

READ The BIBLE Together



EZRA & NEHEMIAH

19th April – 18th July 2015

SHALOM CHURCH, SINGAPORE
(Upholding the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)

Day 1 & 2 Re-read **Introduction to the book of EZRA** (Week 1 Day 2) and read **NEHEMIAH 1**

Ezra returned to Jerusalem around the year 458 B.C. and thirteen years later in 445 B.C., *Nehemiah* left Persia and came back to Judah. *Artaxerxes* was the Persian king in power then (2:1) and *Nehemiah* was his cupbearer.

The story begins with *Nehemiah* (a Jew and the king's cupbearer) in Shushan the citadel, having a meeting with some Jews who have just returned from Judah.

1. What is a cupbearer? What kind of a job is it?

2. What did *Nehemiah* want to know from Hanani and his friends?

3. What was the reaction of *Nehemiah* after he heard their report?

- 4 (a) Why, do you think, did *Nehemiah* react in this way?

- (b) If you were *Nehemiah*, would you have the same reaction? Elaborate.

Some Devotional Thoughts by Matthew Henry

In the providences of God concerning him (*Nehemiah*) we may observe, to our comfort,

1. That when God has work to do, He will never want (lack) instruments to do it with.
2. That those whom God designs to employ in His service, He will find out proper ways both to fit for it and to call to it.
3. That God has His remnant in all places; we read of Obadiah in the house of Ahab, saints in Caesar's household, and a devout *Nehemiah* in Shushan the palace.
4. That God can make the courts of princes sometimes nurseries and sometimes sanctuaries to the friends and patrons of the church's cause.

Verses 5-11 contain the prayer of *Nehemiah*. Since **verse 4** tells us that he prayed for many days, this prayer must be a sample of what his prayer was like during that period of time.

1. After taking some time to read the prayer of *Nehemiah* (**verses 5-11**), write down what you think are its main points:
2. What attributes of the LORD did *Nehemiah* emphasize in his prayer?
3. What did *Nehemiah* confess in his prayer to the LORD?
4. *Nehemiah* says, “We have acted very corruptly against You” (**verse 7**). To what was he referring?
5. Although *Nehemiah* used the word ‘*command*’ in **verse 8**, he was actually referring to a promise of God and asking God to remember it. What is the promise? (**Verses 8-9** cf. **DEUTERONOMY 30:1-5**)
6. How can this prayer of *Nehemiah* help you in your own prayers? List down at least two ways:

■

■

Some Devotional Thoughts by Matthew Henry

He concludes with a particular petition, that God would prosper him in his undertaking, and give him favour with the king: *this man* he calls him, for the greatest of men are but men before God; they must know themselves to be so (Psalm 9:20), and others must know them to be so. *Who art thou that thou shouldst be afraid of a man?* Mercy in the sight of *this man* is what he prays for, meaning not the king's mercy, but mercy from God in his address to the king. Favour with men is then comfortable when we can see it springing from the mercy of God.

Day 5 Review **NEHEMIAH 1**

Re-read **NEHEMIAH 1** (if needed) and review your observations/answers in Day 1-4 of Week 7.

1. What do you think is the message of **NEHEMIAH 1**? (In other words, ask: Why do you think this chapter is in the Bible? If **NEHEMIAH 1** is missing, how would it affect the message of the Bible?)
2. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 1**?

This is one possible way:

In these 11 verses, we see Nehemiah visibly and publicly concerned for Israel. He expressed his concern by his sorrows and tears, and by his fasting and prayer. In his prayer, he identified himself with Israel, took their sins as his, and pleaded for God's mercy.

In Nehemiah, we see a faint picture of our Savior Jesus Christ. His love for miserable sinners (suffering justly and deservedly) led Him to leave His throne in glory and to come into this sinful world. He lived among sinful people, suffered the contradiction of sinners and identify Himself with sinners. Finally, he shed more than tears for us; He shed His blood! He did not just give up His food and drinks for us, but He gave up His life to save us!

What other ways can you see the gospel in this chapter?

3. Write down one lesson you have learnt from **NEHEMIAH 1**:

Day 6 & 7 Read **NEHEMIAH 2:1-10**

Note that Chislev (**1:1**) is our November-December while Nissan (**2:1**) is our March April. Hence the time gap between **NEHEMIAH 1** and **NEHEMIAH 2** is about four months.

1. In order for *Nehemiah* to fulfill his heart's desire and return to Judah, he did something first before requesting the king. (**Verse 4**)
 - (a) What is it?
 - (b) Why?
2. Besides praying, *Nehemiah* had been planning and making preparations for his return to Judah. How do we know?
3. Note his request to the king in **verses 7-8**.
 - (a) Why do you think Nehemiah made the request? Was it necessary? Elaborate.
 - (b) Recall *Ezra's* refusal to make a similar request in **EZRA 8:1-23**. How do you explain the difference?
 - (c) What lessons can we learn from this?

