

BUILDING THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM



Gleanings From The Book Of Nehemiah

By: Joseph van Loon

"When the persons before mentioned did not desist from their supplications and my own conscience made me somewhat uneasy, even in my weakness, because I saw the great hunger and need referred to, then I surrendered myself soul and body to the Lord, and committed myself to His grace, and commenced in due time, according to the contents of His holy Word, to teach and to baptise, to till the Vineyard of the Lord with my little talent, ***to build up His holy city and temple and to repair the tumble down walls.***"

*from "The Complete Writings of Menno Simons"
page 672, In Reply to Gellius Faber.
Herald Press Scottsdale PA 1984*

Foreword.

There are several “Leadership” books to be read on Nehemiah’s exploits in building the walls of Jerusalem which depict a courageous leader of the people of God in his day. These are good books and worthy to be read.

Many sermons have been preached that extol Nehemiah for his faithful work for the people of God who were returned from the seventy years captivity. Those sermons too, commend Nehemiah for his courageous and untiring labour of love for the people of God.

Joseph van Loon did something with the Book of Nehemiah that I have not seen in the many other books and sermons on this excellent Book. He makes The Book of Nehemiah come alive with practical recommendations for our day and time for us as individuals, for our families, and for our congregations.

Joseph’s grasp of the necessity of maintaining one’s salvation as opposed to the “Faith alone” doctrine comes through clearly in this engaging book. The necessity of the church is clearly held forth as opposed to the increasing individualism of our day.

You will find reading this book not only interesting, but edifying for your own life, for your family, and for the church of God.

May God use this book to bring glory, not to Nehemiah, and not to van Loon (for he does not seek it), but to God.

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Montezuma GA.

Preface.

I am always encouraged when reading the Scriptures, they are “my daily bread”, a portion of what I see as being part of the “give us day by day our daily bread” that Jesus taught us in His model prayer. Mind you some of it, this “daily bread” is easier to digest than other pieces of it, but all of it is nourishing to our souls and eternal well being even though at times we may think it quite unpalatable because we do not want to give up the “sweet things” of the world. Is that not somewhat like our physical well being which requires us to have a balanced diet day by day? The scriptures can provide a balanced diet on a day by day basis for our spiritual well being. Do you want to be nourished in your soul and have that eternal well being? If you do, then partake of your own daily portion of the Word of Life offered freely to all in the Scriptures.

Sometime ago as I was partaking of the Word of Life offered in the scriptures in the book of Nehemiah it struck me that there were some very powerful lessons to be learned there and it is my sincere desire that by sharing some of these thoughts with you that you too may be blessed and encouraged in your building on the foundation that is Jesus Christ and help to make secure the walls around your own Jerusalem.

As you journey through this life and seek to build and protect your faith you will encounter difficulties of many sorts but through it all let the words from scripture be your comfort, knowing that our God is with us, in and through all things, as He was in Nehemiah’s time.

Isaiah 41:10 *“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness”*

And let us also remember that He is the One who creates and builds all Psalm 51:18 *“Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion: build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.”*

*Joseph van Loon.
June 2005
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Gleanings From Nehemiah.

Chapter 1

An Introductory Overview.

When we read Nehemiah we read the true story of a man of God who not only served his earthly king but most importantly served His Heavenly King. Because of his faithful and obedient service he became a man through whom the great blessings of God flowed, not so much for himself but, for the people that he loved and cared for - God's people. His example can be a great blessing to us personally, our families, fellowships, and to all of God's people, if we but heed or take notice of the underlying principles in all of Nehemiah's actions. Like Nehemiah we need to not only obey our earthly masters, governments etc. but most importantly obey our heavenly King, Jesus Christ, if we desire to reap the benefits of God's blessings in this life and the next. As we endeavour to live this way we will have conflict and it is for this we need to prepare as Nehemiah did.

This book of the Bible is one which gives us an account of God's people in Old Testament times but at the same time has many lessons for us, if we will but hear the word of God with an open and willing heart and then trust His word and obey it. We are God's New Testament people but all of scripture, including the Old Testament, is given to us for inspiration, encouragement, exhortation & instruction, let us not fail to heed God's unchanging word. Let it be our earnest prayer that as we study the book of Nehemiah over the next few chapters that all of us may learn from it ways to serve our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ better and thus become servants to and for His people as He was.

As we read the book of Nehemiah I hope that, with me, you will be able to see that there is a pattern in which the restoration of Jerusalem and God's people occurred. God is a God of order, not chaos, and we need to follow God's order to be victorious in our Christian life.

Let us consider our own personal life in Christ, our homes, families and fellowships to be like Jerusalem, a city in a land of people that do not love God or His people, and we, who dwell in those homes, belong to those families and fellowships, are God's people or would desire to be. The people of Nehemiah's time were not perfect nor always obedient to their heavenly King and if we are totally honest with ourselves we are no different to them. Hopefully and prayerfully in this book of Nehemiah we can see a pattern that we can adapt to help us become more obedient to Him and keep the world out of our Jerusalem and our lives by building and maintaining spiritual walls. Yes, we do have to live in the world but that does not mean that we have to let the world live in us. As we study Nehemiah let us not be surprised at how God brings about His desires for His people, all the plans are in His hand and they are always perfect even if we cannot see them clearly. What we need to do is to listen to His voice - that small, still voice in our heart - and follow Him who alone is worthy of being followed and emulated.

Without going into great detail let us now look at the pattern of the restoration of Jerusalem and God's people as carried out by Nehemiah under the hand and direction of God. Let us again remind ourselves as we go through this study to look for the many important and valuable lessons that are contained in this portion of scriptures, as in all scriptures, not just for us individually but for us as families, fellowships, and, through it all, remember to humble ourselves and submit ourselves to Jesus Christ in all things as He submitted to His heavenly Father in all things.

Philippians 2:8

“And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Firstly - Nehemiah was informed of the very sad state of affairs of Jerusalem and those of God's people who lived there. Nehemiah was so burdened (upset) for this situation that he wept and mourned for many days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 1:1-11

“The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, ²That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and *certain* men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. ³And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province *are* in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also *is* broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

⁴And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, ⁵And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: ⁶Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. ⁸Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, *If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: ⁹But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. ¹⁰Now these *are* thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. ¹¹O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to*

fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.”

God answered his prayers, but it took time, the scriptures show us that it was four months. Chislev was the month in which Nehemiah was informed of how things were in Jerusalem, this was the ninth month of the Hebrew year, (Nehemiah 1:1) and it was in the month of Nisan that God provided the opportunity for Nehemiah to place his burden before the King, this was the 1st month of the next Hebrew year (Nehemiah 2:2) In this way God answered Nehemiah’s prayers - sometimes God does the same for us by bringing someone into our lives that is able to help us through our difficulties, at other times it may be that He does this through His Holy Spirit either way it is God’s leading.

Secondly - You will notice that Nehemiah did not do anything but wait, and no doubt prayed, until after God had provided him with an answer to his prayers, only then he started out on his God appointed task and travelled to Jerusalem, the place that God called him to.

Nehemiah 2:1-10.

“And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, *that wine was* before him: and I took up the wine, and gave *it* unto the king. Now I had not been *beforetime* sad in his presence. ²Wherefore the king said unto me, Why *is* thy countenance sad, seeing thou *art* not sick? this *is* nothing *else* but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, ³And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? ⁴Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

⁶And 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. ⁷Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; ⁸And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which *appertained* to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

⁹Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. ¹⁰When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard *of it*, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.”

The message in this should be clear to us: **Wait Upon the Lord!** Go where He calls and directs us, which may not necessarily be where we thought we should be going. How often do we rush in without seeking God’s will? Sometimes we think we know just the right answer or solution and virtually say to God: “Step aside Lord, I can handle this!” only to find ourselves falling flat on our face because we have stepped outside of God’s will.

Once in Jerusalem Nehemiah did not announce his plans, there were people there who would oppose him. He quietly looked around and evaluated the situation carefully.

Nehemiah 2:11-18

“So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. ¹²And 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. ¹³And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. ¹⁴Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but *there was* no place for the beast *that was* under me to pass. ¹⁵Then went I up in the

night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and *so* returned. ¹⁶And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told *it* to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.

¹⁷Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. ¹⁸Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for *this* good *work*.”

The lesson for us is: Do not announce your plans before they are formulated. So often the plans we formulate at first seeing a problem have to be changed because when we thoroughly examine the situation we become aware of other circumstances that also need to be taken into account. There is a saying that “fools rush in where angels fear to tread”

Let us not be like fools as Proverbs so aptly instruct us:

Proverbs 1:7

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Proverbs 3:35

“The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools.”

Proverbs 12:15

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”

Proverbs 12:23

“A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness.”

Then, and then only, when Nehemiah had seen what needed to be done, did he inform those of his OWN people of God's directions for the restoration of their homes and their families.

Nehemiah 2:17-20

“Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

¹⁸Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for *this* good work. ¹⁹But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard *it*, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What *is* this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? ²⁰Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.”

Seek the assistance of others of like mind! That does not mean finding people that agree with the way we want things done but rather brothers and sisters who are likeminded as stated in:

1 Corinthians 1:10 “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*”

Those of like mind are most likely to have the same goals in view that you do. Remember the scriptural teachings that “in a multitude of counsellors is safety!”

Proverbs 11:14

“*Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.*”

Proverbs 15:22

“*Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.*”

Thirdly - The rebuilding of the walls started. Walls are like fences, they are meant to keep enemies outside so those inside can live in safety. They also keep those inside from straying unintentionally into enemy territory. We can think of sheep in a paddock, if there is no fence they can wander off and being sheep without a shepherd they will do exactly that, but also if there is no fence then the enemy can get into the paddock and steal the sheep, hurt them or even kill them. The enemy can be foxes, dogs or even people - this is in the physical realm. We have a similar situation in the spiritual realm where if we have no walls or fences the enemy will get in and attack and destroy our desire for God and His ways.

We need to realise and identify those things of and in the world that are our enemy and threaten our live in Christ Jesus and keep them out. Whilst most of the things in the world are of a material nature, once we allow them into our lives they can become destructive to our spiritual nature - the desire for and accumulation of material wealth, for example, can and will draw many away from godly pursuits and in that sense it is thus an enemy that begins in the natural realm but ends up destroying the spiritual. We may be attracted to the lifestyle of others which seems very pleasing to our flesh but is so destructive to our spiritual wellbeing and often leads to a kind of spiritual death to the things of God. There are probably many more examples you can think of yourself or perhaps even see in your own life.

We need to build walls around our Jerusalem where we, our families and fellowships dwell to keep them safe in Jesus. Chapters 3 through to 6 describe how the wall was built and in that there are many lessons for us too, ones that we will look at later. It is suggested that you read Chapters 3 to 6 and see how the people worked together for the good of all - and also see that they had opposition, the enemy tried to stop them but did not succeed because they followed God's directions. Likewise we need to expect problems, such as opposition and derogatory comments, and be prepared for them. Christians today have enemies aplenty, we do not have to go look-

ing for them, they will find us, and we need to be on our guard at all times.

Luke 6:22-23

“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. ²³Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.”

2 Peter 3:17

“Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.”

Fourthly - Nehemiah under God's direction. Nehemiah 7:5 “And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein,” called the Israelites together into an assembly and had Ezra the priest read the Book of the Law of Moses to them. Nehemiah 8:1-3. “And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that *was* before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. ²And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. ³And he read therein before the street that *was* before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* unto the book of the law.”

When the people heard the Book of the Law read to them they recognized their sin in not obeying God and living according to His word, they acknowledged/admitted/confessed their sinful, disobedient life and repented.

Nehemiah 9:1-2 “Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sack-clothes, and earth upon them. ²And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.”

