

# Nehemiah

# INTRODUCTION

God had promised Israel that if they obeyed Him, He would bless them as a nation. If they did not, then He would judge them and cause them to be taken into captivity (Deut. 28). That promise was repeated to Solomon with a specific application to his own life. If he, as king of Israel, obeyed the Lord he would experience God's continual blessing. If Solomon did not obey Him, God would take away his power and position as king of Israel (1 Kings 9:1-9).

As happened so frequently among many of Israel's leaders, a good beginning had an unfortunate ending. Solomon sinned against God, particularly by marrying many foreign wives and worshiping their false gods (1 Kings 11:1-5). So the kingdom was split in 931 B.C. The 10 Northern tribes were initially ruled by Jeroboam, and the Southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) were ruled at first by Rehoboam.

Both kingdoms, however, continued to be characterized by idolatry and immorality. And as God had forewarned, His hand of judgment fell on all Israel because of their sin. The Northern Kingdom fell first and the people were taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The Babylonians brought about the fall of the Southern Kingdom in 586 B.C.

The Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were absorbed into Assyria and eventually into other cultures. However, the people of the Southern Kingdom remained intact in Babylon, and after the power of Babylon was broken by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C., many Jews returned to their homeland.

In 538 B.C. the first group returned to Judah under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-2:2). Over a period of years and tremendous opposition from the Samaritans, the returnees eventually succeeded in rebuilding the temple in 515 B.C.

A number of years later—in 458 B.C.—a second group of Jews returned, led by Ezra (Ezra 7:1-10). Arriving on the scene, they found the Jews in Israel in a state of spiritual and moral degradation. They had intermarried with the unbelieving peoples of the surrounding nations and were participating in their pagan practices. However, through Ezra's faithful teaching ministry, the majority of these people turned from their sins and once again followed God's will for their lives.

In 444 B.C., 14 years after Ezra's return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah also returned and God used him to guide Judah in rebuilding the city's walls and in reordering the people's social and economic lives. What he accomplished in a brief period of time was an incredible feat. How he accomplished this goal is one of the major emphases in the book that bears his name.

(Bible Knowledge Commentary's Introduction to Nehemiah, Gene A. Getz)

## Nehemiah 1:1-11

Nehemiah's station at the court of Persia was *in the citadel of Susa*, or royal city, of the king of Persia, where the court was ordinarily kept (v. 1), and (v. 11) he was *the cupbearer to the king*. By this place at court he would be the better qualified for the service of his country in that post for which God had intended him, as Moses was the fitter to govern for being bred up in Pharaoh's court, and David in Saul's. He would also have the fairer opportunity of serving his country by his interest in the king and those around him. God has his remnant in all places; we read of Obadiah in the house of Ahab, saints in Caesar's household, and a devout Nehemiah in the citadel of Susa. God can make the courts of princes sometimes nurseries and sometimes sanctuaries for the friends and patrons of the church's cause.

It happened that a friend and relation of his came to the court, with some other company, by whom he had an opportunity of informing himself fully how it went with the children of the captivity and what posture Jerusalem, the beloved city, was in. Nehemiah lived at ease, in honor and fulness, himself, but could not forget that he was an Israelite, nor shake off the thoughts of his brothers in distress, but in spirit (like Moses, Acts 7:23) he *visited them and looked on their burdens*. Though he was a great man yet he did not think it below him to take cognizance of his brothers who were low and despised, nor was he ashamed to admit his relation to them and concern for them. Though he did not go to settle at Jerusalem himself he did not therefore judge nor despise those who had returned.

The melancholy account which is here given him of the present state of the Jews and Jerusalem, v. 3. Hanani spoke of the desolations of Jerusalem. It is probable that his errand to court at this time was to solicit some favor, some relief or other, that they stood in need of. Now the account he gives is,

1. That the holy descendants were miserably trampled on and abused, *in great trouble and disgrace*, insulted on all occasions by their neighbors, and *endured much ridicule from the proud*.

