

NEHEMIAH

-A man of prayer and work

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assemblies Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan
- "Synopsis of the books of the Bible." J.N. Darby, Loizeaux Bros. Inc., NY
- "All the men of the Bible." Herbert Lockyer. Zondervan Pub. House, Grand Rapids, MI

The book of Nehemiah is the last of the historical books of the Old Testament. The subject matter has to do with the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem, but the lessons contained in the book relate to the man God used to accomplish the work God gave him. Not having been born in Israel he would have learned of his heritage from those who were willing to tell the next generation why they were a unique people, their history and why God was so important to them. Unless we who know the Lord are willing to spend the time to tell our children and grandchildren what we know about the Lord, and why faith in Him is so important, the following generations will settle down to a comfortable life in the world and will perish in their sins. The son of the man whose name means "the darkness of the Lord," was named Nehemiah whose name means, "the comfort of the Lord."

To not learn the lessons of failure from a past generation is likely to cause failure in the present and future generations. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..." "All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Our offspring are in danger of being lost if they do not have a clear and true understanding of our Lord God and in true repentance, fall upon His mercy for forgiveness and place personal trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone as their personal Savior.

Nehemiah was in a comfortable position in the court of the king of Babylon. The circumstances of his life were what most people want for their own comfort and satisfaction, but this man was to be "the comfort of the Lord." He had learned that eternal things take precedence over temporal things. That spiritual things take precedence over the physical things. Whoever the person was that impacted this man in his early years, likely his own father Hachabiah, did a good job. Nehemiah's heart was where God's heart was. The temple was there and the city of his forefathers needed him. When God has the heart of His servant, He can use that person to do great things in His work. His allegiance and patriotism to his heritage, and consequently to his Lord, changed everything in his life. He had learned some good things about commitment and leadership in the secular role he held in the king's court. He would have learned that carelessness in commitment could lead to the loss of life of others and his own. He would have learned that those who led other people need to be conscious of that which is going on around them both in circumstances and in the lives of the people he was leading. He would have learned not to get distracted by trivial things at the expense of those things that are important.

During the seventy years of captivity, the Jews had been threatened with extermination by the edict of Haman, and yet had prospered. In fact, when the opportunity arose for them to return to their homeland, only a comparatively few wanted to go. Nehemiah may not even have been born when Zerubbabel and Jeshua led the first group of 50,000 Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. A few years later Ezra and 2000 to 3000 people with him went to Judah and were able to get the work restarted and the temple finally finished. When we lose sight of what it means to be in the family of God as a citizen of heaven, we soon become like the people of the world who live for success, pleasure and some for fame. An awareness of God at work in one's life makes the empty bubbles of earth of little value to those who live godly.

Like Nehemiah, if we are conscious of God at work in the world, and know His presence is with us, it is normal for us to communicate with Him in prayer. Some of Nehemiah's prayers were only a few words and others longer and of greater scope of interest and need. When a child of God is not self-centered or overly concerned about his own interests, he is given by God an understanding of that which is important to our Lord. The condition of soul of the Lord's people, the furtherance of the work of the Lord and the need of strong leadership are all concerns to one who is in fellowship with God.

A concern for the unfinished work locally and abroad is a reason for our heart interest and earnest prayer. An awareness of the condition of things in the world, the nation and the assemblies of God's people motivates us to forget the comforts to which we have become accustomed and to deny ourselves and "take

up the cross" of identification with Christ and His kingdom. When we are willing to go forward ourselves as laborers in the harvest, then we are not hypocritical in "praying the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into the harvest." When we are willing to be God's answer to our prayers, then we will find others are able to inspire still others to step out in faith and work for the Lord.

It is important for us to recognize as Nehemiah did, the nobility and holiness in the work of the Lord. There is nothing trivial in any way when we are responsible for transmitting truth or are engaged in other parts of kingdom work. To some earth-bound people it seems foolish to leave comfortable circumstances and success in order to bring the Gospel to people who could care less. Some people are looking for a reason for their own existence and don't know where to turn. Others have no concern because they have never clearly understood the fact of an eternal existence in heaven or hell and a lost eternity.

Nehemiah had the objective of providing safety and security for God's people so clearly in his heart and mind that he was able to move forward in spite of opposition. He encountered outward opposition from those who did not want God's people to live separated lives and there were also inward hindrances, but he persevered because he was confident that what he was doing had divine sanction. In all of his activities he gave God all the glory and credit for what was accomplished. That is one of the reasons for prayer. By expressing our desire for God and our need of Him in any endeavor, we have placed the whole enterprise in the hands of the only One who can make the outcome successful and right.

By the practice of prayer, we become part of the work of God. If we pray the prayers of intercession on behalf of others, we have part in the success of the work that is in their hands. Prayers of supplication are effective when we are specific in our requests and the objectives we anticipate. By the fact of communicating directly with God who has "all power," we become a part of that which is beneficial and lasting. We rejoice with thanksgiving when we see and hear the answers to our prayers. By our words of adoration and worship we are able to glorify God and display His honor to those who are in need of assurance and/or salvation.

Nehemiah is a model to us of one who honors God, is in communion with God, is committed to God and His work. He cared for the physical and spiritual needs of God's people whom he had really only heard about. He practiced the leadership principles he had learned and experienced. He was willing to forgo advancement and personal comfort for the problems, perseverance and pain involved in the work of the Lord.

"Gracious God, my heavenly Father, when I read about those men of old who made such important choices even when their lives were considered successful, I am made to express my thanks for all of those who have made similar decisions down through the ages. The names of many are in the history books, and there are some I know personally. May I and others like me never lose sight of that which is important in the light of eternity. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ Amen."

Nehemiah 1:6. *"Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, night and day, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned."*

IDENTIFICATION.

It is not enough to know what's wrong in the lives and cities of those around,
For many have never heard the Word of God and don't know where they're bound.
Some of us have been blessed, and now our feet are planted on holy ground;
And it is up to us to identify ourselves as God's, and give the Gospel sound.

Before stepping out to work for God, and expect people to listen to what I say,
I need, like Nehemiah, to humble myself before the Lord and kneel and pray.
The differences between the lost and saved are like the differences between night and day,
And often the only way people will listen, is if they know I live life in a different way.

In a far and distant land from where he lived, the need was great he knew.
For him to be an advocate, and before he could let sadness on his face to show;
He had to spend the time with God alone as God's plan for him developed and grew,
And he could define the work before him, and his Lord would empower him to follow through.

Love for God and love for others is so necessary to enable us to do God's revealed will,
And it is now, and always will be God's plan to use mere mortal men and their hands fill
To do the work yet undone, whether it be at home or in a distant field, fallow ground to till,

And there the harvest of a work for God is waiting as it has for years - and is waiting still.

Heart-felt prayer is where the wanting soul will start to gain the insight needed and so essential.

From there he lays himself on the altar for God, giving unreservedly to his Lord, his full potential.

If sin has been a hindrance to his life - covetousness, or whatever sin he faces - he is penitential,

Knowing that for a man to be used for God, he must be clean in order to be used instrumental.

For people in a culture strange or language that to me is unknown, I must take steps to rectify

The lack I have, by laying down at feet divine - marked with nails, all that I thought would satisfy

Me in this life: and stepping out of the zone of comfort I live in, deliberately choose to identify

Myself in language, dress and life-style so they know I identify with Him who for their sins did die.

“O God of all mankind and Father of all that believe: I am about to cross into a modern culture of young Christians who do not think as I think, learn as I learned, dress as I dress or even have the same values taught to them I was taught. Please help me to recognize the differences and not insist that they be like me. At the same time, help me to insist that they must be like Thee. I am aware of the potential barriers that I must go over to reach them. Please help me do this with dignity and grace, In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 1

RIGHT PLACE - RIGHT TIME

The book of Nehemiah is an autobiography for the most part as the Spirit of God moved this man to give us, not only a historical account of events, but also principles of leadership. A man in comfortable circumstances with a very important work in the king's palace, still had his heart in the right place. He knew his Jewish heritage was important and he knew that whatever his circumstances were personally, he was bound by birth to the people of God. Likely he had never been to Jerusalem and had only heard of the first group of exiles who had returned to Jerusalem before his time. The group who went with Ezra fifty years later would have been contemporaries of his, so his interest in their success would have been personal. Then after twelve years his brother and some others with him came to Babylon with news about the state of things with God's people in Jerusalem.

Our interest in the work of the Lord wherever it is in our day is an important part of our lives because those engaged in spiritual enterprise all over the world are our brothers and sisters. We may not know many of the thousands of laborers in the great harvest field of the world, but we can have a part in the work by prayer and practical participation by financial support. The prayer meetings of a local assembly of God's people and the reports from mission fields stirs our interest and hearts. An assembly that prays for and supports missionary work and Gospel efforts will be a healthy assembly. When we know a bit about a work in some far-off field, we will always want to know more and how the work is progressing.

Nehemiah would have known about the group who went with Ezra and his interest in that work and its success was genuinely heart-felt. It was in the month of Chisleu (December) at the king's winter palace where his brother and those with him gave a report of the sad state of affairs among the Jews in Jerusalem and the disorganized and unprotected city that was at the mercy of all those around them. Likely there was some resentment from those idolatrous women and children, and their pagan families against the Jewish men who had put them away. A city without walls is defenseless and vulnerable to attacks from without. Separation without defined barriers is open to any opposition that is louder and stronger. God's people need to know there is an "in and out" to a scripturally gathered assembly. They also need to know the scriptural basis for the separation, the reasons for, and the results of separation.

Even though Nehemiah served in high places and had a high position, he knew the uniqueness of the Jews and the need to maintain that uniqueness in the world. He was seriously concerned about the people and also the place. People are obviously more important than things. Without people the house of God and the fields ripe to harvest are valueless. God desires His people to be with Him and involved with Him in their lives. "Gather My saints together unto Me; those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." The unity and security of God's people is essential to the public testimony of God's grace and saving power to the

world around us. The exiles were in trouble and the disgrace and reproach that the few who were left were enduring was the cause of Nehemiah's great sorrow.

For some reason there was only a remnant of exiles left and they were in danger because of the defenseless city. The wall building project started by Ezra had been forcibly stopped. The rebuilding of the temple was a good thing, but the need of holiness in day to day living of God's people that allowed the temple worship, had to be real to the people. What we are and what we do in daily living affects what our worship and service for God is like. Forms and rituals are not what constitutes worship. If our testimony before the world as citizens is lost, our assembly testimony is of no value. The first step of separation is "unto" the Lord. When we have gathered unto Him there will be separation from the world. There will be a distinctness that makes people of the world uncomfortable because it exposes sin.

Both the walls and gates were destroyed in Jerusalem. There was nothing that defined that place. There was no place at the gate where judges met to make public decisions that kept order among the people. People came and went without any restrictions or reservations. There was no seat of authority and no distinction between the people of God and everyone else. Isolation is quite different from separation. Isolation removes us from any interaction with people and cuts us off from any way to carry out the calling and commission we have been given by our Lord. Separation simply means we are maintaining a uniqueness of life and walk that is consistent with the holy calling we have been given. The distinctiveness of holiness has to do with the way we live rather than where we are. We live by faith so the grace of God can be seen both in our personal lives as believers in Christ, and in our church life as those who are gathered to Christ alone and in His name alone.

Nehemiah 1:10. *"Now these are Thy servants and Thy people, who Thou hast redeemed by Thy great power, and by Thy strong hand."*

NOW THESE.

No matter how far God's own people will go
The Lord is still waiting for them
To return to Him back and then they will know
They can be assured they are welcomed by Him
Who allows terrible things to come to pass;
That His children from sin will return.
His mercy is real and His heart full of grace
Even though for so long His grace they have spurned.

These are His servants, His people, His redeemed
Though the world and its sin did them distract
God's great power and great hand though far they had gone
Their God was ready to welcome them back
But a leader was needed who really knew his God
He remained true when the others had failed
When the time was right, he could speak for the Lord
And give leadership with all that entailed.

We all have our time when others will look
To see if we can help them some way
They need to be able to see that we took
Seriously what God in His Word had to say
We maybe not realize that a simple man
Who feels the demands are too much;
Is just the right person God has in His plan;
Even him who with his Lord kept in touch.

"As an intercessor Father, I come to Thee on behalf of those my brothers and sisters who are going through a hard time today. One may feel let down because the ice took away his fishing gear. Another has never grasped the reality of eternal security. Another has the burden of leadership heavy on his shoulders and is just tired. There are a lot of Thy children who need building up, strengthening and encouragement. Please show me Father, how best to help them. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

THE MAN OF PRAYER

When a second or third generation believer is concerned about the testimony of the Lord's people and the assembly of the saints as a whole, that is a wonderful thing. Far too many of the people of God take their

spiritual heritage for granted and can be counted on as real participants only if they "have time" or "if it will fit into their schedule." Nehemiah had lived his whole life in Babylon and yet he loved the place where God's honor dwelled. Jerusalem and the temple represented the identity of the Jews wherever they were scattered. Jewish history and past glory were still in Nehemiah's heart and mind. He had never seen Solomon's temple or the one Zerubbabel built but he knew where they were and why they were important.

The message that the people in Jerusalem were in trouble and there was reproach in the center of Jewish identity took the good right out of him and he had to sit down and cry over such bad news. A broken and contrite heart is not some "flash in the pan" matter that is momentary, but is a grief to the soul that has known the joy of fellowship with God. It is one thing when one grieves over his own condition, but it is quite another when God's people and the testimony to the Lord's name is in jeopardy. His condition of soul touched others who gathered around him as they realized their need of God to find some solution to this great problem.

Nehemiah had learned the value of prayer when likely when he was young, perhaps from some who remembered Daniel. A man of prayer has an impact on others who can tell if prayer is merely a form or is real and heart-felt. Fasting indicated this matter was of far more importance to Nehemiah than the usual activities of the day. For several days the seriousness and urgency of the state of God's people brought him to earnest prayer to "the God of heaven." This matter went way beyond merely a Jewish matter. The very testimony of God was linked to the state of affairs in Jerusalem, and Nehemiah knew that the God of heaven was the only One who could change things.

Reverence and respect are essential when we approach the great God of power who is awesome (terrible) in His being and authority. The covenant God had with His people of mercy and love was the basis of Nehemiah's appeal in his prayer. That was then and still is today fundamental to fervent prayer. God is just and God is holy, but when our confession of guilt and need is real, the word of God assures us of divine forgiveness.

In the prayer of Nehemiah there was praise and thanksgiving; there was confession and repentance. There was a plain and precise request and commitment on his part to take action. He was an intercessor for people he didn't even know, but he knew the scriptures, he knew who they were and he knew who he was. He knew the promises of God even though he was tied to the authority of an ungodly government. In faith he prayed and believed that which he had been taught. Now was the time to put faith into prayer and action. He spoke to God on behalf of his people who were God's servants, the people who God had redeemed.

One man said it well when he spoke of prayer, "Prayer puts people, problems, plans, prosperity, personalities, potential and purposes into proper perspective plainly to perceive." The book of Nehemiah begins and ends with prayer. Nehemiah was in the presence of the Supreme Authority of the universe when he prayed, so he was conscious of the fact that to the Lord God the king was simply "this man." He prayed and he waited. God doesn't always answer our prayers on our schedule. He wanted God's guidance and was willing to wait for it until he got the right opportunity to make his request to the king. When that time came it would be according to God's plans. The word of God, fellowship and advice of other believers, the timing of circumstances, are all needed when taking action that will affect the lives of many people. Our conscience needs to be clear and our faith strong when we move forward in the name of the Lord.

We will have problems in life and prayer clarifies what it is so we can define the problem in as few words as possible. Then we are able to articulate clearly to the Lord what we are asking for without being too wordy, redundant or generalizing of the request. When we ask God for help to do His will responsibly, we should be precise. Nehemiah wanted favor with the king. He wanted to rebuild the gates and walls of the city of Jerusalem. He wanted the trouble and reproach in Jerusalem to be done with. When our hearts and attitudes are right, our concern and prayers will be real and we can expect God to work.

Nehemiah 1:10. *"Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand."*

ALL GOD'S.

"Thy servants" – they all belong to God. They are those who do the will of Another. They do not have the right to make independent decisions. They have a work to do that has been defined by God. They have one overriding obligation – to do God's will, in God's way and in God's timing. They are not independent. They are not free to ignore His will or to put their own interests ahead of the Master's. They do have the privilege of speaking with the Master; of learning from Him and of trusting His guidance and authority. The responsibility of the servant is simply to act under divine authority, by divine guidance, with divine sanction and doing God's divine will.

"Thy people" – they are uniquely God's. They are those who belong to Another. They bear the characteristics of God. Their character is to be like God's. They are His family; His peculiar treasure; His love-object; His nation of people with a heavenly citizenship. They are to be a heavenly people with interests and aspirations linked with His heavenly kingship.

"Thou hast redeemed" – they have been paid for by God. His only Son was given that those who belonged to Him by creation, would now be His by redemption. The price paid for redemption was high. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. The days of slavery to sin are past. Now we have the blessed bondage of freedom in Christ. As bond-servants we are free to serve Him out of the motivation of love.

"Thy great power" – they are saved because of the power of God. The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. God's great power is uniquely His because it is the power of meekness; the power of life and death; the power of unmeasured love; the power of revealed grace; the power of bestowed mercy. It is unique because the results of that power will be on-going forever and will be evident to all who see it in action. It is not the power that blows everything apart, but the power that brings together and binds tightly so that there is order and usefulness. They are kept by the power of God.

"Thy strong hand" – they are rescued by God's strong stretched out arm and secured by the hand of the Father and the hand of the Son. His strong hand reached down to the perishing and pulled us from the miry pit and set us upon a rock. His strong hand protects from any and all enemies. His strong hand provides shelter and safety.

"O God and Father of all power and might. It is of great importance to me to know that Thou art directly involved in my life from first to last. To be one of Thy people, one of Thy servants who hast been redeemed by Thy power and Thy strong hand gives me a great sense of security and felt comfort. Thank You in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

Nehemiah 1:10. *"Now these are Thy servants and Thy people, whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy great power, and by Thy strong hand."*

THY SERVANTS.

The times are tough Lord, the view is black.
The walls are down Lord, the people lack
A testimony. But not only that, Lord;
Affliction, trouble, fear, loss - no reward
Is here because we have failed - and miserably.
We need help bad, Lord, some evidence visibly.