What they heard read to them, which was God’s written word, would be like us hearing the Scriptures read to us and/or reading it ourselves. The Scriptures should cause us to recognize our sin in not living God’s way, it should lead us to acknowledge our disobedient life and repent. If it does not are we then not in rebellion to God?

Fifthly - and lastly but no less important they made a covenant with God to follow Him. Nehemiah. 10:29 “They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;”

A covenant is a contract, treaty or undertaking we make with another person, promising that we will do certain things, and that we will do whatever we have promised, no matter how hard or difficult it gets, the other person also agrees to do certain things. The covenant that we can make today is to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we do that by acknowledging our sinful ways, repenting of them, being baptised and asking Jesus to come into our lives as Lord and Saviour and then to follow and obey Him all the days of our lives in all of His word.

May each one be blessed as you read and ponder on the scriptures and seek to follow our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Who alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. (John 14:6)



Gleanings From Nehemiah.

Chapter 2

Prayer and Fasting.

In the previous chapter we had a brief overview of the book of Nehemiah and just to refresh our memories a very short resume of the five points we are going to be looking at in the ensuing chapters, Lord willing.

It is our prayer that as we go through this brief study that each of us may gain a deeper insight into the very valuable lesson we can draw from this book of the Old Testament and make application to our lives from the insights so gained as the Lord directs.

- 1** Nehemiah was informed of the very sad state of affairs of Jerusalem and those of God's people who lived there. Being burdened for this situation he wept and mourned for many days, fasting and praying before God.
- 2** Nehemiah waited, and no doubt prayed, until God had provided him with an answer to his prayers and then started out on his God appointed task.
- 3** The rebuilding of the walls started.
- 4** Nehemiah under God's direction called the Israelites together into an assembly and had Ezra the priest read the Book of the Law of Moses them.
- 5** They made a covenant with God to follow Him.

As we read chapter 1 of Nehemiah we see that the events related here occurred in Shushan which was the ancient winter capital of the kings of Persia, it was the place where Daniel was during the reign of Belshazzar. [Daniel 8:2 “*And I saw in a vision; and it came to pass, when I saw, that I was at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in a vision, and I was by the river of Ulai.*”] Esther, Mordecai and Haman were also in this place as related in the book of Esther. Shushan was located in the south western area of present day Iran.

The writer is Nehemiah himself and in verse 2 he shows his concern for his people, to use our language, his brothers and sisters in the faith. His enquiry was about the welfare of his people, the Israelites who had come out of captivity some years earlier and returned to Jerusalem, no doubt his concern was for both their spiritual and physical well being.

This is a point which often escapes us, if we claim to be God’s people, a brotherhood of believers, than we are to enquire after the welfare of our brothers and sisters in the Lord as instructed in: 1 Peter 2:17 “*Honour all men. Love the brotherhood (of believers.) Fear God. Honour the king.*”

Once Nehemiah had inquired after his people in Jerusalem and their plight had touched his heart this is how he responded: Nehemiah 1:4 “*And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.*”

Nehemiah was living in comfort and luxury but did not forget his people but in spirit visited them and looked upon their distress as did Moses in regard to his people during their time in Egypt (Acts 7:23) It certainly was not a matter of “out of sight - out of mind” for them. I wonder how it is with us in relation to our brothers and sisters in the Lord whom we are not able to visit physically because of distance etc. Is our mind so focused on ourselves that we forget them? Do we “weep and mourn” for our brothers and sisters who find themselves in circumstances not as congenial as ours, do we even care enough to think about them? Have you not

“been there” yourself? Where is our love for the brethren, we are directed by scriptures to apply that love without discrimination - Love thy neighbour as thyself! Look how Nehemiah responded when he heard of the plight of his people - his brotherhood. He lived in ease and luxury in the court of the King but it did not close his heart to his people - What about your circumstances, have you become so comfortable and complacent where you are spiritually and materially wise that you do not have a concern for others? Or do you perhaps limit your concern to fit in with your own perceived needs and desires? Do you love your neighbour only when it suits you?

Should we not instead behave like Nehemiah in relation to our brothers and sisters in Christ when we hear or know of their situation or do we behave like the world and say, “I’m sorry to hear they are not doing so well” and then continue on without further considering them? Is this perhaps one of those situations where we need to “walk in our brother’s or sister’s shoes” and experience their life?

Nehemiah did take the plight of his brothers and sisters very seriously, indeed we have recorded in scriptures his humble and reverent address to God in Nehemiah 1:5-11. *“And said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments: ⁶Let Thine ear now be attentive, and Thine eyes open, that Thou mayest hear the prayer of Thy servant, which I pray before Thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel Thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against Thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have dealt very corruptly against Thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which Thou commandedst Thy servant Moses. ⁸Remember, I beseech Thee, the word that Thou commandedst Thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: ⁹But if ye turn unto Me, and keep My commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of*

the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name there. ¹⁰Now these are Thy servants and Thy people, whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy great power, and by Thy strong hand. ¹¹O Lord, I beseech thee, let now Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servant, and to the prayer of Thy servants, who desire to fear Thy name: and prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man”

It strikes me that this prayer is the prayer of a humble man, one who is willing to acknowledge his covenant God and his own sinfulness. We would do well to take note of the method or form of this petition to the Almighty Lord God. It starts off with praising Him for His power and might in much a similar manner as the ‘model prayer’ taught by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 6.

Nehemiah then briefly states whom (or what) he is petitioning for and, before he goes further, confesses the sins of his people and himself. (In the book of Daniel Chapter 9 we can find a very similar style of prayer and it would be worthwhile to read it as well) When I read both Nehemiah’s and Daniel’s prayers I am reminded of Psalm 24:3-5 “*Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? [4] He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. ⁵He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.”*

It seems to me that verse 4 above is crucial to our coming before an all Holy, Almighty God if we seek His answer to our prayers and it is obvious that Nehemiah thought it essential to confess his sins and acknowledge the sinfulness of his people before stating his petition. Whilst the prayer of Nehemiah, as shown in scriptures, is only short we must not take it to mean that it was his only prayer. Nehemiah 1:4 clearly states that he “*sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.*” We need to consider doing likewise in our prayer life if we are truly concerned about a situation. A quick trip to our

prayer closet is not the answer although it may ease our conscience for a short while.

Nehemiah's prayer is to the point and deals with the essentials of the situation, maybe there is a lesson in that for us too. How often do we "waffle on" instead of stating the essentials? This verse also shows that Nehemiah fasted, and if we look at scriptures we can gain some insight into the why, how and when of fasting, which is a subject on its own. (Daniel 9:3, Joel 2:12, Matthew 6:16 & 18, Luke 2:37, Acts 10:30, 13:3, 14:23 and more importantly the example of Jesus Himself when He went into the desert for forty days and nights - read Luke 4.)

There is so much more that we can draw from those portions of scripture but it is rather my desire to have you ponder upon those scriptures for yourself and see what the Lord has to say to you personally in this area of prayer and fasting for the needs of yourself, your family and your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Perhaps the following points may be of assistance in starting you to consider this often neglected area of brotherly love keeping in mind 1 Peter 1:22 "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:*"

Points to Ponder.

- 1] In what way would you show your love when you hear a brother or sister is experiencing hardship or going through a painful experience?
- 2] If you were experiencing that hardship or painful experience how would you want your brothers and sisters to respond to you?
- 3] How would you remind yourself to turn to God in prayer when you experience disappointment or know of a brother or sister who is in that situation?

May the God of all mercies be merciful to us and, as we consider the slightly amended prayer of Francis of Assisi, may we be instruments of His mercy and peace to our brothers and sisters because the walls around our Jerusalem will have an effect on them too. “No man is an island unto himself” is an old saying and that also applies to our relationships in the body of Christ. Yes we do need to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12) but it is best done in the setting of the brotherhood of believers where we can both receive and give support and also very importantly work together for our own good and the good of all. We are told to: “...exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Hebrews 3:13.

As we study Nehemiah’s story we will be able to see that this is the manner in which the walls of Jerusalem were built and we can use it as an example for our own re-building.



*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, extend pardon;
Where there is doubt, encourage faith;
Where there is despair, give hope;
Where there is darkness, shine light;
Where there is sadness, bring joy.
O, Divine Master, grant I may seek not so much
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.*

Gleanings From Nehemiah.

Chapter 3

The Enemy Within And Without.

In the previous chapter we looked at the first step in the rebuilding of the walls of our Jerusalem which was prayer and fasting after recognising the state of our individual spiritual state, our family or church fellowship, so that we may discern God's direction for the rebuilding process. The Lord may use this time of waiting to give us a clearer picture of the enemy we will face and need to overcome to commence and complete the building of the walls. As we wait let us ponder on this:

Isaiah 40:31 *“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”*

This portion could also be called “The Two Kingdoms” as we need to recognise that there are two kingdoms, only in one of them will we be safe for all eternity, that is the Kingdom of God. Jesus Himself told us in John 18:36 that *“My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence.”* He said this in answer to Pilate who wanted to know if Jesus was King of the Jews.

We also know from scripture that there is another kingdom out of which we have been taken when we were born again and became followers of Jesus. Colossians 1:13 *Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son:*

It is quite clear from this scripture that we have been moved, taken from one place to another or translated as the verse says; “into the kingdom of His dear Son” that is Jesus Christ, from some

other kingdom - namely Satan's kingdom or the kingdom of the world. Scripture makes it quite clear that there are two kingdoms:

Matthew 6:33 *But seek ye first the **Kingdom of God**, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Matthew 12:26 *And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then **his kingdom** stand?*

There are many other scripture verses also in the New Testament which speak of these two separate kingdoms, but for now we will continue to look further at the pattern in the Book of Nehemiah that we spoke of at the beginning of this book. It is a pattern, I believe, we can apply to our own lives today. In Nehemiah's time in Jerusalem we can also discern two kingdoms, one occupied by God's people, the other by those who opposed God's people - the same is true today.

Our homes, our families, our fellowships can be compared to Jerusalem, they are all places where all the people in it, hopefully, are God's people, that is they are faithful practicing professing Christians, children being brought up in the nurture of the Lord. Here they live and dwell and all are fully surrounded by enemy territory, physically and spiritually, the kingdom of the world. In that worldly kingdom dwell those who desire no part or portion in God's kingdom in which we dwell, some will actively oppose and endeavour to destroy the kingdom we live in. We need to build and maintain our defences, the walls of our own Jerusalem, to keep the enemy without and our people in and safe.

We can learn from Nehemiah to recognise the enemy and the state of our walls, we need to seek God in earnest and fervent prayer, and wait upon Him, to show us the way to go about building, repairing and maintaining the walls about our Jerusalem which is our home, our family, our fellowship, our own personal life in Christ. It is not a task we can afford to neglect or fail in for the sake of our very souls and those for whom we have been given a responsibility, either as parents, church elders or any other calling in life where we have a teaching/ oversight role.

We are our brother's (and sister's) keeper. In Genesis 4:9 "*And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?*" The word "keeper" here is the Hebrew for "Hedge about as with thorns, guard, generally to protect" I am sure you know the rest of the conversation God had with Cain and to me it points to our own responsibility for our brothers and sisters and others in our care. Would you want to hear your brother's or sister's blood cry out unto God as God heard that of Abel, Cain's brother? You may not cause their physical death but what about their spiritual life – have you caused it to die?

You may recall that we talked about walls as being like fences, they keep the enemy out, they keep predators away from the sheep (God's people) Fences also keep the sheep (God's people) from straying unintentionally into enemy territory. Offcourse we are speaking of spiritual walls and fences which encompass the Kingdom of God, not those made of brick, or stone or wire netting which are indicative of our earthly dwelling place - the Kingdom of the World. The enemy we deal with, the one who roams around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, (1 Peter 5:8) is no respecter of man made walls, we need the spiritual walls to fight the good fight to the end, because as scripture tells us in Ephesians 6:12 "*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*" and therefore we need to keep in mind the words of 1 Peter 5:8 "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*"

The Enemy Without.

