

Nehemiah

Old Testament Leader for Modern Times

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF PAPER

When reading through the Apostle Paul's letters to Timothy in the New Testament, it becomes clear that while, in general, the letter obviously communicates the sound truths about God and how they affect God's people, the purpose of the Holy Spirit in inspiring and having canonized this letter that Paul wrote to his young ministry companion, was perhaps to establish documented practical wisdom for Christian leadership that would remain ever relevant. The same could probably be said of the Spirit preserving his Old Testament masterpiece on leadership – the Book of Nehemiah.

Although the story of Nehemiah tells of the Israelites third step of return to the Promised Land from captivity in Babylon, the rebuilding of the wall to protect Jerusalem's inhabitants, and the rededication of God's people to the Lord, practically speaking, the theme that runs through every single episode in the book is that of godly leadership. A study of the Book of Nehemiah and an isagogical paper on it naturally then must highlight the leadership qualities and demonstrations that the book itself highlights. The following paper will seek to do such.

POSSIBLE DIVISIONS FOR THE PAPER AND CHOSEN DIVISION

There are several possible ways to divide up the Book of Nehemiah according to its natural divisions:

- 1) Of the thirteen chapters in the book, there is a definite shift in content after the first six chapters. The first half of Nehemiah chronicles the reconstruction of the wall; the last half chronicles the spiritual reinstruction of the people who built the wall.
- 2) Another natural division of Nehemiah comes from recognizing the three roles Nehemiah fills in the account. The book opens with him serving as cupbearer to the king of Persia (1:1-2:10). Next, he becomes the project manager behind the building of the wall of Jerusalem (2:11-6:19). Finally, he serves as governor in Judah (7:1-13:31).
- 3) For the purposes of a complete isagogical rendering though, desiring a comprehensive but non-overwhelming outline is preferable. As is the case throughout the Bible, while many of Archbishop Stephen Langton's 13th century chapter divisions accurately complete thoughts and events, not all do. Therefore, the paper divides the book by the NIV headings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON NEHEMIAH

Most of the themes and circumstances that are found in the Book of Nehemiah can likewise be found in the Book of Ezra. In fact, the two books are so closely connected that Jewish rabbis and some Bible versions have combined them into one book. Origen (AD 185-253) was actually the first church leader to distinguish between the two books, which he labeled as I Ezra and II Ezra. And most scholars believe that the author/compiler of Ezra and Nehemiah was also the author of 1,2 Chronicles. Nonetheless, the man Nehemiah is clearly the focus of the action in the chapters of the Book of Nehemiah, which is why most Bible scholars suggest keeping Ezra and Nehemiah separate.

The political situation that existed behind the Book of Nehemiah was as follows: About 140 years prior to the action of the book, Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Jerusalem and deported its population, when Jerusalem fell in 586 BC. Belshazzar rose to power and became the last ruler of Babylon. In 539 BC, Cyrus, the king of Persia, came in and defeated Babylon, allowing for the first wave of exiles to return under Zerubbabel. Darius the Mede took the Persian throne in 522 BC. As attested by Haggai and Zechariah, the temple was completed during his reign. The Jews first tried to rebuild Jerusalem's

walls at this time, but failed. Next, in 486 BC, Xerxes took the Persian throne. His son, Artaxerxes I Longimanus, the king of Persia that is noted in the Book of Nehemiah, then begins to reign in 465 BC. In the “seventh year” of his reign, Ezra arrives in Jerusalem (458 BC). Thirteen years later (ca. 445 BC), Bible readers encounter Nehemiah.

SUMMARY AND LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

NEHEMIAH’S PRAYER (1:1-11)

SUMMARY

Nehemiah, whose name means “The LORD comforts”, was the son of a man named Hacaliah (vs. 1) and was born into captivity in Babylon as his grandparents were likely taken as prisoners in the fall of Jerusalem. Beyond that, very little can be known about the man’s background.

Despite his Jewish ancestry, Nehemiah rose to a position of prominence in the Persian government. He served the position of cupbearer (vs. 11) to the king of Persia (i.e. Artaxerxes). Although the name of this task certainly sounds menial, the position was one that yielded a great deal of political sway.

A high degree of trust was necessary between the taster of the wine and the partaker, the cupbearer and the king. Cupbearers, who were often selected for their personal beauty, developed such a loyal, confidential, and influential bond with kings that modern scholars have often likened them to the equivalent of members of the presidential cabinet in our government.¹ Cupbearers were undoubtedly consulted for advice and wisdom.

The need for such a position was essential in ancient monarchies, since the removal of one man could overthrow a government simply by the nature of the structure of a monarchy. King Artaxerxes and all who were governed by the Achaemenid court of Persia certainly knew this well. Xerxes, the father of Artaxerxes I, was killed in his own bedchamber by a member of the king’s court. There is no doubt then that Nehemiah was well-respected by the king for his godly virtues, and this respect would prove necessary for what Nehemiah would ask of the king.

Our story opens in winter. It is the month of Kislev (our December), in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes (approximately 445 BC). A man named Hanani, likely a blood-brother of Nehemiah, and some other men arrive in Nehemiah’s town of Susa (the capital of the Media-Persian world). They inform Nehemiah that the walls which surround the holy city of Jerusalem remain unfinished (vs. 3).

These “unfinished walls” are much more severe of a situation than say, the unfinished basement of a well-intentioned homeowner who simply has not gotten around to the project. For an ancient civilization, secured city walls were required for stability, safety, and prosperity. Jerusalem still did not have this nearly one hundred years after the return of the Israelites under Zerubbabel.

It wasn’t for lack of effort. The returned Israelites had attempted to rebuild these walls. A variety of circumstances had simply prevented the project from completion. In fact, the most recent attempt to rebuild the walls was only 13 years earlier, when the same Artaxerxes to whom Nehemiah was cupbearer was king. When Ezra had led the second wave of Jews back from captivity (in the seventh year of Artaxerxes’ reign), the Jews worked, in vain, to rebuild the walls. However, Rehum and Shimshai, two government officials in Samaria sent a letter to Artaxerxes informing him of the Jews planned “rebellion” which they claimed was starting with this building project. The king immediately ordered them to stop and destroy whatever work had already been done. This event is recorded for us in Ezra 4:7-23.

