



Principles of Leadership:

Lessons from the Life of Nehemiah



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Contents

Intro	1	Introduction 1	II Kings 17_____	p. 3
“	2	Introduction 2	II Kings 23.15-20; 25.1-30_____	p. 7
“	3	Introduction 3	Ezra 1.1-8_____	p. 11
Lesson	1	Nehemiah 1.1_____		p. 14
“	2	Nehemiah 1.2-4_____		p. 18
“	3	Nehemiah 1.4b-11_____		p. 22
“	4	Nehemiah 2.1-10_____		p. 24
“	5	Nehemiah 2.11-20_____		p. 28
“	6	Nehemiah 4.1-23_____		p. 31
“	7	Nehemiah 5.1-13_____		p. 34
“	8	Nehemiah 5.14-19_____		p. 37
“	9	Nehemiah 6.1-19_____		p. 39
“	10	Nehemiah 6.15-7.5; 7.63-65_____		p. 42
“	11	Nehemiah 8.1-8_____		p. 46
“	12	Nehemiah 8.9-12_____		p. 49
“	13	Nehemiah 8.13-18_____		p. 52
“	14	Nehemiah Ch. 9_____		p. 54
“	15	Nehemiah Ch. 10_____		p. 56
“	16	Nehemiah Ch. 11-12_____		p. 58
“	17	Nehemiah 13.1-9_____		p. 61
“	18	Nehemiah 13.10-14_____		p. 64
“	19	Nehemiah 13.15-22_____		p. 68
“	20	Nehemiah 13.23-31_____		p. 72

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“What any man undertakes to prove as necessary, he shall make good out of the scriptures”

--the primary rule of the Westminster Divines

**Principles of Leadership:
Lessons from the life of Nehemiah**

II Kings 17

*Background I:
The deportation of Northern Israel
and the settlement of Samaria*

For the next several weeks we will be examining the life of Nehemiah, from the book of Nehemiah. To better understand the context of this book that bears his name, it is helpful if a person has a grasp of the events in the life of Israel that preceded the exile. We will begin this study by examining two passages relevant to this background material: II Kings 17 and II Chron. 36. This week we will begin with II Kings 17.

** read II Kings 17 **

I. Historical/Exegetical Overview

We will begin our study of this passage with an historical overview of the events mentioned in II Kings 17. We will then discuss four different sets of observations drawn from this text, that forms the background for the book of Nehemiah.

The chapter can be divided into five sections for ease of consideration:

- vv. 1-7 Hoshea and the siege of Samaria
- vv. 8-18 sins of the Northern Kingdom
- vv. 19-20 sins of the Southern Kingdom
- vv. 21-23 sin of Jeroboam, Son of Nebat
- vv. 24-41 the "New" Northern Kingdom

vv. 1-7 Hoshea and the siege of Samaria

Chapter 17 begins with the last king of the Northern Kingdom: Hoshea. As the text states, he did evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel before him (v. 2). At this time, the deportation of Israel had already begun (cf. II Kings 16. 27-30) and the Northern Kingdom of Israel was (to some degree) a vassal or slave state to Assyria, the great world power to the north.

Hoshea conspired against the King of Assyria (v. 4). Soon thereafter, the entire northern kingdom was exiled to Assyrian-controlled lands.

vv. 8-18 sins of the Northern Kingdom

Verses 8-18 are a summary. Most of the books of I-II Kings is found in narrative. In vv. 8-18 we have the author's own interpretation of this narrative he has been writing. The Northern Kingdom of Israel sinned from its inception, and continued throughout its history. It is interesting to note that of all the kings that had ruled over the nation of Samaria (ie--the Northern Kingdom), not one of them was pleasing in the eyes of the LORD. The people sinned in their worship (vv. 9-14)--they served idols throughout the course of their history. They sinned by rejecting the statutes and ordinances of the LORD (vv. 15-18) and continued in the ways of the nations.

vv. 19-20 sins of the Southern Kingdom

Verses 19-20 only briefly mention the sins of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The influence of Samaria had affected the Southern Kingdom as well.

vv. 21-23 sin of Jeroboam, Son of Nebat

The sin of Jeroboam, Son of Nebat is seen as the "seed sin" for this nation. It was the sin of Jeroboam in which Samaria (the Northern Kingdom) walked throughout their entire existence (v. 22). In a few moments we will discuss this individual.

vv. 24-41 the "New" Northern Kingdom

The remainder of the chapter speaks of the new inhabitants of the northern part of the promised land. At this time, it was the habit of Assyria deport peoples and move them great distances, placing them in unfamiliar surroundings, both geographical and cultural. In this scenario, a "troublesome" people could be destroyed from within, through intermarriage and through cultural assimilation into a new setting. After a generation or two, the peoples would no longer be separate nations, but a heterogeneous mixture of peoples. And hopefully, nationalistic fervour would be a thing of the past.

These verses are the most important for our study of the life of Nehemiah, for they explain from where the enemies of Nehemiah came.

Verses 24-28 speak of the new inhabitants and their subsequent problems in the land of Israel. It concludes with a priest being brought in to teach the people to "fear" the LORD.

Verses 29-33 are a brief discussion concerning the gods these displaced peoples "brought" with them. Note v. 33.

Verses 34-41 discuss their relationship to the law of God. Even though they "feared" the LORD, they did not fear the LORD. They may have went through the motions of worship to the God of Israel, but they continued to worship their idols. In fact, their worship of the LORD was most likely false. Note that it was Josiah, King of Judah, who would come into this land several years later and finally destroy the alter at Bethel, that Jeroboam, the Son of Nebat, had built (cf. II Kings 22). Clearly, their worship of the LORD was not something that was pleasing in the eyes of Josiah (and ultimately the LORD Himself).

II. Observations

In considering this passage, we are endeavouring to have a better understanding of the context in which Nehemiah was living and functioning. The title of our study is "Principles of Leadership: Lessons from the Life of Nehemiah". Although we have not yet begun to study the book of Nehemiah of the life of this man, this passage does illustrate many observations regarding leadership, sin and God that would be profitable for one to consider.

IIa. Observations regarding Sin

The first group of observations we will consider are those dealing with sin. If this passage speaks of anything, it is sin--the sin of Hoshea, the sins of the Israelites and of Judah, the sin of Jeroboam the Son of Nebat, the sins of those exiles brought into the land of Palistine. Sin is a common thread running throughout this chapter.

1. In all areas of life, one will be affected by the sins of others

Israel was affected by the former residents of the land of Canaan (v. 8) and by the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat (vv. 21-23). Judah was affected by the sins of Israel (v. 19). The new inhabitants of the land were affected by the "priest". And later, Nehemiah had to prepare for attacks from the descendants of these same idol-worshiping men and women.

2. Note carefully the legacy that sin may have

This is true of the person of Jeroboam the Son of Nebat. His name is synonymous with sin and disobedience. Adam is another whose legacy is one of sin.

Behold, the legacy of sin:

- persistent
- influential
- indelible

3. Sin is often secret

cf. v. 9. Note also Achan, Annanias and Sapphira. their sins were also secret, at least for a time.

4. sin can often be religious

cf. vv. 10, 33. This sin may take many forms. But even though these actions may have been religious, they were still sin.

5. Doing that which the world does is seldom, if ever, pleasing to God

cf. v. 11

6. The sin of one man may affect many

cf. v. 21. Note how many lives were affected by the sin of one man--Jeroboam the Son of Nebat. His was a legacy that spread several hundred years, until the deportation of the Northern Kingdom.

The same truth can be seen throughout the course of history: note how our lives have been affected by men such as Darwin, Scofield, Finney, Joseph Smith. Each of these men died almost 200 years ago, but their legacy is alive and well all over the globe.

7. Sin will be punished

cf. v. 23. Note also, however, that a leader may have to be dealing with the effects of sin prior to God's divine judgment upon it. Various kings of the Southern Kingdom had to contend with the sin of the Northern Kingdom and its kings.

8. Sincerity means nothing; holiness, righteous and obedience mean everything

cf. vv. 11, 18, 20, 23, 34, 40-41 True religion has obedience; false religion may have many forms, but no true, evangelical, gospel obedience (cf the Pharisees of Jesus' day).

IIb. Observations regarding God

1. The LORD punishes sin.

cf. vv. 8, 11, 22-23

2. The LORD is a patient God--both with the obedient and the disobedient.

3. God will be worshiped as He prescribes

cf. vv. 9-12, 16, 40-41

IIc. Observations on Leadership

1. A leader may experience the cumulative punishment of generations

cf. v. 2 with v. 6ff and v. 18

2. The actions of one man may affect many

cf. vv. 21-23

IId. Miscellaneous Observations

1. Being in a "blessed" place does not make one blessed

cf. v. 24 Even though they dwelt in the promised land, they were not blessed because of this fact.

**Principles of Leadership:
Lessons from the life of Nehemiah**

II Kings 23.15-20; 25.1-30

*Background II:
The reforms of Josiah/
the siege and destruction of Jerusalem*

I. The reforms of Josiah

Before we begin with the body of our lesson tonight, I think it would be good to examine briefly one other episode that transpires in the cities of Bethel and Samaria (both of which were in the Northern Kingdom). Last week we saw that a "priest" was brought back from the exile to teach the new inhabitants of the land regarding the "God of the land". At this time he went to Bethel, both to live and work.

Also, last week, we saw that the new inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom were utilising the old high places that the Northern Kingdom of Israel had used prior to their deportation. In chapter 23 of II Kings we learn that this practice of using the old alters, and the practices introduced by this "priest" were abruptly halted by Josiah, King of Judah.

** read II Kings 23.15-30 **

From this passage, it can be seen that Josiah's zeal for God spilled over into what was now an overtly pagan land. The ancestors of the Samaritans now lived in this land, and were worshiping their gods, along with some adulterated form of the worship of the God of Israel. As it relates to our study of Nehemiah, this episode may provide us with a bit more understanding of the animosity that these new inhabitants may have had for the Jewish people who returned from the exile. Undoubtedly, the ancestors of these "Samaritans" in Nehemiah's time were affected greatly by the deeds of Josiah in at least two ways:

1. the destruction of the high place at Bethel. The high place at Bethel was centuries old at the time of its destruction by Josiah. Undoubtedly, this was one of the more significant and prominent places of worship in the new Samaria, as it had been in the life of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Now, a center of commerce and worship was destroyed by Josiah.

2. the destruction of the rest of the high places and the slaughter of their priests. Not only was a prominent place of worship destroyed by this Judean King, but all of the secondary places of worship were destroyed as well. In our day and age, it is hard to comprehend how devastating this act was. Religion was at the center of many

ancient societies. In fact, one of the first things that these displaced peoples did upon entering into the land of Israel was to set up idols and high places. Josiah destroyed the life of many of these new communities, tearing down their high places.

In addition, he slaughtered many priests who served at these sites. Most likely, some of the descendants in the land at the time of Nehemiah's return were descendants of those slaughtered by Josiah, the ancestor of Zerubbabel, who led an exodus of Jews back to the land of Judah.

These, then, in brief, are the deeds of Josiah, king of Judah against the people who inhabited the Northern Kingdom, after the exile.

Before we leave Josiah, I would like to make one observation regarding his leadership, namely, that *biblical Christian leadership will be hated by the enemies of God*. Undoubtedly, the new Samaritan peoples were not thrilled with Josiah's godly leadership or his godly deeds. His leadership led to the destruction of much of what they held dear, to the death of many people they had honoured. Clearly, unless the Lord graciously gave them repentance, they would have hated Josiah for what he had done. Thus, I observe, that *biblical Christian leadership will be hated by the enemies of God*.

II. The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem

As we move on in our study, please turn to II Kings 25.1-30. This chapter recounts for us the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Verses 1-3 recount the siege itself> Nebuchadnezzar sent his army to lay siege to Jerusalem, and began building a siege wall against the city. For three years the city was under siege.

Verses 4-7 recount the fall of Jerusalem. In the midst of the final hours of Jerusalem, the king and many of his chief officers flee the city. It would appear in v. 5 that some of them may have escaped at this time. However, the king and his sons were captured, and his sons were killed (v. 7) and Zedekiah, King of Judah, was blinded and taken to Babylon.

Verses 8-21 recount for us the subsequent actions of the Babylonian Army against Judah and Jerusalem. In vv. 9-10 the city is burnt, the temple and palace destroyed and the wall of Jerusalem torn down. It would appear from v. 11 that the vast majority of the people of Jerusalem are exiled at this time, with only the poorest remaining in the land. Verses 13-17 recount in more detail the destruction of the temple. Verses 18-21 concern the death of various officials of Judah.

Verses 22-26 relay the woeful tale of the post-siege events in Judah. After destroying Jerusalem and exiling its king and most of the former inhabitants, Nebuchadnezzar appoints Gedaliah to govern Judah. Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, of the Royal family, strikes down Gedaliah, the Chaldeans who were with him, and then leads the people down to Egypt for supposed safety, thus, effectively leaving the nation vacant of residents.

The chapter ends with a brief word about Jehoiachin, captive in Babylon, who is released some years later.

This, then, is the chapter before us.

III. Observations

From the text I would like to move on to various observations that can be drawn from the text, the majority of which are dealing with principles of leadership.

Before we begin, however, I would like to discuss a word of caution. Many of the subsequent observations are drawn from the actions and deeds of Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. Ordinarily, I do not think it wise to look at a non-believer for lessons on how to be a godly person, let alone a leader. However, in this case, the scripture bears witness that Nebuchadnezzar was God's divinely-ordained means for the chastising of His chosen people (cf. Dan. 1, Jeremiah, etc). Thus, he was invincible as regards the conquest of Judah and Jerusalem. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar's actions, in that God made him successful, can be instructive for us as well.

1. Effective leadership is patient

cf. vv. 1-3. Nebuchadnezzar waited three years for victory.

2. Effective leadership is committed to one specific course of action

cf. vv. 1-3. They didn't come and go. They stayed and completed their task.

3. Effective leadership is prepared for contingencies

cf. vv. 4-5. They tried to escape. But the Chaldeans caught them.

4. Not all leadership is "top" leadership

Some leadership is mid-management. Much of what was accomplished was done through delegation. This is true today in the church as well. For example:

- elders over deacons
- elders over congregation
- husband over wife

5. Effective leadership has effective sub-leaders

Note also:

- Moses and Joshua
- Elijah and Elisha
- Elisha and Gehazi (a negative example)

6. Effective leadership is thorough in accomplishing its task.

cf. vv. 10-11. The Chaldeans destroyed all buildings. They took most powerful people and exiled them.

7. Effective leadership thoroughly nullifies opposition

cf. vv. 10-11

8. Effective leadership is merciful

cf. v. 12. Note the actions regarding the poorest of the land, and the treatment of Jeremiah.

9. Nothing is sacred where God's vengeance is concerned
cf. v. 13

10. Position, whether political or religious, is not exempt from judgment
cf. vv. 18-21

11. At times, leadership may come suddenly
cf. v. 22 and Gedaliah

12. Effective leadership is not motivated by fear
cf. vv. 23ff. Where there is fear, as demonstrated by Ishmael, there may be unbelief, disobedience and murder.