Let us recognise who is "**The Enemy Without**" He is Satan, the adversary of God's way since the first man was created by God.

Satan is not always easily recognised for what he really is because he can come in the form of an "angel of light" and deceive us. 2 Corinthians 11:14: "*And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*"

So now it remains for us to recognise what are the enemy's tactics or weapons, We need to come to God's Word to be able to determine those things, it is God's Word which shows us the things that are of God and which are profitable for our eternal life in Christ Jesus and those things which are not.

Some of the things and persons mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Ephesians 5:1-5 and Colossians 3:8-9 can be seen as being 'The Enemy Without'. Sometimes it is difficult to distance ourselves from people because they may be our relatives or people we meet in the work place. Other times '**The Enemy Without**' may be represented in other areas, i.e. people in shopping malls and other public places that we may have need to attend, or the display of various goods in those places, magazine and newspaper content. It is in all these and may other situations that we need to focus elsewhere by calling to mind Philippians 4:8 which instructs us to think of godly or good things as we see or associate with people who walk contrary to God's precepts.

Some may call this judging people but that is not being promoted here but rather an adherence to the scriptural principle of character determination expressed by Jesus Himself when He said: Matthew 7:16 "*Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*"

As you read and ponder the following two passages consider how those things mentioned therein can be brought about into our lives by outside influences. That is '**The Enemy Without**'!

Ephesians 5:1-5 "*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an*

idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

Colossians 3:8-9 “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;”

In these two passages we see some of the things that are of the enemy and against which we need to defend ourselves by building a wall of faith with the foundation stone being Jesus Christ. There are many more scripture passages in the New Testament which tell us what and who our enemies are and it is against these that we need to build and maintain our wall of defence, which is based on our adherence to God’s word, the teachings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and continuing fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. (Hebrews 10:25)

Satan is very well described in John 8:44 *“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”*

The word ‘liar’ used here is translated from the Greek ‘*pseustes*’ meaning ‘falsifier’ and that is what Satan does everyday to so many people, he falsifies the Word of God and twists it to suit his own ends. Remember the words he used to Jesus in His forty days in the wilderness? The doubt he put in Eve’s mind about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? He is still doing the same today. Let us instead concentrate on the words of our Saviour:

John 14:6 *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”*

What a contrast to Satan as shown in John 8:44! Let us never forget that!

The Enemy Within.

Philippians 4:8 “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*”

In this passage we are exhorted to “*think on these things*” and when we look at the “*these things*” that we are exhorted to “*think on*” we can see that they are all in opposition to what ‘The Enemy Without’ portrays. Our carnal inclination however, because of our Adamic nature, is as in: Jeremiah 17:9 “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*”

..... and that is ‘**The Enemy Within**’

In the passages Ephesians 5:1-5 and Colossians 3:8-9 we can see ‘**The Enemy Without**’ and if we do not take to heart and live Philippians 4:8, those “*things*” mentioned in the first two passages can and will become ‘**The Enemy Within**’ our hearts. There are many things, people and circumstances which can be and are the enemy of our souls - some are very obvious, such as transgressing the directions Jesus has given us through the scriptures. Other enemies of our souls may not be so obvious such as wealth and material prosperity, media content (magazines, newspapers, radio & television) some areas of education (acquisition of knowledge for knowledge’s sake) you can probably add other things to this list yourself.

If you consider the matter carefully you will see how ‘**The Enemy Within**’ grows and then slowly starts to exhibit pride, jealousies, covetousness etc. I am sure, you can think of many other unscriptural characteristics which can manifest through these things even though these things may in themselves not be evil. By applying the scripture passages quoted above, we are actually placing or building walls around our own Jerusalem and I am sure that you can find many other scriptures which can also be used for the same purpose when you apply them to your own circumstances.

By reading and studying God's word we will soon discover who or what the enemies of our souls are. It is our prayer that these few and very inadequate words may nevertheless be of some use to assist you in seeking the Lord's direction for the safekeeping of your own "Jerusalem" and those that dwell therein. You could perhaps use Nehemiah as an example to do just that by gleaning the scriptures for yourself keeping in mind these questions.

Points to Ponder.

- 1] How did Nehemiah go about surveying the state of the city?
See Nehemiah 2:11-16 (*hint: consult & assess*)

- 2] In what ways could you use Nehemiah as a role model to become a better leader in your family, on the job, or in some other setting?

- 3] Do you ever consider how God wants you to deal with the challenges and problems you face?

Our prayer for you is that you will take to heart the words of scripture:

1 Peter 5:7. "*Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you!*"



Gleanings From Nehemiah.

Chapter 4

Consultation and Planning.

So far we have looked at just two aspects of rebuilding the walls of our Jerusalem and to some it may appear that, “it is about time we got on with the job” so to speak, and start building, if we did that we would be like the man referred to in Luke 14:28-30: *For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? ²⁹Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, ³⁰Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.*

We live in a society today which demands that things have to be done right now or perhaps even yesterday and often little counting of the cost is done or contemplated - let us not be like that but instead aim to build that which is “fit for the Master’s use”

In any project we undertake there are always certain steps or procedures that need to be followed to ensure the hoped for success of any project, no matter how great or small. There will also be costs associated with projects we undertake and I am reminded of the words of the hymn, “*I Will Be True To Thee*” which portrays some of the costs as we commit our way unto Jesus and start building our walls of faith to protect and strengthen our Jerusalem. As we consider the words of this hymn are we truly willing to apply the words of it to our lives or do we just like the sound of them in our ears? The cost of following Jesus has cost many people their livelihood, and often their very lives, are we prepared to make such a commitment to build according to His word so that our Jerusalem will be a place of refuge and safety.

I will be True to Thee

*Fully surrendered Lord divine,
All that I am or have is Thine
Tho' it may cost me friends or home.
Cause me in lands afar to roam
Now to the world I bid farewell,
Broken forever its deep spell
I will go with Thee all the way,
All of Thy bidding will obey.
Where Thou leadeest me –
I will follow Thee.*

Mrs C.H.Morris



The project we are considering here is the restoration of the walls of our Jerusalem, that is, our home and family and fellowship or perhaps just your own personal life in Christ at this time. In the ancient world cities were walled for protection, the walls were also symbols which said something about the inhabitants and caused the 'outsiders' to form an opinion or view about them. Unwalled cities merited contempt because it showed that the inhabitants were careless about who or what entered their city, walled cities were seen as significant, as having cohesion, of having the same standards amongst the inhabitants.

Nehemiah, I am sure, would not have been able to stand the thought that his Jerusalem, the City of God, would not have walls or gates and thus bring reproach on the people of God that lived

therein, besides allowing free access by any enemy that chose to do so. Would you have your home like that? Free access to all and sundry without restraint? If not, why would you allow your spiritual life to be like that?

Remember we are in a spiritual war as well, where we need to keep out the kingdom of Satan and it's influences. We are not talking just about your physical surroundings but also your spiritual surroundings or the Jerusalem you live in - it is true that we cannot control those things completely but we can certainly prevent their influence on ourselves, our families and fellowships.

As we consider the foregoing we can make some applications to our own circumstances by likening the walls of a city to the scriptural standards and practices in our own personal life, our homes and fellowships. We need to have those walls erected around our personal life, our homes, families and fellowships, and in good shape 24 hours per day, 7 days per week if we profess to be true followers of Jesus Christ. Like the unwalled cities of old if we do not have these scriptural walls ourselves, and yet profess to be followers of Christ, then we too deserve contempt but if our walls of faith, not just spoken faith but active living faith, are kept intact and in good condition then those walls will be a bulwark of protection to all that dwell within those walls and are prepared to accept the reason for their existence.

Consultation.

We can learn much from Nehemiah and the first part is the consultation process which is an orderly and thorough examination of how well protected our Jerusalem really is, what state it is in, how much needs to be fixed and what? We may have been like God's people that Nehemiah found in Jerusalem, they had returned from exile some years earlier, rebuild the temple, made a fresh start with God and were awaiting the coming of the promised Messiah. But as time went on and He did not arrive they slipped back, almost unnoticed at first, into their old pattern of life, materialism, old values - complacency crept in. - As one writer comments. "There

really was no excuse for this, it was wrong, but it happened to God's people in Zechariah's time and Nehemiah saw the results." (Suggested reading: Book of Ezra.)

We too at some time may have made a commitment to follow Jesus and now upon re-examination of our lives find we have slipped somewhat. Let you and I not ever say; "Oh, but that would never happen to me, my faith is too strong, my walls are o.k." - because it does happen and if we are 100% honest with ourselves and before God, we can see in our own lives that not everything is safe and secure at all times - hence the need for rebuilding and repairing the walls of scripture around our own Jerusalem.

Part of the consultation process is to determine what needs to be done and in our aim to build or repair the walls of our Jerusalem it is vital that we consult with our spouse, and where appropriate, brothers and sisters in Christ, not forgetting the most important of all, prayer and the seeking of scriptural guidance.

We need to examine our surroundings, both physical and spiritual to determine the extent of the decay in our walls, how far the rot has set in and how deep we need to dig to re-establish the right foundation and Jude 1:20 shows us how: "*But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,*" - a faith based on the scriptures. Again we can take our example from Nehemiah 2:12-15 "*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. ¹³And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. ¹⁴Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. ¹⁵Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned."*

The phrase *“the gates thereof were consumed with fire.”* in Verse 13, refers to the apparent practise at that time of a conquering enemy burning the gates of the invaded city to emphasise their domination over the people. Are there any ‘burnt gates’ in our lives, families or fellowship where the enemy has got in and established dominion over some part of us, in other words, do we have any besetting sins that we have not dealt with but are just allowing continuing dominion over us? Let us not forget them, even if they are unpalatable for us to deal with - we should rather prefer to be embarrassed now than be condemned on the Last Day because we have not dealt with sin.

It is interesting to note that Nehemiah examined the walls thoroughly from the outside looking in so that he could get a clearer view of their condition, nor did he have any problems in looking at things that most people would rather avoid, the deep, dark, dirty places which we also have in our lives, the places that we would like to keep hidden and rather not deal with because they might embarrass us.

We should also note that he was not alone in his examination of the walls but enlisted the help of *“a few men”* Does this not indicate to us that we too should seek counsel for the task ahead? There is a time when we should seek the help of our brothers in Christ because we can not always see clearly what needs to be done and as scripture has it in Proverbs 11:14 *“Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.”* Proverbs 15:22 *“Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.”* Proverbs 24:6 *“For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.”*

Those words written over two thousand years ago are still as valid today as then and should be of great comfort to us when we seek counsel - seeking counsel is not an admission of weakness or inadequacy but rather one of strength in that we are prepared to open up our circumstances to others for their views and comments - most of us do not like to open ourselves in that manner because

of pride, reliance on self or whatever excuse we may think we have, but to succeed in God's ways we need to do that. In fact scripture teaches us to do this through being accountable/submitting one to another: 1 Peter 5:5 "*Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*" and also: Hebrews 13:17 "*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*"

Ofcourse we would expect that those from whom we seek counsel would keep our confidences as we should also keep theirs.

Like Nehemiah we need to see what is to be done and how we must go about it, whether the old foundation will serve, and what there is of the old materials that can be of use. Good work is likely to be well done when it is first well considered. If you would build up the walls of your Jerusalem first take notice of the ruins of those walls and see what needs restoration, and what may serve as it is.

