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Overview of Nehemiah



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this overview of Nehemiah, presented by Steve Gregg, the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by the Jewish people is highlighted as a symbol of building a spiritual edifice in the New Testament church. Nehemiah, a layman and strong leader reliant on divine guidance, successfully completed the task despite facing opposition from enemies. The book of Nehemiah is significant in the preservation of Jewish faith and highlights the importance of using the right materials, such as spiritually living people who are genuine born-again believers and disciples of Jesus Christ, in building the church.

Transcript

Alright, we're going to be doing an introduction and an overview of the book of Nehemiah tonight. Last month we were talking about Ezra, of course. It is thought by many that Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book.

We know that many of the books we've studied recently in the Old Testament are now two books in our Bible, but were originally one book in the Hebrew Bible. That's true of the books of Samuel. There was only one book of Samuel in the Hebrew Bible.

It divides into two in our Bible because it was so long. Same thing with Kings. We have first and second Kings in the Hebrew Bible.

There was just the book of Kings. Chronicles, likewise. First and second Chronicles were one book originally.

So some believe Ezra and Nehemiah were perhaps originally written by Ezra. It's not known whether Ezra wrote these books, but Jewish tradition says that Ezra wrote the books of Chronicles, and the book of Ezra, and the book of Nehemiah. And it is probable that this tradition is true.

He certainly was capable of doing so, and he lived at the right time, and he had the motivation to do it. If he didn't, then some anonymous author did, who would be less prominent than Ezra. And more likely, this is the work of Ezra.

Although there are several chapters of Nehemiah where Nehemiah speaks in the first person, where making it obvious that he wrote some of these chapters, it is believed that Ezra may have taken the memoirs of Nehemiah. Nehemiah did write his own journals, apparently, and we have the content of them in some of these chapters. But this was just one of the sources that Ezra may have used in writing the whole history, at least as much as was preserved for us, of the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity.

Now, the Israelites, the northern kingdom, had gone into captivity in Assyria in 722 BC, but the nation of Judah, the southern kingdom, had remained for another 130-something years, and was taken into Babylon in 586 BC. And there they spent the better part of 70 years. I say the better part because some were there longer than others.

People like Daniel and his three friends went into captivity in 605 BC. Ezekiel and others went into captivity later in 597 BC, and then the rest of the nation of Judah was carried away into captivity in 586 BC, and the temple was destroyed at that time, and the nation ceased to exist as a nation. The region was now under the control of Babylon, and through most of the time of the captivity, Babylon ruled until 539 BC, when Babylon was conquered by the media Persian empire.

The king of that empire was Cyrus, and Cyrus was very generous toward people in his empire who had been taken away from their homelands by his predecessor, the Babylonian empire. And so Cyrus actually gave permission for all expatriates from other lands who had been taken against their will into Babylon, now that Babylon had fallen and Persia had replaced them in power, Cyrus gave them the right to go back to their own lands. In particular of interest to the biblical writers is the fact that he wrote a decree allowing the Jews to go back to Judea.

It doesn't tell us in the Bible that Cyrus did this with other nations as well, which he did, but that's not important to biblical history. We're interested in the history of the Jews. And so Cyrus allowed the Jews to go back.

The book of Ezra opened with a citation of the decree of Cyrus, and we know that the first several chapters of Ezra, the first six, are about how a man named Zerubbabel in 538 BC led a group of 50,000 Jews from the land of Babylon slash Persia back to Judea, reestablished the community of Jews there, and eventually rebuilt the temple. Now, there was a lot more to rebuild than the temple. We know that during the years following Zerubbabel's time, not all the things that were destroyed were rebuilt.

Many of the houses were not rebuilt, although the people did apparently build enough housing for them to live in. There were still more exiles to come, and lots of houses were in ruins. Also, the walls of the city apparently were in ruins and burned down by the Babylonians, and that meant that even though there was now a community in Judea again, or Judah as it was then called, those people were not protected.

They were vulnerable to invaders. In ancient times, almost every city of any size had tall protective walls around them, and those walls were pretty much impregnable, at least not easily conquered. Some cities had walls that were impregnable completely.

Babylon, for example, had walls that were 300 feet tall all around it, very thick walls, like an eight-lane highway on the top. You can see that walls like that, there's no ancient military technology that could really conquer walls like that. Lesser cities probably had not the budget for those kinds of walls, just like we don't have much of a budget right now for a wall that's being proposed along our southern border, but they had some walls.

If they could have them, they would, because a wall was the best protection in ancient times from invaders. They didn't have airplanes then. They just had to come on horseback, and if there's a big wall in front of you, it was a tremendous barrier.

Now, not always something that couldn't be overcome. Invaders like Nebuchadnezzar and like Alexander the Great and others after him, the Romans, who conquered Jerusalem later on in 70 AD, all had to defeat walls, big walls, and they could sometimes do it. They had ladders.

They had battering rams. They had catapults and things, and they could eventually make breaches in walls so that their armies could get in and invade a city, but a city that had no walls at all was simply a sitting duck. Anyone could just bring their armies in and just sweep in and overtake them, and so the wall being broken down was really not at all acceptable because although the Jews had returned, many of them, many still were in Babylon, as we'll see, but many of the Jews had returned to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

They were surrounded by hostile neighbors. Those neighbors are largely the people that came to be called Samaritans later on. Many of them were half-breed Israelite slash Gentiles because when the northern kingdom of Israel with the ten tribes of Israel in the north had been destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC, these Israelites intermingled with the Gentiles, and so by the time that this came around two centuries later, many of the people were simply intermixed, part Israelite, part Gentile, and their religion was part Israelite and part Gentile, pagan in other words.

These were the people of the Samaritans. Much later, of course, half a millennium later in the days of Jesus, the Samaritans were very much despised by the Jews and the feelings were mutual. The Samaritans, you know, in Jesus' day lived just north of Judea and in the land as a buffer between Judea and Galilee, and both the Jews to the south and the Jews to the north hated the Samaritans, and part of it was because of the history of things like what we read about in Nehemiah, because the enemies of the Jews were these people of the land, and they did not want those walls built.

