

(Through the Bible) Nehemiah 8-13

by Chuck Smith

The sermon highlights the importance of understanding and following God's commands, and the significance of the Feast of Tabernacles as a reminder of God's preservation and faithfulness to the Israelites.

Duration: 1:21:59

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:10-13, Matthew 5:37, Acts 2:42, Acts 8:8, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Biblical Revival", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker describes a scene where the people of Israel are mourning and confessing their sins before God. They spend a significant amount of time reading the book of the law and worshiping God. The speaker highlights the contrast between their devotion and our tendency to become restless in comfortable settings. The people then make a covenant with God and express their desire to renew their commitment to Him. The sermon emphasizes the power of the word of God to bring conviction and the joy that comes from being in a right relationship with Him.

Transcript

Shall we turn at this time in our Bibles to Nehemiah chapter 8. Nehemiah has returned to Jerusalem some 90 years after the first return. Some 160 years from the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. Babylon has been overthrown by the Medo-Persian Empire.

Xerxes has become the king of Persia. Nehemiah was his cupbearer. And because of Nehemiah's obvious sadness in the presence of the king, something that was very unusual, the king questioned him on it.

And he said it was because of the reports that he had heard concerning Jerusalem. The walls of the city were of rubble, the gates were burned with fire, the people were very discouraged. And so in 445 BC, Artaxerxes gave the commandment to Nehemiah to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.

And he returned as an appointed governor over the area by Artaxerxes. And he encouraged the people in the building again of the walls of the city. And in spite of all of the obstacles, both from without and within, the work was accomplished in record time, 52 days.

They erected again the walls of the city of Jerusalem. Even though Tobias, Sambalat, and others had conspired against them, brought commando raids against them and all, still they accomplished the work of

God in 52 days. And there was a great celebration of the fact that they had finished the walls.

Now as we get into chapter 8, and all the people gathered themselves 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. And 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.

And 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. And Ezra the scribe stood upon the pulpit of wood that had been made for that purpose, and beside him stood these other scribes.

And Ezra, oh don't think I'm going to try that. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people. And when he opened it, all the people stood up.

And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, amen, amen, with a lifting up of their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Now we see this beautiful scene.

The people have gathered together in the area that was there near the porch gate, the street in front of it. Ezra is standing on a little pulpit of wood that has been made for him. And he stands on this and reads to the people, both men and women who are standing there, from morning until midday, he reads to them the law of the Lord.

And they stand there listening attentively. About noon, after they had been there probably for five, six hours, listening to the word of God, he blesses the Lord, gives praise unto the Lord, and the people respond by lifting their hands and saying, amen, amen. Now the word amen means so be it.

So it is an acknowledgment of the blessing that Ezra had made. Let it be, let it be. And lifting their hands unto the Lord and then bowing their faces to the ground, they worshiped him.

The Jews are rather demonstrative in their worship of God. It is interesting to go to the western wall to watch them. I don't know if it is a learned behavior or it's just something within them.

But as they are reading their prayer book, they are constantly bowing. And as they get into it, their voices, they lift their voices higher and higher. And they seem to be moving even faster, you know, as they really get into their prayer book and reading their prayers and all.

And then on Friday evening, the beginning of the Shabbat, the young men will come from the Hebrew school up in the upper part of the old city of Jerusalem. And they will come four wide, their arms around each other. And four wide, a group of them will come down singing songs of welcoming the Sabbath and singing songs in the Lord, sort of coming down with a little kind of a dance step.

And they will come on down into the area of the western wall, the large stone area there. And then they will start dancing as they are singing. And they'll get in a circle and go through all kinds of dances as they're singing and worshiping the Lord.

And then when they're through, they lock arms and they go out with a little stutter step again, back up to the school. But it is a very fascinating sight. And it's something that we always like to observe when we are

there in Jerusalem, the Friday evening, beginning of the Sabbath and the worship of these people as their voices are lifted in praise unto the Lord.

And as I say, some of them get very demonstrative in their worship, but it is always a very fascinating experience to see. Now here, if you can sort of close your eyes and picture it, Ezra has been reading to them out of the law of the Lord. And now about noon, he just blesses God.

And the people all lift their hands and say, Amen, Amen. Bowing their faces now, they bow down onto the ground. They begin to worship the Lord.

Beautiful scene as the people are making now a commitment of themselves to the law of God. And acknowledgement of the law of God as the governing principles by which they are going to live. Now, as we read on, that as he read the law, there were certain of the Levites that caused the people to understand the law and the people stood in their place.

And they read in the book of the law of God distinctly and gave sense and caused them to understand the reading. I think that there's a real key here. And I think that it is something that we need to make note of.

That is, that they read the word of God distinctly. And then they caused them to understand the meaning. They actually expounded to them the scriptures.

I feel one of the greatest needs in the church today is the reading of the word of God with the explanations. And expository preaching is probably the greatest need in the church today. And yet it is amazing how little you'll actually find the reading of God's word and then just the giving of the explanation.

You don't know how many thousands of people there are all over the United States who would like to trade places with you tonight. There are about a hundred people or so in Detroit, Michigan who have contacted us and they said, we're praying and believing God to send us a pastor from Calvary Chapel. And we have started putting our ties into a savings account, just waiting.

Because we're confident God is going to send us a pastor. We've sought for a church throughout this city where we could just be taught the word of God. Where we can just gather and study the word like you do at Calvary.

They started listening to the radio, then they started sending for tapes. And now there's over a hundred people that are listening to tapes. And they say, well, Chuck is our pastor.

But they can't find a church where they can just gather and learn the word of God. Find the teaching of the word. It's an amazing thing how difficult it is to find a church that will just teach the word of God and won't get all involved in the church hype or get all involved in emotionalism or something else.