Perhaps it may be of benefit to you to write down the things that you see as being in need of restoration or removal so that you may keep a check on the progress of your building. And don't forget to enlist the help of your family and/or likeminded brothers and sisters in Christ - it is quite possible that they may see things you do not or they may be able to share some of their experiences with you that may be of assistance and not forgetting the most important of all - prayer for discernment and direction.

May the Lord bless each of you as you seek His will in rebuilding the walls of your Jerusalem.



Planning.

The second part of the process is the planning stage - that is the making of a determination of how we are going to go about the task at hand and the allocation of the work that will have to be done. Once more we turn to Nehemiah to provide an example we can use in our plan of rebuilding the walls of our Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 2:17-20 *“Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. ¹⁸Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work. ¹⁹But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? ²⁰Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.”*

Nehemiah disclosed his plans obviously in such a way that he was able to convince the people of the need for their cooperation, he did not say “this is my idea and I want you to go along with it” How often do we act like that instead of following Nehemiah’s example in drawing the peoples attention to the situation which affected them, then he shared with them what God had put into his heart. *“He exhorted them in a friendly brotherly way and he excited them to join with him in the work”* (Matthew Henry’s Commentary) It is the way we too should encourage those whose help we are seeking and whose good we have at heart. When we have done that we will most likely have the support we need to carry out the rebuilding. In family situations there are two scriptures that come to mind as to how this should be accomplished. First, by the husband in his relationship with his wife, with gentleness and love as portrayed in:

Ephesians 5:25 *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; and as a father to his children, also with love and gentleness as shown in: Ephesians 6:4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”*
and Colossians 3:21 *“Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.”*

In fellowship settings we would consider the words of instruction in 1 Peter 5:5 to be an applicable standard. *“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”*

We also need to be aware that once we disclose our plans the enemy too will know of them and endeavour to oppose us as also happened to Nehemiah (verse 19) and we can have the same answer as Nehemiah did; *“Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.”*

Satan and those who belong to his kingdom will indeed have no portion, nor right, nor memorial either in our Jerusalem or the heavenly Jerusalem. Revelation 21 describes the holy city, the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God and verse 27 describes what and who will not enter it, that is they will have *“no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem”* (Nehemiah2:20)
Revelation 21:27 *And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

Let us therefore be encouraged in our prayer and fasting, in consultation and planning as we seek God’s ways for the rebuilding of our own Jerusalem. Jeremiah 6:16 *“Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.”* Let us not be like these people whom Jeremiah spoke to and refuse to walk in *“the good way”*

but instead vow that “*We will walk therein*” (*the old paths, the good way*) by stirring up (encouraging) ourselves and others to that which is good and God honouring.

May the following questions stimulate you and encourage you to consult and plan for the rebuilding of the walls of your own Jerusalem.

Points to Ponder.

- 1] What do you think prevents you from asking others for help when you need it?
- 2] Do you think you would be willing to depend more on the help of other believers?
- 3] Would you help a friend with a problem or difficult situation they are facing?
- 4] How can you learn to depend more on God and allow others to help you face the challenges in your life?



Gleanings From Nehemiah.

Chapter 5

Co-operative Construction. - Part 1.

Previously we looked at Nehemiah chapters 1 & 2 to seek some guidance and insight into how to apply ourselves to recognizing the enemy within and without and planning the construction of the walls of our own Jerusalem. The walls we need to build will be both spiritual defences and physical barriers to guard our hearts, our homes and our fellowship. Proverbs 4:23 “*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*” KJV. Another translation says it this way: “*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*” and it says this I believe in support of the warning in Matthew 15:19 “*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*”

We pray that as we proceed to build our walls that these scriptures will be seen of paramount importance to us, so that what we will do will come from our heart and be godly in all aspects. May we build for His honour and glory, for the establishment of His kingdom in our own hearts, our families, our fellowship and the world around us.

The title Co-operative Construction given to this chapter conveys that which we see when we read chapters 3 to 6 of Nehemiah. Yes, we could construct or build on our own but how much easier is the task when others are there willing to help and encourage us and we, on our part, willing to receive such help. There will of course be those who will endeavour to obstruct our building, either by word or deed perhaps, or by just straight out non-co-operation, as was the case in Nehemiah’s time. Let us begin by reading Nehemiah 3 and note some of the lessons that we can be encouraged by as we build.

Once the people had the plans explained to them they resolved to start immediately, they did not put off till tomorrow what could be done today. They exhibited a zeal for God and His kingdom and in their work were an encouragement to others, as we can be when we exhibit the same zeal. As we read this chapter we note that all the people, except for a few, participated in this work, each family made repairs by their own house as well as helping in other areas. The participants were from all walks of life and stations, including women, so let us not be exclusive in building, we need all the help we can get in the physical sense, but also in the spiritual, and those that are not able to physically participate can be spiritual co-workers through prayer. Then it can truly be called “Co-operative Construction”.

They did not proceed haphazardly by doing a little bit here and a little bit there, they worked in an orderly fashion and those of you who have undertaken any building of any sort will know that there is an order to the way you proceed to finish up with the correct results as per blueprint or other plan. After quite a few years in the building industry I never did see or hear of a successful building project where the ceiling was the first thing put in place. Perhaps the sisters can relate this to their home duties and other tasks. One generally peels/cleans the vegetables before cooking them, you do not iron the clothes and then put them through the washing machine. The people in this chapter started in one place, went right around the walls, repaired as they found the breaches and ended where they began. This can be briefly summarised as follows: They repaired starting at **1]** From the sheep-gate to the fish-gate (Neh.3:1-2). **2]** Thence to the old-gate (Neh.3:3-5). **3]** Thence to the valley-gate (Neh.3:6-12). **4]** Thence to the dung-gate (Neh.3:13-14). **5]** Thence to the gate of the fountain (Neh.3:15). **6]** Thence to the water-gate (Neh.3:16-26). **7]** Thence by the horse-gate to the sheep-gate again, where they began (Neh.3:27-32), and so they brought their work round the city.

By doing things in order and keeping your eyes and ears open you will not miss anything, God instructed His people in the Old Testament many times to do certain things and He always prescribed the order in which they were to do them. It was never haphazard and when carried out as He instructed the results benefited the people. We too can learn from that and perhaps that is part of the “old paths” mentioned in Jeremiah 6:16 with which we concluded chapter 4.

As in our own lives, opposition will be found in and to some of our projects, sometimes from within our own families and fellowships and sometimes from without. As we read Chapter 4 of Nehemiah we can observe that, as the building progressed the builders were mocked by their enemies, some of whom were from among their own people, they did not answer or retaliate but instead prayed to God and got on with the job as we need also to do. We must have an expectation of opposition so that we can be prepared and not be caught unawares or unprepared. The opposition can be both spiritual and physical. Let us remember Ephesians 6:12 *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. We need to realise that those who oppose the Kingdom of God and those that labour therein may also use physical tactics to hinder the work but we are admonished in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; ⁵Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,”*

We can see in Chapter 4 that the builders were ridiculed (verses 2-3) but the people had a mind to work (verse 6), they prayed and kept at the job. We can expect ridicule for our stand but let us pray to the Almighty and keep to the job at hand. Because the ridicule did not work the enemy took to other tactics and started a scare campaign, they threatened physical attacks, all designed to intimidate and stop the builders. Let us not fool ourselves or the next

generation, scare tactics are being used against God's people today, intimidation by way of lawsuits, government legislation etc. is increasingly being used against God's people today. Physical attacks against God's people are a reality today in many parts of the world, all these things are increasing daily and we may be subjected to them as well at some time or other. You may not suffer all or any of these things in the country or city or place where you live at this time but there are many places where these things are a reality to those that live there and we should never be complacent and think that it will never happen to us. The Lord may call some to the mission field where these things are a fact of life or He may allow persecution to come into our lives – we are not immune to these things.

We must be prepared for these things today, but even more urgent, I believe, is the need to prepare our young people, the next generation, for these things. One only has to look at the various forms of legislation that are effective in other countries, and perhaps your own, which are designed to limiting the builders of God's Kingdom through incarceration in jail or even by causing their death. We need to learn from Nehemiah, from scriptures and history to be prepared and arm ourselves for not only the battle that is already upon us, but also one that will intensify as the coming of our Lord and Saviour draws nearer each day. Nehemiah Chapter 4 tells us that the builders armed themselves, their weapons were physical but ours need to be scriptural and for that we turn to the admonitions in the New Testament:

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 “*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: ⁴(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds ;)* ⁵*Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”* and:

Ephesians 6:10-18. “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. ¹¹Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For we*

wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. ¹³Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; ¹⁵And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. ¹⁷And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: ¹⁸Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”

What a blessing these words can be to us if we but take them to heart. No doubt you have read this portion of scripture many times and heard others speak on it. Each time I look at this more and more of God’s will for our conduct in the world is evident, especially as we look at in the context of the building of the walls around our own Jerusalem. Yes, this passage is for us as individuals, but it also points us to the title of this message of cooperation.

In verse 18 we are instructed not just to watch out for ourselves but for all the saints, that is our brothers and sisters in Christ, our co-labourers in the Kingdom of God. Let us not forget either that as our children come to the age of accountability and commit themselves to Lordship of Jesus Christ that they too are our brothers and sisters in Christ and co-labourers in the Kingdom. Are we training them up to become wall builders and defenders of the faith from an early age, are we teaching them to put up the spiritual and physical barriers needed to become inheritors of the Kingdom?

This message is not just aimed to draw our attention to our families, even though they are of prime importance, even Nehemiah acknowledged that in [Nehemiah 4:14](#) *“And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is*

great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.” but he also made an acknowledgement of the need for the brotherhood to be united even though distance separated them, as it does many of us in a very serious physical way. Nehemiah. 4:19-20 *“And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, the work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. ²⁰In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.”*

Are we prepared, are we willing to “sound the trumpet” and rally our brothers and sisters to our side to help us rebuild our walls, will we rally to them when they “sound the trumpet” in their time of need in rebuilding their walls? Our God shall indeed fight for us but we also need to stand shoulder to shoulder in the battle for our very souls and the souls of those placed in our care.

May the Lord bless and protect all those who labour in the building of His kingdom.

Galatians 6:9 *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”*



Gleanings From Nehemiah.

Chapter 6

Co-operative Construction - Part 2

We closed the previous chapter with the encouragement from Galatians 6:9 “*And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*”

It must seem to many non-believers that the Christian way is wearisome because of the continual attention that needs to be given to the Word of God and the inward and outward expression of it in our life. But for those that have become born again the journey need not be wearisome as we keep in mind the prize that will be ours at journey’s end - the crown of righteousness that will result from us keeping our covenant with God to serve Him and only Him all the days of our lives.

As we continue our gleanings from Nehemiah Chapters 5 & 6 we can see that the people of that time, even with all their enthusiasm and dedication, may very well have needed to encourage each other with similar words contained in Galatians 6:9. In all groups of people that profess a common purpose it is not uncommon that there will be those with somewhat different opinions, some may even actively oppose the aims of the majority of the group.

