

**March 23, 2025**

**Nehemiah 6:15-19**

*15* So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.  
*16* And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. *17* Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. *18* For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife. *19* Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.

Scriptures for further study:

Proverbs 1:7

Philippians 1:12-14

John 16:33

“But our God is the God of small things as well as the God of big things.”

-Derek Thomas

“One of the outcomes of this work was a great reversal of affairs.

Israel’s enemies had tried to make Israel afraid, but instead it was they who became afraid (Nehemiah 6:16).”

-Derek Thomas

“We want to be people who do things that can only be done because God is helping us.”

James Hamilton



### **The Hand of God And Fear Nehemiah 6:15-19**

**BIG IDEA:** Because the hand of God is active in our world, we can be liberated from our worldly fear and can have a fear of the Lord that strengthens us for our Christian life.

#### **OUTLINE**

1. The Fear of God’s Enemies

2. The Fear used by God’s Enemies

3. Fear of the Lord

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These "Sermon Discussion Questions" are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. What are some of your fears? What are some of the causes of these fears? How do these fears affect your daily life?
2. What does it mean to fear God? How does this fear of the Lord affect your daily Christian life?
3. Why were Israel's enemies fearful and discouraged in this passage?
4. How have these enemies used fear against the Jews throughout the book of Nehemiah and in this passage?
5. How does the active hand of God or God's providence liberate us from worldly fear and give us Godly fear?

"When God does mighty work, unbelief trembles."

-Derek Thomas

***Praise to Jesus.*** Praise God this week for how great He is and for His faithfulness. Take time this week to worship God in His holiness and ask the Spirit to give you a growing awe and reverence for Him. Praise God that nothing can separate us from His love for us in Christ.

***Repentance through Jesus.*** Ask the Spirit to show when you have taken your focus off God and allowed worldly fear to discourage you from God's mission in your life. Confess the unbelief or lack of trust in Christ that causes you to doubt God and to fear people or the future or death.

***Consecration for Jesus.*** Let us pray this week for the Holy Spirit to show us how our identity in Christ can refocus us on following Him and pursuing holiness. Ask God to lead us to live in such a way that brings God glory in all that we do.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

It has been less than six months since Nehemiah spoke to King Artaxerxes. If God had helped the people of Judah, the nations feared he would turn Judah into a powerful nation that would be a threat to them. The nobles of Judah were cooperating with Tobiah. They were connected because Tobiah, an "Ammonite" (2:10), and his son had married into Jewish nobility. Ezra's measures against intermarriage (Ezra 9–10) perhaps explain Tobiah's hostility to Nehemiah's work. It is not clear how they were bound. But there was clearly a powerful group in Jerusalem committed to Tobiah and opposed to Nehemiah

-ESV Study Bible

## FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. According to verse 16, who got the credit for the completion of the wall around Jerusalem? (God did. Talk with your children about all the opposition that the Jews faced, yet they still were able to complete the wall in 52 days.)
2. Why do you think the enemies of Israel were afraid and discouraged by the wall's completion? (They thought that Israel would become a great nation again and be a threat to them.)
3. We have met Tobiah in earlier chapters of Nehemiah. He has been one of the three main enemies of the Jews, along with Sanballat and Geshem. In this passage, who is Tobiah working with now? And what was his purpose according to verse 19? (Tobiah was working with Jews who were partnering with Tobiah rather than Nehemiah. In verse 19, we read that Tobiah meant to make Nehemiah and the Jews afraid.)
4. What are some things that cause you to be afraid? Why did the enemies of Israel try to make Nehemiah and the Israelites to fear them?
5. Read Joshua 1:9 and Matthew 14:27. Discuss the kind of fear that God doesn't want us to have.
6. Read Proverbs 1:7 and Matthew 10:28. Discuss the kind of fear that God does want us to have.