Note #1: “*So I prayed to the God of heaven*” (**verse 4b**). On-the-spot prayer is based on the practice of on-going prayer.

Note #2: *“And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me” (verse 8b).* The king gave provision, but it was by Yahweh’s good hand that he did so.

Note #3: *“When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel” (verse 10).*

Sanballat was the governor of Samaria while *Tobiah* was the governor of Ammon. Their opposition (*‘deeply disturbed’*) was almost diabolical! *“We are not dealing with a mere human animosity. We are dealing here with the serpent’s seed hating the seed of the woman,”* says Dale Ralph Davis.

Week 8

[7th – 13th June 2015]

Day 1 Read **NEHEMIAH 2:11-20**

1. (a) What did *Nehemiah* do one night at Jerusalem?

(b) Why do you think he kept his mission secret?
2. Why do you think there was a newfound resolve among the Jewish leaders to build the walls of Jerusalem (**verse 18c**).
3. (a) How did *Sanballat*, *Tobiah* and *Geshem* oppose the attempt to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem?

(b) How did *Nehemiah* handle this opposition?
4. What lessons can we learn from these ten verses?

Note: Geshem was called an Arab. He could be a merchant, and his opposition could be motivated by commercial reasons. He could fear that a strong and independent Judah might affect his trade. If so, his reasons for opposing the Jews would be different from Sanballat's and Tobiah's; theirs would be more political.

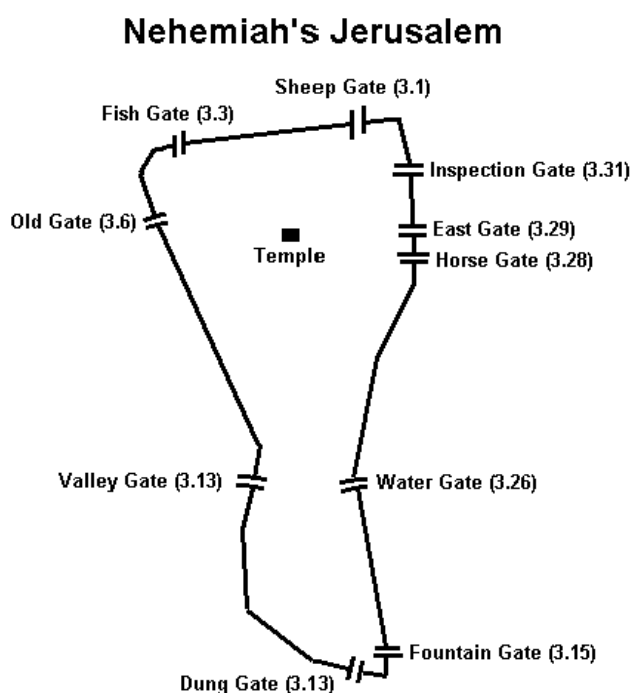
Day 2 Review **NEHEMIAH 2**

Re-read **NEHEMIAH 2** (if needed) and review your observations/answers in Day 6-7 of Week 7 as well as Day 1 of Week 8.

1. Why do you think this chapter is in the Bible? If **NEHEMIAH 2** is missing, how would it affect the message of the Bible?
2. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 2**?

Day 3 & 4 Read **NEHEMIAH 3**

As you scan **NEHEMIAH 3** for the first time, identify the gates mentioned and write down the names of those who were involved in the rebuilding/restoration of the gates and connected walls, using the picture below:



Now, go a bit deeper and note . . .

1. (a) Who was the first group of people who started rebuilding the wall?

(b) What reasons could they possibly give if they did not want to be involved?

Yet praise be to God, they didn't!

Note: The word '*build*' in Hebrew means to '*make strong*'. Hence, it likely refers to restorative work, not necessarily to work from scratch.

2. (a) Who refused to be involved in this work? (**Verse 5**)

(b) What do you think could be the possible reasons they gave for opting out of this work?

Note that others who had social and political clout avidly contributed their share to the work (**3:9,12,15,19**).

3. Read **3:28-30**.

(a) Why were these people making repairs in front of their own house?

(b) Were they doing the right thing? Elaborate.

4. **3:12** mentioned some unusual builders. Who were they and what do you think of their involvement?

5. Some people were doubly diligent and zealous. Who were they?

3:4, 21 ~

3:5, 27 ~

6. What lessons have you learnt from **NEHEMIAH 3**?

Day 5 Review **NEHEMIAH 3**

Re-read **NEHEMIAH 3** (if needed) and review your observations/answers in Day 3-4 of Week 8.

1. Why do you think this chapter is in the Bible? If **NEHEMIAH 3** is missing, how would it affect the message of the Bible?

2. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 3**?