Nehemiah 3:5 “*And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord.*”)

In Nehemiah 5 we can observe this not unusual occurrence of an apparent common purpose but not unity. All those that lived in and near Jerusalem served the same king, all wanted to live in and near the city, all wanted to make a living and provide for their family, but not all agreed with the rebuilding of the walls and the changing conditions that that would entail as can be seen by the actions of Sanballat and his supporters. These people did not want to be part of the ‘Co-operative Construction’ in progress because they saw that their lifestyle could be affected. There were others who were

part of the “Jewish brethren” but did not deal with their own brethren in a God honouring way. They used their relationship with their brethren for their own gain:

Nehemiah 5:1-5 “*And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews. ²For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live. ³Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. ⁴There were also that said: We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards. ⁵Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards.*”

When it comes to our own families and fellowships apparent common purpose but not unity can also occur. There will be those that do not want to co-operate, they may resist inwardly but still have an outward appearance of compliance to what needs to be rebuilt or maintained - whether that be doctrinal issues or church standards - or they may actively resist and thus cause unrest and even division, they may even use their brothers and sisters to gain what they want. Those whom are in positions of leadership or authority, (fathers and mothers, church elders etc.) need to be on the lookout for this sort of behaviour. (We could probably apply this to those in all areas of authority or responsibility) We may see this happening ourselves but it is equally important to be open to listening to others so these things can be recognised and dealt with: Nehemiah 5:6 “*And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words.*”

In the verses following this you will note that Nehemiah did not act hastily and nor should we. Proverbs 29:20 “*Seest thou a man*

that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him.” He gave the matter serious thought and then met with the offenders, showed them their error, challenged their commitment to God’s way, and where necessary required them to make restitution, finally he required an oath (agreement) from them that they would keep the promises made. Sounds a lot like the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 about an erring brother does it not?

Another important point here that is drawn to our attention is that Nehemiah also displayed the leadership attribute of leading by example. He was not one of those who lived by the “Do as I say” rule but by the “Do as I do” rule and we should follow that model of leadership if we desire to have unity of purpose. I am sure that most, if not all, parents and others in leadership realise the truth of leading by example and how much easier it is to train/teach others by this method. Even the world’s psychologists and non-believers acknowledge that example is far more effective as a training method than any verbal instructions.

In all probability Nehemiah lived in luxurious standards at the court of King Artaxerxes before he came to Jerusalem but Nehemiah was a man prepared to do with little to gain much. Here he showed himself to be most hospitable, one could also call him compassionate, caring, generous. The lesson for any of those who seek or are in leadership would be not to seek self aggrandizement but to serve the people who have been put in their care. Nehemiah displays admirable qualities indeed, ones that we would do well to emulate. Serving others rather than serving self should be our aim. Jesus Christ Himself set the standard for leadership, servanthood in the New Testament when He said to His disciples: John 13:14-16 “*If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Verily, verily, I say unto you: The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.*”

Whose feet are we prepared to wash? I do not know if Nehemiah washed anyone's feet but from the following verses we can see that he lived a humble lifestyle, he did not place himself above his people, he served them as we should serve those placed in our care, and not only those, but our brothers and sisters as well. But let us not stop there, let us be servants to all whom the Lord brings us into contact with for then and then only are we displaying the characteristics our Lord requires of us as His followers.

Let us see how Nehemiah behaved:

Nehemiah 5:14-19: *“Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. ¹⁵But 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.*

¹⁶Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work.

¹⁷Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. ¹⁸Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. ¹⁹Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.”

Please note verse 15 where Nehemiah states that he did those things “because of the fear of God” The expression used by Nehemiah here is from the Hebrew word ‘yirah’ meaning moral reverence, exceedingly so, to the stage of fear. It is a concept that is repeated throughout scriptures especially in the Old Testament, Nehemiah would have been well acquainted with the concept. It is also repeated often in the Psalms and Proverbs, two oft quoted ref-

erences are Psalm 147:11 “*The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy.*” and Proverbs 1:7 “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*”

It would serve us well indeed if we sought to live our lives in “*The fear of the Lord*” and that of course would translate to those who have been or will be placed in our care for nurture in the ways of God (not the ways of the world). We can find great encouragement from scriptures knowing that if we walk in His word the work we are engaged in for His kingdom will prosper.

Psalm 1:1-4 “*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. ²But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. ³And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*”

Nehemiah seems to be a man that took the admonition in this Psalm to heart and we should do no less if we want the walls around our Jerusalem to be a strong tower against the enemy within and without: Proverbs 18:10 “*The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.*”

Nevertheless we should never let down our guard because the enemy will continue to probe our defences and seek to exploit our weaknesses as he did in Nehemiah’s time and has since his first victory in the Garden of Eden. Because of Satan’s devious nature he will use any means to unsettle us in our determination to establish the walls around our Jerusalem and provide a safe haven for those who seek refuge therein. We can see in Nehemiah chapter 6 how different people were used in an attempt to discourage, intimidate, threaten and otherwise disrupt the work.

Firstly Sanballat and Geshem wanted to meet Nehemiah away from Jerusalem on their own territory for a “discussion” (verses 3-

4) and Nehemiah's reply was that he was too busy attending to the work at hand to leave and have it come to a standstill, they were persistent however and tried that tactic four times. How often do the things of the world entice us away from the Lord's work in a similar manner when the only intent is to halt the work in progress. Is your faith strong enough not to be drawn away from God's purpose by what may seem a reasonable request or action? How is your determination to follow the Lord God? How is your will power? I will not submit to anyone but my Jesus and I will follow His way - that is the only and best will power we should have.

When soft words failed, the unsubstantiated rumours and veiled threats began – (verses 5-8) but Nehemiah was discerning and responded with a cry to God - verse 9. We must be prepared for a similar situation as we start to build our walls, especially as we leave an unscriptural setting that we may be in to follow the scriptures in spirit and in truth. John 4:24 *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”*

It will most likely be family and those whom we counted as friends that will act this way because they cannot understand why we would want to leave what they see as a comfortable way of life for the demands of scriptural Christianity. Luke 12:51-53 *“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: ⁵²For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. ⁵³The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.”*

As we read the following portion of Nehemiah Satan's ways are shown to us: Nehemiah 6:10-14 *“Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. ¹¹And I said,*

Should such a man as I flee? and who *is there*, that, *being* as I *am*, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. ¹²And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

¹³Therefore *was* he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and *that* they might have *matter* for an evil report, that they might reproach me. ¹⁴My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.”

Here the ways of Satan are shown to us, he even used a person Nehemiah had reason to believe was on his side (Shemaiah) to entice him to sin and thus allow the enemy to reproach him. Using the discernment granted to Him by the Lord, as it is to us, he saw through the enemy’s wiles and did not fall into their trap but instead put them in God’s hands through prayer as we are told to do in Matthew 5:44 “*But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;*”

Despite the opposition, determined though it was, the job was completed and verse 16 is one of great encouragement indeed; Nehemiah 6:16 “*And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.*” You may recall that Psalms 147:2 puts it this way: “*The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.*” And perhaps David had this occasion in mind when he wrote those words and we would do well indeed to remember that as we labour in the Lord’s vineyard – HE is the master builder!

Once again it is our earnest prayer that you may ‘glean’ from Nehemiah some of the wealth that is there for those whom but seek the Truth. May it encourage each of us to ponder on those gleanings as the Lord leads each in our own circumstances.

Points to Ponder.

- 1] In what manner could you be more open and sensitive to God's leading in your life?
- 2] How can you strengthen your commitment to the responsibilities that God has given you?
- 3] How would you prepare yourself for the next time someone tried influence you through intimidation or emotional blackmail you?
- 4] How would you nurture your children so that they will be able to deal with the issues raised in 3]?

Dear Lord strengthen us day by day in Your word. Let the light of Your Holy Spirit illuminate our hearts so that we may become what You ask us to be and created us to be. Give us a humbleness of heart, a tenderness of feeling especially when we have to deal with those whom You have put in our care. Give us courage, strength and determination to stay faithful to the end no matter what life brings our way.

You, precious Saviour, gave Yourself for us that we might live. Help us to appreciate that gift beyond compare and be worthy to be called by Your name.



Gleanings from Nehemiah .

Chapter 7.

Completed but not Complacent.

Over a period of a few months I was fortunate enough to be able to observe the construction of a new supermarket on ground that was partially occupied by a shop, an old home, various trees and, as with all vacant suburban lots, a substantial amount of rubbish. Now the shop had been a thriving concern, the home occupied by a family, some of the trees were fruit trees but it all was demolished and disposed of with the rubbish to make way for a new building because none of the things that were there were of benefit to the new owner - they were all un-productive.

As I watched the development there were a number of lessons I drew from it in comparison to my own spiritual development or growth in faith in God, and Nehemiah's rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

Many years ago my soul was like that portion of land, it was occupied and thriving, it had some fruit trees producing fruit, there was also lots of rubbish and as a result my Jerusalem was not guarded but open to the influences of the world which is Satan's kingdom. As a matter of fact the teachings of the denomination of which I was an active member taught that as long as one was baptised in their particular concept of church and went along with their teachings (works salvation) that one's arrival in the heavenly Jerusalem was pretty well guaranteed. Oh! The deception of that until my eyes were directed to the Scriptures! Then came the "re-development" - the new birth that our Lord and Saviour told us we have to experience before we can enter His Kingdom. (John 3:3) Now the things that occupied my soul, my mind, the things I had built there, the trees that I had allowed to grow there, these things I

realised were in need of refurbishment, replanting and pruning, the rubbish, of which there was much, had to go and it has taken time, as the building of the supermarket has done. In the case of the supermarket building there is an end to its construction but the restoration and the building of God's ways in my soul, my heart and mind is an ongoing process.

Nehemiah found Jerusalem to be occupied with people, businesses and rubbish and no doubt there was a lot of cleansing and clearing before the walls could be rebuilt.

Now the task of building the supermarket has been completed, the construction crews are gone, but the owner is not complacent, they know that the building may be new, attractive in their eyes and the eyes of passersby, but it will not draw them in unless it is stocked with what people desire to have. There will have to be advertising. There will have to be ongoing maintenance to not only keep it stocked, but to keep the building in good repair and pleasing to the eye and secure from intruders. Starting to sound a bit like Nehemiah's Jerusalem and our Christian walk.

When we claim to have become Christians we may have changed the outside, the way we dress, speak, behave. We may have demolished those things that occupied our hearts, cleaned the rubbish (past sin) out of our lives, but do we have the inside stocked with the fruits of the Spirit, those things that will draw people to desire what we have? What form of advertising (evangelism) do we use to draw people? What program (bible reading/study, fellowship) do we have in place, what determination have we made to maintain the new building, (prayer and praise to God) to keep it stocked with spiritual fruit for others to partake of? (studying and living the Word of God).

What precautions have we taken to keep out intruders? (steadfastness to doctrine and scriptural standards). Who is going to be in charge and oversee all this? (appointing elders). Nehemiah faced the same questions when the walls of his Jerusalem were com-

pleted. However, he did not behave like those who build their place of business and say, “Well I have a nice new building, it looks real good, now the people will come” and then sit back in complacency and wonder why no-one comes.

Why should they? The building is just an empty shell with nothing to offer and the only ones who will come are those bent on destruction and the place will look worse then before. And so it could be with our spiritual life if we do not fill the new building with the things of God. A failure to fill the newly cleansed soul with new life in Jesus Christ could result in what is so vividly described in Matthew 12:43-45

“When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. ⁴⁴Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. ⁴⁵Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.”

This is not intended to say that we are filled with demons that have to be cast out in the first instance but it portrays that if we empty ourselves of sin and do not fill up with the power from on high. Luke 24:49 “*And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*” (the promise and gift of the Holy Spirit is described here) then we are very likely to fall deeper into sin thinking that because we cast it out once we can do it again.

Nehemiah saw the construction phase completed but he was not complacent. Let us now then look at chapters 7 and 8 of Nehemiah and see what we can glean for our own lives and the lives of our families and fellowships in this area of seeing the work completed but not being complacent.