These are Thine Lord, Thy servants, Thy chosen few.
I'm one of them Lord, not being or doing all I knew.
But we are not our own Lord, though much we've left undone.
We are Thy servants Lord, bond-slaves of Thy Son.
My head is bowed Lord, my failure stares my face.
But Lord, I love my Master; this hole-bored ear shows His grace.

We are Thy people Lord, our own we are no longer.
Weak as we are and poor Lord, we long for stronger,
Fuller, greater lives lived for truth, and righteousness and Thee.
As one of Thy people Lord, I bow my head, my heart - hear me.
We are not able on our own Lord, to do Thy will although we've tried.
Give us some strength Lord, some courage, power from the One inside.

The price was high Lord, that we might all be redeemed.
We may never know Lord; all that word does mean.
But this I know Lord, no longer are we - nor I - our own.
Thy grace and mercy, justice - all in evidence, and we by blood atoned.
We are Thine own alone Lord, and yet so much to self are bent.
I humble myself here before Thee Lord, I do repent.

Thy power great, Lord, divine, sufficient, full enablement;
Is able yet Lord, to be applied to feeble folk - faith evident
When knees are bent, and hearts do bleed and blend.
Show me once again Lord; Thy power great from Thyself send.
The power we here and now so greatly need and want;

That in this place Lord, repentant, humbled people Thy great glories chant.

Thy hand is strong Lord, the grip and love and pressure easily felt.
The pain is hard Lord, when in chastisement our hearts we feel do melt.
When loving hand, appendage of God's great heart of love;
Its pressure bears down heavy on arrogant shoulders. From above
Comes evidence so strong and sweet - the Lord really cares;
And from Thy all-sufficient hand of grace, comes all we need this load to bear.

“Father God: I never cease to wonder at the willingness of such a Holy One to identify so completely with such low creatures of dust. Thou hast made us and we walked away; loved us when we didn't love Thee; provided and cared for us when we took everything for granted. Thanks for such reminders from Thy word that we are Thine. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Nehemiah 2:1-8

THE SUPPLICANT

Four months of prayer, fasting and preparation of the mind and heart on the part of Nehemiah passed before the first day of the new year in the Middle East. The earnest supplication and spontaneous prayers of a man living conscious of the presence of God with him had prepared this man for that which was ahead. To "wait on God" means we are willing to pray and wait for His time as well as being in His presence in anticipation of learning all He wants to teach us before we are called upon to act. It is normal for us to lay plans and schedules that suit us and we believe would be in our best interest and that of the task before us. It is spiritual when we are confident enough in God to pray, hope and quietly wait for His leading and guidance. To wait without anxiety showing in facial expressions, nervous anticipation and other body language is not easy for us to naturally do.

For four months Nehemiah went about his daily duties in the presence of the king with a cheerful countenance and normal attendant attitude without showing outwardly any anxiety. Some times God uses us to be the answers to our own prayers. That day of celebration was probably not a day in which normal government business was done, so Artaxerxes and the queen were both there when Nehemiah brought the wine to the king as was his responsibility. It may have been because of the celebration going on around him that the sadness in his heart could no longer be concealed by his willpower, or an act of God in His servant that revealed his inner thoughts. The king knew him well enough to see the change in his facial expression. The contrast of the light-hearted attitude between the king and queen and the sadness on the face of Nehemiah was obvious. No wonder Nehemiah response to the king's question was made in great fear.

Fear is a legitimate emotion that God has placed in our nature to preserve us from dangers seen and unseen. Reverential fear is respect for God, and to a lesser degree, for others who have authority over us because of their position and importance. Fear of one's life at the hand of another person is really impossible to hide. It is not wrong, nor is it unseemly to admit to such fear. However, even then we do not need to allow fear to control us or stop us from doing that which is right. Confidence in God and faith in action is greater than the fear of man or even the fear of death.

The courage and faith of Stephen when he was being stoned to death; the fear and trust of the many martyrs at the same time they were dying honored God and testified to the reality of what they believed. We cannot let fear control us or make us reluctant to do that which God wants. Fear of water is not an excuse to not be baptized as a believer. The fear of embarrassment should not keep us from testifying in words to our faith in Christ. "The fear of man bringeth a snare."

Respectful boldness is not arrogance nor aggressive behavior. When we know the Lord is with us in our fears, we realize He will enable us to do what He desires of us. A short prayer in his mind "to the God of heaven" gave Nehemiah the right words to say in the right way. God can do the same for us when we are before judges or are placed in some frightening position. "Whatever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost." Whenever we are called in question, it is right to give honor to whom honor is due. We owe them the respect the office they hold deserves. It is wrong "to speak evil of dignities." It is right "to be subject to the higher powers."

The way Nehemiah responded to the question of Artaxerxes was non-threatening, precise and perfectly suitable for the setting. God was with His servant using his demeanor, his facial expression and his words in an appropriate way. He honored the king, and he made an understandable request with clarity. He did not use the name of the city of Jerusalem because that would have had political connotations. Rather under divine direction he wisely spoke of "the city where my fathers are buried" to define his desire in a way the

king could identify with. Respect for the dead is universal among almost every culture in the world. That reply made his request both precise and personal though it was given in the form of a question. To answer a question with a question is one of the best ways to open a dialogue and bring understanding because the questioner in essence answered his own question. The king trusted Nehemiah as a man and knew him well enough that anything he asked for was of great importance to him. People often will not have the same interest or sense of urgency and concern about a matter that we have, but if we have their confidence, they will assist us or act on our behalf.

It made sense that the king would want a specific answer, a specific place and a specific time when a trusted servant requested a leave of absence. Ambiguity does not sit well in any situation, especially when one is answering a question. When unbelievers ask us of our faith, where we attend "church" and what we believe or why we do what we do, they have a right to a clear answer. People have an expectation that what we do as Christians is not secretive. They may be antagonistic or indifferent but when we reply, our tone of voice and attitude is often as important as what we say. A respectful reply to an antagonistic critical person can be disarming when we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in the way we speak.

When a trusted man does faithfully and well a task he has been given, and can be counted on to be consistent in his service because he has been that way before, he can be counted on to be trusted in other work. To give him a designated work to do and let him do it without unnecessary restrictions, will almost always result in a job well done. Nehemiah's work in the palace up until that day was likely almost the same day after day for a long time. Now for a cupbearer to want to rebuild the walls and gates of a city as a construction superintendent would have been very different. Not only rebuilding but leading men in the project and governing when there would be opposition to his leadership could have daunted a lesser man, and the king would have had his doubts about letting him change his job. Even the requests he made to the king after getting the king's permission to go, indicated he was a capable man and had leadership qualities that were needed for the work he was going to undertake.

The Holy Spirit of God gives guidance and empowers us when we are called to a work for the Lord. But that does not mean we should not make plans as to what needs to be done, and how, and by whom. Ordering one's life keeps us from wasting time or conducting a work in a "hit or miss" manner. Our Lord Jesus Christ made a comment regarding a building project: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?" Nehemiah knew what was needed and where to get it. He had done his homework. He knew there would be opposition beyond the river over which the king had authority. He had thought through the project from the smallest detail of letters, to the largest - timber in the forest.

We are not taking matters into our own hands when we use our common sense that has come from God in the first place. There were political ramifications to consider because by securing the city of Jerusalem with walls and gates, those who claimed local authority even though they had areas of responsibility, would recognize there was another governor who was coming to govern the newly walled city. It is a point of interest, even a marvel, that this man who had never been in that place before, had such a commitment to it that he knew what he would have to face and how to deal with it.

Confidence in God involves knowing Him well enough that we are able to pray in faith, and prepare our own hearts and lives in anticipation of Him using us in His work. It also involves focusing our attention on specifics, not just generalities. Faith can wait as long as necessary, but is ready to act in a moment of opportunity. When we trust in our God, we will not complacently wait for doors to open but will be ready to go forward immediately when the door opens of its own accord. It may be that the door is already ajar and it is only for us to reach out the hand of faith and go through. What a joy it is when like Nehemiah, we know "the good hand of my God [is] upon me." God is the Source of the needed grace from the king. God is the strength we need to accomplish the task before us that He has delegated to us for His own sovereign purposes.

Nehemiah 2:5. *"And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my father' sepulchers, that I may build it."*

SEND ME.

"My regular duties I have to perform. Don't let him know how I am feeling inside. The time is not right yet. Or is this the day? Is this the time I should ask? Maybe it is? He has wine before him, his mood seems okay. Why can I not stop crying? Lord, help me overcome this emotion because he wants more wine right now. O, I can't stop the sadness and he's looking right at me! You have made this thing happen today Lord, help me say the right thing!"

The view in the mind of Nehemiah was of a city of sepulchers – tombs of his fore-bearers. Almost like a dead city: open, vulnerable to attack, helpless against all foes. But more than that, it was in a state of reproach. What was once strong is weak. What was once beautiful is sad to look at. What was once the glorious center of God’s dealings with His people is now a reproach to the name of the Lord. How can I do anything about such a state of affairs?

I will build it again;

I will go at this set time;

I will take the responsibility;

I will do what God put in my heart.

Send me: because the good hand of God is upon me!

Send me: because the work is in my heart!

Send me: because I know God is in this work!

Send me: because I can see the need and know what to do about it!

Send me: because God has answered my prayers in this matter!

Whether it is Nehemiah wanting to preserve what is important to God; or Isaiah, humbled because of a sight of God; or the Lord Jesus, sent by the Father to incarnate grace and truth in a fleshly body as a man; or me, sent by the Lord Jesus Christ, to incarnate grace and truth in my generation – for us all, we are not going just because we want to; we are going because we are sent.

We are sent by One of authority who knows what He is doing. We are sent by One who knows what needs to be done. We are sent by One who figures we can do what needs to be done. We are not sent to mess around, but to get at the work and see it through to completion. We are sent to repair what can be fixed, to build what needs to be started and finished. We are sent to deal with what is wrong and encourage and promote what is right. We are sent with a strength that is greater than our own, so we won’t claim private ownership of what really belongs to the Sender. We are sent and the reputation of the Sender lies in the hands of those He has trusted with the work. We are sent and there’s no point in quitting or coming back with the job undone. It would be unthinkable to not bring to a conclusion a task He has trusted us with, He has not sent us to only make a start but to finish the work He has given us to do.

“The wall is finished; the work is done. Shall I go quietly away? No, that’s not fair to all those who labored so hard with me and for me. Let two companies go up David’s stairs to the top of the wall. Let them feel the ownership of this work with their feet beneath them, fellow-laborers around them, the towers and gates within their view. Let them sing and shout and rejoice and worship! Let the women and the children see they are part of a great work. Let these laborers go first – I’ll walk along behind and then we who are responsible can turn all eyes and hearts toward God.”

“Father in heaven: I am learning a bit of what it is to go back to repair what is broken down and some things that are breaking. Please give me understanding as to how to go about rebuilding that which is precious to You. I don’t want to just plaster over cracks, bit I want to find and fix what I can in order for the great work done in the past can continue into the future. Amen.”

Nehemiah 2: 6. *“And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? And when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.”*

HOW LONG?

You have been traveling this road for a long time -
How long till this work is done?
You have been searching for some way to lasting peace find -
How long until to the Savior come?
You know it is right to obey what the Word of God says -
How long will you procrastinate?
There is no question as to what are God’s ways -
How long until that way you take?

When you became a child of God, gifts He gave to you -
How long until you use those gifts?
You know there are those things you are able to do -
How long until others’ loads you lift?
People around you need to hear the Gospel of peace -
How long until you tell them God’s truth?
Many have not understood salvation by grace -
How long will you wait to explain its worth?

There are many around the world waiting to hear -
How long until you are willing to go?
There are millions who to you live quite near -

How long until your faith you show?
Your children and grandchildren you are able to teach -
How long until with them you sit down?
They need to see how you live, not just preach -
How long until you talk to them alone?

This journey of life I am on will soon be over -
How long shall this journey be?
When I draw near the end and the angels hover -
How long will I have to breathe?
The final words I will have to express -
How long shall my benediction last?
I pray that now and then I can bless -
How long until to heaven I pass?

“Father God, the brevity of life seems to come to mind quite often. Not that I am feeling ill, Father, but sometimes the time seems ripe for this journey to end. May my steps always be ordered by Thee and always be in the right direction. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 2:9-20

RISE UP AND BUILD

There is no question as to Nehemiah's qualifications and patriotic heart towards the city of his fathers. When he finally arrived there after four months of prayer and fasting, and many miles traveled to get to Jerusalem, he rested for three days. To actually see the condition of the city and walls in ruins and no gates to secure the citizens and keep them safe, would have brought the task before him in all its clarity. His name means "Jehovah hath consoled," which gives us some insight into this man who took into his heart and mind the counsel of God. He got information from other men, but was a self-contained man who seemed to be reserved and resolute.

When a person has a specific aim, he is not easily turned aside by the indifference of his brethren or opposition from those who oppose for other reasons. An inspired purpose overcomes all obstacles when our loyalty to the Lord is consistent and on track. A person who knows a need is there, and is sure God had chosen him to fulfill that need, will see things with his own eyes and is not manipulated by the pessimism or unrealistic optimism of others. To reach that goal he will not act in haste or unduly hurry into the task before him without counting the cost. Once he has started the work he will not stop until it is finished.

The arrival of Nehemiah and those with him including the armed guards was certainly a cause of interest among the people. Sanballat, the governor of Samaria nearby, and Tobiah the government of Ammon were "grieved... exceedingly" because they were the controlling leaders in the area. A lot of small isolated villages are much more easily kept under the domination of unscrupulous men than a walled city with gates for security under the leadership of a patriotic Jew who was a soldier, statesman and had the ear of the king.

Hostility is to be expected when the light of God's truth shines in the darkness of people who are demoralized and lethargic. Aggressive demands are often angrily made in the desire to intimidate a Christian. But one who knows why God has sent them to a place to work for Him is not moved by outbursts of anger. Ridicule is another method used by those who oppose the work of the Lord as they seek to stop a work by embarrassing those who are engaged in it. Creating fear, guile and false accusations accompany those who are determined to keep God out of their lives because they love darkness rather than light.

The noble disinterest of Nehemiah in the challenges of lesser men must have infuriated them. He was a man who knew how to say a lot with a few words. When a man has a humble dependence on the Lord and is true to God and His truth, enemies and obstacles really do not change him. He is true to his principles and is not ashamed to admit to his dependence on God. The character of a person stands out best under the attacks of evil men. It was obvious to those who opposed the work of God placed in the heart of Nehemiah that they were up against a formidable opponent. This person was different from the acquiescence they were used to from people who were only surviving and had no dynamic leader.

Nehemiah knew that God was with him in the work before him and rather than wait too long, he "arose in the night" to reconnoiter the area and view the ruined walls and gates. The three days of rest would have calmed his spirit and renewed his body. It would also have been made plain to him the fact that there would be opposition to the rebuilding of the walls. His task was clear before him. The public worship of the Lord's people had to be done safely or they wouldn't even come to the temple. Family life had to be safe in order for it to be normal and pure. The Sabbath day had to be kept and the people had to be confident in the

leadership for all of this to happen. Ezra was a student of the word of God and a preacher. Nehemiah was a strong political leader and a soldier who wasn't afraid to use the sword if necessary. Both are needed in the work of the Lord. One knew the times and the practical needs of the people. The other knew the word of God and their spiritual needs.

Balanced leadership needs more than one person. It is an important part of assembly life to have men who know all areas of need. Plurality of leadership may not mean the elders are all alike. Usually there are those who step out in front like Nehemiah and can organize the people and define the objectives in terms everyone understands. There are those who may be quiet in public but their spiritual weight is unmistakable and their guidance is plainly from a divine perspective. One is practical; another is spiritual; others may be supportive and yet others are cautious. When guided and controlled by the Holy Spirit, this creates balance in assembly life.

After three days of consideration and rest, Nehemiah was ready to take action. He had formulated a plan which needed a clear personal understanding of what needed to be done and how to start. In the night there would be no crowds of people around asking questions or speculating as to what he was doing. In the darkness of night there were no distractions, and even though it was night, he could "view the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire." He knew what God wanted him to do so he didn't have to make decisions based on men's opinions. He got the information he needed first hand by observation and assessment as to the damage and the way to realistically rebuild.

Time taken to realistically approach the work of the Lord includes prayer, reading the word of God, meditation, a biblical approach to the work and "a few men." When the final objective is clear in one's mind, then we can consider what we have to work with, what has to be scrapped, what can be used again, how to remove the obstacles and how to delegate responsibility to those to those with whom we will be working. Nehemiah's nighttime tour gave him the understanding he needed. Some parts he could ride a horse through and the debris was such in other places that he had to walk. Because of that first-hand knowledge he could now speak with confidence and assurance to the priests, nobles, rulers and "the rest that did the work."

The announcement he made was not premature as an advertisement about what he was going to do, but was an honest assessment of what he had found with no attempt to belittle the difficulties ahead. He told them of "the hand of my God which was good upon me." He told them of his authority from the king and he told them the time was come to remove the disgrace that was upon the people of God. He also plainly identified himself with the Jews who were living there as one of them even though he had never been there before. There was no "blame laying" in his words but there was a realistic view of what had to be done and the goal of the project. "We be no more a reproach."

That principle works, when we apply it to any work, we are called upon to do. When we know God has called us to this work and He is in it, we have confidence that it is right. When there is evidence that proper authority has been given to those involved, then we can rally people to the cause and promote it with vigor. Enthusiasm on the part of those who lead, creates a workforce that does "rise up and build." Discouragement and disillusionment about our situation ("There is no point in doing that in this place" or "These are the last days and we are just trying to hold on till the Lord comes") can be overcome when we see things through God's eyes. Vision leads to vitality, and vitality leads to venture. Defeated people can become unified and positive when a leader like Nehemiah raises their sights above that which they have become used to. "And they said, 'Let us rise up and build.'"

It usually happens today just the way it did then when Sanballat and Tobiah charged them with rebellion. To them the charge they made was rebelling against the king. Today the charge usually is that we are against the "status quo" and are "intolerant." "Upsetting the applecart... you are intolerant... why can't you leave well enough alone?" are common challenges. Enemies opposed the Jews by ridicule, mockery and anger. Behind the challenges made by Sanballat and Tobiah was the design to intimidate the previously demoralized and weak-hearted Jews into thinking the king of Babylon would come against them.