Day 6 Read **NEHEMIAH 4**

After reading **NEHEMIAH 4**, write down ...

1. Your first impressions of the chapter and any questions or comments you might have:

2. If **NEHEMIAH 4** is missing, how would it affect the message of the Bible?

3. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 4**?

Day 7 Read **NEHEMIAH 4:1-6**

2:10 ~ *When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.*

2:19 ~ *But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"*

1. From "*deeply disturbed*" and "*laughing and despising the Jews*", Sanballat and gang are now "*furious and very indignant*" (**verse 1**).

(a) How did they express their fury? (**Verses 2-3**)

(b) *Sanballat* had the army of Samaria (**verse 2**) under his command. Why did he not use them to attack the Jews?

(c) How did *Nehemiah* handle the situation?

Verses 4-5 ~

Verse 6 ~

2. How should we view *Nehemiah's* prayer? Consider the explanation of Dale Ralph Davis:

- *It is a prayer for justice, for judgment against sin.*
- *As such, it is a prayer for God to act. Nehemiah is not presuming to take*

vengeance into his own hands; he commits that to God, which is exactly what Romans 12 instructs us to do.

- *This prayer presupposes that the project in question is the work of God; hence to mock it or those doing it is to assault the honor of God.*
- *These are not personal enemies (as those Jesus speaks of in Matt. 5:43ff.) but enemies of God's kingdom.*
- *There is no indication that Sanballat, Tobiah, et al., repented or sought repentance, and so considerations like those in Matthew 18:21-22 do not apply*

Note down your thoughts after reading the above.

3. What lessons have you learnt from these 6 verses?

Week 9

[14th – 20th June 2015]

Day 1 & 2 Read **NEHEMIAH 4:7-23**

Verse 7 ~ *Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry . . .*

Note #1: *Sanballat (Samaria)*

Ashdodites

Jews

Tobiah (Ammonites)

Arabs

The Jews in Judah/Jerusalem were surrounded by enemies!

Note #2: “*Very angry*” (**verse 7**) would be a few notches above “*furious and very indignant*” (**verse 1**).

1. What did Sanballat and gang threaten to do?
2. The dire situation of the Jews was further described in **verses 10-12**.
 - (a) What do you think **verse 10** is seeking to convey?
 - (b) What do you think **verse 11** is seeking to convey?
 - (c) What do you think **verse 12** is seeking to convey?
3. How did *Nehemiah* handle the situation initially? (**Verses 9, 3-14**)
4. What more permanent steps did *Nehemiah* put in place to counteract the threat of the enemies?

Verse 16 ~

Verse 17 ~

Verse 18 ~

Verses 19-20 ~

Verses 21-22 ~

5. **Verse 20c** ~ *Our God will fight for us!*

Since *Nehemiah* was so confident that God would fight for them against their enemies, why then did he put all those safety precautions in place, as we have seen in **verses 16-22**? Explain.

6. Write down the most important lesson you've learnt from this passage?

Day 3 Read **NEHEMIAH 5**

After reading **NEHEMIAH 5**, write down . . .

1. Your first impressions of the chapter and any questions or comments you might have:
2. If **NEHEMIAH 5** is missing, how would it affect the message of the Bible?
3. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 5**?

Day 4 & 5 Read **NEHEMIAH 5:1-13**

1. **Verse 1** says that there was a great outcry of the people. What was the outcry?

Hint: First, look at **verses 2-5** to understand the difficult and painful situations some of the Jews were in. Then read **verses 6-8** to find out what the Jewish nobles and rulers of the people did.

2. (a) What did *Nehemiah* want the people to do to resolve this problem (**verse 11**)?

(b) What motivations should drive the people to do as *Nehemiah* commanded? (**Verse 9**)
3. (a) What did people promise to do? (**Verse 12**)

(b) What further demands did *Nehemiah* place on them (**verses 12b-13**)? Why?

(c) What was the final outcome? (**Verse 13**)
4. What lessons have you learnt from this episode?

Day 6 Read **NEHEMIAH 5:14-19**

These six verses are something of an extract out of *Nehemiah's* diary.

1. As a governor of Judah, what did *Nehemiah* do, and what did he not do?
2. Why, do you think, did *Nehemiah* include this extract here?
3. How should we understand the prayer of *Nehemiah* in **verse 19**?

Day 7 Read **NEHEMIAH 6**

After reading **NEHEMIAH 6**, write down . . .

1. Your first impressions of the chapter and any questions or comments you might have:

2. If **NEHEMIAH 6** is missing, how would it affect the message of the Bible?

3. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 6**?

Week 10

[21st – 27th June 2015]

Day 1 Read **NEHEMIAH 6:1-14**

In **NEHEMIAH 6**, we return to see the continual attacks made by the enemies upon the Jews busy with the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. In particular, these attacks were focused on *Nehemiah*, either to eliminate or at least discredit him.