Now these people had not, as far as we know, launched any invasions against the Jews, but you never know when you might want to. If you're a neighbor who's hostile, you just

as soon have your neighbor against whom you're hostile vulnerable, and so there was no happiness on the part of the neighbors that Nehemiah was going to help build the walls, and that's what this story is about. Now I realize, I mean, I'll say this in passing, there are people who, when Donald Trump was elected, began to speak of him as a Nehemiah, partly because, of course, he ran on the platform of building a wall to keep out invaders.

Now you might say, well, he didn't build a wall to keep out invaders, he's not going to build a wall to keep out invaders, he's trying to keep out illegal immigrants. Well, when there's 13 million illegal immigrants coming in against the will of the nation, that's an invasion, you know, so there is a similarity. However, I'm not saying Donald Trump is anything like Nehemiah.

I'm not even suggesting he's a godly man, but some thought that he is somebody that God is going to use to bring, you know, build protected boundaries around the country. That would not be the application of Nehemiah that I would first make. I believe that there is an application we can make to Nehemiah, and it has very little to do with a wall on our southern border, and that would have to do with the spiritual Israel, the spiritual Jerusalem, which is the body of Christ, the church in the New Testament, and that it also is under construction.

Remember Jesus said in Matthew 16, upon this rock I will build my church. The church is a building under construction. If you look at Ephesians, before we get into Nehemiah, if you look at Ephesians chapter 2, Paul speaks of the church as a building under construction, like a temple, sort of like what Zerubbabel was doing, building the temple.

In Ephesians chapter 2, starting at verse 19, Paul says, Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God. That is the church, of course, the household of God, God's family. Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being jointly, joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also, being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

So we are being built together into a habitation of God. Now this is not a physical building, the church is not a physical building, but it is a spiritual building under construction. Over in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 5, Peter in many respects in his epistle seems influenced by Paul, especially by Ephesians.

I think there are dozens of parallels between 1 Peter and Ephesians, and this is one of them. In 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 5, Peter says that you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. So we are like living stones being built up into a spiritual house.

So it's a spiritual building made of people, spiritual people, making a spiritual edifice. In fact, the word edifice is the word behind the word edify. The verb edify, which we find often in the New Testament, means to build up, like a building, an edifice.

And Paul uses that term significantly in Ephesians 4, verses 11 through 13. Paul says, he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. That is, the building up the body of Christ as a building.

Of course, he used the expression body of Christ rather than, in this case, like temple of the Holy Spirit. He tells the Corinthians that the church is the temple of God. And so here also there is the imagery of building mixed with that of a body.

And that is, the body is being built up like a building through the ministries of the people that God gave to do that. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and so forth. Those are there so that the body of Christ would be built up.

Now, the body of Christ was built, or began to be built, in the first century. And I didn't think I'd take so much time to look at New Testament passages before getting to Nehemiah. But I want to do this.

Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 3. And then we'll get to Nehemiah, I think. I have given out notes on Nehemiah, so if I never get to him, everything I'm going to say is on those notes anyway, right? Probably not. 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Paul is explaining to the Corinthians something they're having a hard time grasping.

And that is that he and Apollos are on the same team. Paul had come and started the church. He planted it.

And he ministered in that church for 18 months in Corinth. Then he left. And sometime shortly after he left, Apollos visited, another preacher.

Paul and Apollos had not even crossed paths yet. Paul didn't even know Apollos, though he probably knew of him by reputation, since Priscilla and Aquila knew both Paul and Apollos. And therefore they had mutual friends.

But Apollos came and made an impression on the church in Corinth so that some people were saying, I like him. I am of Apollos. And others were saying, well, I'm of Paul.

He's the guy who started the church. I'm of Paul. You can be of Apollos.

I'll be of Paul. And others were saying, you know, really, Peter's the guy who's kind of the main authority in the church in Jerusalem. I'm going to be of Peter.

And so Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians, said, I don't understand it. Some of you are saying I'm of Paul. Some are saying I'm of Apollos.

And some are saying I'm of Cephas or Peter. And some are saying I'm of Christ. And he rebuked them because it's as if you're dividing the body of Christ.

But he's still talking about that in chapter 3 when he says in verse 8, excuse me, verse 5, Who then is Paul? And who is Apollos? But ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

Then in verse 9, he says, for we, meaning Apollos and Paul, are God's fellow workers. You, meaning the church of Corinth, are God's field. You are God's building.

Now notice, he's trying to explain how it is that he and Apollos, though ministering separately, and ministering in tandem, not side by side, but Paul came first, then Apollos later, he said, well, look at it this way. You are God's field, right? He says that in verse 9. You, the church, is God's field. I came and I planted seeds in this field.

Apollos came after me and he watered the seeds. And any growth that is taking place is God's doing, not ours. We're just workers.

We're just workers in the field. I planted Apollos water. In other words, I got here first, and I started the crops.

He helped them along. But we're both on the same team, working on the same field for the same boss. It's God who gives the increase.

And he says, because you're his field. But then he changes the metaphor and says, and you are God's building, in verse 9. He says, you are God's field, you are God's building. And having changed that metaphor, he's now going to teach the same lesson with the new metaphor.

When he thinks of the church as a field, Paul's the one who came and threw the seeds out. Apollos is the one who came and watered them. Now, as a building, Paul's going to say, I laid the foundation.

And Apollos and others build on the foundation. And here's what he says in verse 10. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation.

And another builds on it. Another would be Apollos and anyone else who comes along. Anyone who comes and labors in the church and builds up, edifies the body of Christ, they're working on that foundation that Paul laid.

He says, I laid the foundation, another builds on it, but let each one take heed how he builds on it. Here's a warning. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now he's saying no one can start another church in Corinth. There's only one church. There's only one body of Christ, and that's the one that Paul planted there.

