



Staff

1<sup>st</sup> Week. 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> of January. Nehemiah--Rebuilding the Walls.

2<sup>nd</sup> Week. 8<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> of January. Nehemiah--Building the Wall of Unity.

3<sup>rd</sup> Week. 15<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> of January. Nehemiah--Rebuilding the Walls of  
commitments.

4<sup>th</sup> Week. 22<sup>nd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> of January. Nehemiah--Rebuilding the Walls of  
Conviction.

## Nehemiah Quiet Time Series

1<sup>st</sup> Week. 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> of January. Nehemiah--Rebuilding the Walls

Day 1. Wednesday 01-01-03

### 1. Background

#### A. Storyline

For hundreds of years the city of Jerusalem had existed as the capital of Israel, the home of the altar and the temple, and a symbol of strength to every Jew. In 1000 BC, David reigned as king over Israel, the most powerful nation in all the land. It was a glorious time to live in Jerusalem. But as time passed, the Jews drifted from their God. Civil war broke out, and sin overtook both the leaders and the people. After many warnings through the prophets, God finally brought judgment against his people and his city. In 586 BC, God caused Judah (the Southern Kingdom) to be captured by the Babylonians and taken into exile. It was then that the dream was born to return to Jerusalem some day to rebuild their beloved city. But this dream would not come true easily. It would take three different leaders making three different trips home over a period of almost 100 years to finally bring about the restoration of the altar, the temple, the city wall, and the true worship of God that is triumphantly recorded in the book of Nehemiah. The first return of the Jews to their homeland of Palestine was led by Zerubbabel in 538 BC. God used Zerubbabel to lead the people to rebuild the altar and the temple. God also used the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to preach to the people during this time. The second return of the Jews to Jerusalem was led by Ezra in 458 BC. God used Ezra to bring about a spiritual reformation of the people. But they would need spiritual reformation again and again. God also used the prophet Malachi to preach to the people during this time. The third return was led by Nehemiah in 444 BC. God used Nehemiah to lead the people to rebuild the city wall. He and Ezra worked together to restore the true worship of God in Jerusalem.

#### B. Setting the Scene

The book of Nehemiah begins with Nehemiah living in Persia among the exiled Jews who had not yet returned to Jerusalem. He hears a report from some brothers who had recently come from Jerusalem that although the altar and the temple had been rebuilt, the city wall is still in ruins and the Jews living there are in great trouble and disgrace. Nehemiah is greatly moved by the fact that God's people are living in such disgrace and so, after much mourning, prayer and fasting, he feels compelled by God to ask the King of Persia's permission to go back to Jerusalem himself as a temporary governor and lead the people back to spiritual victory. What follows is one of the most inspiring "come back stories" ever in the history of God's people. It is a story of prayer rediscovered. It is a story of faith rekindled. It is a story of what God's people can do when they are truly unified in their mission, in spite of severe opposition.

#### C. Summary of Key Dates and Storyline

- 586 BC = God causes Judah (the Southern Kingdom) to be captured by the Babylonians and taken into exile because of their sins.
- 539 BC = Babylon falls to Persia, who is led by Cyrus, a man whom God will cause to allow his people to go back to their homeland of Jerusalem, in the land of Palestine, in order to rebuild their city, their temple, and their worship of God.
- 538 BC = Many of the Jews excitedly return from Babylon to Jerusalem in order to start this restoration project. But after a noble start, they soon get distracted and sidetracked. (Ezra 1-4 describes this.)
- 520 BC = Haggai and Zechariah prophecy in Jerusalem in order to get the people focused back on the work of God. The people repent of their laziness and self-focus and the temple reconstruction resumes. (See Ezra 5-6; and the books of Haggai and Zechariah.)
- 516 BC = The rebuilding of the altar and the temple is completed. (Ezra 6)
- 465 BC = The worship of God is again half-hearted, and so God raises up a prophet, Malachi, to prophecy in Jerusalem in order to call the people to repentance and get them refocused on giving their best to God again. (See the book of Malachi.)
- 458 BC = Ezra goes to Jerusalem from Babylon to continue the redevelopment project. Though the temple is rebuilt, the law of God is not fully restored, and the city wall is still in shambles. (Chapters 7-10 of Ezra describe this.)
- 444 BC = Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem; Ezra and Malachi are there. Nehemiah will lead the people to rebuild the city wall and recommit themselves once again to God.

### II. Read Nehemiah 1:1-4;

#### A. Understanding

1. How are the people of God doing at the time of this report? (Verse 3)
2. Try to imagine what it must have been like to be a Jew living in Jerusalem at this time. It's been almost a century since the first group of Israelites excitedly returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city, the temple and the spirituality of the people (see timeline and storyline above). But only the temple and the altar have been restored. The city walls are still in shambles and "the people are in great trouble and disgrace (vs 3)." They are no doubt discouraged, defeated and feeling hopeless. Their faith is low and their strength is weak.
3. What was Nehemiah's response to this report? (Verse 4)

4. Nehemiah wept for his city and his people. He hurt deeply over the state of Jerusalem. And it moved him to mourn, fast and pray to God.

### **B. Application**

1. We should be moved to tears for our people and our city as well. We should have deep feelings for how the Kingdom of God is doing both globally and locally, and for the lost people of our city.
2. Jesus wept over the same city 500 years after Nehemiah, "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it...(Luke 19:41)."
3. When was the last time you wept over the spiritual condition of other people? Do you have that kind of heart -- a heart that hurts, a heart that cares, a heart that mourns, a heart that takes it personally, a heart that is moved to fast and pray for the sake of others?

### **C. Prayer Focus**

1. Pray for the lost of your city, neighborhood, school, college, work.....
2. Honestly evaluate the spiritual state of your own sector, and then sincerely pray as Nehemiah and Jesus would for them.

## **Day 2 (Thursday 02-01-03)**

### **I. Read Nehemiah 1:5-11**

#### **A. Understanding**

1. Re-read verses 6-7.
  2. Notice that Nehemiah is not self-righteous and condemning of others. But he includes himself in the blame for where God's people are at.
  3. Notice too that that he did not minimize the severity of their sin or the fact that it was direct disobedience to God himself.
  4. Now re-read verses 8-9.
  5. Notice that he recalls the promises of God: to surely curse unfaithfulness and just as surely reward repentance, no matter how far we have drifted from him.
  6. Now re-read verses 10-11
  7. Notice at least two things:
- Nehemiah's personal initiative. Nehemiah is cooking up a plan. He is saying: I am going to do something about this. It reminds us of Jesus when he is quoted by the Hebrew writer as saying: "Here I am... I have come to do your will, O God (Hebrews 10:7)."
  - Nehemiah's faith in the power of God to change the situation! He starts his prayer with, "O Lord , God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands...(vs 5)". And then he ends his prayer with, "Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man (vs 11)." God's people may be discouraged and faithless, but Nehemiah is neither of these things. Nehemiah is faithful and courageous as he looks to the great and awesome God of heaven to do what he promises he will always do: come through for his people whenever they turn to him in humility, repentance and faith.

### **B. Application**

1. What is your part in the current state of affairs of God's people?
2. Are you faithless or faithful about God's ability and willingness to work powerfully in your group this year?
3. What is God calling you to do about it today and this month? Will you take the initiative as Nehemiah and Jesus did?

### **C. Prayer Focus**

1. Praise God for his mighty deeds in your life already, and for his trustworthy promises about working powerfully again.
2. Confess your sins to God and talk to your discipler.
3. Ask God to show you what you can do to rebuild your part of the wall.

**Note:** Pray with the same confident faith of Nehemiah and Jesus.

## **Day 3 (Friday 03-01-03)**

### **1. Read Nehemiah 2:1-10**

#### **A. Understanding**

1. Nehemiah was "very much afraid (vs 2)" to ask the king such a huge request as the one that God had placed on his heart. But he asked anyway. Someone once said that "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the conquest of it." And someone else said, "Feel the fear and do it anyway."
2. But what was the secret to Nehemiah's courage? Look at verse 4. Nehemiah's courage came from his relationship with God, and specifically from his prayer life, which was not just in the morning, but throughout the day. Clearly Nehemiah had more than a ritual with God; He had a relationship with God.
3. Look at the latter part of verse 8 again. Why did the king grant Nehemiah all of his requests?

### **B. Application**

1. Do you "feel the fear and do it anyway"? Or do you allow your fears to stop you from doing the will of God?
2. Does your relationship with God sustain you "when it counts"? Or in the times when you need it most, does it become apparent that your relationship with God is not as strong as it needs to be?
3. Do you seek God's guidance and favor throughout the day, or just in the morning?

### **C. Prayer Focus**

1. Ask God to reveal what fears have been holding you back lately, and for the strength to overcome them today.
2. Resolve to seek God throughout the day today, and especially "when it counts".

## **Day 4 (Saturday 04-01-03)**

### **1. Read Nehemiah 2:11-20**

#### **A. Understanding**

1. Nehemiah surveyed the situation. He spent time thinking through the task before him. He understood that "work without a plan" would be as foolish as "prayer without work".
2. Verses 17-18 are inspiring. Nehemiah calls the people to join him in the project that God had put on his heart, and the people respond with one heart and mind: "Let us start rebuilding."
3. But it quickly becomes apparent that this project will not be easy. As soon as Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem hear about it, they immediately oppose Nehemiah and accuse him of rebelling against the king (vs 19). Take note: opposition starts the day you decide to do God's work (see also Nehemiah 2:10).
4. How does Nehemiah respond to this false accusation and their immediate opposition to the rebuilding project? (See verse 20.) What insights do you gain from reflecting on verse 20?