Nehemiah had already told the Jews the way the Lord God of Israel had led them, so neither he nor those with him in the work were moved by the threats of the enemies. "The God of heaven, He will prosper us" was all he said in regards to their questioning the rebuilding. He identified the Jews as "His servants" indicating they were under the highest of all authority. Then Nehemiah calmly and bluntly put the enemies in their place. "Ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem." In others words he was telling them to mind their own business, get out because you are trespassing on our property. They had to back off from

their offensive charge when Nehemiah took the offense and made it plain that under God's authority he was in control of the situation, not them.

Nehemiah 2:12. *“And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.”*

CONFIDENTIAL RESEARCH.

It is quite proper to sometimes consider a work by yourself alone.
To research a project ahead of time clarifies to us what must be done.
If there are a lot of options, at first, we may overlook God's plan
That is the blueprint for a work we are to follow, not the opinions of man.

When one takes the time to go over a planned work carefully,
It helps us to be precise so we can approach the work prayerfully.
The needs to accomplish the work can be made quite clear
As the Lord God unfolds to us all that is needed here.

Time taken to stop and consider each different view,
Gives a form to where and how to begin and then follow through.
To take time to look at a work from every possible side
May help to solve potential difficulties that from us first did hide.

To observe and assess all matters surrounding a situation,
Allows us time to apply some thoughtful consideration.
A realistic strategy that comes from gaining firsthand information,
Can really only come by way of thorough observation.

When the time comes to share with others all you have found;
It is obvious to all you have already gone over the ground,
And know what you are talking about from firsthand knowledge.
What God has put in your heart isn't generally learned in a college.

To act prematurely can often create serious stress,
That comes to various groups as their opinions they press
On others, and rivalry can come - instead of uniting,
Through tedious planning sessions, it starts dividing.

We have to share our vision with others it is true -
But take time with God first so they know He started with you.
So when you encourage them to put into action what God intends,
Others can claim real ownership in what God through you did begin.

“Father, please keep me from claiming personal credit for anything Thou hast done through Thy servant. In every work I know there are many You used so all glory will go to Thee, not to men. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 3

SENSIBLE LEADERSHIP

A man who keeps in touch with God knows his own strengths and weaknesses. He is true to God and His principles and makes those principles his own. By prayer and personal devotion to God and His work, he is able to make wise decisions and plans for the work God gives him before starting it. To "wing it" or make snap judgments on the spur of the moment would mean there would be a lot of mistakes, and the work would have to be done all over again. Fellowship and the teamwork necessary for a great work begins with the leaders having a clear understanding of the goal and how to reach it, and then being able to make that plain to those who will participate in the work.

The wall Nehemiah came to build, and the gates to be repaired and set in place were a means to an end. The trouble and reproach the people of God were in was a reflection on the God they knew and were supposed to represent. A haphazard approach to any work we are called to, testifies to our character. Nehemiah was a man of strong trustworthy character. The man himself was a motivating factor in the work ahead. He did depend on God, and did take the necessary steps to begin and maintain the momentum of the work before them.

Much of the work before the Jews was repair work. They had been living in their houses next to the piles of stones that had once been walls and had become used to looking at evidence of disaster and defeat. Then a

man of vision and faith in God was able to describe a finished work before it even started - "We be no more a reproach (disgrace)." When all seems lost how wonderful it is when one person can see beyond what is wrong to what things are supposed to be like, and has the vision and venture to know how to get there.

Consistent with their spiritual leadership roles, the priests came out through the doors of their houses in work clothes and started to clear away the debris and build the Sheep Gate where the animals for sacrifices were brought to the temple. From there they built the section between the two towers that stood in place to guard the Sheep Gate (the spiritual life of the people) and the Fish Gate (the daily business life of the people). Our spiritual life as the people of God cannot be separated from those things in which we are engaged in day to day living. One has said, "What you do, speaks so loudly I can't hear a word you say."

Likely after the first day's work was over and the sounds of active people working together for a common purpose, each group of people would be having something to eat and perhaps were rubbing some oil on aching muscles and blistered hands. But as they looked through the doors of their homes, they could see evidence of a great work that was started all around the city as the first layer or two of stones they laid were joined together with that of others. It would remind them of a soon to be finished work and each person who worked that day would feel a part of something big that was going on. There would be a sense of ownership in the wall that would be there for their whole lifetime.

A wise leader not only can see the big picture, but is also able to see individuals as a small part of that big picture. No one is unimportant. The Holy Spirit raises up "overseers" who can see over and above that which is right in front of them that everyone can see. The objectives of the work, worship and service of an assembly is clear in their minds and they have taken the time to plan how to reach that objective. But it is not enough to know that only themselves. As leaders they should be able and willing to make clear to the Lord's people the objectives and how the saints can participate meaningfully in that work. It is not right to drop an announcement on an assembly of a Gospel series beginning next week if they didn't know anything about it before.

Of great interest to the reader of the book of Nehemiah is that people came all the way from Jericho to assist in the work of rebuilding. Some from Tekoa, a couple of hours away, also came and worked along with those who lived in Jerusalem. With a certain degree of scorn Nehemiah mentioned, "Their nobles put not their necks to the work." They were not going to bear burdens probably because they thought they were above doing labor work. They may have been just plain lazy but for whatever reason, they would not help. Not everyone responds in the same way to a call to work for the Lord. For some it may be a brief adventure. Others may want to impress others temporarily. Still others may have had a real interest but found the labor part too hard for their liking. Goldsmiths were working on the wall, the son of a pharmacist, some women and others stopped their normal life and committed themselves to this great and urgent work. Nehemiah made special mention of Baruch who "earnestly repaired" a section of the wall.

To delegate work is one thing. To make it coordinate with the work of hundreds of others is quite another matter. People have to know someone is responsible for the overall project in order to keep a project on track. Those who lead need to be willing to delegate and then take their hands off the work of others as much as possible. People need to know they are expected to work and act responsibly and yet they need another qualified person to give advice, make corrections and provide the incentive to keep at the work until it is finished. When guiding a work in which quite a lot of people are involved, we still need to expect each person to do their best work in the same way we would when we are working for ourselves. "Second best" is not acceptable in the work of the Lord any more than in any other work. We are what we do "heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men."

Nehemiah gave the people sections of the wall to build close to where they lived. That would give them incentive to do good work, both for the quality of the work as well as it looked. Passers by can often judge the character of a person by their work even better than by their words. Those whose work was at the temple, built near the temple. By keeping the standards high and giving incentives for quality work there is a certain sense of accomplishment and pride in what we do that gives satisfaction.

When we live each day before the Lord conscious of the fact that we will "give account of the things done in the body" when we stand before our Lord at the judgment seat of Christ, then we will not be careless. Even the small things we do have value. People who were building the wall were known by name to Nehemiah. Personal interest in people and a knowledge of them by name is characteristic of a caring leader. Nehemiah recognized family groups, vocational groups and individuals. In that way he would have been able to encourage them all to enthusiastically press forward in the work. A "good and faithful servant" deserves some recognition even though he doesn't expect it and may even be embarrassed by it.

It we were able to have observed that work from above, we would have seen a remarkable sight. All around the city the ground would have been cleared first. Then like a growing thing the layers of stones would have been set and each successive day would reveal evidence of progress. The walls and gates would be rising as if it were alive. Enthusiasm, organized labor and a measure of excitement all make a work of God to progress well. Personal pride can be a deterrent to a project but unity and fellowship with others encourages everyone involved and produces wonderful results.

Nehemiah 3:1. *“Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel.”*

THE WORK.

There are some things to be built but a lot more to repair -
After tragedy has nearly destroyed a work.
Spiritual leaders need to step up to lead and share
That others will see that from physical labor they don't shrink.

To repair a work so large each person has a place
To fill that fits with others and is uniquely theirs.
When that work is completed you will see in their face
Evidence for that work they really care.

Removal of the ashes and all the broken pieces
Is where this kind of work begins.
When you get down to the foundation, you will see this
Is the place to begin building what was broken again.

Walls need to be built to protect the citizens -
There are enemies that still want -
To hinder and divide - to capture the innocent,
And in their strength, their numbers they flaunt.

Gates are important for there is an in and an out
To the place where, with His people, God dwells.
They are open to receive those who come from without,
And who are willing to do what God wills.

Gates can also be closed when danger appears.
It is important to keep God's people safe.
The guarded gates, calms all those who have anxious fears,
Of those who want to be in a safe place.

When the walls of protection are erected and strong;
The work changes that it may maintain
The challenge to keep in what is right and what is wrong,
So, it all won't have to be done over again.

“O Lord God, there are those we know who resent the doctrine of separation from the world. They seem to like to think assimilation of everything to be what is in Thy plan. Please keep me from bring harshly critical of all that is around us, but wholly committed to what Thou hast given us. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 4:1-6

TURN THEIR REPROACH

There are a number of ways opposition against a work of God is mounted. From the enemy without in our day the same as in the time of Nehemiah there was grief, laughter, wrath, mockery conflict and subtlety directed at those engaged in the work. Sadly, there are times when discouragement and selfishness from the people of God themselves causes division and defeat in a work. Opposition to the work of God being done through His people is to be expected. In fact, if there was none there is likely something wrong. The god of this world will not oppose when nothing is being done that has an effect on his control of people. He will not bother those who have no impact on the ungodliness of his system. He will seek as best he can to have God's people assimilate into the lifestyle and occupation of the world, to the extent they just blend in with everyone else. When that happens there is no impact of holy living on the part of believers but they look and act just like they were not even Christians. How would you recognize a believer in a restaurant, on the job or in an airport? If they drink the same wine, beer or liquor as the unsaved people, laugh at the same

jokes as ungodly sinners or dress the same as those who expose themselves in the same way as everyone else - there is no testimony to the grace of God at all. Likely there will only be derisive comments because one claims to be a child of God but there is no visible evidence.

Open opposition in a new work is a sign God is working because Satan is always determined to stop any interference with his domination over people. The life-changing Gospel is a work of God and opposition is a reason to be encouraged rather than be considered a serious hindrance, because it means something is happening of which the enemy is afraid. Opposition may be a testing time for believers in which when faced boldly, supported by earnest prayer to God and faith in Him, we are strengthened. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." It is in times of opposition that spiritual leadership is required to give guidance and confidence to those who look to a leader for inspiration and enthusiasm.

It was not by chance that Sanballat was angry and intimidating. His influence and political ambitions were being challenged as "the authority" in the whole area. The plans of the god of this world and those who serve him are to defeat anything of God that interferes with their life of sin. 300 years earlier the Assyrians took captive the northern tribes of Israel, and moved into the area people from many different places to prevent unity in the population and potential rebellion. Now Sanballat was seeking control over not only Samaria but also the Jews of Judah who had retained their identity, and to a good measure after the temple was built, a certain unity. A unified Jewry would threaten his position.

With an army of Samaritans and other leaders, the opposition united to stop the rebuilding of the walls. Typical tactics of opposition are scorn, threats and bluffs by indicating an "or else" attitude that means you are in danger of attack and/or death. By mocking the Jews as being "feeble" when he spoke to his own henchmen gathered around him, he was saying the Jews were powerless against them. He scoffed at them for using the old stones that had been merely piles of rubbish for over 100 years. In his mockery he cast a bad reflection on them personally as being incapable of finishing what they had started. This can be a problem to those who compare themselves with other people instead of putting faith in the Lord who has given us the task to complete.

Those involved in Gospel outreach will often find these same tactics are used world-wide. The god of this world is a powerful and dangerous foe. His threats and mockery have been successful far too often and happens today when we take our eyes off our Lord and that to which we have been called. Scorn because of the smallness of our numbers compared with huge denominations is used to put down the work of the Gospel in places where Christendom reigns. People say, "This is a Christian country. Take your Gospel to the heathen. We're all Christians here." These are words often used in opposition to plain biblical preaching. Rallying around the "ecumenical movement" so that so-called Christians are "unified" is another tactic used to hinder the Gospel reaching to the unsaved people. This is becoming effective against some assemblies who in the interest of being accepted in a community, become tolerant of sin and want the "modern smooth Gospel." Some assemblies even no longer have meetings set apart for the preaching of the Gospel.

Ridicule seems to be really effective against some of God's people in that it embarrasses them and discourages them to the point of defeat. Nehemiah's spiritual leadership was very evident when these challenges came. he didn't trade insults with Sanballat and Tobiah. He ignored them publicly and prayed privately. The most effective way to confront and deal with opposition is to go to the highest possible authority available to us and get that Person to deal with the matter.

"God is still on His throne,
And He will remember His own.
Though trials oppress us
And burdens distress us,
He never will leave us alone."

Nehemiah knew that those who opposed the Jews were actually opposing God. So in his prayer he turned to God with spiritual insight and understanding. "Vengeance belongeth unto Me. I will recompense, saith the Lord." His prayer was not that the Jews would get their revenge on those enemies but rather the enemies would not succeed in dishonoring God by dishonoring His people. Divine justice against sin has never been thrown out in an effort to make everyone "feel comfortable" by being tolerant of evil. In our day we are able to commit the whole matter to God in prayer; leave it there and go on with our own work. Our Lord, when "He was reviled, reviled not again. When He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously."

Under Nehemiah's leadership and physical participation in the work, the opposition was ignored as the Jews returned to their work after turning the matter over to God. Nehemiah had called their bluff and the enemies

backed off. They all continued to work together on the wall until it was linked together and half way up. "The people had a mind to work" and the work progressed well up to that point. Nehemiah's heart was in the work and the hearts of the people were also because of his wise leadership and willingness to work with them. Enthusiasm is a good thing to maintain momentum in a work, and is especially evident at the beginning of a work. But a work is not done simply by being enthusiastic for the project. To ultimate goal has to be kept in mind with our sights set on the finish of the work.

When we know what God wants us to do, we must keep it before us always as the motivating strength to continue on through set-backs, defeats and discouragement. God has called us to complete a work. We are to this in faith and by persistence, perseverance and pain if necessary. Opposition is really "par for the course." The rewards come after the work is done, not if we stop halfway through.

Nehemiah did not avoid the "blood, sweat and tears" that comes from opposition. He recognized leadership is not a status that exempts one from common tasks we should share with others. "Important work" includes applying one's self and one's leadership skills to the work of the Lord along with all of God's people in our charge. A person may be able to organize, delegate and remain calm under pressure - even understand the power of prayer - but none of those things exempt us from putting our "necks" into the work. We should never expect others to do what we are not willing to do ourselves. Leadership involves knowing what to do and doing it in fellowship with all those who labor in that work for the Lord.

Nehemiah 4:6. *"So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work."*

A MIND TO WORK.

When there is something important to be done, and we all agree as one
This project is to carry out God's will.
Then when we come together; every sister and every brother
Will have a part in this work to fill.
Some are strong to labor; others have gifts that favor
A special part of the work they can complete.
There is bound to be opposition when onlookers fear their position
Is in jeopardy, so the work we do they will try to defeat.

Like those in times of old, set your mind to work and hold
The course, for this work is certainly of God.
Those who seek to intimidate, to threaten or initiate
A plan to bring the work to a stop -
Will turn back and retreat, when they learn they can't beat
Those who have put their mind to the work they do -
And have no intention of quitting, and won't be found just sitting,
Until the work they started is all through.

There is no need to be discouraged, for all can take courage
When a mind to work for God is real to them.
If while working, we watch and pray, and to the work we're committed to stay,
The obstacles and opposition we will leave to Him -
Who knows the end from the beginning, and can stop the foes from winning;
The battle for the minds of those who labor.
We will trust and not be afraid, in the God who all has made -
And blessed the work we do with divine favor.

"Heavenly Father: I learn from this passage, that in spite of dangers seen and unseen, when there is a heart and mind committed to the work - the task can be completed. I also learn that You intend us to be practical and take sensible precautions against anything that tries to stop the work. In view of us traveling soon to engage in these two Gospel series, please bring to my mind all that needs to be done ahead of time. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Nehemiah 4:7-14

SET A WATCH

The narrative that Nehemiah gave the work of rebuilding the walls is emphasized by the linking of successive challenges to the overall objective through the words, "It came to pass." The enthusiasm and vigor applied to the project was a real contrast to the mindset of the people there in years past. So, when Sanballat and Tobiah and the other leaders who surrounded the Jerusalem on four sides got the news that the wall was linked up and was rising rapidly, they weren't just angry but they were "very wroth." People can get very upset when a work for God is being done successfully. We can expect more than one form of

opposition and from more than one direction. It is important for us to remember "we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Those who oppose the work of the kingdom of God do not give up at the first attempt to hinder a work. Ridicule, fear, guile, false accusations, creating doubt, even attempts to corrupt those who are in the work with us, are all tactics used by the enemy to stop the work which we have been given. Unified prayer on the part of all those involved, combined with careful thought and planning are appropriate and consistent with meeting the present need. Preparation and concerted effort are also consistent with faith in God. The Jews joined with Nehemiah in prayer, and set around-the-clock guards. To "watch and pray" was enjoined by our Lord Jesus Christ upon His disciples in view of the subtlety of temptation and the uncertainty of the future.

It is normal when laboring in a work of any kind to get tired. Weariness goes along with human weakness which is not a serious problem if it is only physical. But our physiological and emotional strength or weakness, can affect each other. "Tiredness in the work does not mean one is tired of the work." Outward pressures can foster discouragement if we focus on the problems rather than on the goal. "Much rubbish" that has to be removed makes it seem like we are wasting our efforts unless we keep the calling, the goal and God's "strength for the day" in our minds. Not everyone engaged in a work has the same vision and commitment to it. Those who lead must know when to push ahead themselves and when to pray.

Strangely it was the men of Judah who were the pessimists who came with complaints. They were the ones who would most benefit when the work was completed, so there had to be some underlying motive behind this deliberate act of deception. Not all opposition we face in the work of the Lord comes from those who look on as bystanders. Hidden agendas that some of God's people have, may catch a leader unaware if he is not close enough to those he leads, to know what they are saying and what is going on behind the scene. Some people do not want the work of God to progress because it will call for change in their lives and a greater commitment to spiritual things, rather than that which is valued in dollars and cents.

Moreover, as in the rebuilding of the walls to which Nehemiah was committed, the discontent of some undermined the confidence of others who came from out of the city daily to help build the wall. They were living near the enemies of God's people and likely each day they went to work, they had to endure taunts and threats from those who openly opposed a strong city. An attempt was made by those who opposed from within by repeating the challenge ten times and creating an uneasiness among everyone. This was an underhanded attempt to stop the work by getting people to quit. Nehemiah was not unaware of what was going on, but rather than being "hard-nosed," he wisely set guards who were able to be seen by those without and within, He knew what God wanted and repeatedly put each problem into God's hand in prayer and confidence. Then in faith he took the appropriate action which would have silenced the opposition from his own people.