Just the plain teaching of the word. And in the New Testament church, it said that they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, in the breaking of bread, in the fellowship and in prayer. But to find a church that just does that is a difficult thing.

And so we get letters. We got a call from people in Corpus Christi. There's over a hundred people down there that are praying that God will send them a pastor now from Calvary Chapel because they've been listening to the tapes and all.

And they've been gathering. They gather every week, listen to tapes and praying that God will send them a pastor teacher who will come down and will lead them. And it's just from all over the United States.

We're receiving requests of groups of people that are gatherings, listening to the word, want the word of God, want the teaching of the word of God, but can't find it in any of the churches in their community. And I have a difficult time understanding this because as far as I'm concerned, that's really what the church is all about. Learning the word of God, understanding what God's word has to say to us.

You don't need to learn my philosophies or man's philosophies. You can go to the university and get that. What you need is to learn what God has declared about life and the meaning of life, the purpose of life, the reason for life, the way of life.

And so this is what they were doing. They just read the scriptures distinctly. And then these fellows explained them.

They gave them the understanding. They made the scriptures clear to them. And they were reading out of the law of the Lord, explaining to them the law of the Lord.

Now, Nehemiah, who is the governor, Tershatha is the governor and Ezra, the priest and the scribe and the Levites that taught the people said to all the people, this day is holy unto the Lord, your God, don't mourn or weep. For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, go your way, eat of the fat, drink the sweet, send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared.

For this day is holy unto our Lord. Neither be sorry for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So as they were reading the scriptures and as the scriptures were being explained, the people came under a godly conviction.

For they realized how far they had failed in keeping the law of God. The word of God brought conviction to their hearts and realizing their failure before God, they began to weep as the scriptures were being read. It's always a beautiful thing to see God's spirit working in the hearts of people.

It's always a beautiful thing to see how the word of God is alive and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword and is able to pierce between the soul and the spirit and really begin to cut deep. That conviction just brings tears as people realize their failures. But they said, hey, don't weep, don't mourn.

This is a day of rejoicing because we are renewing the covenant with God. It's a time of coming back to God. It's a time of restoration.

And so go eat the fat, drink the sweet, give portions to those that have not prepared for the joy of the Lord. So be your strength. Oh, what joy there is in the Lord, what joy there is of the Lord.

And what strength there is in that joy. God has intended that your life be filled with joy. That's God's will for you.

God wants you to have a life full of joy. Peter speaks about the joy that is unspeakable or indescribable and full of glory. Jesus said that your joy may be full.

And he was talking always about this fullness of joy. What a misconception it is of God to think that God wants to lay heavy burdens on all of us, to make us just, you know, have to grind through life and barely pull through. I just pray God will help me to make it to the bitter end, you know, to endure.

Well, God wants you to enjoy. And the command was to enjoy the joy of the Lord. So be your strength.

And oh, what joy there is in walking with Jesus. And so the Levites stilled all the people. They said, hold your peace for the day is holy.

Neither be grieved. And so all the people went their way to eat, to drink and to send portions and to make great merriment because they had understood the words that were declared unto them. Oh, what a joy should fill your heart when you go from this place and you've understood the word of God.

You know, in the New Testament talks about where the gospel went and so forth. And it said, and there was great joy in all that city. As a result of receiving the word of God, the result of receiving the gospel, always it follows there is great joy.

And so they went their way to just make their merriment and all because they had understood the words. And on the second day, they're gathered together, the chief fathers of all the people, the priests, the Levites to Ezra, the scribe to understand the words of the law. So the first day it was a public meeting.

All of the men and women, plus those that were able to understand. So children from junior high school, perhaps on those that were able to understand stood there for the reading and the explanation of the law of the Lord. Now, on the second day, just the rulers had gathered together that they might be taught the law of God.

And they found written in the law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month, that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem saying, go forth into the mountain, fetch olive branches, pine branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of thick trees to make booths as it is written. So the people went forth and brought them and made themselves booths. Everyone upon the roof of his house or in the courtyard or in the court of the house of God and in the street of the water gate and in the street of the gate of Ephraim and all the congregation of them that were come out of the captivity made booths.

And they sat under the booths for since the days of Joshua, the son of none, unto that day, the children of Israel had not been keeping this particular commandment. Now, this particular feast called Succoth or the Feast of Tabernacles, which takes place in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. It was commanded in the law of Moses that during this particular feast, they were to make these booths and they were to move out of their houses and for a week live in these little booths that were made out of branches.

Now, as they made these booths, they had to leave enough space in the walls, the thatched walls of palm branches or whatever. They'd leave enough space for the wind to come blowing through it. They'd leave enough space in the roof so that as they would lie there at night, they could see the stars.

The purpose of the Feast of Tabernacles was to remind them how that God had preserved their fathers through the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. That's why they were to make booths. Your fathers dwelt in tents for 40 years.

Now you're living in the land that God promised. You're living in a house and all and, you know, your plastered houses and all this. So in order that you might really remember the hardships that your fathers endured, make these little booths, move out and live in them for a week.

And it'll remind them of God's preservation of their fathers through the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. And to give them a little taste of some of the inconveniences of living in booths or in thatched huts or whatever. And it reminded them of the 40 years.

Also, the feast was to commemorate the fact that God was faithful to his promise. And he brought them into the land and gave them the land that he had promised to their father Abraham. So a twofold aspect of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Feast of Tents. Remember the tents that your fathers dwelt in as they were in the wilderness and now God preserved them. But then the faithfulness of God, he kept his promise.

And after 40 years, he brought them into the land that had been promised to Abraham. During the time of Christ, they further celebrated this particular feast by a daily procession of the priest from the Temple Mount down to the Pool of Siloam, where the priest would fill these great water pots with water from the pool and then would come again singing up the steps back to the Temple Mount. And as the people were all gathered worshiping there, the priest would pour these water jugs out onto the pavement and let the water just splash on the pavement.