#### **B. Application**

1. We too must be organized to be effective. This is especially true of our evangelistic efforts. How many times have we "met an open person" and then failed to follow up? What do you need to organize this week in order to set yourself up for success?
2. What is the evangelistic plan of your group? Are you as wholeheartedly supportive of this plan as the people of Nehemiah's day were about their plan?
3. Have you allowed the "Sanballats" (opposition) to stop you from doing God's will? Or have you responded like Nehemiah did to them in verse 20?

#### **C. Prayer Focus**

1. Pray through your evangelistic opportunities and contacts, and ask God to put a plan on your heart to maximize those opportunities today and this month.
2. Ask God to give you a willing and wholehearted spirit about the evangelistic plan of your group today, and these next couple of months, so that many more souls can be saved this year!
3. Ask God to help you identify the "Sanballats" that are in your life at this time, so that by his power, you can overcome them.

## **Day 5 (Sunday 05-01-03)**

### **1. Here are some thoughts to consider before reading the next section of scripture:**

#### **A. Understanding**

1. Chapter 3 of Nehemiah is a careful record of the individual names of each of the workers who repaired different sections of the wall. At first glance, it may appear to be a section of scripture without much to teach us today. (It may even seem boring to us at first - heaven forbid!)
2. But there is actually much in this chapter that can feed our spirits and inspire our hearts today.
3. Look at this chapter as a beautiful display of teamwork! This tapestry of unity is certainly a marvel in any generation and a great delight for God himself to behold.
4. When you consider the difficulty of the task and the challenge it must have been to accomplish it in only 52 days (Neh 6:15), you begin to appreciate the vital contribution of each and every worker to the project. I'm sure Nehemiah appreciated each of them, or else he would not have taken the time to record each and every one of their names and their individual contributions to the work.
5. How difficult was the task? Here's what one writer says about it: "The task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was a huge one. The wall was more than a mile long and the parts that had to be rebuilt needed to be three or four feet thick, and fifteen to twenty feet high. Rebuilding would be a massive operation, only possible if everyone did their part (adapted from "A Passion for Faithfulness", by J.I. Packer, page 81)."
6. Some things to note about this heroic list of ordinary folks who pooled their resources together to accomplish in a month and a half what had not been done in almost a century before by others who had tried and failed. (Adapted from "A Passion for Faithfulness", by J.I. Packer, pages 86-87).

- **Note the unity:** 41 separate groups worked together on the project.

- Note the diversity: All kinds of different people chipped in and did their part: priests, Levites, temple servants, goldsmiths, merchants, officials, private individuals, women, and men from Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, Mizpah, and other towns close by.
- Note the plan: Think globally. Act locally. Most worked on portions of the wall that were right in front of their own house (i.e. they built the wall in their own neighborhood). Priests rebuilt the area near the temple (vs 1, 28); the temple servants built the area near their dwelling on the temple mount (vs. 26); Jediah built the portion of the wall "opposite his house (vs 10)"; Benjamin and Hassub built the portion of the wall "in front of their house (vs 23)", and so on.
- Note the exception: verse 5 = "The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work." How do you think the "men of Tekoa", who were working so hard, must have felt about the "nobles of Tekoa", who were apparently unwilling to do their part? And yet, it did not hinder the men of Tekoa from doing their part; In fact, they did even more (see verse 5 and 27).

**II. Now go ahead and read Nehemiah 3:1-32 and see what strikes you the most from this passage of scripture.**

**B. Application**

1. What did you personally get most from this passage of scripture?
2. What if a book were written about the spiritual wall that we are building today? Would your name be in it? What portion of the completed wall would be attributed to you and your closest friends and family?
3. What are some good reasons for us to build our part of the wall in our own neighborhoods and work places, rather than in another area of the city? How about if we are teens or college students - what's our part of the wall?
4. Are you more like "the men from Tekoa" who finished their part of the wall (vs 5, 27)? Or like "the nobles from Tekoa", who "would not put their shoulders to the work...(vs 5)?" When others don't do their part, does it cause you to stop doing your part? What should you do in situations like that? What would Jesus do?

**C. Prayer Focus**

1. Praise God today for specific workers on the wall in our church that you feel grateful for.
2. Pray that God would make clear to you what your part of the wall is, and to put it on your heart to take responsibility for it.
3. Pray specifically for your section of the wall (geographical area).

**Day 6 (Monday 06-01-03)**

**1. Read Nehemiah 4:1-3**

**A. Understanding**

1. Sanballat and Tobiah opposed the rebuilding process in much the same way that Satan opposes our spiritual rebuilding today. But one of the greatest defenses against Satan's attacks is to make ourselves aware of his "schemes (2 Cor 2:11b)", "in order that Satan might not outwit us (2 Cor 2:11a)." See if you can pick out the devil's schemes in the following phrases from verses 1-3...
  - a. "He ridiculed the Jews"
  - b. "What are these feeble Jews doing?"
  - c. "Will they restore their wall?"
  - d. "Will they offer sacrifices?"
  - e. "Will they finish in a day?"
  - f. "Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble - burned as they are?"
  - g. "What they are building-if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones."
2. What is Satan trying to do here? What are his tools? What are his tactics? How would these same attacks be rephrased today if they were verbalized by Satan against you?
  - a. How does Satan "ridicule" you, your Bible Talk, sector, zone, Region & our church?
  - b. How does he get us to feel "feeble"?
  - c. How does he introduce doubts into our minds about our evangelistic efforts?
  - d. How does he question our motives and accuse us?
  - e. How does he get us to question whether this is even worth it?
  - f. How does he get us to question and doubt whether we or other people, as far gone as he makes us think we are, can ever be "brought back to life from those heaps of rubble"?
  - g. How does he get us to question whether what we are building will really last?
3. And what is Satan's real goal in all of this, anyway? Re-read verse 11 again for a pretty good clue.
4. Certainly the goal of Nehemiah's enemies was to "put an end to the work (vs 11)." And that is Satan's main goal regarding our efforts to build up the Kingdom of God today.

## 2. Now read Nehemiah 4:4-6

### A. Understanding

1. What was Nehemiah's response to Sanballat and Tobiah's attacks?
2. Did they stop their work in order to "sort out all the problems in the group"? Or did they continue to work on the wall?
3. Were the people discouraged and disheartened by the Satanic opposition? Or did they trust in God through prayer and continue to give their whole hearts to the work of God?

### B. Application

1. How is Satan attacking your faith right now? Is he using some of the same tactics he tried to use on Nehemiah and the Jews?
2. Have you allowed the traps of discouragement, bitterness, fear or faithlessness to ensnare your heart and cause you to stop working on your part of the wall with all of your heart?
3. How can you learn from the example of Nehemiah today?

### C. Prayer Focus

1. Ask God to reveal what schemes of Satan he has been trying to use on you lately.
2. Pray boldly and faithfully to our awesome and powerful God to rescue you from those traps so you can get joyfully and wholeheartedly back to work on the wall of God today.

## Day 7. (Tuesday 07-01-03)

### I. Read Nehemiah 4:7-12

#### A. Understanding

1. What was Nehemiah's defense against the increasingly intense opposition he and his people were receiving? (See verse 9.)
2. He prayed to God and posted a guard. We too need to pray to God and post guards in our lives to help us guard our hearts. How is "discipleship" like "posting a guard" in our lives?
3. Prayer and people - they are two of the most effective ways to protect ourselves from the ongoing attacks of Satan in our lives.

### II. Now read Nehemiah 4:13-23

#### A. Understanding

1. What principles of the "one another relationships" talked about in the New Testament do you see exemplified in these verses? Here's a few ideas just to get you started (I'm sure there are many more than these):
  - a. Verse 13 = we especially need help "at the exposed places" in the walls of our lives.
  - b. Verse 13 = "posting them by families" - the importance of doing the work of God together with our physical families.
  - c. Verse 13 = "with their swords, spears and bows" (Remember the "full armor of God" in Ephesians 6:10-20?)
  - d. Verse 14 = "Don't be afraid of them..." We all need daily encouragement from each other! (Heb 3:13)
  - e. Verse 14 = "Remember the Lord who is great and awesome..." We all need to be reminded to look to our awesome God!
  - f. Verse 14 = "...and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." We all need to be reminded of what and who we are fighting for.
  - g. etc. (There's much more.)

#### B. Application

1. Satan is intensely opposing you. Have you developed a deep conviction yet about praying to God and posting a guard on your life, in order to be victorious in this war and win many souls to Christ?
2. How's your prayer life? Has it increased during this time of studying the book of Nehemiah and praying? Or are you still allowing excuses and circumstances to get in the way of your times with God?
3. Who is posted at the door of your life as a friend to help you win this spiritual war? Are you working well together? Or do you need to work on that relationship today?
4. Whose door are you posted at to help them guard their lives? Which family members? Which disciples? Which non-Christians that you are reaching out to or studying with? All of us should be posted at the three doors listed above (family, disciples, and a Non-Christian friend or friends we are leading to Christ).

#### C. Prayer Focus

1. Pray and post a guard:
  - i. Pray about those who are posted in your life.
  - ii. Pray about those whose lives you are posted at.
2. Family
3. Disciples
4. Non-Christians

2<sup>nd</sup> Week. 8<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> of January. Nehemiah--Building the Wall of Unity.