Hearing that the walls of Jerusalem were unfinished probably was not a complete surprise to Nehemiah. After all, as cupbearer to the king, he was well-acquainted with all of the king's official decrees. Nonetheless, seeing these distraught Jews (including his family member) and hearing them recount what a dire position God's city was in, Nehemiah was so convicted by the mess that he broke down to tears (vs. 4). And when dropped to his knees by sadness, he found occasion to seek his Lord in prayer.

In this prayer, Nehemiah, who has lived his entire life in a pagan land, acknowledged the LORD as the only true God (vs. 5). He confessed his own sin of neglect to these walls as well as Israel's neglect (vss. 6-7). He thanked God for his forgiveness and redemption (vs. 10). And finally, he begged God to improve the situation by changing the heart of the one man on earth whose decree could make these walls happen – the same man who thirteen years earlier had decreed that these walls would not be built.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

In Nehemiah's prayer, we see four marks that characterize the lives of competent, spiritual leaders.²

- 1) **A leader has a clear recognition of the needs of his people:** Involved in government himself, Nehemiah understood full well that no city could rise to any position of prominence without secure walls. He did not allow the size or inconvenience of a project like this to cloud his judgment and convince him that this is something that could reasonably be left undone.
- 2) **A leader is personally concerned with the needs of his people:** Nehemiah lived over a thousand miles from Jerusalem. It would have been easy to forget the plight of the Israelites as "out of sight, out of mind." But Nehemiah wept as though he lived in the heart of the city. Another temptation could have been to blame the returnees for not getting the job done. But instead, Nehemiah included himself in the guilty party of God's children for not giving enough attention to God's city.
- 3) **A serious leader goes first to God with the need:** Evidenced throughout the book, Nehemiah was a man who recognized the power of prayer to God. He understood that without God's intervention and blessing, those walls simply would not have happened.
- 4) **A leader is available to meet the need himself:** A leader must be willing to put himself in harm's way for the sake of a greater cause. Nehemiah risked his position, his personal comfort, and his life with the project that he would lead. A leader does not shy away from responsibility or confrontation simply because it means inconvenience.

ARTAXERXES SENDS NEHEMIAH TO JERUSALEM (2:1-10)

SUMMARY

Approximately four months have now passed after Nehemiah first received the gloomy message from his Jewish visitors. It was the month of Nisan (our April). We see Nehemiah next on the evening of a special banquet. We can deduce this by the presence of the queen at the side of King Artaxerxes (vs. 6).³

Despite the sadness that had been plaguing Nehemiah's heart, Nehemiah never allowed his face to become downcast. In fact, according to Persian law, it was illegal for a servant to ever show sadness in the king's presence. Nonetheless, on this evening, Artaxerxes caught a troublesome glance upon Nehemiah's face that indicated something was wrong. The

king asked Nehemiah, *“Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart”* (vs. 2).

Nehemiah had been discovered. He did the only thing that he knew could help: he offered a quick prayer to God (vs. 4). Aware that he was unable to compose his emotions, he opened up to the man who had become such a close companion.

In all of the passion that had been building up for the previous four months though, Nehemiah still had the wherewithal to make a request before the king that, while creating sympathy for himself, did not evoke negative sentiment from the king. Nehemiah said, *“If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it”* (vs. 5). Notice the skill used here. Nehemiah did not even use the name “Jerusalem” in his request. Doing so could have prompted the king, in pride, to support his previous decree regarding Jerusalem and reject such a proposal. Instead, Nehemiah stated it in such a way that allowed King Artaxerxes, who had lost his own father, to sympathize. Having the fairer and more empathetic sex present in the person of Artaxerxes’ wife likely helped establish a compassionate audience as well.

The request of Nehemiah was more than just to travel to Jerusalem. Nehemiah was asking for letter of permission to the Persian representative officials of the Trans-Euphrates region, for safe travel. Nehemiah also asked for access to the king’s forest. And it was not a coincidence that Nehemiah knew that one of the king’s forests was near Jerusalem. Not only that, but Nehemiah also knew the name of Asaph, the man in charge of that particular forest (vs. 8). Clearly, while persistently praying, Nehemiah had been carefully planning for this opportune moment.

King Artaxerxes briefly thought about Nehemiah’s request. He asked Nehemiah how long he planned to be gone (vs. 6). And then he not only granted Nehemiah all he requested, but in addition, he also sent army officers and cavalry with Nehemiah on his journey (vs. 9). Truly, God had moved the heart of this pagan king.

It is also likely, though, that King Artaxerxes felt that he perhaps had something to gain from a stronger Judah as well. Assisting the Jews in rebuilding their ruined capital city would offer an ally that would serve as buffer state between Persia and Egypt. There had been a revolt in lower Egypt in the late 460s BC, encouraged by the Greeks of Athens, followed by a rebellion in Syria in the 440s BC. The Persian armed forces had squelched both rebellions, but resistance still remained a concern in some areas. A stronger Judah would, for Artaxerxes, meant a stronger Persian presence in the west.⁴ Although it sounds like mere political intrigue, God can certainly work through such circumstances as well.

While Artaxerxes was now perhaps pleased by the thought of a revitalized Jewish presence in Judah, other neighboring communities felt threatened. Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite, who both play large roles in the next chapters of the Book of Nehemiah, were officials in the region who heard of Nehemiah’s coming arrival and were disturbed by the thought (vs. 10)

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

As Nehemiah brings his requests before King Artaxerxes, we see six characteristics of believing leaders that generally help grant success⁵:

- 1) **Loyalty:** It was a product of years of gaining Artaxerxes’ trust that Nehemiah was able to make a request to him that otherwise might have sounded threatening.
- 2) **Tact:** As Nehemiah presented his request to the king, he spoke respectfully. He opened his statements to Artaxerxes with the phrase, *“May the king live forever!”* (vs. 3), a fairly standard way to address the king, but nonetheless, a reminder that Nehemiah desired no ill will to come to Artaxerxes or his empire.