That's the one that Paul laid a foundation for. No one can come to town and lay another foundation on the next corner and say, now this is the church. No, there's only one foundation of the whole church.

I laid it, and that is Jesus. Anyone who else comes and ministers is just building on that foundation. All right? He says, now, verse 12, if anyone builds on this foundation, that'd be Apollos and anyone else who ministers in the town, the day will, it says, excuse me, if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the day will declare it because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one's work of what sort it is.

If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he'll receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God? The church is the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwells in you.

If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. Now, Paul's saying, I laid the foundation of the church. Others like Apollos will come and build on it, but they better be careful what they do.

You can build with gold and silver and precious stones. That is stuff that will survive the test of fire, but you might build with wood, hay, and straw. That will not survive the test of fire.

What he's saying is, a person who builds the church may do so with the right materials or the wrong materials, but the church will be tested, and the fire will show who built with the right materials and who will not. The right materials, what are the right materials? Living stones. The temple's being built of living stones.

That means you have to build the church with real living, spiritually living people. You have to have real converts. You have to have real Christians.

The church is built out of people who really are born again followers of Christ. Now, you can build a big church without requiring people to be born again followers of Christ. You can just make a real big popular movement and teach self-help sermons and things like that and get all kinds of people who've made no commitment to Christ to come in large numbers every Sunday because it feels good and the music's good and the entertainment's good, but you're building a big fat church, but a lot of it's made of wood, hay, and stubble.

And you know, when the trials come, when tribulation comes, a lot of that burns right out, and there's not much left. Only the wood, hay, and stubble is burned off, and the

gold, silver, and precious stones remain. And Paul says if ministers come and they labor in the church, they're building the church, they better make sure what they're building it out of.

Better make sure you're not compromising the gospel in such a way as to win crowds who come in without any commitment. You preach the gospel as it is, and you won't have those people there. You preach the real terms of discipleship.

You preach the real gospel the way Jesus did, and you'll find that a group of 6,000 may thin out to 12 in a day. And so this is what Paul says. The church has got to be built right now.

That was 2,000 years ago. Guess what happened in the 2,000 years since then? A whole lot of wood, hay, and stubble. You've got the medieval period where everybody in Europe was baptized in the church when they're born.

Only a small percentage of them ever got converted, but they were still the church, the medieval Catholic church. Then you have a reformation, and eventually they're baptizing babies into their movement too, so that everyone who's born of a Protestant family is part of the Protestant church whether they're converted or not. Out of that arises the Anabaptist movement that says, wait a minute, wait.

You're not a Christian because you're born in a Christian family. And you shouldn't be in the church unless you make a decision to be in the church as someone responsible. And then, of course, the church has had other movements since then.

But as you know, when you look at churches today, there are some that preach a more rigorous message than others. And some of them that actually preach pretty well have pretty large numbers in them. But a lot of churches are full of people that probably don't have an idea of what it means to be a real disciple of Jesus.

They've never heard anything about it. They go to church, but there's nothing said. And that means that the church in many ways spiritually has been dilapidated.

And that's the condition that Jerusalem was in. The New Testament refers to the church as the heavenly Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem. In Hebrews chapter 12, Paul says, you've not come to a mountain that might be touched.

You've come to Mount Zion, to the city of God, to the heavenly Jerusalem. And he calls it the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn who are written in heaven. That's what you've come to.

That's the new Jerusalem. The old Jerusalem got destroyed and defiled by invaders, pagans. And now it's time to rebuild it in Nehemiah's day.

He was not the first. Zerubbabel and Joshua had led the people, oh, about probably 80 years earlier to come back and build the temple again. Then about 60 years after that, Ezra came back with 10,000 more.

And they, you know, they mainly restored the Jewish religious practices. But the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down. And therefore, it was vulnerable to succumbing again to invasion at any time.

Now, Nehemiah was one of the Jews who had not returned to Jerusalem. Now, it's probably his parents or grandparents that had not. He wouldn't have been born at the time of Cyrus's decree.

He's living like 80 years after that. And he's a grown man, but he wouldn't be that old. He was probably born 60 years after Cyrus's decree.

And if so, then it would have been his grandparents who had not gone back. And so he's, like many of the Jews, like most of the Jews, he's still in the Persian Empire, not in Jerusalem. And somehow, we don't know how, but he came to be part of the household of King Artaxerxes I. Artaxerxes was the Persian king.

And he was a pretty generous king to the Jews, just like Cyrus had been, apparently. And Nehemiah gets permission from Artaxerxes to go and build the walls of Jerusalem. That's what this book is about.

Now, Nehemiah was what was called the cupbearer to the king Artaxerxes. The cupbearer wasn't just the guy who was like the waiter who served the drinks. The cupbearer was the wine taster.

Ancient kings were very vulnerable to assassination attempts. And if someone slipped some poison into his drink, he'd drink it down without knowing it, and then he'd be gone. So, I mean, it was pretty easy to assassinate a king if you had access to his wine.

In fact, Pharaoh had something like that, some kind of an intrigue against him in the days of Joseph. You remember Joseph had a high position in Pharaoh's court, but not yet. He was in prison at this time, but the butler, which is the wine taster, and the baker were thrown in prison with Joseph.

And the baker was eventually hanged. The butler was restored to giving Pharaoh his wine, like Nehemiah did with Artaxerxes. Many scholars think the reason these two men were thrown in jail is because there had been an intrigue against the pharaoh discovered, probably a cache of poison somewhere, and the most suspicious characters would be the ones who gave him his wine and those who would bake his bread.

So they were both put into prison until inquiry could be made, and three days later they were brought out of prison, and the baker was hanged, apparently as the guilty culprit,

and the butler, or the cupbearer, was returned to his job. But you see, Nehemiah had a position like that cupbearer, and he says so at the end of chapter one, the very last line of Nehemiah 1 says, I was the king's cupbearer, so that's where we get that information about him. It was an influential and privileged position because the king's life was in the hands of the cupbearer.