And that was a reminder to them of how that God provided water out of the rock in the wilderness for their fathers. And they would sing and worship God as the water was poured out on the pavement during the days of the Feast of the Tabernacles. They did that for seven days.

The feast lasted for eight days. On the eighth day, there was no procession to the Pool of Siloam. There was no pouring out of water.

This was to commemorate the fact God brought us into the land, a land that is well watered, a land that we do not need a miraculous supply out of the rock that we are now dwelling in the land that God had promised. And so the eighth day, no pouring of water, no processions, just as an acknowledgement that God had kept his covenant with Abraham, kept his word with their fathers, brought them into the land. Now, the Bible tells us that Jesus was in Jerusalem on the last day, the great day of the Feast, which was the Feast of Tabernacles.

And he cried saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. This was the day that they didn't make the procession to the Pool of Siloam. And Jesus declaring himself as the rock from which the water of life flows.

To the present day, many of the Orthodox Jews still build little booths beside their houses and they'll move out and live in these booths for the seven day period of the Feast of Tabernacles. When we were in Jerusalem and in Haifa and all, during the Feast of the Tabernacles several years ago, beside several of the houses, we saw these little booths that the people have made and they moved out of their houses and lived in these inconvenient little booths and they do it to the present day. There are probably Orthodox Jews here in Orange County that do live in these little booths for the period of the feast.

Now, it is interesting on the feast of the Jews, the three major feasts was Passover, Pentecost and Feast of the Tabernacle. On these three feasts, all of the male Jews had to come to Jerusalem to present themselves to God. They all just came to stand here before God.

Here we are, God, your people. And there was great celebration, great feasting and all during this period of time. Two of the feasts have been fulfilled for they were prophetic.

They were looking forward, they are all of them prophetic, looking forward to future events. The Feast of Passover commemorating the Lamb that was slain in order that the firstborn might be spared the death was only a foreshadowing of the Lamb of God that was to be slain in order that we might have life, that we should not perish but have everlasting life. And thus, it was significant that Jesus was crucified during the Feast of the Passover in order that he might fulfill that which that feast foreshadowed, the Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world.

The Feast of Pentecost was a celebration of the first fruits. For 50 days after the Feast of Passover, they would go out and they would cut the corners of their fields and bind the sheaves and bring them in and offer them to God in a wave offering. And this was saying to God, Here, Lord, are the first fruits of the harvest that you have given to us this year.

Because the spring wheat and grains and so forth all ripen up about June over there. And so they offer to God the first fruits of the harvest there in June at the Feast of the Pentecost. And it was significant that when the day of Pentecost was fully come, as the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem, suddenly there was the sound from heaven like as unto a mighty rushing wind.

And it filled all the house where they were seated. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. And they spoke in other tongues as the Spirit gave them the utterance or the ability to do so.

And it happened right on the day of the Feast of Pentecost, which again is significant because there when 3,000 people were added to the church was the first fruits of the glorious harvest that God was going to gather together in the church, the bride for Jesus Christ. And the first fruits of that were on the day of Pentecost, the day in which they were offering to God the first fruits of the great harvest. And so that feast was always foreshadowing the first fruit of the bride of Christ, the great harvest that God was going to gather.

Now, the Feast of Tabernacles. Remember, it commemorates the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, but it also commemorates the covenant of God completed coming into the promised land and now dwelling in this glorious land of promise. The earth has been going through a long wilderness period, but God is going to keep His promise.

Peter said to us, God is not slack concerning His promises as some men count slackness, but He is faithful to us. But there will be those in the last days, scoffers will say, well, where is the promise of His coming? Since our fathers have fallen asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning. Peter said, not so.

There are things that you're not taking into consideration, the flood, and you're also not taking into consideration that God, well, the flood that God has in catastrophes entered into the history of man to alter the situations. Plus, you don't take into consideration the time dimension that one day is as a thousand years to the Lord, a thousand years is as one day. But then he said, God is not slack concerning His promises.

And He's referring directly to the promise of the coming again of Jesus Christ. But He is faithful. And then He tells us the reason for the delay.

He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Now, the earth has been going through a long wilderness experience, but we're going to be coming soon into the glorious promised

land, the promised kingdom, the promised age. It's going to happen.

And I am convinced that when Jesus returns to establish the kingdom age, He'll do it during the Feast of the Tabernacles and thus fulfill the third of the major Jewish feast. And so I anticipate the return of the Lord in what would be in our calendar, October. Not, I don't say Chuck said he's coming this October.

I didn't say this October. But when he comes to establish his kingdom and sets his foot on the Mount of Olives, it will be in the month of October. Now, I know that it's at least seven years off, at least.

How many years off? I don't know. But at least seven years off. Because there's one more seven year period that has to be fulfilled upon the nation Israel.

But when it does happen, I'm certain that it'll happen in October, that the third of the major Jewish feast might thus be fulfilled. And so two of them have now been fulfilled. The third one waits.

But how significant going through the long wilderness and now entering into the promise. Promise land, the glorious promises of God. And so they discovered the Feast of the Tabernacle written there in the law.

They not known about it. They made their little booths and they moved out and they kept the feast for seven days. And on the eighth day, the solemn assembly, according to the manner.

So, as I said, the Feast of the Tabernacles actually lasted for eight days, the seven days of the feast. And then they had this solemn assembly. It was on the day of the solemn assembly that Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.

Now, in chapter nine and the 24th day of this month, the children of Israel were assembled with fasting and with sackcloth and earth upon them. So, again, it's quite a picturesque sight. The people have all gathered together.

They've been fasting. They're wearing sackcloth. Rough garments, no doubt very irritating.

And they've got dirt on them, the custom of just a sign of mourning. Again, you just, you know, rub dirt on your face and and you look miserable. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from the strangers.

And they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 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.