But even more than that, he involved those people in such a way that they could not refute nor avoid their need to keep at the work. He set guards where there were weak spots and made sure everyone had weapons close by to "fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses." That made the work personal. We must preserve what we know is right no matter what others around us may do. Our families need to be protected from the ungodly ways of the world. Our children have the right to look on us as being stable and trustworthy when it comes to the biblical standards and values by which we live. We need to share our concerns with others and stand on guard shoulder-to-shoulder with those of "like precious faith." Criticism, rumors and gossip creates fear in those who are new in the faith or haven't experienced the joy of living by faith.

When we take time to think of the effect of our action, or lack of it, it will help us to look beyond problems in our present circumstances to what is lasting and of far greater importance. The generation to come needs to know that the truth of God is personal to us and it is our desire that it will be to them. That impact will not come with words only when passing on truth, but when my life and activities in business and pleasure reflect what I believe. If those coming behind leaders in families, assemblies and nations do not see consistency in standards, principles and practices, they will move into their future like a ship without a rudder. We must commit ourselves to the truth and the work needed to maintain that truth before our people.

The enemies are all around us, Father -
Some we can see and some we don't.
They don't want Thy truth, but rather
Reject unchanging standards, and won't
Commit themselves to Thee, nor give heed
To the consequences that follow willful acts -

Their only consideration is what they think they need
And ignore the outcome of unassailable facts.

Is there some way, Father, some steps that I can take;
To impress those who know me, that what I say,
Can, if they act on the truth alone, a difference makes
That changes that which leads to darkness, to the light of day?
And those who follow them: family and their friends,
If challenged with the truth they personally know,
Will bring a fruitful harvest seen before life ends
Because in their return to faith, it again will grow.

“Father in heaven, I know we cannot avoid opposition because we are in enemy territory seeking to turn people from the darkness to light. My prayer is that we can see this work progress in people being brought into the safety of Thy salvation, and the security of following Thy work Please help Thy servant to always keep his eye on the finish of the work. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 4:16-23

THE SOUND OF THE TRUMPET

There is an urgency to the work of God that escapes the minds of the Lord's people when we are occupied with the ordinary things of daily life. But when a work has to be done that is out in public view, it is important that it is seen to progress in spite of obstacles and opposition. Complaints and fears are normal and have to be heard and dealt with, but the work at hand is our responsibility to complete. We must not lose sight of the objective. God has given this work to us to accomplish for the benefit of His people. It is a testimony to those around us, many who have a negative opinion of that which claims to be "Christian." God's people are given a new understanding of who we are and why we are here. The kingdom of God is strengthened and furthered in the area where we live when we give ourselves to the work with joy and enthusiasm.

God had frustrated the plans of the enemies of the Jews to stop the work of rebuilding the walls. All of the people returned to the work, but there were significant changes that intimidated the enemies. Now rather than those who opposed appearing to be a strong force against the rebuilding work, it was the other way around. Half of the people were armed and poised to defend the work with shields and body armor on them, and others with bows and spears ready to act on a moment's notice if and when any move was made toward them. A unified plan of defense to protect the people of God is important. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much more, as ye see the day approaching." God's people need each other's help because of the danger that the spiritual enemies we face direct toward us.

There was also an order established when the work was going on. Each group of workers had one of their own leaders supporting them and keeping his eye on what was happening in front of, and around them. This would let those who labored concentrate on the work and at the same time they would be encouraged and led if an attack came. There was also a certain security for each individual in that they had a sword on them at all times. Those who carried material were to keep their weapon in one hand and do their work with the other. This would mean they likely worked in pairs so that if they had to go outside the wall to dump rubbish or get material to bring to the work, they would be protected by each other as they carried a container together. Beside being well armed and well guarded, there was a communication system, so that when Nehemiah sounded the warning, all the people could rally to the point of attack.

In the work of the Lord there is a need for unwavering faith in God and confidence that our work has divine sanction. There is also the need of common sense to deal with the work and opposition to it, in a practical and positive way. The goal is why we press ahead with a work, but there are some things that need to be done along the way to promote that work. It is the final goal that needs to be emphasized rather than the difficulties we face even though we cannot ignore them. We just can't let them side-track us from the ultimate objective and take priority in our labors.

To keep a work that has been entrusted to us from slowing down and maybe even stopping, calls for vigilant attention to be paid to the details, the thoughts and concerns of those with whom we labor. To disparage or ignore the complaints or suggestions of others will separate a leader from those he should be leading. Nehemiah knew he was responsible for the overall work, and he also knew that everyone had to have a sense of ownership in the work. He was not an aloof man who told the people, "Do what I say." He used the words "we" and "us" as one does when they are actively involved in the work. In this way he was a unifying

force to the whole work. Even more, he knew he was a spiritual leader. He was a spokesman for God. "Our God will fight for us."

Nehemiah also knew it was important to keep the enemies outside from knowing what was going on inside. In order to do this, all who had been coming into the city daily were to stay in the city until the work was completed. They were to serve as guards at night as well as working during the day. He was asking for a lot from the people for the month and a half of intensive labor. But he did not ask anything of them that he was not prepared to give himself. Those who are true leaders do not just serve "in advisory capacity." They are involved in all phases of a work, and do not slack back because of the position they hold. They know how to work and the people well enough to be able to put their hand to the work and lend assistance to anyone who needs help and personal encouragement.

Nehemiah was on the job twenty-four hours a day until the work was completed. He likely rested whenever he could get a few minutes to lie down wherever he was. Those who led the work only took off their work clothes when they washed. They worked and slept in their clothes ready at a moment's notice for any contingency that might arise. A man that God can use has the big picture in his mind and heart. Our Lord Jesus Christ was with His own disciples when He was preparing them for the work that was ahead of them. By His presence with them in the work, He made every part of every day's activity important. Nehemiah did the same. That is the pattern of leadership we should follow today.

A leader's ability to know what has to be done and how to do it, is a good thing. He may be cool, calm and collected under pressure. He may spend time praying for the work and for God's help in the work. But unless he is willing to expend time, energy and sweat in the work, he will find the people who follow him will lose heart and soon make excuses for not showing up. "Water rises to its own level." A leader of people sets the level, and when he joins heartily with the saints of God in the work joyfully and enthusiastically, he will find the work goes well and God's people will be glad they are there and are involved in such an important work

A hand of one man said to the hand of another,
"How about lending me a hand?
If we work in tandem, we can together
Do as good or better than one man."
So, working together they carried a load,
That was easier than doing it alone.
It may seem simple, but the unity showed -
Until the task was finally done.

There was more to consider than just one thing.
The other hands of the two men were filled.
They carried a weapon, safety to bring
To the laborers lest they be killed.
Unity and safety go hand in hand,
It is hard to have one without the other.
Thus, the work can advance as God has planned
When we work together as brothers.

"I am thankful Father, for those who guard the people. Also, for those who come alongside to promote and encourage. And there are also those who are willing to communicate meaningfully with us. Thanks for the blessing of being one of Thy people and for what we share with them. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Nehemiah 5:1-5

"FROM WITHIN"

Volunteer laborers from farms and villages outside Jerusalem had been coming each day to assist in the building of the wall around Jerusalem. It would have been a place where they could come for safety in times of trouble or attack from enemies so they had a part, and a responsibility to join in the work. Consequently, they left their daily occupations and made the personal sacrifices to do this emergency work which not only would have affected their income but also their families who had to take care of things while they went into the city to work with those who lived there. Then, because of obvious opposition, the time came when they couldn't even go home at night leaving their wives and children vulnerable to those rich people who didn't put their hands to the work.

When it comes to the work of the Lord, not everyone looks at it with the same degree of interest. Some will wonder, "What's in it for me?" Others, "I can't give up my paid vacation time for something like that." Others might say, "How much an hour are you paying?" Then there are those who count it a great privilege to be

able to freely give their time and energy to a work for the Lord in the assembly, in an outreach of the Gospel or a project in a foreign country where missionaries need their expertise. Those who volunteer their time and money to help accomplish a project for the work of the Lord and the benefit of others will find that it is a fact - "God is no man's debtor."

Likely there were Jews who became wealthy in Babylon when they were in exiles there for seventy years and brought their money with them to invest in land and businesses. Some were in a position to lend money and make money by holding mortgages on property the poorer and newer returnees were buying. Then there were taxes also to be paid to the foreign government who had conquered the land, and if a person didn't have the money to pay, the wealthy would loan money at excessive interest rates. The rich were becoming richer, and perhaps would pay someone to work on the wall in their place. All that was happening between "brother Jews" should not have been happening.

People of wealth need to be very careful that "the love of money" does not claim their allegiance and their souls. Covetousness is a defiling sin that some believers look at as merely "good business." A covetous person will never be satisfied with what they have. There had been Jews in the land of Judah for over one hundred years when Zerubbabel came from Babylon with 50,000 people to rebuild the temple. By the time of Nehemiah's coming with a couple of thousand people they would have been well established in business and property ownership as well as finance. When the newcomers wanted to make a start in farming and/or business they would have been somewhat at the mercy of those who came earlier and had claimed the area for themselves. Through the ages, immigrants have found it takes hard work and perseverance to get started in a new country.

New believers who come into the fellowship of an assembly, or people who move into an area from another assembly and want to become part of the local fellowship, need to know they are gladly received and accepted as one of those who share in common the work of the Lord in this location. At the same time, the expectations of those who have been in the assembly for years needs to be realistic. New believers do not know what is expected of them if someone doesn't go out of their way to tell them and shown them what has been, and is presently going on in this area. Also, we should not expect of them that which they cannot do. Significance and a sense of meaningful participation may start in engaging them in small things and gradually involving them in more important matters as their qualifications and gifts allow. Those who are mature and have been in the local work for a long time, know what to delegate and how much, as time passes. To take undue advantage of a brother or sister in Christ is never right. That can lead to inward discontent and later inward controversy, especially if we act strictly according to "the letter of the law" without the grace that is needed to make the expectations acceptable.

There were a number of groups of returned exiles who came to Judah and were being taken advantage of and actually extorted. It was legal to have indentured slaves at that time. It was legal for one to borrow money and make payments at agreed upon times. But it was not right for the wealthy among God's people to be charging high interest rates of their own "brethren" and making it impossible for the people to meet their needs and pay their debts. The love of money is a characteristic that even unbelievers who practice it themselves, do not expect to see in a child of God. So "there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews," who were taking advantage of the absentee laborers working on the wall, to take what they could while the bread winners were giving free labor to the work of the Lord.

How careful we must be that there be no discrimination among the Lord's people. Some may be poor and cannot change their circumstances because of location, health and family responsibilities. Others may be successful because of their opportunity for education, family connections, heritage or other reasons. The biblical principles that guide us, clarify our responsibilities to each other. We are to "comfort the feeble-minded... support the weak... and be patient..." Inward attacks against the work of the Lord may be even more dangerous and effective than the outward actions of open opposition.

I wonder why those who share a common faith,
Would want to take advantage, instead of showing grace.
Perhaps they have forgotten the pit from which they came -
And have forgotten they too, must do all in Jesus' name.

All of the children of God come from backgrounds quite diverse.
Some feel quite disenfranchised for better or for worse.
As one in Christ together, "One body in the Lord..."
Unity is essential whether carrying the Book or using the Sword.

It is wrong to take advantage of a person when he is down.

A helping hand, a cheerful smile is more effective than a frown.
To take a loss at the present time, has eternal value in the end.
To give not expecting to receive, means it is to our Lord that we did lend.

To "write off" a brother's debt should be common in a family.
What is not seen is eternal, bearing burdens a privileged duty.
"Count it all joy" when one is able to lift another's load.
Perhaps that is one way we remember what we owe to our Gracious God.

"Father, please keep Thy servant from claiming for myself that which Thou hast given me. Give me the discernment to know how best to help others, and the wisdom to know when the time is appropriate to take action. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Nehemiah 5:6-13

RIGHTEOUS ANGER

When a leader of people lives among them and works with them, he is often the one they feel they can approach with frankness when they have problems, knowing that he has an open ear. Those who came to Nehemiah with a "great cry" had had enough of being ripped off, robbed and brought to ruin by those who were of their own people and nationality. It was a natural response for Nehemiah to be "very angry" at those who treated their fellow-citizens as mere pawns to be manipulated in their own "get rich" schemes.

Righteous anger is very different from an uncontrolled outburst of temper. Controlled anger may be an appropriate response to the sin of covetousness that is not uncommon among men. When the innocent suffers because of the greed of unscrupulous men, righteous controlled anger can be the first step to bringing a halt to this evil practice. Empathy can be seen in a number of different ways. It may be evident when we "weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who do rejoice." When a need is obvious and we step up and meet that need, that can be an act of empathy. It is an appropriate response to wrongs done to others when we are angry at sin. That demonstrates real interest and concern for those who have been wronged.

Righteous anger and a vindictive spirit are very different. Righteous anger does not mean "I'll get even with you!" That is vengeance. Vengeance belongs to the Lord who knows the heart and what is behind some actions people take. Outbursts of temper do not solve problems but usually increase them or at least the intensity of the problem. Righteous anger can bring to one's mind a way to deal with the problem in a right way and bring the right solution with the best possible results on the part of all involved.

The first rebuke Nehemiah made after "consulting" with himself - planning what to say - stated what was wrong clearly and precisely. The nobles and rulers had ignored the word of God and the plainly stated laws regarding taking interest on loans. Charging interest to strangers was permitted but not to fellow-Jews. Whether in arrogance or indifference, the nobles and rulers apparently ignored what Nehemiah said to them. After being confronted personally but ignored by the nobles and rulers who were becoming richer at the expense of their countrymen, Nehemiah took the step of bringing the matter out into the open before a "great assembly" of people. No longer was this a matter that could be settled with a minimum of disruption of the rebuilding project and the normal practices of daily living. The nobles and rulers by their indifference had escalated the problem to becoming a major issue of national importance that had to be brought into the full blaze of the light of God's law before the public. Righteous anger confronted the leadership and they could no longer hide behind their own positions of authority. They were now up against the law of God in full view of the "great assembly."

Fairness shown to those who are poor and are oppressed should have been the responsibility of those nobles and rulers. Instead they were the perpetrators of the problem. It is always wrong for us to take advantage of those less fortunate than we. To "visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction" doesn't mean just dropping by to say, "Hello." There are needs to be met and we are responsible to meet those needs. It is our God-given responsibility to show love and concern by the practical help we can give to those in need.

Years earlier those who had returned from Babylon were redeemed who had been slaves to the heathen people around. Now they were doing the same things the "heathen" had done, only were doing it to their own people. Heartlessness toward other people often accompanies the increase of riches when people set their heart on money. It was also a reproach before the worldly people around them who knew they were taking advantage of their own people for their own personal gain. As the people of God, a genuine fear of

God will keep us from thinking things are more important than people. "Blamelessness" is one of the criteria for leadership among God's people.

No one could point an accusing finger at Nehemiah because he did not take from the people even that which he had a right to claim. He was providing for others instead. The contrast between the nobles and rulers, and Nehemiah and those working with him, exposed the attitude and mindset of those who were wronging their brethren. "Let us leave off usury," was a statement that applied to everyone in that great assembly and would remind them of the divine standards they were obligated to follow. When wrongs are exposed and restitution must be made, it is important to carefully define the amounts owed so there is no mistaking what must be done.

To ensure this restitution was made and the standards of the law of God was followed, Nehemiah brought the matter from merely a business matter with temporal consequences, to a spiritual matter with eternal consequences when he had the priests make sure the demands were carried out. We really can't separate the various areas of human life and responsibility. What I think personally, I am. What I am as a person is seen in my relationship with my wife. My relationship with my wife affects our life as a family. Family life affects the fellowship of the assembly of which I am a part. The public testimony of the assembly reflects our Christian commitment to the world around.

There are consequences linked to my statements of commitment to following the Lord. Nehemiah's symbolic act of shaking off his garment, pronounced a curse from God on those who said they would do what they promised but didn't follow through with the promise. Such a person would lose everything. The nobles and rulers understood that if they did not do what they promised, what they had done to their fellow Jews would be done to them.

Nehemiah was a man who knew God well enough that he didn't take credit for the successful conclusion of this serious problem. The whole congregation agreed fully with the solution to the problem and all praise was given to the Lord. Instead of an internally divided people, they were now united. Instead of covetousness, shame and reproach - repentance had brought about a new desire for praise. Now they could get back to their work for the Lord. Division among God's people is often first felt when there are great pauses in worship. Praise becomes half-hearted and people begin absenting themselves from assembly gatherings. The Lord's things take second or third place and the whole assembly begins to suffer from lethargy and complacency, and a critical spirit develops because of one group of people taking advantage of others. Finally, individuals are lost to the assembly and fall under the influence and attractions of the world.

There they stood in their finery with fat faces,
Looking down haughty noses on others who lost to them their places
Of abode, of making a living - they even lost their children too -
Gone because of selfish greed - to the covetousness of the few.

There he stood; his face flushed with righteous anger.
He was not longer to them a transient - he was no stranger.
But silent condemnation coming from his body language, his face, his eyes -
As he consulted with himself the best way to bring them down to size.

Then he spoke with careful words though out before his God.
Each articulated word distinct, perhaps accented with a hand movement and a nod.
They knew what he meant, they knew he spoke his word against them,
But in arrogance, seeking to diminish the problem - they remained silent before him.

But who are all those people coming here from far away and near?
Why has the work stopped, what is bringing so many people here?
And then again, he speaks, his voice loud and tense and strained.
Before everyone gathered - the nobles, the rulers, were publicly blamed.

Their attitude has been changed by his righteous anger carefully expressed.
Now they look on their brethren, those who for money they had oppressed.
And their actions are changed, restitution is made, and hope restored.
As the great assembly became untied, and again in fellowship with the Lord.

"Father in heaven: some of Thy people have become so used to big money that they have forgotten what is important. May these weeks spent among them help to remind them of who they are and what is really important. May they come to the place of real and effective unity in both personal and assembly testimony. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Nehemiah 5:14-19

THE FEAR OF GOD

The account of Nehemiah's work was likely written quite some time after the events that are recorded in this narrative. These particular events are given to establish an accurate historical record for the benefit of those who lived after the time they took place, and also to give important lessons to those all down through the centuries. Leadership has to be properly practiced in order to be authentic. Such lessons need to be precise and understanding in order to be well learned.