In co-operation with the likeminded occupants of the Jerusalem, that he cared so much for, Nehemiah had seen the rebuilding of the walls completed, gates were installed so that a watch could be kept

on the comings and goings of those who dwelt therein but also those that sought entry - either for legitimate reasons or otherwise. Nehemiah 7:1-2 *“After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed. ²I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do.”*

As we read these verses let us take note especially of verse 2. Nehemiah put people in charge that he personally knew, he did not employ someone from outside that he did not know and the qualification was: *“because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do.”* This same standard is one we ought to apply to anyone that we allow to teach, instruct or guide our families and fellowship. We need people of Godly character and demonstrated faith in Christ Jesus for these positions – the New Testament talks about the qualifications for elders in the church, why should we not apply those same or similar standards to those that have an input into our families? They are standards that men, as the heads of the homes, could and should, I believe, apply to themselves if we want to raise up Godly people within our own household. This does not show a complacent attitude but rather a determination to seek the tried and true and the best for the good of those who will dwell in our Jerusalem and ultimately for the glory of the Most High God.

Verse 3 shows Nehemiah giving instructions about the conduct of those that were present in Jerusalem at that time, *“And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house.”*

The Hebrew word used for “watches” and “watch” denotes to safeguard, to be diligent in one’s duties of guarding, and I am sure we can all relate to the meaning of those words. Why it was necessary to do this is told us in the next verse: Nehemiah 7:4 *“Now the*

city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded.”

There are a couple of areas of interest to us in these verses that we could apply to our own Jerusalem, which has previously been described as a picture of our personal life, our families or our fellowships. Firstly, the gates were not to be opened until the sun was hot, in other words it implies that no-one could enter or leave except in daylight when they could be seen and their activities monitored. Secondly no-one was overburdened by having to watch more than one place at a time but each to be: “*over against his house*” In other words this is first and foremost an indication of individual responsibility which is practised in the corporate setting of family, community, and fellowship but at the same time benefits those groups as a whole. We are not to be individualistic (selfish) in our attitudes but consider the good of others as well, in line with the teachings of Jesus Himself - “*Love thy neighbour as thyself.*”

We can also see in these few scriptures that the guard was posted when there were but few people in Jerusalem, so whether we live on our own as a single person, a newly married couple, childless couple or have a very small fellowship, the guard needs to be in place so that there will be no intruders who can make themselves at home and settle in so nicely that as they reside in our Jerusalem (our hearts, homes, fellowships) they will eventually not be noticed as being the enemy because they have become part of the scenery. And that is so much like us as individuals allowing the “*little foxes*” to come in and spoil the vines.

Some years ago we had neighbours who were “soft” on animals, one day they told us of a fox cub that had come into their house yard and was playing with their dog and cat, they found it so nice and cute that they could not bring themselves to get rid of it. Against good advise and warnings that the little fox would grow up and take their chickens they enjoyed the little fox’s playtime with their animals for some weeks, then one morning they woke

up to find that all their chickens, quite a number, had been killed by the “little fox” - you see they had become complacent, they thought their fences (walls) around their chickens would keep the little fox out, but it had become part of the scenery, they had invited it in and allowed it to remain in their lives, it grew in size and appetite, now it was the instrument of destruction.

May we never allow “little foxes” to dwell in our Jerusalem for our destruction. We can and must prevent it by posting a “watch”, as Nehemiah did, for the salvation of our own soul and the souls of those entrusted to our care.

Nehemiah also wanted to see Jerusalem populated, as I would dare say, we would our families and fellowships. The saying that “there is safety in numbers” was obviously something Nehemiah understood and hence we see in the remainder of chapter 7 a list of the names of those that had returned from captivity - saved if you like from the hands of the enemy. Is that not the ones that we would want to have in our families and fellowships, is that not the commission or call that we are all desiring to fulfil? Are your family members named in your records of those that are saved from the enemy? Are the participants in your fellowships named and registered as saved from the enemy? Are their names written in the Book of Life? Most importantly are you?

The noted bible commentator *Matthew Henry* in his “*Concise Commentary on the Bible*” has this to say about this portion of scripture: “Nehemiah knew that the safety of a city, under God, depends more upon the inhabitants than upon its walls. Every good gift and every good work are from above. (James 1:17) God gives knowledge, He gives grace; all is of Him, and therefore all must be to Him. What is done by human prudence must be ascribed to the direction of Divine Providence. But woe to those who turn back from the Lord, loving this present world! And happy those who dedicate themselves, and their substance, to His service and glory!”

When we ponder those words so aptly written we do not use them to replace scriptures but rather use them as a useful tool or model for our own circumstances in our own particular Jerusalem.

In the introductory portion of this chapter we spoke of the building of a supermarket and the need to fill it with goods that others desire to have. To do that the shop owner has in place a program that shows who the providers of the desired goods are with all the relevant details such as, manufacturer, type of goods, method of manufacture, ingredients used, price, availability and many other details that the shop owner requires so that an order can be placed for delivery. I know that such a list can take many, many pages and can be the size of a very large book. (Computerised)

Likewise we too have a large book in which all those things we need to know to restore, rebuild what we need to live in, maintain and defend our Jerusalem here on earth, and it is called The Bible. It shows us the Maker, method of manufacture, ingredients used, price and availability as well as instructions on the use of the various items that are available i.e. God's grace, salvation, spiritual gifts, etc. In Nehemiah's time it was The Book of the Law as commanded by God through Moses to Israel.

Nehemiah 8:1-3 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. ²And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. ³And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law."

Is this not an example for us to follow in the reading of the Scriptures, because in them are the issues of life for us, as they were in the Book of the Law for the people in that dispensation.

To keep our Jerusalem safe, and safe for those that dwell therein, we need to know what the issues of life are in light of the Word of God. There are two scriptures that come to mind in this regard:

Proverbs 4:23 *“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”*

Romans 10:17 *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

The only way to keep our heart with diligence is to learn how to do so and that we can learn through the exercising of our faith which brings us to the second scripture: Romans 10:17. As we continue to read through Chapter 8 of Nehemiah, we note that firstly the people were attentive (verse 3). There was an opening prayer, then praise and worship by the priest (minister) Ezra and the congregation - verse 6, then the Law of God was read distinctly to them and expounded on, explained to them - verse 8, then the congregation was encouraged by being told - verse 9 - *“This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.”*

What a powerful and moving picture of how the hearts of the people turned to God, but the day for them was not yet finished as Nehemiah exhorted and encouraged the congregation as follows:

Nehemiah 8:10-12 *“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. ¹¹So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. ¹²And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.”*

[The meaning of the word “mirth” used here is the Hebrew (Strong’s No. 8057) **simchah**, *blithesomeness* or *glee*, (religious or festival) exceeding (-ly), gladness, joy (-fulness), mirth, pleasure, rejoice (-ing).]

It is a beautiful picture of how we can/should conduct our gatherings around the Word of God, whether it be the family altar or the Lord's Day fellowship with our brothers and sisters, and then hopefully those who come to partake in our fellowship will see us as having that which is desirable to them.

In this portion of Nehemiah we see praise and worship. We see prayer. We see the reading and expounding of the Word. We see tears of joy and I believe repentance. We see a generosity of spirit in sharing with those who had nothing for whatever reason. We see an understanding of God's word. Most of all we see a declaration that the communal gathering was a day holy unto the Lord. Can we, should we not get on bended knee, day in and day out to thank our God for His mercies which are new every morning? Should we not see to it that our reading of the Word of God is done in such a manner as to lead us into being the keepers of our own Jerusalem that we should be? Will God not honour those who honour Him in all they do?

1 Samuel 2:30 *"Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before Me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from Me; for them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."*

John 12:26 *"If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honour."*

This is a wonderful and enduring promise to those who build their house upon the Rock and surround it with the walls of Jerusalem by living out in their daily lives the words of Scripture.

Yes, we may have completed the walls, but we must not be complacent, we need to continue in God's Word so that in time we can as overcomers go from our earthly Jerusalem to have the name of our God written on us and enter into that heavenly city made of gold, the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 3:12

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”

Points to Ponder.

- 1] Would you see Israel’s actions in these passages as being a good model for us?
- 2] Why is it important for believers to meet in fellowship?
- 3] How can we guard against apathy toward God’s Word?
- 4] What gift of praise or worship can you offer the Lord daily?

May the blessing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be with you, my brothers and sisters in the Lord, as we strive for the prize, the crown of glory, that will be for those who endure to the end. Be encouraged and faint not. Support each other in the love of Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:24 *“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.”*

1 Peter 5:4 *“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*



Gleanings from Nehemiah

Chapter 8

Confession

1 Samuel 2:30

“Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before Me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from Me; for them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.”

John 12:26

“If any man serve Me, let Him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honour.”

In the previous chapter these were the two verses of scripture we should read with an understanding of God’s promise of how He will treat us if we honour and serve Him. Conversely they also show how He will treat us if we do not honour and serve Him. As in all things in life there is a choice we can make in this regard and following Jesus is a choice we are asked to make as the people of God in Old Testament times were given a choice to follow or serve God.

One of the most quoted Old Testament verses to portray the choice to serve God is Joshua 24:15 *“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

As we look at the last 5 chapters of Nehemiah it is this verse Joshua 24:15 that I would ask you to keep before your mind’s eye.

The heading of this chapter sums up what takes place in those last chapters in the book of Nehemiah.

Briefly, Nehemiah chapters 9 and 10 are all about confession and covenant and the names of those who signed the covenant. Chapter 11 shows those who dwelt in Jerusalem and their appointed tasks. Chapter 12 relates the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem and the celebration to praise God for the joy He had given them. The final chapter 13 tells us whom was permitted to dwell in Jerusalem and how, even in a very short time, evil had been allowed into it and how it was dealt with - the continuance of the work which had commenced with such enthusiasm and dedication was already being undermined. Maintenance would be needed.

We can build all we like in or for God's kingdom but without the right attitude of heart we would be like those whom the Lord speaks to in Matthew 7:20-23 "*Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. ²¹Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. ²²Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? ²³And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.*"

From this we should take heed of the dire consequences of doing our building without the right heart attitude or motivation - which can be summed up as being a true and abiding love for God and **all** His ways. We can see from scriptures itself that there is an orderly progression to building for and in the Kingdom and in the preceding chapters of this study we have already seen the orderly manner in which the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem took place and hopefully learnt from that the need for orderliness in the building of our own Jerusalem. Ecclesiastes 3:1:4 tell us that: "*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ⁴A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*" and in Chapter 9 of Nehemiah we see this

being applied by the people. Under their leadership of elders and ministers they were made aware of what was needed next to consolidate their work which, had perhaps in the view of some, been completed. Perhaps they felt that it was now completed and were becoming complacent as we spoke of previously.

But here we are in this portion of scripture, after the reading and explanation of the Book of the Law previously, we see their consciences being smitten with guilt for abandoning their God, yes, they had been rejoicing for God's goodness toward them, (Nehemiah 8:8-18) but now it was "*a time to weep, a time to mourn*" for there truly is a "*time to every season and every purpose under heaven*". In our lives too, the same principles apply and we should become aware of what it is time for in our lives today. What season are we in? Repentance, confession, rejoicing, making or renewing our covenant with God? How have we proceeded with the building of our own Jerusalem, have we completed the task on the walls, are we now storing up our treasures in heaven and displaying the fruits of the Spirit for others to feast on? Have we put in place an ongoing maintenance program or have we become complacent and having stocked up on God's grace think that it is enough to last us till we get to heaven without replenishing from the Fountain of Living Water and the Bread of Life? Dost thou desire the crown of life? James 1:12 "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*"

We see in Nehemiah 9 that having rejoiced previously (Nehemiah 8) now the season, the time was for sincere repentance and confession accompanied by: "¹.....*fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads* ²*then the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.* 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.” Nehemiah 9:1-3

Verse 1 is a beautiful yet stark word picture of how they felt about their sins, to put on sackcloth and dust on their heads signified death and burial and if we are sincere about our sinning against an all Holy God then we too should acknowledge that we deserve to die. Romans 6:23 “*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”

This picture presented to us here is or should be an encouragement for us to “put on sackcloth and dust on our heads” and to think of our sin in the same way of putting to death and burying our carnal man so that we can be the people that the New Testament calls us to be if we want to see the kingdom of God

John 3:3 “*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*”

It is my earnest prayer that since you have commenced reading this book you have laboured at and completed your walls of Jerusalem, now it may be for you “*the time to weep, the time to mourn*” before the Lord your God as the people of Nehemiah’s time did, this may be the time for you to “*stand up in your place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord your God (the Bible) one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part confess, and worship the Lord your God.*” (*Paraphrase of Nehemiah 9:3. JvL.*)

The people of Nehemiah’s time did this in corporate and public worship, we can do it as individuals, we can do it as family or we can do it as a fellowship of believers. The pattern is there for us to follow in the particular setting of our own Jerusalem, which is the term used at the beginning of this book to describe our homes, our fellowships or perhaps your individual circumstances if you are on your own.

