waist while he was building, and the trumpeter was beside me."* This verse amplifies and explains some of the details. They were thoroughly prepared to meet the enemy at a moment's notice. The builders were armed and the trumpeter was ready to sound the alarm immediately when Nehemiah gave the command.

4:19-21 - GOD WILL FIGHT FOR US. *"Then I said to the nobles, the officials, and the*

rest of the people: 'The work is enormous and spread out, and we are separated far from one another along the wall. Wherever you hear the trumpet sound, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us! So we continued the work, while half of the men were holding spears from daybreak until the stars came out.' The point Nehemiah stresses is that the work is enormous and spread out. The workers would always be spread out to the point that they were vulnerable to attack. He organized them and prepared them to rally at the point of attack immediately when the trumpeter sounded the alarm that would tell them what to do. All they could do would be to fight against the enemy, believing that "Our God will fight for us."

Does this mean that those who look to God will always win the battle? That certainly does not seem to have been the case when Japan attacked its neighbors (even if only a small percentage of the Chinese were Christians). Nazi Germany was an evil power that ran over nations that professed to follow Christ. The Soviet Union, which Ronald Reagan dubbed, "The Evil Empire", really was an evil empire that openly defied God, seeking by revolution to establish a godless, classless, stateless society. Then, there was the American Civil War, in which many on both sides called on Jesus Christ. The same may well be said of both sides during the Revolutionary War. Why does God not always fight for those who profess Him? Or, those who profess him the loudest.

Repeatedly, we are told that God gave Joshua the victory. God gave David victory after victory. God gave Judas Maccabees miraculously victories. God has also used war to judge the unfaithful, as in the case of Assyria and Babylon. In so many other cases, we may have to wait for Him to explain His purpose.

4:22-23 - STAND GUARD BY NIGHT AND WORK BY DAY. *"At that time, I also said to the people, 'Let everyone and his servant spend the night inside Jerusalem, so that they can stand guard by night and work by day.' And I, my brothers, my men, and the guards with me never took off our clothes. Each carried his weapon, even when washing."* These verses summarize the conditions under which Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas rebuilt the walls of the city of Jerusalem while maintaining continual vigilance.

Chapter 5

Social Injustice

5:1 - WIDESPREAD OUTCRY. *"There was a widespread outcry from the people and their wives against their Jewish countrymen."* Up to this point the emphasis has been upon a threat against the Jews from Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs. Now, we find that there was a serious problem within Jewish ranks. Rank is the operative word here, for it seems

that as soon as there was a measure of protection against the outsiders, there arose a “widespread cry” from the ordinary citizen against their leaders.

5:2 - LET US GET GRAIN. *“Some were saying, “We, our sons, and our daughters are numerous. Let us get grain so that we can eat and live.”* Some of the people were crying out against the nobles and other leaders, either because grain was not available, or because it was being withheld. Sometimes when we see citizens criticize authorities the issues are not clear, or if they are clear they may have been exaggerated. The media today may ignore certain news events and simply run polls and the report on those polls. I sometimes wonder if the liberal media does not tell people what they want them to think and then design a poll to get the results they want. This holds in other countries as well. The president of the United States can go to England and widespread demonstrations break out. Recently, he went to South America and there were riots. Why? In many cases, it is simply a matter of their opposition to America’s war against terror. Negative media coverage causes violent riots in Muslim lands.

The complaints here seem to have been justified. Sadly, a disaster brings out the best in some people, and the worst in others. Following Hurricane Katrina, the mayor of New Orleans was shouting God’s name in vain before the nation. While waiting to be rescued, some condemned those who risked their lives to rescue them. A group of Vietnamese citizens withdrew to the side and asked that they be the last to be evacuated. Good move on their part.

An Arkansas Baptist disaster unit moved in to serve meals in Laurel, Mississippi two days before the Red Cross. We were told that large numbers of people who had pulled their boats down to south Louisiana determined to help rescue people from flooded areas were turned away because of snipers. Snipers fired on doctors who were trying to evacuate patients. Almost immediately, one government agency was pointing the finger and another. One year later, the media and certain politicians were denying the violence, rapes, and looting but Shepherd Smith, reporting from the area on the first anniversary of the Katrina, insisted that it did happen and affirmed what he had reported the year before. It is also interesting that New Orleans became a political football, with local leaders blaming the governor and the president, and the governor and president pointing the finger at each other. What was enlightening was the fact that southwest Louisiana was hit by the full force of Hurricane Rita and no one ever reports on the crimes associated with New Orleans after Katrina side-swiped them as it unleashed its full force on Mississippi. Months after Katrina and Rita, it was safe for carpenters, plumbers, and electricians to work in Mississippi and southwest Louisiana, but dangerous in New Orleans.

Nehemiah simply reports that the people were crying out against their leaders because of the shortage of grain. Bread was the staff of life and without grain there was no bread. The grain shortage had created a desperate situation within the city and in the surrounding areas. They demanded, “ Let us get grain so that we can eat and live.”

5:3 - WE ARE MORTGAGING OUR FIELDS. *“Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, vineyards, and homes to get grain during the famine.”* This underscores the desperate plight of these citizens of Jerusalem. These are not people who are not helping themselves. A number of people argued that one of the issues not addressed by the media in the aftermath of the flood that covered most of New Orleans and surrounding parishes, was that those people who had been used to taking care of themselves got out of the city (there were no doubt many exceptions). Many of those who did not get out of the city were not used to taking care of themselves. They, according to this argument, had spent years waiting for the government to take care of them. To be sure, many were not in a position to help themselves, but the argument may have been valid for others. Does the solution to this situation lie in bringing thousands back without hope of a job, or training them and helping them find jobs (and motivating them to work)?

There were reports that when FEMA passed out money at one location, many of those who received the money headed down the street and formed a long line at a liquor store. Looters broke into many businesses in New Orleans, and a lot of people justified it on the grounds that they were hungry. I never heard people condemn those who broke into supermarkets to get food. They were sickened by those who broke into stores to steal guns, ammunition, televisions, and basketball shoes. Dr. Charles Simmons, already mentioned, went back to check on the hospital over which he was an administrator. He reported that looters broke in and stole all medications, and then destroyed everything they could. They wrecked the place, not for food but because they were evil.

There is no indication that these Jewish citizens were not doing everything they could to help themselves. They were mortgaging their fields and crops to try to get grain to keep their families alive. I grew up with a father who had served in the CCC in order to survive and help his family survive the Great Depression. Before going into the CCC, he and friends killed game to feed their families. My father’s father was killed in a hunting accident when he was about four years old, and he, his brother and sister were reared by their grandmother, and at times by their aunt. The family depended on their garden for vegetables, and supplemented that by picking up hickory nuts and native pecans, as well as what fruit they could find. Daddy killed squirrels, rabbits, and birds to supplement the food supply. When he, his cousin, and friends ran out of shotgun shells, they hunted with sling shots. They did everything they could to help themselves. When the government offered help through the CCC, they took advantage of that program. There were reports of business men who took advantage of their neighbors during the Depression. Others risked everything to help others. Grover Cost was a dedicated Christian who managed a large store in a small Mississippi town. Desperate neighbors came to him with their pleas for help with groceries (staples), feed for animals, seed for planting crops, and tools. He knew them and knew they would pay when they could, so he extended credit, based on what he knew of the character of the people. At the end of the Depression the owners sold the store and the new owners ordered an audit. Cost went out back and blew his brains out. No one found that he had done anything dishonest, but his good name was at stake and he could not stand to be accused of wrong doing.

Paul said that if a man will not work we should not let him eat. However, the Bible clearly teaches that we should help when there is a legitimate need. What we should not do is take advantage of a famine or some natural disaster to get rich at the expense of those who cannot help themselves.

5:4 - THE KING'S TAX. *“Still others were saying, ‘‘We have borrowed money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards.’’* The taxes leveled by King Artaxerxes, may well have been the difference between survival and starvation, but they were not optional. The small farmers mortgaged their land to buy food and borrowed money to pay their taxes. They could not demand tax reform, they paid their taxes, or else.

5:5 - SUBJECTING OUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS TO SLAVERY. *“We and our children are just like our countrymen and their children, yet we are subjecting our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters are already enslaved, but we are powerless because our fields and vineyards belong to others.”* They were powerless, as the extremely poor often are. What we must remember here is that there was no large middle class in that society. Like so many other societies, there was a small elite class that controlled the money and resources, and everyone else who was poor. By poor, we do not mean poor in the modern sense in America. The poor is often able to get help with medical care, food, education and shelter. That has not been the case through much of human history.

5:6 - EXTREMELY ANGRY. *“I became extremely angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints.”* Nehemiah believed these people had a legitimate complaint. The rich and powerful were clearly guilty. That does not mean that all those who are rich and powerful are guilty. These powerful people were taking advantage of their own fellow citizens to make themselves richer, or to protect their wealth and position. Contrast this attitude with that of Barnabas and other members of the early church. Those people held all things in common. They took care of those who were less fortunate. The seven men (often called the first deacons), set aside in the Book of Acts, were elected and anointed to help meet the needs of Hellenistic widows and orphans. That this spirit was not seen in his day angered Nehemiah.

5:7-8 - I ACCUSED THE NOBLES... *“After seriously considering the matter, I accused the nobles and officials, saying to them, ‘Each of you is charging his countrymen interest.’ So I called a large assembly against them and said, ‘We have done our best to buy back our Jewish countrymen who were sold to foreigners, but now you sell your own countrymen, and we have to buy them back.’ They remained silent and could not say a word.”* Nehemiah gave serious consideration to the matter and then accused the nobles and officials of doing the same thing to their own people that foreigners had done. They had bought back Jews from foreigners and now these nobles were selling their countrymen. We could point to slavery, but I would like to pass that and point to something that did not end with the Civil War. That is the way some sharecroppers were treated by some plantation owners.

It would be a grave mistake to accuse all farm and plantation owners of being unfair or dishonest, just as it would be a mistake to assume that all sharecroppers were innocent victims. Many, however, were victimized by those who had control of them. One man said very frankly, "If you think slaves had it bad you should have seen some sharecroppers. The plantation owners owned the slaves and it was to their advantage to offer basic protection and provisions for them. Sharecroppers never had that kind of security. They could be told to move without a moment's notice." Regardless of that, I doubt that many sharecroppers would want to trade places with a slave. I knew a man who worked for a very wealthy farmer who held absolute power over him and his family. One pay day, the sharecropper's check was fifty cents short for a week's work at the owner's cotton gin. When he pointed out the mistake, the wealthy owner said, "Well, what do you want me to do about it?" The man said, "I want my money," and the owner said, "Son, I expect you had better move." He came to see my father about moving onto our place where he lived and farmed for several years, during which time the family made material progress and members of his family committed their lives to the Lord.

5:9-11 - WHAT YOU ARE DOING ISN'T RIGHT. *"Then I said, 'What you are doing isn't right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God [and not invite] the reproach of our foreign enemies?' Even I, as well as my brothers and my servants, have been lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop charging this interest. Return their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses to them immediately, along with the percentage of the money, grain, new wine, and olive oil that you have been assessing them."* There may come a time when a Christian has an opportunity to serve others or to serve himself. When, or if such a time comes, this is a good passage to which he/she should turn. They were looking to the bottom line without regards to the plight of their fellow Jews. They let the profit blind them to the fact that they were taking advantage of those who could not help themselves. Sam Scott was a godly man, an insurance agent, who owned a farm just out of town. His son and I went through school together, and while I knew the son well, I became better acquainted with the father after I had finished school. My mother owned a business next door to his office. Once when we were talking, Mr. Scott told me of farmers he had known who cheated their hands out of their well deserved profits. For those who do not know the Mississippi Delta cotton country back when planters depended on human beings to work their land rather than modern tractors and mechanical harvesters, there was a difference between a farm and a plantation. I seldom heard a planter refer to his place as anything but a farm, but I listened as a fellow student stressed that his father wasn't a farmer, he was a planter. He didn't actually plant the cotton and soybeans, he ordered it done.

Mr. Scott told me of the planter who went to the bank and got one hundred silver dollars and when each sharecropper came in to "settle" after the cotton had been sold, the planter had a stack of ten silver dollars on his desk. By the time he got through showing him all the charges and expenses, the man walked out of his office shaking his head, but holding ten silver dollars. I remembered the time I saw several field hands walk back to the back of a country store and meet with the man who owned the farm and the store. Each one left, looking at others, shaking his head. One shook his head, looked at others and said, "It

ain't right! It ain't right." I told my father and he explained what had probably happened. They wondered how they would feed their families through the winter - there was very little work on a farm from the end of harvest until March when they started preparing land for planting the next crop. What could they do but buy essential groceries on credit from the owner?

My father did not start with land. He was an orphan, reared by an old pioneer grandmother part of the time and by his aunt part of the time. He saw a small farm which was for sale and went to Crenshaw, Mississippi to see Barney Sigler, who owned land all over that part of the delta. He told Mr. Sigler that he did not have a down payment, but, "If you will give me a chance, I will pay it off." In time, when Barney had land to sell in the area he would send word to Daddy that he wanted to see him. We bought almost all of our land from Barney. Daddy was a farmer, not a planter. We worked harder than any sharecropper on the place, but there was another difference. We looked upon them as friends. My parents invited them to worship with us, and most of them did. We saw a number of people over the years come to know Jesus Christ as Savior. Some who moved onto our place came with nothing, and it was rewarding to my parents to see them accumulate a few things, like an automobile, furniture, and clothing. Saturday at noon, they all "took off" (from work) and headed to town. I waved from a tractor every Saturday as they passed by to spend the afternoon and evening in Harold Dorman and Charlie Pride's MISSISSIPPI COTTON PICKIN' DELTA TOWN, Sledge, Mississippi. I never envied them because James and I knew our parents needed our help to pay for the farm. We worked, not for personal profit at the time (though we never had anything against that!), we worked for the family. We worked for Mother and Daddy, and for the little ones, Linda and Mike. In contrast to those who cheated sharecroppers and field hands, my father provided a tractor without charge, and as far as I know, no one every paid for a gallon of fuel. As a matter of fact, it was not unusual for Daddy to take his tractor and break their land or plow their cotton - or send me to do it.

When you read of how the nobles and officials were fleecing the poor, remember what Nehemiah said: "That ain't right!" Or was that the black field hand in Quitman County, MS? I would be hesitant to cry racism here, though there was a color issue - Green! They would have, and did take advantage of whites and blacks. They would use either for their own profit. I might add, there were advantages for blacks and there were advantages for whites. One black man who lived on our place was overheard saying, "You always finish the year into the man and he won't make you move." Some of the black people were among the first to leave the farm, many going to Chicago where they found good paying jobs.

Nehemiah addressed the immediate need to fact the fact that what they were doing was not right, and then he spelled out action that they must take:

- 1) "Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God?"
- 2) You should not invite "the reproach of our foreign enemies? I, as well as my brothers

and my servants, have been lending them money and grain.”

3) Please, let us stop charging this interest.

4) “Return their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses to them immediately, along with the percentage of the money, grain, new wine, and olive oil that you have been assessing them.”

He urged them to:

1) Recognize that what they were doing was not right.

2) Repent of this wrong.

3) Return what they had wrongfully taken.

5:12 - WE WILL DO AS YOU SAY. *“They responded: ‘“We will return [these things]and require nothing more from them. We will do as you say.’ So I summoned the priests and made everyone take an oath to do this.”* The hand of God must have been on Nehemiah, for these nobles and officials, those who had profited at the expense of the poor actually repented. Though they did not promise here to make restitution, that is what Nehemiah had called for and that seems to be what they were agreeing to do. Nehemiah called the priests in and made them take an oath to do what they promised.

5:13 - THEY PRAISED THE LORD. *“I also shook the folds of my robe and said, “May God likewise shake from his house and property everyone who doesn’t keep this promise. May he be shaken out and have nothing!” The whole assembly said, ‘Amen,’ and they praised the Lord. Then the people did as they had promised.”* Everywhere I turn today, I hear comments about praise: Praise services, praise music, praise leaders, praise teams. Praise is not only good, it is essential. Why then do I sometimes get a strange feeling about what some call praise? In the first place, praise is a response to God’s nature, His character, His attributes, or His blessings. It concerns me that some who talk about praising God make praise the blessing. I cannot tell those who honestly praise God from those who just love praise music, but I do know some comments I hear disturb me.

I was on my way to Glorieta, New Mexico in 2001 for the semi-annual meeting of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources on a Sunday morning when I began looking for a church. I had a plan. I would get up and start driving and when it came time for worship I would find a town and then I would find a church. I had not calculated the distance between towns on the high plains of northwest Texas and eastern New Mexico. I finally found a town somewhere east of Albuquerque, and stopped and got directions to a Baptist church. That was a strange service, from beginning to end. For one thing, the praise team kept us on our feet for a long time and when they finished their part they left - I mean they left the auditorium! The quest speaker, who seemed to have been a layman, had a good message, but before he finished, the door burst open, and in marched the praise team. The sermon was over.

A have told our people, as long as I am the pastor, I am the worship leader. Any time people claim

that the worship is over when the song service ends, you know someone has missed one of the basic truths of the Word of God. It is through the foolishness of the Word preached that souls are saved. When the Word of God is faithfully preached, God promises to speak to hearts. “Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God” (and that is the Word preached in Romans 10).

People are a lot more comfortable with praise than conviction of sin. Praise is more comfortable than contrition. Praise is less gut-wrenching than repentance. But for those who have bowed before the Lord with a contrite heart, repented of sins, and committed themselves to obedience, praise is the natural response. Some praise God one way, others another. You cannot impose your praise music or praise cliches on others. We will know the praise is genuine when believers praise God with their lives after leaving the service.

Good Governor Follows Bad Governors

5:14-15 - FURTHERMORE. *“Furthermore, from the day King Artaxerxes appointed me to be their governor in the land of Judah—from the twentieth year until his thirty-second year, 12 years—I and my associates never ate from the food allotted to the governor. The governors who preceded me had heavily burdened the people, taking food and wine from them, as well as a pound of silver. Their subordinates also oppressed the people, but I didn’t do this, because of the fear of God.”* It was Francis Schaeffer who first called to my attention something I had taken for granted: this is history, real history. This really happened! It happened in an historical setting.

O Saturday evening, November 12, 2005, a reporter for Fox News, serving as weekend anchor, talked with two guests about statements Pat Robertson had made about God’s judgment on the nation because of sin. One guest was referred to as “Bishop” so and so, the other was a senator from Alabama. The anchor, obviously no supporter of Pat Robertson, permitted the bishop to attack Robertson, and attack is not to strong a word. He mentioned earlier statements by Robertson when Hurricane Katrina hit the south coasts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The bishop stated that he didn’t see how anyone could take Pat Robertson seriously. He focused his attack on two issues, creation and the judgment of God. Creation, he said, is religious and it has no business in a biology class because there are no facts in it. He strongly criticized Robertson for his statement that God was judging America.

The senator from Alabama was then asked if he thought that God might use a natural disaster to judge people. The senator stated the he absolutely did believed that. He said, “I have been a Christian for thirty-five, since I was born again through faith in Jesus Christ, and when I got into the Bible I discovered that God causes some things to happen and he permits other things to happen.” The senator stated that he believed that there are no accidents and that God is in control.

The bishop strongly condemned Pat Robertson, and by association, the senator.

Assuming his most bishop-like, authoritative look and voice, he became the teacher: the senator had brought up the Bible, and you cannot trust that! The Bible, as he sees it, is filled with all sorts of things you cannot believe or trust. The Bible, he said, states that God hated the Egyptians, and He made the sun stand still while the Israelites slew the Amalikes. The very thought seemed absurd to the Bishop. He seemed incredulous to the Bishop that some people had the naivete' to believe the Bible. I was so thankful that the senator responded to the Bishop, affirming his faith in God and in the Bible. Here is a shocking thought: that Bishop has risen to an office of leadership in some denomination, which implies that his church agrees with his theology - and that this modern day false prophet supervise ministers who serve under him, and presumably agree with him!

I believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, the perfect Word of the perfect God. I have often reasoned, if God could not have produced an inerrant Book why do we call Him God; and if He could have done it but would not, what kind of God is He? What we are reading here is there because it really happened, and because it sets forth principles applicable to people of any age.

Nehemiah gives his personal testimony here, and as we read it we are reminded of Paul's response to the church at Corinth. At a time when religious people often came to a new city looking for financial support and expecting financial remuneration for their services, Paul had worked with his own hands as a tent maker to finance his ministry, so as not to be a burden to the new church there. He stresses that those who spend their life in God's service are entitled to have the church provide for their living. As the church planter, Paul elected, for their sake, not to receive anything for his work. Some decided that he could not have been one of the better missionaries or he would have accepted money for his work. Critics are going to criticize because that is what they are. Paul was not able to eliminate all critics in the first century.