**Day 8. (Wednesday 08-01-03)**

***Please read Nehemiah 5:1-13***

A great outcry was raised among the people because of the injustice of their treatment of each other. Some complained that they needed to work more to get grain so that their own families could be fed. The underlying complaint is that they were working so hard on building the walls of the Kingdom that the needs of their own families were being neglected.

Money problems are rarely just money problems; instead, relationship, discipline, and stewardship problems often lie at the root. When the Jews turned to their brothers for help, they were taken advantage of. It is one thing to help out brothers and sisters in their poverty, but it is quite another when we use our position in life to take advantage of others and try to profit from them in their times of need. The wealthiest and most shrewd businessmen always look for the needs of society in their perfect timing so that they can make their personal fortunes.

God understood that times like these would come, but He expects that we will not charge interest (exacting usury) or enslave our brothers and sisters by their indebtedness to us when they are in need of the basic necessities of life. In Nehemiah's day, God had already given the people instructions about these matters in His Law (see Leviticus 25:39-43). Nehemiah knew that all of these people had left their captivity in Babylon to rebuild Israel and be free again--not simply to be enslaved again to new owners!

Nehemiah was indignant over the abuse of relationships that were taking place within the family of God. In Nehemiah 5:9, he questioned, "Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?" The Hebrew word for "reproach" is "Herpah", and in this context, it conveys the idea that the unbelievers will mock as they see the way that the "people of God" treat one another. To our shame, the lost are often better at taking care of one another, having mercy, and being hospitable than the children of God. This should not be.

Jesus knew that our treatment of each other--our unity and love--are some of the brightest lights we have for evangelizing this dark world. He said it well in John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." It is our own selfishness and greed that enslaves our brothers and sisters with "profitable opportunities". Satan has used this method to divide and embitter God's people and destroy their unity from the days of Cain and Abel until now. (For another example of this, read the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25:29-34). Let's not fall prey to the devil's trap; and instead, let's be humble, helpful, and honest with one another.

In Nehemiah 5:12-13, it is very impressive to see how quickly and humbly the people responded to Nehemiah's correction and carried out their promise to repent in these matters. Are you so quick to repent? Or do you put up a fighting defense when you are corrected--hoping to explain and justify your actions?

**Day 9. (Thursday 09-01-03)**

***Please read Nehemiah 5:14-19***

One of the outstanding qualities about Nehemiah that we see over and over in this book is his heart to lead in a Godly, rather than a worldly, way. A Godly leader sacrifices his own privileges so that the needs of his people can be met. Nehemiah had full rights, as the man in charge of the work in Jerusalem, to take advantage of the "benefits" of his position. It might even be fair to say he deserved those rewards; however, he did not look to his own needs first, but to those of his people. Nehemiah devoted his personal time to working *among* them, not simply *over* them. He was not blind to the sacrifices of time, labor, and money that the people were investing in order to rebuild the walls of the Kingdom--and what was their reward? It was merely to live within the safety of its walls and set up a future for posterity.

In humility and unselfish love, Nehemiah did not want to be a burden to his brothers and sisters, nor did he want to "lord over them" (Neh. 5:15). He was not only sharing in the work with them, but also neglecting his own wages and feeding many of the people at his own table. The apostle Paul was unified in the same Spirit with Nehemiah when he was careful to not be a financial burden to the needy congregations of his day (see 1 Corinthians 9:1-15, 2 Corinthians 11:7-12, and Philippians 4:14-19). Similarly, Jesus shared the same Spirit when He said in Matthew 20:25-28, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Anyone who truly walks by the Spirit of God--and particularly, anyone who leads by the Spirit--will subjugate his or her own selfish desires for the sake of pleasing God and caring for His people (see Romans 8:5).

In exchange for his sacrificial behavior, Nehemiah only asked God for one thing: "**Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people.**" He was not looking for recognition from men, but from God.

How about you? Are you a burden to others? When you meet with other disciples, are you more focused on having your needs met and dealing with your problems than you are on building others up? Do you lord over others around you? All of us lead in some capacity--whether in the Kingdom, in our families, at school, at work, or in our neighborhoods--so all of us need to evaluate how selfish or how sacrificial our leadership is. Lastly, are you bartering with God--doing your "good deeds" in hopes of receiving something more than you deserve? (For further thoughts, see Luke 17:7-10 & 1 Peter 5:2-4.)

### **Day 10. (Friday 10-01-03)**

***Please read Nehemiah 6:1-14***

**First of all, let's set the stage of who is who:**

**Sanballat** is called a Horonite in Nehemiah 2:10, designating him as either from Beth-Horon in Ephraim, some 13 miles northwest of Jerusalem, or, more likely, from Horonaim, a city of Moab mentioned in Isaiah 15:5 and Jeremiah 48:3-5. In papyri found at the Jewish settlement in Elephantine, Egypt, Sanballat is called the governor of Samaria. His daughter was married to the Jewish high priest Eliashib (Neh. 13:28). Keeping this in mind, his opposition to Nehemiah was most likely politically motivated. If Jerusalem were rebuilt, Samaria would lose its political prowess as the center of Judea.

**Tobiah** was an Ammonite. He is designated as an "official" in 2:10, though some translators would use the word "servant" instead. The Hebrew word, "ebed," is usually a designation for a servant and probably indicates that he was Sanballat's lieutenant or subordinate and not a full member of the coalition.

**Geshem** was undoubtedly a chieftain from the more distant Arabia and a full partner in the league.

Why were these three men and their cohorts so opposed to Nehemiah's work? Their motive was probably jealousy. Being newcomers to the area, the Israelites were potential rivals for grazing land and for the commercial revenue that came from caravans traveling between Egypt and points east.

Previously, the neighboring tribes led by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem had planned to enter Jerusalem through the breaches in the walls and attack from within. Nehemiah had received word of this and had set careful watches to prevent this infiltration (chapter 4). Now the breaches were all filled and only the doors needed to be installed in the gateways. New tactics were called for, and chapter 6 details these final attempts of Israel's foes to stop the building of the city.

It is interesting, me and Rita were in Jerusalem, September 1999, we were praying, touching, leaning against, and looking at the very walls that Nehemiah and his people rebuilt. Much of the wall still stands today! Nehemiah was so thorough about the work that God had graciously assigned him that he says upon its completion: "Not a gap was left in it" (6:1). Nehemiah did not treat his role and duties in God's Kingdom haphazardly or flippantly, but rather with an excellent and diligent spirit that wanted to please his Lord. The foundations of his hard work still have impact on the people in Jerusalem today--2500 years later! He did not work as one working simply for himself, but as one who worked for the Lord (see Ephesians 6:7).

In addition, he would not be intimidated, tricked, distracted, or lured to the Plain of Ono and, by doing so, neglect the work that God had given him. Oh, no--he was going to stay righteous, setting the needs of the Kingdom first. He had his priorities straight! He knew that he was carrying on a great project and not just some menial task of building some wall in the middle of an abandoned city.

The enemies of God, Sanballat and Geshem sent their message to Nehemiah hoping he would meet with them--by appearances, a peaceful meeting, perhaps even a reconciliation or a vacation--"You've been working awfully hard, Nehemiah. Come. Take a break for a few days with us out on the plain of Ono." "Let us meet together" sounds so friendly--after all, we want unity, right?

The plain of Ono was about 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It would have taken a day to get there, maybe a day to meet, and a day to get back. The work would stop for half a week if he were to attend this meeting. The plain is near Tel Aviv, where Ben Gurion airport is located today. It was not neutral ground; it was on the border of enemy territory, near Ashdod. The meeting seems to be a summit of sorts, but with a hidden agenda. Can't we just live together in peace? Can't we all just get along?

Opposition often comes when one commits oneself to be unified whole-heartedly with the purposes and plans of God. Sometimes unity with God appears to be disunity with others. It takes discernment and determination to stay the course of God's will in the face of so many distractions--and sometimes these distractions are not even evil in and of themselves. Jesus explained to His disciples that such fervor to do God's will is not understood by the people of the world (John 15:18,19) but only by those who know their master's business (John 15:15). This is why the slander and false accusations inevitably come--carnal minds of this world do not understand the spiritual business of God.

It must have been hard for Nehemiah to hear that such slanderous rumors had been reported among the nations. It isn't easy to have lies spread about you, but this great man of faith did not reply with retaliation; instead, he calmly stated the truth. He saw through their wicked schemes and attempts to make him fearful. Nehemiah knew where to get his strength. He prayed to God, "Now strengthen my hands." (6:9)



In reality, even with the walls complete, Israel did not stand a chance against her many foes. Nehemiah knew that their greatest protector and shield was not a stone fortress, but God Himself. In all our efforts to build in the work of God, even with excellent skills and talents, we must not forget that God is the master architect and builder (Hebrews 11:10) and it is only through Him that we can be strengthened for everything (Philippians 4:13).

If the devil cannot distract you with the world, he often tries to do it with someone from among you--such was the case with Shemaiah. This man was acting as a prophet but was not one. He was offering Nehemiah safety in the temple. At first, it sounds reasonable, but Nehemiah knew that Shemaiah was trying to get him to disobey God. Only priests were allowed in the temple, and Nehemiah was not a priest. If he had done what was suggested, he would have committed a grave sin and would have been faced with major consequences. For example, in 2 Chronicles 26, King Uzziah, who was not a priest, went into the temple; and God instantly struck him with leprosy.