The New Testament makes provision, I believe, for both a private and public confession of our faults.

Private Confession - you to God.

1 John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Public Confession - you to the brethren before God,

James 5:16 *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”*

(It is my view that the ‘healing’ spoken of here can be either spiritual or physical – it is in God’s determination)

This is something we need to do, confessing our faults if we desire to be presented by God with the gift mentioned in Romans 6:23. First we are told that: *“the wages of sin is death”* and then like a lot of things in life there follows a BUT, which in this case is a beautiful, life giving present from our God *“.....but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* and all if we just come to Him in repentance and godly sorrow, confessing our sin. Remember that Jesus Christ has already paid the price, the wages of our sin, through His obedience to His Father by dying on Calvary’s cross and taking our deserved sentence of death (the wages of sin) on Himself.

As we continue on through chapter 9 of Nehemiah we can see the wonderful things that God did for His people and yet time and time again they turned from Him, and in all truth so often do we even though you and I believe that God did an even greater deed for us by sending His Son Jesus (John 3:16) Unlike the people of the Old Testament we no longer have to offer sacrifices to God through the blood of bulls and goats for the remission or payment of our sins - Hebrews 10:4 *“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”* Even David in the Old Testament realised that this was so and he foreshadowed the way or the manner in which we should behave today in respect of our

sin - Psalm 51:17 *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”* and this is further confirmed in Psalm 32:5 *“I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”*

In spite of all that God’s people in the Old Testament did, how they behaved God NEVER changed and they acknowledged that fact. Just read through this chapter 9 of Nehemiah and read in condensed form all that God did from creation to their time and how they treated Him - Psalm 106 contains a similar account. Are we any different? I firmly believe that we are not and, like the people of Nehemiah’s time I too, and maybe you dear reader, can repeat in all sincerity the words spoken in this portion of scripture:

Nehemiah 9:33: *“Howbeit Thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for Thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:”*

As we look at our own sinfulness and God’s goodness we can be eternally thankful for the encouraging revelation given for all in Hebrews 13:8 *“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”*

Precious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we come before you and our brethren in sackcloth and with dust on our heads, desiring to be dead to sin and alive unto Thee. We freely confess our shortcomings and trespasses and with humbleness of heart and contrite spirit seek Your ever loving kindness and mercy in forgiveness for our sin. We desire, Lord, a new way of life, a life in You, a covenant relationship with You, a covenant which You have already sealed with Your blood on Calvary, for You Lord desire that none who believe on You should perish but have eternal life. Amen.



Gleanings from Nehemiah

Chapter 9

Entering Covenant Relationship.

Psalm 116:12-14

“What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? ¹³I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. ¹⁴I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people.”

The people under Nehemiah’s leadership had completed the restoration of the walls of their Jerusalem and had now come to a decision, based on their knowledge of what God required of them, to make a covenant with Him, to start a new relationship with Him and leave their sinful ways behind. As you have progressed through this short study on Nehemiah you may have been encouraged to read God’s Book, the Bible, and found therein the encouragement and direction for building or perhaps restoring the walls of your own Jerusalem as it applies to yourself, your home, your family or fellowships.

At the close of the previous chapter we finished with a prayer of acknowledgement of our wrongdoing before God and an expressed desire to renew our relationship with Him and finished it with these words: “We desire, Lord, a new way of life, a life in You, a covenant relationship with You, a covenant which You have already sealed with Your blood on Calvary, for You Lord desire that none who believe on You should perish but have eternal life.”

If it is our sincere desire to enter that renewed relationship with God we can, as in all other things in our spiritual life, go to the scriptures for direction and inspiration so that we may enter into a ‘covenant relationship’ with God.

The word relationship depicts the existence of some form of bond or attachment between individuals or between individuals

and objects. These relationships from a Christian perspective may be fitted into three descriptive categories.

- 1) Godly - they draw or bind us to God.
- 2) Neutral - they neither draw us to or away from God and
- 3) Sinful - they draw us away from God.

When we use the term “covenant relationship” we shift our focus from what often is a relationship that is easily broken to one that has a permanent, binding quality. In Webster’s Dictionary the word “covenant”-derived from a Latin word meaning ‘to come together’- is further defined as a ‘meeting or agreement of minds’ As we read further in the book of Nehemiah Chapter 10, this definition of a ‘meeting or agreement of minds’ can be seen.

Nehemiah 9:38

"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it."

This last verse of chapter 9 was the culmination of Israel’s self examination and measuring their conduct and heart attitude with God’s requirements which had been laid before them. As we read the scriptures for ourselves or hear the word preached to us it is important that we have a complete willingness, as the people of Nehemiah’s time had, to see and acknowledge our own wrong doing and seek to redress it. Under the Old Testament dispensation the covenant that existed was one of works in that it implied, in the commands, prohibitions and promises of God, a promise that those that walked in perfect obedience would be entitled to happiness. The Book of the Law of Moses was quite plain in its message: Do this and live, Do that and die. The Book of Deuteronomy is very explicit in this area of obedience to God’s requirements. A number of times in the Old Testament this is brought out, for example the sons of Aaron:

Leviticus 10:1-2

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. [2] And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.

In the Old Testament era God made covenants with Adam, Noah, Moses and David, but none were able to do what the New Covenant does for us under Jesus Christ. The old covenants required perfect obedience and continuous blood sacrifices but they were not redemptive as the New Covenant is.

Jesus states in Matthew 26:28 *“For this is My blood of the new testament, (covenant) which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”*

The door has been opened for us by Jesus Christ to make a covenant with Him, a covenant which He has already sealed with His blood shed on Calvary. It is a covenant of grace by which God gives salvation to those that call upon Him in a covenant relationship, a return you may say for our believing in Christ Jesus and a yielding obedience to Him in the terms of the gospel. This covenant relationship with Jesus is a personal one but because we bind ourselves to a yielding obedience to the gospel this covenant relationship overflows and affects all our other relationships, including family, home and fellowships.

In Nehemiah’s time this aspect of a covenant relationship affecting all other relationships also applied and as we look more closely at some verses in chapter 10 this can be seen. We see that the people determined to change their ways, they made their decision with serious consideration, they did it together as a brotherhood of believers and they professed it to be a *“sure covenant”* indicating that they would never depart from it, that they would live and die by what they had covenanted with God to do. What these people did was in fulfillment of Jeremiah 50:5 that when they returned out of captivity they would *“.....ask the way to Zion with their faces*

thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.”

Nehemiah Chapter 10:1-27 gives a detailed list of the names of those who signed, what in this case was a written agreement, and Nehemiah again set an example of leadership by being the first to sign his name. Those that followed after him were the leaders of the priesthood and the leaders of the people. It probably would have been impractical for all the people to sign it individually and by their leaders signing it on their behalf again we see leadership and good example in action. These leaders showed that they were not putting burdens or expectations on their people that they were not prepared to carry themselves.

Pray that it would be so for those of us who are in positions of leadership! And dare I say that most, if not all of us, will find ourselves in such a position at various times in our brief span on earth.

As we look at who made this “*sure covenant*” we see that they were a people who separated themselves from the world around them, and those that dwelt therein, because of the false gods those people served. They separated themselves in this way because they had received the law of God They embraced how He wanted them to live and professed their desire to walk in His ways.

Nehemiah 10:28-29 “*And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; ²⁹They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His judgments and His statutes;”*

As we continue on in this chapter -verses 30-39 - it should be an encouragement to us to see how they made commitments to live in God's will.

Matthew Henry in his commentary on this chapter has this to say in part about making a covenant with God; “In our covenants with God we should engage particularly against those sins that we have been most frequently overtaken in and damaged by and those that resolve to keep the commandments of God must say to evildoers as in Psalm 119:115 “*Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.*” End quote.

Having briefly looked at the pattern set in Nehemiah’s time of making a covenant relationship with God we can make applications from it for our own lives. Even though we are no longer under the Law - the old covenant - we are still answerable to God for the same requirements of obedience to His word when we make a covenant with Him. John 14:15 “*If ye love Me, keep My commandments.*”

At the commencement of this study of Nehemiah the hope was expressed that with me you would consider your home, your life, your fellowship to be like the Jerusalem of old, a city in a land of people that do not love God or His people. As we come to the closing chapters of the Book of Nehemiah we can see a reinvigorated people, desirous of returning to the God who so loved them - that situation came about because of a leadership that sought God’s will, a leadership that was self-sacrificing, a leadership of example and servant hood. In some ways this depicts the example that Jesus Christ Himself has set us:

Philippians 2:7 “*But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:”*

What better example could we have, should we be in a position to exercise leadership whether in the home or in a fellowship. Today we see the fulfillment of the New Covenant in Christ that has been made available to all men everywhere: John 3:17 “*For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.*”

We today have the opportunity to be redeemed under the New Covenant and like Israel of old we too have a choice of obeying God or disobeying Him: Mark 16:16 is quite clear about the penalty attached to non-belief (disobedience) in very precise words. *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”*

If we take these words to heart then there is an even greater urgency to get to “grips with God and His ways” and to make a covenant with Him unto everlasting life. Christ Jesus has already sealed that covenant with His blood for all that will call upon Him. Matthew 26:28 *“For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”* as it was foretold in John 1:29 *“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”*

When God’s people in the Old Testament repented of their sins they still had to make physical blood sacrifices as atonement but not so for us, the blood has been shed by Christ on Calvary’s cross (Luke 23:3) When we make our covenant with Christ Jesus through repentance and baptism we shall have not only the gift of the Holy Ghost but remission of sin. (Acts 2:38 *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”*)

Under the new covenant that we can choose to enter into with God, His laws are written on our hearts, they are no longer external rules and requirements set before us : Hebrews 8:10-12 *“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: ¹¹And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest. ¹²For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”*

No longer do we need to struggle with keeping external rules (the law) as the Israelites did. God's requirements have been written on our hearts, they are within us and have become or should become our inward motivation to love and serve Him. Once we have taken this step of making a covenant relationship with God we have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit enabling us to walk in God's ways in our Jerusalem:

1 Corinthians 6:19 *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”*

We are not alone in the battle for our souls, let us be encouraged by the words of David in Psalm 18 as we call on our Saviour Jesus Christ, He too will be our strength as we labour to protect our Jerusalem, using the scriptures as our weapon and toolkit to defend, repair where necessary, and build our Jerusalem wherever the Lord has placed each of us. In this task we are to be co-workers with our brothers and sisters or should be if we take heed of and live as in Hebrews 3:13 *“But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”*

Another writer has said this about the new covenant into which we can choose to be partakers: “All scriptures have become the ground on which we walk - a watered garden to enjoy. We may pluck food from its branches, for it is full of fruitful things for our benefit, our strengthening, our healing and our guidance - that we might be the ‘living epistle’ of Christ in a dying world.”