Now consider Nehemiah's testimony. He served as the governor of Judah for 12 years, from Artaxerxes' 20th year (444 B.C.) to his 32nd year (432 B.C.)

"This Hebrew word for governor is *peh* derived from the Akkadian word *pa*. (The word for governor in 7:65, 70; 8:9; 10:1 is a Persian word.) One of the "fringe benefits" of being governor was a food allowance, granted him by the Persian officials, perhaps for official entertaining of guests. However, Nehemiah did not take advantage of what was rightfully his. In providing food for many Jews and in entertaining dignitaries from other nations (v. 17), he served food and wine out of his personal resources. This practice contrasted with the former governors, who charged the Jewish people... 40 shekels (about one pound; cf. NIV marg.) of silver besides the food allowance of food and wine. Even those governors' assistants took advantage of their position and oppressed the people, demanding their payments" [Bible Knowledge Commentary, QuickVerse Electronic Library - BKC].

Because of his commitment to God and his love for his people, Nehemiah refused to add to the burden of his fellow Jews. Those who lead conferences in Christian leadership today would do well to note two of the basic leadership qualities Nehemiah manifests through all of this. First, there is the compassion for those under him, and second, there was his refusal to use his privileges at the expense of others. Not only did former governors take advantage of every benefit and every perk, their subordinates did the same. What was the difference with Nehemiah? He feared God!

5:16 - I DEVOTED MYSELF. *“Instead, I devoted myself to the construction of the wall, and all my subordinates were gathered there for the work. We didn’t buy any land.”* This is totally consistent with the burden he experienced when his brother told him about conditions in Jerusalem, his prayer, his preparations, both in Susa, and when he arrived in Jerusalem, and his courageous defense against Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs. He had not come to serve himself but to serve God and his people. The character of a godly man is seen in his conduct. Nehemiah tells us, first, that “I devoted myself to the construction of the wall, and all my subordinates were gathered there for the work.” In the second place, he adds, “We didn’t buy any land.” They were not land speculators, and they refused to take the land of the poor for grain. K & D, Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 4: Ezra-Job, observes that

“The manner in which Nehemiah, together with his servants, set themselves to the work of wall-building is seen from Neh 4:10, 12, 15, and 17. Neither have we (I and my servants) bought any land, i.e., have not by the loan of money and corn acquired mortgages of land; comp. v. 10” [K & D].

5:17 - AT MY TABLE. *“There were 150 Jews and officials, as well as guests from the surrounding nations at my table.”* Years ago, there was a debate about the so-called Jesus People, who were accused of being so heavenly minded that they were of no earthly good. Someone quickly added that they were reacting to their parents who were so earthly minded they were of no heavenly good. There are people who take pride in that they abstain from drinking, immorality, dishonesty, and violence. A former army chaplain testified that when he went to a new assignment, he attended a party. Some asked, “Chaplain, would you like to dance.” He replied, “No, thank you. I don’t dance.” Another invited, “Chaplain, would you like a drink?” He said, “No, thank you. I don’t drink.” Yet another officer offered him a cigarette, to which he replied, “No, thank you. I don’t smoke.” A young officer asked, “Chaplain, do you spit?”

The former chaplain, turned counselor, did not say that he had compromised, but the point he was making was that he could not find an answer. He did not say that he offered any explanation, and he seemed to think the last question had some merit. We can give positive answers about negative questions. I abstain from drugs, alcohol, and tobacco for the same reason I abstain from putting water in my gas tank or sand in my crank case. The body was not designed to run on things which lead to addiction, misery, and even death.

Nehemiah not only abstained from the practice that had probably made former governors as rich as

the nobles and the wealthy people of the land, He went the second mile in providing for those who served under him. Someone told me about a man (“Fred”) who owned a very successful farm in the Mississippi delta. He was a strong supporter of a local private school, as were a number of his peers. This man showed his true character when he looked at those who were less fortunate. One day, he called in his farm manager and asked him about his daughter, a high school senior who had maintained a high grade point average and demonstrated leadership skills. He said to his manager, “I have been observing Kate since she was just a baby and I want you to know that I have been very impressed with her. I would like to ask your permission to pay for her to go to college. She is your daughter and I would never make such an officer without your approval.” He did not owe this to his farm manager.

It was learned in time that “Fred” would stop by the school office from time to time and ask the secretary to hand him the books. He would then thumb through the book and point to certain people who were behind with their tuition and tell her he was going to give her a check to catch those people up with their tuition. At the same time, he absolutely refused to help those who would not help themselves and those who would not pay their debts.

5:18 - I DID NOT DEMAND. *“Each day, one ox, six choice sheep, and some fowl were prepared for me. An abundance of all kinds of wine was [provided] every 10 days. But I didn’t demand the food allotted to the governor, because the burden on the people was so heavy.”* He did not demand what was due the governor because he did not want to be a burden to his people. He provided both wine and food for his own table. This must have come from his salary and the gift from the king.

Some might justify modern consumption of wine, beer, and liquor by pointing to the use of wine in Bible times. There was an article in a Christian magazine many years ago about wine drinking in Bible times, pointing to the practice among the Greeks. Wine was very important to the ancients, at a time when there were few beverages other than water to drink. The ancient Greeks would serve wine, mixed with two or three parts water to one part wine. This stretched the wine supply, purified the water, and gave them a more pleasant beverage with their meals than plain water.

5:19 - REMEMBER ME FAVORABLY. *“Remember me favorably, my God, for all that I have done for this people.”* This must have been both a prayer and an affirmation of Nehemiah’s faith in God. He is not saying that he was doing all these things for the people with his eye on the reward, he is trusting the God whom he honored in this manner would provide for him.

Chapter 6

Enemies Seek to Stop Builders, 6:1-9

6:1-2 - LET'S MEET TOGETHER. *“When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and that no gap was left in it—though at that time I had not installed the doors in the gates—Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message: ‘Come, let’s meet together in the villages of the Ono Valley.’ But they were planning to harm me.”* Servants of God have often been attacked by “brothers” and “sisters” who invited them to a meeting, ostensibly for one purpose when in reality they had something else in mind. I was called to serve the Lord with my life when I was 13 years old. I taught “Juniors” when I was 15, and I was licensed to preach by my home church when I was 17. I was ordained at 19 and called to a student pastorate when I was 20. I have known a lot of pastors and many of them can tell stories about the meeting that was called when they were not invited and the meeting that was called for one purpose, but after a brief mention of that subject it became obvious that there was a different agenda.

Paul Driscoll was pastor of Mid-City Baptist Church in New Orleans when I was in seminary and someone asked him to speak to one of our classes. He told a story about something that happened to him in a particular church in Louisiana. I remembered what he had said when I was called to a church in that area a few years later. He had been a young business man when the Lord called him to preach. His church called him as their youth pastor and he got out on the street and won a lot of young people to the Lord and got them involved in that church. One day the pastor told him the deacons would like for him to sit in on the next deacons meeting. He assumed he would be recognized for all the work he was doing to lead these young people to the Lord. What he heard was something like, “Now Paul, we appreciate the fact that you are an enthusiastic young man and you are trying very hard. But these are not our kind of people.”

Another pastor was asked if he would meet with a group of pastors. He became suspicious before the meeting and mentioned his doubts about the purpose of the meeting to another person who was invited to the meeting. When they arrived it was obvious that this was not an informal meeting with pastors, but an official meeting of the associational executive committee. A few people approached this meeting as though it were something of a mini-inquisition, though others were very gracious.

A lady was called in and told that she and her husband were being stripped of all their jobs in the church. Why? She had asked questions about a book that was being recommended as an outreach program. A pastor friend was surprised when he was terminated by a church he had served for ten years. He had only recently had an opportunity to move to another church, but he talked with this people and told them that he felt led to stay, but he wanted to know if they knew any reason he should move. They assured him that he was secure in his position as their pastor. He was blind-sided a short time later when he was asked to resign. No reason was actually given.

The news today in America is filled with charges and counter charges involving political intrigue, but we were taken by surprise on nine-eleven, 2001 when Muslim terrorists

attacked the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. Since that time we have become aware of murderous plots that still shock Americans. When the coalition forces attacked Iraq, the success was swift and decisive, but since that time we have received regular reports of evil, violent attacks carried out by insurgents against American and British troops, their allies, and against Iraqis who are trying to help rebuild their country. It seems that there is a never ending supply of suicide bombers, snipers, and attacks of various other kinds. Plots are carried out against Israel on a regular basis, and Israel has reported plans by terrorists to hit America again. In November, 2005, three suicide bombers were responsible for the deaths almost sixty people and the injury of scores more - this time in Amman, Jordan - Muslims killing Muslims.

When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and other enemies discovered the progress, they tried to set up Nehemiah with a proposed meeting: "Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message: 'Come, let's meet together in the villages of the Ono Valley.'" They wanted Nehemiah away from Jerusalem and away from his small but dedicated army of workers. When you read this stop and think about the murderous plans of Islamic terrorists in the Middle East. Intelligence agents are constantly looking for these murderous plots today, and according to various reports the CIA, Homeland Security, the FBI and other intelligence organizations have discovered and prevented numerous plots against America since nine/eleven, 2001. Among the most shocking plots against America was one uncovered by the British in which there were plans to hijack ten or more airliners that were bound for America. More recent intelligence has revealed that their plans were not to blow up the planes over the Atlantic, but over American cities.

We are not told how, but the Lord revealed this plot to Nehemiah. We are often reminded that the Word of God is not some mystical book written to promote worship of some mythological god. Nehemiah gives the specifics of the progress on the walls: "though at that time I had not installed the doors in the gates." The enemies may well have tried to kill Nehemiah before he could install the doors. The gates to ancient cities were very large and therefore very heavy. They were built to withstand the most powerful battering ram. Opening and closing them required some effort, so doors were built into them so that when the gates were closed at night individuals could enter or leave the city without opening the gates.

6:3 - I AM DOING A GREAT WORK. *"So I sent messengers to them, saying, 'I am doing a great work and cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?'"* Nehemiah wisely sent messengers - possibly the same messengers who came to invite him to meet with Sanballat and his friends. Nehemiah was well aware of the fact that he was doing a great work, work so important that he could not leave it. This was a wise response, but it was more than a good move psychologically. God's people should always know when they are engaged in "a great work." There is an outstanding example of this in the sixth chapter of Acts:

"In those days, as the number of the disciples was multiplying, **there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews** that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. Then the Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, **'It would not be**

right for us to give up preaching about God to wait on tables. Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry.”

“The proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch. They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:1-6).

There was a legitimate complaint by the non-Palestinian Jews against the Palestinian Jews. The Hellenistic widows and orphans were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles realized that the complaint was legitimate, but they also recognized the fact that the work in which they were engaged was a great work. They were preaching and teaching the Word of God. The world may not understand how great this work is, but Christians should. The apostles found a solution without ceasing the work to which they had been commissioned.

Pastors today must know when they are doing a great work. The world tells pastors that their worth is measured in the nickels and noses they report at the end of the year. It tells him that he should spend his time at the hospital, the nursing home, the reception, the funeral for a member's great uncle's second cousin. All of those things are important, but he has taken his eyes off the great work to which God has called him if he does not remain focused on the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. He is commissioned to witness for Jesus Christ, but this command applies to all believers. He is commissioned to visit the sick, the fatherless, the homeless, those who are hungry, and those who are imprisoned, but every Christian is expected to do that.

The pastor is called to preach the Word of God. I visited Dr. I. H. Barrett, one of the pioneers in the field of allergy treatment. Dr. Barrett told me one day that he saw his as a calling from God, but he looked up at me and added, “but it is not as high a calling as yours.” When the pastor takes his eyes off that work, preparing and delivering sermons and Bible lessons in the power of the Holy Spirit, he has forsaken the greatest work God has given him. All pastors have sinned in failing to pray or investing the time necessary in sermon preparation at some time or another. We must confess that sin, repent, receive God's forgiveness, and return to the greatest work to which anyone can be called.

I heard the late Stephen Olford at a Nation Wide Bible Conference at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis a number of years ago. We had received our doctorates the same night in 1978, and I was amazed at the respect the administrators and professors had for Olford even then. My respect for him grew, as more and more people declared that they got more out of the preaching of Stephen Olford than anyone else they had ever heard. In that Bible conference, Dr. Olford declared that there was a famine in America, and that it was a famine of expository preaching. The primary charge against those preachers who neglected expository preaching was laziness. If we take our eyes off the preaching of the Word, we have taken our eyes off the great work to which we are called.

I thought of that, and of a passage in the tenth chapter of Romans when I attended a convention and

listened to a praise leader lead us in worship. We were in a large church sanctuary and of course they had no hymnals, so they had the giant screens on either side of the choir loft. I listened carefully. When Don Antley, Gene Abbey and I walked out into the foyer, we paused to discuss the service. Don said, “I listened closely and I could not hear the words we were singing. What I heard was the beat.” I asked them, “Do you remember any of the words we were singing in there.” They stopped and thought before agreeing that they did not remember them.

I added that everything the worship leader said was true. They agreed. A day later, I think I discovered what it was that disturbed me, even though most of the people there seemed to enjoy that part of the program. What I remembered was that for most of my ministry, the pastor wanted a music minister who directed the music, or in the vernacular, “lead the singing.” Sometimes the pastor had to remind a music minister that it was he whom the Lord had called to preach the sermon: “Just sing, don’t preach.” Today, in many churches, the “worship leader” does more preaching than the pastor. I once sat with a well known denominational leader who is also a pastor. A pastor from a church in what we think of as the pioneer area for evangelicals asked the local pastor, “How does it feel to preach to all those people?” The pastor said, “Sometimes I don’t.” Asked to explain, he said, “when things are really going good I don’t preach.”

When a pastor finds something more important than preaching the Gospel, he has taken his eyes off the great work to which God has called him. Someone might argue that prayer is more important than preaching, but let us assume that the pastor has prayerfully prepared the sermon from a text inspired by the Holy Spirit. He has prayed throughout the week for those who will be hearing the sermon. They should have been praying for him and for the service. Now, don’t tell me that prayer has suddenly become the most important thing you can think of if you have been neglecting to pray for the pastor and the preaching of the Word all week. Before he preaches, the pastor prays, “Lord, I cannot do this on my own. Without the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the very best I can do is make a speech. Please bless the preaching of the Word and prepare the hearts of Your people to receive it and apply it in their lives.” If the sermon is an answer to prayer, why would we want to dispense with it? If the Holy Spirit elects to overpower a congregation with urgency of prayer, He might lead them to stay after the sermon and pray for another hour. Or, three hours. I wonder what that would do to the zeal of some of our more pious members? Paul was inspired to address this in Romans:

“But how can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? **And how can they hear without a preacher?** And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How welcome are the feet of those who announce the gospel of good things! But all did not obey the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message? **So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ**” (Romans 10:14-17, emphasis added).

The NASB renders verse 17: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the words of Christ.” The context shows that “the word” here is the Word preached. It is important to read the Word, but God uses what Paul calls the “foolishness of preaching” to speak to

hearts and convince people of their need to trust Christ and follow Him. God speaks uniquely to the hearts of listeners when the Gospel is preached. Preacher, don't take your eyes off the great work to which God has called you. The lost world cannot possibly understand why this such a great work, but the pastor must never lose sight of it.

Nehemiah did not abandon the work and neither should we, whether our work is preaching, teaching a Sunday School lesson, working with children, or locking up after the services are over. God has given all believers spiritual gifts with which they are to serve Him, and whatever the gift is that He has given you is to be used in the great work of Jesus Christ. Never leave the great work of God, not even for good work of man or the praise of the world.

6:4 - FOUR TIMES. *“Four times they sent me the same proposal, and I gave them the same reply.”* Sanballat and his friend were committed and determined. We have enemies today who are just as determined, maybe even more so. According to some reports, Saddam Hussein paid twenty-five thousand dollars to families who persuaded a son to strap on a bomb and blow himself up in an effort to murder Jews.

6:5 - A FIFTH TIME. *“Sanballat sent me this same message a fifth time by his aide, who had an open letter in his hand.”* Sanballat was not about to give up on his diabolical scheme. The details are consistent with an historical account: the aid had “an open letter in his hand.”

6:6 - YOU JEWS PLAN TO REBEL. *“In it was written: It is reported among the nations—and Geshem agrees—that you and the Jews plan to rebel. This is the reason you are building the wall. According to these reports, you are to become their king.”* In the letter, Sanballat informed Nehemiah that word had been spread that the Jews were planning to rebel against the king of Persia. Communism used the lie as a tool and considered it moral if it advanced the cause of Communism. Islamic terrorists practice lies, deceit, and all sorts of propaganda to advance their cause. They bomb some target and then claim credit for it, both to frighten people and to recruit those who are susceptible to their propaganda. Without a doubt, every time some senator or congressman accuses President Bush of lying to justify the invasion of Iraq, the terrorists are encouraged to continue to kill Americans and anyone else who helps Americans or Jews.

The wall was the focus of the controversy then, just as “the fence” is the focus of a modern controversy in Jerusalem. The letter stated that the report revealed a plan whereby Nehemiah would become their king. This report did not have to be true, all it had to do was serve the purpose of the enemy. One of the conspirators had probably written the report.

6:7 - SET UP THE PROPHETS. *“And have even set up the prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim on your behalf: ‘There is a king in Judah.’ These rumors will be heard by the king. So come, let's confer together.”* The enemies accused Nehemiah of setting up prophets in Jerusalem who would proclaim him to be their king. The announcement that these rumors would certainly reach King Artaxerxes was supposed to place added pressure on Nehemiah

meet with them. They did not want to meet with him, they wanted to kill him.

“In the Persian period letters were made from a roll of papyrus or leather which would be tied and sealed with clay and impressed with an inscription of the sender (Yamauchi). By leaving it opened, it was intended to be made public. The content of the letter was insolent. It accused Nehemiah of fomenting a revolt against the Persians by building fortifications and hiring prophets to get the people to accept him as king. The only way in which such reports could be stopped from reaching the king, the letter said, would be if Nehemiah were to come to the meeting on the plain of Ono, modern Kafr 'Ana located near Lydda (“Ono,” NBD). The ploy was obvious to Nehemiah, who was sure of his own integrity. He refused to allow their lies to keep him from the work he needed to do” [NCWB].

By sending Nehemiah an open letter, Sanballat sought to put public pressure on him to meet with them. A deceived public often seeks to force the hands of leaders. Nehemiah refused to play into their hands. Satan is the father of liars, a liar from the beginning, and he not only helps the liar, he also deceives those who hear the lies. Yahweh hates and exposes lies when His people walk with Him. That does not mean they will never be deceived, but it does mean that the Holy Spirit is our daily Guide.

6:8-9 - INVENTING THEM. *“Then I replied to him, ‘There is nothing to these rumors you are spreading; you are inventing them in your own mind.’ For they were all trying to intimidate us, saying, ‘They will become discouraged in the work, and it will never be finished.’ But now, my God, strengthen me.”* Nehemiah was not deceived by the carefully crafted plot. He accused Sanballat of “inventing” them in his own mind. He adds that they were trying to intimidate them to stop the work.

Enemies try to Intimidate Nehemiah, 6:10-14

6:10 - THEY ARE COMING TO KILL YOU. *“I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was restricted to his house. He said: Let us meet at the house of God inside the temple. Let us shut the temple doors because they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you tonight!”* We are not given any information as to why Shemaiah had been restricted to his house. Apparently it was not a serious health issue because he suggested that they go to the house of inside the temple and barricade themselves there. Shemaiah announced, “They are coming to kill you tonight.” A surface scan of this verse might lead one to believe he was concerned for Nehemiah’s safety, but that is far from the fact, as Keil & Delitzsch point out:

“Nothing further is known of this prophet Shemaiah. From what is here related we learn, that he was one of the lying prophets employed by Sanballat and Tobiah to ruin Nehemiah. We are not told what induced or caused Nehemiah to go into the house of

Shemaiah; he merely recounts what the latter was hired by his enemies to effect. From the accessory clause, “and he was shut up,” we may perhaps infer that Shemaiah in some way or other, perhaps by announcing that he had something of importance to communicate, persuaded Nehemiah to visit him at his house” [K & D].

It is also obvious that Shemaiah was not confined to his home as a prisoner who was serving home detention, nor was he physically stricken so that he could not leave his house. Nehemiah trusted God and if he had been less courageous he would not have been in this situation in the first place. Many people have been betrayed by those they thought they could trust, but the Lord revealed that he could not trust Shemaiah. He was nothing more than a tool used by Sanballat and his friends.