13. Effective leadership is not motivated by pride
cf. Ishmael (a negative example)

14. Obedience does not guarantee success
cf. v. 25 and the example of Gedaliah

15. a leader may be challenged, at times, by one who is "more worthy"
cf. Ishmael's claim over against Gedaliah.

16. Obedience may end in great sorrow.
cf. the lives of Jeremiah and Gedaliah

17. some leaders are no leaders at all
cf. the life of Jehoiachin. Although he was released from prison and seen as a king, he was no ruler at all.

IV. Historical Summary

- Northern Israel exiled
- "Samaritans" arrive
- Josiah's reforms
- Nebuchadnezzar begins exile (cf. Dan. 1)
- Siege and destruction of Jerusalem

**Principles of Leadership:
Lessons from the life of Nehemiah**

Ezra 1.1-8

*Background III:
The beginning of the Return*

The book of Ezra begins in a rather miraculous manner. A pagan king, King Cyrus, begins to reign as king of Persia. Babylon is gone. The Medes and the Persians are now the dominant power of the world. And out of the blue, it seems, Cyrus sends a decree that any exiled Jew who wishes can return to Judah and Jerusalem to build a new temple for the God of the Jews. In v. 2, Cyrus credits God with giving him the kingdoms of the earth. In vv. 3-4 is the decree to return to Jerusalem to build a temple for the God who is in Jerusalem.

In vv. 5-8 we see the return of many of the exiles to Jerusalem. In addition many of the original vessels of the House of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken, are restored to the exiles for the new temple.

The chapter continues with Sheshbazzar and subsequently Zerubbabel leading a group of exiles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. For all intents and purposes, this land is uninhabited when they arrive and appears to have been that way for several years.

This, then, is the chapter before us.

I. A note regarding Cyrus

Before we proceed on with observations from this section, I'd like to say a few words regarding Cyrus, King of Persia. Like Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus is a divinely-decreed instrument of God's working in the life of His people. In Isa. 44.28-45.1, Cyrus is decreed to be the servant of God who will rebuild the temple. Further, in Daniel 1.21, Daniel was said to have served until the third year of Cyrus and did have success under his new master (cf. Dan. 6.28).

What, then, are we to make of this request, this command of the king? Was he truly sympathetic towards the Jews? Was he actively a believer of the Lord, the God of Heaven? Or are we to understand these words in another light?

Although one may want to see Cyrus in the best light possible, even in light of the fact that the scriptures see no ill in this man, I think that there were other motives in the mind of Cyrus when he made this command. Rather than seeking the interests of

the LORD, it would seem that he was seeking his own interests and providentially this was for the best for God's people. Other similar decrees have been found in ancient writings, where Cyrus decreed that other temples be built. More than likely, he was "playing it safe". If he was kind to all the gods, then, perhaps they would be nice to him. Note that the LORD is referred to as "the God who is in Jerusalem", possibly in contrast to the gods who dwelt elsewhere. whatever the case and whatever his motives, Cyrus was God's divinely-ordained instrument by which the temple was to be rebuilt. (For a further discussion of Cyrus and the decrees, see Derek Kidner, p. 18, pp. 32-33 in his commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah [in the Tyndale Series] regarding this issue.)

II. Observations

1. What God says, He will do; and He will do so in His time

cf. v. 1. "to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus,...". Everything that Jeremiah said regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, and concerning the 70 years, God did at the proper time.

2. Some unbelievers may benefit and be a blessing to the people of God

cf. Cyrus' decree. cf also Prov. 21.1. This was also true of Nebuchadnezzar as regards Daniel and his friends, the Roman empire in the time of Christ, etc.

3. Using God and genuinely worshiping Him are two vastly different things.

4. One generation may see wrath, another mercy

5. True revival is a work of God

cf. v. 5

6. God is the one who gives His people favour in the eyes of others

cf. Cyrus giving the temple vessels back. Note also the silver and gold given the Israelites when leaving Egypt. Note also the favour given Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 1.

7. Unbelieving men may make some doctrinally-sound statements

cf. Cyrus and his decree. These need to be understood in the greater context (eg--Cyrus' other decrees show that he was not concerned only for "the God who was in Jerusalem".)

8. A moral, although non-believing, leader may also be a blessing.

cf. Rom. 8.28

III. Other Miscellaneous Introductory Matters

Author of Nehemiah

--much of the book is in the 1st person

--reads like one's journal account of history

- cf. the internal musings: eg--2.2; 2.11ff; 5.6
- internal prayers: 6.14; 13.14, 29, 31b
- also written in 3rd person: 8.9; 12.26, 47
- may have been written by Nehemiah. May have been written by Ezra, according to Jewish tradition. Ultimately, the authorship is unknown. Most likely Ezra may have taken the writings of Nehemiah and filled them out into what we have today. These two books, Ezra and Nehemiah were originally considered one book in the Hebrew scriptures.
- most likely written around 430 BC

Historical Background of Persia

(For a further discussion of the historical background of Persia, see Derek Kidner, pp. 111-116, in his commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah [in the Tyndale Series] regarding this issue.)

IV. Brief Outline of Nehemiah

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1.1-2.8 | Report regarding Judea/Nehemiah's response |
| 2.8-3.32 | Building the Wall of Jerusalem |
| 4.1-23 | Adversaries |
| 5.1-19 | Internal Issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> v.1-13 usury v.14-19 provisions |
| 6.1-14 | Adversaries II |
| 6.15-7.73 | Completion of the Wall/Related Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> v.6.15-7.3 wall completed v.7.4-73 genealogies |
| 8.1-18 | Religious Observances |
| 9.1-10.39 | Confession and Related Issues |
| 11.1-36 | Inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea |
| 12.1-47 | Priestly Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> v.1-26 priestly genealogies v.27-43 dedication of the wall v.44-47 temple duties |
| 13.1-31 | Nehemiah and the sins of Judea |

Lesson 1

"The Setting"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

v. 1.1

I. Review of Background and Outline

Before we begin our study tonight, I would like to briefly review the last three lessons, which speak of the history prior to the coming of Nehemiah, and to review our outline.

For the past several weeks, we have been looking at the background of the book Nehemiah, that is, namely, the history of the deportation of the northern kingdom of Israel; the subsequent re-settling of the northern kingdom with the ancestors of the "Samaritans"; the reforms of Josiah and how they affected these new Samaritans; the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the southern kingdom to Babylon; and last week we looked at the beginnings of the return of the Jewish people to the promised land during the reign of Cyrus King of Persia. This then is what we have looked at thus far.

In ch. 7 of the book of Ezra, we have recorded the record of the second wave of exiles returning to Judah, led by Ezra the scribe, who was of priestly descent. As ch. 7 records, this return was a return sanctioned by decree from the Persian king, to re-establish the worship of the God by the Jews. Apparently, the rebuilding of the temple a generation before did not also lead to the re-establishing of all of the rites of the Jewish sacrificial system and religion. This royal decree seems consistent with the Persian policy respecting the various customs of conquered peoples, that we observed last week.

The return we have mentioned here in Ezra 7 appears to have taken place some 12-15 years prior to the events we have recorded in Nehemiah 1. This then brings us to the First Chapter of the book of Nehemiah.

Before we begin I would also like to review the outline of the book before us:

Brief Outline of Nehemiah

- 1.1-2.8 Report regarding Judea/Nehemiah's response
- 2.8-3.32 Building the Wall of Jerusalem
- 4.1-23 Adversaries
- 5.1-19 Internal Issues:
 - v.1-13 usury
 - v.14-19 provisions
- 6.1-14 Adversaries II
- 6.15-7.73 Completion of the Wall/Related Issues
 - v.6.15-7.3 wall completed
 - v.7.4-73 genealogies
- 8.1-18 Religious Observances
- 9.1-10.39 Confession and Related Issues
- 11.1-36 Inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea
- 12.1-47 Priestly Issues
 - v.1-26 priestly genealogies
 - v.27-43 dedication of the wall
 - v.44-47 temple duties
- 13.1-31 Nehemiah and the sins of Judea

II. Brief Exposition of the Text

* read ch. 1 *

1.1

v.1 Verse 1 begins, "The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah." The phrase, "the words of Nehemiah..." here can be translated in two ways. First, as it is here, it makes reference to the words of Nehemiah. Second, however, this word translated here as "word" is also translated elsewhere in other writings of the Bible written around the same time as "deeds". This use can be seen in II Chron 35.27, referring to the deeds of Josiah, and in Jeremiah 5.28, referring to the deeds of the wicked. Thus in this case, verse 1 is referring to the deeds of Nehemiah, which is what the book describes, rather than the words of Nehemiah, which can have the idea of the "words" as almost referring to the prophecy of someone. Thus I think it is best understood that verse 1 tells us that this book contains the deeds of Nehemiah, which it does.

Verse 1 concludes with two pieces of information. The first is a time reference as to when the deeds recorded in this chapter take place, "...in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year. From this information, we can learn that the events here recorded take place approx. 12-13 years after the return of Ezra to Judah.

The second piece of information this verse provides is it gives us the location of where these events take place, "...in Shushan the citadel". From this we can see, *firstly*, that this chapter takes place in a very royal setting. The Persians had kind of a winter headquarters in Shushan. Apparently, this citadel was quite a fortified

structure, where the kings would stay in the winter months. Thus the king would have all or most of his trusted officers and advisers with him at this citadel. All that he would need to run the kingdom would be with him there at the citadel.

Secondly, this chapter takes place in a very governmental setting. Nehemiah apparently was, as we would refer to it today, a governmental employee. His wages were most likely paid out of the royal treasury, from the taxes collected from the Persian Empire. He was not a man of the field, nor a blacksmith. Neither, however was he royalty. He was a Israelite who was a high-ranking official in the Persian government.

Thirdly, this chapter takes place in a very worldly, possibly sinful setting. Although not recorded here, it is highly probable that this king acted in a similar manner to the kings that came before him. In that day and age, for the most part, whatever a king wanted, he got. This can be much more easily seen in the book of Esther, where many sinful attitudes can be seen throughout the book. It is only reasonable to assume that many of the same attitudes which flourished in the reign of the previous king (Ahasarus) still persisted in the reign of Artaxerses, the king during the time of Nehemiah. And this is the court in which Nehemiah served.

This then is v. 1.

III. Observations

1. The life of a leader may and can be studied by others.

This observation is taken more from the nature of the case, rather than a specific verse. Note carefully, the life of a leader can be and often is studied by others. Biblical examples of this can be seen: Moses-Joshua; Elijah-Elisha; Paul-Timothy. cf I Cor 11.1

2. God will have Christian leaders in secular vocations.

From v. 1 we learn that Nehemiah was in the service of the king. More than likely, he was in the service of the king for some time, for one did not become a cupbearer for a monarch in a day. Nehemiah must have been in the service of the king for quite some time before obtaining his present position. Further, he must have been a faithful and loyal subject in the eyes of the king to have ascended to this position.

3. God may have Christian leaders working in eminently sinful locations.

As we have seen earlier, Nehemiah was in a secular capital, serving a government whose stated policy was to re-establish the worship of the gods of the peoples that the Babylonians had deposed. Further, there were the royal "excesses" that most likely were taking place. Yet this man was a godly man in the midst of this sin, this excess, and he was faithful to his master, for in ch.2, the king sends him off for 12 years to work in a distant province, only to return to his former position at the end of this time. The king surely considered him faithful. Thus it is possible that a godly man can be a godly man and work in a "sinful" setting.

4. It may be years before a leader actually becomes one.

The passage does not state the age of Nehemiah. Neither does it state the number of years that Nehemiah served King Artaxerxes. However, by the very nature of the case, Nehemiah did not rise to this position overnight. Typically it took years for a person to rise to the position of cupbearer. The cupbearer was the one who brought the king his wine, and who tasted it beforehand, to see if it was poisoned, or if it was fit for the king. Obviously, only the most trusted of the king's subjects obtained this position. And, most likely, this trust was built up over a number of years, not days.

Further, the passage says nothing concerning the type of relationship Nehemiah enjoyed with the other Jews of that day. As far as we know, Nehemiah did not become a leader for his people until the king sent him to Judah, to rebuild the wall. It was most likely years before Nehemiah assumed this position. Note also Moses, Joshua, etc.

5. The obedience of Nehemiah in the 20th year of the king is just as important as is his service in the land of Judah.

This observation goes hand in hand with the proceeding. Just because Nehemiah was not seen to be a leader of the Jewish people until later in his life, that does not mean that his service was any less important before God. The Lord was his master throughout this whole time. Nothing changed with this new assignment. He was still a servant of the Great King, a servant of Jehovah. Before he had served the king of Persia, now the people of Judah. His former obedience was just as pleasing to God as was the latter. The latter may have had more of a direct relevance for the people of God. However, Nehemiah was still serving the same Master.

6. Leaders may be very religious and very sinful at the same time.

The policy of the Persian empire was to re-establish dead religions, to restore idols to their places, all that prayers may be given to their gods for their welfare. Here we have an example of sincerity devoid of godliness, devoid of holiness. Sin doesn't always have to be raucous or deviant to be sinful. Each of these gods had their own morality; thus the sacrifices. Usually in these systems good was rewarded and evil punished. Yet all of this was sinful in the eyes of the LORD.

This then is v. 1.

Lesson 2

"The Report regarding Judea"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

v. 1.2-4

I. Review of Last Lesson (v. 1.1)

- the deeds of Nehemiah
- time frame
- setting:
 - royal
 - governmental
 - worldly/sinful
 - lonely (cf v.2)
- observations

II. Brief Exposition of the Text

* read 1.2-4 *

As we have seen, verse 1 of this chapter gave us the historical setting and the time of the events recorded here in ch. 1. Verses 2-4 record for us the coming of certain Jews from Judah to the citadel in Shushan (Susa). It would appear from these events that the Jews were treated by the Persians as citizens of Media-Persia. They appear to have access to the citadel as any of the other peoples of the day. Although not stated directly, the Jews did not seem to have this same luxury during the era of the Babylonian kings. During that time, they were a subjected people, not much better than slaves. Here in the book of Nehemiah, these Jews have access to one of the more-trusted servants of the king--the cupbearer. The times, it seems, have changed.

v.2

In verse 2 we have the coming of a number of Jews to visit with Nehemiah. One of the visitors is here referred to as "Hanani, one of my brothers". It is unclear at this point whether this individual was actually a brother of Nehemiah, or whether this was Nehemiah's way of referring to another individual of Jewish descent. The term, brother, can have both meanings. Since Nehemiah was most likely writing to Jews, this reference is better understood as referring to one of Nehemiah's relatives, possibly even an actual brother. The remainder of these men remain anonymous.

Upon meeting with these men, Nehemiah questions them concerning the welfare of those who have returned from the exile to the land of Judah. It would seem from this

question and Nehemiah's subsequent response, that Nehemiah had not heard from his brother for quite some time. As we saw in our last lesson, Ezra the Scribe had returned some 12-13 years earlier. Further, this return of Ezra was not accomplished without royal notification. The same Persian King knew about and authorised the return led by Ezra. This return was royal information, something of which the cupbearer of the King of Persia would have knowledge. The one piece of information that neither the book of Nehemiah or Ezra provide us with is whether Nehemiah was cupbearer for the king at the time of the return of Ezra. More than likely he was not. A fact like that seemingly would have been recorded, seeing that Nehemiah elsewhere records for us his dealings with Ezra and the land of Judah.