Shemaiah sought to persuade Nehemiah to embrace an easy-going, compromising religion that would shirk persecution, that would carry no cross, and that would be governed by fear of the opinions of other people. He knew how to use religious talk, but it was still a trap; if Nehemiah had heeded his instruction, he would have sinned and given others something with which to find fault and discredit him.

Nehemiah stood brave against this religious deception; and in his commitment to obedience, God revealed to him the heart of Shemaiah--who was no true prophet; but was on Sanballat's payroll! Instead of lashing out against Shemaiah and his fellow false-religionists, Nehemiah simply committed these wicked men and the situation to God.

Nehemiah's response to the three-fold attack of pretended friendship, slander, and false religion makes us admire him as a leader. "Come down to the plain of Ono," they said to Nehemiah. "Come down from the cross," they said to Jesus. But Nehemiah--and Jesus--were carrying on great works and would not be stopped. They slandered Nehemiah, but he did not defend himself. He spoke the truth and trusted in God. Jesus was also insulted, but did not retaliate (1 Peter 2:23). A false prophet offered Nehemiah an easy way out. Jesus was also offered a way out by Satan; just worship Satan, and all the kingdoms of the world would be delivered to him. But Jesus would have none of it. What about you?

#### **Day 11. (Saturday 11-01-03)**

##### ***Please read Nehemiah 6:15-7:3***

According to Jewish tradition and Rabbi Eliezer in the Talmud, "The world was created on the 25th day of Elul. Six days later, the first day of the month of Tishrei, marked the creation of the first human being." To this day, the Jews celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, in accordance with this tradition. The month of Elul is the final month in the Jewish year. This month is a particularly propitious time for prayer, self-introspection, and repentance. It is a time of intense spiritual preparation for the coming year and the upcoming holiday. Last year (2002/5762), the month of Elul began on August 8, 2002 and lasted through September 6, 2002. Whether we agree with Eliezer's date of creation or not, there is one thing we know from the Scriptures, this was the day that the people and Nehemiah finished their work on the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

They finished the wall in 52 days! Wow! What a tremendous task completed so quickly, especially when you consider that the walls had sat there destroyed for over a century; now in a matter of days, they were rebuilt! At the beginning, when Nehemiah saw the need, he prayed for four months (the difference in time between Nehemiah 1:1 and 2:1); but the work itself took less than two months. Nehemiah worked longer in prayer than on the wall! How often we neglect the spiritual walls that must first be built; instead we leap toward the tangible walls that bring us visual recognition. But in Nehemiah's case, the wall was finished, and completed so fast that it was surely to be credited to God's glory and not to man's. There is nothing like the will of God being accomplished with excellency and expediency to make His enemies lose their self-confidence. Men will compete if they think the work is man-made; they will surrender if they perceive that it has been done with the help of God Himself. Self-confidence is never a match for confidence in God.

No great accomplishment comes without intimidation from our opponents. Regardless, Nehemiah kept his trust in God, even selecting leaders who would reflect his own convictions. He chose Hananiah because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most do. "Emet", the Hebrew word translated in 7:2 as "integrity", conveys reliability, faithfulness, and continuance. It is the primary Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to signify "truth." Hananiah was the kind of man who did what was right even when no one was looking or holding him accountable. He was loyal and unified with God's purpose. He feared God more than he feared what man could say or do to him. (See Jesus' comment on this same attitude in Luke 12:4,5) Nehemiah was careful to choose leaders who would value the cause. Are you like Hananiah? What is your reputation among the people of God in your life? How does one build a reputation of integrity with man and with God?

In Nehemiah 7:3 we see that he was careful to keep the doors shut until the sun was hot. The gates were not to be opened till sunrise or later, and to be shut at sunset, which is still the custom in many cities of the East. If a traveler arrives after sunset, he finds the gates shut, and on no consideration will they be opened until morning. With the gates locked until the heat of the day when the sun was shining clearly, any nearby enemies would be easier to spot and the inhabitants of the city would be up, alert, and ready to defend themselves. Nehemiah did

not fail to take any necessary precautions to guard the great work that God had given him. We should arm ourselves with the same attitude.

Nehemiah set gatekeepers and guards up on the wall as watchmen. How many times has a victory been won in our lives, only later to be lost because there was no guard? An enemy comes in because we are not watching. Walls can be climbed if there is no one there to stop the enemy, but a watchman can easily push down a foe from the wall. In later years, the walls of Jerusalem were built with special slits and holes so that arrows, stones, and hot oil could be hurled out on anyone who tried to climb up. Remember what Peter wrote, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8) An unmanned wall does not stop the devil. If you plan to keep your convictions from failing in a time of testing, they must be accompanied with prayer, confession, and boldness.

### **Day 12. (Sunday 12-01-03)**

#### ***Please read Nehemiah 7:4-7:73***

The reading of such a genealogy of names may seem boring or without reason at first. (Some may have even skipped reading it altogether!) But with a little research, patience, and care, golden nuggets of truth can be extracted from such a list.

Nehemiah took a census of the people because he knew that these men and women were the few who were willing to give up the 70 years of stability established in Babylon for the rocky new fortress of building God's kingdom. These were the pioneers who would lay down their comfort to pursue the will of God. Only a small percentage of the people that went into captivity returned for the rebuilding.

During the building of the wall, there had been some difficulty with keeping the people faithful to God. Perhaps the census was initiated to expose those who had crept in, but were not in the genealogy register, or who had intermarried with the pagan Babylonians during the captivity. A discussion on land rights and ownership was about to occur, and it is certain that Nehemiah wanted to insure that properties went to their rightful heirs. Whatever the reason, God had put it in the heart of Nehemiah to check this register to see who were Hebrews, and who were not. It reminds me of the parable of the wedding feast that Jesus told in Matthew 22. When the king noticed the guest without the proper garments, he had him cast out. Many people try to reap the benefits of God's Kingdom without truly committing to its ranks. God will not tolerate this forever.

#### **Nuggets to consider:**

Nehemiah 7:7--Zerubbabel had brought the first group back from captivity. He brought the largest number of the people back to their homeland. Notice also that Mordecai is here. He is also mentioned in Ezra 2:2. In the absence of any other qualifier, this might be evidence that may allow us to assume that this is the Mordecai, the great and renowned man of conviction, of Esther 10:3. This identification would shorten the chronology as far as the book of Esther is concerned, and indeed would tend to identify Esther's Ahasuerus as Darius.

In Nehemiah 7:44 we read about the singing descendants of Asaph--Asaph was a singer, prophet, and leader appointed by David (1 Chronicles 16:4,5). These men who journeyed to Jerusalem were Asaph's offspring. Twelve of the Psalms are credited to him: Psalm 50, and Psalm 73 thru 83.

In Nehemiah 7:61 we see that some of the people were rejected from the priesthood because they could not prove their lineage. God had made very strict requirements for who would serve in the Levitical and Aaronic orders. A lost genealogy could put one's status as a Jew at risk. Even today, if one wants to become a citizen of Israel, he must first prove through his genealogy that he is a Jew. (Exodus 28, 29 & Leviticus 8) Thank God that today, all disciples serve as Kings and Priests in His Kingdom. We no longer have need of an earthly High Priest to sacrifice for our sins because Jesus, our heavenly High Priest, has done it for us once and for all, through the shedding of his own blood (Hebrews 10 & Revelation 5:10). We no longer need to dedicate our time to endless genealogies (1 Timothy 1:4). Some take great pride in their earthly family trees, their heritage, and their last name; but Jesus let us know that we all need to be born again in order to be part of His family (John 1:12,13; John 1:3-5). Thank God our names are written in the most important registry--the Lamb's Book of Life!

In Nehemiah 7:65, The Urim & Thummim are mentioned. This was a means of determining God's will (Exodus 28:30). The implication here is that those who could not come up with their rights to the priesthood through the genealogies, could eventually be admitted when a priest serving with the Urim and Thummim could determine God's will for each person's individual case.

In Nehemiah 7:70, we notice the unity and great contribution of all the people. This was an incredibly large sacrificial offering for the work of God. Like our brothers and sisters of long ago, we too should have such hearts to give.

### **Day 13. (Monday 13-01-03)**

#### ***Please read Nehemiah 8:1-12***

The Water Gate led from the old City of David to the Gihon Spring located adjacent to the Kidron Valley. This was the spring to which Hezekiah had a tunnel dug (2 Chronicles 32:30). Jerusalem was one of the few great cities of antiquity that was not built near a great river, and the city depended on reservoirs and springs for its

water. The text in chapter 3 does not say that this gate was repaired, but only that the workers repaired the walls adjacent to it. The temple servants were descendants of the Gibeonites who were made drawers of water (Joshua 9:23). They would naturally want to live near the most important source of water for the city.

What a day that must have been when Ezra spoke from daybreak until noon about the Law in commemoration of the wall's completion! The people had gathered together as "one man" in perfect unity to hear him speak from the first five books of our Old Testament. Nothing is more pleasing to God than the unity of His body coming together to worship him. Ezra stood on a platform and the people also stood while he preached from the holy book--they responded with lifted hands, shouts of "amen," and with worship to God. They wept openly and did not hide their shame. These types of reactions to the preaching of the Word should not be foreign to our own services today.