It is not easy for the average American believer to comprehend the intense hatred of many ancients, as well as terrorists, gang member, and even religious zealots today. Anis Shorrish is a Christian Arab who debates Muslims around the world, pointing out flaws in the Qu’ran, He has been so successful that Muslim zealots have made, according to his testimony, eleven attempts on his life. Anis is courageous, but he is also cautious.

6:11-13 - I WILL NOT GO. *“But I said, “Should a man like me run away? How can I enter the temple and live? I will not go. I realized that God had not sent him, because of the prophecy he spoke against me. Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He was hired, so that I would be intimidated, do as he suggested, sin, and get a bad reputation, in order that they could discredit me.”* Nehemiah could no doubt discern two flaws in Shemaiah’s advice. In the first place, God would hardly ask Nehemiah to run when the project on the walls was nearing completion. In the second place, no true prophet would ask someone to violate God’s Law. Only priests were allowed in the sanctuary (Num. 3:10; 18:7).

“If Nehemiah, not being a priest, entered the temple, he would have desecrated it and brought himself under God’s judgment. He would not disobey God to try to gain safety from his enemies. Nehemiah was convinced that Shemaiah was a false prophet, employed by Tobiah and Sanballat to trick him. If the governor had entered the temple and lived, his people would know he disregarded God’s commands” [BKC].

6:14 - MY GOD, REMEMBER. *“My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat for what they have done, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the other prophets who wanted to intimidate me.”* Once again Nehemiah, the man of prayer, prayed. This time that God would remember his enemies and punish them for their diabolical scheming. He included the Prophetess Noadiah in this prayer for God’s judgment. We know nothing about her other than the fact that she is linked to other false prophets who were trying to intimidate Nehemiah.

The Wall Is Completed, 6:15-19

6:15 - THE WALL. *“The wall was completed in 52 days, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Ellul.”* Their enemies had done everything within their power to stop the Jews from rebuilding the wall. They had tried both overt and covert means, subterfuge, threats, and plots. They had planned to kill Nehemiah but God had delivered him. Even though the workers had to work with their swords at hand and under the eyes of guards, they had accomplished the task in what must have seemed an impossibly brief time.

The day and month are mentioned but not the year. Commentary by Keil and Delitzsch remind us that we are dealing with real history here:

“The year is not mentioned, the before-named (Neh 2:1) twentieth year of Artaxerxes being intended. This agrees with the other chronological statements of this book. For, according to 2:1, it was in Nisan (the first month) of this year that Nehemiah entreated permission of the king to go to Jerusalem; and we learn from 5:14 and 13:6 that he was governor in Jerusalem from the twentieth year onwards, and must therefore have set out for that place immediately after receiving the royal permission. In this case, he might well arrive in Jerusalem before the expiration of the fourth month. He then surveyed the wall, and called a public assembly for the purpose of urging the whole community to enter heartily upon the work of restoration (2:11-17). All this might take place in the course of the fourth month, so that the work could be actually taken in hand in the fifth” [K & D].

6:16 - WHEN OUR ENEMIES HEARD. *“When all our enemies heard this, all the surrounding nations were intimidated and lost their confidence, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God.”* When the outlying nations saw that the wall had been completed they were “intimidated,” and lost confidence to continue fighting against them. One of the reasons they were intimidated was that they realized that the task had been accomplished by the help of Yahweh, the God of the Jews.

6:17 - 19 - THE NOBLES SENT MANY LETTERS. *“During those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah’s letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, since he was a son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah. These nobles kept mentioning Tobiah’s good deeds to me, and they reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.”* This explains the connection between Tobiah and the citizens of Jerusalem. It also explains one of the reasons Sanballat would have wanted him on his side.

“One reason Tobiah the Ammonite (cf. 2:10, 19) was able to make some inroads into Judah was that he was related to the Jews in two ways (also cf. 13:4). His father-in-law was Shecaniah son of Arah (cf. Ezra 2:5), and his daughter-in-law was the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah, who worked on two sections of the wall (Neh. 3:4, 30). Many Jews were therefore loyalists

to Tobiah, perhaps having trading contracts with him, and they kept telling Nehemiah good things about Tobiah. Yet Tobiah tried to intimidate the governor-builder with threatening letters” [Bible Knowledge Commentary - BKC].

Chapter 7

The Exiles Return

7:1-2 - DOORS INSTALLED. *“When the wall had been rebuilt and I had the doors installed, the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites were appointed. Then I put my brother Hanani in charge of Jerusalem, along with Hananiah, commander of the fortress, because he was a faithful man who feared God more than most.”* The first step was the rebuilding of the wall and the next logical step after that was the installation of the doors and then the appointment of the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites. As soon as the city was secured normal worship could be resumed without fear of the enemies. Keil & Delitzsch explains the unusual appointments and responsibilities at this time:

“According to ancient appointment, it was the duty of the doorkeepers to keep watch over the house of God, and to open and close the gates of the temple courts; comp. 1 Chron 9:17-19; 26:12-19. The singers and the Levites appointed to assist the priests, on the contrary, had, in ordinary times, nothing to do with the service of watching. Under the present extraordinary circumstances, however, Nehemiah committed also to these two organized corporations the task of keeping watch over the walls and gates of the city, and placed them under the command of his brother Hanani, and of Hananiah the ruler of the citadel. This is expressed by the words, v. 2: I gave Hanani...and Hananiah...charge over Jerusalem” [K & D].

7:3 - DO NOT OPEN THE GATES. *“I said to them, ‘Do not open the gates of Jerusalem until the sun is hot, and let the doors be shut and securely fastened while the guards are on duty. Station the citizens of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some at their homes.’* Nehemiah is showing the same wisdom and caution now that he had shown during the construction phase. They have the same enemies and they are just as determined to destroy the Jews.

“Hanani was Nehemiah’s brother who had reported the Jerusalem problems to the cupbearer (1:2). Hananiah... a man of integrity, had deep spiritual convictions. Nehemiah, knowing that his enemies were still around, ordered that security measures be maintained: the city gates were to be opened only a few hours each day; and citizens, probably many of whom had been wall-repairers, were to serve as guards” [BKC].

The new Prime Minister of Iran has called for the eradication of all Jews. Muslim terrorists have become so enraged against all who do not support their cause that they are blowing up, not only Jews and Americans, but fellow Muslims. During November, 2005, Islamic terrorists set off bombs in Lebanon, killing almost 60 people and injuring many more. The terrorists are becoming more sophisticated all the time. We can be sure that Sanballat and friends were no less cunning and shrewd. God, who had given them the protection to build the wall must now protect and defend them as the people returned to normal business and worship.

7:4 - FEW PEOPLE. *“The city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and no houses had been built yet.”* I read with interest the suggestion in a commentary that the city covered about 30 - 40 acres, and that even a few thousand residents would have seemed few for a city that size. I spent a number of summers measuring cotton land for the ASCS (USDA) in Quitman County, Mississippi, and I can assure you that if you put a few thousand people in a 30 acre field, I would not want to be there with them. These people lived on “the ground floor.” There were no high rises, but, according to Nehemiah, the city could accommodate a lot more people than it had in it. Actually, the point is that it needed more people for the security of the city and the temple.

7:5-6 - GOD PUT IT IN MY MIND. *“Then my God put it into my mind to assemble the nobles, the officials, and the people to be registered by genealogy. I found the genealogical record of those who came back first, and I found the following written in it: These are the people of the province who went up from among the captive exiles deported by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Each of them returned to his own town in Jerusalem and Judah.”* We know that Zerubbabel had a record of those who returned with him. The registration Nehemiah ordered was reasonable and logical, but Nehemiah gives God the credit for leading him to do it.

“A record had been found of the first group which had come with Zerubbabel (7:5ff.). There are variations between this list and the record found in Ezra 2. These discrepancies are probably the result of copyists’ errors (Kidner). Another consideration is that one must reckon with the Jewish custom of calling the same person by different names; Hariph (7:24) is the same person as Jorah (Ezra 2:18); Sia (7:47) is the same as Siaha (Ezra 2:44), etc. One reason for Nehemiah’s registration was to find out who exactly should have duties in the temple services. Zerubbabel’s old record was certainly helpful in figuring this out” [NCWB].

7:7 - THEY CAME WITH ZERUBBABEL. *They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah. The number of the Israelite men included:*

7:8, Parosh's descendants 2,172

7:9, Shephatiah's descendants 372

7:10, Arah's descendants 652

7:11, Pahath-moab's descendants: Jeshua's and Joab's descendants 2,818

7:12, Elam's descendants 1,254
 7:13, Zattu's descendants 845
 7:14, Zaccai's descendants 760
 7:15, Binnui's descendants 648
 7:16, Bebai's descendants 628
 7:17, Azgad's descendants 2,322
 7:18, Adonikam's descendants 667
 7:19, Bigvai's descendants 2,067

 7:20, Adin's descendants 655
 7:21, Ater's descendants: of Hezekiah 98
 7:22, Hashum's descendants 328
 7:23, Bezai's descendants 324
 7:24, Hariph's descendants 112
 7:25, Gibeon's descendants 95
 7:26, Bethlehem's and Netophah's men 188
 7:27, Anathoth's men 128
 7:28, Beth-azmaveth's men 42
 7:29, Kiriath-jearim's, Chephirah's, and Beeroth's men 743
 7:30, Ramah's and Geba's men 621

 7:31, Michmas's men 122
 7:32, Bethel's and Ai's men 123
 7:33, the other Nebo's men 52
 7:34, the other Elam's people 1,254
 7:35, Harim's people 320
 7:36, Jericho's people 345
 7:37, Lod's, Hadid's, and Ono's people 721
 7:38, Senaah's people 3,930
 7:39, The priests [included] : Jedaiah's descendants of the house of Jeshua 973
 7:40, Immer's descendants 1,052
 7:41, Pashhur's descendants 1,247
 7:42, Harim's descendants 1,017

 7:43, The Levites [included]: Jeshua's descendants: of Kadmiel, Hodevah's descendants 74

 7:44, The singers [included] : Asaph's descendants 148

 7:45, The gatekeepers [included] : Shallum's descendants, Ater's descendants, Talmon's descendants, Akkub's descendants, Hatita's descendants, Shobai's descendants 138

 7:46, The temple servants [included] : Ziha's descendants, Hasupha's descendants, Tabbaoth's

descendants, 47 Keros's descendants, Sia's descendants, Padon's descendants,

7:48, Lebana's descendants, Hagaba's descendants, Shalmal's descendants, 49 Hanan's descendants, Giddel's descendants, Gahar's descendants,

7:50, Reaiah's descendants, Rezin's descendants, Nekoda's descendants, 51 Gazzam's descendants, Uzza's descendants, Paseah's descendants,

7:52, Besai's descendants, Meunim's descendants, Nephishesim's descendants 53 Bakbuk's descendants, Hakupha's descendants, Harhur's descendants,

7:54, Bazlith's descendants, Mehida's descendants, Harsha's descendants, 55 Barkos's descendants, Sisera's descendants, Temah's descendants,

7:56, Neziah's descendants, Hatipha's descendants.

7:57, The descendants of Solomon's servants [included] : Sotai's descendants, Sophereth's descendants, Perida's descendants, 58 Jaala's descendants, Darkon's descendants, Giddel's descendants,

7:59, Shephatiah's descendants, Hattil's descendants, Pochereth-hazzebaim's descendants, Amon's descendants.

7:60, All the temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants 392

7:61, The following are those who came from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but were unable to prove that their families and ancestry were Israelite:

7:62, Delaiah's descendants, Tobiah's descendants, and Nekoda's descendants 642

7:63, and from the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, the descendants of Hakkoz, and the descendants of Barzillai-who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by their name.

7:64, These searched for their entries in the genealogical records, but they could not be found, so they were disqualified from the priesthood.

7:65, The governor ordered them not to eat the most holy things until there was a priest who could consult the Urim and Thummim.

7:66, The whole combined assembly numbered 42,360

7:67, not including their 7,337 male and female slaves, as well as their 245 male and female singers.

7:68, They had 736 horses, 245 mules,

7:69, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

“The quote from the register ends with 7:69, where Nehemiah again picks up the narrative. The rest of the chapter concerns his generosity and that of other leading men in providing the proper equipment for the temple ministers” [NCWB].

7:70 - 71 - SOME OF THE FAMILY LEADERS. *“Some of the family leaders gave to the project. The governor gave 1,000 gold drachmas, 50 bowls, and 530 priestly garments to the treasury. Some of the family leaders gave 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,200 silver minas to the treasury for the project.”* Nehemiah adds this historical footnote to show the response of some of “the family leaders” to the registration and audit (slaves, horses, mules, camels, and donkeys).

7:72 - *“The rest of the people gave 20,000 gold drachmas, 2,000 silver minas, and 67 priestly garments.”* No matter what the priests, prophets, and family leaders did, there would be no genuine revival, or awakening until “the rest of the people” became involved. Now they are ready for the implementation of Yahweh worship.

7:73a, - *“So the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, temple singers, some of the people, temple servants, and all Israel settled in their towns.”* The leading citizens of Judah had been taken into captivity in one of the three invasions by Babylon (606 B. C; 597 B.C., or 586 B.C.) They returned in 536 B.C. to rebuild the temple but when opposition arose they ceased. Sixteen years later, God sent Haggai and Zechariah to challenge the people to resume the work on the temple. Four years later, in 520 B.C., the temple was dedicated. Now, in 445 B.C., Nehemiah leads the people in rebuilding the wall of the city. They are now prepared to resume worship without fear of molestation. The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated and the wall was dedicated.

Nehemiah’s first term as governor was from 445 - 433. He returned to Persia (433 - 424?). Malachi prophesied in Nehemiah’s absence, and Nehemiah returned to serve a second term as governor (possibly in 424 B.C.).

Chapter 8

Reading of the Law By Ezra

7:73b - 8:1 - EZRA THE SCRIBE. *“When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns. All the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses that the Lord had given Israel.”* According to this account, the people gathered together and asked Ezra to bring out the law of Moses

and read it to them. There is no indication that Nehemiah demanded the reading of the Word of God. It is all together possible that the miraculous accomplishments they had witnessed and been a part of had so overwhelmed them that they wanted to know more of the law of the Lord. Regardless of whether or not they had neglected the House of God for so long, they were still aware of the law which God had given to Moses.

8:2 - EZRA THE PRIEST. *“On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding.”* The introduction to this account (Neh 7:73b-8:1a) is identical to Ezra 3:1.

“The same matter, the assembling of the people on the approach of the seventh month, is described in the same words. But the object of this assembling of the people was a different one from that mentioned in Ezra 3. Then they met to restore the altar of burnt-offering and the sacrificial worship; now, on the contrary, for the due solemnization of the seventh month, the festal month of the year. For this purpose the people came from the cities and villages of Judah to Jerusalem, and assembled “in the open space before the water-gate,” i.e., to the south-east of the temple space” [K & D].

Ezra had returned to Jerusalem in 458 B.C., 14 years before Nehemiah, with the blessing of King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7). We are not told how he got the approval and support of the king, but we do know that his purpose in going to the homeland he had never seen was to teach his people, the Jews, God’s Law. In Ezra 7:6, 11-12, 21 he was called a teacher.

“Of course Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries (cf. Neh. 12:33, 36). Ezra’s descent from Eleazar, Aaron’s third son, is seen in the chart “Ezra’s Lineage,” near Ezra 7:1-5. When Ezra first arrived in Jerusalem, the moral and spiritual condition of the people was deplorable (Ezra 9:1-4; 10:2, 10). But as he prayerfully taught them God’s Word, they began to respond to and to obey the laws of God. A few years later Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and challenged them to trust God to help them rebuild the walls. The effectiveness of Ezra’s ministry is also reflected in the people’s behavior after the walls were completed. The two-month building program was an interlude in Ezra’s teaching, but apparently it helped motivate the people to want to know more of God’s Law. They themselves asked Ezra to continue his teaching ministry among them (Neh. 8:1). This was the first day of the seventh month, the day which was to be the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1)” [BKC].

8:3 - ALL THE PEOPLE LISTENED. *“While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law.”* The adults and the children who were old enough to understand (Neh. 8:2-3) listened attentively all morning as Ezra faced west by the Water Gate (vs. 1).

8:4-5 - EZRA OPENED THE BOOK. *“Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah stood beside him on his right; to his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up.”* Once again we see why the Book of Nehemiah is included in the Historical section of the Old Testament. We are looking at real history, as the details will attest. The attention to detail is amazing. What person is there who does not wish his family had kept a journal or saved records, or important correspondence for the past two or three generations. Today, some two and one-half millennia later we are reading details of what happened in ancient Jerusalem, including one of the titles for Ezra (scribe), the platform that was built for the purpose, and the names of the leaders who stood with him.

8:6 - EZRA BLESSED THE LORD. *“Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, ‘Amen, Amen!’ Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.”* The reading of the law and the comments on it proved to be an emotional experience for these assembled Jews. As he finished reading from the law, Ezra blessed the Lord (praised the Lord), possibly with a sentence of two of thanksgiving as David had done in 1 Chronicles 29:10. One would assume that it was the Spirit of God moving in the heart of Ezra, the priest/scribe. When he praised the Lord the people responded in the tradition of their fathers by raising their hands and then falling down on their knee and bowing to the ground as they joined together with Ezra in worshiping the Lord.

There are many people who do not believe they can praise God without raising their hands. This passage neither prescribes, nor prohibits the raising of hands. Those who would pull a verse out of context and then impose something on themselves or others may be sincerely seeking to obey the Lord at one point, but reject that which does not appeal to them (for example, what Paul wrote about covering the head or length of hair). Style of worship should not be based on an historical record from Ezra - what we do see here is how these ancient Semitic people worshiped.

I have attended meetings - and I will only mention Baptists here - who said Amen during a sermon. I do that myself when I feel led. For me, it is more important to hear, consider, and apply the message the Holy Spirit has given the preacher than it is to “sic him on” by saying Amen. When I am preaching, a sincere Amen is deeply appreciated. When I sense that an individual is more concerned with being heard by others than affirming what I have said, I am concerned that someone may pay more attention to his fervor than to the message.

I have been to meetings in which the Amens were, in the words of Chef Emeril Lagosse, used to “kick it up a notch.” There were shouts like, “Preach on” or some such words of encouragement.

If encouragement is the idea, then we should praise the Lord for it. If however, one is

trying to create a spiritual high, he should be careful because of the danger of doing something in the flesh.

The question is, how do we know the difference? My son John, an attorney, suggested this test. Suppose you are sitting on the side of a mount in Galilee around A.D. 28, and Jesus is preaching. He says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Would you respond by shouting, "Preach on, preacher! Tell 'em about it!" Or would you sit in silence, drinking in every word? I am not suggesting how you should respond, but I believe we should be very careful when we are tempted to criticize those who respond differently to the preaching of the Word. I would caution against anything that would hinder, restrict, or prohibit the preaching of the Gospel.

8:7 - EXPLAINED THE LAW. *"Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places."*

"Nehemiah did not explain exactly how Ezra and the Levites read and explained God's Law to this large crowd that may have numbered between 30,000 and 50,000 people (7:66-67). Possibly Ezra read sections of the Law in the presence of all the people (8:3), and then at certain times the Levites circulated among them and made it clear (paôrasú, "to make distinct or interpret," possibly means here "to translate" from Heb. to Aram.) and explained (gave the meaning of) what Ezra had read as the people stood in groups (vv. 7-8). The most gratifying thing that happened, of course, is that the people obeyed God's Word. What they heard touched their emotions, for they wept as they heard the Law (v. 9). Apparently they were remorseful over their past disobedience to the Law and contrite over their sins" [BKC].

8:8 - TRANSLATING AND GIVING THE MEANING. *"They read the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read."* This sounds like an Old Testament Pentecost type experience, but without the supernatural phenomena associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower the church. Note the elements that parallel the preaching of the Word of God today:

- 1) They read from the Scripture (the inerrant Word is our authority).
- 2) They translated it (as a missionary does today).
- 3) They explained it to the people (as in expository preaching today).
- 4) They made sure the people understood what was read (communication for edification).

8:9-12 - HOLY TO THE LORD. *"Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, 'This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.' For all the people were weeping as they heard the*

words of the law. Then he said to them, "Go and eat what is rich, drink what is sweet, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, since today is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, because your strength comes from rejoicing in the Lord. And the Levites quieted all the people, saying, 'Be still, since today is holy. Do not grieve.' Then all the people began to eat and drink, send portions, and have a great celebration, because they had understood the words that were explained to them." The Holy Spirit inspired Nehemiah to include names, events, and dates in this account. Nehemiah, the cup bearer to the king, is now the governor of Judah, and Ezra is both a priest and a scribe. They are joined by the Levites in instructing the people. The lesson of the moment is, "this day is holy to the Lord your God."