In v. 2, Nehemiah asks regarding the "escaped ones", the ones who remained or endured through the exile. Derek Kidner, in his commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, sees a significance in the term escaped ones

...the word "escaped" is akin to one of Isaiah's favourite expressions, "the remnant"--that little portion of Israel with whom the future was to lie.

--Kidner, p.78

In his question Nehemiah also asks concerning the welfare of the city of Jerusalem.

v.3

In verse three we find the response of the men from Judah to Nehemiah. Clearly what we have here is a summary of the report. These were men from the land in question, from Judah. They must have had an intimate knowledge of these conditions.

The report they give is not a cheery one: The exiles who have returned are in "great evil and disgrace". To what these men of Judah were referring is not clear. It may have been a reference to their following words concerning the condition of Jerusalem, for the welfare of the people was tied up with their capital. Or, they may have been referring to an unnamed woe. In either case they were in a bad situation.

These messengers conclude their message with a statement concerning the condition of Jerusalem itself. The walls are still torn down; the gates are still burnt with fire. Apparently the return of Ezra has done little to restore the city of Jerusalem to a fraction of its former glory. The city still lay in ruins.

v.4

Upon hearing these words, Nehemiah is devastated. The text states that he sat and wept, and mourned for days. The scope of this verse quickly proceeds from their face to face conversation, to the subsequent response of Nehemiah, which continued for some time, "I mourned for days".

The verse concludes with two Hebrew participles, describing Nehemiah's subsequent activities, "and I was fasting and praying before the God of Heaven."

These then are the verses before us.

III. Observations

1. A godly leader will have God's concerns at the forefront of his thought.

In v.2 we have recorded for us Nehemiah's questions when these men from Judah arrive. What we find are no questions concerning individuals, no questions concerning financial concerns, no questions concerning families. No, what we have here is the record of what was Nehemiah's chief concern--the people and the city of God. Nehemiah was concerned with God's concerns.

2. A godly leader may face grievous situations.

Clearly this news was not pleasing to Nehemiah. Nor was this easy news to digest. From the context it would appear that this news devastated Nehemiah. A godly leader does not always have the luxury of dealing with "happy thoughts" or good reports. This report was a grievous one, and one which weighed heavily upon Nehemiah for a period of time. Most likely, he was not himself for quite some time, as is seen from ch.2. Thus I observe in the second place, a godly leader may face grievous situations.

3. A godly leader grieves over the welfare of God's people and the glory of God's name.

As we have just mentioned, Nehemiah was devastated by the news reported to him. Why was he grieved? Because of his deep social concern for a destitute people? Because of a Zionist or nationalistic concern for the Jews to rise in power again, as in the days of Solomon? Because Nehemiah was an emotional individual? No, Nehemiah wept and grieved because the city where God said His name would dwell was still in ruins. The city of the temple of God still lay desolate.

Zerubbabel had returned a generation before and the Temple was rebuilt. Ezra now had been in the land for 12-13 years, to restore the worship of "the God of Heaven". Surely, with the Temple built, Jerusalem would be restored. It was the centre of worship for the people of God.

But the messengers relayed otherwise. The city was still in ruins and the gates were burned with fire. This would mean that God's people were worshiping in a hovel, in a destroyed city, not a city worthy of the God of Heaven. "This is the city of Jehovah, the god of the Jews. and there is his temple, right beyond those burnt-out buildings". These thoughts grieved Nehemiah--and he wept. A godly leader will grieve over the welfare of God's people and the glory of God's name.

4. There is no shame in a leader crying.

5. A godly leader is one who will pray to the God of Heaven in the midst of difficult situations.

It is interesting to note the change in venue in v. 4. At the beginning of verse 4 Nehemiah is conversing with the messengers from Judah. When the verse ends

Nehemiah has been fasting and praying for days. In his recollection of these events Nehemiah's prayer was the next event, although it went on for days. He makes no mention of their departure or of any other conversation. The thing that consumed Nehemiah's life from the time he had heard the report was prayer.

As recorded in these verses this prayer had at least two facets. The first is spontaneity. Immediately, upon hearing these words, Nehemiah is praying. His prayer was spontaneous and immediate.

Second, his prayer was consistent. In vv.4 & 6 we have participles used to describe the prayerful activity of Nehemiah. A participle is like an English gerund, and "ing" word which denotes continuous activity. And this is the way the prayer of Nehemiah is characterised. A godly leader is one who will pray to the God of Heaven in the midst of difficult situations. Further, this prayer will be both spontaneous and continuous.

Lesson 3

"The Prayer of Nehemiah"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

v. 1.4b-11

I. Review of Last Lesson (v. 1.2-4)

- the coming of the messengers
- a sad report
- the grieving of Nehemiah
- observations

II. Brief Overview of the Text

* read ch. 1.1-11

Last time we looked at the background for this section of the chapter. The messengers had come and informed Nehemiah of the very grievous situation that the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem were in. Beginning in the latter half of v. 4 is the record of the prayer of Nehemiah. As we noted last week, this verse describes the activity of Nehemiah with participles, indicating that the activity found recorded here was a continuous activity, an activity that went on for some time. He states that he was fasting and praying before the God of Heaven (or God of the Heavens). This seems to be a rather post-exilic designation for God, found repeatedly in Ezra and Nehemiah. This is the name of God used by the Persians as well. And this is whom we find Nehemiah praying to.

In verses 5-11a we have the contents of this prayer. As the text stands we have one of two things in these verses:

1. this prayer is a summary of the prayers of Nehemiah over the period of time that Nehemiah was fasting and praying, or
2. this is one of the actual prayers that Nehemiah actually prayed, and he has recorded it here as a typical prayer that he prayed over the course of time he was fasting and praying.

From the context it appears that the latter of these two options is what is found here, possibly a prayer which was prayed just prior to Nehemiah appearing before the king in ch. 2.

In verse 5 we find Nehemiah's prayer beginning with praise to God for who He is. In vv.6-7, is a request for the attention of God to this prayer, and a confession of sin. Verses 8-9 are Nehemiah repeating scriptures back to God--scriptures which were very relevant to the current situation. Verses 10-11 are the conclusion of the prayer. In them he reiterates that he is praying on behalf of God's chosen people, those whom He brought out of Egypt, the sons of Abraham. He concludes by asking for compassion for himself before the king.

These then are the verses before us.

III. Observations

1. A godly leader directs his prayer to the "God of heaven".

The first recorded action we have of Nehemiah subsequent to the coming of the grievous report is prayer to God. He did not talk to others, he did not run to the priest, he did not go directly to the king--he prayed to God.

Further, he saw God as the God of heaven.

--a glorious God

--an all-powerful God

--a sovereign God

--a faithful God, who keeps His word and covenant

2. A godly leader is one who understands the importance of keeping the Law.

cf. v.5; cf Jn 14.21

3. Prayer can be (and often is) inconvenient.

cf. day and night, v.6.

4. A godly leader is one who can recognise sin in his own life and the lives of others.

cf. v.6

5. a godly leader is no stranger to confession of sin.

Nehemiah had been praying in this manner for some time. cf participles.

6. a godly leader is one who sees that sins of omission are just as sinful as sins of commission.

cf. v.7

*Note: To keep the law one must be familiar with the Law.

7. A godly leader is one who expects God to be faithful to His word.

cf. 8-9

Just as God was faithful to His word in scattering them, Nehemiah expected God to be faithful in gathering them again.

8. A godly leader has an experiential acquaintance with God and election.

cf v.10

9. a godly leader has an experiential acquaintance with the omnipotence of God.

cf v.10b

10. a godly leader is one who realises that unless God gives success, there is no true success.

cf. v.11

11. a godly leader is one who does not lose sight of his present duty. cf. v.11c

Lesson 4

"Nehemiah Sent to Judah"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 2.1-10

I. Review of Last Lesson (v. 1.4b-11)

- the text
 - the prayer of Nehemiah
 - praise to God (v.5)
 - request for the attention of God (v.6)
 - confession of sin (vv.6-7)
 - scripture repeated (vv.8-9)
 - conclusion and request for mercy (vv.10-11)
- observations

*II. Brief Overview of the Text***read text, vv.2.1-10**

In v.11 of ch 1, Nehemiah concludes his prayer with a request for mercy before the king. He then concludes the verse with an editorial comment, explaining that he was the cupbearer to the king.

In v.1 of ch 2 we find Nehemiah carrying out the duties of the cupbearer. What follows is a rather remarkable statement. He states that he had not been sad in the presence of the king before. The text does not state how long Nehemiah had served the king in this capacity. Clearly he must have served the king for some time, or else the king would not have sent him on this mission. How long he had served we do not know. But what is clear, is that, throughout the time of his service, for years, he had not been sad before the king.

In v.2 begins the discussion between Nehemiah and the king concerning the city of Jerusalem. The king begins the discussion by discussing the welfare of Nehemiah. Immediately, in v.3, Nehemiah states the true nature of his affliction--the city of his father's graves lies desolate, its walls destroyed and its gates are burned with fire. In response, the king asks Nehemiah what he wants, and Nehemiah prays to God in the midst of the conversation.

In v.5 Nehemiah makes his request of the king. He desires to go to Jerusalem, to rebuild its walls. After a brief discussion, the request is granted. In closing this conversation, Nehemiah makes one more request, that of supplies, namely wood for sacrifices and the gates of the city. This request is also granted, and a letter is given

him to this end.

In v.9-10 is a brief record of the trip and arrival. Also in v.10 is the first mention of Sanballat and Tobiah, two of the adversaries of Nehemiah. Please remember, that at the time of the writing of this book, that these people who now inhabit Samaria have been there close to 300 years. They undoubtedly had become well entrenched in the land since their arrival generations before.

These then are the verses before us.

III. Observations

1. A godly leader is one who carries out his duties in spite of how he feels.

Clearly from our study last week we saw just how profoundly the news of the people of Judah and of the city of Jerusalem had affected Nehemiah. He states in ch 1 that he wept and mourned, and prayed and fasted for days. He stated that he was praying night and day. Clearly his life was consumed with this news.

However, throughout the period of intense prayer and grief, the king knew nothing of his struggle. The king did not need to know of his struggle. This issue was one which was spiritual in nature. Nehemiah knew who he needed to speak to concerning this issue--the One who was the God of heaven, who could change this situation, the One who had a deep, abiding concern for His people and for His name.

Before we proceed any further, a word of caution needs to be stated. I am not stating that it is virtuous to hold one's feelings in, or that one should not discuss his concerns with others. On the contrary, at the proper time, both of these have their place. But often, we, as Nehemiah, do not have the luxury to exclusively deal with our problems. Life goes on, and as Christians, we each have our God-given duty to attend to. We, as Paul, in I Thess, can be praying without ceasing in the midst of our duties. Thus I observe, that a godly leader is one who carries out his duties in spite of how he feels.

2. A godly leader is one who is discreet concerning his spiritual condition and spiritual issues.

cf Mt 6.5-6, 16-18

3. A godly leader fears and reveres legitimate authority.

cf v.2c & 3a

Nehemiah feared the king. He feared what the king might think or do. Further, he honoured the king as king with the typical greeting of the day. He saw no conflict in honouring the king here and in worshipping the true King in ch 1. He respected the authority that God had set over him. And further, Nehemiah understood that it was this true King that would grant him success (cf v.1.11), not this earthly king. And even so, Nehemiah did not despise this king, but gave him the honour due his position. Thus I observe that a godly leader fears and reveres legitimate authority.

4. A godly leader is a man of prayer, even in the midst of difficult situations.

cf. v.4b

How are we to understand this phrase? Did Nehemiah kneel down before the king and pray? Did he bow his head? Did he raise his hands? No. What we have here is an instance of what we may refer to as "instant prayer", of a prayer that was uttered in the heat of the moment, without warning, to the God of heaven. This type of prayer is done almost by spiritual instinct, like a reflex action. And this was the type of prayer we find Nehemiah engaging in. And it is this type of prayer that a godly leader will be utilising throughout the course of his life.

5. A godly leader is bold, even in the midst of his fears.

cf. v.5

In v.2 Nehemiah states that he feared greatly before the king. Yet here in v.5 he is boldly making request of the king for what may be considered an outlandish request. Clearly, this request would cost tens of thousands of dollars, even by today's standards. And yet, this is what Nehemiah requests of the king. Nehemiah understood that the God of heaven had answered his prayer of v.1.11.

6. A godly leader fully expects God to be faithful to His word, and plans accordingly.

cf. v.6

This observation is closely related to the last. In v.6 we have the king listening to the request of Nehemiah, the queen next to him. In a typical conversational fashion, the king asks him how long he will be gone, and when he will return. Unless we assume that Nehemiah was a master of thinking on his feet, the answer he gives shows that he had given this matter some serious consideration prior to appearing before the king. In that he gave a specific time to the king, Nehemiah must have had an estimate for how long it would take to accomplish all that is mentioned in v.8, the wall of the city, the gates for the wall, and the other buildings mentioned here. Further, Nehemiah also had enough forethought to ask for a letter from the king, approving all his actions. Most likely he was aware of the potential problems and adversaries that awaited him in Judah.

The ground for all this planning can be found in vv.8-9 of ch 1, where Nehemiah repeats God's word back to Him. As we saw last week, Nehemiah fully expected God to be faithful to his word, as He had been in scattering the children of Israel. Thus I observe in the sixth place, that a godly leader fully expects God to be faithful to His word, and plans accordingly.

7. A godly leader sees success as directly coming from the hand of God.

cf v.8b

In the latter part of v.8, after hearing the details of Nehemiah's request, the king gives him all that he asks. At this point in the text, Nehemiah could have stopped. But he didn't. He comments on this rather amazing event with the phrase, "and the good hand of my God was upon me". He knew that whatever success he had was because of the direct working of his God. God had granted him mercy before the king, God had turned the king's heart to be favourable to Nehemiah.

8. A godly leader will face adversaries to the work of God.

cf. v.10

Up to this point, this passage has had a very positive tone. Nehemiah has been given all of which he asked. The king had even sent some of his own officers, both to lend credibility and protection to the task. Yet in v.10 mention is made of two individuals who in no wise were pleased with the coming of Nehemiah. At this point, they could not have known the full scope of what Nehemiah desired to do. As we learn later, the officers who came with him didn't fully know the scope of this mission. But even what they did know displeased Sanballat and Tobiah. As we shall see in the coming lessons these will be seen as true enemies of the work of God, and the tactics they employed are still used to this day.

Lesson 5

"Nehemiah and the Inspection of the Wall of Jerusalem"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 2.11-20

I. Review of Last Lesson (v. 2.1-10)

- the text: Nehemiah before the king
 - king recognises the sadness of Nehemiah
 - the boldness of Nehemiah before the king
 - the granting of the request
 - additional requests
 - success
 - the arrival
 - adversaries
- observations

*II. Brief Overview of the Text***read text, vv. 2.11-20**

For our lesson tonight, we will be looking specifically at vv. 11-12, and 16-20; vv. 13-15 being a recounting of Nehemiah's night time examination of the wall of Jerusalem.