Although the words convicted the people, piercing their hearts, they learned that the "joy of the Lord was their strength". They would celebrate with great rejoicing instead of sulking in worldly sorrow over their new awareness of the neglect they had shown towards the Law. We also need to be reminded not to wallow in self pity when God's Word convicts us, but to follow the pattern of repentance that shows Godly sorrow outlined in 2 Corinthians 7:9-11. Notice that in verse 8:10, they not only fed themselves in their celebration, but they also gave to those who had nothing prepared. Celebration is a time for sharing, not a time for introverted selfishness.

It is significant enough to mention at this point that Ezra was the designated spiritual and religious leader, not Nehemiah. Nehemiah was not a prophet or a priest; he was just a layman. He was motivated by his relationship with God, and he devoted himself to doing God's will amidst his common secular life. Nehemiah understood that the spiritual aspects and duties of a relationship with God are not limited to those in the ministry, but to everyone called a child of God.

#### **Day 14. (Tuesday 14-01-03)**

##### ***Please read Nehemiah 8:13-18***

The great assembly of the day before was gone and the celebration a day old, but the people's desire to keep looking into the Word was kindled again. They discovered that it was the time of a specific festival, the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-36), when they were to live in booths or rough tents and huts to symbolize the 40 years they spent in the wilderness after they were delivered with Moses from Egyptian captivity. The feast also served as a week of thanksgiving for the harvest God had granted them. For four decades in the wilderness, the Hebrew nation relied entirely on the provision of God Almighty. Their clothes and shoes did not wear out (Deuteronomy 29:5), and they--and their flocks--did not lack for food or water (Nehemiah 9:15,20-21). God provided everything. This festival was a pause in an otherwise busy world, for one week out of 52, to remember God's faithfulness in providing for His people and to give Him the honor He deserves. Even today, in our wanderings through life, God has been the unseen Provider who has been faithful to us even when we have forgotten Him.

As one of the three pilgrim festivals, along with Passover (*Pesach*) and Pentecost (*Shavuot*), the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) was the third appointed time for all Jewish males to come to Jerusalem with their tithes and offerings. At this time of year, and for the week of *Sukkot*, Jerusalem would have traditionally been overflowing with people. By Tishri 15, the normal population of about 600,000 people swelled to between 2 and 3 million in Jesus' day. Amid the throngs of people and the din of activity, the priests of the temple had their own endless jobs to do. Behind the scenes of temple life, they meticulously carried out instructions given to them in the Torah (The Law). Part of their duty was to sacrifice a total of 70 bulls during the festival of *Sukkot* (Num. 29:12-39). Jewish teachers and rabbis apply great importance to this instruction.

In the sacrificial system, bulls were offered on behalf of a nation or nations. On *Yom Kippur*, the high priest sacrificed a bull for his own sins as he represented the nation of Israel. During *Sukkot*, many rabbis assert, the 70 bulls represented the 70 nations that descended from Noah, the ancestors of all the Gentiles of the world. These bulls, according to Hebrew scholars, were sacrificed for the peace and well being of the Gentiles, so that they might one day acknowledge the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was Jewish doctrine for hundreds of years and, though many Jews remain unaware of it, their prayers have been answered: Gentiles who believe in the Messiah of Israel have been faithfully grafted in (Rom. 11:17-24) and have become adopted children of Abraham (Gal. 3:29).

What can you do in your schedule to take some time out to reflect on how God has provided for you? Consider what a great family he has joined you to and the joy it provides when we all live together in harmony.

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> Week. 15<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> of January. Nehemiah—Rebuilding the walls of Commitment.**

#### **Day 15. (Wednesday 15-01-03)**

**Reading: Nehemiah 9:1-3**

**Fasting (Today Is a day of fast)**

On the tenth day of the seventh month between the feast of trumpets (Neh 8:2) and the feast of tabernacles (v:14) is the day of atonement (Yom Kippur). This day had a special symbolism. Two goats were taken to bear the people's sins. One was killed as a sin offering; the other was sent off into the desert to bear away the sins of

the people. The two goats thus symbolized both forgiveness for sins by death and complete removal of the sins for which atonement was made (Lev 16). The ordinary Israelite remained at home, and the priests carried out the ritual. It was the only day of fasting required of Israel and was to be a special Sabbath of rest and personal reflection. It was a time of special sorrow, special sin offerings, and atonement.

On occasion, there was a fast that was kept two weeks later as a day of humbling before God. It appears that Nehemiah 9:1-3 records just such a fast. Fasting is much more than simply going without food (Isaiah 58:1-9). We can see from this passage the type of fasting in which God calls us to participate.

A day of fasting is first of all a **day to humble yourself**. In Exodus 10:3, God asked Pharaoh "how long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?" Pharaoh had stubbornly refused to acknowledge God's right to exert his authority over him. His stubborn refusal eventually led to God's ultimate judgment when not only Pharaoh but also the armies of Egypt were drowned in the Red Sea. We, like Pharaoh, struggle to submit ourselves to God's righteous authority in our lives. Fasting is to be a time when we choose to pursue a posture and heart of humility before God. It is a time to admit, not only to ourselves but also to God that we have been disobedient and that God is completely justified in his right to judge us for our sins.

A day of fasting is a **day to separate yourself** from what is of the world. With a spirit of repentance a decision must be made to stop sinning. It is amazing how sophisticated we can be at times in making excuses for our sinful actions and attitudes. Yet, God tells us clearly that it is only with repentance that we can receive times of refreshment (Acts 3:19). Sin never refreshes but only brings about a suffering of our souls (Psalm 51:7-9)

A day of fasting is a **day of communion with God**. In Nehemiah 9:3 it is recorded that they spent a quarter of the day (3 hours) reading from the Book of the Law and another quarter of the day praying (confessing sin and worshipping God). For a relationship to be strong and continually growing communication must go both ways. Here Israel listened to God speak to them through his Word and then spoke to God through prayer.

**Application:** It is apparent from Isaiah 58:1-9 that God expects us to maintain a spirit of fasting every day, not just on those days when we go without food.

1. How is your spirit of humility before God? Are there sins that you have held on to and made excuses for? Choose now to humble yourself before God, accepting his right to expect obedience, and confess your sin before him.
  2. It is important to have a plan in order to enable yourself to separate from what is of the world (i.e. sinful actions and attitudes). Sit down and prayerfully consider what your plan is going to be. Write down your plan or communicate it with those God has placed in your life to help you.
  3. Take some time to consider how your communion with God is going. Commit yourself to spending great and consistent time reading from God's Word and praying to the God who makes all the difference in our lives.
- **Consider taking a day to fast and take some extra time to study your Bible and pray to God.**

### **Day 16. (Thursday 16-01-03)**

In Neh 9:4-38, we have an account of the prayers that were offered up on this day of fasting and humbling before God. Their focus is immediately drawn toward adoration of who God is and then what God has done. It seems crazy to have to admit it but all too often our prayers are filled with what *we need*, what *we want*, and what *we would like changed*. We naturally tend to become self-focused instead of God-focused. When we take time to reflect on whom God is, in all his glory, our faith, gratitude, and heart of adoration is stimulated. We get back to being focused on God and what God desires for our life.

Not only is it to our benefit to offer prayers of adoration but the Bible tells us that it is fitting and proper to do so because God deserves this from us (1 Chron 16:29; Ps 29:2; Ps 96:8). The Hebrew writer identifies the proper attitude of worship to be one of reverence and awe (Heb 12:28). The word "idol" can be defined as any person or thing devotedly or excessively admired. Therefore, the sin of idolatry is attributing greater worth, affection, or devotion to something other than God. In our hearts, God becomes common and therefore of less value to us than the other things we pursue in our lives.

A sure sign of this happening is when we find ourselves struggling with devoting consistent and great time to prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and God's work of saving the world. It becomes difficult to desire to sacrifice financially to God. There is a general lack of excitement in our commitment to God and His Church. Sin becomes more alluring and exciting and we find it seemingly impossible to resist.

This is exactly what had happened to Israel as they fell headlong into the sin of idolatry. They lost their vision of the transcendent glory of God. Because of this they drifted away and were ultimately sold into captivity to foreign nations (Neh 1:5-9).

God's people had rebuilt the wall not just through hard work but through a recommitment to standing in awe of God. The prayer of adoration we see in Neh 9:4-6 is just one example for us to consider as we focus on standing in awe of God in all his glory.

They began their prayer by adoring God as the only living and true God (v:6). It is interesting that as God taught this truth to his people through Moses, He immediately followed it by the command to "Love the

LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut 6:4-5). They adored God as the creator of all things and the source of all life. God's creation, including the heavenly host worship and praise Him (Ish 6:2-4, Rev 4:8-11). They also recognized that no matter how much they, or the angels of heaven, praised God that they would never even come close to capturing the magnitude of God's glory (v:5b).

**Application:** The Jews spent a quarter of the day offering prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, and confession because they had repented of idolatry. They gained the conviction that they had treated God as something common and resolved to worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe.

1. Spend some time everyday reflecting on who God is and what he has done, especially in your own life. The Psalms are a great place to look for help. Spend some time every day praying prayers of adoration to God.
2. Take some time to evaluate your devotion to God as seen in your time of prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. Are you tempted to treat God as common and less than Holy?

### **Day 17 (Friday 17-01-03)**

#### **Gratefulness (consider start a "gratitude journal)**

God's people continued their prayer by listing some of the ways that He had shown them kindness and favor. God calls us to "devote ourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Col 4:2). In fact it is impossible to worship God acceptably without a heart of thanksgiving (Heb 12:28). Let's examine some of the things they mentioned and make application to our own lives.