Nehemiah must have returned to report to king Artaxerxes all that he had been doing in the building of the wall and the city. Then the king sent him back as governor of Judah for at least twelve years. His leadership ability was obvious, so in order to establish and maintain the orderly conduct of those under his authority, he acted in a way that was acceptable to those whose authority he was under.

We learn some things only when we have actually practiced them, not just because we have studied them or read about them in a book. Nehemiah had calluses from working with his hands in the building project along with those he led and likely from farming to be able "to provide for his own." Taxation that is fair or unfair is still a source of complaint among people. Nehemiah had the right to take from the people the provisions they needed to maintain him while he governed the province of Judah. The governors who were before him had taken what they deemed right and likely enough to make them wealthier than they were when they took the "government job." There seemed to be resentment against the government officials because their demands had impoverished the citizens.

When leading people we must be able to sense their attitudes as well as listen to their voices. "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content," applies to leaders as well as to those they lead. It applies to the rich as well as the poor. It is one of the ways those who are wealthy can help the poor and gain their confidence, respect and loyalty. Nehemiah could honestly say, "So did not I," and the people of Judah knew he spoke the truth. He was able to distance himself from the unjust practices of those who were governors before him because he was motivated "because of the fear of God."

Reverential fear of divine Persons is not a negative response and attitude, but a positive one. It indicates respect for the Person when we give honor to the Lord as well as honor to those who are due honor. This attitude keeps us from exalting ourselves in pride. By an awareness and acknowledgement of the holiness of God, we are motivated to obey Him and look upon people and things through His eyes. That in turn opens the eyes of our understanding. True fear of God is not just manifest in the words we say and how we speak them, but our actions will also demonstrate the reality of our words. Wisdom and grace in deeds are as important as words of wisdom and grace. God's people usually respond in positive ways to a leader whose fear of God is real. They usually will seek to emulate one they know who is in fellowship with God, because they know the role he has been given to fulfill, is consistent with the word of God.

"Give and it shall be given unto you," is a principle that works. Accumulating wealth at the expense of other people who grudgingly give what is demanded, is contrasted by the faith-actions of a "cheerful (hilarious) giver." Nehemiah financed the people who served him as well as meeting his own needs - and he had enough left over to meet the needs of others who came to him as visitors. As a man who knew his people, he likely met needs of those who were poor with daily beef, mutton and the meat of birds provided freely to them at his expense.

Those who lead God's people and labor for the Lord do not have to ask for help when they are exercised to live by faith. They learn that "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." The Lord knows our needs and He is able from the bounty of His own storehouse to provide all we need. The example of mature believers who have experienced God at work on their behalf, is the best way to teach godly, practical Christian living to those who look for spiritual guidance in life.

The parenthetical incident was put in this place in the narrative likely because it illustrated the right attitude and actions of the Lord's people in contrast to the incident that proceeded in this chapter. It is right that we seek God's approval upon our labors and attitudes as we serve Him. Any service for the well-being of the Lord's people can, and should be done for the glory of God and the blessing of others. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.

Nehemiah 5:15. *"But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God."*

DON'T DO IT.

For financial gain people can easily compromise what they know is right
To charge family members interest is really not too bright.
All you will have to show as a result of making that choice,
Will be like a pelican in the wilderness with no one to hear your voice.

Every person at times, has to decide what they want to do.
What others did in the past doesn't mean you have to too.
To profit by the misfortune of others really isn't what God intends.
It is right to help those in need around us with the bounty God does send.

To enslave other people by charging a tax on what they eat,
Is contrary to the intention of laboring for one's needs to meet.
There is much spent on what is not necessary that tends to make one poor.
I did not, and still don't want to be constantly clamoring for more.

When a work for God is being done, I want to put my shoulder to the wheel.
To do my part, no matter how small, certainly affects just how I feel
About a work being done by others, in which I can have a little part.
I do not want to ignore the value of a work others did right from the start.

It tends to tie the hands of the laborers if someone charges a higher price
Then is reasonable to expect a thing is worth, it's like paying for it twice.
I should consider what my brethren and sisters are doing and help to meet their need.
I did not in the past add burdens on others to satisfy my greed.

Keep me, O God, in the present - and in the future too,
From a covetous spirit and claiming in old age, things that belong to You.
I want to have a gracious spirit, so I can enjoy what others have done.
If I can have a little part in the work, it would be like a testimony when I am gone.

Bless, O Lord God, the labors of those who are building for Thee.
Bless those who have a part in the work - those people folks never see.
Bless the result of their labors; in the future may their work always last.
I do not want to lay any burdens on people, nor profit with a covetous grasp.

“Father, there are some laborers that are on my heart, and I pray for them now. Strengthen their hands in the work. Father, please send more into the harvest to bring in the fruit of the labor of others. Help them to plow new ground and sow good seed that others may reap where they have sowed. I have sought to sow and if it would bring glory to Thee, I would like to help harvest the crop. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 6:1-9

INTIMIDATION

The internal problems among the people of Judah had been faced and dealt with wisely and firmly. The writer of the narrative had used Nehemiah's on-going consistency in leadership as an example for the Lord's people as to how they should deal with one another that they might live and prosper peacefully. Then the account goes back to the building of the wall that was nearing completion.

There are "teaching moments" that arise in the Lord's work that call for a temporary change of focus to either correct a wrong or emphasize that which is right. The fact that exorbitant interest had been charged on the general population had to be addressed because it had an effect on the building work going on. What the word of God said about charging interest to the Jews had to be taught again and warning given to those unscrupulous money lenders who were impoverishing their own people. The teaching that we are to conduct business right according to the word of God "because of the fear of God" had to be enforced by Nehemiah's personal testimony. When the Lord's people can see a leader practicing what he preaches, they will be inclined to follow his leadership even in times of open opposition from without.

Any man who leads God's people in a work that is against evil and spiritual danger, if he is acting according to the word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit and not his own opinion, can expect to be personally attacked by those who are under the control of the devil. Unjustifiable attacks and character abuse come in many different forms of intimidation. Satan uses people to start rumors which are totally unfounded in the truth, and he then promotes this by gossip and deceit. It is an unfortunate characteristic of a natural man or

a carnal man to accept as true a report that puts down the character of a leaders. The motivation behind such a thing may be jealousy, envy or sometimes they just don't like a person.

Deceit and false reports are common practices the devil uses to stop a work of God. Attacks on one's character are very hard to defend against, particularly if a person is not well known. Not very often will other people rise to the defense of one who has come into the public eye unless they know them well. The law may not judge a man before it hears him, but many people do. The only defense is to trust God to take care of those problems we can't solve, and keep pressing ahead faithfully in God's strength to accomplish the work He has given us.

Nehemiah saw through the attempts of Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, who along with other enemies tried four times to stop the work of finishing the wall that had to have the gates installed, and four times Nehemiah gave them the same answer. They wanted to get the leader away from the work in the hopes that the laborers would quit before the gates were in place. Then the city would still be in danger. Nehemiah had the right perspective of the work he had been given. He was doing a "great work" and he knew it would cease if he wasn't there. Any work God gives us is a great work whether small or large because it has been given us by a great God. We need to understand the value of any work we have been called upon to do for the Lord.

To leave a work unfinished because of intimidation is a lack of faith on our part. Satan will use any means from deceit to death in order to stop the work of God. One who has been called by God must remain steadfast in purpose and be determined to fulfill their responsibility. Any act of compromise and/or intimidation is a step down if we respond to such threats. Commitment to a work until it is completed is expected of those who God calls. To remain consistent in the work may be hard during the trial at times, but our God can "strengthen" our hands through the testing times rather than take us out of the difficulty.

Nehemiah 6:5-6. *"Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; wherein was written, 'It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews thi to rebel: for thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words.'"*

CHARACTER ATTACKS.

What means this open letter that everyone can read?

Often the objective behind such an act is to sow some poisoned seed.
There may be a personal dislike of one, or there may be some misunderstanding.
But whatever the reason to spread character attacks, something is underhanded,
To bring a question upon a work that may be different then what one chooses -
And the hope in starting a gossiping campaign is one's credibility looses
Its impact and the work will fail which they are trying to undermine.
A search is on that some flaw in character the accusers hope to find.

When these attacks come, and they surely will, remember who called you to labor.

God commissioned you to do a work, not to curry everyone's favor.
Stick to the work, remember the goal; God has designated you as the one
To do this work, so don't get sidetracked, keep at it till it is done.
You may have to respond if they attack continually, but don't join in a fight.
Brethren who publicly disagree to the onlookers is an awful sight.
Say as little as possible, use simple plain words restating your objective.
And don't allow yourself to be stopped by jealously worded invectives.

Press on faithfully, the prize is before you, the labor will soon be over.

Those who oppose you personally will sometime have to recover
Their credibility because God has His way of bringing things to pass;
He is concerned about your goal too, and knows about the character attacks.
If something needs to be done about them, leave it to God to arrange
A meeting if necessary, or if He chooses, let things go on without change.
You can't change another person's mind; all you can control is your own.
Just keep doing what you know God wants; all the circumstances to Him are known.

Tend to your own work and don't meddle in things others put across your path.
Often God allows times of testing; remember a soft answer turns away wrath.
Keep your soul warm with God's truth every day, never allow yourself to be bitter.
You are better off laboring alone, then to argue with a grandstand sitter.
Spend time going over the plans you know God has given to you.
Perhaps the character attacks will cease, when the work you do is through.
Then it won't make any difference about what others have had to say.
The "well done" from the Master we serve, will take care of problems on the way.

“Gracious Father, give to Thy servant a patient and calm spirit. Keep me from wanting to retaliate. Help me to focus every day on the work before me - not on what others say, or whether I am popular. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 6:10-19

FINISHED!!

We should never think that opposition to the work of God will cease even though the work is going good at the moment. The enemy of men's souls will never stop his implacable desire to oppose anything that is of God. Some things, even though they are of the opposition, may never show themselves for a long time. There seems to be layers upon layers of schemes and insidious plans that come one after another to bring a stop to the furtherance of the Gospel and the establishment of the people of God on a solid foundation of scriptural truth.

Nehemiah had been attacked politically with charges of plotting rebellion. He had been attacked personally by those who said he wanted to be the king of Judah. There were other attacks against his spiritual commitment and his personal integrity. Some of these came from without and some from within among the people of God who wanted the status quo to remain so they could prosper financially at the expense of others and retain their positions of authority over others.

One of those was Shemaiah who probably was a person of note in the community because he apparently had access to the temple. He may even have been a priest. For some reason he was a man of credibility, so when Nehemiah found him shut up in his house, there was something peculiar about that. It seems like he was implying that he was in danger of being killed by the same enemies Nehemiah had. He wanted Nehemiah to think he was allied with him so asked to meet him in the temple and shut the doors so they would not be killed in the night.

"Fifth column" practices are deceptive in that they are made to appear as if they are allies instead of enemies. But the underlying motives are to use false warnings from false witnesses and false prophets to give false messages in order to defeat those whom they are against. Usually such people are self-proclaimed messengers who seek to impress others by speaking with authority.

For a leader to suggest something that is not scriptural, is evidence that in spite of his position and words, he is not God's messenger. When intimidation and slander from enemies does not hinder us from doing God's work in God's way. We may be inclined to listen to a sympathetic voice suggesting a way out of a problem even though it is unscriptural. We need to keep in mind the fact that the world, the flesh and the devil are always enemies, and none of those will ever stop in their desire to make a child of God fall. Nor will they ever cease operating against us in this lifetime, even to taking advantage of the weakness of body and mind in those who are in old age.

Nehemiah had experienced assaults against him, but they were all proven to be false. Various forms of intimidation had failed so one within the city, from a fellow countryman of some importance who had the right to go into the temple, tried to get Nehemiah to sin. If Nehemiah had gone into the temple where he should not have gone, he would have lost his credibility as one who spoke for and worked for God. A man who is a spiritual leader will lose the respect of the people and the right to lead when he does what he knows is wrong. In an assembly or in a family, hypocrisy and deception for the sake of money or self-advancement by a leader, will result in the loss of trust in those who follow him.

The intention of Shemaiah was to create an evil report against Nehemiah so that he would be reproached and rejected by the people. Sanballat and Tobiah had hired him for that reason but Nehemiah could see through his deception. Yet in his response he laid no charge against the falsehood of Shemaiah. He would not go where he should not go and was able to retain his integrity in spite of Shemaiah, a woman named Noadiah and other prophets who tried to keep the wall from being finished. Intimidation does not stop a person of faith from accomplishing their work because their trust is in the Lord.

Nehemiah's prayer was not for vindication but simply his response to a threat. His first recorded prayer was his response to bad news from Jerusalem. An open heart before God with a specific request is an appropriate response to bad news. When he prayed when he was in conversation with the king, he gave God credit for an answer before it happened. That attitude of prayer keeps us from taking credit for ourselves. He prayed when he was mocked and was thus not tempted to take matters into his own hands. He prayed when threatened, and then took action while trusting God. Again, he prayed when threatened and asked for help when he was under pressure by those who wanted to make him afraid.

The plot against Nehemiah was deep and widespread among the upper-crust of society seeking to continue to make him afraid. But instead he concentrated on finishing the work at hand, not on his own self-interest or credibility. The "great work" we have is more important than any attacks made against us personally. Nehemiah didn't seek to retaliate against any of those who were opposing him nor did he seek vengeance of any kind. Uncompromising convictions, patient and consistent labor brought the wall to completion in 52 days. Even the enemies knew God was behind the work and had given the needed strength and courage to finish the wall quickly. Even the enemies knew "that the work was wrought of our God." Such a rapid accomplishment made those who opposed fearful.

However, even after the walls were finished the covetous nobles of Judah were still opposed to Nehemiah because their positions of leadership and financial wealth were being taken away. All they had controlled by their wrong connections and alliances was being lost. Compromising alliances create compromised positions. Compromising positions cause compromised truth. The corrections under Ezra's authority had not lasted and some Jews had gone back to unholy marriages. Unequal yokes are hard to break because they claim our minds, emotions and will if we are not on guard against them.

It is an unfortunate, but not uncommon practice, for those who oppose a servant of God, to keep trying to undermine his credibility and authority. Innuendo, gossip, half-truths and words taken out of context are used to create suspicion and lack of confidence in a person. A campaign of praise for an enemy and criticism for a faithful servant in the service of the Lord causes confusion and unrest among the Lord's people/ It happened to Nehemiah and it can happen to us.

An amazing work was quickly done.
The city wall was finished.
But instead of joy, there were some
Who wanted the man's character diminished.
There was safety and security now for the city,
What God wanted was fully done.
But for the covetous there was no pity
For the leader who they were against had won.

We cannot expect those who seek to oppose,
To welcome us with open arms.
It is foolish for us to ever suppose,
That enemies wish us to have no harm.
The intervention of truth causes concern
To those people who traffic in lies.
Truth by its very nature deeply burns
In the conscience, when it is brought down to size.

To discern hypocrisy and underhanded deceit
Is God-given wisdom in the soul of God's man.
He knows that he will have to compete
With falsehood and the enemies plans.
It is highest wisdom to always be ready and willing
To be on guard and consciously aware
Of subtlety and compromises compelling
Our attention wanting us with evil to share.

The Lord Himself is our refuge and safety.
He knows all from the beginning to end.
In the scriptures of truth, He tells us plainly
Of the tactics those who oppose God do send.
In faith and with confidence unwavering,
We commit ourselves to the work in our hand.
Without vengeance or nagging complaining,
We will endure until fulfilling God's plan.

"Gracious Father, for Thine own reasons Thou hast given us good health and strength to keep at this work Thou hast given us. In faith we will press ahead in Thy strength of fulfill that to which we have been called. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Nehemiah 7

SENSIBLE CAUTION

The place where God chose to place His name and dwell with His people was certainly important to Him and it was also important to Nehemiah. Probably more than anyone in his day, he had his heart centered in the same place God's heart was. The city of Jerusalem and the temple were now safely inside the completed wall. It was to be a place of safety governed by holy order. It was there the worship of God by the nation and the service of God could be carried out as God intended.

Where the Lord meets with His people today is just as important as the place where He met with the Jews in the past. The assembly of God's people is not some haphazard, casual, occasional meeting of a few people when it is convenient for them. One of the reasons for a local fellowship of believers is to provide a place of safety for God's people. There they can be preserved from the open attacks on Christians personally because they are united with others of "like precious faith." In "the place of the name" there is order provided by those the Holy Spirit raises up to be overseers of the flock of God. There is order in the public practice of the priesthood of all believers, and there is room for the privilege and responsibility for each to be involved in divine service.

Hanani, the brother of Nehemiah, was the one who brought the news of the state of the city of Jerusalem and the wall that had been broken down. Now this tried and proven man who had been with the people laboring to build, was put in charge of the city. He had been honest in his description of the condition of things at first and had been a trustworthy participant in the work. It was appropriate for him to take public responsibility for the maintenance of the city even though he was the brother of Nehemiah. In the assembly of God's people, the personal qualifications of leadership are what is important, not whether he is the brother of another leader.

Hananiah, another man who had proven responsibility for guarding a building, did well in his care of the citadel. These men had the fear of God in them and were doing what they did conscious of the fact that God was overseeing them. These two men were now charged with the safety of the city. Those who God raises up to lead other people, need to be consciously aware of the need of being watchful, careful, cautious and at the same time approachable.

People of integrity can be trusted because they fear God and are conscious of the value of other people. They are able to do the work of the Lord and do it in a scriptural way. A reverence for God and faithfulness in labor on behalf of other people, gives credibility to the leadership of such men. This is in contrast to those who are easily moved by the opinions of other people and cannot be counted on to participate in the work. There are some who take the place of leadership who can tell others what to do, but do not join in the actual work. The rulers and nobles in Jerusalem were like that.

The spiritual safety of God's people is a major concern in assemblies today. Many voices are heard on radio and TV that seem so convincing and authoritative that people accept what they say with little question. Men quote scripture verses and use them in a way to support their own personal agenda. Books are written that convince people that new truth has been revealed to them that must be accepted. "Gates" need to be closed until the bright light of day, the bright light of God's word, clearly reveals anything that is brought in among the Lord's people. Not only the leaders of the assembly, but everyone in the assembly should be on guard in their own sphere of influence lest an enemy come in through their own area of responsibility. In Jerusalem there were guards on the wall, but everyone was expected to guard the area of their own homes.