So, again, can you picture them there for a fourth part of the day, the reading of the scriptures and now for a fourth part of the day, just worshipping God. Praising God and worshipping God. It's interesting how that we get fidgety sitting in comfortable pews after a half hour, an hour or so.

You know, we're still fidgety. And yet here are these people standing for a fourth part of the day, hearing the word of God read and then for another fourth part of the day, just standing there worshipping God. They'd never get by with it today.

Then stood up upon the stairs, the Levites, and they cried with a loud voice unto the Lord, their God. And they said, stand up and bless the Lord, your God forever and ever. And blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

Now, even thou art Lord alone and thou hast made the heaven and the heaven of heavens with all the hosts of the earth and all things that are therein, the seas and all that are therein, and thou preservest them all and the host of heaven worshipeth thee. So, this glorious acknowledgement of God, the greatness of God, the glory of God, the power of God, you've made the heavens of heavens. You are above everything.

You've made the universe and you preserve the universe. Now, it is interesting that Paul tells us in the book of Colossians concerning Jesus Christ that all things were made by him and by him all things are held together. This whole universe is held together by the power of Jesus Christ.

According to Columb's law of electricity, positive forces repel each other, opposite forces attract. Try and put two positive poles of a magnet together and you'll see how the positive poles repel. But the whole concept of a magnet and the attraction is that of the opposite poles attracting, the positive poles repelling.

There is actually a tremendous repelling force in positive poles or positive charges, the protons. If you had one tablespoon full of protons on the north pole, solid, another solid tablespoon full on the south pole, at that distance of some 8,000 miles, the repelling force would be so great that it would take 3,000 tons to hold those protons on the poles. Even at that distance, the repelling force of positive protons, positive particles.

So, we know that an atom has in its nucleus positive charges held together. But how are they held together? The scientists talk about the nuclear glue. Now, we have discovered that we can upset the nuclei of an atom by bombarding it with slow-moving neutrons.

And when we can upset the nuclei of an atom, that when we can, we can then cause these positive poles to respond according to their nature. And we have an atomic explosion. That's what it's all about.

It's upsetting the nuclei of an atom by the bombardment of slow-moving neutrons that get in and upset these positive forces. And they respond according to their own nature of repelling. And when they do, you see the tremendous force that is unleashed when you start a fission reaction of these positive poles responding to their own nature.

And you get this tremendous explosion of the atomic bomb. All it is, is releasing the positive charges to respond according to their nature of repelling. Now, if that much power is unleashed by nature when they are responding to their nature, then it also stands that it takes at least that much power to hold them together contrary to their nature.

If the whole material world would respond according to the natural laws of the repelling of positive forces, immediately this whole thing would just dissolve and would just be one gigantic poof. And positive particles would be just going all over repelling each other and the whole universe would just blow to pieces. But there's a power that's holding it all together.

Imagine the tremendous power it must take to hold this material universe, even the power that would take to hold this pulpit together. The amount of fissionable material in the bomb at Hiroshima was about the size of a dime. And yet when those positive particles were allowed to respond according to their nature, look at the tremendous damage that was accomplished.

But what force is holding them together? Here they talk about it. Oh, God, you've created the heavens and heavens. You're so great.

Your power is above all things, you know. And you actually are preserving the whole thing. Paul tells us he's holding it together.

By him, all things consist or are held together. How glorious. The power of God.

Now, Francis Schaeffer said that the time has come when we as Christians just shouldn't say God. Well, God did this for me or God did that for me because there are many concepts of God today in the minds of people. And when you say God, a person thinks of the God in their own concept, that which they have in a thought of God.

And it may be far different from the thought that you have of God. Some fellow may sit and meditate upon his navel and say, Oh, that's God, you know. Or you sit and you hold a rose and you smell of it and you say, Oh, that's God.

So when you say God, a person may think of this rose, Oh, you know. And so he said that we must start defining and saying the God who created the heavens and the earth. Now they are defining the God because there were many gods that were worshipped around them.

Baal was worshipped and Molech was worshipped and Mammon and so many various gods were worshipped by the people around them. That as they began their worship of God, they make really a definition and a distinction of the God that they are worshipping. Bless Jehovah, your God forever and ever.

Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. For even thou, oh Yahweh or Jehovah alone has made the heaven and the heaven of heavens, the whole universe with all of the hosts and the earth and all of the things that are therein. The seas and all that is therein.

Now they've been reading the law of Moses and they were been reading Genesis in the beginning. God created the heaven and the earth, been reading the first few chapters of Genesis. And so they acknowledge that God was the one who has created, even as is declared in Genesis, this whole universe and all that is in it.

Now it is interesting in the New Testament, the fourth chapter of the book of Acts, when the apostles were responding to the prohibition that was laid upon them by the religious leaders not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. Peter and John gathered with the disciples and they told them the experience they had before the Sanhedrin. And they prayed and when they started to pray, they said, Oh Lord, thou art God.

Thou has created the heavens and the earth and everything that is in them. Probably remembering the prayer offered here in Nehemiah, where much the same thing is said. Thou art the God who has created the heavens and all the hosts, the earth and all the things that are in the sea, that all the things that are in.

And you preserve them all. And the host of heaven worshipeth thee. So the host of heaven would be a reference to the angels who worship God.

So when he said he created all the host of heaven, it would be he has created all of the angels and they do worship him. Thou art Yahweh, the God who did choose Abram and brought him forth out of the earth, the Chaldees. You gave him the name of Abraham and you found his heart faithful before thee.

And you made a covenant to give him the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites and so forth. And you have performed your words for you are righteous, acknowledging that God made the promise to Abraham. God fulfilled the promise to Abraham.

Here we are, we're in the land for God. You are righteous. And you did see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt.

You heard their cry by the Red Sea. You showed your signs and wonders upon the Pharaoh. And so they're just sort of rehearsing their history.