2. That the holy city was exposed and in ruins. *The wall of Jerusalem was still broken down, and the gates were, as the Babylonians left them, in ruins*. This made the condition of the inhabitants both very despicable under the abiding marks of poverty and slavery, and very dangerous, for their enemies might when they pleased make an easy prey of them. The temple was built, the government settled, and a work of reformation brought to some completion, but here was one good work yet undone; this was still lacking.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

**How did Nehemiah react after hearing the news of the present state of the Jews and Jerusalem?**

**Show how God accomplishes His work by putting Joseph in Egypt, Ezra in Babylon, Nehemiah in Susa, Esther in Susa, Daniel in Babylon, etc.**

## Nehemiah 2:1-20

Nehemiah had prayed for the relief of his countrymen. Nearly four months passed, from Kislev to Nisan (from November to March), before Nehemiah made his application to the king for leave to go to Jerusalem, either because the winter was not a proper time for such a journey, or because it was so long before his month of waiting came, and there was no coming into the king's presence uncalled, Esther 4:11. Now that he attended the king's table he hoped to have his ear.

He took up the wine and gave it to the king when he called for it, expecting that then he would look him in the face. He had not used to be sad in the king's presence, but conformed to the rules of the court (as courtiers must do), which would admit no sorrows, Esther 4:2. The miseries of Jerusalem gave him cause to be sad, and his showing his grief would give occasion to the king to enquire into the cause.

The account which Nehemiah gave the king of the cause of his sadness, which he gave with meekness and fear. He modestly asked, *"Why should my face not look sad as it is when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins?"* He assigns the ruins of Jerusalem as the true cause of his grief.

The king had an affection for him, and was not pleased to see him melancholy. It is also probable that he had kindness for the Jews' religion; he had discovered it before in the commission he gave to Ezra, who was a priest, and now again in the power he put Nehemiah into, who was a statesman. Wanting therefore only to know how he might be serviceable to Jerusalem, he asks his anxious friend; *"what is it you want? Something you would have; what is it?"* Nehemiah immediately *prayed to the God of heaven* that he would give him wisdom to ask properly and incline the king's heart to grant him his request. It was a secret sudden utterance: he lifted up his heart to that God who understands the language of his heart: *Lord, give me a mouth and wisdom; Lord, grant me favor in the presence of this man*.

He asked for a commission to go as governor to Judah, to build the wall of Jerusalem. He also asked for a convoy (v. 7), and an order to the governors, not only to permit and allow him to pass through their respective provinces, but to supply him with what he had occasion for, with another order to the keeper of the forest of Lebanon to give him timber for the work that he intended.

He intimated that he was unwilling to lose him. He would spare him awhile, and let him have what clauses he pleased inserted in his commission, v. 8. Here was an immediate answer to his prayer.

The king appointed *army officers* and *cavalry* to go *with him* (v. 9), both for his guard and to show that he was a man whom *the king did delight to honor*, that all the king's servants might respect him accordingly.

He was at *Jerusalem three days* (v. 11), and it does not appear that any of the great men of the city waited on him to congratulate him on his arrival, but he remained unknown.

He arose in the night, and viewed the ruins of the walls, probably by moonlight (v. 13), that he might see what was to be done and in what method they must go about it, whether the old foundation would serve, and what there was of the old materials that would be of use. Those who would build up the church's walls must first take notice of the ruins of those walls. Those who would know how to amend must enquire what is amiss, what needs reformation, and what may serve as it is.

He did not tell them, at first, what he came about (v. 16), because he would not seem to do it for ostentation, and because, if he found it impracticable, he might retreat the more honorably. But when he had viewed and considered the thing, and probably felt the pulse of the rulers and people, he told them *what God had put in his heart* (v. 12), even to *rebuild the wall of Jerusalem*, v. 17. "*Come, let us rebuild the wall.*" He did not undertake to do the work without them (it could not be the work of one man), nor did he charge or command imperiously, though he had the king's commission; but in a friendly brotherly way he exhorted and excited them to join with him in this work. To encourage them to it, he speaks of the plan, *First*, As that which owed its origin to the special grace of God. He does not take the praise of it to himself, as a good thought of his own, but acknowledges that God *put it in his heart*. *Secondly*, As that which owed its progress thus far to the special providence of God. He produced the king's commission, told them how readily it was granted and how eager the king was to favor his plan, in which he saw the hand of his God *gracious upon him*. They presently came to a resolution, one and all, to concur with him: *Let us start rebuilding. So they began this good work*. Many a good work would find hands enough to be laid to it if there were but one good head to lead in it.