The city was large enough to accommodate a lot of people but not very many wanted to live there for some reason. The assembly is not going to be a popular place for people who are attracted to worldly things. There is room for many, but only those who want to follow godly order in life, worship and service are willing to move inside "the walls" of biblical truths that guard the dwelling place of God. Attractions of business, success and pleasure lead many to places where there is no public testimony, or where they "can feel comfortable." There are many reasons people have for moving away, but the scriptures still say, "Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."

God guided Nehemiah to a list of names of people and their occupations to fill the needs that were in the city. They were to fill the needs for order, the worship of God and the service of God in His work. The spiritual condition of God's people is the concern of true leaders who have been placed in that role by the Lord. Qualifications for different works are not left to chance or personal preference. Ezra's list was plain. This reminder of the past was the same thing that gave hope and guidance for the future. Ezra was the spiritual leader of the people and Nehemiah was the government leader responsible to meet the needs that were among the citizens.

The public leaders were identified by name. From those men came the areas of responsibility they were obligated to fill. It wasn't up to a vote, nor to personal preference. The designation of responsibility was clear. Ordinary people were identified by families and dwelling places. They all knew there was a significance in their lives and work to be who they were and do what they did for God. Priests were called upon to act before the Lord toward the people and for the people to the Lord. They were not excused from that work. Likely some priests remain in Babylon where they were not able to do the work of the priesthood and so blended in with everyone else.

Some religious groups today limit "priestly work" to a few who have been trained in denominations schools to be professional "spiritual advisors." In scripturally gathered assemblies there is opportunity for the public practice of the priesthood of all believers to be carried out. There are different roles of priestly ministry depending on the person and the God-given gifts they have received. Some have an audible role and others a silent role. Some work is out in the open and others work is unseen by almost everyone. It is public because of its nature in the life of the assembly, not in the visual sense. In the "house of God" there is room for all to be part of the work of God.

Levites and temple servants as well as those whose forbearers were servants of Solomon all had a place to be identified with in service. The temple, the city, the nation all had certain areas of work that were to be filled by those who were qualified by their place in the genealogical record of the nation. Some had made the journey from Babylon who could live and raise their families among God people but who could not prove their citizenship. Consequently, they could not participate in the work of God.

Only God knows who are truly His people. Occasionally we must simply wait for evidence of reality to be seen before certain ones can be part of the fellowship of the assembly. God has His own way of making plain to the assembly those who are truly children of God and those who are not. We do not have the Urim and Thummim to give us answers from God, but we do have the word of God and the Holy Spirit of God to "bear witness" to the truth.

In assemblies of God's people, the financial responsibility is voluntary and sacrificial. Financial support is an obligation but is not imposed on the people by men. Each person gives to the Lord from that which the Lord has given to them as individual. "Let every one of you lay by in store as God has prospered him." Some of those who were family leaders and government leaders generously contributed to the work of God. But their names are not given because they were giving voluntarily to the Lord and were not paying taxes to the government nor to the house of God.

The goal of building the wall, establishing the work of the Lord, and functioning as a province was done orderly and peacefully. Even though enemies had been threatening throughout the process, under the wise leadership of Nehemiah, the objective was reached.

Nehemiah 7:2. *"That I gave Hanani, and Hananiah he ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many."*

INTEGRITY AND REVERENCE.

There is a work to do that is not just a temporary task.
It involves making decisions alone when there is no one around to ask
Advice from or try to find out if it meets political expediency -
And still people will be affected - we need a man of integrity.

Such a man can be trusted to do what he knows is best
For the general welfare of all involved, is the final test.
He admits to his limitations but has learned to trust the Lord.
When he comes to a conclusion, the people will trust his word.

Not just for one time or event does he prove faithful -
The bent of his life is such that all know he is truly grateful
To God for His mercy and grace that makes him a man who is humble,
He is not afraid to admit his need of God to keep him from a serious stumble.

In such a leader we look for a sense of reverence and godly fear.
His decision-making process is done knowing that God is here,
Listening and watching, guiding and directing in the inner reaches of his heart.
His fear of God and awareness of his own weakness was obvious from the start.

He is able to stand before the people with dignity, yet not pride.
The reverence for God and his own integrity he never tries to hide.

He knows when God assigns a work to do, to God he is accountable.
The people he serves in the name of the Lord must know he is reliable.

To lead people in the authority of the Lord, calls for consistency.
There has to be a commitment on his part to act without partiality.
What such a man appears to be in public, he must be at home.
His wife and children are well aware of the way he is with them.

When a person is alone where no one else hears or sees what he does -
Is a test of his integrity and fear of God as to what he does really choose.
When it is truly for God and His glory, God gives him strength for the day.
And with quiet confidence in God, he leads others in a righteous way.

“The pressures and trials of leadership, O God, means I must call on Thee at any and all times. A number of people are going to be affected in their personal, marriage and assembly lives by what I take in to my mind today. Guide me I pray in the way I should go. Fill me with truth that is needed and expedient. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 8

"THE BOOK"

Not all of the Lord's people have the same abilities, understanding and God-given gifts. Nehemiah was a good organizer and knew how to get things done when it came to building the wall and getting order established in Jerusalem. Ezra had come to Jerusalem twelve or thirteen years before and had brought the vessels for the temple with him. The sacrifices and offerings were begun again when he came and the people were reminded again of who they were and what made the people Israel unique. It was during that time he had to teach what the scriptures had say to about mixed marriages and then bring about the changes that had to be made, although some obviously didn't comply with that teaching. As a "man of the book" he had spiritual authority that people recognized.

Personal achievements are examples of what God can do through people during their lifetime. Personal commitment to live for God is very different. Those who are effective spiritual leaders are not usually all that conscious nor aware of what they have done in life because they are busy doing what God wants. Those who are personally committed to the Lord are concerned with obeying Him rather than keeping track of what they have done. Ezra was a careful student of the scriptures and he intended to not only know what the word of God said, but to obey it himself and teach others. He was committed to teaching other people what the scriptures said and why it was important to apply biblical truth to their lives. It isn't enough to know what the Bible says. That can be learned without any real commitment. Those who teach must know it themselves, practice it themselves and "be able to teach others also."

Ezra's teaching set the stage of Nehemiah's work and the return of the nation to the fear of God. He led the revival of scriptural teaching, and Nehemiah led the rebuilding of the wall and orderly recovery of the nation to be a law-abiding people. Two different kinds of men, each with a different work, were able to coordinate their work successfully. When the people of God need to return to their roots, including moral living and spiritual practices, the use of the variety of gifts God gives different people can be the key to those things happening in the most profitable way. Israel has a spiritual basis for their national identity that isn't the same in other nations. In many countries a point is made to separate the spiritual practices of the people from their political and social practices. Israel's laws in Bible times that governed national life were the word of God, the statutes and precepts, and the commandments of scripture.

For the people of God today the preeminence of the word of God is the cause and key to revival. It is incumbent upon us to "rightly divide the word of truth." When the word of God is given a preeminent place before the people, not just the teachers and leaders, a movement can start among the people that begins in each person's heart. Then the saints are unified because of the word of God, not just the words and challenges of a charismatic leader. A gathering of the Lord's people in an appropriate place for the right reason has an impact upon each one because of the fellowship expressed and shared. In front of the "Water Gate" seems to be a suitable place to hear the water of the word of God read and interpreted. A spiritual leader who's heart was repaired and who is able to teach the word of God, is needed to help apply what is read.

Ezra had waited patiently for the right conditions and the right time before he was able to have the undivided attention of the Jews. He did not interfere in any way with Nehemiah's building work. They both did what God wanted in harmony with each other and under divine direction. When the right day came soon after the

wall was finished and within a month of the three fall Feast of Jehovah, the people stood together as families listening to the words of "The Book" being read by Ezra. He was on a high platform with six men on one side and seven on the other so the people could see him and hear him read. They paid attention to him because they had wanted him "to bring the book" and read the words of God Moses had written down.

The voice of God is heard through the public reading of the word of God. It is important for us to remember that ourselves and pass that truth on to our child. Scriptures are the inspired "breathings of God" to us, not a mere recitation of ancient stories and facts. Exhortation and instruction should accompany the reading of the word of God today just as it did them when men moved among the people to give them understanding as to what the word meant. Attention was given to this reading and that which accompanied it for six hours. The book was spread open before them all and the men on either side of Ezra standing with him would have given the whole event a sense of respect and reverence as the spiritual need of the people was felt.

There was a verbal response by the people when they said, "Amen, Amen!" There was also a physical response as they lifted their hands, and bowed their heads and faces toward the ground. There was also a spiritual response as they "worshipped the Lord." Men assisted in this event moving among the people and making sure they understood the teaching ministry Ezra was giving. The result of this reading was conviction of sin and tears of repentance and restoration. Recovery with tears, and joyful celebration go together as we are strengthened by facing and dealing with sin and returning to the Lord with heartfelt reality. The two leaders brought hope and joy back to the people by this holy activity before a holy God. The objective behind such a time is "a holy people" who will glorify God.

What should I do with what I learn and come to know personally? What changes does the reading of the word of God make in me? Hopefully there will be a restoration of spiritual commitment, and the resolve to not allow anything to take the place of Jesus as Lord in my life. For the Jews in that day there was the Feast of Trumpets sounding joy through the nation. Then there was the Day of Atonement relating to their repentance. The last of the feast was the Feast of Tabernacles that lasted for a week and reminded them of where they had come from and what was ahead in the future millennium reign of the True Messiah. They would have been reminded for the first time since the days of Joshua that God had brought them out of bondage and protected and guided them through the wilderness, providing for them all the way to the promised land. The message would have spread throughout the nation - a new Sabbath is coming. "Jesus will reign where're the sun, doth its successive journey run."

Nehemiah 8:8. *"So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."*

FACTS OF RECOVERY.

The Word of God is opened - the people have gathered to hear.

The words are spoken distinctly - the Spirit of God is near.

They hear the actual words first - then hear the interpretation.

When they really knew what it meant - it caused great consternation.

When first we hear God's Word clearly - we find we are convicted,

As the Holy Spirit reveals to us areas of truth we have neglected.

There probably will be tears of repentance as we bow in humiliation.

But the first step of recovery comes when we give God's Word real appreciation.

They gathered together the second day to hear what God had to say.

They learned from the Word of God, what He says, He expects us to obey.

Without delay they rose up to act knowing faith is not just mental assent.

So instead of waiting for a convenient time, they immediately rose up and went.

There are times when we understand more clearly, God is not just making a suggestion.

He makes plain through His Word He is expecting obedience; faith then springs into action.

In our souls we are convicted that what God said is truly inspired.

The second step of recovery is God creates in us brand new desires.

When the Word of God was read again, some remarkable things did occur.

They stopped all their secular activities, and to the teaching they did concur.

First came confession of their wickedness, then of the mercies of the Lord.

Worship follows quickly after confession as we become conscious of the presence of God.

The recognition of wrongs brings repentance as when our first love we have left.

Unequal yokes have to be dealt with; they leave God's people bereft.

Things and people out of place must be changed; high profession; lukewarm practice must be gone.

There is an awareness of corrections to be made when we set about to right our wrongs.

When steps of faith are taken and we truly seek first the kingdom of God,
The grace of God becomes real to us and we commit ourselves to follow the Lord.
Confession and worship express appreciation as our life takes on a new bent.
The third step of recovery is God uses us and there are new accomplishments.

“Heavenly Father, as this day unfolds, may my appreciation of Thy Word, be enhanced. May my desires be to truly obey the Word as I read it and the Holy Spirit reveals its truth. May I be able to accomplish something of value today and in the days ahead, honor Thee and bring glory to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 9:1-5

SINCERITY FINALLY

When God's people come together and enjoy fellowship, praise and worship together, it is possible to catch a momentary spiritual high that fades when we leave and go back to normal daily living. The Israelis who had gathered for celebration at the finishing of the wall had listened to the word of God read, had been convicted by the reading and bowed down before God in humility and weeping. They had spent a week in joyful celebration of some of the Feasts of Jehovah and in unified fellowship. The nation seemed to be on the road to recovery.

There is great benefit to the Lord's people when we gather together in fellowship for spiritual refreshment and learning from the reading and expounding of the scriptures. But then there comes an awareness of what we have heard and the fact that it calls for a response from me personally. I have heard God's word explained in context and the interpretation has been given as well as some applications. Now what am I going to do with this knowledge? What effect am I expecting and what changes am I willing to make? We haven't really learned anything unless there is evidence of application of truth in my own life. True learning has a real significant effect on my mind, my will, my emotions and my life.

The effect of the events earlier in the month, and the reading of the scriptures continued, and the people gathered again to hear the word of God. But this time on the twenty fourth of the month, they came with a different attitude. There was sackcloth and dirt deliberately put on them. There had been fasting, separations made and confession of sin. Reality was evident as a result of what they had been considering over the past days since the big celebration. Reading of the scriptures has an awakening effect on the sincere person who is conscious of God and has been finally willing to listen to His word. A conscious awareness of God who gives us the big picture in His word of our past present and future, and our place and responsibility to Him in our time, changes us. Understanding of truth is not some casual "Yes," but gives us the whole perspective of what it means to be a child of God and how we fit in the great unfolding of divine purposes.

Heart-felt response to truth produces true and lasting change in the people of God. Our faith is not some casual acceptance of what we have been taught. It is personal trust being placed without reservation in our God and His word that unfolds His will for us. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." There comes a knowledge of what it means to be in the long line of faith and those who love the Lord. Like those in Nehemiah's day, we stand and identify ourselves with people of faith, and wait to hear what God our Lord will say to us from His word. Our separation is not a temporary action, and our confession is real. Our worship is in spirit and in truth, and our confidence is in our Lord, not ourselves. The effect of the reading of the scripture is understanding. The response to the truth is change. The joy of obedience is restored fellowship.

Reading the word of God and confession of sin often go together. There are things that happen in our lives that we may not consider all that important until we read and heed the scripture. "Abstain from all appearance of evil," means just that. Anything that indicates an activity is questionable is wrong. Sincerity of God's people and humility, leads to confession and separation from anything that defiles. The desire of those who are in fellowship with God is to worship Him. It is consistent with our new nature to want to honor our Lord and see Him honored publicly. That's why we do not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. When there is repentance and restoration of God's people, and an awakening to the importance and reality of God's plans, then we pray together and in private as intercessors for those around us. We also conduct ourselves in a way that shows the sincerity we have towards God, and the genuine interest we have towards the spiritual well-being of those around us.

Those who lead God people in prayer need to be conscious of the fact they speak on behalf of the whole congregation. They need to be able to "Lift up holy hands without wrath or doubting." They need to be able to pray in sincerity and honesty. An understanding of scripture enables us to know God's will in our requests are consistent with that will. Public prayers of appreciation of God, adoration, praise and thanksgiving by those who are mature in the faith, will often open thoughts in those men who have less or little experience in public praying to participate to the degree of their spiritual experience. The reading of the word of God opens us to sincerity in prayer, adoration, thanksgiving, intercession and worship.

Nehemiah 9:3. *"And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the Lord their God."*

ATTENTION

It doesn't happen very often -
Humility is not publicly seen.
Usually it takes a coffin,
Or a disaster unexpectedly come.
So, when God's people all stand,
And are not trying others to impress -
Then things not previously planned,
Are sincerely and openly expressed.

The word of God then applied,
To life-situations makes us stop and consider.
Sins excused or even denied -
We face even though the taste is bitter.
The word also gives the solution -
So that which is wrong is made right.
Confession brings then a conclusion -
That brings relief, and dark yields to light.

Then we stand in fellowship together -
In praise and in worship to God.
The company of God's people then gather -
To hear read, and then respond to God's word.
Honesty brings a lift to our spirits -
To God's patience and grace, we give praise.
He speaks through His word and we hear it -
Our voices in joy and honor we raise.

"My Father in heaven, may I never ever take for granted all the evidence of Thy grace and mercy. Thy word keeps me in the path of faith and - hopefully - obedience to Thy perfect will. Please give Thy servant a sense of the vitality and authority of Thy word so that I do not sin against Thee nor ignore my responsibilities to Thee and Thy people. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Nehemiah 9:6-38

CONTRASTS

A gracious and merciful God:

As the people of Israel were gathered and heard the word of the Lord read to them and worshipped, it was a normal response to the will of God revealed through the word, to face themselves in the presence of divine holiness. The word of God read carefully and the sense of it given in context, often precedes prayer. The word awakens the soul to what is real, lasting and important. The things with which we have been occupied then seems trivial and insignificant in the light of a consciousness of God as real and involved in the lives of His people. It was then they Lord's people began to pray and acknowledge the Person and work of God on behalf of them as a nation of people who had been called by Him to be different.

It is to be hoped that the Lord's people today realize that our relationship with the Lord God is real, and He is to be feared and revered among us. To approach Him in prayer is a holy practice not entered into with a casual attitude like we would have with contemporaries of the same status in life. Even though we have received "the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, "Abba Father," that doesn't give us license to approach and address Him with any kind of disrespect or familiarity. "Thou, even Thou, art Lord alone," gives us a sense of the uniqueness of our heavenly Father.

The One to whom we speak in prayer is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. Supreme authority over everything is His alone. He created all things and "by Him do all things consist." He had created the universe

and maintains everything in it order by the power of His own word. He is eternal in His Person and His existence. Without a beginning and without an end, He lives in an eternal "now" and has an orderly plan that He allows us to catch a glimpse of in the scriptures.

He is the Sovereign God who has the right to do what He wants, when He wants, with whoever He wants, for whatever purpose He wants. He knows who is willing to believe in Him and chooses to save them by His grace. He sets up kings and kingdoms and has the right to put them down. He appoints those who lead His people, and He knows who will obey His word and keep His laws. He knows everything and everybody, He chooses those who will do His will to represent Him in each generation. He saves us from hell and for heaven by His mercy and grace. He keeps those who trust Him from falling, and when they are in times of opposition and pressure to compromise, "He is near unto all that call upon Him."

Our God is a compassionate Lord who has experienced suffering Himself and is able to help those who pass through times of suffering because He has already been there Himself. He was troubled in His soul as He looked forward to the cross and all He would go through there when "He made His soul an offering for sin." He was troubled in His spirit as He thought of one who would betray Him and of the end of such a person. He was troubled in His body when He was on the cross in pain and physical agony bearing our sins that He might bring us to God. But then when speaking to those who belonged to Him by faith, He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

The holiness of God is a character trait of the One who said, "Be ye holy for I am holy." He is perfect in holiness. His law gave the standard of perfection that is consistent with His character and is the template of that which he desires in us. This righteous standard reveals our imperfection and sinfulness. It is "our schoolmaster to bring us to God," in our need and lack of righteousness. When we admit to that need and accept His gracious provision because of the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, we are granted the righteousness of the One who is our substitute.