1. **Verses 1-9** present a series of insidious conspiracy they made on *Nehemiah*.
 - (a) What was the conspiracy?

 - (b) How did *Nehemiah* respond to it? (**Verses 3, 8, 9c**)

2. *Nehemiah's* enemies would not give up but kept trying different strategies. Some people within the Jewish community were not in favor of the building project; so *Sanballat* and *Tobiah* tried to use them against *Nehemiah's* leadership.

Who (of the Jews) were roped in to help *Sanballat* and *Tobiah* to attack *Nehemiah*?

3. Hear *Shemaiah's* proposal to *Nehemiah* in **verse 10**, and then *Nehemiah's* response in **verse 11**.
 - (a) It was generally understood that this was an attempt to discredit *Nehemiah* in the eyes of the people. **How?** (Hint: Ponder the response of *Nehemiah* in **verse 11**, and also the later assessment given to us in **verse 13**)
 - (b) How could *Nehemiah* discern that God did not send *Shemaiah*?
4.
 - (a) How should we understand *Nehemiah's* prayer in **verse 14**?
 - (b) Have you ever prayed in similar fashion? Should you? Elaborate.

Day 2 & 3 Read **NEHEMIAH 6:15-19**

1. The 25th of Elul is October 27, 445 B.C. On this day, the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was completed.
 - (a) What was its effect on the surrounding people? (**Verse 16**)
 - (b) Contrast **verse 16** with **verse 9** and **verse 14**. What do you see?
2. In your own words, describe what is happening in **verses 17-19**.

Note: **Verse 19** highlights two items: intimidating letters from *Tobiah*, and a constant stream of gossip, part of which was propaganda about the good

deeds of *Tobiah*. This was continuous. There was then a kind of 5th column within the city trying to wear down *Nehemiah* to the “reasonable” solution of “reconciliation” and compromise.

3. Summarize lessons we can learn from this chapter about how to deal with those who oppose God’s work?

Day 4 Read **NEHEMIAH 7:1-3**

1. What work had been accomplished up to this point (**verse 1**)?
2. Name the two men who were specifically identified in **verse 2**, and what positions were they given?
3. What characteristics qualified them for this work? Why would these qualities be important?
4. Describe the provisions made to guard the gates.
5. Why were these precautions needed?

Day 5 & 6 Read **NEHEMIAH 7:4-73**

NEHEMIAH 1 begins with *Nehemiah* concerned about the sad condition of the Jews back in Judah – “*in great distress and reproach*”. He began to pray, and when the occasion arose, he sought and gained permission from *Artaxerxes* to return to Jerusalem and rebuild its walls.

The story continues with *Nehemiah* back in Jerusalem, surveyed the desolations and then rallied the leaders and people to arise and rebuild Jerusalem. It was not an easy

project, as they faced oppositions of various forms from the surrounding people. Yet within 52 days, they completed the work, and in **NEHEMIAH 7:1-3**, we read of *Nehemiah* hanging the door and setting up security arrangements for the city.

Much has been accomplished but the work was not finished! There was the need to repopulate Jerusalem, and an even greater need to ensure that the people living there were holy– people who feared the Lord, followed His Word and shunned evil ways. **Nehemiah 7:4** onwards will address each of these issues, starting with genealogy!

1. What was the situation in Jerusalem at that time? (**Verse 4**)

2. To deal with the situation painted in **verse 4**, *Nehemiah* wanted to register the people by genealogy. The purpose is to make decisions concerning who should move in and stay in Jerusalem. This was actually carried out in **NEHEMIAH 11**. As he started to register the people, he discovered the genealogy list of the first return. This list was reproduced, with some changes, from **verse 6** onwards.

To whom did *Nehemiah* attribute his plan/response?

3. **Verses 6-72** are a reproduction of **EZRA 2**, with some changes. Dale Ralph Davis highlighted the significant correspondence between the two lists:

EZRA (538 B.C. group)

NEHEMIAH (445 B.C. group)

Genealogical record (2:1ff.)

Genealogical impulse & record (7:5ff.)

List ends (Ezra 2:70):

“And all Israel in their towns”

List ends (Neh. 7:73a):

“And all Israel in their towns”

7th month

& the sons of Israel in (their) towns
(3:1)

7th month

& the sons of Israel in their towns
(7:73b)

Assembly (3:1b)

People were gathered as one man to
Jerusalem

Assembly (8:1)

All the people were gathered as one
man to the plaza

Inauguration:

Altar in the ruins (3:3,6)
(1st day of 7th month)

Fulfillment:

Law in the city (8:1-2)
(1st day of 7th month)

Feast of Tabernacles (3:4)

Feast of Tabernacles (8:14ff.)