They have been reading this history. They have been listening to it. They've been reading the law of the Lord from morning till noon.

And so these are the things that they were reading in the first five books. You did divide the sea before them so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land. And their persecutors you threw into the deeps as a stone into the mighty waters.

That sort of puts down the little theory that it was the Sea of Reeds and it was only, you know, 18 inches deep. Figures don't lie, but liars sure can figure. Moreover, thou let us them in the day by the cloudy pillar at night by the pillar of fire to give them light in the way wherein they should go.

And you came down also upon Mount Sinai and you spoke with them from heaven and gave them right judgments, true laws, good statutes and commandments. So notice he gave to them right judgments, true laws, good statutes and commandments. And you made known unto them your holy Sabbath and you commanded them the precepts and the statutes and the laws by the hand of Moses.

You gave them bread from heaven, the manna in the wilderness for their hunger. And you brought them water out of the rock for their thirst. And you promised that they should go in and possess the land that you had sworn to give to them.

But they and our fathers dealt proudly. Now, here's the acknowledgement. God, you were faithful.

God, you kept your word. But our fathers, they failed. Always the failure is on our part.

So many times we're wanting to blame God. God is righteous. God is faithful.

God will keep his word. We're the ones that have failed. Never God.

The failure is always on our part. But our fathers dealt proudly. They hardened their necks.

They didn't hearken to your commandments. They refused to obey. Neither were they mindful of the wonders that you did among them.

But they hardened their necks in their rebellion. They asked for a captain to return them to their bondage. But you are a God who is ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.

And you forsook them not. Isn't that beautiful? They say, oh, I don't believe in the God of the Old Testament. He's a God of wrath and judgment and vengeance.

I love the God of the New Testament. Believe in the God of the New Testament. As though there were two gods revealed in the scriptures.

Never. One God. And he's revealed in the Old Testament right here as gracious, ready to pardon, merciful, slow to anger, great kindness.

And he forsook them not. That sounds like it would come from the pen of Paul as he's talking about the grace of God in the New Testament. Oh, how gracious is God? How merciful is God? How understanding, how pardoning.

When they made the molten calf and they said, this is the God that brought us out of Egypt. Now, again, they point out God is faithful. Even when they were not, God was still faithful.

And they went ahead and made this golden calf. Yet in your manifold mercies, you did not forsake them in the wilderness. And the pillar of the cloud did not depart from them day to day that it might lead them in the way.

Neither the pillar of fire at night to show them the light and the way wherein they should go. But you gave also thy good spirit to instruct them. Oh, how good is God to us even though we often fail, even though we often are hardening our hearts.

Yet the faithfulness of God and the mercy of God and the grace of God and the patience of God with which he deals with our lives. He won't forsake them. He won't forsake his people.

Though they had turned their backs and forsaken him, still he is faithful. He will not forsake them. How glorious is our God.

And then giving his good spirit to instruct them. And you didn't withhold the manna from their mouth or the water for their thirst. And for 40 years, you sustained them in the wilderness so that they lacked nothing.

Their clothes did not get old and their feet did not swell. Moreover, you gave them kingdoms and nations and divided into them into the corners that possessed the land of Sihon and Og. And their children also multiplied as the stars of the heaven.

And you brought them into the land concerning which you had promised to their fathers that they should go in and possess it. So the children went in and possessed the land and you subdued the inhabitants of the lands before them. And they took the strong cities and the fat of the land and they possessed the houses that were full of goods, wells that were already digged, vineyards and olive yards that were already planted, fruit trees in abundance.

So they did eat and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. Nevertheless, they were disobedient. Notice how they are acknowledging always the righteousness of God and the failure of the people.

And so important that we do this. God, you were righteous. You were fair.

We were the ones who failed. We were the ones who turned our backs. Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against thee.

They cast thy law behind their backs. They killed the prophets that testified against them to turn them back to you. And they wrought great provocations.

Therefore, you delivered them into the hand of your enemies who vexed them. And in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto you, you heard them from heaven. And according to your manifold mercies, you gave them saviors who saved them out of the hand of their enemies.

But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee. Therefore, you left them in the hand of their enemies so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they returned and cried unto you, you heard them from heaven.

And many times did you deliver them according to your mercies. What an accurate picture of the history of the nation of Israel. And you testified against them that you might bring them again unto the law.

Yet they dealt proudly and did not hearken to your commandments, but they sinned against your judgments, which if a man do, he shall live in them and withdrew their shoulder and hardened their neck and would not hear. And yet many years did you forbear them and testified against them by that spirit in your prophets. Yet would they not give ear.

Therefore, you gave them into the hand of the people of the lands. Nevertheless, for thy great mercy's sake, you did not utterly consume them or forsake them. For you are a gracious and merciful God.

Oh, that is so powerful. I love that. Now, therefore, our God, the great and mighty, the awesome God who keeps the covenant of mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee that has come upon us and on our kings and our princes and priests and prophets and fathers and upon all the people since the time of the kings of the Assyria unto this day.

How be it you are just in all that you brought upon us for you have done right. We have done wickedly. What an important acknowledgement to make.

God, you are just in all your ways. There are people today who are constantly challenging the justice of God. Well, how can God, a God of love, allow this? Or how can a God of love do that? Or how can a God of love, you know, send a man to hell and all of the challenges of the justice of God? But let me tell you this.

God is absolutely fair and God is absolutely just. Oh, but what about that poor African who has never heard of Jesus Christ? And he dies without ever knowing what's going to happen to him. God is going to be absolutely just and absolutely fair.

You better not worry about him. You better worry about yourself. You have heard.

You're the one you better be concerned about because you know. God will be fair with him if he doesn't know. God will also be fair with you because you do know.

He's righteous. Oh God, thou art a righteous God. You're just in all that you've done for you have done right.