As the children of Israel continued in their prayer of adoration and worship, they remembered events in their past and the unmistakable evidence of God's presence with them in their national history. We do well to review God's ways with us as we journey through life surrounded by temptations and snares from the world, the flesh and the devil. Like they said in their prayer, so we too know God to be a forgiving God who is willing to forgive those who confess their sin and forsake that which is wrong. As a gracious God, they, and we, know that we do not deserve the least of His mercies but His grace gives us that which we are helpless to get or do for ourselves. He is to be trusted because He is "faithful and just." There is nothing at all unfair about our God.

Those who prayed together in the street in Jerusalem were reminded of God's power to subdue their enemies and give them an inheritance. He delivered them by His power. He fed them by His power and gave them water by His power. He opened the way into the promised land by His power and made it possible for them to claim every place where they put their feet by His power. They were protected by His power from enemies and even disasters as long as they were willing to obey and serve Him.

God is a just God in His dealings with us and in His decisions and judgments. He allowed judgments to fall on His people to bring repentance and open the way to recovery to fellowship with Him. He is a patient God who gave warnings through prophets of coming judgment if there wasn't a return to Him by faith and obedience. He still is patient with us knowing that we are only frail, mortal men. He is consistent in keeping His promises even when there is opposition to His will. He keeps His covenants in spite of our failures. He can be called upon by anyone with a pure heart and is "ready to pardon." He is always true to His word.

People who hardened their necks:

In contrast to the wonders of God's person and work on behalf of His people, is the attitude and actions of those who He called to be His people. "To whom much is given, much is required" makes those who have been blessed with spiritual blessings as well as temporal blessings much more responsible to obey God and live by faith in Him, than those around us who really know nothing about God except through their senses. We have been given such privileges that when we take them for granted or treat them with disdain or dishonor, we are actually seeking to demean a holy God to being one who should do all this for us because we demand it. What dishonor! What disrespect! What a disgrace on our part!

Like those Jews in the past who finally faced up to their sins, we need to be reminded of who we are and where we came from. In the prayer of those people they faced themselves and their forbearers and saw themselves for what they really were. Willfulness and stubbornness are characteristics of the old nature with which we have been born. By nature, we want our own way in spite of what we have been taught by those

who want the best for us. Deceitfulness has become a part of the way of life in the world today, but this is not new. The Israelites and everyone else had the same character fault. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and is desperately wicked."

Disobedience to authority is bad enough, but disobedience to the Almighty Lord God is absolutely inexcusable. "They were disobedient" was a statement of fact in relations to the Israelites in the and their children knew it, but they also had to face their own disobedience as do we. To disobey God is to reject His right to be our Lord. Unthankful people have characterized every generation to this present moment. People accept every blessing as if we have a right to it, own it and got it for ourselves. "Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above..."

Today, as in the past, people and nations are covenant breakers. Covenants of marriage are broken. Covenants in business are broken. Covenants among nations are broken. Covenants God made with His people were broken by people but never by God. He keeps covenant. It is arrogance on the part of human beings that when we "dealt proudly" as they did in the past, we become stiff-necked, or "hard-necked," as did those people and refuse to listen to what God says, nor do what God wants. The results of such attitudes and behavior leads us into slavery to sin and because of sin. Then being law-breakers, unfaithful and wicked people becomes almost the normal way of life for those who ignore the Lord God of heaven. At least those in that day acknowledged, and affirmed that God was right and they were wrong, and were willing to sign an affirmation document to that effect. It is then that recovery can begin, fellowship can be restored, and the terms of a covenant relationship can again be in place between our Righteous God and His own people.

Nehemiah 9:31. *"Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God."*

OPEN CONFESSION.

They rise to their feet to show honor and respect.
They have been humbled, no longer harden their necks
Against God and His ways, His truth and His laws.
On the stairs in front of all the leaders to plead their cause
To God Himself, in open and frank confession -
Declaring that they as a nation had learned their lesson.
And now in humility and heart-felt contrition -
Have come to seek mercy and grace for a sinful nation.

We need to learn too, as we review our history -
That the blessings we have received are not a mystery -
But are provisions from God, who in His bountiful grace;
He kept us and fed us giving us this wonderful place
To live and serve Him as a people who found mercy -
But a terrible attitude has come upon us - we no longer serve Thee.
The idols of materialism, of existentialism and pride -
Have turned us from Thee, Father God, and we have no place to hide.

The review of assembly life from its inception until now -
Lets the newer generations learn where we came from and how
We are a unique company of people with a strong heritage,
That we need to remember and learn from experience and ourselves we gage -
And see what has happened over the last one hundred and ten years -
And the causes of our failures and weakness so that we will fear
The God who has cut covenant with people He did choose -
And for our part we will humble ourselves lest our testimony we loose.

History of a family has a real benefit to our children.
It gives continuity and respect to remember those before them.
The children never met most who are in the family tree -
But their place in their generation will help them to see
They are part of a group of people, who found God in the past,
And lived their lives in view of God so their heritage would last.
Now it has been passed on to the new generation that has arrived -
So, they can see how the family unit by God's grace has survived.

I review all alone the events and years of my life:
Where I came from; what I have done; how Linda became my wife.
And I consider with wonder, God's mercy and grace to me -
Allowing me to be a servant of His, and letting me to see

His hand in salvation as His Gospel I sought to preach -
And those He has saved; He has instructed me to teach.
I am not an important person; I'm limited in so many ways,
But I have learned through my own history, the glories of God's grace.

“O Lord God of heaven and earth and all that is in them: I have read this review made by people in the past, and how because of it, they covenanted with Thee again. If it is possible in some way, may I and my family, this assembly - yea even this departed nation, again experience Thy kindness, mercy and grace in recovering us to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 10

A BINDING AGREEMENT

By definition covenants are fixed and binding, so when the people of Israel made a "sure covenant," they were agreeing to the principles of the covenant God had made with the nation of Israel through Moses. The act of setting a "seal" to it meant that they were signing it with a written "Amen." That indicated the agreement of the people to what Ezra had prayed in his review of Israel's history before the Lord. The concern of the people to get back in fellowship with the Lord was what initiated this "sure covenant" as they testified to their intention to obey the Lord.

A review of the history of the Lord's dealing with us is one thing. To go back over and face our failures in contrast to God's faithfulness is quite another thing. It is then we have to humble ourselves in repentance and consider the consequences of our sin in the light of God's holiness. Sincerity is a good beginning, but wishful thinking does not bring reality in practice. Resolve and reality sound good together, but until there is an inward change of heart and character in a person, or an assembly, reality is still missing. There may be cosmetic changes that look good for awhile but they only cover the underlying problems that are hidden from public view.

The review of the character, the words and the covenants of God given by Ezra as the spiritual leader of the people, was in great contrast to the character, words and breaking of covenants by the people of God. There had been national covenants made by God with Abraham, Moses and David - which they had broken. The finishing of the wall was a high spot in their national life and they became conscious of God working with them to complete the project in spite of outward and inward opposition. As a result, they seemed to sincerely want to get back in a real covenant-relationship with Him. The reading of the scriptures and sincere prayer is fundamental to keeping in fellowship with God. We cannot rely on memories or past victories to give us power over sin and its consequences. It is God Himself who has to work in us to do His will and bring pleasure to Him.

We are blessed with being part of a new covenant made on the highest and best possible terms. God's covenant with us is made in "the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you." This covenant does not depend on human resolve, but on a righteous act of God in which "Christ died for us," and we died with Christ. Now the new birth has brought a new creation in Christ, with a divine nature of which we have been made partakers. A real, lasting covenant has been formed that is a reality now and forever.

In the binding agreement the Jews made with God, the signatories moved forward to sign as a public testimony to obey the terms of the covenant. Nehemiah stepped forward at the first one to sign. That would have been appropriate for the governor, and he was one whose sincerity and commitment was without question. Following him priests signed on behalf of their families as the representatives of the people before God. Probably Ezra had a family member sign for him as he was of a priestly family. Levites signed for their families as spiritual leaders. Chief leaders signed for their families as those who represented the business and government part of the nation. Then the people gave their verbal assent in the form of an oath to obey the terms of the covenant.

The commitment of the people bound them to the covenant principles as it was made first with God and Moses. The terms agreed on affected relationships [v.30], time [v.31] and resources [v.32-39]. By their nature, covenants are promises to be kept and the Jews of that day took steps to demonstrate their obedience to the covenant they had made with the Lord. In their relationships they committed to united families who feared God and were going to be separate from the idolatrous people around them. They agreed to separate themselves to the Lord and His law, and took an oath of commitment to be a separate people.

When separation is from the world and unto God, that means we fear God with reverential respect and honor. We are committed to obey His word in order to give a positive witness of God's grace to the world,

and we avoid idolatry and spiritual compromise in worship and service. When we turn away from God we lose any positive influence for our faith as a Christian and lose any spiritual prosperity we might have had, and even in some cases, moral and financial prosperity. When we leave the high ground of faith, we lose our reputation for honesty and integrity so that others are sure that we can be trusted.

The people of God that day took steps of obedience and commitment to marriage and to keeping the Sabbath Day. The step to testify to the place our Lord holds in our affections personally is demonstrated in our commitment to marriage "in the Lord." The second term of the covenant they agreed to was to the use of their time. Sabbath days were to be honored in spite of the culture among whom they lived. Convenience and profit is the nature of present-day use of time. Some are able to make time-and-a-half or double time on the Lord's Day, so they opt for work rather than worship. Work and worship have separate places in the lives of God's people. God is to come first in spite of our personal preferences, pleasures or advantages. The Lord's Day. The first day of the week for us is a day of remembrance of our Lord and showing His death; resurrection of our Lord; responsibility in giving our finances; revelation of His word through teaching and preaching; reviewing the work of the Lord and the value of our heritage in Christ to our families.

We are also to act responsibly with the resources we have been given. The Jews paid a tenth for the temple and the work of those associated with carrying on the work of worship and spiritual life. They were obligated to support the spiritual life of the nation with their resources. We too have a financial responsibility to support the work of the Lord with our resources. However, in the new covenant we have not been given a stated amount of obligation, but what we give is based on our degree of appreciation for what we have received. Giving to God is an on-going privilege of association with divine things in the work of the Lord. It is a privilege to participate in that which is eternal.

Some work is open and obvious like the service of the priests was our in the public view. Other service is unseen and unappreciated like cutting the wood needed to keep the altar-fire burning. We have been entrusted with money, land and property of different kinds to use as God intended. The Lord's work is supported by a separated people who have set their seal to keep covenant with our Lord and all that is associated with the maintenance and furtherance of that work. May we always be reminded of the words of our Lord to "seek first the kingdom of God" in all we do.

Nehemiah 10:30. *"And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons:"*

POSITIVE CHANGES.

*"We like each other, it may be love, surely this cannot be wrong!
And after all, God may save his soul! He seems so very strong!"*

Words like this often flow like water within a river's banks.

But if you agree and let her have her way, some day she'll not give you thanks -

Because no matter how or what people say, when a yoke is unequal -

Grief and regret; remorse and sorrow are almost always the sequel.

God has told us His ways and it is always best; He knows the end from the beginning.

If we submit to His wisdom and plans, He gives the strength to keep us from sinning.

God is the Source of all blessing in life, He sends the sun and the rain.

For benefits we received we can show our appreciation by giving from our goods to Him.

There are many ways open that I can give a portion of my time and treasure.

I find when I give; He gives more - pressed down, running over without measure.

The grace He supplies meets the needs of my soul; His grace I often need.

Out of the storehouse of His abundant supply, He my body and soul does feed.

He is faithful to me in every possible way; may I always be faithful to Him;

For in the little I pour into the cup in His hand; He in turn fills my cup to the brim.

There are principles and practices God expects from me, none are impossible to do.

Things that have been wrong, I must change now, before this day is through.

If there are instructions to give, I have overlooked; Lord, help me give them today.

May I make clear what God wants from me; give wisdom to me I pray.

The things I have grasped too tightly in hand; I open my hand to pass on

From God's bounty to me, the things I have and see that the will of the Lord be done.

In my work and worship, may I always honor my Lord, how great is His love to me.

*From my eyes and heart, may there come praise and worship today, that God's glory others
may see.*

"O my Father: today I am speaking in a place I have never spoken before. The subject of "Discipleship" is important to Thy work. Give me help to express Thy truth with compassion and grace - yet at the same time be faithful in the challenges people

need to hear. Please fill me and use me in ways that can bring the most honor and glory to Thee. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Nehemiah 11

THE HOLY CITY

For the first time the city of Jerusalem is called "the holy city." Even though it had a more glorious past when David and Solomon as well as other kings ruled there, the city is in a special way, sanctified in the midst of surrounding opposition and reproach. In the years before the people of Judah were taken into captivity in Babylon, Jerusalem was a vital, important city in the Middle East. King lived there, so it was a center of the seat of government. Its location among the surrounding nations was such that a lot of business was conducted there. More importantly, the temple Solomon had built was there and it had been, in the "glory days" of Solomon and some of the good kings, the center of the nation's spiritual life. But then because of spiritual departure, the whole city was reduced to ruins, without a temple and without walls. Strangely, even after Zerubbabel built the temple and fifty years later Ezra came and it was finally finished - and twelve years later Nehemiah came and the walls were built, people were not inclined to live in the city.

It is very easy to settle into a self-centered life, not caring nor interested in what happens to others as long I am able to maintain my own self-interests. Rural living tends to be less concerned about people apart from neighbors living close by. But the commission of our Lord Jesus Christ to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel," makes it necessary for us to leave our "comfort zone" and reach out to connect with people where they are - not just where we are. The gathering of the Lord's people in scriptural assemblies is essential for effective Christian testimony, "and so much the more as we see the day approaching."

A bunch of buildings without people is not a real city. Nehemiah knew this, and he also knew of the reticence of the people to leave their status-quo, their homes and their land to move into city living. But a gathering center needs an organized, disciplined community of people to regain and maintain an orderly life for the population as a whole. Nehemiah was the governor and he had identified Hananai and Hananiah as rulers of the city. In order to repopulate the city to where it could function as the center of national and spiritual life, people were needed who would move in. Only some "leaders" from areas around volunteered to live in the city.

The people had indicated their zeal for the word of God when it was read to them. They were aware of sin as a problem that had to be confronted, confessed and forsaken. And, they had separated from the worldly ties they had formed in some of their own families. They also were committed to God and His house - but only as it was convenient to them without the cost of being disliked by those who had no interest in the God of Israel.

When a need arises and there are none who want to commit to meeting that need, it is necessary for those who are effective leaders to evaluate the problem and come up with a suitable solution. It is not always popular with people when hard decisions have to be made. People can see the problem and will often say, "Why doesn't someone do something to fix it?" The leadership of God's assembly is often challenged and condemned by those who complacently look on as bystanders. They want solutions as long as nothing is expected of them.

The casting of lots, was a way God's will be made known to people in the Old Testament times right up to the beginning of the early church. Now with the whole canon of scripture at our disposal, we have in written words the revealed will of God. We don't need to vote for leaders among us because their qualifications have been described in written words in the Bible. As the Holy Spirit makes obvious those He has raised up, it is plain to us where authority in assembly life lies. God's expectation for a scripturally gathered assembly, and the functions for which it is responsible, is very clear.

One tenth of the people who lived in their own homes in villages and property around Judah, and those in the area allotted to the tribe of Benjamin, were designated by the casting of lots to move into Jerusalem. In a way it meant starting life over again living in a different way and different place. They likely knew they would be disliked by those who opposed the rebuilding of the city, the temple and finally the walls. It would be costly to leave their homes and move into the city. They wouldn't have the same independence they had in rural living because they would live close to other people, close to the temple and under pressure to have a closer adherence to the word of God.

There is a cost to obedience. There is a cost to responding to divine authority. There is a cost to living by faith. There is a cost to maintaining fellowship with God and His people. There is a cost to separation from

the world unto God. But compared to the cost our Lord paid to redeem us, save us, call us to Himself and make us children of God - any cost is really a privilege to pay.

There were those in Jerusalem whose attitude to the will of God was such that "they willingly offered themselves" realizing the will of God was much more important than their will. That same attitude impressed others who "blessed all the men" who volunteered to move into the city. They could see the difference in those who were willing and obedient to the Lord compared to those who moved by lot.

Some things cannot be hidden even though people may not make "a big deal" of their faith and obedience. When that attitude is real and consistent, the Lord's people recognize its value. So, when such people moved into the city, these people wanted to please God in spite of the changes, challenges and personal costs. Unity among the Lord's people is needed for effective living and testimony. Some will pay a higher cost than others, but both are dependent on each other. One group provides for the physical needs, and the other for the spiritual needs and security needed to maintain orderly life that pleases God.

Capable, active, committed, strong men joined together in unity to bring the city of Jerusalem to meet its potential and the expectations of the nation and God. In the city, was the temple where the worship of God was evident. It was there where the Lord dwelt in the midst of His people. Priests were "able men" doing the work of the Lord as overseers of the spiritual life of the nation. Levites who moved in were responsible for the outward business of the temple, and they began with "thanksgiving in prayer." Porters (guards) were responsible to ensure the safety and normal functioning of the temple. They needed to guard against a hard, heavy-handed approach to spiritual things that leads to isolation. They also had to guard against a free, liberal stance of "anything goes" that would have quickly eliminated the character of the temple and the city.

Balanced, moderate men are needed to maintain the worship, growth and safety of God's people. Then, like in Jerusalem, the spirit of praise and thanksgiving can be maintained among God's people. "The singers" led public praise in honoring God. The variety of people who moved into the city made it a vital society as the center of the nation in spiritual, social and business life. The king's representative would be able to testify to the consistency, order and effectiveness of a city following divine direction. Assemblies of God's people today maintain a similar and effective public testimony when the gifts are used effectively in coordinated unity.

Nehemiah 11:2. *"And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem."*

OFFERED THEMSELVES.

They left their homes; their places of inheritance; their comfort zone
The call was urgent; the need was great; they could meet the need
Others stayed where they were; supporting; fulfilling a different role
But each was important; God knew who to pick for His work.