- 3) **Honesty:** Although his words were carefully selected, Nehemiah was in no way deceptive of what his intentions were. He did not attempt to convince Artaxerxes of benefits to Persia, but clearly stated that the primary benefits would be to Nehemiah's own people.
- 4) **Prayer:** Even in the heat of the moment, having been asked by the king to explain his downcast demeanor, Nehemiah turned to the one whom he had turned to throughout the process and sought blessing.
- 5) **Planning:** Nehemiah had a mature understanding that prayer does not replace planning, but that they rather are faithful companions to one another. Responsibly planning gave God "faith in action" to bless.
- 6) **Dependence on God:** Artaxerxes now found a revitalization of the Jewish people to be politically beneficial instead of detrimental. God alone can guide the circumstances of the planet to change like this. His fingerprints were all over this decision of the king.

NEHEMIAH INSPECTS JERUSALEM'S WALLS (2:11-20)

SUMMARY

Preparations for the trip to Jerusalem took some time. Most scholars guess around two months. And when Nehemiah arrived, he didn't immediately launch into work. Rather, he waited three days. Perhaps God's will was silent to him at this time. During the course of these days he was likely surveying the wall, the city conditions, and the general disposition of the people. At night, undoubtedly he was praying. No longer was Nehemiah the cupbearer. He was now the construction foreman to a project that was 150 years in the making.

On his third night there, Nehemiah saddled his horse and rode around the city wall, making thorough inspection for the work that needed to be done. He then gathered the city officials to inform them of his plans. His motivational speech alerted them to the severity of the situation that they were in (v.17), a danger they had probably come to see as a "way of life" over the years. Nehemiah let them know that he would lead them in the rebuilding campaign and informed them that God had already granted numerous blessings that made this project possible. The officials rallied behind Nehemiah and agreed to get to work.

The immediate enemies to this work once again made themselves known (v. 19). Sanballat the Horonite was the governor of Samaria, north of Judah. Tobiah the Ammonite's position is uncertain. In all likelihood, he was a Persian appointee, working under Sanballat, who supervised the region of Ammon, east of Judah, across the Jordan River. And now these two had recruited Geshem the Arab, a leader of the people south of Judah. The opposition by these leaders of neighboring peoples began simply with ridicule. They looked to disparage an already discouraged people. But Nehemiah would not allow this to happen.

Nehemiah's reply to the adversaries was that "*The God of heaven will give us success*" (vs. 20). This served as an inspiring reminder to the Israelites that this project was guided by the will of the one true God. This statement informed Nehemiah's opponents that they were not up against a dispirited people, but against God Almighty. And finally, this exercise of faith reminded Nehemiah himself to be courageous in the LORD.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

When encouraging the Jewish officials to join him in rebuilding the walls, Nehemiah teaches a valuable lesson about motivating workers for projects⁶:

- 1) ***Personally identify with those whom you are seeking to motivate:*** In verse 17, when stating the problem that Jerusalem faced with no walls for defense, Nehemiah uses the words “we” and “us”. Having never lived there himself, it would have been very easy for Nehemiah to say, “*Look at the mess you guys have gotten yourselves into. Get to work and fix this.*” However, instead, Nehemiah says, “*Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace*” (v. 17).

BUILDERS OF THE WALL (3:1-32)

SUMMARY

Constructing a two-and-a-half mile wall thick enough to fortify an ancient city from invaders was an enormous task. The only way to make the project appear manageable was to divide it into many smaller projects. Nehemiah, proving himself to be a masterful coordinator, divided the wall into approximately forty sections and mobilized the people to work harmoniously and simultaneously.

Chapter 3, in a counterclockwise direction, lists the gates of the city and names who was the leading the workers at each particular spot. As we hear each of the names (we often read lists of names like this in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah), we are reminded that no effort put forth to glorify God goes unnoticed. The Lord certainly sees it himself. And God’s people, likewise, should not forget to express appreciation for such labor.

The workers on the wall were an interesting collection of people and where precisely they worked on the wall was far from random. Nehemiah devised a plan where the people were assigned to sections of the wall near their homes. The idea was that they would be more personally invested in a project in their own “backyard.” Another benefit to this method was that it cut down on needless travel time. Also, if invaders attacked, workers were already near home to protect their families. Finally, there was benefit in these walls being a “family project,” so that years later, the next generation could show ownership in the city whose walls they helped build.⁷

Other demonstrations of Nehemiah’s wisdom were seen in this plan as well. For instance, there was commuting help for the project – families from Jericho (v. 2), Tekoa (v. 5), Gibeon (v. 7), and Mizpah (v. 7) – whom Nehemiah assigned to the sections of the wall that were not near many homes, sections that naturally would have been short on labor. Nehemiah also assigned jobs on the basis of vocation. He sent Eliashib the high priest to rebuild the Sheep Gate (northeast corner) with his brothers (v. 1). The animals sacrificed in the temple were brought in through this gate, so naturally it would have been a gate that held specific meaning to them. Finally, yet another interesting move of Nehemiah’s was seen in verse 12 of the chapter. Nehemiah mentions Shallum, an official in Jerusalem, working side-by-side with his daughters. In other words, Nehemiah made this a family affair!

It is worth noting the phrases “next to him” and “next to them” and “after him” and “after them” in chapter 3. These phrases (and some variants) are listed twenty-eight times and in twenty-one of the thirty-two verses.⁸ What is seen here is that God’s people were working side by side to accomplish an extraordinary goal. Neither Nehemiah, nor any other individual in Jerusalem, could have completed one gate by himself, let alone the entire wall. But together, with God’s help and the love of God uniting them, the people were undoing 150 years of rubble and regret.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

In Chapter 3, Nehemiah, in two ways, demonstrates that leaders need to be humble enough to understand that they cannot accomplish worthwhile projects by themselves⁹:

- 1) **Nehemiah delegated authority:** As one man, Nehemiah simply could not supervise the constructing of all the gates or sections of the wall at the same time. While he undoubtedly travelled around the wall daily, he entrusted the completion of the wall to the workers as guided by their own immediate, responsible supervisors.
- 2) **Nehemiah got everyone involved:** Every believer is gifted by God (1 Cor 12:4-6). It is sometimes tricky to help believers find their gifts and then get them into a position to use those gifts to glorify God by serving God's people. A skilled leader will discover ways to lead God's people to do both.