And how Nehemiah had come to be in that position, I don't know, but he had the king's respect, that is very clear. And this chapter one tells us that Nehemiah was going about his duties, and he had a relative who was with one of the families that had gone back to Jerusalem earlier, and that relative came back to visit the folks in Persia, and he brought news from Jerusalem, and Nehemiah said, what is the condition of the people and the captives in Jerusalem who have returned? And his relative said, oh, the walls, the walls are totally burned down and destroyed, they're a rubble, there's no protection. And Nehemiah was particularly affected by this.

He wept, he fasted, it just grieved and struck him that, you know, here it is, two generations or so after the return of the exiles from Babylon, and they still are as vulnerable to being attacked as they were before. Now, some scholars believe that the walls had in fact been built again, but had been destroyed again by these Samaritan enemies. We're not told if this condition of the walls that is described to him in chapter one, if this condition was the condition that they remained in from the time of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of them back in 586 BC, or if this is a condition that has more recently come about, even though the Jews who were in the land had rebuilt the walls, their enemies had burnt them down, we don't know.

But since we don't know, we can probably just assume they're still in this condition because of what enemies had done, you know, when the Babylonians conquered. In any case, Nehemiah set himself to pray, and his prayer in chapter one is very moving. It's a great model of intercessory prayer, as a matter of fact.

I think that people who want to know how to pray often will benefit from looking at the prayers recorded in the Bible. Nehemiah gives us a great example of a prayer which, you know, in many respects could be the way we would pray for our nation or for the condition of the church. As I said, I think the church has been built with wood hands, double to a great extent, and easily vulnerable to destruction.

Spiritually speaking, as long as there are preachers who are not preaching the gospel properly, and churches that don't bother to disciple people, there's always the danger that whole branches of the church will go off into error. In fact, hey, it's not even hypothetical. It seems like the church today is subject and vulnerable to every kind of error that flies through, whether it's the Hebrew roots, whether it's the hyper charismatic things going on up in Reading, whether it's the full preterist errors.

I mean, there's these movements currently growing very fast in the church, which I think

is because Christians have not been schooled in the scripture. They've not been made strong. Their fortifications have not been built.

And therefore, the church is vulnerable and not only vulnerable, it has succumbed already. In some parts, it's spiritually a rubble. And the rebuilding of those walls, spiritual walls, is the task of any who will undertake it.

And I think it's our responsibility to do what we can to restore the church to its pristine purity and build the walls against error and against compromise. And so what Nehemiah was doing, what he prays for Jerusalem, we could pray actually very similar prayers for the church in our time. In fact, let me just read this prayer real quickly.

He said, this is chapter 1, verse 5. I pray, Lord God of heaven, oh, great and awesome God, you who keep your covenant and mercy with those who love you and observe your commandments. Please let your ear be attentive and your eyes open that you may hear the prayer of your servant, which I pray before you now, day and night for the children of Israel, your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against you, both my father's house and I have sinned. Now, we don't know what sins he's committed.

Daniel prayed this way too in Daniel chapter 10 or 9. Actually, he sounds like he's as guilty as everyone else when he wasn't, but he's identifying with his people. He's one with them and their sins, he feels, you know, he has to bear the burden of that too. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments and statutes, nor the ordinances which you commanded your servant Moses.

Remember, I pray, the word that you commanded your servant Moses saying, if you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among all the nations. But if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a place dwelling for my name. Now, these are your servants and your people whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.

Oh, Lord, I pray, please let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to their prayer of your servants who desire to fear your name. And let your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. Now, this man is Artaxerxes, but we had no clue of that until this moment.

When he says this man, as a reader of this book, you think, what man are we talking about here? But he says, because I was the king's cupbearer, he says. So he saw his position in the palace, his trusted role and access to the king as a God-given opportunity. He apparently felt like this is an opportunity I dare not squander.

God, give me a favor. I'm going to go and try to do something about this. Now,

remember this.

Nehemiah was not like Ezra. Ezra was a priest. His whole genealogy goes back to the priests of Israel, back to Aaron.

Zerubbabel, who had led the first group of captives, was descended directly from the kings of Judah, of the line of David. I mean, these were the two leaders of the Jews who had returned previously. First, Zerubbabel, a descendant of the kings of Judah, led the first group.

Ezra, a priest, led the others. Nehemiah, what is he? We don't even have his genealogy. We don't even know.

He wasn't a priest, apparently, and he certainly doesn't seem to be in the kingly line. He was just what we call a layman. He wasn't somebody upon whom responsibility would naturally fall to take leadership.

But God had put it on his heart to not let this stand. And you know what? When the church is in bad shape, it's not always the clergymen who care. Sometimes they're very complacent.

Sometimes their salaries are secure. Sometimes the way things are is really quite advantageous to them. It's often a layman, somebody who works an ordinary job or works for the city or something like that, somebody who's not a church official, who God just puts on their hearts and says, It's not okay.

It's not okay for the church to be in this condition. And that's what Nehemiah was. And God just put it on his heart, and he became a leader, a very strong leader.

And God had put him in a position where he had access to the king, and he knew that that was going to be something that translated into responsibility. I have opportunity that most people don't have. Therefore, I'm seeing that as a divinely given responsibility.

I'm going to speak to the king. God, you help me. God, you give me favor in his sight.

And so chapter 2 talks about how it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Now, why not? Well, you might say, Well, Nehemiah was just a cheerful guy.

But not only that, he may not have always been cheerful, but he was never sad in the presence of the king. It is very important in the ancient Middle East that the servants of the king always be cheerful. There is not supposed to be anything to bring a cloud over the happiness of the king.

To be bothered by people's petty, you know, depression or sorrows, their personal

problems, they leave that at home. You don't bring that to the office. You don't bring that to the palace.

If you are seen to be sad in the presence of the king, you're spoiling the mood. And you are not allowed to be sad in the presence of a Middle Eastern monarch. And so he says, I had never been sorry in the presence before.