As we have seen earlier, the text of the book of Nehemiah reads like a journal or diary. At this point, we have Nehemiah's record of his coming to Jerusalem, his examination of the wall of the city, the declaring of Nehemiah's plan to the Jewish leaders, and their subsequent response to his proposal.

Verse 11 states, "And I came to Jerusalem and was there three days." The verse really tells us very little of what took place in those three days. It does not tell us what he did. It does not tell us where Nehemiah stayed. It does not tell us with whom Nehemiah associated. It simply states that he came to the city of Jerusalem.

The only other information we are given is in v. 12, concerning Nehemiah's night time examination of the wall of Jerusalem. During the night of one of the three days Nehemiah was in Jerusalem, Nehemiah arose and, with a few men with him, examined the wall of Jerusalem. The verse continues with a rather interesting statement, "...and I had not declared to anyone (lit., to a man) what my God was putting (or giving) to my heart." From the first part of this chapter, we saw that Nehemiah had given some serious thought into all that had to be done for the city. But here, Nehemiah states that he had not declared what the Lord *was putting* in his

heart. In the original this "putting" is described by means of a participle, and can have the idea of continuous or ongoing activity. Thus Nehemiah is stating that the final details for the work at hand were still not finalised.

In vv. 13-15 is Nehemiah's examination of the wall. In v. 16 Nehemiah reiterates that he had told this plan to no one, not to the soldiers who were with him, not to the Jewish officials or leaders. In vv. 17-18 we have the revealing of Nehemiah's plan. He first states their present position and condition. Then he lays out the remedy--the rebuilding of the wall. In v. 18 we find the affirmative response to this plan.

Verses 19-20 record for us, in a bit more detail, some of the opposition first expressed in v. 10, which we looked at last week. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, three leaders of the surrounding provinces were not happy that the wall was to be rebuilt. Verse 19 gives us a bit of insight concerning how they first attempted to stop the work. Their opposition is first expressed in a verbal assault on the work itself, declaring it to be illegal or unauthorised by the king.

In v. 20 is Nehemiah's response to their attack. Interestingly enough, he does not answer their claim with a straightforward rebuttal and by showing them the documents from the king. Rather, he cuts to the crux of the matter, basically telling them that they have no part or business in the work of God.

This, then, is the text before us.

III. Observations

1. A godly leader is patient.

cf v. 11b

Up to this point Nehemiah had prayed and fasted 6 months. This issue had literally consumed his life. He was bold before the king. The King had favour upon him. He thusly makes the trip, w/ a royal escort. Yet he waits three days.

2. At times, it is needful that a leader be discreet

cf v.12a-b

Nehemiah understood that what was before was exceedingly important. What he was doing, that is, what God was doing through him would affect Jewish life for centuries to come. Yet he speaks to no one in the 6 mo. He speaks to no one once the king grants his request. Or on the trip. Or upon arrival. Not for three days.

3. A leader may not know the full extent of his task until the last minute.

cf v. 12b

Nehemiah has prayed 6 mo. and planned for most if not all of this time. Finally his request was granted. Yet here we find Nehemiah still referring to the plan, stating that God was still placing it in his heart.

4. A godly leader does not act hastily.

cf v. 13-15

5. A godly leader is no respecter of persons.

cf. v. 16

He told no one, regardless of rank or position.

6. A godly leader understands the biblical relationship between the city of God and the glory of the name of God.

cf. v. 17

Nehemiah understood that Jerusalem was the city where God had chosen for his name to dwell. And as such, the city lying in ruins was in Nehemiah's eyes a disgrace to the name and people of God.

7. It is truly a sign of grace whenever God's people agree and act upon a task.

cf v. 18

8. A godly leader does not waste time answering false accusations; rather he directs his answer to the root of the problem.

cf v.20

9. A godly leader may not always be involved in all the intimate or mundane details of any given task.

cf ch.3; note also Acts 6.1ff., 18.1ff.

Lesson 6

"Adversaries I"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 4.1-23

I. Review of Last Lesson (v. 2.11-20)

- the text: Nehemiah in Judah
 - the coming of Nehemiah
 - examination of the wall by night
 - the discreetness of Nehemiah
 - declaration of the work; unanimous response
 - opposition and rebuttal
- observations

II. Brief Overview of the Text**read text, vv. 4.1-23**

As we saw last week, the people of Judah, from the least to the greatest, began construction of the wall of Jerusalem. In ch. 4 we have the record of the first sustained attack or opposition to this work.

v. 1-3--the slander of the ungodly

In 2.10 and in 2.19-20 we have the first statements concerning this opposition which is now expressed in ch 4. In ch 2 the opposition was primarily a questioning of the legality of the work. Here in ch 4 we have a record of the slander and the mocking of the enemies of Judah. Basically, we find them making fun of the work and of the workers (cf "feeble Jews", also v. 3). Further, they desire to discourage the work, pointing out the magnitude of the job the Jews are undertaking (can they finish in a day).

v. 4-5--the prayer of Nehemiah

In vv. 4-5 we have recorded a prayer that is a response to the verbal opposition

31

mentioned in vv. 1-3. The prayer is a brief imprecatory prayer against the ungodly, against those who would take delight in hindering the work of God.

vv. 6-12--the opposition escalates

V. 6 mentions that the work went on. In vv. 7-12 we find the record that the opposition was growing, both in intensity and in the number of adversaries. In v. 7

five separate ethnic groups are mentioned opposing the work of God. Further, the text states here that they were very angry, lit. that "they burned exceedingly". What began in v. 1 as a war of words was about to become a real battle. V. 8 states that they were going to come and fight against Jerusalem.

V. 9 is almost a parenthetical thought, inserted into the text before us. In the midst of these trials, they prayed. Further, they set a guard against their enemies.

In vv. 10-11 is the record of further verbal abuse with which the Jews were dealing. It appears from v. 10 that some of the verbal assaults against the Jews were beginning to take their toll ("we are unable to rebuild the wall"). In v. 12, it seems that the workers not only had to deal with the reports from their enemies, but also from fearful messages from their own countrymen as well.

vv. 13-20--a godly response to the attacks

Nehemiah faced two adversaries: the allied leaders around about them, and the fear which was infecting the workers. To combat these, Nehemiah does two things. First, Nehemiah strengthens his defenses of the city and of the workers (v. 13). Second, he continues to remind the people of their God.

In vv. 15f we see the results of the work begun in vv. 13-14: God had frustrated the enemy, and the workers were now better armed and prepared for any further attacks.

vv. 21-23--a summary of the matter

In vv. 21-23, we find Nehemiah summing up this first real challenge to the work. The work did not stop. The people were better prepared for adversity. The people were now even more committed to the task at hand (cf. sleeping in the city, and not changing clothes).

This, then, is the text before us.

III. Observations

1. Mockery is often used to thwart the work of God, and thus godly leadership.

Mockery here consisted of:

- a. character assassination (feeble Jews)
- b. magnifying the task
- c. deriding the quality of the work done

Note: leadership is affected when those which are led are affected

2. A godly leader is one who can recognise "swine".

cf. Sermon on the Mount

(3. Only a Calvinist can properly understand imprecatory prayer.)

Only understood when election and reprobation are rightly understood.

4. Godly leadership will face repeated and often intensifying opposition.

cf v. 1-3, & 7-8

5. A godly leader will not only be a man of faith and prayer, but also of wisdom.

cf. v. 9

6. *Sometimes the most subtle and insidious attacks come from within.*

cf. v. 12 (ten times); also note David

7. *Often those who are led have need of reminders*

cf v. 14

8. *Godly leadership is often the divinely-ordained means by which opposition is thwarted.*

cf. v. 15

9. *Godly leadership is wise leadership.*

cf v. 16-20

10. *Godly leadership is committed to the task at hand.*

cf v. 21-23

Lesson 7

"Internal Issues: Usury"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

5.1-13

I. Review of Last Lesson (v. 4.1-23)

- the text: Adversaries I
 - the slander of the ungodly v.1-3
 - the prayer of Nehemiah v.4-5
 - the opposition escalates v.6-12
 - a godly response to the attacks v.13-20
 - summary v.21-23
- observations

II. Brief Overview of The Text

As we have just seen, the last chapter dealt with the first serious opposition to the work of rebuilding the wall. In ch. 5 we have recorded the first internal problem to face the Jews rebuilding the wall.

* read ch. 5.1-13

vv.1-5--statement of the problem: usury and slavery.

It appears that during the time of their project that a famine was in the land (v. 3). Further it seems that these workers, listed in ch 3 either didn't bring much food with them when they came to work on this project, or, that they were not very well off and didn't have much to begin with. Clearly this work was taking the vast majority of the workers away from their normal work or their tending to their own fields or flocks. What we find in ch 5 is the result, then, of this situation. In ch 5 there are two types of problems: one physical or natural, and one social and moral.

The physical problem, as we have just mentioned, was the famine. This famine would appear to be in the late spring or early summer, since this was around the time that Nehemiah arrived in Judah (He had spoken to the king in March-April of the 20th yr. [cf. ch 2.1]). Most likely the food supplies of the previous year were dwindling. Perhaps also the winter crops had failed also, or there had been a lean harvest.

As the text records, this famine then led to two social ills: usury and slavery. It is interesting to note that both of these practices were not prohibited in the Law of God. However, there were certain exceptions concerning how these situations were to be handled between one Jew and another. Please turn to Lev. 25.35-46. Ch 5 of Nehemiah, then, records for us the violations of the Jewish nobles and rulers against

their brethren.

vv.6-11--the rebuke and remedy

In v. 6 and following we find Nehemiah's response to this sin. V. 6 states that he was very angry, lit. that he burned (with anger) concerning this situation. In v. 7 we learn that it was the richest of the land who were engaged in this sin. The text further states that Nehemiah contended with these nobles and rulers. It would appear that he opposed them to their face and in the midst of all the assembly.

In v. 8ff we have recorded Nehemiah's rebuke. He rebukes them for making slaves out of Jews who had just been redeemed from slavery. This may be a reference to the exile itself, or a reference to some other unknown period of time of slavery. To Nehemiah's rebuke there is no response.

In v.9 Nehemiah gives a further reason why the Jews should obey. their disobedience would give the nations one more reason to ridicule them and their work and may result in the nations continuing to blaspheme God. (cf Rom 2) In v.10 Nehemiah uses his example as one to follow. He was giving to the needy, as the Law prescribed. Finally, in v.11 Nehemiah urges and exhorts them (emphatic in Heb) to return the fields to their former owners. Further, they are urged to give back that which they have taken as collateral for these loans.

vv.12-13--the response

In vv.12-13 we have recorded the response to the entreaty of Nehemiah. "We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say". From the report here it seems as if the admonition of Nehemiah had its desired end. But what the text does not state is the attitude of the rulers and nobles. One possible understanding of v.12b-13 is that Nehemiah was not fully convinced that these individuals were sincere. Thus, he calls the priests forward to witness to the confessions and affirmations being made that day. In addition, he pronounces a curse upon the man who goes back on his word. To this the assembly agrees.

These then are the verses before us.

III. Observations

1. A godly leader will face various social ills.

cf. v.5.1-5

Note: this social ill was a result of a lack of conformity to the Law of God.

Also note: true social ills are always an outflow of the sinfulness of man. Note two modern extremes within the professed church:

1. totally emersed in social programs
2. totally ignoring social problems

2. A godly leader is angered by the things that anger God.

cf. v.5.6--"and I was exceedingly angry"

Note: all anger is not sin

3. a godly leader is a man of action in dealing with sin.

cf. v.6--"when I heard..."

He acted:

- quickly
- wisely
- had the facts
- called an assembly
- biblically
- he knew the Law

(4. There is no response for sin)

cf. v.8b

5. A godly leader understands the importance of the fear of the LORD.

cf v.9; cf also Prov. 9.10

6. A godly leader knows that the world is watching his every step.

cf. v.9b

Note also Rom 2

7. A godly leader lives the life he teaches about.

cf. v.10

8. A godly leader realises that greed is a strong master.

cf. v.12b

Lesson 8

"Internal Issues: Provisions"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

5.14-19

I. Review of Last Lesson

--the text: 5.1-13 Internal Issues

--vv.1-5--statement of the problem: usury and slavery (cf. Lev 25.35-46)

--vv.6-11--the rebuke and remedy

--vv.12-13--the response

--observations

II. Brief Overview of the Text

In our last lesson we saw recorded the first internal threat to the work of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. In the remainder of the chapter, almost parenthetically Nehemiah records for us his own actions at this time. In these verses we get a glimpse of how Nehemiah viewed himself, the workers, and his task.

* read ch. 5.14-19

In v.14 we learn a bit more concerning the mission on which Nehemiah was sent by the king. Apparently, the king sent him to be the governor of the province, back in ch 2, (cf in the 20th year...). Further, he held this position for 12 years. As a side, it is interesting to note that, from the context here, Nehemiah is writing this account sometime subsequent to this 12 year period. As such we really have precious little of the acts or deeds of Nehemiah recorded here. He records for posterity only those bits of information relevant to the spiritual life of the Israelites--the building of the wall and related issues, various internal moral issues, the dedication of the wall, intermarriage.

In the last part of v.14 we are introduced to the topic of this section--the conduct of Nehemiah as it related to the governor's portion or provision. As it states here, for the entire time of his governorship he did not utilise the provision provided by the king.

In v. 15 we learn that his example was one that had not been followed during the previous administrations. Nehemiah did not partake of the provision of food or of the wine. He goes on to say that, unlike the former rulers he did not oppress the people. This may either refer to the manner in which the former governors utilized their support, or possibly even to the manner in which this portion was extracted from the people. In either case, Nehemiah did not act in a similar fashion. Nehemiah

concludes the verse with his reason why--his fear or reverence of God.

In v.16 we see that this policy of not utilising the governor's portion was also the practice of the men under the leadership of Nehemiah. We also learn that it was policy during the time of Nehemiah to deal with integrity in all matters. He states in v.16, that they did not purchase any land, presumably in loans, as he fought against in the verses we looked at last week.

Verses 17-18 gives us an idea of two things. First, it gives us an idea of how much of a sacrifice Nehemiah was making, in not taking the governor's portion. He was feeding well over 150 people each day, apparently out of his own pocket. Second, it gives us an idea of how burdensome it would have been for the Jewish people to provide these provisions on a daily basis, esp. if there was a famine in the land. He concludes the verse by restating that this daily portion would have been burdensome on the people. Verse 19 concludes the thought begun in v. 14, in a rather unique fashion. Here we find Nehemiah recording a prayer into the narrative, a prayer for remembrance.

These then are the verses before us.

III. Observations

1. *A godly leader realises that not all of his actions are "important" actions.*
cf 12 yrs of service and only records few events.