OPPOSITION TO THE REBUILDING (4:1-23)

SUMMARY

Success naturally breeds opposition. In the next three chapters, Nehemiah and the workers of Jerusalem will face plenty of it. It started with the familiar characters of Sanballat and Tobiah. These two were angry that the formerly defeated Jews were experiencing new life and making progress. They sought to knock them down a few pegs by casting some insults, such as: *"If even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!"* (v.3)

Nehemiah immediately turned to God in prayer. His prayer was not gentle either. Rather, he asked for God to deliver vengeance upon those who oppose his will and oppress his people. Some modern scholars have even had trouble accepting this prayer as godly. Nonetheless, *"such prayers for judgment occur frequently in the Scriptures. Psalms 7; 35;58;59; 69:19-28; 109; 137:7-9; and 139:19-22 furnish examples of such prayers. These psalms are called imprecatory psalms, or cursing psalms."*¹⁰

After prayer, the Jews fought even harder to get the wall to the point of half height (vs. 6). This only angered their enemies even more. They began to threaten violence. And to understand the compromising position the Jews were now in, one need only to visualize it geographically. Samaria was to the north. Ammon was to the east. The Arabs were to the south. Last, a newly mentioned group, the people of Ashdod (i.e. the Philistines), were to the west. Jerusalem was being squeezed on all sides.

The Jews were quickly becoming discouraged. They received a timely encouragement from Nehemiah though: *"Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes"* (v. 14). The Jews then armed themselves with spears, swords, and bows in addition to the work tools that were in their hands. Nehemiah divided them into two rotating groups – one to stand guard while the others kept working on the wall – and they accelerated the building pace, working each day from dawn until dusk (v. 21).

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

From the growing discouragement of the Jews in the face of constant opposition, we learn three important insights for leadership in chapter 4¹¹:

- 1) ***It's more difficult to complete the second half of a task than the first half:*** The middle of a project is a dissatisfying place to be. The finish line is not in sight and the early optimism and excitement have faded. And typically a project always takes more (time, resources, energy) than what was first anticipated. Strong Christian leaders will find ways to keep people motivated and focused through these lulls. Nehemiah accomplished this through prayer and reminding the people that they were fighting for their families.
- 2) ***Fatigue combined with a sense of uncertainty makes discouragement more likely:*** These people (albeit for a greater cause) have neglected their homes, their health, and their work. They were hungry and physically and emotionally exhausted. The threat of enemies was enough to break them. Nehemiah stopped work to encourage them. Proper time to rest and recharge is essential for any great project.
- 3) ***Effective leadership involves both modeling and exhortation:*** Had Nehemiah not been more dedicated, more upbeat, and more hard-working than everyone else on this project, the people likely would not have followed. Since he indeed was a leader in all of these respects, when he spoke, the people listened. Rarely (if ever) do we see anything in the book that could be perceived as disrespect for him from his own people.

NEHEMIAH HELPS THE POOR (5:1-19)

SUMMARY

The oppression experienced by the Jews from their enemies was beginning to take its toll financially on the workers. Some of the people were running out of food. Compounding the problem was the recent famine (v. 3). Many who had enough to eat were putting food on their tables by mortgaging their fields, their vineyards, and their homes (v. 3). Others, in order to keep their property, were borrowing money from their Jewish brothers to pay taxes to King Artaxerxes (v. 4). Worst of all, when crops failed, creditors, who were often charging exorbitant interest rates (i.e. usury), took away their property and sold their children into slavery (v. 5). This was a direct violation of God's instructions for how Israelites were to treat their indebted countrymen (Lev. 25:35-36, 39-41). Nehemiah was furious about all of this. And until the moral house was cleaned, no progress would be made on the construction of the wall.

Well acquainted with the law, Nehemiah knew that it was not wrong to lend money to a non-Jew for interest. It was also not wrong to lend money to a Jew. However, it *was* wrong to demand interest on a loan to a Jew. And it also *was* wrong to enslave a fellow Jew, let alone sell them to foreigners. In righteous anger, Nehemiah confronted the priests and nobles, sought their repentance, and then made them make an oath that this would not happen again, but that they would support their fellow countrymen in need (v. 12). To show his seriousness, Nehemiah shook out his robe (v. 13), indicating that any man who does not keep this oath would have his house shaken empty of its properties by God.

This type of evidence of his concern for the people of Jerusalem led to the people electing Nehemiah governor of Judah (v. 14). There was no higher position of leadership amongst the Israelites at this time. And yet, despite his newfound authority, which could have meant considerably greater privileges, Nehemiah remained a leader who modeled humility for the people. One illustration of this is founding in the fact that he did not touch the liberal food allowance that was regularly allotted to the governor. This was a personal "expense account" for entertainment purposes. During the entire twelve years he would serve in his first term as governor of Judah (ca. 445-433 BC), he refused to access this account, as a demonstration of sacrifice and good intention to the people.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

In seeing how Nehemiah deals with the internal financial and spiritual problems of his people in chapter 5, Christian leaders learn¹²:

- 1) **Internal problems are inevitable:** Nehemiah is a skillful leader and godly role model for the people. Likewise, Ezra, who has not been mentioned to this point in the book, but is still at work, was directing the people. The Israelites did not lack strong leadership at the top. Nonetheless, when sinners are grouped together, they inevitably sin against one another.
- 2) **Christian leaders must not ignore internal conflict:** The easiest thing for Nehemiah to have done when the food began to become sparse would probably have been to simply buy meals for the workers and tell them to get back to work. That would not have solved the bigger problem the Jews had of being uncaring towards their Jewish neighbors though. What good would it have served to build walls around a godless community? Nehemiah stopped work and addressed the issue head-on.
- 3) **Christian leaders must handle negative emotions properly that are caused by internal conflict:** Nehemiah unleashed a loving rage against the wealthy of the community, that they might understand the serious and spiritual nature of their crimes. It was clearly communicated that it was intolerable for God's people to let one another suffer in need and actually contribute to that suffering.
- 4) **In solving conflicts among people, Christian leaders must lead by example:** When given opportunity to choose luxury for himself *or* caring for the needs of his people, Nehemiah, now elected as governor of Judah, demonstrated that he would always choose his people. Christian leaders not only encourage their people to love others ahead of themselves, but they demonstrate it.