Leaving the comfort of pastoral calmness; of peace and quiet
Into the city with noise, and people, and more people - travelers
On the road to eternity; needing what you have to give - yourselves
Not everyone will say "Thank you" - but you offered yourselves.

God delegates as He sees fit - the work is totally strange
You have never done this before - this work is inside
And others are there too; you've always worked alone
Now you must learn to work with others - under pressure.

The pressures of expectation - the proximity of people
The stigma of a country person living and working in a city
Feelings of inadequacy overwhelm you and you are afraid
But God is God: and you must learn to trust Him.

Your faith has always followed predictable paths
Now you can't see beyond the next step
In the past you could do what you wanted to
Your own personal skill now gives way to God's will.

Your time is not your own, there are matters concerning the people
There is business in God's house - you are it!
Take responsibility over the outward business
Let others do their work - it is different - offer yourself.

“Lord God, the business of this day awaits my best efforts. Give to Thy servant right words, right attitudes and right actions to fulfill Thy will. I feel so inadequate - but I trust Thee because I know Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 12

WHAT A DAY OF REJOICING!

Restoration is a time of rejoicing. The conclusion of a great work for God is a time of rejoicing. To see a work accomplished by united people in spite of serious obstacles is reason for great rejoicing. But uncontrolled enthusiasm without some order creates mass confusion and chaos that can deteriorate into nothing more than a noisy riot. Nehemiah and Ezra along with other leaders brought dignity and order to a great celebration, and yet did not quench the open expressions of joy among the people of God. At first the long lists of names of the priests and Levites was compiled to determine who should lead and the reason for their position in the grand parade.

In the historical context of the 100 years since the rebuilding started, there was an order developed that would remind people of the fact this was a work of long years. It is common for us to view history from our own view point, and the unfolding of events from the limitations of our own experience. True, there work of one hundred years could have been completed in a comparatively short time if it hadn't been for the fear of man, opposition and unnecessary caution due to lack of faith, but in spite of that, God had used His people to fulfill His purpose and it now was a time to rejoice in a way that would honor God. Four different lists of priests and Levites were likely made to determine who would lead in the dedication of the city that was restored, and to lead in worship at the temple.

Priests and Levites work was related to the spiritual life of the nation. That is the heart, the moral center of any people and/or in any culture. Without worship there is no meaningful reason for our existence except to make the best of a chance happening that brought us life. Without some objective that is higher than our own pleasure, life has at best only occasional experiences to offset the boredom of meaninglessness. It is important for us to value what has been passed on to us from spiritual leaders in the past. That serves to give us a perspective to our lives. Spiritual leaders in the present build on the foundations and efforts of those who have given us a legacy and a heritage of faith.

We are built upon the accomplishments of those before us, who built on that of those before them. Without such a transmission of truth and understanding, we would have no foundation for what we do in the present, and nothing to pass on to those who follow us. Many people who have been or will be affected by us, will never be known by us personally. But everyone is known by God as to who they are and what they have done, do, or will do. Knowing any influence for good and for God we can have in a positive way in their life, is enough to keep us committed to living for God.

A dedication of a completed work is a way of identifying the unique purpose for which has been done. To set apart a building, or in this case - the walls, the city and the temple for God, keeps its use clarified so the people will not expect to use it for just any reason. The place where the Lord's people gather is not used as an auction barn, a repair shop or an entertainment center - but for uses consistent with the purpose for which it was built. In the time of our Lord, He "cleansed the temple" because the Father's house was to be a house of prayer, not a place of business for "a den of thieves." David had left instructions concerning the use of the temple and how singing was to be done. A spiritual atmosphere is created when God's people come together in "the place of the name" to carry out spiritual practices consistent with the spiritual life of the assembly.

dedication of the work was a way of giving to God's people a possession for His purposes, His glory. The temple, the city and the wall were each for a different purpose - but all with a divine purpose. Each one was His and each use was important to the uses of the others. There was safety and security for God's people from the wall and the gates. There was family, and community unity maintained, and united fellowship in the city by which there was strength and common good promoted. The spiritual and moral life of the people were made more effective by the temple as a place where God's people came together to worship and praise His. There they would see beyond daily activity to the big picture of God living with His people in the past and future, and the blessing of God with them in the present.

The people came to the dedication and we learn the value of worship. Worship unites God's people. It is in worship spiritual things predominate in our minds and emotions. The future becomes real and important in light of the accomplishment of a finished work. Hope is stimulated and enthusiasm for eternal things becomes real to us as the most important objective of our lives. Full hearts and praise go together. Thanksgiving to the Lord comes as a result of true praise. Audible expressions of appreciation indicate the

thoughts of our hearts toward God and toward other people. The coordinated words of praise and thanksgiving are understandable by singing in tune with others. When we say the same words at the same time in the same tone, what would have been only noise without a tune, becomes beautiful and God-honoring.

There had to be purity among the priests and Levites first before they could purify the people, and then after that they could symbolically go to the wall and the gates a carry out a purifying and dedicating act that was observed by those looking on. People would know when they walked through the gates in the wall into the city of Jerusalem, and then go on to the temple, that this was a set apart place, dedicated to God, His will, His word and His work for the blessing of His people.

Public worship at the dedication included responsive singing from two large choirs that could be heard in the city and even beyond the walls. The two choirs went up on the top of the wall singing as they went and marched around the wall in different directions until they met ear the temple in the northeast corner of the city. Ezra was at the head of one group and Nehemiah followed the other group. Once the reproach that was over the people was lifted at the completion of the wall after one hundred years since the return of the exiles began, there was reason for thanksgiving. The sounds of thanksgiving and praise was heard by the Lord's people - and by those outside who had opposed the rebuilding of God's city and house.

When God's people come together, things are to be decently and in order under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Overseers know what is appropriate for an event or a meeting of the saints. They need to plan ahead so there is no confusion nor contention when the event occurs. Joy is the result of God's work being done in the way He intends. The singers and the gatekeepers had their roles identified and they would know where they should be a what they were to do without any mix-up. Apparently, the choirs sang responsively when they met. Likely one group would sing a line of a psalm and the other group would sing the next line. The impact of such singing is very impressive to the listeners, and has the power to evoke worship from the hearers as well as the participants. Perhaps there would be a part of the singing that would join both choirs together in a climax of coordinated words that would rise higher and louder as it concluded. However, they did it, there was "great joy" among all the people of God as praise ascended to the Lord.

There where the choirs met near the temple, priests then offered sacrifices at the house of God so there was both sight and sound as the God of heaven was honored. Godly order keeps the Lord's people within the bounds of scripture, and avoids extemporaneous expressions that are merely ecstasy or fleshly emotion being expressed in confusion. "Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" have a biblical basis, and are easily understood as to the words and message being conveyed. The sounds of musical instruments did not overwhelm the words of worship the singers expressed. There are those who "make music" today but the words are obscure and hard to hear as the instruments lead the tune. What is old is not wrong when it comes to the praise and worship of God's people.

The worship, praise, thanksgiving and joy of God's people moved them to respond to the obvious needs of the temple, the priests and the Levites who served on their behalf. The response was that of giving their portion each day to meet the needs. When we give of our substance that of which "God has prospered" us, there is joy in the sacrifice of giving. It is an evidence of appreciation that, instead of being a grudging responsibility, it is a great privilege of expressing thanks for God's grace to us. Such times of holy consecration and dedication are not forgotten as we look back in our experience as children of God. What joy it gives at the present as well, and it stirs our hearts in anticipation of the great joy when God's children all gather at home with the Lord and begin to sing together in harmony our praises to the Lamb.

Nehemiah 12:43. *"Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."*

O HAPPY DAY.

Two companies of singers loudly singing God's praise
One going each direction on the wall recently raised
Ezra with one group, Nehemiah with the other
The sound of praise hymns getting louder and louder
Until they finally all arrived at the house of God
And the sound of singing beyond the city walls was heard
A day of recovery was a day to rejoice
To the glory of God, they sang with one voice.

There is something very special that is hard to explain
When God's people rejoice together at the sound of God's name

Their hearts need expression and so when joined together in song
Each one singing in praise to God, yet all together as one
It is affecting to the hearers and singers alike
Joy comes when the spirits are lifted and faces are bright
At the thought of God's grace, marvelous as it is
We experience its blessing and to our God we give praise.

It is a happy day of rejoicing when God's people all share
A time of fellowship on the journey with those who care
That the Lord has preserved us in ways beyond our thought
And we lift our voice to praise God for what He has wrought
O happy day of rejoicing as when in God's house we sing
Our thoughts of the Savior and what His cross-death did bring
To us who were lost but now as children of the King
United in song, worship and praise as to the cross we cling.

It will be a happy day when the saints of God will as one rise
To meet our Lord at His coming at the great gathering in the sky
And perhaps a song will be started as we rejoice in our redemption
And we think of all it cost Him when He bled for our salvation
It will be a happy day when all the saints in heaven sing
Unto Him who loved and washed us in His blood to make us clean
And fit us for the glory of living in the house of God forever
Our songs of praise unite us now, and there nothing can us sever.

“Father, today we are going to worship and praise Thee in our remembrance of Christ. Fill Thy servant with suitable thoughts to express, songs of praise to sing and useful words of exhortation and salvation to pass on. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nehemiah 13

FAILED LEADERSHIP

The reading of the word of God is essential to the life of an assembly of God's people, as well as to each individual. The truth of God is given for instruction, information and control as we live from day to day through this world that has no desire for God. But the reading of the scriptures has to be linked with a desire to obey God by applying the truth of God to our conduct and convictions by which we live. We can be knowledgeable of scriptural truth and not be practitioners of eternal life. It is possible to know the truth, but not make it our own. "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also, wisdom, and instruction, and understanding." Truth that we know but do not practice condemns us.

When the word of God was read in Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day, there was no question as to the fact that God's people were to be a people separated to God and from the ungodly. They had been taught the responsibility of the people to provide for those who served God in the temple. Commerce was to cease at sundown on Friday and not to begin until sundown on Saturday. Forbidding marriages between believers and unbelievers had been made plain. The responsibility of leaders, especially the priests, to follow biblical practices themselves before expecting others to do the same, was made obvious.

It had been made unmistakably clear that those who practiced evil should never come into the assembly of God. People of Moab and Ammon in particular were mentioned because even though they were descendents of Lot the nephew of Abraham, they opposed Israel right from the time they came to the promised land. Anything that caters to the flesh, has no place in the house of God or among God's people. God's people are expected to take God's word seriously. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment - and reveals truth and the Person of Christ to us through reading and practicing divine truth.

There are biblical principles to be practiced and plain doctrine to be applied, that assemblies must adhere to no matter what other religious groups may practice. The laws of the land even have to take subservience to the long established and proven laws of God. God's laws are universal and apply to every culture and nation. They are laws that relate to personhood, not merely to the functioning of society.

Nehemiah was obligated to the king of Babylon and had to fulfill those obligations even though his heart was in Jerusalem with the people of God. The Jews had wanted to have the word of God read, and had indicated they intended to follow it. But what people say, and what they do, are often quite different. Enthusiasm is not conviction. Words and actions do not always mean the same thing. The word of God in the heart is needed for obedience and commitment to truth. Positions held, and effective leadership are often very different. So Nehemiah was gone, things went back to the way they were before he first came.

It is hard to understand that the high priest who would participate in the building of the wall (although he didn't finish the gate by putting bolts and bars in place) and sanctified it as well as priests themselves, would be willing to make an apartment for an enemy in the temple. But that is what Eliashib did. That place that had been set apart for holy things, was desecrated by an enemy of God. Something was seriously wrong with that priest. He had his own agenda which included alliance with Tobiah. Likely he thought Nehemiah was too strict and so took a whole new direction in leadership after Nehemiah left. Without consideration of the effect such an action would have on others, he did what he wanted.

To defy God and His word by substituting that which pleases one's self or other people, is an affront to divine authority and leads to serious consequences among the people of God. The limitations of divine order are for our blessing and fruitfulness. To remove such limits, opens the door to sensual, secular and evil practices that are for the pleasure of the flesh, not for the glory of God.

The provisions for those Levites and singers who served in the temple had diminished to the extent those servants had to leave their work for God and go back to farming to provide for their families. When support for the work of the Lord dries up and there is no provision made for those who further the Gospel, then the commission to preach the Gospel is affected, and the assembly becomes powerless and unhappy. Once one area of compromise is accepted, others follow. The Sabbath became just another business day and the things of God were ignored in the interest of making money. The first day of the week is unique because it is the day of the *resurrection* of our Lord. As He was "raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" - eternal life. The first day of the week is a day of *revelation* of divine truth. John gave us a lot of important things to learn, know and practice as he wrote on the Lord's Day. It is also a day of *remembrance*. The Lord's people come together on the first day of the week to remember our Lord Jesus Christ and all He means to us. The first day of the week is a day of *review*. We show the Lord's death until He comes again. There is a special *responsibility* to lay aside finances to give as an offering to God on the first day of the week. *Recollection* of divine purposes by the *reading* of the word of God was done on the first day of the week.

These biblical practices we read about in the scriptures were not just for the past. They are for us to practice today. Personal pleasures were not the reason for keeping the Sabbath. In a sense, we have unique privileges in which to be engaged on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, as we honor Him. To do our own pleasure without considering what is His desire, indicates a spiritual lack. Either there is no appreciation for Him because there is no spiritual life, or the attractions of the world, the flesh and the devil have claimed our occupation - maybe even the desires of our hearts. Isaiah 58 verses 13 and 14 give us insight as to how the Lord looks at His "holy day."

How strange it seems to be that soon after Nehemiah had gone, the people either forgot their commitment to God, and the great joy they had at the dedication of the wall, or thought that Nehemiah had been too strict in his leadership. Likely no one stood against the high priest, Eliashib when he allowed Tobiah to have a place in the temple. The influence of unequal yoke in family ties does not fade away to where it does not have an effect for evil. "Evil men and seducers" cannot be trusted but will "wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Nehemiah knew when he came back to Jerusalem that something had to be done quickly. His prayer was that the work done would be preserved and the conditions for fellowship with God would be able to be restored. Righteousness restored brings the Lord's people back to where they can be effective for the Lord again. When departure takes hold of people there is no reason to wait hoping for the wrongs to right themselves. That will never happen. Action has to be taken to right the wrongs.

Nehemiah went right to those responsible: the rulers and the nobles of Judah and rebuked them, but also told them the steps to be taken for correction. Then he took action himself and personally threw all of Tobiah's things out of the temple, and he personally made sure the rulers and the guards were all back to their stations. The duty of providing for those engaged in the service of God, was again established, and the storehouse was again filled to meet the needs of the Levites. It is possible for us to get careless about our responsibilities by simply putting off what needs to be done now. The habits we form in meeting our obligations will hopefully become a part of our lives that we do as regularly as eating meals and paying our bills when they are due.

Even though the ruined walls had been rebuilt and the city repopulated, the testimony of God's people to those around had been ruined. What was not seen physically was obvious by the unfaithful attitude toward God and His law. The Sabbath had been broken and even unbelievers from far away on the coast took advantage of making money off of God's people on the day that was supposed to be set aside for holiness. So, Nehemiah dealt with that by having the city gates closed and barred on the Sabbath. Those who sought

to test his resolve by setting up business just outside the walls were soon stopped because they recognized his authority.

Those to whom God has delegated authority need to be committed to use that authority when necessary but not abuse it. Firmness, seriousness, and fairness are needed when rebuking and correcting. It is possible to be too lenient or too hard. Correction of that which is wrong and the establishing of precedents to be followed is the objective when dealing with those who are careless about divine things. Some may only submit outwardly without convictions as to the right or wrong of a matter. That may be the best we can expect from immature people. Hopefully the time will come when they can see the rightness of a matter for themselves.

There was a further matter that had to be addressed when Nehemiah came back from Babylon. That which had undermined the testimony, the spirituality, the character and even the existence of the nation itself - the marriage of believers with unbelievers was happening again. One of the high priest's grandsons was son-in-law to Sanballat, the enemy of God's people. The example of Solomon and what followed his unequal yokes was given as a warning to the Jews. That action threatened the whole nation's existence and brought tragic consequences for generations following that wrong and willful action of a wise king.

Sin has to be recognized and dealt with no matter how painful and difficult it may be. Wise people learn from the mistakes of others as to what to do and not do. The dangers were there and the unfolding pattern of departure had made its way into the families of the Israelites. Intact family units are the key to good national life. Success or failure can happen depending on how parents teach and lead their children. Delegated authority (headship) has been given by God to government leaders, assembly elders and the heads of households. They are "ordained" - appointed by God. The disintegration and/or dysfunction of families, have to be faced and corrected, else the consequences will be felt by everyone.

The four prayers of Nehemiah in this final chapter show his concern and commitment to deal with the problems with urgency. Nehemiah's effective leadership provides lessons for those who lead God's people today. His purpose was clear and precise right at the beginning of his call. God's will, was his motivation. He was also an honest man who spoke clearly without any ambiguity so that everyone knew what he meant when he spoke. He committed himself to living above reproach and was conscious of God and he took everything to God in prayer.

Nehemiah 13:30-31. *"Thus I cleansed them from strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; and for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good."*

IMPORTANT CHANGES.

The house of God is where God dwells
Among His own people on earth.
It is not a hotel or just a place of convenience -
Where God dwells is of inestimable worth.
To let a man, take the place of God
Is an insult of the most serious kind.
To think we can bring man up or God down
Happens when blind men lead the blind.

God has His way of supplying His servants,
They are not men who are paid by the hour.
God's plan is for them to be freely supported
By a portion of the provision that is ours.
It is a simple plan but it works quite well
For those who can count from one to ten.
We set aside an agreed on reasonable amount
And pass it on to make provision for them.

There are days when we work and apply our efforts
To meet all the needs in life that arise.
We must remember God wants us not to forget
There is a time and a place where we bring praise.
It is important to Him, and it should be to me
To join with others in that meeting place.
There in the place that has been chosen by Him,
He meets us and we remember His grace.

The things that appeal to my natural flesh

Are not things that can please God.
To do what I want and then ask God to bless
May soon bring on me His chastening rod.
It is important to consider before taking an action;
Is this decision I am making in God's will?
To do things God's way will bring the greatest satisfaction
And His purposes in His way I can fill.

“O Gracious God, may I this day be found properly doing Thy will in Thy house in an honorable way that can bring glory to Thee. Mat the service we are called to here be such that those to whom we minister in the Gospel, hear and believe. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”