Therefore, the king said to me, Why is your face sad? Now this is scary because if the king doesn't like it, this could go badly for Nehemiah. He could be punished. He could be kicked out of his job.

The king said, Why is your face sad since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart. He says, Then I became dreadfully afraid. He's afraid because you're not allowed to be sad in the presence of the king.

But he says, Well, I've been found out. I might as well speak boldly in my mind. And I said to the king, May the king live forever.

Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my father's tombs lies waste and its gates are burned with fire? That's a pretty bold thing. Okay, I am sad. I'll just say it.

I'm sad. How could I be anything else but sad? My ancestral home is in ruins. So that's why I'm sad.

Sorry. Now the king, of course, remember Nehemiah had prayed that God would give him favor on the side of the king. His prayer was answered.

He says, Then the king said to me, What do you request? Okay, you're sorry. What can I do for you? Notice Nehemiah had not given any indication that he had a request. He was just sorry.

It wasn't the king's problem. It wasn't the king's responsibility to make sure all of his slaves and servants, you know, didn't have anything to be sad about. What business is that of the guy who's ruling the biggest empire in the world? But this king was very sympathetic.

What would you like? What can I do for you? What is your request? He says, So I prayed to the God of heaven. Now I mentioned his great prayer in chapter one. We've read it.

I want to also point out that one thing you'll get from reading the book of Nehemiah is his prayer life. It's not only great when he's fasting and praying like he was in chapter one. He prays all the time spontaneously.

Whenever there's any issue, whenever there's any challenge, he prays. He reminds me of watching Fiddler on the Roof and Tevye, the main character there, how he just kind of

talks to God just like he's talking to someone in the room. Just about everything.

About his complaints and everything. Well, Nehemiah had that kind of relationship with God. And he just would pray.

And he said, Okay, so I prayed to the God of heaven. That is, he didn't want to speak up and make a request to the king without God's continuing to give favor because he might be seen as a little presumptuous to ask the king for what he's going to ask him. Now, I want to just point out to you that as you read through Nehemiah, you find again and again these prayers of Nehemiah.

If you look at chapter four, in the first three verses, the Samaritan enemies are mocking the Jews and trying to discourage them from building the wall, which they had begun to do. And it says in chapter four, verse four, Nehemiah says, Here, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their reproach on their own heads and give them as plunder to the land of captivity.

Do not cover their iniquity and do not let their sin be blotted out before you, for they have provoked you to anger before the builders. Now, this is an imprecatory prayer, like some of the Psalms. But it's a prayer.

It's just in the middle of the narrative. He's just telling the stories. And these people made this mockery.

And then he just starts praying to God right there, even as he's writing. Likewise, in verse nine of chapter four, he says, Nevertheless, we made our prayer to God. And later on in chapter five, verse 19.

We find in the middle of the narrative, he just says, Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people. And then over in chapter six, at the end of verse nine, he says, Now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. Now, as you read the story, you'll realize that these are interruptions in strictly a narrative of what's going on.

He just interjects with these prayers, like, Hey, these people are really coming against us hard. God, will you take care of them for me? That's basically what he's saying. He's not going to let them distract him much.

It says in 1 Peter chapter five, Cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you. Basically, Nehemiah became the governor. Artaxerxes allowed him to become the governor of the city.

And so these were his problems. He was responsible for this project being successful. And when the enemies came and tried to bring all kinds of interruptions, that was his problem.

But he would never take time off to solve it. He just said, God, take care of this. Have mercy on us.

Remember us. Take care of those guys. And then he'd just keep working.

They even asked him one time, Hey, why don't you come over to such and such place? We'll negotiate some kind of a treaty. He said, I'm not going to leave this work. This is an important work I'm doing.

Why should I go meet with you? You know, he's not going to be distracted from his duties by opposition. But he does commit everything to God in prayer. And so in chapter six, in verse 14, again, he says, My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat.

Those are the bad guys. According to their works. And the prophet is Noah, Daya and the rest of all the prophets who would have made me afraid.

And we have more of this. Also, if you look at the last chapter, chapter 13. Chapter 13 has like four different major problems he has to fix.

We'll come to it eventually. But I just want to point out how often he prayed about it. In chapter 13, verse 14, he says, Remember me, oh my God, concerning this.

And do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for its services. The same chapter, the latter part of verse 22. Remember me, oh my God, concerning this also.

And spare me according to the greatness of your mercy. And then verse 29. Remember them, oh my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

And then at the very end, the very last line of the book is, Remember me, oh my God, for good. So he's just, this guy is not a religious leader, but he's a spiritual man. He's more prayerful than many Christians.

Whenever he's got a problem, he just prays. He's a layman with a regular job, actually kind of a powerful job, working for a king. He could be likened to Jesus, really, who had a pretty powerful position.

And then he came down to serve his people. Nehemiah gave up a powerful position in the government to go and suffer reproach with the people of God in Jerusalem. And so in chapter 2, when the king said, What do you request? He says, So I prayed to the God of heaven, which is, of course, his general pattern.

And verse 5, chapter 2, verse 5, he says, I said to the king, If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my father's tombs, that I may rebuild it. Now, send me doesn't just mean give me a

leave of absence so you can find another cupbearer to fill in for me. He said, Send me with money.

Send me with resources. Send me with troops. Send me with all that I need, is what he's implying here.

And so he doesn't know how the king is going to take this. So the king said to me, the queen also sitting beside him, How long will your journey be? And when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me, and I set a time. Now, we're not told here what time he said it would be.

We know it ended up being 12 years. In chapter 13, verse 6, he says that he spent 12 years there, and then he returned to the palace in Persia for a while. We don't know how long, and then he came back to Jerusalem and did some more leadership stuff.

But this trip was going to be a 12-year visit to Jerusalem where he's going to be the governor, and he's going to be supported by the king, Artaxerxes. And, you know, the resources are going to come from the Persian king. And so he's asking rather boldly, you know, let me go for 12 years from your service and finance my whole project.

And so he says in verse 7, Furthermore, I said to the king, If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the river, that they may permit me to pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest. Now, this is really getting bold. He's asking for, you know, wood and stuff like that to be given to him.