FURTHER OPPOSITION TO THE REBUILDING (6:1-14)

SUMMARY

The wall was almost complete. Nehemiah's enemies, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem now repeatedly sent letters to Nehemiah suggesting they wanted to get together with Nehemiah to put aside their prior disagreements. They encouraged him to come to a village on the plain of Ono, which was a beautiful valley about twenty miles north of Jerusalem. It was also likely a neutral site for the group to amicably meet together.

Four times in a row, however, Nehemiah replied "no" to the gathering. First, Nehemiah understood that these men who had recently only wanted to bring harm upon Nehemiah and his people probably had not all had an immediate change of heart. However, brilliant at facing conflict when necessary and yet avoiding conflict when it is unnecessary, Nehemiah did not question Sanballat's motives for the meeting when responding. Instead, he offered a very practical reason for not meeting – no time. Ono was a good day's trip away. The meeting undoubtedly would have lasted at least a day. Another day travelling home would mean this trip was a three day commitment, minimum. Nehemiah, finishing his project, simply did not have the time. And if these men could not understand that, then they clearly were not truly seeking peace with the Jews after all.

Ever persistent, Sanballat sent a fifth letter indicating that his sources had informed him that Nehemiah and the Jews were planning a revolt. After his opposition by intrigue (vv. 1-4), now Sanballat is bringing opposition by innuendo to Nehemiah (vv. 5-7). Nehemiah did not even quantify this accusation with a thorough explanation. He simply replied,

“Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head” (v. 8). And after this reply, Nehemiah dealt with the unfounded claims by turning to his Lord in prayer (v. 9).

Next, a third subtle attack was right around the corner – opposition by intimidation. A man who was apparently regarded as a prophet, named Shemiah, came to Nehemiah and encouraged him to go and hide from his threatening enemies in the temple (v. 10). This was problematic for two reasons though. Nearing the end of the project, Nehemiah saw no need to flee the scene, particularly since he trusted that God would protect him. Second, Nehemiah was not a priest, so it would have been a clear violation of God’s law to enter the sanctuary (Numbers 3:10; 18:7).

Nehemiah saw Shemaiah for what he was, a traitor who had been bought off by Sanballat and Tobiah to frighten him. He would not be fooled. But understanding the desperate and under-handed lengths his enemies were going to in order to wreck this project, Nehemiah again turned to God in prayer, asking that the Lord remember their evil ways (v. 14).

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

In the way Nehemiah handles the attempts at deceptive opposition that he faces in chapter 6, Christian leaders learn:

1) **Christian ministry is gospel proclamation ahead of polemics:** Dr. John Brug writes, “If we spend so much time trying to refute attacks that we divert a great deal of time and energy from preaching the gospel, God’s enemies have accomplished their purpose. Rather, let us devote our resources and energy primarily to the task of building through the gospel.”¹³

2) **When falsely accused by critics, Christian leaders cannot allow fear to influence their actions:** Chuck Swindoll writes, “Feeling fear is not a sin itself, but yielding to the intimidation of God’s enemies in an effort to preserve himself would display a lack of confidence to the Lord. And if the fear were to grow strong enough, it might even cause a good leader to blur the line between right and wrong.”¹⁴

THE COMPLETION OF THE WALL (6:15-7:3)

SUMMARY

“So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days” (v. 15). Nehemiah had received his brother’s report in the winter of 445 BC. Nehemiah received permission to go to Jerusalem in the month of Nisan, our April. Preparation time likely took a couple of months. Travel time likely took a month or so. Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem on what we would call August 1. Now, fifty-two days later, on our September 21, reconstruction of the massive wall of Jerusalem was complete – two and a half miles of masonry. From the moment Nehemiah began weeping in sadness regarding Jerusalem’s wall to the moment he perhaps began weeping regarding its completion, it was only about nine months.¹⁵

As though alerting readers to the fact that opposition was not through, upon mentioning the completion of the wall, Nehemiah proceeds next to talk about the Jews increasingly glowing reviews of Tobiah – the same Tobiah that had been opposing Nehemiah throughout the rebuilding process. Tobiah, whose name means “The Lord is good”, presented a unique threat to Nehemiah. As his name indicates, he was probably a worshipper of the Lord. He also had profitable trade agreements with the wealthier class in Jerusalem. And finally, he was linked to the wealthier families of Jerusalem by marriage. His son, Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berekiah, who was a leader of one of the groups who helped repair the wall (v 18). The connection of blood relatives, prior friendships, and financial

dependence made it difficult for many Jews to dislike Tobiah. This would prove to be a dangerous alliance for Jerusalem for years to come. The unheeded warnings against intermarriage were always costly for God's people.

A final item to note from this section is the delegation of labor. Nehemiah, who recognized the importance of training others to replace oneself, appointed Hanani (his brother) to the position of civic leader (i.e. mayor of Jerusalem). He also appointed Hananiah as military leader (i.e. chief of police of Jerusalem) (v. 2).

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

As Nehemiah recounts the Jews' affection for Tobiah, a personal enemy to him, Christian leaders learn:

- 1) ***For personal reasons, Christians will sometimes be tempted to inappropriately defend others:*** The Jews should have ceased contact with Tobiah. Evidenced time and again by his opposition to Nehemiah and the building of Jerusalem's wall, he did not have their best interest in mind. However, he was wealthy, powerful, and most importantly, related. The temptation to break the First Commandment by loving friends and family ahead of God still can draw God's people away today.

THE LIST OF THE EXILES WHO RETURNED (7:4-73)

SUMMARY

Nehemiah chapter 7 contains another of the lists for which the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are notorious. In fact, the list of Nehemiah 7 is virtually identical to that of Ezra 2. The purpose of such a list is certainly not to mention all of the returnees, but rather to indicate that exiles from a variety of walks of life and Jewish tribes returned – that God's people were still intact and ready for renewal. It also reminded the people of their heritage and preserved a record for future generations.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

From the list of exiles found in Nehemiah 7, Christian leaders learn:

- 1) ***God always preserves his people:*** God did not let his people waste away in captivity. God was with them in Babylon too despite the fact that they were in Babylon because they had deserted him. Nonetheless, he promised a return to Jerusalem and he delivered.