We are the ones that have done wickedly and neither have our kings or our princes or our priests or our fathers kept your law nor hearkened to your commandments. And you test and your testimonies were with you to testify against them for they have not served thee in their kingdom and in their in thy great goodness that you gave to them and in the large and fat lamb which you gave before them neither turned they from their wicked works. Behold, we are servants this day for the land that you gave unto our fathers

to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof.

Behold, we are servants in it and it yielded much increase unto the kings whom thou has set over us because of our sin. Also, they have dominion over our bodies and over our cattle and over our and at their pleasure and we are in great distress and because of all of this, we make a sure covenant and write it and our princes and Levites and priests seal to it. Okay, here's the whole picture.

God, you were fair, you were honest, you were right but we're having a horrible time. You know, we are servants in this land. The kings are ruling over us and though the land is producing, they're exacting taxes that are ruining us.

Now, God, we want to renew a covenant with you. We want to get right with you. Important step.

We want to make a covenant. We want to sign to the covenant. Lord, we want to put our X. I'm going to walk in a covenant.

I want to renew the covenant of God. Marvelous, marvelous idea and purpose. So, these are the guys who signed the covenant.

Now, these words were sealed and these people signed the covenant starting with Nehemiah, the governor. And he gives the names of the leaders who signed the covenant. And the rest of the people, verse 28, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the nephemims and all they that separate themselves from the people of the lands under the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, everyone having knowledge and having understanding.

They claimed to their brethren, their nobles and they 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 all the commandments of the Lord our God and his judgments and statutes. So, this is the covenant they made and they by a curse, you know, curse be the man that, you know, fails to do it and all. And they, yes, will do it when they bound their hearts together and in a determination, we're going to serve God.

We're going to follow him. We're going to keep his commandments that we've read in his law. We will not give our daughters to the people of the land, nor will we take their daughters for our sons.

And if the people of the land bring any of their merchandise or food on the Sabbath day to sell it to us, we will not buy it from them on the Sabbath day or on the holy days that we would leave the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. So, they'll keep the Sabbath year law in that they will forgive every debt in the seventh year as was commanded in the law of Moses. And also that they'll allow the land to just not be planted or cultivated in the seventh year.

Give the land its rest. Actually, you remember they were 70 years in captivity in Babylon that the land might have its rest for they have been in the land for 490 years and they did not keep the seventh day or the seventh year Sabbath for the land. So, God said, I'm going to give the land the Sabbath that you didn't give it.

I'll keep you out of it for 70 years so that the land will have its 70 Sabbaths at its midst. Now, they said, we'll keep it and the exaction of every debt. We also made ordinances for us to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel to the service of the house of God.

So, we'll all give this money that the house of God might be maintained, that they might have the show bread, the meal offerings, continual burnt offerings and all of the Sabbath offerings, new moons and set feast and so forth. And so, we all covenant we know we're going to support the house of God and the worship in the house of God. And we will bring the first fruits of our ground, the first fruits of the fruit of all of our trees year by year to the house of the Lord.

Also, the firstborn of our sons, our cattle, as it is written in the law, the first things of the herds, the flocks to bring to the house of God and the priests that minister in the house of our God, that we should bring the first fruits of our dough. And now that's not your money, but your bread dough that they made and the offerings and the fruit of all manner of trees and of wine and oil and to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God and the ties of the ground and to the Levites, that the Levites might have ties in the cities of all of our tillage. And the priest, the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites.

And when the Levites take the ties, the Levites will bring up the tithe. And so it was just commitment. Lord, we're going to follow you.

We're going to keep your law. We're going to keep all of your commandments and statutes. We're not going to, we're going to keep the Sabbath day law.

We're not going to buy on the Sabbath day. We're going to keep the seventh year. We're going to start keeping up the house of God and the worship and so forth.

I mean, it was, it was the heart of the people to covenant. Lord, we're going to be your people again. We're going to serve you.

And the rulers of the people, chapter 11, dwelt at Jerusalem. And the rest of the people also kept slots that one in 10 might dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city in nine parts, dwelt in all the other cities. So when they came back, they actually inhabited quite a bit of the territory down towards Hebron, Beersheba on up to Ramallah, Bethel and all quite a bit of territory.

There was only about 50,000 of them. And so they decided that one in 10, which means about 5,000 would dwell in Jerusalem. They wanted to maintain the capital city so they'd have a place of worship and all.

And the rest of the people, of course, Jerusalem, isn't that good a farm territory. There's much better farming down in some of the valleys around Jerusalem than there is in Jerusalem itself down into, down towards Hebron, the Eshkol Valley and all, much better farming, even down towards Bethlehem and the valleys down through there. So one in 10 would, and so they cast lots to find out which ones would stay in Jerusalem and the rest would move into the surrounding territories and live in the surrounding territories.

And so we have the names of the families upon whom the lots were drawn who should dwell in Jerusalem. And then beginning with verse 20, the names of the families that were to dwell in the other cities roundabout. And some of the cities and the villages where they were to dwell.

In chapter 12, now these are the priests and the Levites. And so it gives the names of those priests and Levites that were serving at the time. And it gives their genealogy in verses 10 to 21.

And then it tells the chief of the Levites, the priest. So when we get to verse 27 of chapter 12 and at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought the Levites out of all of the places to bring them to

Jerusalem to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgiving, with singing, with cymbals and salt trees and with harps. And so the time of the dedication of the wall was to be a time of great festivities, a lot of singing, a lot of music, a lot of just excitement and worship as they were dedicating the wall.

So gathering the Levites for most of them, the musicians among the people. So to gather them together and the sons of the singers, they gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country and around about Jerusalem from the villages and also from the house of Gilgal in the fields of Geba and so forth. And from all over the people gathered.