Write a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel, which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy. And the king granted to me according to the good hand of my God upon me. Now, this statement that God grant, the king granted this according to the good hand of God means I saw God's sovereignty in this.

The king granted every request I made. And that's not because it was likely to happen naturally, but because God's good hand was upon me. You find that expression many times in the book of Ezra about the success of Ezra.

He says he succeeded because of the good hand of God upon him. You see it in Ezra chapter 7, verse 6, and verse 9, and verse 28. Also in Ezra 8, verse 18, and 22, and 31.

Six times in Ezra it talks about the good hand of God upon him. And now Nehemiah uses the same expression. It just means that the good hand of God upon him means the blessing of God is on him.

And therefore, things are going his way. And so, in verse 9 we find him already now back in Judah. That was a long trip.

As I recall, it took Ezra's group five months to make the trip between Persia and Judah. So about, depending on what route they took, five to seven hundred miles to go on foot. It's a long way to go.

But that distance is traversed between verse 8 and verse 9. The king grants him everything he wants in verse 8, and he's in Judah in verse 9. Then I went to the governors of the region beyond the river and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me, so no one could give him any guff. Verse 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.

The same thing was said of the enemies of the Jews in the time of Zerubbabel. When Zerubbabel came, it was not pleasing to the locals that someone was seeking the good of Israel. Now the rest of this chapter, Nehemiah simply says, the first night he was there, he didn't tell the Jews whom he had come to serve and be their governor, he didn't tell them why he was there.

He waited until nightfall, and just alone, on a horse, without anyone accompanying him, he made a survey of the damage, and it was really bad. He said there were places that the rubble was so bad that his horse couldn't get through. Just piled stones and stuff like that, it was a real mess.

But by the next morning he had surveyed the whole situation, and he called the leaders of Judah together in chapter 3, and told them, he's here from Persia to help them get the wall built. And so he organized them for that task, and they began to build. Now, it didn't take them very long, they actually built the whole wall from scratch, or from beginning to end, in 52 days.

Just a little more than a month and a half. Yeah, about a month and three weeks. And that's pretty good, because this wall surrounds the whole city.

But what he did, and we read about it in chapter 3, is that he sent people to work near their own dwelling places. He said, okay, you're responsible for this section of the wall from here to here. And generally speaking, it's the part they live next to.

So they'd have a particular vested interest in having a strong wall defending their own home from invasion. Give them a good incentive to do a good job. And they worked, they had a mind to work, the Bible says.

And they got the wall all connected to itself about half its height. It says, because the people had a mind to work. And of course, this made the enemies very unhappy, because the wall was going up.

And so in chapter 4, it says, but it so happened when Sanballat heard that we were

rebuilding the wall, that he was furious. Now, Sanballat and Tobiah are simply the main leaders of the opposition. These are not Jewish men, these are Samaritans, one's an Ammonite.

There's also a guy named Geshem, which is a Philistine, as I recall. But this is the local opposition, non-Jewish, who want to make sure this doesn't happen. And so Sanballat heard it.

He was furious and very indignant and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria and said, what are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish, stones that are burned? Now, Tobiah, the Ammonite, was beside him. And he said, whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, it will break down their stone wall.

So they're basically just saying this task is more than you Jews can hope for. Even whatever you do is going to be feeble. A fox could knock it down, obviously, is what he's saying.

And what's Nehemiah's response? He doesn't get into a shouting match with him. He just says, hear, O our God, for we're despised. And he prays for God to attend to the enemies.

And verse 6 says, so he built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half the height, for the people had a mind to work. And so there was an awful lot of trouble. Verse 10 says, Judah said to him, the people of Judah, the strength of the laborers is failing, and there's so much rubbish that we're not able to build the wall.

And so the people were discouraged. And so they were also being threatened. They were afraid that the enemies were going to fight them.

And it says in verse 11, and our adversaries said, they will neither know nor see anything until we come into their midst and kill them and cause their work to cease. So there was a lot of work to do, a very daunting task, and they are also afraid because their enemies were plotting to come in and kill them. So what Nehemiah did is he took half the workers and gave them weapons, and the other half were to work on the wall.

Now, even the ones that worked on the wall had a weapon at their side. They had a sword hanging on a sheath on their belt, and they were working on the wall. So they were armed like soldiers, but working.

Then the other half were armed guards. And as it turned out, there were no attacks against them, but they were threatened. But because Nehemiah took these measures, no attack occurred.

And sometimes to be the best defense is to be very strong, even if you're not going to attack anyone. It keeps people who would attack you at bay. That's not bad policy in general, I think.

And so we have more opposition in Chapter 5, and the problem there is that the Jews were oppressing their fellow Jews. Now, what was happening was there was a shortage of food. As you read Chapter 5, there was a famine.

It's possible that the food was being destroyed by their enemies because they were working on the walled city. All the farmlands would be outside the walled city, of course. And therefore, with everyone employed on the wall, perhaps not many crops were being grown, or the crops that were being grown might have been taken or destroyed by their enemies.

That often did happen when a city was under siege. They were not under siege, but they were working on the wall, and therefore they might not have been able to attend to and protect their farms as much. We aren't told that this is why, but we're told there was a famine.

They didn't have enough food, and people were poor. And people were so desperate to buy the food that was available, the little bit, that the prices were way high, and they'd have to go into debt to buy it. And going into debt, they'd have to put up their lands and their houses.

They'd have to mortgage them to get enough money to eat. Well, the Jewish bankers among them, who were lending them the money, were charging them interest. Now, the Law of Moses forbade a Jewish person from charging interest on a loan to another Jew.

The Law of Moses said they could charge interest if they lent money to a pagan, but not a fellow Jew. So they were in violation. These ones who were charging interest were in violation, and it was discouraging to people.

Here they're trying to build a wall, but they can hardly afford to eat food. And not only can they hardly afford to eat food, but once they do get their food, now their houses belong to somebody else. In fact, not only their houses, but even their sons and their daughters.