Observe the parallels and especially note how Nehemiah used the same language following the genealogical parallel (e.g. how the lingo of Neh. 8:1 picks up that of Ezr. 3:1). But the gathering Nehemiah 8 described was a wholly different gathering than that of Ezra 3:1. It occurred in the same month (7th month), yet some 90 years later.

Nevertheless, the editor of **NEHEMIAH** wants us to view the two assemblies side-by-side. He wants to draw a distinct parallel between the watershed beginning in **EZRA 3** (when the returned exiles began to build the temple) and the contemporary gathering in Nehemiah's day after the temple had been rebuilt and the city restored. In this way the editor emphasizes that the occasion of **NEHEMIAH 8-10** was as central and seminal as its earlier counterpart, namely the initial restoration under Zerubbabel. **EZRA 3** had been the critical commencement, **NEHEMIAH 8** in turn is a kind of consummation. Thus, the covenant renewal of **NEHEMIAH 8-10** can be seen on a plane with the temple restoration of **EZRA 3**. **EZRA 3** stresses the people and temple, while **NEHEMIAH 8** stresses the people and torah. Or, to say it another way, one portrays worship restored, the other depicts the word restored.

Day 7 Review **NEHEMIAH 7**

Re-read **NEHEMIAH 7** (if needed) and review your observations/answers in Day 4-6 of Week 10.

1. What do you think is the message of **NEHEMIAH 7**? (In other words, ask: Why do you think this chapter is in the Bible? If **NEHEMIAH 7** is missing, how would it affect the message of the Bible?)
2. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 7**?
3. Write down one lesson you have learnt from **NEHEMIAH 7**:

Day 1 Read **NEHEMIAH 8**

After reading **NEHEMIAH 8**, write down . . .

1. Your first impressions of the chapter and any questions or comments you might have:

2. Why is **NEHEMIAH 8** in the Bible? In other words, what do you think is the message of **NEHEMIAH 8**?

3. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 8**?

Day 2 Read **NEHEMIAH 8:1-12**

1. These twelve verses record a great assembly of the Jews in Jerusalem.
 - (a) When did it take place, and what is significant about this date?

 - (b) How long did the assembly last?

 - (c) Who were present?

 - (d) What was the activity that dominated this assembly?

(e) What was the posture and attitude of the people during this activity?

(f) What else did the people do? (**Verse 6**)

2. Focus on **verses 7-8**.

(a) Describe what happened here.

(b) How is this important? Elaborate.

3. Focus on **verses 9-12**.

(a) What did the leaders want the people to do? Why?

(b) What was the reason for the people's great joy?

4. What lessons can we learn from these twelve verses concerning our Christian public worship today?

Day 3 Read **NEHEMIAH 8:13-18, LEVITICUS 23:33-43**

1. (a) When did this second assembly take place?

(b) Who were present?

2. From the reading of the Law, they learnt about their obligations to do something.
 - (a) What was it?
 - (b) What was their response?
 - (c) What was the outcome?
3. What lessons can we learn from **NEHEMIAH 8:13-18**?

Day 4 Read **NEHEMIAH 9**

After reading **NEHEMIAH 9**, write down ...

1. Your first impressions of the chapter and any questions or comments you might have:
2. Why is **NEHEMIAH 9** in the Bible? In other words, what do you think is the message of **NEHEMIAH 9**?
3. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 9**?

Day 5 Read **NEHEMIAH 9:1-3**

Verse 1 informs us that we are now in the 24th day of the 7th month. The Feast of Tabernacles would have finished on the 22nd day of the month, yet these people did not return to their cities. Instead they stayed on to do what they are going to do here in **NEHEMIAH 9**. This shows how serious they treated the matter before them.

From **NEHEMIAH 8:9-12**, we learnt that the people were mourning and weeping after they've heard and understood the Law. However at that time, the leaders told them "*the day is holy, do not be grieved.*" In obedience, they put aside the mourning and weeping, and kept the Feast of Tabernacles with great joy. Now that the Feast is over, they were determined to address the cause of their grievances in **NEHEMIAH 8:9**.

1. How do we know that the people took the matter very seriously? (**Verse 1**)
2. What did the people do? (**Verse 2**)
3. What else did the people do? (**Verse 3**)
4. How long did the whole meeting last? (**Verse 3**)
5. What is the relevance of these three verses to you? Elaborate.

Day 6 & 7 Read **NEHEMIAH 9:4-15**

The Levites were going to lead the people in a prayer of confession, yet they began with a call to the people to "*stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever.*" As Derek Kidner puts it, "*The barely habitable city, the encircling heathen, and the poverty and seeming insignificance of the Jews are all transcended by the glorious reality of God.*" Let us learn to give praise to our God, at all times, even when we come to confess our sins!