"The portion read made a powerful impression upon the assembled crowds. Undoubtedly it consisted of certain sections of Deuteronomy and other parts of the Torah, which were adapted to convict the people of their sin in transgressing the commands of the Lord, and of the punishments to which they had thus exposed themselves. They were so moved thereby that they mourned and wept. This induced Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites, who had been applying what was read to the hearts of their hearers, to encourage them" [K & D].

The spiritual leaders found instructions for this feast in Leviticus 23:37-43. This was celebrated from the 15th to the 22nd of the seventh month (Tishri).

"Since they discovered these instructions on the second day of the seventh month (Neh. 8:2, 13), the timing was perfect. They had exactly two weeks to prepare for it. So they had the people get branches from various kinds of trees (v. 15) and build booths (temporary shelters) in various places, including the square... by the Gate of Ephraim (see the map "Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah," near 3:1). This recalled their days of wandering in the wilderness (Lev. 23:43). Their celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles was unmatched since the days of Joshua. When the altar was completed in 536 B.C. the people then celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (Ezra 3:4), but here the joy and involvement was much greater. Ezra read the Law during the Feast of Tabernacles, because Moses had indicated that this was to be done every seven years (Deut. 31:10-13) [BKC].

Every child of God must have an awareness of the holiness of Almighty God, the holiness of His Word, and the holiness of the Day He proclaims as holy. In the Old Testament, the Sabbath was a holy day. There were other days, like the Day of Atonement, that were holy unto the Lord. In the New Testament, Christians began to worship on the first day of the week as they were forced out of the synagogue. The Lord's Day is a holy day. It is different from all other days, and God expects us to keep it holy unto Him. This was a holy moment and the people responded by weeping. They were told, "Do not mourn or weep.' For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law." We may infer that these people kept on weeping and needed to be told not to continue to weep.

Festival of Booths

8:13-14 - DWELL IN BOOTHS. *“On the second day, the family leaders of all the people, along with the priests and Levites, assembled before Ezra the scribe to study the words of the law. They found written in the law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that the Israelites should dwell in booths during the festival of the seventh month.”* The first response of the people to the reading of the Law by Ezra was to raise their hands, drop to their knees, and bow to the ground in worship. Here we have another response of these people. When they heard the instructions (from Lev. 23:37-43), they determined to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles). One commentary outlines the sequence in chapter 8 as follows:

- 1) There was an intellectual response to the Word (vv. 1-8).
- 2) There was an emotional response to the Word (vv. 9-12).
- 3) There was a volitional response to the Word (vv. 13-18). [BKC]

After their spiritual leaders discovered the long neglected law concerning the Feast of Tabernacles, the people were determined to celebrate it. This was celebrated from the 15th to the 22nd of the seventh month (Tishri).

8:15-17 - MAKE BOOTHS. *“So they proclaimed and spread this news throughout all their towns and in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Go out to the hill country and bring back branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, just as it is written.’ The people went out, brought back branches, and made booths for themselves on each of their rooftops, and courtyards, the court of the house of God, the square by the Water Gate, and the square by the Gate of Ephraim.*

The whole community that had returned from exile made booths and lived in them. They had not celebrated like this from the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day. And there was tremendous joy.” The people did as they were instructed and gathered the leafy branched and made booths, or tabernacles. Again, Nehemiah gives the specifics about building of the booths, the location, and the fact that the people lived in them.

“Since they discovered these instructions on the second day of the seventh month (Neh. 8:2, 13), the timing was perfect. They had exactly two weeks to prepare for it. So they had the people get branches from various kinds of trees (v. 15) and build booths (temporary shelters) in various places, including the square... by the Gate of Ephraim (see the map “Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah,” near 3:1). This recalled their days of wandering in the wilderness (Lev. 23:43). Their celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles was unmatched since the days of Joshua. When the altar was completed in 536 B.C. the people then celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (Ezra 3:4), but here the joy and involvement was much greater. Ezra read the Law during the Feast of Tabernacles, because Moses had indicated that this was to be done every seven years (Deut. 31:10-13)” [BKC].

It is inconceivable that the Chosen People would have gone almost a millennium without observing this important feast. If you look carefully, Nehemiah does not say that they had never observed the feast. What he said was that they had not lived in booths in connection with the observance of the feast. Keil & Delitzsch Comments:

And the whole community that had returned from captivity (comp. Ezra 6:21) made themselves booths and dwelt in booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day, had not the children of Israel done so [K & D].

The Hebrew word refers to their dwelling in booths. Again, the words here do not tell us that the Israelites had not celebrated this festival since the days of Joshua,

“that is, since they had taken possession of Canaan: for, according to Ezra 3:4, those who returned from captivity kept this feast in the first year of their return; and a celebration is also mentioned after the dedication of Solomon’s temple, 2 Chron 7:9; 1 Kings 8:65. The text only states that since the days of Joshua the whole community had not so celebrated it, i.e., had not dwelt in booths. Neither do the words imply that since the days of Joshua to that time no booths at all had been made at the celebration of the feast of tabernacles, but only that this had not been done by the whole congregation. On former occasions, those who came up to Jerusalem may have regarded this precept as non-essential, and contented themselves by keeping the feast with solemn assemblies, sacrifices, and sacrificial feasts, without making booths and dwelling in them for seven days” [K & D].

8:18 - EZRA READ OUT OF THE BOOK. *“Ezra read out of the book of the law of God every day, from the first day to the last. The Israelites celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day there was an assembly, according to the ordinance.”* Ezra placed great emphasis on the Word of God. There is a lesson in this for America today. Francis Schaeffer, around 1960, declared that the next great battlefield in Christianity would be the Bible. He could not have been more prescient. My entire ministry has been involved in what has been called the Battle for the Bible. That battle is not over, even though great progress has been made.

Chapter 9

A Nation Confess Its Sin

9:1 - DUST ON THEIR HEADS. *“On the twenty-fourth day of this month the Israelites assembled; they were fasting, wearing sackcloth, and had put dust on their heads.”* Keil & Delitzsch (Commentary on the Old Testament Vol. 4: Ezra-Job) provides a capsulized explanation:

“On the twenty-second of Tishri was the Hazereth of the feast of tabernacles; on the twenty-fourth the congregation re-assembled in the temple, “with fasting and with sackcloths (penitential garments made of hair; see rem. Joel 1:8) and earth upon them,” i.e., spread upon their heads (1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam 1:2; Job 2:12),—the external marks of deep mourning and heaviness of heart” [K & D].

While Keil and Delitzch may provide the basic background and interpretation, some application may be in order. It is commendable that so many believers have a passionate desire to worship scripturally. At times some of those attempting to do so are may be inconsistent. For example, I understand that praying in Jesus’ name means prayer that is consistent with His will, His character, and His nature - He will never violate either. At the same time, I recall a time when I affixed His name to the end of a prayer - shall we say, religiously. By that I mean that I would begin to close a prayer with “In Jesus name, Amen,” and then think of something else, mention that and say again, “In Jesus’ name, Amen.” Then I would recall a promise to pray for Tom’s Aunt Sally and add, “And Lord, be with Tom’s Aunt Sally, whatever her problems is. In Jesus’ name, Amen.” I understand that I will not be heard because of the repetition, yet I still believe I should close my prayer with those words: “In Jesus’ name, Amen.” At the same time, if I am driving down the road I may pass someone’s house and pray for healing, or a neighbor pastor’s church and whisper a brief petition on his behalf. I can talk with Him anytime without imposing a formal “prayer format” on myself, but when I set aside a time for prayer, pray publically, or with family, I still add, “In Jesus name, Amen.”

There are people who may read Nehemiah and assume that a certain posture is required for worship. They raised their hands (some with palms up, others with fingertips up), or bow down and lean forward until their forehead touches the ground or floor. Worship as the Lord leads you through His Word and by His Spirit. It is interesting, however, that I do not recall anyone who had tried to follow the example of these ancients who took a bag of dirt into the sanctuary and sprinkled it on their heads. For that matter, I do not recall too many people wearing sack cloth, and most of us in America do not appear to have overdone it with the fasting. You do not often find designer labels, alligators, and polo players attached to sack cloth!

9:2 - SEPARATED THEMSELVES. *“Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the guilt of their fathers.”* God had chosen them and separated them for His glory and service, but throughout the entire history of the nation they had never remained faithful for very long at a time. The history of the Period of the Judges reveals a cycle of rebellion which began with their association with pagan Canaanites or some other idolatrous people. They would turn to idolatry; God would punish them by using an enemy to conquer and oppress them; they would repent and call on Him for deliverance; God would send a judge to deliver them; and they would live in peace as long as that judge lived. Then the cycle would begin again. Nor, did their rebellion stop with the Period of the Judges. The Lord sent Jeremiah with a stinging indictment near the end of the seventh century B.C.:

“Hear the word of the Lord, house of Jacob and all families of the house of Israel.

“Here is what the Lord says: **What fault did your fathers find in Me that they went so far from Me, followed worthless idols, and became worthless themselves?**

“They stopped asking: Where is the Lord who brought us from the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, through a land of drought and darkness, a land no one traveled through and where no one lived?

“I brought you to a fertile land to eat its fruit and bounty, but after you entered, you defiled My land; you made My inheritance detestable.

“**The priests quit asking: Where is the Lord?** The experts in the law no longer knew Me, and the rulers rebelled against Me. **The prophets prophesied by Baal and followed useless idols.**

“Therefore, I will bring a case against you again. This is the Lord’s declaration. I will bring a case against your children’s children.

“Cross over to Cyprus and take a look. Send [someone] to Kedar and consider carefully; see if there has ever been anything like this:

“**Has a nation [ever] exchanged its gods?** (but they were not gods!) Yet My people have exchanged their Glory for useless idols.

“Be horrified at this, heavens; be shocked and utterly appalled. This is the Lord’s declaration.

“For **My people have committed a double evil:** They have abandoned Me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jer 2:4-13, emphasis added).

In Nehemiah’s day, The people separated themselves from foreigners who did not know or respect the Law of Moses. They confessed that neither they nor their ancestors had kept the Law.

9:3 - CONFESSION AND WORSHIP. “*While they stood in their places, they read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day and spent another fourth of the day in confession and worship of the Lord their God.*” The attention to the Word of God impacted their lives miraculously. They did not place the time restraints on God that are imposed by so many today. We want God to bless us but if He is going to do it He had better do it between 11:00 A.M. and 12:00 noon! We have plans for Sunday Dinner, plans for an afternoon at the Mall, and a football game that evening. We want God’s blessing, but we just do not want God to get in the way of our social life, recreation, or business.

9:4- CRIED OUT ALOUD. *“Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the raised platform built for the Levites and cried out loudly to the Lord their God. The spiritual leaders called on the people to worship Yahweh with all their hearts. The Levitical leaders stood on scaffolding erected for the Levites and “cried out loudly to the Lord their God.”*

9:5 - BLESS THE LORD. *“Then the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah—said: ‘Stand up. Bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting. Praise Your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise.’”* The repetition of the names of the Levites in this verse would suggest that this invitation to praise God is distinct from the crying to God with a loud voice of verse. 4, and “seems to say that the Levites first cried to God, i.e., addressed to Him their confessions and supplications, and after having done so, called upon the congregation to worship God” [K & D].

9:6 - YOU ALONE ARE THE LORD. *“You alone are the Lord. You created the heavens, the highest heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them, and the heavenly host worships You.”* Two points are stressed in their praise for Yahweh. First, He “alone is the Lord.” Believers should know that theologically, but they should know it experientially. We should know it both academically and practically. The Lord made the charge that their forefathers did not know Him:

“Listen, heavens, and pay attention, earth, for the Lord has spoken:

‘I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me.

The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s feeding–trough,
but Israel does not know; **My people do not understand**” (Isaiah 1:2-3).

Two different words are used for know. The first means to recognize, the second to know experientially. The ancestors of these people may have know **about** God, but they did not **know** God.

YOU CREATED THE HEAVENS. This is the second point. Satan has used the gospel of evolution so effectively in schools, government, and the science lab that many preachers and Bible teachers have either compromised or ignored the biblical claims. You cannot study Genesis without being informed about the work of the Creator. One may accept it, reject it, or do what so many Christians have done: compromise. Christians have been compromising so long that even many preachers and Christian professors have adopted one of the compromise theories (the Gap Theory, or the Day/Age Theory). The recent emphasis on Intelligent Design (ID) is, with some people, a sincere desire to return to a Scriptural position on creation. The way others promote it may well be a compromise, or even deception. If you have intelligent design there must be an Intelligent Designer, and for Christians that means the God of Genesis.

When you go to the Book of Job you encounter the Creator, and in Psalms He is praised for His creative acts. In the opening verses of the Gospel According to John, Jesus is seen as the Agent of creation. In Revelation, Jesus is worthy of our worship because He is the Creator. In fact, He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the Creator at the beginning, and the King of kings and Lord of lords at the end. He is Creator of all that exists, and modern day saints should praise Him for his mighty works in creation.

9:7-8 - YOU CHOSE ABRAHAM. *“You are the Lord God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and changed his name to Abraham. You found his heart faithful in Your sight, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Girgashites—to give it to his descendants. You have kept Your promise, for You are righteous.”* They knew the account of Abraham’s call to go to a Land of Promise. His name had been changed from Abram, meaning exalted father, to Abraham, meaning father of a multitude. God entered a covenant relationship with Abraham and He had kept that covenant, even when the chosen people were living in rebellion against Him.

9:9 - YOU MADE A NAME FOR YOURSELF. *“You saw the oppression of our ancestors in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea. You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, all his officials, and all the people of his land, for You knew how arrogantly they treated our ancestors. You made a name for Yourself that endures to this day.”* They praised God for delivering them from bondage in Egypt. These people knew their history, which makes their continual rebellion all the more disturbing. Elsewhere, I have mentioned a long-time Jewish friend who was always been quick to say that he was Jewish but he was not religious. His daughter is a Christian, but he rebuffed every effort she made to witness to him. He knew much of the history of the Jews, but did not acknowledge God. In fact, he was very critical of anyone who tries to witness to him. He said, I don’t have any sin to confess!” He told me that he told his wife that I was the only one he could really talk with at our health club. Since he talked with a lot of people, I understood that he meant about anything “religious”. I explained, “I am your friend. We do not agree, but I am your friend. I will never try to convert you because I cannot convert you. I will always be there if you are interested in talking about it.” I tried to keep the lines of communication open and share my faith when I have an opportunity. Sadly, he closed his eyes in doubt and opened them in torment. He rebuffed every attempt to witness to him for the Lord and now he will pay the price forever.

9:11-12 - YOU DIVIDED THE SEA. *“You divided the sea before them, and they crossed through it on dry ground. You hurled their pursuers into the depths like a stone into churning waters. You led them with a pillar of cloud by day, and with a pillar of fire by night, to illuminate the way they should go.”* Tim Vineyard is the incredibly gifted Vice-President over the Technology Division for LifeWay Christian Resources. Tim left a family business in order to accept a position with LifeWay so that he could serve the Lord in a special way. Members of the board of trustees listened to the recommendation by Dr. Jimmy Draper and voted to create a new Technology Division and we elected Tim as the Vice-president over the division. Tim has developed an outstanding

electronic library, THE BIBLE NAVIGATOR, which features the HOLMAN CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE. I can still hardly believe that I had the privilege of serving on the Broadman and Holman Committee as the HCSB was being translated, and meeting with Dr. Ed Bloom, the General Editor when he fielded questions from the Broadman and Holman Committee.

Tim Vineyard demonstrated THE BIBLE NAVIGATOR to members of the board of trustees at the LifeWay Conference Center in Glorieta, New Mexico. After demonstrating the program Tim asked for questions. He had just told us about the Atlas and demonstrated it briefly. I could not resist raising my hand. When Tim recognized me I asked him about the route the Israelites took during the Exodus. When he seemed confused, I told him that I have a much larger electronic Bible library and I like it, but when it comes to the Exodus, the dotted line showing the route the Israelites took when they left Egypt shows that they detoured around the Red Sea! I wanted to know if the BIBLE NAVIGATOR navigated around the Red Sea, or across it. These Israelites had no problem understanding it: “You divided the sea before them, and they crossed through it on dry ground.”

These people had heard Ezra read the Word of God, and now they were acknowledging His miraculous deliverance. He had heard the cry of their forefathers in Egypt and called Moses to deliver them from Egypt. He hardened the heart of Pharaoh long enough to demonstrate to all Egypt and to the Israelites that He was the only God, and all the deities of Egypt were false gods. The Israelites needed to be reminded from generation to generation to praise God for delivering their ancestors from bondage, seeing them through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land. He delivered them from Egypt by His mighty hand, and He delivered them from the wilderness into Canaan by His mighty hand.

9:13 MOUNT SINAI. *“You came down on Mount Sinai, and spoke to them from heaven. You gave them impartial ordinances, reliable instructions, and good decrees and commandments.”* Their ancestors had an appoint to keep with Yahweh at Sinai. Say the word and every devout Jew knows what every Christian should know. Sinai is where God gave Moses the Law. As some church signs and bumper stickers remind us that they are Ten Commandments, not ten suggestions. The Ten Commandments stood as the single greatest code of ethics the world had ever seen, or would see until the Sermon on the Mount.

Some liberal Old Testament students have claimed that Moses copied the Mosaic Law from the Code of Hammurabi. A comparison between the two should refute such a claim. The question might be, where did Hammurabi get his code? Where did he live? From whom did he receive his ideas? The answer may much easier than you think. The Ark landed on Mt. Ararat and Noah and his family disembarked and settled in the area. Generations later, Hammurabi probably lived not too far from where Noah settled after the Flood. Noah instructed his sons, who instructed their sons, who in turn instructed their sons. Even if it had been distorted over the years, it would still have reflected the code of ethics God gave Noah.

9:4 - YOUR HOLY SABBATH. *“You revealed Your holy Sabbath to them, and gave them commandments, statutes, and a law through Your servant Moses.”* God commanded His covenant

people to remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. This law has never been repealed. The Lord gave Jeremiah a message about the Sabbath:

“This is what the Lord said to me, “Go and stand in the People’s Gate, through which the kings of Judah enter and leave, and in all the gates of Jerusalem. Announce to them: Hear the word of the Lord, kings of Judah, all Judah, and all the residents of Jerusalem who enter through these gates. This is what the Lord says: **Watch yourselves; do not pick up a load and bring it in through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.** You must not carry a load out of your houses on the Sabbath day or do any work, **but you must consecrate the Sabbath day**, just as I commanded your ancestors. **They wouldn’t listen or pay attention but became obstinate**” (Jer 17:19-23, emphasis added).

9:15 - BREAD FROM HEAVEN. *“You provided bread from heaven for their hunger; You brought them water from the rock for their thirst. You told them to go in and possess the land You had sworn to give them.”* God gave the Children of Israel manna from heaven to sustain them in the wilderness. The bread from heaven sustained life, and that is all it did. It is for that reason that when I hear someone pray, “Lord, send us manna from heaven”, I cringe a little. Jesus announced, “I am the Bread of Life.” Those who take Jesus into their lives will never hunger again, and they will never thirst again. Those who ate manna in the wilderness did hunger again. The manna did sustain life but it never satisfied the people. Wilderness believers never did anything but gripe and complain, and of course, attack their leaders. That is why we know they were Baptists!

9:16-18 - THEY REFUSED TO LISTEN. *“But our ancestors acted arrogantly; they became stiff-necked and did not listen to Your commands. They refused to listen and did not remember Your wonders You performed among them. They became stiff-necked and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in faithful love, and You did not abandon them. Even after they had cast an image of a calf for themselves and said, ‘This is your God who brought you out of Egypt,’” and they had committed terrible blasphemies...”* The sins of their ancestors were not sins of ignorance but sins of iniquity. It is not that they did not know any better, they refused to listen, refused to acknowledge God, refused to follow Him. God sent Jeremiah with a message to the people of Judah:

“This is what the Lord says: Stand by the roadways and look. Ask about the ancient paths: Which is the way to what is good?

“Then take it and find rest for yourselves. But they protested: We won’t!

“I appointed watchmen over you and said: Listen for the sound of the ram’s horn. **But they protested: We won’t listen!**

“Therefore listen, you nations and you witnesses, learn what [the charge] is against them.

“Listen, earth! I am about to bring disaster on these people, the fruit of their own plotting, for they have paid no attention to My word. They have rejected My law” (Jer 6:16-19, emphasis added).