They'd have to sell into slavery in exchange for food. That's what they're saying. And they come to Nehemiah and complain about this, and he is furious about this.

And let me see if I can find it. In verse 9, he addresses it. He speaks to those who are the lenders, who are oppressing their brethren.

In verse 9 of chapter 5, Then I said, What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? I also with

my brethren and my servants am lending them money and grain. Please let us stop this usury.

Restore to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also the hundredth part of their money and the grain and the new wine and the oil that you've charged them. So they said, We will restore it. We'll require nothing from them.

We'll do as you say. Then I called the priests and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. So he confronted them, and he's the governor.

He's kind of the sole authority with Assyrian troops behind him. And he says, You guys release those debts. He says, I've been lending, but I don't charge interest.

In fact, not only was he lending, but as you read the rest of the chapter, he talks about how generous he actually was being. He had all kinds of people eating at his table, hundreds of people. He had them at his table every day eating, and he wasn't charging anything for that.

He had a heart for the project and for the cause and for the people. And he was not the least bit interested in making money off people's extremity and need. And so he rebukes those who did, and he ends that chapter saying, Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Now, Chapter 6 tells us there's a conspiracy that arose against him. And Tobias and Sanballat said, Why don't you come over and join us for some negotiations over in such and such a town? But he says they were planning to kill him. And that's when he said, I'm not going to come over.

He said, I'm involved in a great work. In verse 3, I sent messengers. I didn't even answer myself.

I just sent messengers. Go tell him I'm involved in a great work so that I cannot come down. Why should I? The work cease while I leave it and go down to you.

I'm not the least bit interested in talking to you anyway. I'm not going to give up something important I'm doing in order to do something unimportant like have a meeting with you. Probably more corporations would do well if their leaders would say, Let's not have so many meetings.

Let's just do the work. Let's get the work done here. And that's what he's doing.

And so then we go on. Chapter 7 is just a list of names. The same list is found in Ezra, Chapter 2. It's a very long chapter.

And so was Ezra, Chapter 2. It's the same list. It's the list of all the people who had gone

back to Jerusalem from Persia. And it's just the same list reproduced here in Nehemiah.

So we won't really go into that right now. Now, Chapters 8 through 12, very quickly, we have Ezra appearing again. Now, Ezra was seen in the latter part of the book of Ezra, Chapters 7 through 10.

He has not been seen in this book yet. But now that Nehemiah is back, he's working alongside Ezra. And we've been hearing what Nehemiah has been doing.

We now have this appears not to be from the memoirs of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is not spoken of in the first person in this section. But Ezra is.

And what they do is they call together the people to have the law read to them. The wall is now complete. They're going to dedicate the wall in Chapter 12.

But this is going to be attended by a great celebration. And even a keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles. And it begins with all the people standing and listening to the law being read.

Now, this was supposed to happen every Feast of Tabernacles, every seven years. I'm sorry, not every Feast of Tabernacles, on the Feast of Tabernacles every seventh year. According to the law of Moses, they were supposed to read the whole law to the whole people.

They didn't have copies at home to read. People couldn't study their Bibles at home. They couldn't even read them at home.

They didn't have Bibles at home. So they had to hear it. Every seven years, they got the whole thing read to them audibly.

And so we have a description of how Ezra read the law to the people. And it gives a long list of people, mostly priests, Levites, who would, it says, give the sense of the law. This is perhaps the first reference we have to expository Bible teaching.

Because Ezra would read some laws, and then these other guys around him would expound on what that means. And how that is to be practiced. And they read the law that way.

And the people, it says in verse 9, at the end of verse 9 of chapter 8, all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Now, verse 10 says, You remember that line, the joy of the Lord is your strength? There used to be a song we sang back in the 70s about that. What he's saying is, you guys are weakened if you're depressed.

Rejoice in God. It's only as you continue to rejoice in God that you'll be strong against your enemies. I mean, we are vulnerable here.

We don't want you weakening yourself by saying, oh, poor me, and I'm so evil. You know, just listen. This is a holy day.

Celebrate it. And be joyful. And only then will you really be strong as you need to be.

He also says in verse 12, all the people went their way to eat and drink and send portions and rejoice greatly because they understood the words that were declared to them. That's the words of the law. Because they heard the law expounded, they were joyful.

All right. Well, we're not going to go into detail much more about this. There's a confession of the people's sins, a long prayer in chapter 9. This is probably Ezra praying, but it's basically a long recital of Israel's history, their history of rebellion against God and God's mercy toward them up to their own time.

And at the end of it, in verse 38, chapter 9, verse 38, it says, and because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it, and our leaders and the Levites and the priests seal it. And then in chapter 10, we have a list of people who made this covenant with God. And the covenant was basically they're going to keep the law of God from now on, which they didn't do.

We'll find they didn't do, but they made this covenant to do it. And so that chapter, chapter 10, is mostly about this covenant that they made. Chapter 11 gives us lists again.

We don't need to go over them. The first part of the list is the people who dwelt in Jerusalem. Not everyone dwelt in Jerusalem.

Many people dwelt in the villages and worked their own farms. But there was a special blessing on those that were allowed to stay in Jerusalem because the city had to have people live in there. So they actually took sort of a - they cast lots, and they also asked for volunteers.

And we have a list of the people who stayed and lived in Jerusalem up through verse 14. We have a list of the Levites in verses 15 through 18, a list of the gatekeepers in verses 19 through 24. And then there's a list of people dwelling outside Jerusalem in verses 25 through 36.

If those lists interest you, you're welcome to read them. They don't have many names that will mean anything to you. They're largely unknown people to us.

Now, chapter 12 then, simply in the first 26 verses, it's a list of the priests and Levites. Ezra, Nehemiah, even Chronicles had a large emphasis on the priests and Levites and had many lists of them. We're not going to read this list either.