2. *Sometimes the LORD may give His servants more of a leadership role than they desire.*
cf ch. 2.5ff w/ 5.14

3. *Not all leadership of the people of God is gracious or giving leadership.*
cf 5.15--"but the former leaders..." Some were downright oppressive. Note also various kings of Judah and Israel (Saul, Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Manassah).

4. *A godly leader is one who fears the Lord.*

cf. v. 5.15c

He walks in:

--wisdom

--charity

--mercy

--integrity

--holiness

5. *Godly leadership tends to have godly sub-leadership*
cf v.5.16--"we did not purchase..."

6. *Leadership will have its public moments*

cf v. 5.17--150 men at each meal and Nehemiah was the host. Very seldom are there private moments

7. *Godly leadership is aware when a burden is too heavy and acts accordingly.*

cf v.5.18--"the service was heavy" All things are lawful; not all things are profitable.

Lesson 9

"Adversaries II"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 6.1-19

I. Review of Last Lesson

- the text: Nehemiah's example
 - did not utilise the governor's portion
 - former gov.s' did and were oppressive
 - those at Nehemiah's table
 - prayer to God
- observations

*II. Brief Overview of the Text***read text, vv. 6.1-19**

As we saw two lessons ago, Nehemiah had just faced his first major internal problem, that of usury and slavery. And almost parenthetically, Nehemiah adds vv. 14-19, concerning his own conduct as it related to money and the people of Judah. In this chapter, Nehemiah faces renewed opposition from without--from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem.

vv. 1-4--request for a meeting

In vv. 1-4, we find the record that, upon hearing that the work of the wall was proceeding well (v. 1), the enemies of Nehemiah were requesting a meeting with him. But as v. 2 states, "...they were planning to harm me." In v. 3 he gives the messengers answer, that he is doing a great work and cannot come down. It is interesting to note, that, at the time of these messages there was no state of war between these two provinces--Judah and Samaria. In fact they were both Persian provinces and there would have been no restriction upon travel at this time. The messengers came easily enough. But yet the main characters, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, did not come. It is also interesting to note that Nehemiah did not propose this possibility to the messengers either. Clearly, Nehemiah understood that these individuals had no serious interest in discussing anything. The text concludes informing us that they sent this message to Nehemiah four times.

vv. 5-9--the opposition escalates

Verse 5 records for us the account of the fifth coming of the messenger, but this time, with a letter. V. 6 gives us the contents of this letter--charges of treason against Nehemiah. Notice how detailed the deception is: it has witnesses, name-dropping, twisting of the actual facts, actual lies concerning Nehemiah, and a false scenario of how this lie was supposed to come into being. Lastly, the letter ends in a

threat, this information is going to be given to the king.

Verse 8 contains Nehemiah's response to this lie. Nehemiah exposes this lie for what it is--a lie. He rightly calls it a fabrication. In v. 9 we learn of their intended plan--to frighten Nehemiah and the workers.

vv. 10-14--treason/betrayal

In vv. 10-14 the opposition takes on a new twist. Thru the words of one of the Jewish people--even a prophet, comes the attack. This prophet urges Nehemiah to hide in the Temple, in the place where only the priests could go. In so doing, Nehemiah would have gained a reputation akin to Saul, or Uzziah, who both took the priestly function upon themselves. This one had been hired against Nehemiah, in order to get Nehemiah to sin (v. 13). The attack came from at least some of the spiritual leadership in Judah. It is interesting to note how much access these gentile leaders had to the supposed godly men and women in Judah at this time.

vv. 15-19--the completion of the wall

The chapter ends with the statement that the wall was completed in 52 days. Clearly, this was a relatively brief time for the completion of this project. Keil and Delitsch, in their O.T. commentary give a fourfold explanation as to how the work was finished in this time. First, the leadership of Nehemiah in hastening the work. Second, the zeal and relatively large numbers of the builders. Third, the commitment of the workers to the task (cf ch 2). Fourth, the work was not to rebuild the whole wall, but to repair the breaches in this wall, that Nehemiah had examined in ch 2.

The chapter closes on a rather interesting note. Tobiah, the Ammonite official, appears to have colleagues in Judah. Apparently, amidst the usury of ch 5, some of the people of Judah were in debt to Tobiah. Further, he was the son-in-law of one of the prominent Jews (cf v. 13.8ff). Possibly because of their oaths or because of their relation to Tobiah, they were reporting the deeds of Tobiah to Nehemiah, and further, the works of Nehemiah to Tobiah.

This, then, is the chapter before us.

III. Observations

1. For the godly leader, the work of God is non-negotiable.

cf. vv. 1-3

There is no need to discuss the work of God with the world.

2. For the godly leader, not all meetings are profitable, and some are to be avoided.

cf. v. 2

3. Opposition to godly leadership is both persistent and increasing.

cf. vv. 4-5. Also note ch. 4

--ridicule of work/deeds (4.1-3)

--ridicule of the workers (feeble Jews)

--physical assault against the workers (4.7-8)

--advanced threats (4.11-12)

- physical assault (death) against the leader (6.2)
- deception/character assassination (6.4-5)
- entrapment (6.10-13)

Note: the ungodly know that the surest way to stall the work of God is to attack the leader.

Note also: opposition to godly leadership may become more desperate over time.

4. Note in vv.11-12 how important obedience is to the leader.

5. Some attacks upon godly leadership may come from "godly" individuals.

cf. v. 10

6. ungodly alliances may compromise the work of God and/or be a source of grief for the leader and/or the people of God.

cf. vv. 18-19

Lesson 10

"Completion of the Wall/Related Issues"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 6.15-7.5, 63-65

I. Review of Last Lesson

- the text: renewed opposition
 - request for a meeting
 - deceitful letter
 - treason/betrayal
 - the completion of the wall
- observations

II Brief Overview of the Text

* read text, vv. 6.15-7.5*

As we have just reviewed, ch. 6 records for us the renewed opposition which Nehemiah faced. Vv 6.15-19 record for us the actual completion of the wall. Thru the leadership of Nehemiah and the fact that most likely it was the breaches of the wall being repaired, the wall was completed in just 52 days. The enemies of Judah knew that it was their God who had given them success.

This passage concludes with a brief statement concerning the relationship of many of the Jews to Tobiah and his family. First, many of the Jews were in debt (lit, possessors of oaths to him) to Tobiah. Tobiah now had some type of influence over them, whether it was economic, social or personal. Further, Tobiah was actually related to a prominent Jewish family by marriage. V. 19 concludes the passage, stating that "they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words (or deeds) to him". Even in the midst of Judah, Tobiah had allies.

V. 7.1 is really a continuation of the events mentioned in the latter part of ch.6. The chapter division would be better placed at 7.4 than here. In vv. 1-3, Nehemiah is busy completing the peripheral business related to the wall. In v. 1 the gatekeepers were appointed. Now since the gates were hung the gates needed to be manned.

It possibly may be implied from this verse that the temple worship was not in full swing, even though the temple had been rebuilt 100 or so years ago. This verse states that the singers and the Levites for the temple service were appointed for their tasks. If the temple had been functioning at 100%, there would have been no need for this to have been done.

In vv. 2-3, Nehemiah places his brother and Hananiah, a God-fearing Jew over the city. Their chief function seems to have been overseeing many of the social/police functions of the city. V.3 has them being in charge of the gates of the city. By means of these gates the social order of the city was regulated, primarily by when the gates were opened and closed. In the latter half of v. 3 guards are appointed throughout the city, presumably answering to these two men.

In vv. 4-5 we have recorded some of the last details concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem--the re-inhabiting of the city. Nehemiah understood that a city such as Jerusalem would need to have a stable population to be established as a city. The temple needed a walled city. And the walled city need people. To that end, Nehemiah sets out to resettle the city. It is interesting that Nehemiah turns to the genealogical records for a list of candidates. It must be remembered that at this time, God's elect people were primarily a homogeneous ethnic group. More importantly, with all of the regional opposition to the rebuilding of the wall and of the city, Nehemiah did not want to settle gentiles in this "new Jerusalem".

What follows is the genealogical records from the return under Zerubbabel. For the most part we will not be looking at these verses. These records were preserved for the nation of Judah and do not have a direct relevance to the design of our study. We will, however, be looking at vv. 63-65 which do bear on our study. In these verses we find a record of those who had a claim to the priestly office (and thus to the priestly portions of the sacrifices) but had no proof of ancestry. In v. 65 the governor (i.e.--Zerubbabel?) bans them from service and from the priestly portions.

These, then, are the verses before us.

III. Observations

1. a godly leader is one who recognises that not everyone who confesses God is godly.

cf. v. 5.16

Note the situation. The enemies of God, who have been trying to stop this work, now are confessing that this work was accomplished from God. They may have even made statements that the God of the Jews is stronger than our gods. Yet even in the midst of this confession there was no repentance, no acknowledgment that they had sinned in fighting against the God of heaven. Unless the God of heaven draws a man, enlightens a man, regenerates a man, he will hold onto his idols, his lesser gods to the end. His confession is no better than that of the demons, who confessed that Jesus was the Christ, or who believe that God is one and shudder. Not everyone who confesses that God is godly. In reality, they still knew nothing of the true God; all they knew was that their gods were not as strong as the God of the Jews. An unbeliever may see and even confess the work of God, but not know the God of the work.

2. it is a rare blessing of leadership that all under his care are loyal to him.

cf v. 19

Most biblical leaders did not enjoy this blessing very long. Note ch 2.18 to 6.19.

cf also Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Christ, Paul

(3. The enemies of God will always have their advocates.).

cf. v 19

4. a godly leader understands that after the work is done, there is still work to be done.

cf. v 7.1ff

The wall had been completed. The gates were hung. Yet there was still much that Nehemiah needed to do. It seems to be human nature to do the task, and upon completing the majority of the task, to stop or to take a break. Yet with Nehemiah, he did not stop until the task had truly been completed. Seldom do the people of God get large periods of rest. We do not see Abraham taking three weeks off to go to Egypt or Ethiopia.

5. a godly leader will, by the grace of God, have godly lieutenants.

cf. v.2-3

Nehemiah was truly blessed of God with these men. First, the Lord had given him a godly brother. (Godly siblings are a double blessing from the Lord). Second, the Lord gave him Hananiah, one who feared the Lord more than many. Please note: there is a need for godly leadership at all levels. One does not need to be the chief of operations to have an important function in the body cf. Acts 6 (deacons); I Cor 12

6. a godly leader understands the importance of keeping order over and for the people of God.

cf. v. 3b

Nehemiah understood that the people of God and the city of God needed order. God is a God of order. And His city was to be orderly. Both the gates of the city and the guards in the city were means to this order. The gates provided order for the whole, and the guards order for the individual households.

Please note: with this observation in mind, that each of our actions or the actions of those in our household may disrupt or contribute to the thoughtful worship of God when we meet for worship. Those things which tend towards order should be cultivated; those which tend towards disorder and distraction of us and others should be discouraged.

7. A godly leader is not naive.

cf v. 3b--Nehemiah setting of the guards

8. A godly leader is not afraid and does not hesitate to utilise his authority.

cf. v. 2--"and I commanded"

In the latter half of the 20th century, many have a fear to command. "Who gave you the right??!!!" Others think it even sinful for a man of God to be commanding others. For the church of God to function properly, there needs be the discriminating utilisation of God-given authority.

9. a godly leader realises and understands that God has unlimited and unimpaired access to the core of his being.

cf. v. 5

The heart is no "limited access" or "restricted access" area of the human psyche. There is no such area in the understanding of the biblical Christian. There is no such area in the pages of God's word. God can and does touch the heart as easily as he does any other facet of the human psyche. Note God's absolute control over the woman as the ravens who ministered to Elijah. In the Hebrew the same verb is used of both. (see I Kings 17. 4, 9). Note also Prov. 21.1.

10. a godly leader understands that no service is better than corrupt service.

cf. v. 65

Note also Saul, Uzziah (negative examples), and David (he did not build the temple even though he longed to do so)(positive example).

Lesson 11

"The First Religious Service since the Return of Nehemiah"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 8.1-8

I. Review of Last Lesson

- the text: the completion of the wall, and related duties
 - the completion of the wall
 - Tobiah
 - guards for the city
 - resettlement of Jerusalem
 - Urim and Thummim
- observations

*II. Brief Overview of the Text***read 8.1-8**

As we have just reviewed, ch 7 concerned some of the last details related to the rebuilding of the wall and of the city. In fact, from this point on the focus of the book changes. With ch 8.1 on, the book is primarily concerned with the spiritual life of the people of Israel. All that has gone before, even though there may have been spiritual issues, has concerned the rebuilding of the wall and related issues.

One also needs to note in these last chapters how much is not said, how much is left out. Up to this point the book of Nehemiah has concerned itself with a relatively short span of time--52 days rebuilding the wall, and 6 mo to a year prior to this in the land of Persia before the king. From this point on the events of ch 8-12 concern themselves with 3 events: the restoration of the religious life of Judah (ch 8-10), the resettlement of Jerusalem (11-12.26), and the dedication of the wall (12.27-47). These events also took place in a relatively short space of time.

The remainder of the book also seems to deal with issues related to the first year of Nehemiah's administration, issues that arose from this restoration of the religious life of the people of God. Thus, we will attempt, by the grace of God, to give this section before us a closer look.

vv. 8.1-8

In ch 7, Nehemiah was registering people for the repopulation of the city of Jerusalem. Before the city is completely populated, we find the Jewish people gathering (lit.--were gathered) to Jerusalem, to an open place by the water gate. The translations here state "...and they said to Ezra the Scribe to bring the book of the Law...". I think it is better understood as follows, "...for they said to Ezra the

Scribe...", since we find that at the time of this gathering that a podium of some dimension had been prepared. The Law here referred to was, as the text states, the Law of Moses, that which the LORD commanded Israel. This was the Law of Moses, this was the Law which David revered, this is the Law at which Josiah wept. This was the Law of God.

In v. 2 we find Ezra bringing the book of the Law to this podium. He was before the men and women and "those who were understanding to hear", which seems to be a reference to the children of the people. Thus all Israel was before him. V. 3 gives us, then, the time frame and duration for this meeting--they began at the light of day (cf Heb) and went until noon, close to a six hour period.

Ezra and other scribes stood on a podium above the people. In v. 5, it states that Ezra was seen by all the people. When he opened the book of the Law the people stood. It is difficult to say whether this action was an inherited Jewish tradition or whether this was the result of a true reverence of the word of God. Even though the Jewish people were the sons of Abraham, very seldom was there true reverence for God or His word throughout the history of Israel. Here, however it would seem that the reverence is sincere, from the response in vv. 6, 9.

In v. 6 we have the record of the beginning of the proceedings--Ezra blesses the LORD, the great God. The people respond reverently, both in word and in deed. They confess their Amen to the blessing and they bow face downward (noses groundward) before the LORD.

V. 7 gives us the list of the other scribes who, along with the Levites, were explaining the Law to the people that day. V. 8 concludes the passage that *they* were reading in the book of the Law. Apparently, Ezra was not the only one who was reading that day. He had help, both on the podium and among the people. Please note the explanation of Derek Kidner in his comm. on Ezra and Nehemiah:

It is not clear how these groups operated, but we may surmise that those on the platform successively read out portions of the law (as, in the synagogue, seven or more readers might share this task on the sabbath), and that the thirteen, or more, of v. 7 moved among the congregation in the intervals between the readings, making sure they understood.¹

The verse ends with the statement that they were translating (lit. declaring distinctly) and giving insight and explained the reading.