And then he said, I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall and I appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one went on the right hand of the wall towards the dungate and those that went down in that direction. And also, verse 43, that day they offered great sacrifices. They rejoiced for God had made them rejoice with great joy.

And the wives also of the children rejoiced so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off. So a tremendous day dedicating the walls and worshiping God and just the shout and the joy and the singing was so glorious that was heard for a long distance. And at that time, some were appointed over the chambers of the treasures for the offerings and for the first fruits and for the tithes to gather them out of the fields.

Both the singers and porters kept the word of their God and the word of the purification, according to the commandment of David and Solomon. For in the days of David, Asaph was appointed as the chief singer to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel in the days of Nehemiah gave the portions of the singers and the porters every day as portion and they sanctified the holy things and the Levites and the Levites sanctified under the children of Aaron.

And on that day, they read in the book of Moses in the audience of all the people and therein was found written that an Ammonite and a Moabite should not come into the congregation of God forever because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but they hired Balaam against them that he should curse them. Howbeit, our God turned the curse into a blessing. Now it came to pass when they heard the law that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

So they're discovering things all the time in the law of God as they're reading the law of God. They're discovering things and then they're seeking to inaugurate them. And so reading again, they came across the passage that a Moabite or an Ammonite were not to come into the house of God forever because of the treatment that they gave to the children of Israel when they were coming from Egypt into the promised land.

They would not allow them to pass through their land. They wouldn't help them with food. They King Balak hired Balaam to come and curse them and all.

And so God said, don't let them in the house of the Lord throughout all their generations. So they separated all the mixed multitude out of them. Before this, Eliashib, the priest who had the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God was allied unto Tobiah.

Now, Tobiah was this rat who gave Nehemiah so much trouble when he was trying to rebuild the law. But here the priest was a friend of his. And so he had prepared for him a great chamber in the temple, a place where they used to keep the meal offerings or all of the wheat and for the meal offerings of frankincense,

the vessels and the ties of the corn and the new wine and the oil.

One of the storage rooms, the high priest gave to this guy, Tobiah and put his furniture in there. Let it become his living quarters. And here was this guy that gave such a hard time to Nehemiah in the building of the walls and so forth.

Now this priest, because he's his friend, patronizing him and all, gives him a place to live in the temple. And so we read that. But in all of this time, I was not at Jerusalem when these things were happening, for he had returned back to Persia.

And he didn't know that the priest had given this place to Tobiah there in the temple. And so he said, well, this time I wasn't in Jerusalem for in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, the king of Babylon, I came unto the king. And after certain days, I obtained leave of the king.

So after 12 years in Jerusalem, rebuilding the walls, setting things up, governing, he, Nehemiah, returned back to Persia, came back to the king and no doubt gave him reports and all. And after a period of time, and we don't know how much time, the king of Persia allowed Nehemiah to come back to Jerusalem. And when he got back to Jerusalem, what does he find? But this rat Tobiah that had done so much to hinder the work of God, here he's got sumptuous quarters right in the temple of God.

The priest has given him these quarters. They took out the area where they stored the corn and so forth. And they say, here, you move right in, you know, brother rat.

And so I came to Jerusalem. And when I found out the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah in preparing him a chamber in the courts of house of God, it grieved me sore. Therefore, I tossed all of his furniture out and Tobiah out of the chamber.

And I commanded that they cleanse the chambers and brought again the vessels of the house of God. And the meal of the friends frankincense. So many coming back and he's cleaning house.

He finds Tobiah set up house, you know, his furniture on. Man, he just tossed him out with his goods, put him out. And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them for the Levites and the singers that did the work were fled everyone to his field.

So you remember just a little while back, everybody had read the law and they said, oh, we're going to serve God. God, you know, we're going to write the covenant. We're going to sign.

We're going to tithe. You know, we're going to support the temple. We'll give the shekel and so forth.

They're part of the shekel annually. We're going to do these things. God, we're going to keep your law.

God, we're going to keep your Sabbaths and all. Didn't take him long to fall away from that commitment. Isn't it interesting how quickly we can turn away from the vows that we've made to God, how easily we can break vows.

Now, the vows are really made in sincerity. Oh, how many vows I have broken. Growing up as a child, wanting to be better, wanting to be good, wanting to do the right thing.

Oh God, I'm going to pray every day this week. Oh God, I'm going to live for you this week. Oh God, I'm just going to serve you.

And then it doesn't come. It doesn't happen. And the following Sunday night, I'd feel so guilty.

I'd have to get saved again. And then I'd say, Oh God, this week is going to be different. Lord, I'm going to really serve you this week.

And I would mean it. I was sincere. As Jesus said to Peter, the spirit indeed is willing.

And that was so true of me. My spirit was willing. I love the Lord.

I wanted to serve the Lord, but my flesh was weak. The will to do was with me, but how to perform I could not find. I desired to serve God.

And with my heart, I did serve the Lord. But with my mind, with my flesh, I just couldn't bring it in. The flesh was weak.

But yet in my heart, in my mind, I love God. And I wanted to serve God. And I made so many promises.

And I was just like the children of Israel, making the promises saying, Lord, we're going to do it. We're going to sign. Here we are.

And I even signed covenants. Every summer camp, we had covenant signing up there. You know, I'm going to live a victorious life for Jesus Christ all year long.

I'll never drink. I'll never smoke. I'll never go to the devil's places and the whole thing.

And standing around the campfire, tears flowing down my face. God, this year I'm going to serve you. The will was there.

The desire was there. The problem came in the performance. How to perform, how to do, or how I thank God for the day in which I discovered the grace of God.

And that the blessings of God upon my life were not predicated upon my faithfulness to my promises or vows. But the blessings of God upon my life were bestowed because He is a God of grace, full of mercy. And I began to experience then the work of God in my life.