Sanballat and Tobiah, two of the Samaritans, but by birth the former a Moabite, the latter an Ammonite, when they saw one come armed with a commission from the king to do service to Israel, *were very much disturbed* that all their little paltry methods to weaken Israel were thus baffled and frustrated by a fair, and noble, and generous project to strengthen them. When they saw a man come in that manner, who came to *promote the welfare of the Israelites*, it vexed them to the heart. When he began to act they set themselves to hinder him, but in vain, v. 19, 20. With what good reason the Jews slighted these discouragements. They bore up themselves with this that they were the *servants of the God of heaven*, the only true and living God, that they were acting for him in what they did, and that therefore he would bear them out and prosper them, though the nations raged, Ps. 2:1.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

### **What request did Nehemiah make to the king?**

**Is the key to Nehemiah's success stated in Neh. 2:8: "and the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me"?**

**Show from the following verses how God calls His people to be builders: Neh. 2:4, 5, 18; Ezra 4:6, 21; Ezra 6:15.**

**What was Nehemiah's response to Sanballid and Tobiah who tried to stop the rebuilding of the wall?**

Neh. 2:19-20

### **Nehemiah 3:1-32**

Saying and doing are often two things: many are ready to say. "Let us start rebuilding," who sit still and do nothing, like that fair-spoken son who said, "I go, Sir," but did not go. The workers here were none of those. As soon as they had resolved to build the wall around Jerusalem they lost no time, but set about it. This chapter gives an account of two things:

I. The names of the builders which are recorded here to their honor, for in this they revealed a great zeal for God and their country.

II. The order of the building: they took it before them, and ended where they began. They repaired.

1. From the Sheep Gate to the Fish Gate, ver. 1, 2.
2. From there to the Old Gate. ver. 3-5.
3. From there to the Valley Gate, ver. 6-12.
4. From there to the Dung Gate. ver. 13, 14.
5. From there to the Fountain Gate. ver. 15.

6. From there to the Water Gate. verses 16-26.

7. From there by the Horse Gate to the Sheep Gate again, where they began (verses 27-32), and so they brought their work quite round the city.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

**Why would it be natural for the priests to undertake the responsibility of repairing the Sheep Gate?**

**How was God working in the builders to complete the wall?**

Neh. 4:6, 9, 20

**Do we need what the builders had in our everyday life? What are we to do if we lack it?**

Ecc. 9:10 1 Cor. 10:31 1 Cor. 15:58

### **Nehemiah 4:1-23**

Here is,

I. The spiteful scornful reflection which Sanballat and Tobiah cast on the Jews for their attempt to build the wall around Jerusalem. The information was brought to Samaria, that nest of enemies to the Jews and here we are told how they received the news.

1. In heart. They were very angry at the undertaking, and were *greatly incensed*, v. 1. It vexed them that Nehemiah came to seek the welfare of the Israelites (ch. 2:10); but, when they heard of this great undertaking for their good, they were out of all patience.

2. In word. They despised it, and made it the subject of their ridicule. "*These feeble Jews*" (v. 2), "what will they do for materials? *Will they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubbish?* And what do they mean by being so hasty? Do they think to make the walling of a city but one day's work, and to keep the feast of dedication with sacrifice the next day? Poor silly people! See how ridiculous they made themselves!" "*If even a fox climb up on it*, not with his subtlety, but with his weight, he *would breakdown their wall of stones.*"

II. Nehemiah's humble and devout address to God when he heard of these reflections. He did not answer these fools according to their folly; he did not reproach them with their weakness, but looked up to God in prayer.

1. He begs God to take notice of the indignities that were done them (v. 4), and in this we are to imitate him: *Hear us, O our God, for we are despised.*

2. He begs God to avenge their cause and turn the reproach on the enemies themselves (v. 4, 5); and this was spoken rather by a spirit of prophecy than by a spirit of prayer, and is not to be imitated by us who are taught of Christ to *pray for those who persecute us*. Christ himself prayed for those who reproached him: *Father, forgive them.*

They made such good speed that in a little time they had run up the wall to half its height, for *the people worked with all their heart*; their hearts were in it, and they would have it forwarded.

The conspirators were not only Sanballat and Tobiah, but other neighboring people whom they had drawn into the plot. *They were very angry. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel.* Nothing would serve but they *would fight against Jerusalem*, v. 8. Why, what quarrel had they with the Jews? They hated the Jews' piety, and were therefore vexed at their prosperity and sought their ruin. The hindering of good work is that which bad men aim at and promise themselves; but good work is God's work, and it shall prosper.