**In vs.: 7-8** we see **God's call** to Abram. God decision to choose Abram was based solely on the goodwill of God. Abram did nothing to deserve this choosing. The childless man's name was changed to Abraham (father of a multitude) because God had a great vision for his future. He was given the promise of a land that at the time was possessed by six other nations. The parallels are obvious in our own lives. As disciples of Jesus, we too have been chosen by God (Eph 1:11, 1 Pet 1:2). God has a vision for our lives, to bless us and use us to bless the lives of others (2 Cor 2:14). God has also given us the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey; **heaven**.

**In vs.: 9-11** is recorded **God's deliverance** of Israel from bondage in Egypt. What a timely reminder to the remnant in Jerusalem as they were working and praying for the completion of their own deliverance out of Babylon. They were reminded that God delivered their forefathers out of compassion for their suffering. That He had responded to their cry for help as He miraculously intervened to bring about their release. God has intervened in our own lives in much the same way. Out of compassion for us He has delivered us from the bondage we were in to sin (Rom 8:7-8).

**In vs.:12** they are reminded of **God's presence** with them in the pillar of cloud and fire. His presence not only guided them but also provided protection for them from their enemies (Ex 13:21; 14:20). We have been given the same promise of God presence with us to guide and protect us (Mt 28:20).

As was mentioned during yesterday's study, we are often consumed by what *we need, what we want, and what we would like changed*. We become self-focused and self-reliant instead of God-focused and God-reliant. We can become overwhelmed by life's challenges and the obstacles we face. Spending time in prayers of thanksgiving remind us of all that God has done and that there are not any obstacles which are to great for God to overcome.

#### **Application:**

1. As you think about your prayers do you tend to be self-focused or God-focused? Take some extra time today and remember what God has done for his people through out time.
2. Especially consider how God has blessed your life. Remember how you have been chosen, delivered, guided and protected. Spend some extra time giving thanks to God in your time of prayer today.
3. It might be helpful for you to start a "**gratitude journal**". Spend a few minutes each day recording the ways that God has blessed your life and offer up a prayer of thanksgiving.

### **Day 18. (Saturday 18-01-03)**

The greater part of the prayer recorded in Neh 9 is filled with a focus, not on the needs of the congregation, but on the glory, power, and faithfulness of God. Our greatest need is to remain God-focused. Intuitively we realize that we are limited and therefore incapable of overcoming all the challenges we face. We need something "bigger than life" to strengthen and guide us. We need God.

In their prayer they remember **God's faithful provisions** for them. He supplied for their spiritual needs by giving them His Word and instituting a system of worship and communion with Him. He provided for their physical needs by giving them bread from heaven (manna) and water from out of a rock. He gave them a land of their own (Canaan's Land) with homes they had not built, fields they had not plowed and wells they had not dug (vs.: 20-21, 25).

He not only gave them a land to live in but also enabled them to be **victorious in conquest** and multiplied their numbers to fill the land. Throughout Nehemiah we are told how it was God that enabled his

people to accomplish what ordinarily would have been impossible. We are often tempted to allow the enormity of our task to overwhelm us and instead of turning to God for the help to accomplish the impossible we give up or become stalled out in our faith. God has blessed us with so much. It seems so easy to focus on what we don't have instead of on all that we do have. We can become like little children on Christmas morning that tears through their gifts without taking the time to be grateful for what they have already received that morning.

In Matthew 19:16-26, Jesus taught the rich man what it would take to enter into the Kingdom of God. When confronted with the challenge he went away sad because it was more than he thought he could bear. Jesus seized the opportunity to teach the disciples, who were with him, an important lesson. With man alone it is impossible to manufacture the spiritual fruit that God desires. However, with God all things are possible. As we strive to build up God's wall in our own Geographical area, (Sector, Zone, FG, Region), families, work places, schools, neighborhoods, and congregations remember God's faithful provisions and the promises of victory we have in Christ.

**Application:**

1. Take some time to write down some of the ways God has provided for you and your family. Be thankful in prayer.

What situations or challenges tempt you to be discouraged? How have you seen God bring you victories over some of the different challenges you have faced and overcome? Commit to praying prayers of thanksgiving for past victories. Then pray about the present day challenges you face with the conviction that all things are possible with God.

**Day 19. (Sunday 19-01-03)**

They remembered **God's continued mercy** in spite of their rebellion. We tend to have a grave misunderstanding of grace, mercy, and justice. When we feel in our heart that God is being unfair in his dealings, in any given situation, in essence we are saying he is being unjust. What we are demanding is that God responds with justice. Justice is the administration of deserved punishment or reward. If God were to grant us justice based on our own performance in life we would all be doomed for our failures with others, ourselves, and especially with God. Mercy means that we don't receive punishment, which we justly deserve, for acts that have been committed (Matt 18:23-28). Grace means that we receive blessing we haven't earned and we don't deserve (Eph 2:8-10). God continued to give grace and mercy to his people while lovingly disciplining them for their rebellion in the desert. He continued to send the prophets to teach and admonish them. Even when he disciplined them through neighboring peoples he did not put an end to them or abandon them.

As we studied the Bible to become Christians we became convinced and convicted of our sinfulness before God. The more deeply we understood this the more we began to appreciate God's mercy and his grace extended to use through Christ. Rather than embolden us to sin more it became a source of determination to stop sinning. The more we understand and embrace God's grace in our lives the more we have the power to say no to sin and to chose to live righteously (Titus 2:11-14). Each day we need to spend time thinking about and admitting our weakness before God and excepting his mercy and grace in order to experience true growth.

We must always guard our hearts from becoming like the Pharisees who lost connection with their own sinfulness. In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus tells the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The Pharisee was not involved in the more "obvious" sins that seemed to be prevalent in those less committed than himself (ie. the tax collector) and felt his righteous acts made him righteous before God. The tax collector, on the other hand, felt his sinfulness and begged God to act toward him with mercy. Jesus, clearly teaches that it was the heart represented by the tax collector who would receive mercy and not that of the self-righteous Pharisee.

**Application:**

1. Think about who you are in your sinful nature. Remember how God has worked in your life despite these deficiencies. Allow your gratitude for God's grace to motivate you to live righteously today and to say no to sin.
2. In what ways are you tempted to rely on your "righteous deeds" to make up for areas of sin in your life.

**Day 20 (Monday 20-01-03)**

Finally, after considering the greatness of God and his incredible faithfulness to his people, they end their prayer with a confession of sin and a solemn resolve to repent. The more thankful we are for God's mercies the more humbled we will be for our own sins and the more determined to produce fruits of repentance in our lives.

Although they ask God not to take lightly the sufferings they have endured, they confessed that it was because of their own sins that they found themselves in their present circumstances. God had been fully justified to punish them and had acted faithfully towards them through all their sufferings (v: 33). They acknowledged that God had warned them to return to his word and that they had taken his goodness to them for granted (vs: 34-35). It has been said, "fatness and fullness often breeds pride and self-indulgence". This is particularly pertinent to those of us who live in the United States and have reaped an incredibly disproportionate amount of God's blessings. We

must be constantly on guard that we do not allow the relative wealth that we live in to cause our hearts to become prideful and our spirit to become self-indulgent.

The result of their sin was that they found themselves slaves in their own land. They were impoverished in spite of the fact that the land produced an abundant harvest. This was due to the fact that they had to give the fruit of their labor to their masters (Assyrian Kings) by way of taxes. This is what happens to us when we embrace sin and refuse to repent. The blessings of God's Kingdom are all around us but we can't seem to experience them in our own lives. We can be tempted to conclude that God's blessing just aren't available or that He has in fact lied and that we would be better off looking outside God's Kingdom for satisfaction. Like the Jews of Nehemiah's day we simply need to confess and repent of our sins. God is eager to bring his blessing into our lives as we return to him (Neh 1:9).

The people eagerly turned back to God and recommitted themselves to follow the Law of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations, and decrees of the Lord (Neh 10:29). They were so intent on repenting and recommitting themselves to God that they wrote out a binding agreement. Nehemiah was the first to sign it, followed by the leading priests and Levites, and the family leaders. It is encouraging to see that the people willingly followed the example of their leaders as they recommitted themselves to God. Nehemiah 10:28 describes true biblical repentance when it says they "separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God." (see also, 2 Cor 7:8-11)

#### **Application:**

1. Repentance should be an ongoing process in the life of any disciple of Jesus. Ask God to show you in what areas of life He is calling you to a higher standard than you are presently living.
2. Sit down with those who know you best and ask them if they perceive that you have allowed material comforts to dull your commitment to carefully obey God, or to become self-indulgent.
3. Consider writing out an agreement of commitment, between you and God, for those areas of your life that you are striving to more perfectly conform to God's will (ex. Prayer, Bible study, particular areas of temptation, outreach, personal commitment, etc.).

#### **Day 21 (Tuesday 21-01-03)**

God has called his people to be holy (Lev 11:45). To be holy means to be separate and dedicated to God for his exclusive use. In the book of Leviticus God gave the rules and regulations by which Israel would be able to live in state of holiness. These rules and regulations stipulate how they were to separate themselves from the things, and actions, that would make them unclean. In other words they were not to live or worship like those in the surrounding nations. If they did, they would no longer be holy but would become common (ie. like the people around them). As the priests, Aaron and his sons were told by God "you must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD has given them through Moses." Their responsibility as priests was to safeguard the holiness of God's people.