1. How was God presented in **verse 6**?
2. From **verses 7-15**, God is presented as Redeemer.
 - (a) Why was there a people called Israel? It was because ...

- God _____ Abram and _____ him out of Ur, and gave him the name _____

- God made _____ with him to _____ the land of the Canaanites to _____
- God _____ His words for He is _____

(b) How did God deliver Israel from their bondage in Egypt, and why did He do it?

(c) Besides deliverance, what else did God do?

Verse 12 ~

Verses 13-14 ~

Verse 15 ~

3. Review **verses 7-15**. How is it similar to the Christian Life? Elaborate.

Week 12

[5th – 11th July 2015]

Day 1 Read **NEHEMIAH 9:16-25**

These ten verses narrate, in summarized form, the history of Israel from the days in the wilderness until the conquest of Canaan. It is a story of Israel's continual rebellion and God's persistent grace!

1. From **verses 16-21** ...

(a) List down the rebellious acts of Israel:

(b) In contrast, what did the LORD do?

(c) What is the message here?

2. **Verses 22-25** focus our attention on the conquest of Canaan.

(a) Who was the main actor?

(b) Who were the beneficiaries?

(c) What is the message here?

Day 2 Read **NEHEMIAH 9:26-31**

These 6 verses narrate, in summarized form, the history of Israel from the days of the judges until the exile of Israel/Judah. Once again, it is a story of Israel's continual rebellion and God's persistent grace!

1. From **verses 26-27** ...

(a) List down the rebellious acts of Israel:

(b) What did the LORD do in response?

2. From **verses 28-31** ...

(a) List down the rebellious acts of Israel:

(b) In contrast, what did the LORD do?

3. What is the message here?

Day 3 Read **NEHEMIAH 9:32-38**

This section of the prayer begins with “*Now therefore*”. The Levites and the assembly were ceasing their historical review to make their contemporary request.

1. How did they describe their condition then?
2. Did they blame God for their condition, or did they admit that they deserve it? Explain your answer.
3. What was their request(s) that they place before God?
4. (a) What else did they do?

(b) What is the significance of this?
5. What is the relevance of these verses to you? Elaborate.

Days 4-5 Read **NEHEMIAH 10:1-39**

1. In these 39 verses, we read of the Jews making a covenant with God. What is the relation between this covenant making and their prayer in **NEHEMIAH 9**?
2. Who were involved in the making of this covenant?
 - _____ (verse 1b)
 - _____ (verse 1c)

- The priests (verses 2-8)
- _____ (verses 9-13)
- _____ (verses 14-27)
- _____ (verses 28-29a)

3. The rest of **verse 29** is a general statement of what the covenant is about. It contains both a negative and a positive aspect.

The positive aspect is the commitment to observe and do all God's commands, ordinances and statutes.

The negative aspect is "*to enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's laws.*" What does this mean?

Do you think there is any significance in having both a positive and negative aspect to their covenant? Elaborate.

4. Following the general statement of the covenant (**verse 29**), **verses 30-39** contain very specific elements of the covenant. What are they?

- _____ (verse 30)
- _____ (verse 31)
- _____ (verses 32-33)
- _____ (verse 34)
- _____ (verses 35-39)

"*We will not neglect the house of our God*" (**verse 39e**) is a summary statement of the last three specific elements stated above.

5. (a) What is the significance of having these specific elements in the covenant?

(b) What is the relevance of (a) for you?

Notes from Matthew Henry on this covenant

The general purport of this covenant: They laid upon themselves no other burden than this necessary thing, which they were already obliged to by all other engagements of duty, interest, and gratitude—to *walk in God's law, and to do all his commandments*, Neh. 10:29. Thus David swore that he would *keep God's righteous judgments*, Ps. 119:106. Our own covenant binds us to this, if not more strongly, yet more sensibly, than we were before bound, and therefore we must not think it needless thus to bind ourselves. Observe, when we bind ourselves to do the commandments of God we bind ourselves to do *all* his commandments, and therein to have an eye to him as the Lord and our Lord.

Day 6 Review **NEHEMIAH 10**

Re-read **NEHEMIAH 10** (if needed) and review your observations/answers in Day 4 & 5 of Week 12.

1. What do you think is the message of **NEHEMIAH 10**? (In other words, ask: Why do you think this chapter is in the Bible? If **NEHEMIAH 10** is missing, how would it affect the message of the Bible?)

2. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 10**?

3. Write down one lesson you have learnt from **NEHEMIAH 10**:

Day 7 Read **NEHEMIAH 11**

After reading **NEHEMIAH 11**, write down . . .