9:19 - YOU DID NOT ABANDON THEM. *“You did not abandon them in the wilderness because of Your great compassion. During the day the pillar of cloud never turned away from them, guiding them on their journey. And during the night the pillar of fire illuminated the way they should go.”* Their ancestors had rebelled against God in the wilderness and He might have abandoned them. In fact, He had told Moses that He would destroy them and start over with Moses. Moses interceded for the Chosen People and God relented and spared the people. They were spared, not because of their merit but because of His great compassion, because of His grace. All those who were twenty years old and older, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb (the faithful spies) were forced to wander in the wilderness until they were all dead. The Lord continued to provide all their needs. They had the pillar of cloud to guide and protect them, and the pillar of fire to illuminate their camp. When the cloud lifted they packed up and moved out. When it stopped they pitched their tents and erected the Tabernacle in the midst of the camp as a testimony to the Children of Israel that Yahweh dwelt among His people.

9:20 - YOUR GOOD SPIRIT. *“You sent Your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold Your manna from their mouths, and You gave them water for their thirst.”* Any explanation of “Your good Spirit” is aided by verse 30 where we read, “Your Spirit warned them through Your prophets.” Around 1980, I invited a retired seminary professor for whom I had great respect to preach a revival in the church I served as pastor. He had taught me Old Testament and when I was his student he was one of the few conservatives on campus. The more we visited during the week the more I realized that his position had changed on some issues.

My old friend and former teacher made a point of condemning a man who showed him his Major Writing Project in his doctoral program. My friend said, “He had written on The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. There is no Holy Spirit in the Old Testament!” I could not believe what I was hearing. We worship a triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and you cannot disassociate one member of the Trinity from another. When we read that the Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit, that includes Genesis, Joshua, Psalms, and Jeremiah.

“Your good Spirit” is the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. My former professor stressed that what we read about in the Old Testament is the Spirit of God, not the Holy Spirit. It seems more natural to think that the words “You” (vs. 19) and “Your” in this verse would indicate that Nehemiah is speaking to God the Father and that the term “Your good Spirit”, at the least, leaves the door open for assuming the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. The Spirit is the One who communicates with the prophets. In particular, in the wilderness, Moses was that prophet.

YOU DID NOT WITHDRAW YOUR MANNA. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, from death to God’s purpose for His Chosen People, and He had led them out into

the Wilderness where He provided everything they needed for their journey to the Promised Land, including manna and water which kept them alive. It is important that we understand that manna was food for the journey from Egypt to Canaan, not food for Canaan. Canaan was the land "flowing with milk and honey", which speaks of both livestock and the fruit of the land. If there were milk and honey in the land, conditions would be right for agriculture and horticulture as well as animal husbandry. The late Dr. Jan Mercer sent me a copy of a book by Major Ian Thomas in which he dealt with this. Jan and her husband Andy had heard Major Thomas teach on this subject in Dallas. I would recommend his works to anyone. Without going back to review what he wrote, I would like to simply point out the fact that God never intended for His people to dwell in the wilderness - that is where He did not want them! He wanted them in Canaan. He did not want them eating manna for forty years, He wanted them to be living on milk and honey (and all the bounty those words imply).

Why were they in the wilderness so long? Because of their disobedience. Because they refused to go in and possess their rightful possession. We have an analogy here that we need to understand. Egypt came to symbolize bondage and death. Those people who were in the wilderness had been delivered from bondage, but they were not where God wanted them. He wanted them in the Land of Promise. Egypt may well represent the death and bondage in which the lost person is living. In which case, Canaan represents the place where God wants His people to dwell at present, and that is not simply in heaven by and by; it is also a life of obedience, service, and fellowship with Him here and now. It is the spirit-filled life right now. The wilderness is the place where people live who have been delivered from Egypt but refuse to enter the land and possess their possessions. They, through a faulty faith, prefer to walk in the flesh than to walk in the Spirit.

Those believers who obey God will follow Him and possess their possessions. They bear the fruit of the Spirit, of which Paul writes in Galatians. Those who are saved but refuse to walk in the Spirit do not bear the fruit of the Spirit, but may produce many of the works of the flesh, of which Paul also wrote. As a matter of fact, it is often difficult to tell a wilderness wanderer from a resident of Egypt. The wilderness believers have dwelt on the borderline of Egypt so long that they look, sound, and sometimes even smell like the people on the other side. There are a lot of people who will assure you they are born-again Christians whose lives speak more of Egypt than Canaan. They testify that they belong to the Lord, but they seem to long for the fruit of Egypt.

Manna sustained life, and God sustains the life of the wilderness believer. What God will not grant to the wilderness wanderer is milk and honey. God is not producing the fruit of the Promised Land in the wilderness, and He does not produce the fruit of the Spirit when we walk in the flesh. He sustains us but he does not bless us as He desires. The wilderness Christian is not sent back to Egypt, but he is not permitted to enjoy the bounty of Canaan. He wanders through life griping, complaining, and often plotting against the Lord's called servant, just as they complained about and to Moses (the pastor in our day). You will never find a believer who is genuinely filled with joy in the wilderness, though there might well be moments of happiness or excitement. Why is that? The wilderness is not a

fruitful place, and though those who persist in dwelling in the wilderness may know a few spiritual highs, they will never know the full abiding joy of the Lord.

9:21- YOU PROVIDED. *“You provided for them in the wilderness 40 years and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell.”* Those Israelites in the wilderness was there because God had delivered them from Egypt by His mighty hand. The wilderness believer is sustained by the mercy and grace of God, even if he does not fully appreciate it. The wilderness wanderer has no real testimony other than the fact that he has been delivered from Egypt. The overwhelming majority of those who have been delivered from Egypt are wandering in the wilderness today when they should be (and could be) reaping the bountiful harvest of Canaan. Canaan is not the “sweet by and by” one imagines as he sings “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks I stand and cast a wistful eye to Canaan’s fair and happy land.” Canaan is where God wanted His people long ago, and by analogy, where He wants His children today. God sustains people in the wilderness. He blesses those in Canaan. A mighty act of God was required to get the Children of Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness, and a mighty act of God is required to get wilderness believers out of the wilderness and into Canaan. If you are a backslider, you cannot forgive your unfaithfulness and you cannot transfer yourself into the Spirit-filled life (Canaan). Just as God parted the waters of the Red Sea to bring His people out of Egypt, He parted the waters of the Jordan River in order to bring them out of the wilderness into Canaan. Deliverance from spiritual death requires a miraculous act of God, and deliverance from the life lived in the flesh to the Spirit-filled life requires a might act of God. Deliverance begins when we repent.

9:22-25 - YOU GAVE THEM. *“You gave them kingdoms and peoples and assigned them to be a boundary. They took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and of the land of Og king of Bashan. You multiplied their descendants like the stars of heaven and brought them to the land You told their ancestors to go in and take possession of it. So their descendants went in and possessed the land: You subdued the Canaanites who inhabited the land before them and handed their kings and the surrounding peoples over to them, to do as they pleased with them. They captured fortified cities and fertile land and took possession of well-supplied houses, rock-hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. They ate, were filled, became prosperous, and delighted in Your great goodness.”* In his prayer, Nehemiah acknowledged God’s deliverance, the victories He granted, His providential care, and the fruit He had granted them when they entered the land. He acknowledge that *“They ate, were filled, became prosperous, and delighted in Your great goodness.”* Nehemiah’s prayer acknowledges all God’s blessings for His people. He had done all He promised to do for them. In spite of their persistent griping and complaining, turning on their leaders, failure to obey Him, and their propensity for idolatry, God brought them through the wilderness, across the Jordan, and into Canaan. The Conquest would be a continuing testimony to His providence. He blessed them with miraculous victories and divided the land among the Twelve Tribes. Now, in his prayer, Nehemiah acknowledged:

- 1) God’s deliverance,
- 2) the victories He granted,

- 3) His providential care, and
- 4) the fruit He had granted them when they entered the land.

He acknowledged that “They ate, were filled, became prosperous, and delighted “in Your great goodness.”

9:26-29 - THEY WERE DISOBEDIENT. *“But they were disobedient and rebelled against You. They flung Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets who warned them to turn them back to You. They committed terrible blasphemies. (27) So You handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. In their time of distress, they cried out to You, and You heard from heaven. In Your abundant compassion You gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the power of their enemies. (28) But as soon as they had relief, they again did what was evil in Your sight. So You abandoned them to the power of their enemies, who dominated them. When they cried out to You again, You heard from heaven and rescued them many times in Your compassion. (29) You warned them to turn back to Your law, but they acted arrogantly and would not obey Your commandments. They sinned against Your ordinances, by which a person will live if he does them. They stubbornly resisted, stiffened their necks, and would not obey.”*

These people did not have a leather bound copy of the King James Bible in every home. In order to learn the Word of God, they must hear the Word read over and over. Repetition was essential, so once again they must hear the story of God’s dealings with their forefathers. In the previous verses, Nehemiah praised God for delivering their ancestors from Egypt, for His providential care in the wilderness, and during the Conquest. In all of this, only Yahweh was faithful. If the Covenant had depended upon their merit it would have been rendered null and void very early in their history. It was continued because of His grace, His love, and His holiness.

Now, we move to the Period of the Judges. Rather than summarize centuries of rebellion and restoration, it will help the student of the Word to observe a cycle of rebellion that would be repeated time and again through the entire period of the Judges. This cycle is easily followed in Judges:

- 1) The people rebelled against God and embraced Idolatry.
- 2) God used one of the enemy nations to oppress them severely (His judgment).
- 3) In despair, they called upon Him to deliver them.
- 4) God sent a judge to deliver them miraculously (Samson, Gideon, et. al).
- 5) They lived in peace as long as that judge (deliverer) lived.

When that judge died, they began the cycle all over again. Before condemning those ancient Israelites for being so foolish and so sinful, take a look at America today. There is

an open war going on against Jesus Christ in America today, proving that the world is at enmity against Christ. There are communities where Christ is forced out of Christmas in public places, but not Judaism, Islam, or Kwanza. Prayer and Bible reading were taken out of schools in 1962-1963 and according to William Bennett's moral index, the lines on the chart took a sharp upward turn from that time until the end of the century. Today, things are going on in schools that would shock the grandparents of most of those children. If they demanded an answer they might be shocked to learn what the teachers know. In many cases those grandparents need look no further than their own children for the reason. Countless boys and girls in our schools today are coming from seriously dysfunctional homes. A five year old demonstrates to his grandparents what he had watched his mother and her latest boyfriend do in bed the week before. Oral sex has risen sharply since Bill Clinton declared that oral sex is not sex. There has been a sharp rise in attacks on young girls. Among the most prominent cases was that of little 8 year old Jessica in Florida who was kidnaped and held in a single-wide mobile home where she was repeatedly molested by a habitual sex offender who was not registered. He finally buried little Jessica alive under the steps to the trailer. Jessica's Law is being passed in state after state to require registration of sexual offenders, a law that might have saved little Jessica.

For months, Fox News has covered the disappearance of Natalie Holloway on the Island of Aruba, after she had gotten into a car with three locals who apparently had a history of preying on young women. Sadly, very few people are dealing with one obvious factor in the case, and that is that she was an 18 years old young woman who was drinking in a bar in a foreign country. A lot of the young adults who get into trouble do so in a bar or after leaving a bar in the middle of the night.

There is a breakdown in discipline both in the home and at school. Whole classes are influenced by the behavior of a few in the early grades and by the time they are in the fifth or sixth grade, some classes have a reputation for causing problems in the classroom. Many of those same kids will manifest behavior issues that will worsen incrementally over the next few years. What is the source of this information? It comes from teachers with many years experience in the classroom. Parents, politicians, social workers, and bureaucrats may blame the school or the teachers. The teachers are thinking, "I am doing the best I can with what I have," meaning that they are, in many cases, dealing with a defective mind and spirit in the classroom. It is hard to overcome the negative moral and social influences on a child in a classroom filled with other students. Elsewhere I mentioned an assistant district attorney who prosecutes juveniles says he does two things. First, he tells them, "I will do everything I can to keep you out of the system, but if you will not listen to me, I will do everything I can to put you where you cannot hurt anyone else." This prosecutor has been thinking about writing a book in which he will tell parents, teachers, and social workers what a lot of young people are telling him that they do not tell their parents or teachers. I talk with that prosecutor almost every day - he is my son. He has a genuine burden for children and young people, made more acute by his little six year old daughter Abigail.

America was founded on Christian principles. Children learned to read by reading the Bible, and their parents wanted them to read so they could read the Bible. David Barton, of THE WALL BUILDERS, is an incredible source for those who want to look into the Christian foundation upon which America was built. There is absolutely no question about what the Founders were thinking when they laid that foundation. We have their written statements to prove it. When this writer was a junior in high school English a history teacher began the first class of the new year by telling about her week at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center. She told them that the theme for the week was, "God has a plan, a place, and a purpose for every life." That was not only acceptable, it was commendable at the time. Today, America is in rebellion against God and the principles upon which the country was founded.

Bill O'Reilly reported (Dec., 9, 2005) that a school in Texas will not permit students to wear green or red during the days leading up to the "Holiday" break because it might remind someone of Christmas. The very word "Christmas" has become so offensive that many nation-wide chains will not permit employees to say, "Merry Christmas", and they will not have any signs that include the word Christmas (pressure from Christians has caused some of those chains to reconsider their position). The backlash is having some of them change their mind for 2006. The freedom Christians have lost can be directly attributed to Christians who have spent their lifetime in the wilderness rather than in Canaan. Many Christian who would consider themselves "good Christians" and active church members have no conception of the Spirit-filled life. America is sinning against a much greater light than those ancient Israelites. God will deal with their disobedience.

9:30 - YOUR SPIRIT. *"You were patient with them for many years, and Your Spirit warned them through Your prophets, but they would not listen. Therefore, You handed them over to the surrounding peoples. (31) However, in Your abundant compassion, You did not destroy them or abandon them, for You are a gracious and compassionate God."* Nehemiah, in his prayer acknowledges the sins of his ancestors, and the patients of God through "many years." He said, "Your Spirit warned them through Your prophets, but they would not listen." This attitude of rebellion prevailed throughout the centuries we identify as the Period of the Judges, The United Kingdom, and the Divided Kingdom, or roughly from 1400 B. C. Until the Babylonian Captivity (three invasions: 606, 597, and 586 B. C). There was never a time when Israel merited either God's providence or His mercy. They were preserved according to His grace and His sovereign will.

YOUR SPIRIT WARNED THEM THROUGH YOUR PROPHETS. This writer has written thirty sermon manuscripts in a series from the Book of Jeremiah which will be included in THE SERMON NOTEBOOK (posted on the PastorLife.com web site by Dr. Mike Minnix of the Georgia Baptist Convention). The title of this series is *Jeremiah's America*. Two passages from Jeremiah, alluded to earlier, will illustrate this significance of the Spirit of God speaking through His prophets, and at the same time lend themselves to an application in America today.

“The word of the Lord came to me(The Spirit of God speaking through His prophet): “Go and announce directly to Jerusalem that **this is what the Lord says: I remember the loyalty of your youth**, your love as a bride —how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. (3) Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of His harvest. All who ate of it found themselves guilty; disaster came on them.” **This is the Lord’s declaration.** (4) **Hear the word of the Lord**, house of Jacob and all families of the house of Israel. (5) **Here is what the Lord says: *What fault did your fathers find in Me that they went so far from Me, followed worthless idols, and became worthless themselves?*** (6) ***They stopped asking: Where is the Lord*** who brought us from the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, through a land of drought and darkness, a land no one traveled through and where no one lived? (7) I brought you to a fertile land to eat its fruit and bounty, but after you entered, you defiled My land; you made My inheritance detestable. (8) ***The priests quit asking: Where is the Lord?*** The experts in the law no longer knew Me, and the rulers rebelled against Me. The prophets prophesied by Baal and followed useless idols” (Jer 2:1-8).

The point we should not miss here is that the people who listened to Ezra and Nehemiah were descended from those who had heard these words that God sent Jeremiah to deliver. They could not plead ignorance. The issue is was iniquity. The second passage is from the Temple sermon found in the seventh chapter of Jeremiah:

“This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: (2) “Stand in the gate of the house of the Lord and there call out this word: Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who enter through these gates to worship the Lord.

(3) **“This is what the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: *Correct your ways and your deeds, and I will allow you to live in this place.*** (4) Do not trust deceitful words, **chanting: *This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.*** (5) Instead, if you really change your ways and your actions, if you act justly toward one another, (6) if you no longer oppress the alien, the fatherless, and the widow and no longer shed innocent blood in this place or follow other gods, bringing harm on yourselves, (7) I will allow you to live in this place, the land I gave to your ancestors forever and ever. (8) But look, *you keep trusting in deceitful words that cannot help*” (Jer 7:1-8, emphasis added).

9:32 - SO NOW. *“So now, our God—the great, mighty, and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant— do not view lightly all the hardships that have afflicted us, our kings and leaders, our priests and prophets, our ancestors and all Your people, from the days of the Assyrian kings until today.”* Nehemiah appeals to the Lord to consider all

the hardships that had fallen upon His Chosen People; from the time of the Assyrian invasion when the Northern Kingdom was destroyed in 722 B.C. by Sargon II, the three invasions of Judah by Babylon and the seventy years of the Captivity, and now their subjugation to Persian kings.

9:33-35 - YOU ARE RIGHTEOUS. *“You are righteous concerning all that has come on us, because You have acted faithfully, while we have acted wickedly. (34) Our kings, leaders, priests, and ancestors did not obey Your law or listen to Your commandments and warnings You gave them. (35) When they were in their kingdom, with Your abundant goodness You gave them, and in the spacious and fertile land You set before them, they would not serve You or turn from their wicked ways.”* God is righteous. The Scripture is clear: there is none righteous but God. Because of His righteousness, Nehemiah trusts Him to deal faithfully with them. They had acted wickedly, according to their nature, but He had dealt with them in righteousness, according to His nature and purpose. Nehemiah confesses that his people had continually rebelled against God, but He had always dealt with them in righteousness. This has an application in any age. It applies, not only to nations, but also to individuals. God has blessed America as no other nation in history, but today America is in a moral and spiritual tail-spin, and the secularists are presenting the war against God in a positive light, thanks to the classrooms that have forced prayer and Scripture out, a liberal media with a distinct anti-Christian bias, judicial myopia, and politicians who are more concerned with their re-election than God’s claim on America. For example, in states that vote overwhelmingly for a marriage bill that identifies marriage as a union between one man and one woman, judges have often ruled against the majority.

9:36 - SLAVES IN THE LAND. *“Here we are today, slaves in the land You gave our ancestors so that they could enjoy its fruit and its goodness. Here we are—slaves in it!”* Nehemiah might have been a powerful official in the service of the king of Persia, but in his prayer he identifies with his kinsmen. His heart is broken by the fact that they are slaves in the land God had given Abraham 2000 B.C., and even as late as Jeremiah’s day (626 - 586 B.C.) He promised that they would be permitted to live in the land if they obeyed Him. They are paid a price for their rebellion. These Jews of Nehemiah’s day should learn from the history of God’s dealings with their ancestors. Why would they not want to learn from their experience? In Romans One, Paul provides some insight when he stresses that those who are deceived by idolatry profess to be wise but they have become fools.

9:37 - WE ARE IN GREAT DISTRESS. *“Its abundant harvest goes to the kings You have set over us, because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and our livestock as they please. We are in great distress.”* Nehemiah is still praying. He acknowledges their deplorable plight. The sad thing is that from the sixth century B. C. until the time of Christ, they would know no sovereignty as a nation, and from A. D. 70 until 1946 there would be no homeland for the Jews. The price of rebellion can be as severe as the blessings of obedience are glorious.

9:38 - A BINDING AGREEMENT. *“In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement in writing on a sealed document containing the names of our leaders, Levites, and priests.”* A binding

agreement is a covenant. In this case, they “put it in writing” on a sealed document containing the names of the leaders. They are sincere in their commitment. The names of their leaders will follow.