These, then, are the verses before us.

1 Derek Kidner, Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, DJ Wiseman, Gen. Editor. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. 1979. p. 105

III. Observations

1. *Few leaders, if any, will have times of renown.*

cf v. 1-2--Ezra and the others speaking to possibly 60,000 people.

Few of God's leaders have ever had that privilege, either in the Bible, or in church history.

2. *a godly leader is one who sets the word of God before the people.*

cf v. 1-2

3. *a godly leader takes whatever time is necessary to do the work of God.*

cf v. 3--meeting took approx. 6 hrs.

4. *it is a rare blessing indeed that the ears of all the people are to the book of the Law.*

cf v. 3

Note: did not have this blessing:

Moses
Samuel
Elijah
Jesus

did have this blessing:

David
Josiah
Joshua

5. *a godly leader seldom does God's work alone.*

cf v. 4,7-8

"and they read..."

6. *a godly leader understands that the reverence shown during the service is for God, and not for him.*

cf v. 5

7. *Note the high and holy blessing of leading God's people in worship before Him.*

cf v. 6--and all the people answered Amen, Amen

8. *The godly leader is to be involved in teaching.*

cf v. 8

cf also Mt 5.1-2, 7.28-29

this is the work of the ministry

Lesson 12

"The First Religious Service since the Return of Nehemiah--Part 2"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 8.9-12

I. Review of Last Lesson

- the text: the reading of the Law
 - Ezra and the Law
 - the reading of the Law: Ezra and the Levites
 - the reverence for the Law
 - ministering the word
- observations

II. Brief Overview of the Text

* read 8.1-12 *

As we saw last time the people had gathered together in Jerusalem for the reading of the word. I failed to mention last time one of the main reasons the people gathered at this time. Lev. 23.24-26 state that on the first of the seventh month, there was to be the feast of trumpets. Thus, this meeting was already part of the Jewish calendar. However, it does not seem that this exposition of the word was a regular part of this ceremony. The text clearly states that they asked Ezra to bring the Law and to read it. This, then, was a perfect time for this event to occur, the day being a Sabbath to the LORD.

We ended last time with v. 8, where we find Ezra and the Levites reading and explaining the law to the people. It is interesting to note that in the latter half of v. 8, there are three different words used to describe this teaching process. At this point, I think the King James has a fine translation of this verse:

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

In v. 9ff we have recorded the response of the people to the reading of the law and its exposition: great weeping. V. 9 begins with the leaders of the people in the process of calming down and comforting the people. They begin this process by reminding the people that this day is holy to the LORD their God. The day was holy, as we have seen before, because this was the day of the Feast of Trumpets. This day was a holy feast day, as prescribed in Exodus and Leviticus, and was the beginning of the feasting time in the seventh month. this feast was to be followed by

the Feast of Booths and the day of Atonement. Thus, this day was holy to the LORD. As such, this day was to be one of rejoicing. Thus we find the leaders admonishing the people to this end. Further, they give instruction to the people as to how to celebrate this day--it is to be a day of feasting, of eating and drinking and kindness. Again they remind the people that the day is holy.

Verse 10 ends with probably the most famous portion of the book of Nehemiah, the little phrase the joy of the LORD is your strength. We need to pause here to properly understand, due to popular misconceptions concerning this verse.

The popular concept of joy is not the biblical concept. One example should suffice. Popular joy is basically happiness. This can be seen today in evangelical circles most explicitly in the charismatic movement. If one is not happy, one is not joyful. Yet scripture states that it is better for one to go to the house of mourning rather than the house of feasting, and sorrow is better than laughter (Eccl 7.2-3). The charismatic conception flies in the face of this verse; yet the biblical Christian walks in this verse even while rejoicing always as Paul states in I Thess. Biblical joy is a deep-seated joy, rooted in the person and character of God, not in the varying circumstances of life. God changes not, and the source of our joy changes not. This joy is there in sorrow or in laughter, in richness or in poverty, for God is the Author and Source of this joy. It is the joy of the LORD.

The phrase concludes stating that this joy is our strength. Immediately, images of physical strength come to mind. Yet that is not the Hebrew word utilized here. The word used here is the word "ma'oz", which has the idea of a mountain stronghold or a place of refuge. It connotes a place of safety, not rippling muscles. The joy of the LORD is for the believer a refuge, a place of safety. It is a stronghold for the believer. This same attitude can be seen in the life of Stephen in Acts 7, and in the apostle Paul, in Phil 4. This, then, is the sense of this phrase.

In v. 11 we find the Levites, apparently moving among the people, assisting in this task of calming the people. "Be still, for the day is holy". The words "be still" are the translation of the little Hebrew word "hassu", which is the same word found in Hab. 2.20. This word is probably comes the closest to our English "be silent" or possibly even "shut up", which conveys, although somewhat crudely, the immediate import of the word. This was to be a holy day, a day of rejoicing.

In v. 12 the people return home, and they do eat and drink and make great joy "for they understood the words that had been made known to them."

This, then is the passage before us.

III. Observations

1. *A godly leader is involved in teaching the word of God.*

cf v. 8

Biblical teaching:

i--based in the word of God

ii--it is systematic

"the word 'parasha', which the Massoretes' term for a paragraph, comes from this root"

--Derek Kidner, p. 106, n. 2

iii--it is exegetical--to explain, to give the sense of the passage

three terms used to describe this activity in this passage:

--parash (distinctly),

--secel (insight),

--bein (to explain or understand)

grammatically, the first word represents *what* they were doing, the second and third words describe *how* they were doing it.

(2. *One of the prime uses of the Law of God is to point out sin).*

cf. v. 1-12. cf also I Tim. 1.8-9

3. *A godly leader is wise in the use of his time.*

cf. vv. 9-10

We observed last time that a godly leader will take whatever time is necessary to do the work of God. However, he will not do this to the detriment to the people of God. Ezra took what time was needed, but yet was wise in the use of his time. Note the wisdom of Ezra: He stopped at midday. By this time the sun would be getting hot. Further, it was a feast day and the people were most likely getting hungry. Lastly, the people were weeping and this issue needed to be dealt with.

4. *A godly leader understands that obedience is more important than weeping.*

cf. v. 10-11 "to obey is better than sacrifice"

5. *A godly leader sometimes needs to be forceful.*

cf. v. 11--"hussu" (see above)

6. *A proper understanding of the word of God is truly a blessing indeed.*

cf. v. 12

that those under our leadership truly understand is all we can hope for and work for. cf the prayers of Paul, almost always for understanding (e.g. Eph. 3.14ff).

Lesson 13

"The first Religious Service since the Return of Nehemiah--Part 3"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 8.13-18

I. Review of Last Lesson

- the text: the response to the reading of the Law
 - the people weep
 - "this day is holy"
 - the joy of the LORD
 - the people feast
- observations

*II. Brief Overview of the Text*** read vv. 8.13-18 **

As we have just seen, the Israelites were deeply moved by the reading of the Law. Further, the leaders understood that the people's obedience to the Law was even more important than their emotional state. The passage ended with the people celebrating the Feast of Trumpets as prescribed.

In this next section are recorded the activities of the next day. From what is known of the Feast of Trumpets, this second day was not part of this feast. The people appear to have a sincere desire to hear the words of the Law. In v. 13 we have mention of this convocation. They came "to attend to [or, to understand] the words of the Law" (v. 13).

In v. 14 is the record of the Feast of Booths being "found". The Jewish people, in the seventh month, were to celebrate this feast (cf Lev. 23.33-43). This feast was also known as the feast of Ingathering (cf Ex. 23.15-16) and was to be a feast of celebration of the harvest or ingathering of the crops. Along with the prescribed sacrifices for the feast, the people were to live in booths or huts for the entire length of the feast.

In v. 15 is the record of what the booths were to be made: of tree limbs and branches. In v. 16 we find the people going out and gathering these branches for their huts. The text states that the people built these huts in various places, in the open places of Jerusalem, in the courtyard of the temple, even on the roofs of their homes. The whole assembly made these booths and lived in them for the prescribed timeframe. As we have seen before, this assembly may have numbered upwards of 60,000 people. Clearly, it took this many people a bit of time to gather enough branches for these huts or booths. Almost two weeks have passed from v. 13 to 17,

the time from the feast of Trumpets to the Feast of Booths. The verse concludes with the phrase, "and there was very great gladness." the people were glad in the midst of their obedience to the Law of Moses.

The passage concludes with a summary verse, stating that the people continued in the Law. "And he read day by day, from the first day until the last day from the Book of the Law of God." They kept the feast as prescribed.

This, then, is the passage before us.

III. Observations

1. A godly leader is expected to know the Law
cf v. 13

Those who are to know the Law:

- true worshippers, cf Jn 4.24, e.g. Enoch (Heb 11.5-6), Job (Job 42.7ff)
- parents (Deut. 6.6-7)
- grandparents (Deut. 4.9)
- priests/prophets/pastors
- deacons, cf Acts 6.5, 7.1ff
- older men, cf Titus 3.2--sound in faith
- older women, cf Titus 3.3-5
- every member of the covenant community (Heb 8.10-11)

2. The legacy of godly (or ungodly) leadership is of sovereign appointment.
cf v. 14--Moses, Abraham (friend of God), Mk. 10.35ff

3. A godly leader understands that it is God who gives revival.

This chapter records for us one of the rare instances of revival among the people of Israel. Please note:

This revival was not due to:

- the righteousness of Ezra or Nehemiah
- the righteous example of Ezra or Nehemiah (cf also Josiah)
- the spiritual work/prayer of Ezra or Nehemiah (cf also Hag 1.14)
- the pleading/begging of the leaders
- the manipulating of guilt by the leaders

This revival was due to the working of God--note: this revival was to fulfil prophecy. (cf Ezr 1.1, Hag 1.14, the prophetic concept of the remnant, etc.)

Lesson 14

"The Prayer of the Leaders"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

ch. 9

I. Review of Last Lesson

vv. 8.13-18

- the text: the second day of reading the Law
 - a second day
 - the feast of booths "found"
 - the making of the booths
 - continued reading of the Law
- observations

II. Brief Overview of the Text**read ch.9 **

As we have just seen, ch 8 ended with the people gathering for a sacred assembly. Ch 9 begins two days later, on the 24th day of the month. The Feast of Booths, which was just celebrated in ch 8, was to begin on the 15th of the seventh month and end on the 21st of that same month. The 22nd day was to be a sacred day as well. But in the book of Leviticus the 24th day is nowhere mentioned.

It appears that the mourning and sorrow first felt on the first day of the month had continued as the people were "reintroduced" to the word of God. Thus a special day of fasting was appointed for the confession of their sins, both personal and corporate. Ch 9, then, is the record of that confession.

The chapter begins with the people gathering with fasting and wearing sackcloth, having dust on their heads. It appears that this was a very solemn assembly. In v. 2 it states that they confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. In v. 3 we see that this service also consisted of the reading of additional portions of the Law of God.

What follows is the contents of this prayer. It begins, as many Old Testament prayers, with an extended section of praise to God for who He is and a recounting of His works. The body of this prayer is a recounting of the works of God as they relate to the people of Israel, and the sins of their fathers as they relate to the works and person of God. Three times God is praised for His gracious dealings with the people of God, and three times the sins of Israel are mentioned, Israel sinning against the LORD. The prayer concludes with a petition to God for yet more mercy, and the

people making a covenant with the LORD.

Before leaving this overview of the text I would like to note some of the allusions to the Law of God found in this prayer. Verse 6 is a reference to the creation and the creative power of God. Verses 7-8 are a summery of the Abrahamic covenant. Vv. 9-12, the Exodus out of Egypt; vv. 13-15, the giving of the Law. Basically, the whole framework of this prayer is found in the pages of the Law of God.

This, then, is the text before us.

III. Observations

1. The confession of sin is a serious matter for the child of God and the leader of the people of God.

cf. v. 1-2

2. A godly leader understands that the "sins of the fathers" may have their legacy far beyond their years

3. A godly leader prays to a God of power.

cf. v. 6, 10-12, 32

4. A godly leader prays to an electing God.

cf. v. 7-8, 24-25 (cf Isa. 43.4). Also note: God considered righteous in context of election (cf v. 8, 33).

5. A godly leader prays to a God of mercy.

cf. v. 17, 19-21, 27, 28, 31

6. A godly leader prays to a God of wrath.

cf. v. 27

7. A godly leader prays to a covenant God

cf. v. 23, 24, 32

8. A godly leader understands that man is a totally sinful and depraved being.

cf. v. 16-17, 18, 26, 28, 29, 33, 34-35

Lesson 15

"The Covenant of the People"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

ch. 10

I. Review of Last Lesson

ch. 9

- the text: the prayer of the leaders
 - a solemn assembly
 - the leaders pray
 - recount the faithfulness of God
 - recount the sins of Israel
 - prayer for mercy
 - the making of a covenant
- observations (p. 27)

II. Brief Review of the Text**read vv. 1, 28-39**

As we have just reviewed, the leaders of the people were praying and confessing their sins before the LORD (cf vv. 9.2-3). The prayer concludes in v. 9.38 stating that the leaders and the people were making a covenant, and that the leaders were sealing it on behalf of the people that day. In ch 10, then, we find the contents of this covenant. Just as our own Declaration of Independence has the names of the signers prominent on the document, it appears that this document also had the names of the signers prominently displayed. In vv. 1-27, then, are the names of those who signed this document.

In vv. 28-29 we find the general contents or summary of the covenant made that day. Verse 29 states that the people entered into "a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, and to observe and to do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his ordinances and His statutes:..." the people were serious about following the whole revelation of God's Law, whether it was a commandment, a statute or an ordinance.

What follows are various particulars to which the people pledged themselves. One must note that these particulars are not the entire contents of their covenant made that day. No, these are the particular issues that were of some note to the exiles who returned to the land. Each seems to deal with an issue that was particularly relevant to their situation of returning to the land and of beginning to live again as Israelites in the land

In v. 30 is a commitment to keep the covenant community pure and to avoid mixed marriages. In v. 31 concerns the keeping of the Sabbath as prescribed. Verses 32-

34 deal with various issues related to the service of the temple. Verse 32 states that they were going to levy a tax for the service of the house of God, with which they would buy supplies for the service of the temple (v. 33). In v. 34 wood was to be brought to the temple for the sacrifices.

Verses 35-38 concern themselves with the various sacrifices and tithes that were to be brought, and how these were to be divided. This section is summed up in v. 38, where the text states, "...and we will not neglect the house of our God."

It is interesting to note how much of this section is taken directly out of the Pentateuch, that is, the Law of God. Virtually all of these provisions are taken directly from the words of Moses to the children of Israel. For example, v. 30 comes from Ex. 34.16. Verse 31 comes from Ex. 20.10 and Ex. 23.10; verse 36 from Ex. 13.12-13. This list could go on. A Bible with cross references can provide more verses.