What a wonderful expression of the manifold things that are available to us as we make our own Jerusalem a place of refuge for those whom Christ is calling to Himself. Choosing to enter this covenant relationship with God is a personal decision but one that nevertheless affects our relationship with other people. We may come into conflict with them because our ways, God's ways, are not their ways and we thus have to either separate ourselves from them or teach them about God's ways so that they too can make a choice. This situation generally applies to those outside our own

homes and families but in our own family/home we can and should sit down and teach family members to distinguish between good and evil so that they can make a decision on an informed basis to join themselves to God in a covenant relationship, through repentance and baptism and separating themselves also from the world's customs and devoting themselves to conducting their lives in accordance with God's word.

We can take note of Nehemiah's people where whole families committed themselves to the covenant of that time (see Nehemiah 10:28-29) and it would be a fine thing indeed if families that were united in their determination to serve God would establish a covenant relationship with Him not only individually but as a family group in this day and age. I believe it would bring great strength indeed to our own Jerusalem if all were united, it would certainly give Satan reason to pause knowing that there are 'watchmen' on the walls and at the gates of that Jerusalem.

There is then finally the covenant relationship which can and should be established in a brotherhood of believers. Again there is an example in Nehemiah 10:29 "*They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His judgments and His statutes;*" Here are the people of God gathered in fellowship as a community of believers, they agree to 'cleave' to each other, they bind themselves with an oath to observe God's laws. Here we have an example of true brotherhood and commitment not only to God but to each other.

If you truly desire your own fellowship of believers to be united in one under God then perhaps you should give serious thought and consideration to making such a commitment on its formation and encourage others who may join themselves to the fellowship at a later date to also make such a commitment. The early Christians had such commitment to each other that they shared all things (read Acts 32:37)

Psalm 116:18-19

“I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people, [19] In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the Lord.”

Oh Lord give us a heart like those, Your followers of old, endue us with power from on high that we may be living testaments to Your saving grace. May we, who have been called out of darkness into Your marvellous light, be bright shining beacons of Your Word working in our lives today, and so draw others into the safety of the temporary Jerusalem You have helped us to build for Your honour and glory here on earth until we may assemble with all the saints in Your heavenly and eternal Jerusalem.

Amen.



Gleanings from Nehemiah

Chapter 10

Continuity and Maintenance.

We have looked at building and restoring the walls of our Jerusalem with insights from the book of Nehemiah which I pray may be helpful to us all. As with any building project there comes a time when we can see the finished job but unless we walk around it, through it and thoroughly inspect it we may not see that there are some minor corrections that need to be made.

Continuing maintenance is also an essential requirement to keep the building in good repair and functioning in the way it was meant to be.

God has created us with five physical senses; sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. Each operates independently but are in partnership to make us whole and functional people. As we go about our daily tasks, and perhaps travels, these five senses tell us many things about our surroundings. For example we may enter a well kept public park; our senses allow us to enjoy the flowers, birds etc. They also help us to avoid areas or situations that may be off limits or dangerous - the same applies to our homes and other places we find ourselves in - our physical environment. In both Old and New Testament there are numerous reminders to us to use our senses for discerning God's ways and also to become aware of those things which are not God's ways – our spiritual environment. These two environments are not mutually exclusive but interdependent.

Our physical environment can and does have an influence on our spiritual environment and how we respond with our five senses will either be negative or positive to our spiritual environment - our life in Christ Jesus. As we consider the last three chapters of Nehemiah let us be conscious of how we need to take note of our

surroundings to ensure that there is a continuity in the way we live for God and a careful maintenance of His ways. The survival and growth of our Jerusalem is dependent on the co-operation of those that dwell therein and the quality of the leadership. Christ is our example of leadership and He has given us all the instructions we could ever need for abiding faithfully in our Jerusalem until He calls us home.

We noticed at the close of our discussion on Nehemiah chapter 10 that the people of that time had made a covenant with each other and with God to live in accordance with His commandments: Nehemiah 10:29

“They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;”

As we look at the remaining chapters of Nehemiah (11 to 13) we can see further signposts for our life in Christ in our own Jerusalem. Chapter 11 shows us that not all those who had made the covenant stayed in Jerusalem but that they were chosen by lot;

Nehemiah 11:1-2 *“And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities. ²And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.”*

It is not intended to convey that this is how we should choose those whom will dwell in our Jerusalem but rather see it as a determination by those who were not so chosen to bless those who were and they themselves live in their own possessions.

The lesson or example, I believe we can take from this today, is that when our fellowship becomes spiritually mature and numerically strong that we give consideration to chose with God's leading those whom will stay to maintain the fellowship and others to be sent out to establish new fellowships elsewhere. When we read the history of the early Anabaptist fellowships we note that this

was part of their way of spreading the gospel and it has also been a pattern adopted by some Mennonite fellowships over the years – it is still the practice with many of them today.

As we build our own Jerusalem, be it our own life, our family or our fellowship, let us keep in mind the great commission our Lord gave us all to preach the gospel to all the world, we cannot do that if we all decide to stay in one place and huddle together in a comfortable little group and ignore the world around us. Jesus did not do so and nor should we.

As we come to chapter 12 we see a people rejoicing in what they had accomplished, they had rebuilt the walls of their Jerusalem, they had reconciled themselves with their God and made a covenant with Him and each other, and now it was a time of celebration and rejoicing. It reminds me somewhat of the words of Jesus in Luke 15:7 *“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”*

Rejoicing indeed, not just one sinner, but probably many thousands had returned to the Lord. We rejoice when one of our family members repents and comes to the Lord. The fellowship rejoices when that happens to one who is seeking to follow Christ and takes that first step. Here we have a whole nation returning to God, no wonder there was a great celebration, it was a celebration, I believe, not just for the restoration and dedication of the walls but even more so for their new and restored covenant relationship with God. Nehemiah 12:27 *“And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps.”*

As we read through the chapter we see again the order that this was done in, it was not each man “doing what was right in his own eyes” but co-operating with others and following the instructions of their leaders. We too need to follow that example of being prepared to work together with others and to submit to those who

have been placed over us in accordance with God's word [Hebrews 13:17] God blessed them in their rejoicing and it was a very great rejoicing indeed; Nehemiah 12:43 tells us how great: *“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.”*

May we too rejoice with great joy as we complete the walls of our Jerusalem and make our covenant with Him who has saved us from destruction.

In the midst of their rejoicing they did not forget to read from the Book of Moses, nor should we forget to partake from the Scriptures, even in the midst of our rejoicing, as there are always needful instructions for our continuation in our covenant with God and with each other. As in all things in life, if we forsake or forget to take care and maintain what we have then soon it will fall into disrepair and in time become useless. We are reminded of this need in our spiritual life by the words in Hebrews 10:25: *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”*

Even though the people had the Book of Moses read and explained to them they needed a reminder of God's requirements to be separated from those that did not follow God, (Nehemiah 13:1-3) and they acted accordingly. We too need to continue to read and hear the Word of God so that we may be informed as to God's ways for our lives and act accordingly. It is not enough to read or hear it once; we need to continue in the Word to obtain the correct and maximum benefit for our lives and God's glory.

It is not clear in the scriptures how long Nehemiah was away from Jerusalem after the walls were completed but on his return from his duties with King Artaxerxes in Babylon he found that the people had again fallen into error. He says that this “grieved me bitterly” (verse 8), he was in particular referring to the accommodation given to Tobiah, who had shown himself to be an enemy of God's people, (Nehemiah chapters 2 & 4) within the precincts of

the temple. It would be like us giving a place to live/participate in our home/fellowship to someone who actively opposes God's ways. It also teaches us something about human nature, that it is led astray into false ways without strong and diligent leadership.

Nehemiah had put people in charge but it would appear that they had not been accountable to each other and thus fell into error. Sin had come into Jerusalem and needed to be exposed and cleansed out. We too need to carefully and regularly examine our Jerusalem to see if any sin has crept or been allowed in, expose it and cleanse it out. This is maintenance of our soul and spiritual life and it is a continuing task until the moment we are called home by our heavenly Father.

Earlier in this study we spoke of a completed supermarket but now whenever I go past I see the maintenance of the surrounds and the inside of it, without it there would soon be a mess that no-one would want to visit and so it is with our homes in the natural sense. If they are in a continual mess and state of untidiness, visitors will start to avoid us and it is the same with our spiritual life if it is messy and untidy, that is an un-scriptural life, tainted by sin, then we will not attract those whom seek Christ but instead repel them.

1 Corinthians 6:19: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"

In *Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary* the following observation is made on this verse; "We are to be clean, as vessels fitted for our Master's use. Being united to Christ as one spirit, and bought with a price of unspeakable value, the believer should consider himself as wholly the Lord's, by the strongest ties. May we make it our business, to the latest day and hour of our lives, to glorify God with our bodies, and with our spirits which are His."

Whilst this particular scripture verse is related to a spiritual application it may also be applied, I believe, to our physical circumstances. We owe it to our God and Creator to be not only clean and fit for His use spiritually but also physically. A clean, tidy Christian can be an attractive witness for Christ, a continually untidy

and unclean Christian is off-putting, if not repugnant to others, and this applies to our personal appearance as well as to our homes. May it never be so for us.

To be that attractive witness for Christ takes work, both spiritually and physically, and that is where the continuity and maintenance comes in. If we continue in His word we will maintain our Christian witness and for that we need the help of our brothers and sisters in Christ, yes we can do it on our own, but the road gets difficult and tiring when there is only one, we need each others company, that is why the scriptures urge us to continue in fellowship and exhort and encourage each other daily. (Hebrews 3:13, 10:25) Nehemiah acted in this way on his return from Babylon the second time, as we can observe in chapter 13. Once again he took time to observe what was happening but he also took steps to correct the sin that had been fallen into It is the very same thing we need to do in our own Jerusalem. It grieved Nehemiah bitterly that the people could have fallen into such error in such a short time but especially, because it was the leadership that had failed, and he took them to account. The scripture says that he “contended with them” and we can be sure that this would not have been an easy task for him. To admonish and correct others is always to be done in the light of the love Christ tells us to have for others. (Mark 12:31) He admonished them, He corrected them, and He instructed them in the way they should go. All these actions are those of a godly leadership and that is how we should be in our homes and fellowships.

We can also see from this chapter (verse 17) that, despite the position that some held, Nehemiah nevertheless corrected them, again there is a similar requirement put upon us in the New Testament Galatians 6:1 “*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*”

We may feel uncomfortable carrying this out in our fellowships or our homes but it needs to be done so that the example of wrongdoing may not be copied by others. If the wrongdoing is ig-

nored some weaker members may take it that it is not so bad after all because no correction has been forthcoming. All this is part of maintaining the integrity of our Jerusalem before God.

Furthermore, if any of us behave in a way that is not in accord with the Word of God then, we also have to be prepared to accept some responsibility for the sins which others may commit because of our example. Here again we can or should see the need to maintain our faithfulness to God's ways. There are many more areas in our spiritual journey that we need to regularly examine to see if we are continuing in the faith or if we need to carry out some repairs and maintenance to the walls of our Jerusalem. As is the case with our physical well being, which we need to check regularly and maintain through proper diet and exercise, so it is with our spiritual life. The Apostle Paul urges us a number of times in his various letters to continue in the faith, in doctrine and the things that we have learned from the gospels and he was not saying anything different then that which Jesus Himself said in John 8:31: "*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed;*"

Our Lord's words are plain and easily understood, they apply to us as well as those He was speaking to then, we cannot be His disciples if we do not continue living in accordance with His word - we need continuity and maintenance of our faith if we are to be accepted by Him in that final Day. Let us therefore be mindful of the need not to give up, become careless or complacent as we abide in our Jerusalem awaiting that better Jerusalem.

Let us be mindful of the words of our Saviour, Lord and King.

Luke 9:62:

"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