Chapter 10

The Binding Agreement (9:38-10:39)

10:1 - THOSE WHOSE SEAL. Those whose seals were on the document were: Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah, 2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 3 Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, 4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, 5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, 8 Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These were the priests. 9 The Levites were: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel, 10 and their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiiah, Hanan, 11 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, 12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, 13 Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu. 14 The leaders of the people were: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, 15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, 16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, 17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, 18 Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, 19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, 20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, 21 Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, 22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, 23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, 24 Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, 25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, 26 Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, 27 Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

10:28 - THE REST OF THE PEOPLE. *“The rest of the people—the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants, along with their wives, sons, and daughters, everyone who is able to understand and who has separated themselves from the surrounding peoples to obey the law of God—join with their noble brothers and commit themselves with a sworn oath to follow the law of God given through God’s servant Moses and to carefully obey all the commands, ordinances, and statutes of the Lord our Lord.”* The names listed in verses 1-27 were affixed to the written agreement. All the leaders and their families “join with their noble brothers and commit themselves with a sworn oath to follow the law of God given through God’s servant Moses.” This covenant shows a strong commitment to the Mosaic Law. If they had been looking for an escape clause, they would not have committed themselves to “obey all the commands, ordinances, and statutes of the Lord our Lord.” What we are seeing here is more than a modern day revival service when the evangelist extends an invitation that is designed to get half the congregation to come forward to “rededicate their lives to the Lord.” Some of those “decisions” never lasted through the night. What we are seeing here is a revival of mammoth proportions, a genuine spiritual awakening. What we are seeing here is both a formula and a test of genuine revival. If the revival does not effect the behavior of individuals and impact the community in which they live we need to find some word other than revival to associate with it.

Details of the Covenant

10:30 - MARRIAGE. *“We will not give our daughters in marriage to the surrounding peoples and will not take their daughters as wives for our sons.”* They had been doing this before Nehemiah arrived in the land. Intermarriage with foreigners, was a clear violation of the Mosaic Law, but they were making no attempt to keep the laws, statutes, and ordinances of God. Miscegenation may be defined as crossbreeding, intermarriage between people of different races. It must be stressed, that no matter how much some have tried to bend any reference to this as racial, the primary issue was intermarriage between the people of the Covenant and pagans. They were forbidden to intermarry with other Semitic peoples who did not commit themselves to the Yahweh.

Israel was chosen by Yahweh to be a holy people, separate from the pagan people who surrounded them. In the New Testament we learn that Christians are not to be unequally yoked with non-Christians. Both the Mosaic Law and the New Testament need to be applied in modern day America. Parents need to have the backbone to say, “No Virginia, you are not going to change him! If he will not go to church with you and show that he has made a commitment to the Word of God while you are dating, he is most certainly not going to do it after you are married.”

10:31 - SABBATH. *“When the surrounding peoples bring merchandise or any kind of grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or a holy day. We will also leave the land uncultivated in the seventh year and will cancel every debt.”* This is a pledge to honor the commands and statutes God had given them through Moses at Sinai. They agreed not to buy or sell merchandise on the Sabbath Day or on other holy days. What does the Sabbath, or the Lord’s Day mean to the “average” church member today? Is it a day to:

Go to church and the cafeteria?

Go to church and the cafeteria and to the Mall?

Go to church and the cafeteria and to the Mall and a movie?

Go to church and the cafeteria and to the Mall and a movie and home in time for the game?

Many church members think nothing of missing every Sunday evening. They go to Sunday School (that may be the social event of the week for some), then to the morning worship service. Then the rest of the day is a day for recreation or business. Some people have to work on Sunday or lose their jobs. Some jobs require Sunday work, especially those in the medical field or law enforcement. We thank the Lord for them. Many others abuse the Lord’s Day for their own profit and recreation. A lot of church members think nothing of leaving church, grabbing a quick bite of lunch and heading for the lake or the golf course on Sunday. Is it possible that we may see not genuine revival in America until we commit the Lord’s Day to the Lord? Books on revival do not often deal with the Lord’s Day. Maybe they should.

The Israelites of Nehemiah's day pledged to do something else their ancestors had refused to do: "We will also leave the land uncultivated in the seventh year and will cancel every debt." They pledged to honor the Sabbath Year. At the time of the Babylonian Captivity, Jeremiah delivered the word from the Lord that they would be in Babylon for seventy years.

It seems that Israel had not observed the Sabbath Year for 490 years! The land would lie fallow one year for every Sabbath Year they had missed. The arm of the Lord is as long as the memory of the Lord.

10:32-33 - WE WILL IMPOSE. *"We will impose the following commandments on ourselves: To give an eighth of an ounce of silver yearly for the service of the house of our God: (33) the bread displayed before the Lord, the daily grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbath and New Moon offerings, the appointed festivals, the holy things, the sin offerings to atone for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God."* These people enter this covenant voluntarily. The bread displayed before the Lord is literally, rows of bread. According to the law, everyone over twenty years of age was to pay half a shekel to the temple (Exod. 30:13, 14). "Due to the general poverty, however, the tax was reduced to one-third of a shekel, or the shekel in postexilic times was heavier" [NCWB].

THE DAILY GRAIN OFFERING was a sacrifice given along with animal sacrifices, or by itself. A portion was burned and the remainder eaten by priests and worshipers.

THE REGULAR BURNT OFFERING was burned to ashes. It was offered in worship, seeking God's favor, or to avoid judgment.

SIN OFFERINGS, providing cleansing from sin, were very important offerings.

ATONE FOR ISRAEL. Sins offerings were given to atone for the sins of the people. In the Old Testament, the word has to do with propitiation, expiation, and reconciliation through the offering of a substitutionary sacrifice. In the New Testament, atonement comes through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary summarizes the terms of this written agreement, or covenant into which these Israelites entered with Yahweh. The stipulations they spelled out in the agreement include:

- (a) avoidance of intermarriages (v. 30; cf. Ex. 34:16; Deut. 7:3-4),
- (b) keeping the Sabbath and the sabbatical year (Neh. 10:31; cf. Ex. 20:8-11; 23:11-12; 31:15-17; Lev. 25:2-7; Deut. 15:1-3), and
- (c) supporting the temple service by giving a third of a shekel (about one-eighth of an ounce) annually (Neh. 10:32-33). According to Exodus 30:11-16 the temple gift was to be one-half a shekel annually, but here it was valued

lightly. These temple offerings gave the priests and Levites money for maintaining the bread on the table of the Presence (Ex. 35:13; 39:36; Num. 4:7), for making various offerings, for celebrating monthly and annual festivals, and carrying out other duties. (See comments on Neh. 13:10-11 regarding the people's failure to keep this commitment.) [BKC].

Keil & Delitzsch Commentary adds that

“The establishment of such a tax for the expenses of worship, does not justify the view that the contributions promised by Artaxerxes in his edict, Ezra 7:20f., of things necessary to worship had ceased, and that the congregation had now to defray the expenses from their own resources. For it may readily be supposed, that besides the assistance afforded by the king, the congregation might also esteem it needful to furnish a contribution, to meet the increased requirements of worship, and thus to augment the revenues of the temple,—the royal alms being limited to a certain amount (see Ezra 7:22) [K& D].

10:34 - DONATION OF THE WOOD. *“We have cast lots among the priests, Levites, and people for the donation of wood by our ancestral houses at the appointed times each year. They are to bring the wood to our God’s house to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law.”* While a lot of information is given about the priests and the sacrifices, very little has been written up to this point concerning the wood which was essential for offering burnt offerings. The law prescribed that wood should be constantly burning on the altar, and that the priest should burn wood on it every morning, and burn the burnt-offering with it (Lev 6:12f). The New Commentary on the Whole Bible carries an excellent summary concerning the provision of wood for the sacrifices:

“Previously this had been done by the Nethinim or temple servants (“Nethinim,” NBD); but too few of them returned, so the work was assigned as stated. **While Leviticus 6:8-13 specified that the fire of the altar was to burn continually, it made no prescription as to how or who would provide this wood.** Thus a plan is implemented here (Clines). Later, the duty became very important, and Josephus tells (Jewish War, 2.17.6) of the Xylophoria, or the solemn and appointed times at which the people brought up wood to the temple” [NCWB, emphasis added].

Keil & Delitzsch offers amplification:

“The law gave no directions concerning the procuring of the wood; yet the rulers of the people must, at all events, have always provided for the regular delivery of the necessary quantity. Nehemiah now gives orders, as he himself tells us, Neh 13:31, which make this matter the business of the congregation, and the several houses have successively to furnish a contribution, in the order decided by casting lots. The words, “at times appointed, year by year,” justify the conclusion that the order was

settled for several years, and not that all the different houses contributed in each year” [K& D].

10:35 - FIRSTFRUITS. *“We will bring the firstfruits of our land and of every fruit tree to the Lord’s house year by year.”* The firstfruits were exactly what the name implies, the first fruits of the harvest, with the idea being that they brought the Yahweh the best of the harvest. He is the source of all our blessings and the offering of the firstfruits acknowledges that.

10:36 - THE FIRSTBORN. *“We will also bring the firstborn of our sons and our livestock, as prescribed by the law, and will bring the firstborn of our herds and flocks to the house of our God, to the priests who serve in our God’s house.”* The first born son was special to the ancient Israelite family. He represented both God’s blessings and the very epitome of human vigor (Gen. 49:3; Ps. 78:51). The blessing of the first born son had its roots in the memory of the death of Egypt’s first born son and the salvation of the first born of Israel. According to the Law,

“All the firstborn of Israel, both of man and beast, belonged to Yahweh (Ex. 13:2,15; compare 12:12-16). This meant that the people of Israel attached unusual value to the eldest son and assigned special privileges and responsibilities to him. He was presented to the Lord when he was a month old. Since he belonged to the Lord, it was necessary for the father to buy back the child from the priest at a redemption price not to exceed five shekels (Num. 18:16). The husband of several wives would have to redeem the firstborn of each” [Holman Bible Dictionary].

10:37 - ONE-TENTH OFFERING. *“We will bring a loaf from our first batch of dough to the priests at the storerooms of the house of our God. We will also bring the firstfruits of our grain offerings, of every fruit tree, and of the new wine and oil. A tenth of our land’s produce from our lands belongs to the Levites, for the Levites are to collect the one-tenth offering in all our agricultural towns.”* The offerings of first-fruits were brought into the chambers of the temple where they were stored, and distributed to the priests for their support. One tenth of the produce of all the tillable land would be collected in all the agricultural town (grain, wine, olive oil) and distributed to the priests for their support.

10:38 - A PRIEST OF AARONIC DESCENT. *“A priest of Aaronic descent must accompany the Levites when they collect the tenth, and the Levites must take a tenth of this offering to the storerooms of the treasury in the house of our God.”* With regards to the offerings and to the priesthood, the people pledged to obey the Law God had given them. There is actually little or nothing new here. They had not been observing the Law but now they pledge to do so. The stipulation that a priest of the Aaronic line would accompany the Levites when they collected the offering was a wise decision because “the presence of a priest would help prevent graft and deceit on the part of both Levites and people” [NCWB]

10:39 - WE WILL NOT NEGLECT. *“For the Israelites and the Levites are to bring the contributions of grain, new wine, and oil to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are kept and where the priests, gatekeepers, and singers serve. We will not neglect the house of our God.”* The agreement into which these leaders entered under the leadership of Nehemiah was a covenant to return to the Law under which they were supposed to live their lives. Their ancestors had refused to obey the Law, and up until this time these people had neglected its statutes and ordinances.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary summarizes the terms of this written agreement, or covenant into which these Israelites entered with Yahweh. Some of the stipulations are given in the comments on verse 32-33. Other responsibilities to which the leaders and people pledged themselves were:

“(d) contributing wood for the fire on the altar of burnt offering, which was to burn continually (Lev. 6:12-13),

“(e) giving the firstfruits of their crops (Ex. 23:19; Deut. 26:1-3) and their firstborn... sons and animals (Num. 18:15-17; Deut. 12:6) to the Lord, and

“(f) paying annual tithes (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:21-24). The Levites were to tithe the tithes they received (Neh. 10:38-39; cf. Num. 18:26) to help provide for the priests’ needs. The final statement of the agreement, We will not neglect the house of our God (Neh. 10:39),

“summarizes obligations (c) through (f). Under Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s leadership the people had been led to place a higher priority on spiritual things, including the care of the restored temple. This was even more important than restoring the city’s walls” [BKC].

ILLUSTRATION: When I was a student at Mississippi College, I led the Baptist Student Union (BSU - now Baptist Christian Ministries) mission trip to the Hinds County Jail in Jackson for 2 ½ years and I went on my own to the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman every Sunday morning and preached at one of the camps for something over a year. I also served as student pastor of the Dockery Baptist Church, Cleveland, MS. I took groups on the BSU bus to Jackson and assigned places for students who went with me. I often went to the maximum security cells myself, though I preached to those in the bullpen from time to time and at times I witnessed in juvenile.

I had met Rocky and his friend, twelve year olds from New Orleans, the week before and wanted to follow up on the visit. Every time I asked if they were Christians, if they believed in Jesus, if they believed in God, I got the same response, “I was baptized when I was a baby.” The second time I talked with these boys, I had just begun when two friends came up to me and asked if they could trade places with me. The man in the second cell down the hall had intimidated them. I had no choice, so I walked past the empty cell and stopped in front of a cell where a man sat on a cot at the back of the cell. There was a commode in one corner and maybe a wash basin. The man sat with his

head down in a manner that said, “I don’t want to be bothered.”

I realize now how naive I was, but at the time I did not take the time to try to figure out what an adult was doing in Juvenile, or why there was an empty cell on either side of him. Years later, when I began to hear about homosexuals, I realized that there was a reason the authorities would separate him from the bull-pen and keep a vacant cell between him and the two boys. I began by introducing myself and asking his name. I will call him Mike here. I asked where he was from and discovered that he had grown up within an hour of my home, and about twenty minutes from the Quitman County, MS, ASC office (a division of the USDA) in Marks, where I worked every summer. After introductions, Mike had settled down, so I asked, “Mike, do you believe in God?” He said, “Yeah, I believe in God.” That is when I felt compelled to follow up with a question I was not planning to ask: “Mike, you have said that you believe in God. Let me ask you another question: Do you believe God?” Mike got up from his cot and started toward me. I immediately thought of the students Mike had frightened and quickly calculated the distance back to the wall behind me and realized that he could not reach through the bars and touch me if I stepped back. However, a sudden move back might have sent the wrong signal and I would have lost any hope of reaching him. So, I stood right in front of the bars as Mike came to a stop and raised both hands (as though he might be planning to reach through the bars).

I stood watching Mike as he came to a stop and raised his hands. I was relieved when his hands came to rest on two bars on either side of my face, opposite each shoulder. He had been waking with his head down, and even though I was looking into his face, I was not looking into his eyes. Mike looked up and asked, “Johnny, can you get me a Bible?” As I recall, he got mine. Mike came there believing there is a God. After that day, Mike knew God. Francis Schaeffer wrote about those to whom God is but a memory. A lot of people remember that their parents believed in God, and they remember going to church when they were growing up, but they do not know God.

On December 12, 2005, I was driving through Monroe, LA when I hit the “Power” button on the radio and heard Rush Limbaugh. His caller at the moment was a very articulate lady from Virginia, who wanted him to explain why he rejected the claims of environmentalists that we are causing global warming and that we are a threat to the earth. He spent so much time with the answer and the follow up responses that he had to take two commercial breaks back to back.

Informed listeners and readers should know that David Limbaugh is a committed and informed Christian, as were their parents and grandparents. Rush often gives me the impression that he believes there is a God, but that he may not really know God. However, when the lady asked why he did not believe we could destroy the environment, he surprised me with his answer. He said, “let me lay it out for you. I believe in creation. I believe in God.” Then he proceeded to tell her just how marvelous and detailed creation was. For example, he said that the earth is 93 million miles from the sun. If it were 95 million miles from the sun we would all freeze to death. If it were 90 million miles from the sun we would all be sizzling. He added that it was for this reason that he did not believe there was life anywhere else in space. This earth is exactly where it had to be for us to survive.

Rush Limbaugh added that the atmosphere is only 15,000 feet thick around the earth (compared to 93 million miles to the sun). That is just three miles! Yet, no matter what man has done to the environment, no matter what nature has done to it, it is still there. Man cannot create the atmosphere, he cannot cause a tsunami, he cannot cause an earthquake, he cannot shift the continents. Throughout the centuries, the environment has cleaned its self up, and it will continue to do so. Rush went through a litany of reasons he believed man is not going to destroy the environment. He argues that the “environmentalist wackos” are liberals with a political agenda, not people whose primary purpose is to protect the earth. Many who contribute to their work are sincere, however.

Having spent 25 years reading books and other materials from creation scientists, I followed Limbaugh’s reasoning, one point in particular resonating with me. The earth was strategically located for life at 93 million miles from the sun. Today, they call it Intelligent Design - seldom giving credit where credit is due. Henry Morris and Duane Gish have been hammering away at the same theme for a half a century and most modern day creationists are indebted to them, as well as a number of other creation scientists who laid the foundation - and who do not apologize for subscribing to a literal Genesis account of creation.

Rush Limbaugh remembers God. David Limbaugh knows God. I trust that Rush also knows God, but sometimes he does not talk like he really knows Him personally. An elderly lady who is very close to my wife Becky and me told me that the last time she talked with their mother, she was very happy with David’s relationship with the Lord, but she was worried about Rush. The people Nehemiah found in Jerusalem when he returned remembered God. They believed there was a God. Based on this written agreement, this covenant they made before God, it would seem now that many of them had come to know God.

Chapter 11

The Resettling of Jerusalem

11:1 - THE LEADERS...STAYED IN JERUSALEM. *“Now the leaders of the people stayed in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots for one out of ten to come and live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the other nine-tenths remained in their towns. (2) The people praised all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.”* Nehemiah does not provide information as to the reason Jerusalem was so sparsely settled while towns and villages were densely settled. A logical explanation might be that when the remnant of the Jews returned from the Babylonian Captivity in 536 B. C., they found the city of Jerusalem was a desolate place, the walls having been broken down and the city looted and razed by

the Babylonian troops under Nebuzaridan, commander of Nebuchadnezzar's army. One of the most important structures of a city like Jerusalem was a great high, thick protective wall, complete with gates. Jerusalem and for a long time had neither a complete wall nor gates. Many of the people may well have decided to live in the small towns and villages because that put them closer to their vineyards and grazing land. Now that Nehemiah and the other Jews had rebuilt the walls and reestablished worship and the sacrificial system, and rebuilt the walls of the city, they needed larger numbers living in the city help guard the walls, provide the sacrifices needed for worship, and to keep the fire burning for the sacrifices. They also needed enough people there to provide the needed protection for the worshipers.

The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament (Vol. 4: Ezra-Job) offers an excellent commentary on verses 1 and 2:

“Vv. 1 and 2 narrate the carrying out of Nehemiah's resolution, Neh 7:4, to make Jerusalem more populous, and follow 7:5 as to matter, but the end of Neh 10 as to time. For while Nehemiah, after the completion of the wall, was occupied with the thought of bringing into the thinly populated capital a larger number of inhabitants, and had for this purpose convoked a public assembly, that a list of the whole Israelite population of the towns of Benjamin and Judah might be taken in hand, the seventh month of the year arrived, in which all the people assembled at Jerusalem to perform those acts of worship and solemnities (described 8-10) in which this month abounded. Hence it was not till after the termination of these services that Nehemiah was able to carry out the measures he had resolved on. For there can be no doubt that vv. 1 and 2 of the present chapter narrate the execution of these measures” [K & D].

One in ten of all the people in the land was appointed by lot to dwell in Jerusalem, and the remaining ninety percent lived in the other towns and villages throughout the area. The people blessed the men who were willing to move into Jerusalem and dwell there. According to Nehemiah 7:5, this is something God put it into Nehemiah's heart.

11:3 - HEADS OF THE PROVINCES WHO STAYED IN JERUSALEM. *“These are the heads of the province who stayed in Jerusalem (but in the villages of Judah each lived on his own property in their towns—the Israelites, priests, Levites, temple servants, and descendants of Solomon's servants—*

11:4 while some of the descendants of Judah and Benjamin settled in Jerusalem): Judah's descendants: Athaiah son of Uziah, son of Zechariah, son of Amariah, son of Shephatiah, son of Mahalalel, of Perez's descendants;

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

11:6 The total number of Perez's descendants, who settled in Jerusalem, was 468 capable men.

11:7 These were Benjamin's descendants: Sallu son of Meshullam, son of Joed, son of Pedaiiah, son of Kolaiah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, son of Jeshaiiah,
 11:8 and after him Gabbai [and] Sallai: 928.
 11:9 Joel son of Zichri was the officer over them, and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in command over the city.
 11:10 The priests: Jedaiah son of Joiarib, Jachin, and
 11:11 Seraiah son of Hilkiyah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, the chief official of God's house,
 11:12 and their relatives who did the work at the temple: 822. Adaiah son of Jeroham, son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah
 11:13 and his relatives, the leaders of families: 242. Amashsai son of Azarel, son of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, son of Immer,
 11:14 and their relatives, capable men: 128. Zabdiel son of Haggadolim, was their chief.
 11:15 The Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni;
 11:16 and Shabbethai and Jozabad, from the leaders of the Levites, who supervised the work outside the house of God;
 11:17 Mattaniah son of Mica, son of Zabdi, son of · Asaph, the leader who began the thanksgiving in prayer; Bakbukiah, second among his relatives; and Abda son of Shammua, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun.
 11:18 All the Levites in the holy city: 284.
 11:19 The gatekeepers: Akkub, Talmon, and their relatives, who guarded the gates: 172.
 11:20 The rest of Israel, the priests, and the Levites were in all the villages of Judah, each on his own inherited property.
 11:21 The temple servants lived on Ophel; Ziha and Gishpa supervised the temple servants.