EZRA READS THE LAW (8:1-18)

SUMMARY

There had been times when the high priest, Ezra, who arrived in Jerusalem thirteen years prior to Nehemiah, was so appalled at the immorality he saw there that he tore his garments and pulled out some of the hair from his head and beard (Ezra 9:3). He would fall to his knees and beg God for forgiveness for the people and revival for their spiritual

hearts. One day (Ezra 10:1), a large group of people came and joined him in confession. This was a breakthrough and perhaps had been priming the Israelites for the renewal that was now to come under Nehemiah's leadership.

This chapter marks an important shift in the Book of Nehemiah. Having completed the wall, Nehemiah was well aware that the more important work was still to be done – the rebuilding of godly spirituality in Jerusalem. Whether speaking of church structures or secular structures, the timeless truth remains: *“It is pointless to have a well-constructed superstructure if little or no life exists on the inside.”*¹⁶ Nehemiah was humble enough to know that this was the time for him to take a step back and, with his full support, allow the Israelites' appointed spiritual leader, Ezra, to lead the reform.

On the first day of the seventh month, the civil New Year's Day for the Jews, the people gathered at the Water Gate in Jerusalem to hear Ezra read from the Book of the Law of Moses (Nehemiah 8:1). With thirteen leaders of Israel standing at his side, Ezra proclaimed God's Word to a crowd that likely numbered 30,000 to 50,000 people.

There was one obvious hiccup in the proclamation of God's Word at this time – a problem that was now being faced for the first time and would, realistically, continue to remain a problem for the world up until the Reformation – God's Word was being proclaimed in a tongue that was not native to many of the people. A good percentage of these exiles were no longer fluent in Hebrew, which meant that the Levites had to *“read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read”* (v. 8).

Appreciating the weight of God's law, understanding their own wrongdoing and that of their forefathers, the people began to weep (v. 9). Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levite leaders forbade this though. They reasoned that this day, marked by a six hour reading of and return to God's Word, was a joyous occasion – the start of the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles.

On the next day, the heads of the families and the Levites returned to listen to Ezra for spiritual insight. While the first day was spent recalling God's Word, the second day was deeper exposition and application of that Word. This happened for seven days. It was perhaps the best week for God's people in 150 years.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

From the spiritual restoration that is seen taking place in chapter 8, Christian leaders understand the process by which spiritual renewal takes place:

- 1) **Prayer for the spiritually weak or dead:** It is no coincidence that Nehemiah and Ezra, likely the two most zealous in prayer in Jerusalem, were the civil and spiritual leaders of God's people. Dependence on God through prayer gives him opportunities to open doors for Christian leaders.
- 2) **Proclamation of law and gospel:** Romans 10:17, as just one example, makes it clear that God's Word needs to be present if faith is going to be planted or nurtured.
- 3) **Explanation of God's Word:** The account of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 suggests the difficulty that readers of the Bible may experience while seeking to grasp its truth, if they do not have someone to clearly communicate its truth to them in terms they can process.
- 4) **Repentance by listeners:** Sorrow over sin, followed by a turn away from it that leads to seeing God's grace in the Savior Jesus is the most basic element of spiritual revival.

THE ISRAELITES CONFESS THEIR SINS (9:1-37)

SUMMARY

It was the “twenty-fourth day of the seventh month” (i.e. October 30 on modern calendars) (v. 1). This was not an official holiday prescribed by the Law of Moses. Rather, the tenth day of the month was the annual celebration of the Day of Atonement, the most official penitential day of the Jewish calendar. Nonetheless, the Jews still becoming reacquainted with the Law, chose this day to gather (in fasting, sackcloth, and ashes) to confess their sins to God in prayer.

Undoubtedly led by Ezra, this prayer was massive. After spending a quarter of the daytime in reading from the Pentateuch, Ezra, as well as all of the Israelites standing with him, next sought the Lord in prayer for three straight hours. The recorded product found here is the longest prayer in all of Scripture (9:5-38). In this prayer the Israelites acknowledged God for his work in creation (vv. 5-6), they reviewed the failed history of their people (vv. 7-31), and appealed to God for mercy in their present distress (vv. 32-37). Whereas many ancient civilizations blatantly chose to erase errors of their past, the Jews took ownership of their fathers’ mistakes. They recalled God entering into a covenant relationship with Abraham (vv. 7-8), God miraculously delivering them through the Red Sea from slavery in Egypt (vv.9-12), his preservation of his people in the wilderness (vv.16-21), the Lord’s patience with them in leading them to the Promised Land (v. 22-25), the unfortunate cycles of prosperity-sin-decline-oppression-repentance-deliverance and back again chronicled in the book of Judges (vv. 26-29), and finally their rise to power under King David only to eventually faithlessly fall harder than ever, resulting in captivity (vv. 30-31). These Jews were well aware that they deserved nothing from God. Yet, citing his grace (v. 32), they still desired his help.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

From the honesty of the Jews’ prayer of chapter 9, Christian leaders learn that their prayers improve when:

- 1) **Prayer is combined with Bible study:** The Jews prayed for three hours *after* hearing God’s Word for three hours. Naturally, after hearing about him, they began their prayer by acknowledging his greatness.
- 2) **Prayer contains humble, honest, and specific confession:** Christians often say “sorry” for their sins without taking the time to enumerate these sins in their prayers and verbalize their severity. The Jews here were not general about their sins, but got painfully specific about them – hoping a frank reminder of the seriousness of their sins would help them discourage another slip.
- 3) **It is understood that God’s love is undeserved:** The Jews recognized they did not deserve to have God listen or help. But he had in the past. They were certain their Heavenly Father would listen now too. Aware of their own sinfulness, they appreciated the contrast of God’s goodness all the more.

THE AGREEMENT OF THE PEOPLE (9:38-10:39)

SUMMARY

The fourth and final direction of the prayer heard in Nehemiah 9, having looked upward, backward, and inward, is now forward. The Jews pledged faithfulness to the Lord in this prayer. In essence, they made a statement of reorganized priorities (v. 38).

Again, a list of names is given at the beginning of chapter 10 – those who sealed the written oath of faithfulness to God. Nehemiah listed eighty-four names. After listing himself, he mentioned the names of twenty-two priests (v. 1-8), seventeen Levites (v. 9-18), and forty-four other leaders (likely, heads of homes) (v. 10-27). These individuals were all political, economic, and religious leaders who represented numerous other men, women, and children.