Nehemiah and the people recommitted themselves to a life of holiness. They were making the commitment to stop living as the common people of the world live and to start living like God's people. Although this section addresses two particular areas of recommitment, remember they had already committed to carefully obey all of God's Law as given through Moses (Neh 10:29).

They recommitted themselves to holiness, **relationally** (v:30). God had warned his people not to make treaties with foreign nations or to take husbands or wives from foreign people because they would lead them into idolatry (Ex 34:15-16). The history of Israel is filled with the sad accounts of God's people allying themselves with foreign peoples, either through treaty or marriage and the idolatry that came from these alliances. The Apostle Paul writes the Corinthian church and warns them not to be yoked together with unbelievers but rather to purify themselves and perfect holiness out of reverence for God (2 Cor 6:14-7:1). It is sometimes a fine line that we must tread as we follow the example of Jesus who lived among the people of the world but never became like the people of the world.

They recommitted themselves to holiness, **materially** (vs: 31-39). It is important to remember that the Jews were very poor and that many of them previously had had to sell their sons and daughters into servitude in order to be able to pay their taxes and buy food to eat (Neh 5:3,4). Yet, they were committed to never allowing God's house to fall into disarray or disrepair again. They recommitted to providing the offerings, tithes, temple tax, and first born of their livestock as well as the first fruit of their harvest. In other words they committed to seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness no matter what the cost was to themselves (Matt 6:33).

#### **Application:**

1. How has Satan worked to tempt you to sacrifice your personal holiness either relationally or materially?
2. Pray to support God's plan to rebuild the walls of his kingdom with all of your heart. How can you put this prayer into practice wholeheartedly today?

4<sup>th</sup> Week. 22<sup>nd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> of January. Nehemiah--Rebuilding the Walls of Conviction.

**Day 22 (Wednesday 22-01-03)**

**Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 11  
The Heart of God's People**

For a variety of reasons, no one wanted to settle in Jerusalem itself. The people had spread out into the surrounding countryside to occupy their own historic villages and small farms. Lots were cast so that one out of every ten families would move into Jerusalem. As you would expect, most of the family heads are listed.

We read that the people commended all of the men who *volunteered* to live in Jerusalem. We can see over and over again that it is easier at times to make specific sacrifices to serve God, as long as those sacrifices fall conveniently into our lifestyle. But when it comes to giving our entire lives to do what we must to glorify God (like these men volunteering to move their families to a place where no one wanted to go), our hearts get challenged.

Today we are going to tie in the teachings of Jesus in looking at the hearts of men, so that we can make sure that our hearts are right before God. The religious leaders in the Old Testament had a tendency to 'honor God with their mouths, but not their hearts'. As his people today, we can tend to lose the joy and honor of serving God, and when this happens we will do the religious duties, but lose the heart and sincerity that God desires.

Nehemiah was involved in a great project to build the wall and restore the prominence of God back into the lives of his people. Today, as Christians we have a similar task ahead of us in restoring the prominence of God into the hearts and lives of all men. This begins with us looking at ourselves first.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus teaching a parable in which he uses a Priest and a Levite to help us understand what is of utmost importance to God from his people.

**Luke 10:25-37**

Maybe the Priest was too busy to take the time to help  
Maybe the Priest didn't want to get involved  
Maybe he didn't know how to help  
Maybe he was just lazy  
Undoubtedly he was selfish

**Conclusion:** The question is not really 'Who is your neighbor', but rather 'To whom are you a neighbor?' The people that you serve, those are your neighbors.

Helping the teachers at your children's school  
Helping your disciples your sector. Baby sitting, having children over at your house, having singles over.  
Helping your neighbors with whatever they need  
Helping your community

What are ways that you see your heart being that of the Levite or the Priest?  
What keeps you from having the heart of a good neighbor?

**Challenge:** Today make it a point to keep your eyes open to opportunities to be a good neighbor to someone. Act on those opportunities. "Go and do likewise".

**Day 23 (Thursday 23-01-03)**

**Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 12:1-26  
The People's Representative**

The first half of this chapter lists many of the priests and Levites who had served during the approximately 90 years since Zerubbabel had returned from exile.

Throughout the book of Nehemiah we have seen the priests, Levites, and leaders of the people highlighted in helping to build the wall. It may help for us understand who these people were, and their roles.

**Priests** -- The Priests were direct descendents of Aaron and served as the people's representative to God (Exodus 2:1-10)

**Levites** -- Forbidden to serve as priests, a privilege reserved, on penalty of death, for Aaron's sons (Numbers 3:10) the Levites were dedicated to an auxiliary ministry for the priests, especially in regard to the manual labor of caring for the tabernacle. The Levites had a specific role in building the tabernacle of God. The Levites came to prominence after Aaron led the people into apostasy with the golden calf (Ex. 32:25). The sons of Levi avenged the Lord's honor by punishing many of the rebels.



When Jesus came on the scene we see how he is for us the new High Priest, and we take on the role of the priesthood as his body.

**Jesus** -- In the book of Hebrews we see the author persistently pressing the point that Jesus has been appointed by God (Heb. 5:5-10) to be the new, the true high priest that can finally deal with human sin. His priesthood surpasses that of Aaron (Heb. 7:11), contains the perfection missing in the older sacrificial system (Heb. 7:18) and is based on God's own oath (Hebrews 7:20-22)

**The Commission of the Church** -- As Christ's body, the church is anointed to a priesthood in the world, providing a service that declares the will of God to humankind and bears human needs before God's throne in prayer (1 Peter 2:5-9)

How does knowing that you are a 'Royal Priest', serving the creator of the universe, affect the way that you are living your life everyday?

How has this relationship with God changed your view of yourself, or your value as a person?

In what ways are you going to serve the church in fulfilling your responsibility as a member of the royal Priesthood (1 Peter 2:5-9)?

What actions are you going to take today to intercede for the people in your geographical area, family, neighborhood, social circles, through prayer? In what way are you going to 'declare' the praises of God to your family and friends?

Let's pray to feel in our hearts the joy and honor of being God's representatives on earth.

### **Day 24. (Friday 24-01-03)**

#### **Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 12:27- 43 Joy of Celebration**

This half of chapter 12 deals mostly with the dedication service of the new wall in Jerusalem. In Nehemiah 4:3, Tobiah had criticized the wall saying that it would topple over if even a fox climbed up on it. It must have been embarrassing for him when the huge procession of choirs and leaders paraded around the city *on top of the new wall!*

Celebration has always been part of the history of God's people when a great victory has been accomplished. It makes us realize that celebration must be a part of our God's character and heart. In fact King David, the 'man after God's own heart' celebrated with singing and dancing as the ark was brought back in to the city of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:1-5). Celebration and worship seem to go hand in hand as we glorify God. In our lives to day, it seems like it is very difficult to understand a celebration mindset in our relationship with God. We celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and victories of our favorite sports teams. In reality we have a habit of glorifying men. Yet in Luke 4:5-8 we read where Jesus emphasizes that we are to worship God and serve him only.

We see how Jesus spent a lifetime worshipping God, and yet he also participated in a celebration as he entered the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey as the Prince of Peace and King of Kings (Matt. 21). If we take a peek through the scriptures into the future, we can see the celebration of the heavenly hosts as Jesus enters the city to bring salvation to man, conquering death.

The celebration that we can feel as disciples can be overwhelming, knowing that Jesus has won the victory over death, and we as his people are more than conquerors in life and death through Jesus. (Romans 8:37)

As we come together to meet at our Sunday services, let us come together with a spirit of celebration, worshipping God as his people! Are we coming to our meetings early, excited to be there? Or do we run in late, wishing that things would start a little later to better suite our weekend sleep schedule? What is our spirit like? Are we there to worship God, or to fulfill a duty of attendance?

The joy and honor that we should have in our hearts every day should be inspiring - but also should be evident on Sundays when we meet together as a church.

The people of Nehemiah worshipped with singing and joy.

Joy and Gratitude are two of the greatest challenges that we face in the United States today. We are tempted to see through the eyes of what we don't have, and complain about all of the things that we do. What are specific things that you can do today to see things with a more joyful outlook and more grateful heart?

At times we feel we don't have enough time, money, or patience. Meanwhile, we spend endless amounts of time trying to entertain ourselves and sedate our burdens. Let us pray to have a grateful heart for the abundant life that we have in Christ, and the hope that we have through our relationship with God.

Let us pray to not see things as the world does, but to have eyes that are spiritual, seeing things with an eternal perspective.

## **Day 25. (Saturday 25-01-03)**

### **Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 12:44-47 Faithful with what we've been given**

We see in this chapter that certain men were given certain responsibilities to make sure that other people's needs were met. Men were put in charge of the contribution and tithes that the people would give to the priests and Levites. We see here a two-fold commitment: the commitment of the people to give and meet the need; and the commitment of the ones who had been given to, the responsibility of bringing in the portions required by the law to fulfill their responsibility.

As Christians, we are all given the responsibility to be faithful with the various things that God has given us. Let us think for a moment of what we have. First of all we have the fruits of the Spirit given to us through the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Are we giving to others these fruits through our life? Love? Joy? Peace? Patience? Etc. The only hope that the world has to grow in these qualities is for us to give these continually through our life. Jesus said in Matthew 5 that we are the light of the world.