The Levites and Priests

11:22 The leader of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, son of Hashabiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Mica, of the descendants of Asaph, who were singers for the service of God's house.
 11:23 For there was a command of the king regarding them, and an ordinance regulating the singers' daily tasks.
 11:24 Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, of the descendants of Zerah son of Judah, was the king's agent in every matter concerning the people.
 11:25 As for the farming settlements with their fields: Some of Judah's descendants lived in Kiriath-arba and its villages, Dibon and its villages, and Jekabzeel and its villages,
 11:26 in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth-pelet,
 11:27 Hazar-shual, and Beer-sheba and its villages;
 11:28 in Ziklag and Meconah and its villages,
 11:29 in En-rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, and
 11:30 Zanoah and Adullam with their villages; in Lachish with its fields and Azekah and its villages.
 So they settled from Beer-sheba to the Valley of Hinnom.

11:31 Benjamin's descendants: from Geba, Michmash, Aija, and Bethel—and its villages,
11:32 Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah,
11:33 Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim,
11:34 Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat,
11:35 Lod, and Ono, the valley of the craftsmen.
11:36 Some of the Judean divisions of Levites were in Benjamin.

Chapter 12

List of Priests and Levites Continued

12:1 - *“These are the priests and Levites who went up with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and with Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,”*

12:2 - Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,

12:3 - Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,

12:4 - Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah,

12:5 - Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah,

12:6 - Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah,

12:7 - Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah. These were the leaders of the priests and their relatives in the days of Jeshua.

12:8 - The Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah— he and his relatives were in charge of the praise songs.

12:9 - Bakbukiah, Unni, and their relatives [stood]opposite them in the services.

12:10 - Jeshua fathered Joiakim, Joiakim fathered Eliashib, Eliashib fathered Joiada,

12:11 - Joiada fathered Jonathan, and Jonathan fathered Jaddua.

12:12 - In the days of Joiakim, the leaders of the priestly families were: Meraiah of Seraiah, Hananiah of Jeremiah,

12:13 - Meshullam of Ezra, Jehohanan of Amariah,

12:14 - Jonathan of Malluchi, Joseph of Shebaniah,

12:15 - Adna of Harim, Helkai of Meraioth,

12:16 - Zechariah of Iddo, Meshullam of Ginnethon,

12:17 - Zichri of Abijah, Piltai of Moadiah, of Miniamin,

12:18 - Shammua of Bilgah, Jehonathan of Shemaiah,

12:19 - Mattenai of Joiarib, Uzzi of Jedaiah,

12:20 - Kallai of Sallai, Eber of Amok,

12:21 - Hashabiah of Hilkiyah, and Nethanel of Jedaiah.

12:22 - *“In the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, the leaders of the families of the Levites and priests were recorded while Darius the Persian ruled.”*

12:23 - *“Levi’s descendants, the leaders of families, were recorded in the Book of the Historical Records during the days of Johanan son of Eliashib.”*

12:24 - *“The leaders of the Levites—Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua son of Kadmiel, along with their relatives opposite them—gave praise and thanks, division by division, as David the man of God had prescribed.”*

12:25 - *“[This included]Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, and Obadiah. Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms at the gates.”*

12:26 - *“These [served]in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest and scribe.”*

Dedication of the Wall

12:27-29 - DEDICATION OF THE WALL. *“At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sent for the Levites wherever they lived and brought them to Jerusalem to celebrate the joyous dedication with thanksgiving and singing accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres. (28) The singers gathered from the region around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netophathites, (29) from Beth-gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth, for they had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem.”* At the time of the dedication of the wall, the Levites were brought to Jerusalem and Levitical ministries were restored.

12:30-31 - THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES. *“After the priests and Levites had purified themselves, they purified the people, the gates, and the wall. (31) Then I brought the leaders of Judah up on top of the wall, and I appointed two large processions that gave thanks. One went to the right on the wall, toward the Dung Gate.”* The New Commentary on the Whole Bible offers the following note:

“Chronologically, this service is probably tied to 6:15 (Fensham) This ceremony of dedication was an act of worship by Nehemiah, expressing thanks to God both for allowing the walls and gates to be completed and for choosing Jerusalem to be his holy city. The temple was the place where God showed himself in a special way. After many years of ruin and lack of proper worship, this dedication ceremonially expressed the fact that both the city and its temple were being returned to their rightful master. Leaders and Levitical singers from all parts of the country, as well as a huge assembly of people, marched in solemn procession around the city walls, stopping at intervals to sing praises, offer sacrifices, and pray that God would continue to give Jerusalem his special presence and blessing” [NCWB].

Nehemiah assembled two great choirs to sing thanks (see vv. 8, 27). The number in each choir is not mentioned, but we may assume that the two choirs began near the Valley Gate. It may not have been coincidental that this was the place where Nehemiah began and ended his nighttime inspection of the ruined walls months earlier (2:13-15). The Bible Knowledge Commentary provides an interesting overview of this passage:

“The first procession moved counterclockwise on the southern and eastern wall toward the Dung Gate (12:31) and past the Fountain Gate up to the Water Gate. Because both choirs entered the temple (v. 40), the first one may have proceeded on the wall up to the East Gate (see the map “Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah,” near 3:1). The procession included the following: Ezra, who led the group (12:36), the choir, Hoshaiiah... half the leaders of Judah (v. 32), priests (seven of them named and some with trumpets), and Zechariah and his eight associates... with musical instruments.

“The second choir moved clockwise, presumably starting at the Valley Gate and going past various gates and towers (see comments on chap. 3) till they arrived at the Gate of the Guard. This group included the choir, Nehemiah, half the officials (12:40), priests (seven of them named and with trumpets), and eight others who apparently were singers. The parallel arrangement of the two processions is striking.

“Their walking on top of the wall (vv. 31, 38) visually demonstrated that the walls were strong, a rejoinder to Tobiah’s earlier mocking claim that the wall would be so weak that even a fox on top of it would break it down (4:3). Perhaps Nehemiah wanted Tobiah to see that with God’s help the project was completed in spite of his and others’ opposition. Since the people now carried no spears, swords, or bows (cf. 4:16, 18), the enemies had no doubt withdrawn. Seeing the two large processions marching on the walls must have been an impressive sight” [BKC].

12:32 - Hoshaiiah and half the leaders of Judah followed: 12:33 - Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 12:34 - Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah.

12:35 - “Some of the priests’ sons had trumpets: Zechariah son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph,

12:36 - “and his relatives: Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David, the man of God. Ezra the scribe went in front of them.

12:37 - “At the Fountain Gate they climbed the steps of the city of David on the ascent of the wall [and went above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east.

12:38 - “The second thanksgiving procession went to the left, and I followed it with half the people along the top of the wall, past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall,

12:39 - “above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Old Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate. They stopped at the Gate of the Guard.

12:40 - “The two thanksgiving processions stood in the house of God. So [did]I and half of the officials accompanying me, as well as

12:41 - “the priests: Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets;

12:42 - “and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. Then the singers sang, with Jezrahiah as the leader.

12:43 - “*On that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great*

joy. The women and children also celebrated, and Jerusalem's rejoicing was heard far away." Nehemiah has given a summary account of the people and key events associated with this great thanksgiving celebration. They worshiped with "great sacrifices" and rejoiced because of all the Lord's blessings. The thanksgiving ceremonies were at once a worship celebration and a response to worship of the true and living God.

Support for the Levites

12:44-45 - THEY PERFORMED THE SERVICE. *"On that same day men were placed in charge of the rooms that housed the supplies, contributions, firstfruits, and tithes. The legally required portions for the priests and Levites were gathered from the village fields, because Judah was grateful to the priests and Levites who were serving. (45) They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, along with the singers and gatekeepers, as David and his son Solomon had prescribed."* The walls have been rebuilt, providing a safe place for the priests and Levites to lead the people in worshipping Yahweh. At this point, worship is restored after so long a time. They were not only following the Mosaic Law, they were implementing the form and format for worship begun by David and Solomon.

12:46-47 - IN THE DAYS OF DAVID. *"For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there were leaders of the singers and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. (47) So in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers. They also set aside daily portions for the Levites, and the Levites set aside daily portions for the descendants of Aaron."* The place of music in worship has deep roots and a long history. Music is especially linked to praise and thanksgiving. In the New Testament, we are given more information about the singing of hymns in Christian services than in Judaism, but we do know Jewish people still sing beautiful hymns. The Book of Psalms was the basic hymnal for Hebrew worship. Anyone reading the Psalms can appreciate that. Music is a vital part of worship today, but we must be very careful not to let it take the place of the two most essential emphasis in the New Testament: preaching and teaching the Word of God (the importance of prayer is assumed here in both traditional and contemporary worship).

Chapter 13

Nehemiah's Reforms Continue

13:1-3 - THE BOOK OF MOSES. *"At that time the book of Moses was read publicly to the people. The command was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, (2) because they did not meet the Israelites with food and water. Instead, they hired Balaam against them to curse them, but our God turned the curse into a blessing. (3) When*

they heard the law, they separated all those of mixed descent from Israel.” There were no printing presses in that day and the only way people might know the Word of God in most cases was to hear it read in a public gathering like this. The Word of God had been neglected, just as it had in the days before a copy of the Law was found during the reign of Josiah. In both cases it was when the people read the Scripture that revival came to the land.

That the people who hear the Word of God must apply it in their own personal lives goes without saying. Joshua gives us a good example of how the Word of God was read and applied in his day. In the closing section of the Book of Deuteronomy, we find God telling Moses to write what He told him in the book. Joshua tells us that they read what Moses had written and whatever Moses wrote, they did. God told Joshua what to tell the people:

“Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their fathers to give them as an inheritance. (7) **Above all, be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left,** so that you will have success wherever you go. (8) **This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to recite it day and night, so that you may carefully observe everything written in it.** For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. (9) Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh 1:6-9, HCSB).

The Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, the perfect Word of the perfect God. As I often say, if God could not have produced a perfect Book why call Him God; and if he could do it and wouldn't do it, what kind of God is He? I have been active in the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention for many years, and I have witnessed the transition from the time when we were derided for holding an inerrant view of Scripture, to the next phase when I heard, “I really believe the Bible is inerrant, but I just don't want anyone to try to make me say so;” to the time when we are hearing, “We believe the Bible is inerrant, too!” The issue may not be as much theological as political with some. At the same time, there are liberals who do not believe the Bible is inerrant, or even authoritative.

ILLUSTRATION. When the Episcopal church elected an openly homosexual priest to the office of Bishop, two priests appeared on the Hannity and Colmes program on Fox News to defend the action of their church. When Sean Hannity asked, “But what about what the Bible says?”, one of the priest smugly, quipped, “The Bible is not our authority!” Let me be quick to add that many Episcopalians were not at all happy with that action by their church. I talked with Judge Sharon Marchman of Monroe, LA, and she told me that her pastor was very much opposed to the election of the homosexual bishop, as was she.

ILLUSTRATION. On the Fox New channel DAYSIDE (Dec. 13, 2005), the hosts and guests discussed the execution of “Tookie” Williams in California in the early morning hours the same day. The step-mother of one of the four victims of the man convicted of those vicious murders expressed her conviction that the execution was right and just, and consistent with the California state laws.

The hosts brought on a very young Catholic priest who addressed her in compassionate words before stating that while he appreciated her grief, he was still against the death penalty because it was an act of violence. Williams forced the step-son of the lady who appeared on the program to lie face down on the floor and then shot him twice in the back. He later bragged about it to friends and laughed at the way the dying man was gurgling. The other murders were also particularly heinous. The violence was committed by Tookie Williams, not the state of California who gave him three medications to put him to sleep, to stop his breathing, and the to stop his heart.

I watched this articulate, sincere, pious, almost child-like priest, as he smiled and said that he had to oppose the execution because it was an act of violence. I wanted to hear him quote his authority. I was recalling the Mosaic Law, in which God prescribed, not a sterile, controlled injection, but a violent stoning for those who committed premeditated murder.

I knew some men who had committed murder in Jackson, Mississippi. One was a premeditated murder, another was a second degree murder (but far more violent). It was a privilege and joy to see both of those men repent and receive Jesus Christ as Savior. I followed up with both of them at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. They owed the state of Mississippi a debt and it was right for them to pay that debt.

William Wetzel was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison, and while serving that sentence he killed another prisoner, a crime for which he was convicted and sentenced to die in the gas chamber. Wetzel was saved before the execution and began reading his Bible. The chaplain told this man had the highest IQ of anyone who had ever set foot on the grounds at Parchman, and he was expanding his knowledge of the Word of God faster than anyone he had ever seen. Many people appealed to the governor to commute the sentence to life without parole so he could spend the rest of his life working with other prisoners. The governor did not grant the petition and he died in the gas chamber in front of witnesses who were convinced that he should have lived. The executioner, for the first time ever, had tears in his eyes. A church member told me he had witnessed a lot of executions, but he would never do it again. Many people felt that he would have been a valuable witness for the Lord if he had been permitted to live, but they did not change their minds about the death penalty.

For the Christian, the issue is not how we feel, but what the Word of God says. The Bible is our authority. Nehemiah, like Joshua, understood that.

The Word of God told these Israelites how to deal with pagans around them. The Scripture is our authority in all relationships. Here, it was on the basis of the Word of God that they knew how to deal with two pagan nations. According to the Law, no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, because they did not meet the Israelites with food and water. Instead, they hired Balaam to curse them, but our God turned the curse into a blessing. The Ammonites and the Moabites, their kinsmen, not only did not offer sustenance, they did all they could to prevent God from fulfilling His covenant and His commitment to His people. To some, it would seem that God is being unfair. It is amazing how many things people find unfair.

An educator called me one day to tell me he had just heard a motivational speaker make a statement he thought I would find interesting. The man said, "It is not a just world, it is just a world." That answer might satisfy the secularist, but it is not scriptural. In fact, this is an especially unjust world, and it has been since the Fall. The prince of this world is not concerned with being fair, he is concerned with striking out against God.

What is the application for us today? We are called to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the world. God wants Gentiles to be saved. What He does not want is for us to turn our serves over to the world. We have enough lost people in the church as it is!

ILLUSTRATION. As soon as Reese and Dawana Little of Monroe, Louisiana, heard about the evacuees from Hurricane Katrina, they made plans to help. They put some people in an apartment and paid the rent and utilities for two months. They were a little surprised when one of them came back to them and asked, "When are you going to get me a car?" They admitted that they were tempted to take them and drop them off at one of the shelters! Their church, St. Albans Episcopal Church, opened the doors to the evacuees, providing both food and shelter for them. They had Muslims staying in their fellowship hall, and they were providing for them. Then, one of their imans came to them and asked if they could hold Islamic classes in their church. Reese said there was no way they were going to hold Islamic classes in his church. Can you imagine what the Muslims would say to a request like that from Christians?

St. Albans needed a soloist to sing at their Christmas Eve worship service, so they asked a music professor from the University of Louisiana, Monroe for a recommendation and he recommended my son Mark. Dawana was excited when she heard Mark's name mentioned and quickly endorsed that recommendation. They had no problem with a Baptist singing in their church, but they refused to have a pagan class taught there. They are to be commended.

13:4 - THE STOREROOM. *"Now before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was a relative of Tobiah (5) and had prepared a large room for him where they had previously stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, and the tenths of grain, new wine, and oil prescribed for the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, along with the contributions for the priests."* Nehemiah had returned to the court of King Artaxerxes "of Babylon" (Actually, the king of Persia, which had defeated Babylon).

13:6-9 - WHILE I WAS NOT IN JERUSALEM. *"While all this was happening, I was not in Jerusalem, because I had returned to King Artaxerxes of Babylon in the thirty-second year of his [reign]. It was only later that I asked the king for a leave of absence (7) so I could return to Jerusalem. Then I discovered the evil that Eliashib had done on behalf of Tobiah by providing him a room in the courts of God's house. (8) I was greatly displeased and threw all of Tobiah's household possessions out of the room. (9) I ordered that the rooms be purified, and I had the articles of the house of God restored there, along with the grain offering and*

frankincense.” While Nehemiah was at Babylon with King Artaxerxes, Eliashib the high priest had compromised the Temple and given to his relative, Tobiah the Ammonite (Neh 2:10; 3:35, “a large chamber in the temple, probably in the fore-court of the temple (v. 7), probably for his use as a dwelling when he visited Jerusalem. . . On his return, Nehemiah immediately cast all the furniture of Tobiah out of this chamber, purified the chambers, and restored them to their proper use as a magazine for the temple stores” [K & D].

One might speculate as to how Tobiah had managed to lead the high priest into such a compromise so soon after Nehemiah’s departure, even if they were related. One commentary I use offers a good overview:

“Now that Nehemiah’s term of office had expired and the governorship was in the charge of Hanani, Nehemiah’s brother (7:2), it may be that no one dared resist Tobiah. Or else, Eliashib saw political merit in this compromise. He probably would not have taken such liberties while Nehemiah was present. After his term of twelve years as governor, during which he repaired and refortified Jerusalem, Nehemiah had returned to his master, Artaxerxes. Then, after some years, he returned to his post in Jerusalem. Bagoki became governor in 407 B.C., thus making Nehemiah’s second term as governor some time after 432 and before 407 B.C. (Bright). The great improprieties, which may have prompted Nehemiah’s return, seem to indicate that he was gone for a considerable time. Ezra is not mentioned in connection with Nehemiah’s second term, suggesting that he was now dead. Giving one of the best rooms of the sacred building to Tobiah, an enemy of the Jews, was evidence of gross corruption, and Nehemiah seized upon this as the object of his first reform. The room was purified and quickly restored to its proper use—that of storing the sacred items of the temple” [NCWB].

13:10 - THE LEVITES. *“I also found out that because the portions for the Levites had not been given, each of the Levites and the singers performing the service had gone back to his own field.”* Things had deteriorated rapidly during the time Nehemiah was gone. This added information illustrates that they had turned completely away from the “written agreement”

13:11 - I REBUKED THE OFFICIALS. *“Therefore, I rebuked the officials, saying, ‘‘Why has the house of God been neglected?’’ I gathered the Levites and singers together and stationed them at their posts.”* It was the duty of the heads of the communities to see that the tithes were brought to the house of God (2:16). This is why Nehemiah rebuked them. Neglect of the house of God has always been a serious matter. Jesus cleansed the temple because those who were responsible for services had turned it into a den of thieves (or house of merchandise).

Nehemiah was led of the Spirit of the Lord to rebuke those who were guilty of this offence. Paul wrote to Timothy, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, **for rebuking, for correcting**, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be

complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17, emphasis added).

13:12 - JUDAH BROUGHT A TENTH. *“Then all Judah brought a tenth of the grain, new wine, and oil into the storehouses.”* The rebuke had the desired effect. All Judah brought the tenth to the storehouses. The tithe was a significant issue, as their response shows. The tenth recognizes God as the source of all their blessings. God does not need our money. If he can create the world, he could create money. They why demand the tithe? Because we need to bring it. Bringing the tithe to the Lord:

- 1) is the honest thing to do - the tenth belongs to Him.
- 2) honors His commandment.
- 3) recognizes His ownership of all we have.

13:13 - I APPOINTED TREASURERS. *“I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiiah of the Levites, with Hanan son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah to assist them, because they were considered trustworthy. They were responsible for the distribution to their colleagues.”* That some of the leaders previously appointed had failed in their responsibilities is clear, but that does not necessarily mean that they had all failed. This time, Nehemiah is giving special attention to those he appoints to be as sure as possible that they are trustworthy.

13:14 - REMEMBER. *“Remember me for this, my God, and don’t erase the good deeds I have done for the house of my God and for its services.”* The word “remember” is an appeal to Yahweh not do destroy all the good deeds that had been done on the temple and its services. This not the only time he makes this appeal to the Lord. There are times when the people must be called on to remember their commitment to God. In fact, what he appeals to them to do in the following verses is to:

- 1) Remember God and His Law.
- 2) Repent of their sins.
- 3) Return to the covenant.

