

Nehemiah

Return to Me

Teaching Series by Pastor Trey Graham

They [visitors] said to me, “The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.” Nehemiah 1:3

When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was **fasting** and **praying** before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 1:4

Nehemiah prayed... “Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you **return to Me** and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.’”

Nehemiah 1:8-9

So **the wall was completed** on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, **in fifty-two days**. Nehemiah 6:15

TIMELINE

- *Now it happened in the month **Chislev** [**late November – early December**], in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came ... Nehemiah 1:1a
- *And it came about in the month **Nisan** [**March/April**], in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him... Nehemiah 2:1a
- *Nehemiah's trip to Jerusalem took 2-3 months (**April or May to June or July**)
- *Construction work must have begun on 3rd day of **Av** [**late July**]
- *Wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month **Elul** [**late September**], 10 months after Nehemiah learned of the problem & after 2 months of work

What is more important?

Hands or Heart? Logistical or Spiritual?

The narrative of ch. 7 is not resumed until ch. 11. In between come three important chapters which deal with the spiritual restoration of the community under the shared leadership of both Ezra and Nehemiah. If ch. 7 has already shown that bricks and mortar are not in themselves sufficient to secure the future, then these chapters further indicate that it is not enough either just to fill the city with people of any sort. Only a people which has experienced God's redemption and renewal, a people to whom is entrusted the law of God (ch. 8), who recognize their dependence upon Him (ch. 9) and who are fully committed to a life of faithful obedience (ch. 10) can ensure that the institutional structures which have been set in place serve their true purpose.

Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people [not just the religious leaders] for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, **all the people stood up**. Then **Ezra blessed the Lord the great God** [יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים הַגָּדוֹל]. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then **they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground**. Nehemiah 8:5-6

They read from the book, from the law [תּוֹרָה
torah] of God, translating to give the sense **so
that they understood the reading.**

Nehemiah 8:8

Then he [Nehemiah] said to them, “Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared [less wealthy people]; for **this day is holy to our Lord**. Do not be grieved, for **the joy** [חֵדְוָה chedvah] **of the LORD is your strength** [מְעֹז maoz].” Nehemiah 8:10

So the people went out and brought them and **made booths** [סֻכּוֹת *sukkot*] for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity **made booths and lived in them**. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so [as an entire nation] from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And **there was great rejoicing**. Nehemiah 8:16-17

סוכה sukkah booth



We will celebrate Sukkot on Sunday, October 9

Nehemiah Chapter 9

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month [Tishri] the sons of Israel assembled [in the temple] with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them [demonstrations of mourning]. The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. Nehemiah 9:1-2

*Feast of Booths (Sukkot) ended on 22nd of Tishri

While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law [תּוֹרָה torah] of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day [3 hours]; and for another fourth [3 hours] they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God. Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Chenani, and they cried with a loud voice to the Lord their God. Nehemiah 9:3-4

*Notice the absence of the names of Ezra and Nehemiah

Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah, said, “Arise, bless the Lord your God forever and ever! O may Your glorious name be blessed and exalted above all blessing and praise! **You alone are the Lord.** You have made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them and the heavenly host [angels] bows down before You.” Nehemiah 9:5-6

“You are the Lord God, who chose Abram and brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees [Gen. 11:31, 12:1, 15:7], and gave him the name Abraham [Gen. 17:5]. You found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him to give him the land of the Canaanite, of the Hittite and the Amorite, of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite [Deut. 7:1, Ex. 3:8]— to give it to his descendants. And You have fulfilled Your promise, for **You are righteous.**” Nehemiah 9:7-8

“You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt [Ex. 3:7], and heard their cry by the Red Sea [Ex. 14:10]. Then You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh [Deut. 6:22], against all his servants and all the people of his land; for You knew that they acted arrogantly toward them, and made a name for Yourself as it is this day. You divided the sea before them [Ex. 14:21-22, 28, 15:19], so they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground; and their pursuers You hurled into the depths, like a stone into raging waters [Ex. 14:27].”

Nehemiah 9:9-11

“And with a pillar of cloud You led them by day, and with a pillar of fire by night [Ex. 13:21, Num. 14:14] to light for them the way in which they were to go. Then You came down on Mount Sinai [Ex. 19:20], and spoke with them from heaven [Deut. 4:36]; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments.” Nehemiah 9:12-13

*Powerful prayers remember the goodness of God

“So You made known to them Your holy sabbath [Ex. 20:9-11], and laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, through Your servant Moses. You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger [manna in Ex. 16:4], You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst [Ex. 17:6], and You told them to enter in order to possess the land which You swore to give them [Deut. 9:1, 5].” Nehemiah 9:14-15

Have you
ever been
on the
spiritual
roller
coaster?



“But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly; they became stubborn [Ex. 32:9, 33:3] and would not listen to Your commandments. They **refused to listen**, and **did not remember** Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them; so they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt [Num. 14:4]. But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness [Ex. 34:6]; and You did not forsake them.” Nehemiah 9:16-17

“Even when they made for themselves a calf of molten metal [Ex. 32:1-4] and said, ‘this is your God who brought you up from Egypt,’ and committed great blasphemies, **You, in Your great compassion, did not forsake them** in the wilderness; the pillar of cloud did not leave them by day, to guide them on their way, nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go.” Nehemiah 9:18-19

“You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them [Ps. 143:10],
Your manna [Num. 11:6-9] You did not withhold from
their mouth, and You gave them water for their thirst
[Num. 20:2-8]. Indeed, forty years You provided for
them in the wilderness and they were not in want [Deut.
2:7]; their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet
swell [Deut. 8:4]. You also gave them kingdoms and
peoples, and allotted them to them as a boundary [Josh.
18:12-20]. They took possession of the land of Sihon the
king of Heshbon and the land of Og the king of Bashan
[Num. 21:21-35].” Nehemiah 9:20-22