This, then, is the contents of the covenant the people made before the LORD, and the text before us.

III. Observations

1. At times in the spiritual life of an assembly, the leader does represent the people he leads.

cf. v. 9.38 (v. 10.1 [in the Heb.])

--other biblical examples:

--father as head of the family (e.g. Achan)

--pastor as head of the people

--missionary (Paul and gift for Jerusalem)

--Christ (Rom 5)

2. True biblical revival is based upon and grounded in the word, even the Law of God.

cf. events of ch 8-9

--note also modern scorn for the Law of God and the word of God in general (charismatics, liberals, modern evangelicals, etc.)

--note also the reformation

3. True biblical revival will result in a lasting change of behaviour.

cf. vv. 28ff

--v. 29 a change in attitude to the Law of God

--v. 30 a change in marriage practices

--v. 31 a change in economic practices

--v. 32-39 a change in giving and service towards the work of God

4. A leader is worthy of his support

cf. v. 37-38

note also 13.10, and I Thess 5.12-13

5. Godly leadership may wait years to see the fruit of its labours.

cf Ezra. Had been in the land 12-15 yrs prior to this revival, but yet only now, it seems, were the various items related to the worship of God re-established. Further, the temple had been standing approx. 100 years before this time of revival.

Lesson 16

"Misc. Issues Related to the Establishment of Jerusalem"

**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

ch. 11-12

I. Review of Last Lesson

ch. 10

- the text: the covenant of the people
 - scope of the covenant--v. 29
 - misc. provisions of the cov.
 - mixed marriages (v. 30)
 - the sabbath (v. 31)
 - misc concerns of the temple (v. 32-39)
- observations

II. Brief Overview of the Text

* read ch. 11-12 *

As we have just reviewed, the people have just entered into a covenant before the LORD to "walk in God's Law, and to observe and to do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes..." What we find here, in ch 11 and 12 are Nehemiah and the other leaders of the people wrapping up, as it were, misc. issues related to the establishing of Jerusalem.

This evening, we will not be taking the time to read the entirety of these two chapters. But as we go thru this overview, we will hit various portions of these two chapters.

vv. 11.1-24--the settling of the city of Jerusalem

The main body of ch 11 deals with one issue--the settling of Jerusalem. Verses 1-2 are an introduction to what is to follow. What follows is the record of who, by either position or Israelite family, ended up settling in the city of Jerusalem:

Vv. 3-9 concern various family leaders.

Vv. 10-14 concerns the priests; vv. 15-18 the Levites.

Vv. 19-24 concerns various governmental/"police power" individuals (e.g. gatekeepers, overseers).

vv. 11.25-36--the rest of the land

vv. 25-36 closes out the chapter by mentioning some of the other towns/villages that were inhabited by the exiles who had returned to the land.

vv. 12.1-26--the next generation of leaders

Approximately the first half of ch. 12 concerns itself with the people who were now leading at the time of Nehemiah, and with establishing or demonstrating the fact that these individuals were rightly in their positions. The author does this first by recounting the list of leaders who came up out of Persia with Zerubbabel (vv. 1-11), and then showing that the current leaders are from the same Israelite family (vv. 12-21)

vv. 27-43--the dedication of the wall

The vast majority of this chapter deals with the dedication of the wall, the very issue that so moved Nehemiah to tears and prayer and fasting in ch. 1. With the conclusion of this section, the book could have closed. In fact, after this chapter, approx. 25 years pass before the events of ch 13.

Vv. 25-30 concerns the gathering of the Levites for this dedication and their purification. Vv. 31-43 mention who served on that day, and v. 43, which closes this section, only briefly mentions what was done that day, and that in a very general manner.

vv.44-47--the last leaders appointed

In vv. 44ff final matters are taken care of. Men are appointed to oversee the contributions which would now be coming into Jerusalem as a result of the covenant made in ch 10. The chapter closes with a note that the people were obeying as they stated they would, in ch 10 (cf. v. 47).

These, then, are the chapters before us.

Although we have just reviewed these verses very briefly, I would also like to mention, in line with our study on leadership, that many, if not most of the individuals mentioned in these two chapters are leaders of some sort. We will not take the time to note all the references, but I would like to mention a few verses.

- Ch. 11 --v. 9ff--the leaders of the priests
- v. 15--the leaders of the Levites.
- v. 19--the leaders of the gatekeepers

- Ch. 12 --v. 1ff--the former leaders
- v. 12ff--the next generation of leaders
- v. 31ff--the leaders of the dedication

III. Observations

1. *It is wise that a leader be accessible*

cf. v. 11.1--centrally located, a location known to all

2. *It is truly a blessing indeed (especially for the leadership) when the people volunteer for a difficult task.*

cf. v. 11.2 --city recently rebuilt, much may still have needed to be rebuilt. Some may have left relatives.

Typical problems of city life, etc.

3. *Leaders come in all "shapes and sizes"*

cf. vv. 11.1-24 note diversity in tasks and backgrounds. Surely there must also have been a diversity in personalities as well.

4. *Leaders have sons*

cf 12.1ff w/ 12.12ff

note also the spiritual truth of this principle:

--Paul and Timothy

--Timothy and "faithful men"

5. *Note who blessed are a people to have a "man of God" as their leader.*

cf. v. 12.24

Many today who do "the work of the ministry" are not "men of God".

6. *A godly leader deserves respect*

cf. v. 36--Ezra leading the way

7. *At times leadership has its important moments.*

cf. v. 12.27-43--most of the deeds of these men never mentioned. Many of the "mundane" moments are actually more important than one or two high points.

8. *A godly leader sees God as the giver of joy.*

cf. v. 12.43--the leader sees joy as coming directly from the hand of God (cf. p. 49 [notes]).

9. *A leader is worthy of his support*

cf. v. 12 47

10. *The obedience of a leader is noted*

cf. v. 12.47--Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, especially as it relates to religious duty.

Neh. #17

"Nehemiah and Tobiah, and the Temple of God"

PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP: LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH

vv. 13.1-9

I. Review of Last Lesson

ch. 11-12

- the text: misc. issues related to the establishment of Jerusalem
 - the settling of Jerusalem 11.1-24
 - the inhabited villages of Judah 11.25-36
 - the former and current leaders of the priests and Levites 12.1-26
 - the dedication of the wall 12.27-43
 - final appointments 12.44-47
- observations

II. Brief Overview of the Text

* read vv. 13.1-9 *

As we mentioned during our last meeting, the events of ch 13 take place some time after the rest of the book, possibly some 25 years after the events of ch 12, for in v. 6 Nehemiah states that he had gone back to the king 12 years after he came into the land (in the 20th year of the king--cf ch 1-2).

The passage begins with the people of the land continuing to read thru the Law of God. What we have recorded here is their finding of a section in the Law concerning who could and could not enter the assembly of Israel. Most likely they were reading in the book of Deuteronomy, ch 23.3ff. Again, as we have seen here, the people are obedient to the word of God, separating the mixed multitude or foreigners from Israel (v.3).

What follows, in vv. 4ff, is an account of a specific instance of the violation of this provision of the Law. One of the priests who was in charge of the storehouses of the temple, Eliashib, had given a section of the temple storehouses to Tobiah for a residence. Tobiah is mentioned in ch 2.10 as an Ammonite official, and elsewhere is called the Ammonite. He may have been of Ammonite decent, as is possible from these references. It is also possible that Tobiah was Jewish, or at least partially so, if one takes into account his name. The name Tobiah means "Jehovah is good", and is definitely an Israelite name. This may also account for his being a relative of the priest. In this case, Tobiah would have been a Jew who was seeking the welfare of the Ammonite people, which was also prohibited by the Deuteronomy passage. In either case, Eliashib the priest was disobedient to the word of God.

Apparently, Eliashib had given Tobiah a room or rooms in the temple which were designated for the tithes and offerings which were brought to the temple. From the amount of material that was to be stored in this room (cf v. 5) it seems that Eliashib had given Tobiah a block of rooms for his use. This would also explain why Nehemiah cleanses "the rooms", in v. 9, as he is rectifying this situation.

In v. 6 we learn that these events had taken place during a time of prolonged absence by Nehemiah. Nehemiah had returned to the king, as he said he would, in ch 2. Upon his return, Nehemiah learns of the evil that Eliashib has committed with regard to Tobiah, giving to him a room (or rooms) in the temple courts of the house of God.

The next verse begins as follows: "and it grieved me bitterly (sore)...", or, as the NASB has it, "and it was very displeasing to me...". These translations are ok, however I think that the Hebrew is stating the displeasure of Nehemiah a bit more strongly than this. In the Hebrew, the word that is used here is the verb form of the Hebrew word for evil. Literally, what Eliashib had done was exceedingly evil in the sight of Nehemiah.

The remainder of the verse contains the response of Nehemiah to this sin. "And I threw out all of the vessels of the house of Tobiah out (or outside) from the room." The picture is a very graphic one that each of us may have seen before: the personal effects of someone piled up outside his home, usually for failure to pay the rent. In this instance, Tobiah was cast out to make room for the holy things of God. (As a side, what Nehemiah did here would be, in the 1990s, unthinkable in many churches. People should always take precedence over things, even the holy things of God. The 20th century church has made an idol out of the poor. This is not to say that we are not to minister to the poor, but the poor, like all else can never be the all-consuming purpose of the church.)

In v. 9 we find Nehemiah cleansing the rooms once inhabited by Tobiah. Further, these same rooms are once again utilized for their original purpose.

This, then, is the text before us.

III. Observations

1. Godly leadership continues in the word of God

cf v. 1

Note: ch. 8--revival. Began reading the word. Continued in the word.

ch. 9--reciting the word

ch. 10--obeying the word

ch. 13--continuing in the word

2. The assembly of the righteous is no place for them that hate God

cf. v. 2 Both:

- Moabite/Ammonite
- religious (cf Balaam)

3. It is truly a God-given blessing that the people are obedient

cf. v. 3, also ch 8.1ff

4. A godly leader understands that all of the word of God is relevant.

cf. vv.1-3, also the book of Deut.

5. Behold the legacy of a sinful man

cf. Balaam

6. Not all religious leadership is godly leadership

cf. v. 4, Eliashib

Notes: this appears to have went on for some time. No one challenged this arrangement (at least not recorded). At times religious leadership can commit very grievous sins.

7. A godly leader honours his word

cf. v. 6--Nehemiah going back to the king. cf. also ch 1-2

8. A godly leader knows and understands that which is evil

cf. v. 7, also Heb. 5.11-14

9. Godly leadership is concerned for one thing--the glory of God's name

cf. v. 8

Lesson 18

"The portion of the Levites"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 13.10-14

I. Review of Last Lesson

vv. 13.1-9

- the text: foreigners; Tobiah and the temple of God.
 - continued reading of the word of God vv. 1-3
 - the sin of the high priest Eliashib vv. 4-5
 - the absence of Nehemiah v. 6
 - the return of Nehemiah and the discovery of sin v. 7
 - Nehemiah's remedy--the cleansing of the temple vv. 8-9
- observations
 - note #2, 6
 - note also: a godly leader is no respecter of persons. Eliashib was the high priest. This was his doing. Yet Nehemiah obeyed God rather than obey Eliashib.

II. Brief Overview of the Text** read vv. 10-14 **

As we have just seen, the temple had been desecrated by the high priest, in giving a substantial section of the temple to Tobiah the Ammonite official. What we find in the verses before us is a situation which may very well have grown out of the actions of Eliashib in vv. 1-9 (cf v. 5).

v. 10

Having arrived back in the land, Nehemiah knows or discerns that the portions of the Levites has not been provided for them. This provision was provided by the tithes and offerings which were to be brought to the temple. This is exactly what was covenanted back in ch 10, vv. 29ff. Clearly, this had not been done for quite some time, for, as the text states, the Levites had gone back to their fields. Literally, in the Hebrew, this idea of returning to the fields is presented much stronger. The Hebrew reads here, that "they fled...each man to his field". This fleeing seems to have been complete as well, in that both the Levites and the singers had left the service of the temple. It appears that the only major class of individual who had not left was the priests, who, during this time, were under the ungodly leadership of Eliashib the high priest.

There is one other thing that this text is telling us, altho indirectly. The situation was, that the people were to be providing for the Levites through the tithes and offerings that were brought into the temple. Clearly from our text this was not happening. Thus one of two things was taking place. First, the people were not bringing any more tithes to the temple. This may be indicated by Nehemiah's response in v. 11. Or second, the provisions were not being distributed among the Levites and possibly being hoarded by the priests. This may explain v. 13. Most likely it was a combination of sins which contributed to the current situation.

v. 11

In v. 11 we find Nehemiah contending with the rulers or heads of the Jewish people. At first glance, one would have assumed that Nehemiah was speaking to the wrong people. "Shouldn't he be contending with the Levites themselves?" Keil and Delitzsch state that these heads of the people were to make sure that the tithe was gathered and taken to the temple. And it was these with whom Nehemiah was contending. The Hebrew word here often has the meaning in the O.T. of a physical fight, or of striving with someone. It also often has the idea of a quarrel or verbal combat. This is the sense that the word has here. Nehemiah was verbally combating these individuals concerning their actions. By their not bringing the tithe they were neglecting the house of God. Their sins of greed and/or sloth were sins against God directly and the Levites indirectly.

Verse 11 concludes with Nehemiah gathering up the Levites and stationing them back at their posts in the house of God.

v. 12

In v. 12 we learn that all Judah then brought the tithe into the temple of God again.

v. 13

To further rectify this sinful situation, Nehemiah appoints "faithful men" over the task of taking care of the tithes and offerings and of distributing this provision among the Levites. It is interesting to note that there seems to be one representative of each of the serving factions which served God in the temple represented in v. 13, thus no one faction (e.g.--the priests) would get the lion's share of the provision.

v. 14

Verse 14 is a much more intimate verse than the preceding. Verses 10-13 are narrative; verse 14 reads as a personal entry in a journal. "Remember me O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out (or blot out) my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services." Here we gain a personal glimpse into the prayer life of Nehemiah before the God he served (and loved to serve). In this prayer he is bold, passionate, respectful, humble and devoted--all at the same time.

These, then, are the verses before us.

III. Observations

1. Godly leadership may not be followed by godly leadership.

Note the troubles with which Nehemiah had to deal upon his arrival back in Judah:

- sins of the high priest
- the matter of Tobiah
- cleansing the temple
- Levites and singers have no support
- neglect of the temple
- Sabbath defiled
- mixed marriages

2. A leader is worthy of his support.

cf. v. 10

3. Behold how the sins of some totally and dramatically affect the lives of others.

cf. v. 11

At the end of ch 10 we saw that the service of the temple had been restored to the fullest extent since the exile. Yet within the span of 10-20 years, these Levites and singers, who began new careers serving in the temple, had lost their jobs to the neglect of the temple. Gone was the prescribed provision. Thus, they "flee" to their fields to survive. From their standpoint they were faithful (for we do not find Nehemiah faulting them for their actions), yet, in the course of time, they were under stress and had no sustenance. The sins of these leaders and ultimately, the people, had dramatically affected their lives.