Each of the regulations that was described in the documented pledge of the people required an exercise of faith in the fact that God would provide – for peace, for food, for family. The specified commitments of the covenant were that there would be no further intermarriage with pagan foreigners (v. 30), no business activity on the Sabbath (v. 31), regular provisions for the temple work (vv. 32-35), dedication of the firstborn (v. 36), and regular tithes (vv. 37-39). Drafted by the Levites, this covenant characterized the Jews' desire to remain focused on 1) the authority of the Bible, 1) the importance of the temple, and 3) the responsibility of the people.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

From this section of Nehemiah, a worthwhile principle about keeping promises is taught to God's people:

- 1) **Written plans confirm right priorities:** Oral tradition was still normal for the world at this time. It would have been easier to simply ask the people to make a promise rather than writing a promise. No one would have questioned its integrity. However, as an extra level of self-accountability, the people chose to put their oath in writing and seal it by the names of their leaders. Written documentation is always more binding than verbal agreement.

In his leadership book on Nehemiah, *Hand Me Another Brick*, Chuck Swindoll mentions that when agreeing to marry a couple, he requires at least three premarital counseling sessions as well as a formal list of the couple's priorities. Occasionally he reads these priorities in the ceremony and often weaves the concepts into the wording of their vows. He then requires them to listen to a recording of their ceremony every year when their anniversary rolls around. The goal is to make sure that the couple is holding to the pledge they'd made before God and correct any areas where that they have gone off course. Documentation of promise used as a reminder for God's people, used properly, can be a powerful device.¹⁷

THE NEW RESIDENTS OF JERUSALEM (11:1-36)

SUMMARY

Chapter 11 resumes the story begun in Nehemiah 7:4-5. Those passages mentioned Nehemiah's plan to repopulate Jerusalem as he began the census necessary for resettlement. After the intervening account of the renewal of the covenant, the narrative now returns to the topic of Jerusalem's re-inhabiting.

Most Jews had chosen to refrain from living in Jerusalem since its fall in 586 BC. With no walls, it was dangerous. Anyone foolish enough to live there was easy prey for robbers. The Jews who returned in exile then typically chose to build homes (and often nice ones) in the suburbs.

Nehemiah knew that God wanted his people recentralized in Jerusalem though. To accomplish this, for starters, Nehemiah required the leaders of the Jews to live in the city (v. 1). Also, some Jews graciously volunteered to move to the city (v. 2). And to complete the repopulating process, the people agreed to cast lots so that the number of Jews who

returned from exile who lived in Jerusalem would be approximately one out of every ten. If the number of those said to have settled in Jerusalem from the lists in this chapter are added up, the total number of adult males comes to 3,044. If women and children are added to that, the resulting population of Jerusalem at this time could very conservatively be put at about 10,000. Since this was intended to be one-tenth of the entire population, the number of Jews in Judah was perhaps about 100,000.¹⁸ Some scholars, however, believe that the number was considerably larger than this though, estimates going all the way up to one million.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

From the amassing of people to live in Jerusalem that is seen in chapter 11, Christian leaders learn:

- 1) ***The priority of being close to God trumps everything else for God's people:*** Why would God (through Nehemiah) force his people to move to Jerusalem? Simple: this was where the temple was. In the Old Testament, this meant that Jerusalem was primarily thought of as the place where God, his Word, and his will dwelled. The Jews, as a people, needed to reflect their desire to be near God, by living where God dwelled.

PRIESTS AND LEVITES (12:1-26)

SUMMARY

The first half of chapter 12 is yet another list in the Book of Nehemiah. The function of this list appears to be to assure the people that the priests and Levites whom they were following were really descendants of the families God appointed to serve in this capacity. This was an important issue since sacrifices offered on their behalf at the temple were only valid if offered by valid ministers.

Further examination of the list indicates that what is provided here is not one list, though, as much as it is four lists. The first list names twenty-two leaders of priestly families at the time of the first return under Zerubbabel and Jeshua, one hundred years earlier (vv. 1-7). The second list names Levitical leaders (vv. 8-9). The third list mentions the line of high priest from the time of Zerubbabel until the writing of the book of Nehemiah (vv. 10-11). And the fourth list names the heads of the priestly families at the time of Joiakim, right before the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

Although this last list of Nehemiah will again seem tedious to many readers, another valuable point can be gleaned about Christian leadership:

- 1) ***Christian Leaders Must Be Qualified:*** The Law of Moses was clear regarding who among God's people were allowed to minister on behalf of the people. Although the New Testament Christian Church does not have restrictions on who is allowed into representative ministry by family lineage, certain qualifications for God's representative leaders certainly still exist (see 1 Tim 3).

DEDICATION OF THE WALL OF JERUSALEM (12:27-47)

SUMMARY

Shortly after the completion of the wall, the city began to show signs of renewal and progress. New homes, new businesses, and in general, new life, all contributed to the quick repopulation of Jerusalem. The finished wall was ready to be dedicated by the people it would protect (ca. 444 BC).

At the dedication, Nehemiah instructed the leaders of Judah to go up on top of the wall. He also gathered two choirs who were to parade around the wall belting out joyful songs (v. 31). They likely started near the Valley Gate in the southwest. The first procession, led by Ezra, moved in a counterclockwise fashion upon the wall. The second procession, led by Nehemiah, simultaneously moved in a clockwise direction. They met between the Water Gate and the Gate of the Guard in the northeast. Then they proceeded into the temple area (v 40).

Chapter 12 concludes by indicating how happy the Jews were to have reconnection with the Lord. Their heart for the Lord was seen by their generosity in supporting the Lord's earthly ministers and their work (vv. 44-47). This has always been as accurate an external indicator as any for the hearts of God's people.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

From the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, Christian leaders learn:

- 1) **Connection with God Brings Joy to the Heart:** The word that is found in 12:43, referencing the impression that the Jews' celebration had on the neighboring people, is fascinating and telling. The verse does not say that the "song" of the choirs was heard from afar. Rather, it says their "joy" was heard from afar.¹⁹

Words are sometimes confused. Tone, however, is so clear that it can be interpreted clearly by little children or even animals. Christian leaders will understand that as influential and powerful as words are, gospel proclamation should be accompanied by a joyful tone that indicates happiness and contentment in the heart.