TORAH TUESDAY

STUDY THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION
WITH PASTOR TREY GRAHAM

EVERY TUESDAY MORNING
7:00 AM

“You made their sons numerous as the stars of heaven, and You brought them into the land which You had told their fathers to enter and possess. So their sons entered and possessed the land [Josh 11:23]. And You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and You gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, to do with them as they desired. They captured fortified cities and a fertile land. They took possession of houses full of every good thing, hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, fruit trees in abundance. So they ate, were filled and grew fat, and **reveled in Your great goodness.**”

Nehemiah 9:23-25

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“But they became **disobedient** and **rebelled** against You, and cast Your law behind their backs [Ezek. 23:35] and killed Your prophets who had admonished them [1 Kings 19:10] so that they might return to You, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them, but when they cried to You in the time of their distress, You **heard from heaven**, and according to Your great compassion You gave them deliverers [Judges 2:11-23] who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors.” Nehemiah 9:26-27

“But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, and many times You rescued them according to Your compassion, and admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law [תּוֹרָה torah]. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, by which if a man observes them he shall live [Lev. 18:5]. And they turned a stubborn shoulder [Zech. 7:11] and stiffened their neck, and would not listen.” Nehemiah 9:28-29

“However, You bore with them for many years, and admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets, yet they would not give ear. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands [Jer. 30:11]. Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, for **You are a gracious and compassionate God.**” Nehemiah 9:30-31

*Powerful prayers remember the character of God

So far in this long and eloquent prayer,
what is missing?

They have not asked God for anything.

No requests so far, only praises.

“Now therefore, our God, **the great, the mighty, and the awesome God**, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness, do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You, which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria to this day.” Nehemiah 9:32

*Assyria was the first great power after Egypt that menaced Israel and Judah, beginning in the ninth century, over 400 years before Nehemiah’s time.

“However, **You are just** [Deut. 32:4] in all that has come upon us; for You have dealt faithfully, but **we have acted wickedly**. For our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers have not kept Your law or paid attention to Your commandments and Your admonitions with which You have admonished them.”

Nehemiah 9:33-34

“But they, in their own kingdom, with Your great goodness which You gave them, with the broad and rich land which You set before them [Ex. 3:8], **did not serve You or turn from their evil deeds.** Behold, we are slaves today, and as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty, behold, **we are slaves in it.**”

Nehemiah 9:35-36

*Israelites must pay taxes to the Persian Empire. They are bondmen in the land which God gave to their fathers as a free people, bondmen of the Persian monarchs; and the increase of the land which God appointed for His people belongs to the kings who rule over them. – Commentary on the Old Testament

“Its abundant produce is for the kings whom
You have set over us **because of our sins**; they
also rule over our bodies and over our cattle
as they please, so we are in great distress.
Now because of all this we are making an
agreement in writing; and on the sealed
document are the names of our leaders, our
Levites and our priests.” Nehemiah 9:37-38

*Powerful prayers demonstrate humility before God

Nehemiah Chapter 10

For the purpose of giving a lasting influence to this day of prayer and fasting, the assembled people, after the confession of sin (given in Nehemiah 9), entered into a written agreement, by which they bound themselves by an oath to separate from the heathen, and to keep the commandments and ordinances of God,—a document being prepared for this purpose, and sealed by the heads of their different houses.

— Commentary on the Old Testament

Now on the sealed [signed] document were the names of: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah. These were the priests. And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; also their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. Nehemiah 10:1-13

The leaders of the people [families]: Parosh,
Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad,
Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,
Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,
Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, Meshezabel, Zadok,
Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea,
Hananiah, Hasshub, Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,
Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, Ahiah, Hanan,
Anan, Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

Nehemiah 10:14-27

Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding,
Nehemiah 10:28

are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse [that called down calamity if they failed to carry through on their agreement] and **an oath to walk in God's law** [תּוֹרָה torah], which was given through Moses, God's servant, and **to keep and to observe all the commandments of God our Lord**, and His ordinances and His statutes; and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. Nehemiah 10:28-30

As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt [Deut. 15:2]. We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God [Ex. 30:13]:
Nehemiah 10:31-32

for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering [Num. 28:3-8], the sabbaths, the new moon [Num. 28:9-15], for the appointed times [Num. 28:16-31], for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God [Lev. 6:12], as it is written in the law; Nehemiah 10:33-34

and that they might bring the first fruits of our ground [Ex. 23:19, Deut. 26:2] and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree [Num. 18:13, Lev. 19:23] to the house of the Lord annually, and bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle [Num. 18:15-16], and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law [תּוֹרָה torah], for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God. Nehemiah 10:35-36

We will also bring the first of our dough [Num. 15:20], our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil [Num. 18:12] to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns. The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes [Num. 18:26] to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse [2 Chron. 31:11].

Nehemiah 10:37-38

For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers. Thus **we will not neglect the house of our God.**
Nehemiah 10:39

Commitments in this written prayer...

- Everyone can and should participate, no matter their job
- Walk in God's law (torah)
- Keep God's commandments
- Raise children to know, love and serve God
- Prioritize time with God over business ventures
- Show compassion to others in need
- Give faithfully to God's house (Temple)
- Celebrate God's appointed holy days
- Give back to God from what He has given them

Nehemiah

Return to Me

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“For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. But in their distress **they turned to the Lord God** of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him.”

2 Chronicles 15:3-4