What about the physical things that God has blessed us with? Time -- are we giving others our time? Finances -- are we using our finances for God, or are we making sure we are taken care of and then giving to God as sort of an insurance payment so nothing bad happens to us? Our family -- are we giving of our family to help others. For example; are we inviting our kid's friends, school friends..... over to spend time and be part of our relationships as a family?

As we think about our life in the church -- are we giving of ourselves and being faithful with our responsibilities as a family? Are we eager to help out in KKC, Ushering.....? Are we eager to help out if there is a need in severing communion? Do we give rides to church? Are we using our talents to encourage the church and build it up?

One of the greatest gifts that we can give to each other is a gift that the world cannot give outside of Christ; that is the gift of forgiveness. One of the greatest gifts that we can all give to each other, that would be light to the world, is the gift that we received from the blood that Christ shed on the cross. May we forgive each other, as God has forgiven us.

Is there anybody that you feel that you have not forgiven? In the spirit of Matthew 18, meet with that person this week and truly from the heart forgive whatever has been done against you.

Now let us go and give God's love to each other and to the world! John 13:35-35.

## **Day 26. (Sunday 26-01-03)**

### **Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 13:1-14 Are we still Sacrificing?**

This is certainly an inspiring chapter. Nehemiah had served as governor of Judah for 12 years (444 to 432 BC). Beyond his rebuilding of the wall and the organizing of Jerusalem, little is known of this period of his life. I suspect he was an excellent governor.

In 432 BC he returned to Persia to serve once again in King Artaxerxes' court. It appears he was there for maybe two or three years. Whatever the case, he returned to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 13) to sort out some serious problems in Jerusalem. You will enjoy this chapter.

The people in Jerusalem had rebuilt the walls and went on to live their lives. Over the years their convictions had softened and God's house was being neglected again. Places that were once holy and righteous were now being used for selfish purposes - and this being done by the priests.

If we are not careful, we too can become complacent with our lives. The newness of having a relationship with God and the joy that we had knowing that our sins were forgiven, and making sure that our hearts and lives were holy, can be replaced by the comforts and desires of the world. The joy that came from sacrificing to build the wall was replaced by the unhappiness of feeling that their lives were not being taken care of. Today as we look at our own heart, we must ask ourselves if we are taking care of God's temple (our heart), and God's family (the church) with the same desire for holiness that we had when we first became a Christians.

Are we sacrificing with the same joy? Are we sacrificing more or less of our time, money, and heart? Are we seeking to build God's kingdom first, or are we first taking care of our life, waiting for the church to tell us what they need from us?

Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his Kingdom". Are we seeking ways to serve the Kingdom? Or are we depending on the Kingdom to seek us out, and take care of our needs? Are we waiting or seeking?

In Matthew 6:21, Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". What are some ways that we are putting our treasure in our relationship with God and his family?

Let us all make decisions to get back to a heart of sacrifice that will get our own heart in the place that it needs to be to put the Kingdom first in our lives.

### **Day 27. (Monday 27-01-03)**

#### **Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 13:15-30 Remember Me**

As we read through chapter 13, we see Nehemiah's repeated desire to be remembered by God. This echoes in our minds and hearts as we remember the same desire that the penitent thief expressed to Jesus in Luke 23:42 while both were hanging on their crosses left to die. When the entire destiny of our future rests on the will of another, it puts us in a place of humility that will pierce our pride and crush our independence. To feel totally dependant on God is where we all need to strive to be, and yet we fight with all of our self-sufficient might to avoid.

Nehemiah had just finished a great work and had impacted the lives of the Israelites forever. He had poured out his life to be used by God and had worked side by side with God to accomplish one of the greatest tasks to date. Yet, his greatest longing, was not to be recognized by men, but to have God remember him and his life. When we remove ourselves from the battle we get insecure. So, we must stay in the battle.

As I think about my life, it is the times that I am the most dependent on God that I feel the sense of His Spirit involved in every aspect of my life. It is a place spiritually that we have the most security, and yet from a worldly point of view, it is a time that produces the most insecurity. We don't like to be busy. But when we are not working hard is when we get insecure in our relationship with God.

Let's look at some of the other times in the Bible that people have asked either God or others to remember them.

- Genesis -- Joseph asking the cupbearer
- Judges 16:28 -- Samson
- 1 Samuel -- 1:11 -- Hannah
- Nehemiah 5:19, 13:14, 22, 31 -- Nehemiah
- Psalms 25:7 -- David
- Jeremiah 15:15 -- Jeremiah

We all want to be remembered. When people remember us it makes us feel important. When they don't remember who we are, we feel devalued and unimportant. When people remember our birthdays or special days, we feel special. We all desire to be important enough for people to remember who we are. We want to be remembered for being a great friend, a good mother or father, a responsible son or daughter, a caring neighbor, as well as just making a difference with the life that God has given to each of us. As we reflect on this, we must ask the questions "Have I been a great friend to anyone? Have I been a spiritual father or mother? Have I been a good son or daughter? Have I been a godly neighbor? Have I used my life to make a difference in eternity for others?"

How good are we at remembering others? Do we remember the people that have impacted our lives, and do we thank them. Do we see the value in others, or are we focused on whether others see the value in us? We all know how true Jesus' words are: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Why then, are we so focused on what we get and not what we give? We are more joyful while giving of ourselves and impacting others lives, if only for a moment.

As we learn from Jesus, we see how he was always showing others how much he cared about them, yet rarely do we see the people in his life remember the challenges that Jesus was facing in his own life. Yet it's through the words of the scriptures that we try as hard as we can to remember what Jesus did. We take the Lord's Supper every week at our services to remember him, and pledge our commitment to him. The scriptures that we base our lives on are written through the Holy Spirit by those who remembered what Jesus did while on earth and wrote it down to give us faith.

The need for total dependence on someone else to remember us is a powerless position to be in - and precisely where God wants us to be in our relationship with him.

### **Day 28. (Tuesday 28-01-03)**

#### **The Battle is God's**

Think back to your baptism. Why did you become a Christian? What commitment did you make to God? When you said, "Jesus is Lord," was it unconditional?

During the last 23 years the Kingdom of God has grown tremendously. The completion of the 6 year plan (to see a church planted in every nation of the world with a city of 100,000 or more in population) was absolutely miraculous. Christians from all over the world sacrificed their material possessions, sold property and cherished

items and went where they were called to go. Many gave up great jobs, left their universities and withstood great persecution while preaching the good news of Jesus. God was pleased, but Satan was angry. We were not ready for the retaliation by the demonic forces of evil. He has attacked us with distraction, despair, disillusionment, materialism, comfortability and the lure of this world. Some of us have become faithless and hopeless. We have become like Gideon when he asked the Angel of God, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us....." (Judges 6:13). Nehemiah was in a similar situation. He had done well gaining the trust of his King. He had a great job and he had a comfortable life. God had not abandoned His people, he was waiting for them to repent and return to Him.

When Nehemiah saw the destruction of the walls of Jerusalem he was distraught. He wept, mourned and fasted. He made a decision to have a personal impact--to make a difference. He would have to come out of his comfort zone, he would need to sacrifice, he would have to have faith. He prayed and prayed and prayed. He begged God for success, and then he went to work.

Two months ago during the Pac Rim BT Leaders Conference in Manila, the Kim's d-group met to discuss a plan to rebuild the "wall" of the Pac Rim churches. God was moving in a powerful way as Frank made a proposal of a plan which he termed the "Nehemiah Project." (See Nehemiah 6:3). The plan would call for all of the disciples in the Pac Rim to study the book of Nehemiah and to begin rebuilding the "spiritual walls" which were broken down. Walls of faith, hope, discipleship, evangelism, love for God, true family, and leadership needed to be rebuilt. Also of great urgency, was the need to rebuild our zeal to see people become Christians. We began in the month of August with calling everyone to be dedicated to prayer. The Southwest family of churches joined together and took our place in a 24 hour prayer chain that the Pac Rim has been doing since 1994. As we drew closer to God the "scales" began to fall off our eyes and we saw the devastation Satan had wrought in our lives. Stories of disciples praying all night, waking early and praying for hours became common--God was pleased. During September, we all began to study the book of Nehemiah. We all heard the same sermons and Bible Talks and we studied the same quiet times--it has been awesome! God is pleased! We also began to sow the seed. Thousands have been shared with and God blessed our invitation services last week. Now it's time to see God bring in the harvest. We need to continue to have faith and hope that God will give success to His church but we also need to be on our guard against distractions. Let's remember the Great Commission of Matthew 28 to "go and make disciples." Let's remember the words of Hebrews 12:1 to "throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles..."

#### **Conclusion:**

When Nehemiah's enemies heard of his success in rebuilding the wall they were ticked. They tried to get him to stop building by distracting him. Satan will do the same to you. In what ways will he try to distract you?

As we conclude the month of September with our study of Nehemiah let's remember the lessons:

- 1) Honest Evaluation of where you have been spiritually.
- 2) Sincere prayer asking God for forgiveness, help and success.
- 3) Commitment and sacrifice for God's plan.
- 4) Joyful work day by day.
- 5) Don't give into the distractions and temptations that Satan will throw at you.

#### **Challenge:**

Read Ephesians 6:10-18.

Satan wants to stop you. He will do anything that it will take. You have been promised the victory as you stay close to God. Put on the full armor of God. Remember the wall of Jerusalem was built in 52 days. It was built brick by brick. It took everyone being involved. God granted Nehemiah and His people great success. He will grant you success.

The Battle is His!