Scriptures for further study:

Matthew 14:22-33

1 Peter 5:7

Philippians 4:6-7

John 16:33

## FOR STUDENTS

Scriptures for further study:

Proverbs 1:7

1 Peter 5:7

Philippians 4:6-7

Matthew 14:22-33

1. What are some things that cause you to be afraid, and how do those fears impact your daily life and faith in God?
2. Read Nehemiah 6:16. Who got the credit for the completion of the wall, and why did this make Israel's enemies afraid? What does this teach us about the power of God?
3. Throughout Nehemiah, Israel's enemies have used fear to discourage God's people. How have they done this, and how do we see fear being used in the world today to distract or intimidate Christians?
4. What does it mean to fear the Lord, and how is it different from being afraid of something in the world? Read Proverbs 1:7 and Psalm 147:11—how can a right fear of God actually strengthen us?
5. Read Isaiah 41:10 and John 16:33. How do these verses encourage us to trust God when we are afraid or face challenges?
6. Think about something God has done in your life that can only be explained by His power. How can remembering those moments help you trust Him more when you face fear or uncertainty?

## FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. Though somewhat hastily constructed, the entire wall was rebuilt in just 52 days! Certainly, the people of God had worked diligently and tirelessly, but human agency alone could never account for this achievement. “This work had been done [ultimately] with the help of God” (verse 16).

Question: Think about your own life and experience for a moment. What things have you seen or accomplished that only God could have made possible? Things that cannot be fully explained apart from the hand of God.

2. The Nehemiah story is partly a story of good triumphing over evil and God’s purposes prevailing over the enemies of God’s people.

Question: How does this encourage you to believe that God’s good purposes prevail and will prevail in your own life as well? How does the Nehemiah story present a reassuring picture of the ultimate triumph of God and his people at the end of all history?

3. This episode shows us a great reversal. At first, the people of Israel had been afraid of their enemies. But now their enemies are afraid of them once they see that God’s power is unstoppable. Even though we do not see direct evidence here of saving faith among Israel’s enemies, they at least acknowledged that God was among the Jews.

Question: How might non-believers today also be encouraged to reckon with the reality of God as they see us live out our faith in front of them?

(See 1 Corinthians 14:25 and John 13:34-35 for some good examples.)

## The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



*The Ancient of Days*, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork and artist.

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Blake's poem "Europe", depicts a world filled with suffering based on the political climate of Europe and politics in England in the 1790s. It is appropriate in light of the suffering of God's people described in Ezra and Nehemiah. The artwork by Blake serves to remind and encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances. William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to connecting the prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible with the events in his country; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)



## Introduction to Nehemiah

From January to May 2024, we heard sermons from the Book of Ezra. The introduction to Ezra, recorded sermons, and discipleship resources can be found on our church website at this address; <https://www.fpcrome.org/pdd-ezra/>

Ezra and Nehemiah were, for centuries, received as one book narrating the return of God's exiled people to their land, as under Persian rule they were allowed to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem. These two books cover three different waves of returning exiles, from 538 to 433 BC. But they tell one story: the restoration of God's covenant people according to his Word—which they are now called afresh to obey.

This restoration required, first of all, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstatement of ceremonial worship. The first leader, Zerubbabel, led the initial wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to accomplish this goal (Ezra 1–6). The second wave came more than half a century later, led by Ezra, who rebuilt not the temple but the people, teaching them—and calling them to obey—the law of Moses (Ezra 7–10).

Thirteen years after Ezra arrived, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He first led the people to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1–6). Then, along with Ezra, he sought to restore the people (Nehemiah 7–13) as God's holy nation, followers of his Word.

The restoration was not complete, however. These books picture God's people regathered but struggling; they are poor subjects of a foreign king; their city is devastated; enemies oppress from without; sin threatens from within. We see the faithful hand of God mercifully preserving his people according to his promises. We also see the dire need for the perfect fulfillment of God's promises in the salvation accomplished by his Son. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible.)