But from verse 27, chapter 12, verse 27 on to verse 43 anyway, they dedicated the wall. The wall was completed, and they had a dedication service. What they did is they had two choirs praising God, walking on top of the wall, starting at one point, going opposite directions, and around the perimeter of the wall and meeting each other at the other side.

And some of the people were assigned to go with one choir, Nehemiah and his people went with the other choir. And there's not much we have to read about this right here, talk about it. But they praised the Lord, they sang, they worshipped for this dedication of the wall.

And the city was now secure, at least it was secure from physical attack. They were still succumbing to spiritual compromise, however, from time to time. The latter verses of chapter 12 simply list some of the temple responsibilities we're not going to bother ourselves with.

But chapter 13, the final chapter, is about Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem. Because he says in chapter 12, verse 6, excuse me, he says, During all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I had returned to the king. Now you remember that he left the king in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes.

And so he was in Jerusalem from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year for twelve years. Then he went back to Persia. But at the end of verse 6 it says, Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king and I came to Jerusalem.

And so he comes for a second term as governor. We don't know how long he was gone. It's certain days.

And that could have been any number of days, we have no idea. But what he found when he came back were several serious compromises. One of them was that Tobiah, who was one of their historical enemies alongside Sanballat, he had made a league with one of the priests who had emptied one of the storerooms of the temple where the food for the Levites was kept.

And rented it out or gave it to this guy, Tobiah. We're not told what he did with it. He may have lived in it.

It says that Nehemiah, when he found it out, he threw out all the guy's household goods out of the room. But I don't know if it was where he was living or if it was like a mini storage unit for him or what. But he had free space in the temple, which he should not have.

And so Nehemiah dealt with that and threw all that stuff out. Then he found in verses 10 through 14 that the people had not been providing the Levites with their portion. Now, the Levites were supposed to receive the tithe.

And there are some parts of the sacrifices that were devoted to the Levites also. But the people had not brought them. Now, there's a good chance that Nehemiah was contemporary with Malachi.

We don't know. I mean, it's around the same time. Malachi is not mentioned in this book.

But Malachi the prophet was the last of the prophets in the Old Testament. And Nehemiah is the latest historical book coming up to the latest point in history that's recorded in the Old Testament. And it's thought that Nehemiah and Malachi might have been contemporaries.

In any case, Malachi's book also rebukes the people for not bringing their tithes, for neglecting the tithes, so that there's no food in God's house for the priests and the Levites. And we read here in chapter 13 that this was the case. In verses 10 through 14, they were neglected.

So, of course, Nehemiah rebuked the people for that. And required them to start bringing those things so the Levites would have something. Actually, the Levites, because they couldn't eat because no tithes were coming, they had to go work the fields, which meant the temple service was being neglected.

The Levites were supposed to be set aside to work in the temple, but no one was bringing the tithes, so they had to eat. So they had to go out and get jobs. The clergy, in other words, were being driven out into the job market because they were not being adequately supported by the people.

And therefore, the ministry was being neglected. And so Nehemiah attended to that. Then in chapter 23 through 29, I mean verse 23 through 29, Nehemiah discovered that once again, as had happened in the days of Ezra, the people were marrying pagan women.

It had gotten so bad, in fact, that many of the Jewish children didn't even know the Jewish language anymore. In other words, they not only had pagan mothers, they had pagan culture. They didn't even know the language of the Jews.

They couldn't read the script. They couldn't understand the scriptures that were taught in Hebrew and so forth. So there was this compromise in marriages that was leading to a deterioration of the nation's next generation by it not being able to preserve the culture of its ancestors.

And of course, the devil always goes for the youngest. I mean that's how basically things have happened in the church in modern times or even in this country in modern times, with the youngest. I think this is partly the fault of public schools have been isolated culturally from previous generations.

The values, the language, the thoughts of the parents' generation are not being passed down to the kids because the kids are taken out of the parents' homes at age four or five and stuck into classrooms with their peers and with teachers who are basically have an agenda to teach something else than what their parents would teach them. Now, this is not what was going on there. It was intermarriage with the pagans was a problem there.

But the same result was that the children were being alienated from the culture of their ancestors and therefore threatening the very existence of the Jewish religion in the next generation. Nehemiah got really upset about that and he required them to give up those alliances with the pagans too, just like Ezra had required to do. And finally, I'm sorry, that is the final one.

There's one just before that I missed and that was they were breaking the Sabbath. They were buying and selling on the Sabbath. And pagan vendors were coming outside the walls of Jerusalem, actually were coming inside the walls of Jerusalem to sell things on the Sabbath.

And Nehemiah required that the gates of the city be shut on the Sabbath so that these guys couldn't come in, so that people couldn't purchase things on the Sabbath. He said for a couple of weeks, the next two Sabbaths or so, the vendors came and they parked outside the walls to see if their gates were going to open. And when they didn't, Nehemiah rebuked them and said, go away.

These gates are not going to be open. We're not going to be buying from you on the Sabbath. If you don't go away, I'll have you arrested.

And so the vendors went away. So Nehemiah was able to, on his second term, rid the temple of Tobiah, who had taken up lodgings there, it would appear, restore the giving of the tithes to support the ministry, restore Sabbath observance, and then restore the separation of the Jews from the pagans in their marriages and in their families. And these were all things that were necessary to keep Israel from going back into the same problems they'd had before the Babylonian exile.

So Nehemiah, I mean, if he hadn't done that, who would have? If he had not come back, these people would have been doing these things. A generation later, a bunch of kids wouldn't even be speaking the Hebrew language anymore, wouldn't even know the scriptures. And so his role was very important, obviously.

He's not the most exciting character in the Bible. Nehemiah is not exciting like reading the book of Genesis or the book of Joshua or something like that, or the story of David. He's not anywhere near as colorful as those people, but he was a very important player in the preservation of the Jewish faith after the Babylonian exile.

And that's why his book is important. And of course, his last line in the book is,

remember me, oh my God, for good. And of course, he is remembered.

We've got the book about him that God has arranged for him to be remembered for as good that he did.