4. Godly leadership involves confrontation.

cf. v. 11--"and I contended"

The heads of the fathers households had sinned--apparently both in example and in weak leadership. This was a matter which Nehemiah had to confront. As a result the temple had suffered; the service had been greatly curtailed, possibly it had even ceased. Most likely, this sin had gone on for some time. As we mentioned earlier, this word translated as contend can have the idea of a verbal assault--Nehemiah was attacking the sins of the leaders.

As can be seen from the rest of the book Nehemiah has had to confront many issues, ideas, and individuals in the re-establishment of the city of Jerusalem (Sanballat, Tobiah, the fear of the people, the betrayal of Jewish leadership, mixed marriages, etc.). As can be seen, a godly leader will have confrontation throughout the course of his ministry. There can be no purity without confrontation; there can be no discipline without confrontation.

Please note, it is possible to have a religious organisation without confrontation, but it is impossible to have a true church of God without it. As long as God is continuing the process of building up and purifying His church, there will be confrontation (note I Jn 2.19 for example).

5. Godly leaders may not be utilized for quite some time.

cf. v. 13b

Clearly the temple had been neglected for a period of time. These faithful men apparently did not serve in this capacity until after the second arrival of Nehemiah. This may have been a period of close to 10-12 years.

cf. also Moses

6. A godly leader is a man of passionate prayer.

cf. v. 14, also Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah (cf Lamentations), Jesus

Lesson 19

"The Restoration of the Sabbath"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 13.15-22

I. Review of Last Lesson

vv. 13.10-14

- the text: the portion of the Levites
 - the portion not given the Levites (v. 10)
 - Levites flee to their fields (v. 10)
 - Nehemiah contends with the rulers (v. 11)
 - restoration of the tithes and offerings (v. 12)
 - appointment of faithful leaders (v. 13)
 - prayer to God (v. 14)
- observations
 - note #3, 4, 5

II. Brief Overview of the Text

* read vv. 13.15-22 *

v. 15

In vv. 10-14, Nehemiah was dealing with a sin problem--one of neglect or sins of omission. Here in vv. 15-22, he is still dealing with sin, although here the sins are sins of commission, that of active disobedience.

Verse 15 opens stating "In those days..." Clearly this has reference to the same days as those mentioned above--the days after the second return of Nehemiah to the land. It would appear that there was a wholesale neglect of the Law of God. What is even more telling is that the disobedience recorded here is also in Jerusalem--the city, where in ch 11-12, the leaders of the people were to dwell, that is both the civic as well as the religious leaders.

Verse 15 continues, "I saw in Judah the treading of winepresses..." Nehemiah here lists for us a sampling of the activities which were being conducted upon the Sabbath. Again, as we did last week, I would like you to turn to the 10th chapter of this book, to look again at the covenant made there. In v. 31 we find, "if the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; we would forgo the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt." Back in ch 10 the people covenant to keep the Sabbath. Here, in ch 13, some 10-20 years later, there is selling and commerce on the Sabbath.

The verse concludes with the statement that Nehemiah warned them about the day

on which they were selling provisions. The word here translated as "warn" has the idea of a solemn warning or strong admonition concerning something. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* this word is the same word whereby Moses cautioned Israel against curiosity at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19.21), and is the same word Samuel used when he warned the people concerning the monarchy and the problems associated with it (I Sam 8.9). Thus here Nehemiah solemnly warns them concerning the Sabbath.

v. 16

In v. 16 he documents further instances of their defiling of the Sabbath--that of purchasing items, presumably for profit or economic gain.

v. 17

In v. 17 we find Nehemiah again verbally assaulting the nobles of the people. These nobles, it must have been, apparently had led the way in this sin. Further along in the verse, we find the results of their sin--they were defiling the Sabbath. Elsewhere in scripture the word has the idea of treating that which is holy as common. And this is exactly what they were doing, treating the Sabbath as any other day, as a good day to make a profit.

v. 18

In v. 18, Nehemiah continues with his rebuke of the nobles. "Did not our fathers do thus, and our God brought on us and on this city all this evil? And you are adding wrath on Israel, in defiling the Sabbath."

Here Nehemiah mentions three facts concerning their sin. First this was the same sin which their fathers had committed years before. Second, God, in being true to His word, had punished their sin, bringing evil upon the city of Jerusalem and upon the people (cf. also II Chron 36.20-21). And third, in defiling the Sabbath in the same manner, they were adding wrath upon Israel.

v. 19

In v. 19 Nehemiah begins to rectify the situation. As night fell upon the eve of the next Sabbath, Nehemiah gave the command that the gates of the city were to be closed and not opened until after the Sabbath. He further appointed some of his servants over the gates, most likely, that they would be guarded by faithful men and not opened until after the Sabbath.

v. 20

Verses 20-22 deal with an issue which arose after the implementation of the measures mentioned in v. 19. Apparently, some of the vendors were camping outside of the city walls.

v. 21

In v. 21 we find Nehemiah's remedy to this new problem. He takes what appears to be by our politically-correct mindset of the 90s a drastic approach to this problem. He threatens them with force. Most likely this would have included being physically removed from the area next to the wall, and possibly bodily harm and/or the loss of their goods.

v. 22

Verse 22 concludes this section with Nehemiah permanently appointing Levites over the gates, to assume this duty from the servants of Nehemiah who had the job temporarily (cf. v. 19). As we saw that the last section ended with a prayer to God, so ends this section. Nehemiah prays here that God would again remember him and that God would have mercy upon him.

This, then, is the text before us.

III. Observations

1. Godly leadership involves confrontation.

cf. v. 15, 17 We have previously made this same observation last week. Here, the nobles of the people had sinned. Again, Nehemiah is involved in confront. Most likely, this sin had gone on for some time. This buying and selling seems to be a well-established ritual by the time re-enters the land. As we mentioned during our last lesson, this word translated as contend can have the idea of a verbal assault--Nehemiah was attacking the sins of the leaders and solemnly warning them concerning the Sabbath.

As can be seen, a godly leader will have confrontation throughout the course of his ministry. There can be no purity without confrontation; there can be no discipline without confrontation.

Please note, it is possible to have a religious organisation without confrontation, but it is impossible to have a true church of God without it. As long as God is continuing the process of building up and purifying His church, there will be confrontation (note I Jn 2.19 for example).

2. A godly leader is not afraid to call sin sin.

cf. v. 17--"...what is this evil thing which you are doing?"

In v. 17 confronting the nobles of the people. They had been sinning for some time in this matter. However, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, the people did not have a strong or godly high priest in the land at this time. Thus, this sin was not challenged openly, from a position of authority.

With the return of Nehemiah, all, this changed. As we have seen, Nehemiah was a man of action in dealing with the sins of the people. In v. 7 of this chapter we saw that Nehemiah was a mature individual, one who knew and understood what sin was. And here in v. 17, he states that the thing they were doing was *evil*. Their sin was evil. He referred to it as evil. To our 20th century ears these two words, "sin" and "evil" seem old and antiquated. They are words which are usually relegated to heinous persons, like Hitler or Stalin, not to the ordinary Joe on the street. Yet this word "evil" is the very word that Nehemiah uses to describe what is taking place in the land of Judah. These nobles were participating in evil deeds. And Nehemiah did not shrink back from declaring these deeds as evil, and of confronting these men concerning this sin.

3. *A godly leader sees God as the one who is truly sovereign in and thru evil.*

cf. v. 17--"...and our God brought on us...all this evil.

Nehemiah understood that this evil that was brought upon the city was directly from the hand of God. God was the one who brought it. This is exactly what the Hebrew says. This includes all of the deeds of the raids on the land by King Nebuchadnezzar, the destruction of the city and its wall, and the captivity. To all this Nehemiah refers in this rebuke of the nobles. To Nehemiah, God was the God of Daniel 4, where Nebuchadnezzar states,

and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:

35: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

--Dan. 4.34b-35

4. *A godly leader sees God as the one who punishes sin.*

cf. v. 18

We had mentioned earlier that the world in the latter half of the 20th century does not recognise the concept of sin. Likewise, the world, and much of professing Christianity has denied the truth that God has any wrath, or that He will ever punish sin. Yet this is what Nehemiah states--that God punished sin. God is a punisher of sin, and this is the God whom Nehemiah served.

5. *A godly leader is one who corrects sin*

cf. v. 19, 20-21

From our text, it appears that Nehemiah wasted no time in correcting the sin, or rectifying the situation. Nehemiah was not a man who could live w/ sin, as apparently Eliashib the high priest had done.. This has been his habit in the issues concerning Eliashib and Tobiah, and in the issue of the provision of the Levites, and it is his habit now. It seems that as soon as he learned about the problem that he began to correct the problem.

Further, Nehemiah was a man who would go to extreme measures to correct sin. In vv. 20-21, here we have Nehemiah dealing very severely with the merchants who were spending the night by the gate. One today may well say, that all that needs done is to ignore them; they'll go away. Nehemiah knew better. These individuals were sinning, just as the Jews had been. Thus he removed them from outside the wall. There was to be no selling just outside the wall, either.

6. *A godly leader is sees the greatness of the mercy of God.*

cf. v. 22

Lesson 20

"Mixed Marriages"**PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH**

vv. 13.23-31

I. Review of Last Lesson (vv. 13.15-22)

- the text: the restoration of the Sabbath
 - the Sabbath defiled (vv. 15-16)
 - the warning of Nehemiah (vv. 17-18)
 - the restoration of the Sabbath began (v. 19)
 - a further problem and solution (vv. 20-21)
 - Levites assume the gates (v. 22)
- observations
 - note #2, 3, 5, 6

II. Brief Overview of the Text

* read vv. 13.23-31 *

v. 23

As we have just reviewed, Nehemiah was rectifying various problems that had arisen during his absence. This is also how the chapter concludes. Here in v. 23 Nehemiah is dealing with another serious problem--that of mixed marriages. And he states, "Also in those days I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, of Ammon, of Moab." As we had seen earlier in the chapter, the people had separated themselves from all that was foreign. Here in v. 23, there are women from at least three of the surrounding countries that have married into the covenant community in Judah. Ashdod was a Philistine city to the west, on the Mediterranean Sea. Moab and Ammon were two countries to the SE and East of Judah, respectively. All of them had for centuries been at war with the people of God. Now they were in the most intimate of relationships with God's people. As we have seen before, these unions were prohibited by the Law of God.

v. 24

In v. 24 we learn more of the extent and results of this intermarriage. This intermarriage must have gone on for some time. We learn in v. 24 that those who intermarried had had children and that they were at least of the age of speech, for, as v. 24 states, "Half of their sons (were) speaking Ashdodite, and there was none of them who could speak in Hebrew, but according (to the language of) one or the other people." From this verse it would seem that the majority of the foreign women that had married into Jewish society were of Philistine, that is, Ashdodite origin. This may explain why Ashdod is mentioned first. The item that struck the attention of Nehemiah was that of speech--none of the children could understand Hebrew. This, to Nehemiah, was a catastrophe. If they could not understand Hebrew then they could not understand the holy scriptures when they were read, and most likely they were not even being instructed in these scriptures. To Nehemiah this was unacceptable.

v. 25

In v. 25 we have the record of the very extreme response of Nehemiah to their sin. Again we find Nehemiah contending with the people. However, unlike the previous confrontations, this one became violent. In his holy anger, Nehemiah curses those who sinned in this manner, hitting or striking some of them and pulled out their hair. He then makes them swear an oath that they would no longer intermarry.

v. 26

The rebuke continues in v. 26. Nehemiah reminds them of Solomon and how he sinned in marrying foreign women. Even though he was great in the sight of men and beloved of God, he still sinned in this matter.

v. 27

In v. 27, Nehemiah asks a question, in having such an example as Solomon before us, should we then hear of you sinning in like manner? In the mind of Nehemiah this story, this history concerning Solomon, had a direct application on this situation. These Israelites would have (or should have) known about the example of Solomon. Thus, sinning in like manner was foolish indeed. He ends the verse by stating the magnitude of this sin--it was against God. These marriages were sin against God.

v. 28

In v. 28 we find an illustration of just how far this sin had proceeded in the priestly line. One of the sons of the high priest had married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite. He was now a relative, by marriage, of one of the enemies of the people of God--one who actively tried to stop the rebuilding of the wall, and who had even plotted the death of Nehemiah.

The verse concludes with a rather telling statement, "and I caused him to flee from before me." Here we have Nehemiah chasing the grandson of the high priest from before him. It is very likely that both his father and grandfather (the high priest) were there at this same time. Most likely, these events were taking place in a special assembly called for this purpose. Yet this did not stop Nehemiah from dealing with the sins of the people. Nehemiah dealt with sin regardless of who was present.

v. 29

In v. 29 we again find Nehemiah praying. However, the prayer recorded here is not the passionate expression of love and longing for mercy that we have seen before. Here we find Nehemiah praying to God that the deeds of these priests not be forgotten. They have defiled the priesthood Nehemiah states, most likely referring to the reputation that these priests now had before the people of God. They had defiled the priesthood in another way. By marrying a foreign woman, it was very possible that the seed of this union would one day be high priest. This would have been an abomination. Thus would the priesthood be truly defiled.

v. 30

In v. 30-31 we find the summary of the matter. "Thus I cleansed them of everything foreign...." These words here are a summary of what took place. In the book of Ezra, ch 10 it is recorded that these foreign women and their children were sent away. This was a very difficult time in the life of Israel.

v. 31

In v. 31 the book concludes, rather abruptly, with yet another prayer of Nehemiah.

"Remember me, O my God, for good." Again we see that Nehemiah was a man of passionate prayer, and one who longed to be pleasing to his God.

These, then, are the final verses of Nehemiah before us.

III. Observations on the Passage

1. *The mother is a Teacher/Leader in the home.*

cf. v. 24

2. *A godly leader uses scripture to admonish the errant.*

cf. v. 26

3. *A godly leader understands that the stature of a man does not diminish or offset his sin.*

cf. v. 26

4. *A godly leader knows and understands that all sin is against God.*

cf. v. 27

5. *In the correcting of sin, a godly leader is no respecter of persons.*

cf. v. 28--correcting the grandson of the High Priest

6. *At times, the correcting of sin may be very difficult for the leader and very costly to the assembly.*

Undoubtedly this was not an easy task for Nehemiah

7. *A godly leader understands that life in the assembly of God's people is to go on.*

cf. v. 30-31

VI. Corollaries from the Text

1. *Unity matters*

cf. v. 23-24, cf. also II Cor 6

2. *The primary goal of reading (and education) is to understand the word of God.*

cf. v. 24

VI. Observations Concerning Nehemiah

1. *Nehemiah was a man of a deep love for God and his glory.*

He loved God.

He loved His word.

2. *Nehemiah was a man of passionate prayer.*

cf. ch 1, 13

3. *Nehemiah was a man who feared God and not man.*

cf. his interactions with Sanballat, Tobiah, Eliashib

4. *Nehemiah was a wise and insightful leader.*

cf. his use of "lieutenants"

5. *Nehemiah was a man of "biblical" action*