1. Your first impressions of the chapter and any questions or comments you might have:

2. Why is **NEHEMIAH 11** in the Bible? In other words, what do you think is the message of **NEHEMIAH 11**?

3. How can we see the gospel in **NEHEMIAH 11**?

Week 13

[12th – 18th July 2015]

Day 1 & 2 Read **NEHEMIAH 11:1-36**

Recall that in **NEHEMIAH 7**, *Nehemiah* was concerned about the scarcely populated Jerusalem. To deal with the problem, he started to register the people and he soon discovered the genealogy list of the first return. **NEHEMIAH 7** ends with a republication of that list. What happened after that?

NEHEMIAH 11 provides the answer. Hence, **NEHEMIAH 11** can be seen as a continuation from **NEHEMIAH 7**.

1. Why do you think there is a need to intentionally repopulate Jerusalem?

2. The leaders of the people dwelt in Jerusalem.
 - (a) Who else would live in the city of Jerusalem?

- (b) Who decided the people who will live in the city of Jerusalem?
 - (c) Those who live in the city of Jerusalem were declared blessed. In other words, they were commended. Why do you think they were commended?
 - (d) Imagine that you were a Jew living in Judah then. Would you choose to live in Jerusalem? Why? Elaborate.
3. **Verses 3-24** list the people who lived in Jerusalem. As you read these verses, you will find that some of the people were called '*men of valor*'.
- (a) What does the term mean?
 - (b) Why do you think men of valor were needed to live in Jerusalem?
4. **Verses 25-36** list the people who lived outside Jerusalem. Since the overall concern was to intentionally repopulate Jerusalem, why then would the author of **NEHEMIAH** talk about people who lived outside the city?

Day 3 Read **NEHEMIAH 12:1-26**

These verses break down as follows:

12:1-9 – Priestly families & Levites at time of Zerubbabel & Jeshua (536 B.C.)

12:10-11 – List of high priests

12:12-21 – Priests during Joiakim's time (2nd generation)

12:22-23 – Notes about records

12:24-26 – Levites in Joiakim's time and following

1. What do you think is the reason the author includes these 26 verses here?
2. What is the relevance of these verses to us today?

Day 4 Read **NEHEMIAH 12:27 - 13:3**

The text does not tell us how long after the completion of the wall this dedication took place. We can assume it was very soon. *Nehemiah* did not separate the secular (wall building) from the sacred (worship), which was all part of the community's dedication to God. It was natural and appropriate to call a special worship service at the completion of the wall-building project that God had guided and protected.

1. At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, there was singing and there was sacrifice.
 - (a) How did they carry out the singing?
 - (b) How did they carry out the sacrifice?
 - (c) How would (a) and (b) impact our public worship today?
2. On the day the wall of Jerusalem was dedicated, two other things were done:
 - i. *And at the same time . . .* (**12:44**)
 - ii. *On that day . . .* (**13:1**)
 - (a) What arrangements were put in place in **12:44-47**, and why was it done?
 - (b) In addition to all the activities mentioned above, there was also the reading of the Law (**13:1-3**) during the dedication of the Jerusalem wall. What did they learn from the Law and what was their response?

At this point, the story appears to come to a happy ending. The walls of Jerusalem have been rebuilt and a dedication service conducted. The city has been repopulated, the people have made a covenant to walk in God's laws, and they have carried out whatever reforms the laws of God demanded. However, **NEHEMIAH** did not end at **13:3**. Instead, we have another 28 verses recording various unhappy incidences that will occupy our attention for the next two days.

Day 5 & 6 Read **NEHEMIAH 13:4-31**

Having finished what he set out to do, *Nehemiah* returned to *Artaxerxes* in Persia. (See **NEHEMIAH 13:6**, cf. **2:6**) But after some time, *Nehemiah* obtained leave to come back again to Jerusalem, to redress grievances, and purge out some corruptions which had crept in during his absence.

If indeed this is the historical background to **NEHEMIAH 13**, then how are we to understand **13:4**? Hear Dale Ralph Davis:

There is a troublesome phrase at the beginning of Nehemiah 13:4. It is usually translated in a temporal sense, e.g. "now prior to this" (NASB). This would seem to say that the following episode in which the priest Eliashib gave Tobiah motel accommodations in the temple took place before the episodes of Nehemiah 13:1-3 and 12:44-47. These latter two sections both begin with "on that day," referring to the time of the wall dedication in Nehemiah 12:27-43, and so both these sections are meant to be taken with that time of dedication.

Nehemiah was clearly present at that time. However, Nehemiah 13:6 implies that the reason Eliashib checked Tobiah into temple quarters was because Nehemiah was gone, reporting to the king. The simplest solution, I believe, is to follow the suggestion of Howard Crosby in Lange's Commentary. He insists that *weliphne mizzeh* in 13:4 should be taken positionally and not temporally, i.e., that it should be translated: "*In the face of this.*"

Note Crosby's comment: "*This should be 'in the presence of this'... with the circumstantial and not the temporal signification of liphne mizzeh. For Eliashib's evil conduct occurred while Nehemiah was away on his visit to Susa in Artaxerxes' thirty-second year, and not before the dedication-day. The meaning is, that Eliashib, the high priest, notwithstanding all this reform wrought by Nehemiah in Artaxerxes' twentieth year, in the face of it all, dared, twelve years after, when Nehemiah was far away, to introduce Tobiah into the courts of the temple.*"

1st Problem -- **13:4-9**

1. What was the problem?

2. How serious was it?
3. How did *Nehemiah* deal with it?
4. Do you think *Nehemiah* was too drastic in his dealing here? Explain.