13:15 - ON THE SABBATH. *“At that time I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath. They were also bringing in stores of grain and loading them on donkeys, along with wine, grapes, and figs. All kinds of goods were being brought to Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I warned them against selling food on that day.”* Nehemiah saw clear and open violation of the Law (the Ten Command in particular). Their ancestors had violated the Sabbath during the days when Jeremiah was delivering the “Thus saith the Lord” in Judah generations earlier:

“This is what the Lord says: Watch yourselves; **do not pick up a load and bring it in through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.** (22) You must not carry a load out of your houses on the Sabbath day or do any work, but **you must consecrate the Sabbath day**, just as I commanded you

ancestors. (23) They wouldn't listen or pay attention but became obstinate, not listening or accepting discipline.

(24) "However, **if you listen to Me, says the Lord**, and do not bring loads through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day and **consecrate the Sabbath day** and do no work on it, (25) kings and princes will enter through the gates of this city. They will sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses with their officials, the men of Judah, and the residents of Jerusalem. This city will be inhabited forever" (Jer 17:21-25, HCSB).

Just as their ancestors had refused to listen to Jeremiah, these Jews had refused to listen to Nehemiah. How can anyone read this Scripture and not understand the Word of God: "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy"? Charles Haddon Spurgeon has been quoted more often than any other preacher I can imagine. His comments on the Sabbath will help to illustrate why:

"When a gentleman was inspecting a house in Newcastle, with a view to renting it as a residence, the landlord took him to the upper window, expatiated on the extensive prospect, and added, 'You can see Durham Cathedral from this window on a Sunday.'

'Why on a Sunday and not any other day?' inquired our friend, with some degree of surprise. The reply was conclusive enough. "Because on that day there is no smoke from those tall chimneys."

Blessed is the Sabbath to us when the earth-smoke of care and turmoil no longer clouds our view. Then our souls often behold the goodly land, and the city of the New Jerusalem.

-- Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Quotable Spurgeon*,
(Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, Inc, 1990)

When I was growing up on a Mississippi Delta farm seven miles west of Sledge, Mississippi, we had neighbors who would justify working their land on Sunday by saying, "The ox is in the ditch." Every year when the harvest was over some of them would declare that they never would work on the Lord's Day again. Then the next year they would do the same thing. My father made no open statements, but his family can attest to the fact that he did not work on the Lord's Day. Not only did we not work on Sunday, we stopped every Wednesday afternoon in time to get to prayer meeting. I will never forget the Saturday a sharecropper came to see my father and said, "I know you don't work on Sunday, but I don't go to church. Can I use a tractor and plow our my cotton tomorrow while you are at church?"

Nor will I forget my father's answer: "I don't work on Sunday. My land is not worked on Sunday. And my tractor does not work on Sunday." We had neighbors who would vow

that they would never do it again, but they could always find some emergency. We took good care of the livestock but Daddy never pushed the ox into the ditch so he could bail him out on Sunday.

When my father decided to get started planting soybeans he paid someone to cut his beans for a couple of seasons before he bought a combine and began harvesting his own. One Friday evening, a man with whom he had a contract to cut his beans came by the house and told my Dad that he had a breakdown before he finished the last field. He lacked several acres finishing. He told us he would repair his combine on Saturday and come back Sunday and finish cutting the beans. Daddy told him he did not work on Sunday and would not have his beans cut on Sunday. The man told him he did not have the same scruples about working on Sunday and if he left he couldn't come back for those few acres. Daddy told him he would just have to leave if that was his position. I don't know if he made an impression on that man, but I know he made an impression on his oldest son. Did my father benefit financially because of his decision? No, he actually lost a little. He may not have made as much money, but the investment in his sons and daughter continued to yield a harvest.

13:16 - THE TYRIANS. *“The Tyrians living there were importing fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah in Jerusalem.”* Some natives of Tyre who were staying among the people of Judah, were buying and selling fish on the Sabbath. The people of Tyre may not have known the Law of God, but those who were buying their fish did know what the Scripture had to say about Sabbath violations. Some are convinced that these fish merchants were not permanent residents of Jerusalem at this time but people who were there for a brief time to do business.

13:17 - I REBUKED THE NOBLES. *“I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them: ‘What is this evil you are doing—profaning the Sabbath day?’”* Nehemiah rebuked those most guilty. These people may have profited from the commerce that was being conducted on the Sabbath day. We may certainly infer that it did not happen without their approval.

13:18 - PROFANING THE SABBATH. *“Didn't your ancestors do the same, so that our God brought all this disaster on us and on this city? And now you are rekindling His anger against Israel by profaning the Sabbath!”* Those who pleaded innocence in the violation of the Sabbath compound their guilt. Their ancestors knew God's Holy Law and they knew the value He placed on the Sabbath. One story from their his history was enough to teach them the value God placed on the day He set aside at creation for His honor and glory. Their ancestors could never plead innocence. Their problem was iniquity - not just sin, which means to fall short of the mark, but iniquity, which means to be warped or twisted, which is exactly what their sins had done to them, and what it will always do to people when they persist in sin to the point that it becomes a daily practice.

Their ancestors had kindled God's anger in the wilderness. They were clearly taught God's Law by Moses and what these people could read in Exodus 16 should have convinced them

of the value God placed on the Sabbath:

(21) They gathered it every morning. Each gathered as much as he needed to eat, but when the sun grew hot, it melted. (22) **On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food**, four quarts apiece, and all the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. (23) He told them, "This is what the Lord has said: '**Tomorrow is a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.** Bake what you want to bake, and boil what you want to boil, and everything left over set aside to be kept until morning.'"

(24) So they set it aside until morning as Moses commanded, and it didn't smell or have any maggots in it. (25) "Eat it today," Moses said, "**because today is a Sabbath to the Lord.** Today you won't find any in the field. (26) For six days you may gather it, but **on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none**" (Ex. 16:21-26,).

PROFANING THE SABBATH. "And now you are rekindling His anger against Israel by profaning the Sabbath!" Moral relativism has invaded the church today, along with its constant companions, tolerance and permissiveness. The worst sin to many today is intolerance. They believe they should be able to do whatever they desire and no one has a right to say anything about it. President George W. Bush is despised and vilified today by the left in America. He is accused of imaginable injustices, warmongering, lying - everything but being unfaithful to his wife. His Supreme Court appointments are the key, and the reason they are the key is Roe v Wade. Organizations like Planned Parenthood rant and rave about a woman's right to choose, and politicians parrot it. No woman has a right to kill another human being, unless it is in self-defense, defense of his country, or in defense of others. It is revealing that if a person who kills a pregnant woman he is convicted of two murders (as in the Scott Pederson case). The fetus is a human being in a case like that, yet doctors who perform late-term abortions defend the practice on the grounds that the mother has a right to choose, which is the message of groups like Planned Parenthood.

The media, with some notable exceptions, is pushing the war against God in America. John Gibson's book, AMERICA'S WAR AGAINST CHRISTMAS, had focused new light on the attacks on Christianity. America is a far more dangerous place than it was when I was growing up in the Mississippi Delta. Many people never locked their doors. My parents left their car keys where they knew they could find them - in the ignition! I was a teenager before someone was pointed out to me as some one to avoid. I figured out in time that he was a homosexual. Now, some churches are ordaining homosexuals! What does all of this have to do with the Sabbath? Everything! People who honor God by keeping His Sabbath do not habitually commit all of these sins. It is His Sabbath, His Name, His title, and anyone who takes that which is His and uses it for his or her own personal profit or pleasure on His Sabbath are looking God and the face and defying Him. People who will do that will skip worship services to visit Grandma, when they might have visited her on Saturday. People who will do that will attend Sunday School or the morning worship service and complain if the sermon is a little long, because they will get behind the Methodists in the line at the Piccadilly, which will cause them to run late meeting their friends at the lake (golf course, woods, mall).

If you put football, baseball, basketball, golf, hunting, or shopping between yourself and God you are committing idolatry. The Sabbath is your opportunity to give God the time He demands. America is profaning the Sabbath today. The debate over which day is the Sabbath today is going to sound like a very hollow argument when you have an opportunity to stand before God and try to persuade Him.

In the New Testament, the First Day became the Holy Day when Christians were forced out of the synagogues. They chose to worship on the First Day in honor of the Resurrection.

13:19 - BEFORE THE SABBATH. *“When shadows began to fall on the gates of Jerusalem just before the Sabbath, I gave orders that the gates be closed and not opened until after the Sabbath. I posted some of my men at the gates, so that no goods could enter during the Sabbath day.”* Governor Nehemiah had the authority of Persia behind him, and while King Artaxerxes may not have observed the Lord’s Sabbath, he would have enforced the governor’s orders. God had told Jeremiah that when the Jews returned from Babylonian Captivity they were not to rebuild the Ark of the Covenant, for Jerusalem itself would be a symbol of His presence with His people from that time forward. Those who brought their produce in through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath Day were profaning the Sabbath, Jerusalem, and God’s name.

For the benefit of those who continue to insist that you cannot legislate morality, Nehemiah orders the observance of the Sabbath. He cannot command the people to worship God on the Sabbath, but he can command that they do not dishonor His Sabbath Day by making it a day of commerce. Sabbath observance would refocus America’s attention on the rest of the Ten Commandments and focus our attention on the need for revival.

13:20-21 - I’LL USE FORCE. *“Once or twice the merchants and those who sell all kinds of goods camped outside Jerusalem, (21) but I warned them, ‘Why are you camping in front of the wall? If you do it again, I’ll use force against you.’”* After that they did not come again on the Sabbath.” There were those who did not take Nehemiah’s order seriously at first. They brought their merchandise to Jerusalem and set up a market just outside the gates of the city to entice the people to come out and purchase their fish, produce and merchandise. Nehemiah threatened to use force, so the merchants did not set up their camp there again.

One may wonder what difference it made where these people camped if they were away from home. There might have been either of two reasons. First, the people who camped outside the gates of Jerusalem also set up their booths for business. Second, their presence was a reminder of their merchandise and it might become a distraction on the Sabbath. The first reason seems the stronger one, but the distraction could lead people to dishonor the Lord’s Day. Anything that distracts people from worship is a sin.

13:22 - TO KEEP THE SABBATH DAY HOLY. *“Then I instructed the Levites to purify themselves and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember me for this also, my God, and look on me with compassion in keeping with Your abundant, faithful love.”* He had instructed them before on Sabbath observance before, but now he takes it a

step further by telling them both to purify themselves and to post a guard at the gate so that they would keep the Sabbath Day holy.

REMEMBER ME FOR THIS ALSO MY GOD. Once again, Nehemiah breaks out into a prayer that God would remember him and his service: “Remember me for this also, my God, and look on me with compassion in keeping with Your abundant, faithful love.” This is not a prayer for material gain or prestige as a reward for his service to Yahweh. He asks for compassion, and he anticipates it because it is in keeping with His “abundant, faithful love.”

13:23-25 - JEWS WHO MARRIED. *“In those days I also saw Jews who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. (24) Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or of one of the other peoples but could not speak Hebrew. (25) I rebuked them, cursed them, beat some of their men, and pulled out their hair. I forced them to take an oath before God and said: “You must not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters as wives for your sons or yourselves!”* Nehemiah had dealt with this during his first term as governor, but it seems that as soon as he returned to the court of King Artaxerxes, they returned to their old ways, violating this law just as they had violated the Sabbath law. Nehemiah warns them in the strongest terms that they should not do this, and then he took action himself:

“Again Nehemiah responded with a rebuke (cf. vv. 11, 17). Also he asked God to judge them (called curses down on them) and even struck some of them physically, pulling out their hair, probably from their beards. To lose one’s beard was a disgrace (2 Sam. 10:4; also see Isa. 50:6). He made them swear before God that they would not continue to commit this violation of God’s Law. He reminded them of Solomon’s sin in marrying foreign women (cf. 1 Kings 11:1-8). This was wickedness, an act of unfaithfulness. Nehemiah’s pulling out the men’s hair may seem to be violent and inappropriate for a man of God. However, Nehemiah was concerned that God’s judgment not fall again on Judah. He knew God would not tolerate this sin” [Bible Knowledge Commentary].

In America today, the divorce rate is escalating and leaving it its wake a lot of children whose lives are turned upside down. Some will never recover from it. My wife deals with it as a teacher, and my son deals with it as a prosecutor who deals with juvenile issues all the time. It is obvious that young people need to be better prepared for marriage. One of the first things that needs to be emphasized is the importance of seeking the guidance of the Lord in choosing a husband or wife. Physical attraction is not going to pay the bills or solve relationships with in-laws. Sadly, many people will never know the joy of living with a spouse for forty or fifty years, and growing together in the Lord.

13:26 - KING SOLOMON. *“Didn’t King Solomon of Israel sin in matters like this? There was not a king like him among many nations. He was loved by his God and God*

made him king over all Israel, yet foreign women drew him into sin.” Solomon prayed for wisdom and received both wisdom and wealth, both of which were proverbial. Yet, at some point he began sinning by marrying foreign women and permitting them to bring their pagan religions with them. They even drew him into their sinful practices. He sinned in the multiple marriages and he sinned in committing idolatry. God had loved him and blessed him, but he threw all of that back into His face when he married these foreign women. The consequences were devastating. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible agrees:

“Nehemiah rightly recognized that Solomon’s intermarriage with pagans (1 Kings 11:1ff.) led to the schism of the nation, and eventually the destruction of the state of Israel. He did not want history to be repeated (13:26), so he took these radical measures to reform the nation. Nehemiah should be remembered not only as the Jewish leader who oversaw the building of Jerusalem’s walls, but as a reformer who was zealous for the Lord, for his law, and for the Jewish people” [NCWB].

13:27-28 - ACTING UNFAITHFULLY. *“Why then should we hear about you doing all this terrible evil and acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women? Marrying foreign women was acting unfaithfully against God, just as one would prove himself unfaithful to God today if he or she married a non-Christians.*

13:28-29 - I DROVE THEM OUT. *“Even one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of Eliashib the high priest, had become a son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. So I drove him away from me. (29) Remember them, my God, for defiling the priesthood as well as the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.”* The sin of intermarriage with pagans had defiled the priesthood! The grandson of the high-priest had married a pagan. Nehemiah’s reaction may seem severe to us today, but we must remember the severity of the offense. He says, “I drove him away from me” (so that he would not be a burden to the governor or to the priesthood). He does not amplify his reasons for us but he does tell us that the grandson of the high-priest was the son-in-law to Sanballat, the Horonite (Neh 2:10), who was so hostile to Nehemiah and to the Jewish community in general, and would not comply with the demand of Nehemiah that he should dismiss this wife.

“In this case, Nehemiah was obliged to interfere with authority. For this marriage was a pollution of the priesthood, and a breach of the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites....It was a pollution of the priesthood to marry a heathen woman, such marriage being opposed to the sacredness of the priestly office, which a priest was to consider even in the choice of a wife, and because of which he might marry neither a whore, nor a feeble nor a divorced woman, while the high priest might marry only a virgin of his own people (Lev 21:7,14). The son of Joiada who had married a daughter of Sanballat was not indeed his presumptive successor (Johanan, Neh 12:11), for then he would have been spoken of by name, but a younger son, and therefore a simple priest; he was, however, so nearly related to the high priest, that by his marriage with a heathen woman the holiness of the high-priestly house was polluted, and therewith also “the covenant of the priesthood,” i.e., not the covenant of

the everlasting priesthood which God granted to Phinehas for his zeal (Num 25:13), but the covenant which God concluded with the tribe of Levi, the priesthood, and the Levites, by choosing the tribe of Levi, and of that tribe Aaron and his descendants, to be His priest.... This covenant required, on the part of the priests, that they should be “holy to the Lord” (Lev 21:6,8), who had chosen them to be ministers of His sanctuary and stewards of His grace” [K & D].

13:30 - I PURIFIED THEM. *“So I purified them from everything foreign and assigned specific duties to each of the priests and Levites.”* Nehemiah purified the priests and Levites again so that they might lead the people in worshiping Yahweh.

13:31 - REMEMBER ME, MY GOD. *“I also arranged for the donation of wood at the appointed times and for the firstfruits. Remember me, my God, with favor.”* Nehemiah, after purifying the priests and Levites, made arrangements for the donation of wood for the offerings. He then closes by once again calling on the Lord to remember him. This time one seems to sense the passion of the invocation, “Remember me, my God, with favor.”

What better way to close a study of the Book of Nehemiah? “Remember me, my God, with favor.”

The following article, written by Mike S. Adams (ref., Matthew 10:32-34), criminology professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (Dec 14, 2005, Townhall.com), cries out for a Nehemiah. At a time when, as one lady said, a lot of young pastors out there are trying to be the next Rick Warren, we need some Nehemiahs who are not afraid of dealing with the tough issues facing this generation.

“Nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus of Nazareth stated, “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

“As I was re-reading those three verses yesterday, I was reminded of a speech broadcast live (and rebroadcast several times) on television from my school, the University of North Carolina – Wilmington. In the speech, the self-proclaimed religious expert strongly urged the audience to abandon the notion of the deity of Christ. To do so, he claimed, would be to fully appreciate what a great man Jesus really was.

“Such an assertion raises a number of issues. One issue is the weight of the ego of the speaker who urges us to believe that he is telling the truth about the deity of Christ – while suggesting that Jesus was simply lying. In the conflict between the religious speaker and Jesus Christ there is, of course, a gap in credibility. One has been the subject of more books than any other who has ever walked upon the planet and also has the distinction of having time based

upon His birth. On the other hand, I cannot even recall the speaker's name.

“Of course, another issue is the mental dexterity of a speaker who claims that Jesus is only a great man if He (or he) is also a liar. Such assertions were once confined to those with IQs below room temperature – long before our universities declared war upon the notion of truth (or Truth) in the postmodern era of education. Now that we scoff at the notion of truth, the epithet “liar” has lost some of its punch.

“Those who often read my columns are probably predicting that I will also raise an issue relating to freedom of speech. Those prophecies are just as correct – although not as impressive or complex - as the ones found in Chapter 53 of Isaiah.

“Indeed, the speaker who urged the audience to reject Christ's claim that He is God did so under the full protection of the First Amendment. And I am glad that he was able to do so. There is no better appreciation of the Truth than that which is gained from its juxtaposition with falsity.

“But the problem at my university (and many others) is that the First Amendment is not deemed applicable to those who make the contrary assertion that Christ was, and is, our Lord and Savior precisely because He is the Almighty God. A conversation I had with a student just last week is illustrative.

“The student was fired from his job at UNCW for being too “open” about his faith in Jesus Christ. Fortunately, he got another job on campus shortly after he lost one for disagreeing with the Gospel according to the Office of Campus Diversity and, instead, following the Gospel according to Matthew. (See paragraph one of this editorial for details).

“I do not know whether the student was asking me for advice but here it is anyway:

“Your goal in your new job at UNCW is to get fired again. The reward for doing so will be much greater than the minimum wage. (See paragraph one of this editorial for details).

“If this one example does not suffice to demonstrate that UNCW (The University of No Christian Witnesses) is intolerant towards Christian speech, consider another. Last month, a new Christian student organization was told to be cautious in its efforts to spread the Word of God because of the university's harassment policy, which, of course, limits “offensive” speech.

”And you know the type of speech they are talking about. It's the kind that creates a “hostile environment.” (See paragraph one of this editorial for details).

“When I received an email from one of the Christians in the organization – an email that included the text of the administrator’s preposterous warning – he was looking for advice on how to deal with the situation. I offer it gladly in these following sentences:

“Your goal in your new Christian organization is to spread the Word of God with such zeal that you will be thrown off campus for violating the harassment policy – the one that ignorant administrators think trumps the First Amendment right to religious expression. (This is also the policy that malicious administrators pretend to think trumps the First Amendment right to religious expression).

“Of course, getting booted off campus will not be a big deal. But the reward will be very great. (See paragraph one of this editorial for details).

“As I think about my advice to these students, I am reminded of the “Holiday Greeting” (<http://www.uncw.edu/chancellor/greetings/>) sent out earlier this week by UNCW Chancellor Rosemary DePaolo. The greeting mentions the word “diversity” but not the words “Christ” or “Christmas.”

“There is something very wrong with the idea that the word “Christ” is offensive by itself but protected free speech if followed by the words “was not the Son of God.” I believe that this idea has consequences. See paragraph one of this editorial for details.”

Mike Adams is a criminology professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and is a regular columnist for Townhall.com.

PRAYER: “Remember me, my God, with favor,” and if you want me to be a Nehemiah in a land that has turned its back on you, I will begin by confessing my sins and asking forgiveness. I confess that I live among a people of unclean lips, as in the days of Isaiah, among a rebellious people who have turned there back to you. Even if it is not popular in the world today, I will seek to proclaim the Word of God just as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. In Jesus name, Amen!