His grace, His mercies don't make promises anymore. I found out making promises to God really wasn't to trust in His grace, but it was to trust in my flesh. I always thought I could do better.

And every vow that I made was expressing to God some confidence in my flesh. Lord, I'm going to do this for you. And I meant it.

But my flesh is weak. I know that in me, that is in my flesh, there doesn't dwell a single good thing. So I do not challenge the sincerity of these people when they sign this covenant.

God, we're going to serve you now. But Nehemiah, the leader goes and soon the people are, you know, back to their old tricks. They're not paying.

And thus the Levites had to all go back out into their fields. They all had to go back and get their jobs again. They had to go to work.

And thus the temple worship was forsaken. So Nehemiah said, I contended, contended with the rulers. And I said, why is the house of God forsaken? I gathered them together and set them in their place and then brought all of Judah, the tithes of the corn and the new wine, the oil into the treasuries.

And I made treasures over the treasuries. And he names those that he made as treasures. Remember me, he said, Oh my God, concerning this and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for the offices thereof.

And in those days I saw in Judah some who were treading their wine presses on the Sabbath day and they were bringing in the sheaves and they were loading down their donkeys and also their wine and their grates and their figs and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I testified against them in the day wherein they sold these vituals. And their dwelt men of Tyre also therein and they brought fish and all manner of goods and they sold on the Sabbath to the children of Judah in Jerusalem.

Now they had said earlier, Lord, we're not going to buy on the Sabbath at all. We're going to keep your Sabbath. Here they violated that.

So I contended with the nobles of Judah and I said unto them, what evil thing is this that you do and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do likewise and God bring all of this evil upon us and upon the city? Yet they bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath. And it came to pass when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded the gates should be shut and charged that they should not be open until after the Sabbath. And some of my servants said I at the gates that they should allow no burdens to be brought in on the Sabbath day.

So Nehemiah to correct this violation of the Sabbath ordered in the evening before the Sabbath began, close and lock the gates and don't unlock them until the Sabbath is over. Stop the trafficking on the Sabbath day. Now it is interesting that the Jews actually start closing down on Friday afternoon about two o'clock for the Sabbath.

Just as Nehemiah established before it gets dark, they start taking off now for their Sabbath about two o'clock in the afternoon. They close their shops and also that everything is over. By the time the sun goes down, the family is all gathered in the home and the mother offers her little prayers.

She lights the Sabbath candle and they begin then their Sabbath worship. Also, there are some areas of Jerusalem where they're seeking to enforce the Sabbath and they don't want any cars driven through their area on the Sabbath day. And so they put barricades up in front of some of the streets.

So there are some streets in Jerusalem where you can't even drive a car on the Sabbath day. And then there are boys who have their piles of stones. And if you decide that you're going to drive a car there anyhow, you'll find your car stoned on the Sabbath day.

Now, that's a violation of the Sabbath day to bear a burden, hurl a stone, but they feel righteous in doing it and they actually stone the cars that would drive through their neighborhoods on the Sabbath day. Now, Nehemiah was forcing the Sabbath. He closed the gates in the evening before it gets dark.

Go ahead and lock the gates and don't open them up until the Sabbath is over. So some of the merchants and the sellers of all kinds of wares were lodged outside of Jerusalem for a couple of weeks, once and then twice. So I testified against them and I said to them, why are you lodging about the wall? If you do

this again, I'm going to lay hands on you.

And so from that time forth, they did not come anymore on the Sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves and they should come and keep the gates to sanctify the Sabbath day. So remember me, oh my God, concerning this also and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

Lord, remember my good deeds. And in those days also, I saw Jews that had married wives from Ashdod and Ammon and Moab and the children spoke half the speech of Ashdod and they could not speak the Jews language, but according to the language of each people. And I contended with them and cursed them and I smote certain of them and plucked off their hair and made them swear by God saying, you shall not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters unto your sons or for yourselves.

So Nehemiah is really straightening things out, pulling out their hair, cursing them. And of course, going back though, they entered into a curse. We're not going to do this.

And they said, you know, let us be cursed if we do this thing. And they made their vows and said, let us be cursed if we violate this back a couple of chapters. And now they have violated.

So he curses them because they said, let us be cursed if we do it. So he went ahead and cursed them and plucked off their hair and smote them. He was tough.

He said, did not Solomon, the king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations, there was no king like him who was beloved of his God. And God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, even him did outlandish women cause to sin.

So one of the greatest problems is outlandish women. And even a guy as wise as Solomon and loved as Solomon was outlandish women were his downfall. You know, there is something here.

Solomon had quite a bit to say about it in the book of Proverbs concerning that woman who flatters with her lips, winks with her eyes, says, come, my husband is on a journey. My bed is all perfumed. He said, don't go into her house for it is the gate of hell.

Many strong men are destroyed. Solomon was speaking, perhaps out of personal experience as wise as he was as blessed of God as he was. Yet outlandish women his downfall was women, actually.

And it was it was a curse and it was his downfall. It caused his downfall. So Nehemiah is reminding them, look, you guys, you can't handle it.

A guy as wise as Solomon was destroyed by outlandish women. And you're going to be destroyed, too. Shall we then hearken unto you and do all this great evil to transgress against our God and marrying strange wives? And one of the sons of Jorda the son of Eliashib, the high priest was the son-in-law to Sambalot.

Now, Sambalot was the other guy. Tobiah was one. Sambalot was the other.

They gave Nehemiah a bad time. Therefore, I chased him out of there. Remember them, oh my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites.

And thus I cleansed them from all the strangers and appointed the wards of the priest and the Levites, everyone in his business. And for the wood offering and for the tithes appointed and for the firstfruits, remember me, oh my God, for good. So the story of Nehemiah, a very, very remarkable person, very honorable person.

I like him. I like his spirit. I like his spunk.

I like his dedication to God, his commitment. Be fun meeting him.

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