2nd Problem -- 13:10-14

5. What was the problem?
6. How serious was it?
7. How did *Nehemiah* deal with it?
8. If you were *Nehemiah*, would you do the same thing? Explain.

3rd Problem -- 13:15-22

9. What was the problem?
10. How serious was it?

11. How did *Nehemiah* deal with it?

12. Do you think *Nehemiah* was too drastic in his dealing here? Explain.

4th Problem -- 13:23-31

13. What was the problem?

14. How serious was it?

15. How did *Nehemiah* deal with it?

16. If you were *Nehemiah*, would you do the same thing? Explain.

Note: Nehemiah's prayer in **verses 14, 22 & 31** are not works-merit prayers. Rather they are prayers uttered in the spirit of **HEBREWS 6:10, MARK 14:9** and **MATTHEW 10:40-42**. They are the prayers of one who knows that God does not ignore the earnest service of unworthy servants. In **verse 14**, *Nehemiah* asks God not to wipe out his "loyal deeds." The term is the plural form of Yahweh's covenant love (*hesed* in Hebrew). Nehemiah's deeds then are those done out of a covenant commitment, deeds done in response to Yahweh's covenant commitment.

Day 7 Review and Summary of **NEHEMIAH 13:4-31**

What is the message of **NEHEMIAH 13:4-31**? Ralph Davis gave a very good summary below:

“Do you see what chapter 13 is saying? Note that the four abuses listed above that Nehemiah corrected had already been eschewed in the covenant of 10:30-39. In light of this, ponder two quotations, which I believe are on the mark:

The final note in Ezra-Nehemiah is thus one of ambiguity. We may wonder how the people who had so exuberantly celebrated the completion of the defenses against the enemy came so readily to accept the enemy's presence within the Temple and the high priest's family. How, indeed, could those who had committed themselves so solemnly to religious purity (chapter 10) so rapidly return to practices which were essentially irreligious? If we sense a certain desperation about Nehemiah's last efforts to put the house of Israel in order, a tiredness about the need yet again to bring back the wandering sheep to the right path, a feeling that there is no reason to think that this reform will be more successful than any other, a sense that after all he himself has done his best (vv. 14, 22b, 31b), then we may be catching the right meaning here.

McConville, Gordon,
Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther
The Daily Study Bible

The Book of Nehemiah seems to peter out in what might be considered a somewhat unsatisfactory manner, not so much with a bang as with a whimper. All the abuses referred to in this final chapter have been the subject of earlier treatment, but they rear their heads again here despite the best efforts of the reformers to eradicate them... It is as though the book is pointing to its own failure, reminding us that however important good structures and routines may be... nothing can substitute for the renewal of the naturally perverse inclinations of the human heart.

Williamson, H.G. M., New Bible Commentary

These estimates do not discount the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, but expose the flakiness of the professing people of God. Does not the end of Ezra-Nehemiah then function as a blinking, yellow caution-light to those who place too much confidence in reform of the church? Not that such reform must not be pressed – but can't there sometimes be a subtle arrogance in it? *“We will separate from such-and-such a body, and we will start a new denomination, and we will see to it that it remains confessionally orthodox, fosters godly piety, and never gets on that slippery path to compromise.”* But, probably, it will. Look at the Free Church in Scotland a mere fifty years after the Disruption of 1843. Not even among the people of God can true constancy be found, not even when they take sacred vows to remain faithful.

Do you see how Ezra-Nehemiah preaches an implicit messianism? Does not the failure of Israel in this Scripture make you look for the Israelite who will not fail? Covenants are solemnly sworn yet easily broken. Where will we find the covenant keeper except in our faithful Savior Jesus Christ? Ezra-Nehemiah should drum into us a holy distrust of ourselves and give us a clear grasp of how tenuous our devotion is. *“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.”* Isn't it healthy to see that? And if we do, is there not hope?

Acknowledgement

Whatever the weaknesses of this Read-The-Bible-Together guide, they would have been far greater without the kind help of LAU Beng Hwee, PHUA Lai Tee and Monica ONG in giving their time and energy to review the entire guide, asking questions all the way and giving many valuable suggestions. Thank you, sisters!

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another! (Proverbs 27:17, ESV)

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Questions or comments concerning this RTBT guide?
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