NEHEMIAH'S FINAL REFORMS (13:1-31)

SUMMARY

After a twelve year term as governor in Judah, Nehemiah had returned home to reclaim his position as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes in Persia. It was the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes reign (ca. 433 BC). Between chapters 12 and 13 of Nehemiah, there is an unknown passage of time. Scholars' estimates range from as few as two years to as many as fifteen. Regardless, Nehemiah was likely at least forty years old when he left Susa the first time for Jerusalem. The end of his first governorship would have made him fifty-two years old. Returning after an unknown number of years means that Nehemiah was probably around sixty years old when he returned to serve a second term as governor of Judah.²⁰

Although the Jews had survived for awhile in Nehemiah's absence, a gradual decline was definite. The opening verses of chapter 13 indicate that the people were still listening to God's Word, as they recognized the need to cast foreigners from their worship assembly. Nonetheless, throughout the rest of the chapter we see that virtually every aspect of the covenant highlighted in Nehemiah 10 has been broken.

Nehemiah specified four significant factors that demanded correction, problems that God had already recently sent the prophet Malachi to correct. First, Israel's high priest at the time, Eliashib, had allowed his friend and old enemy of Nehemiah, Tobiah, to live in some empty rooms in the temple. There is debate as to whether Tobiah had *any* Jewish blood, let alone Levitical blood, which meant that he had no business being in the temple storerooms, which should have been filled with provisions for the priests and Levites. Nehemiah was so furious about this, that upon his return to Jerusalem, he literally threw Tobiah and all of his possessions out onto the street (vv. 4-9).

Aware of the neglect in supporting the temple workers, which led many to move away so that they could support themselves, Nehemiah rebuked the city officials. He wanted them to feel appropriate shame in neglecting God's house. He placed responsible officials in charge to make sure this would not happen again (vv. 10-13).

Next, Nehemiah dealt with the merchants who had again gone back to selling grain on the Sabbath. Here too, Nehemiah firmly chided them. He actually posted guards at the gates of the city as an additional level of accountability against the merchants (vv. 15-22).

Nehemiah's fourth and final step in correction was to deal with those who had broken Mosaic Law by marrying foreigners. In love, Nehemiah explained how this was not racism. It was just spiritually treacherous. He reminded them how even Solomon, in all his wisdom, had been led away from faith by the idolatry of foreign wives. And not only was it these Jewish men and women who suffered, but their children barely stood a chance of knowing the true God when growing up in a syncretistic home. So upset was Nehemiah that he actually beat and pulled out the hair of the men who had made this mistake, so that all would learn from their errors.

The Nehemiah that is seen in chapter 14 is perfectly consistent with the Nehemiah whom we saw in the early chapters – faithful, driven, uncompromising, and dependent on God. In this chapter he once again faced wrongs and wrongdoers head on. He dealt with them severely. He lovingly worked towards permanent correction. And he did this all while seeking God's help through prayer. Throughout this chapter Nehemiah asked God to “remember him” and his actions (vv. 14, 22, 29, 31). This was not self-righteousness. It was simply the acknowledgment that God had graciously conformed Nehemiah's heart to God's will and that Nehemiah desired for that to remain the same.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES LEARNED HERE

From Nehemiah's return and second term as governor in Jerusalem seen in chapter 13, Christian leaders come to the realization that:

- 1) ***Good Leadership is Consistently Good:*** It would be hard to believe that the people of Jerusalem would have slipped back into their old errors if Nehemiah had remained in Jerusalem instead of returning to Susa. This does not mean that Nehemiah made a poor decision. But it does indicate that God's people are never “fixed” in this lifetime. They need continued “*teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness*” (2 Tim 3:16).

CONCLUSION

Without question, Nehemiah remains a relevant study for Christian leaders today, both spiritually and practically. Outside of God himself, one would have trouble finding a more consistently godly and effective model of leadership in Scripture than Nehemiah. In fact, Jesus can quite easily be seen in the person of Nehemiah, who leaves an exalted position to identify with the plight of his people and leads them into restoration, all while maintaining prayerful dependence on God.²¹

For God's people, Nehemiah continues to be an example of concepts like how to pray, how to be faithfully prepared, how to harmonize dependence on the divine with human action, how to execute plans in a timely fashion, how to handle discouragement for self or others, how to maintain focus, how to motivate others when morale is low, how to handle criticism and deflect false accusations, how to accept promotion without abusing its privileges, how to help others develop God's perspective on life, how to solve tough problems, and how to glorify God in all that you do. These are essential components to effective leadership in the modern world, making the Book of Nehemiah a blueprint of responsible management for Christians today.

The Lord not only blessed the Jews who returned from exile by working through his faithful servant, Nehemiah, but he also blessed his church today by having his Spirit communicate Nehemiah's inspired story to us. The New Testament makes it clear that in the coming of Christ, God's temple in the New Testament church is the members of that church (1 Cor 3:16). Carrying the analogy a step further then, the walls that protect the holy city of God's people and the gate that grants entrance into that city consist of the *Means of Grace*, which Christian leaders are called to administer. Faithful Christian leaders, then, like Nehemiah, humbly lay the bricks that they have been called to lay, for the glory of God and the benefit of God's people.

NOTES

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- ¹ John F. Brug, *The People's Bible: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985), digital copy.
- ² Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 24-32.
- ³ Gene A Getz, *Nehemiah: Becoming a Disciplined Leader* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 22.
- ⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 30.
- ⁵ Ibid, 26-30
- ⁶ Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 56.
- ⁷ Gene A Getz, *Nehemiah: Becoming a Disciplined Leader* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995,) 52-53.
- ⁸ Ibid, 51.
- ⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 45.
- ¹⁰ John F. Brug, *The People's Bible: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985), digital copy.
- ¹¹ Gene A Getz, *Nehemiah: Becoming a Disciplined Leader* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995,) 90-93.
- ¹² Ibid, 119-124.
- ¹³ John F. Brug, *The People's Bible: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985), digital copy.
- ¹⁴ Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 135.
- ¹⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 78.
- ¹⁶ Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 141.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, 186.
- ¹⁸ Howard F. Vos, *Bible Study Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 127.
- ¹⁹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 214.
- ²⁰ Gene A Getz, *Nehemiah: Becoming a Disciplined Leader* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995,) 135.
- ²¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 19.

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Note: All Bible passages used are from the 1984 New International Version translation.