At the very time when the adversaries said, Let us *put an end to the work*, Judah said, "Let us even let it fall, for we are not able to go forward with it." v. 10. They represent the laborers as tired, and the remaining difficulties, even of that first part of their work, the removing of the rubbish, as insuperable, and therefore they think it advisable to desist for the present. Active leading men have many times as much ado to grapple with the fears of their friends as with the terrors of their enemies.

Information that was brought to Nehemiah of the enemies' intentions, v. 12. There were *Jews who lived near them*, in the country, who, though they had not zeal enough to bring them to Jerusalem to help their brothers in building the wall, yet, having by their situation opportunity to discover the enemies' movements, had so much honesty and affection for the cause as to give information concerning them; indeed, that their information might be the more credited, they came themselves to give it, and they said it ten times, repeating it as men in earnest, and under concern, and the report was confirmed by many witnesses. "*Whatever place you turn to, they are against us*, so that you have need to be on your guard on all sides."

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

**What verse in chapter 4 shows the proper relation between faith and works?**

**What tactics were used by Sanballat and his associates to stop the work on the wall?**

## What were the pious and prudent methods Nehemiah used to baffle the plan set against them and to secure his work and workmen?

Matt. 26:41

### Nehemiah 5:1-19

As grain was dear, so the taxes were high; the king's tribute must be paid, v. 4. This mark of their captivity still remained on them. Now, it seems, they did not have the means on their own to buy grain and pay taxes, but were required to borrow. Their families came poor out of Babylon; they had been at great expense in building them houses, and had not yet regained their strength, when these new burdens came upon them.

The persons they dealt with were hard. Money must be had, but it must be borrowed; and those who lent them money, taking advantage of their necessity, were very hard on them.

1. They exacted interest from them at twelve per cent, the hundredth part every month, v. 11. But if the poor borrow to maintain their families, and we be able to help them, it is certain we ought either to lend freely what they have occasion for, or (if they are not likely to repay it) to give freely something towards it.

2. They forced them to mortgage their lands and houses as security for the money (v. 3), and not only so, but took the profits of them for interest (v. 5, compare v. 11), that by degrees they might make themselves masters of all they had. Yet this was not the worst.

3. They took their children as slaves, to be enslaved or sold at pleasure, v. 5. "Our heirs must be their slaves, and we are powerless to redeem them." This they made a humble remonstrance of to Nehemiah, not only because they saw he was a great man who could relieve them, but a good man who would. Let us lament the hardships which many in the world are groaning under; putting our souls into their souls' place, and remembering with our prayers and aid those who are burdened, as burdened with them. But let those who show no mercy expect *judgment without mercy*. It was an aggravation of the sin of these oppressing Jews that they were themselves so recently delivered out of the house of bondage, which obliged them in gratitude to *untie the cords of the yoke*, Isa. 58:6.

The previous complaint was made to Nehemiah at the time when he had his head and hands as full as possible of the public business about building the wall; yet, perceiving it to be just, he did not reject it. The case called for speedy intervention, and therefore he applied himself immediately to the consideration of it, knowing that, let him build Jerusalem's walls ever so high, so thick, so strong, the city could not be safe while such abuses as these were tolerated.

1. He *was very angry* (v. 6).

2. He *pondered them in his mind*, v. 1. By this it appears that he did not say or do anything unadvisedly. Before he rebuked the nobles, he pondered concerning what to say, and when, and how.

3. He *accused the nobles and officials*, who were the wealthy men, and whose power perhaps made them the more bold to oppress. Let no man imagine that his dignity sets him above reproof.

4. He set a great assembly against them. He called the people together to bear their testimony (which the people will generally be eager to do) against the oppressions and extortions, v. 12. Ezra and Nehemiah were both of them very wise, good, useful men, yet, in cases not unlike, there was a great deal of difference between their management: when Ezra was told of the sin of the rulers in marrying foreign wives he tore his clothes, and wept, and prayed, and was barely persuaded to attempt a reformation, fearing it to be impracticable, for he was a man of a mild tender spirit; when Nehemiah was told of as bad a thing he grew angry immediately, reproached the guilty, incensed the people against them, and never rested until, by all the rough methods he could use, he forced them to reform; for he was a man of a hot and eager spirit. Very holy men may differ much from each other in their natural temper.

God's work may be well done and yet different methods taken in the doing of it, which is a good reason why we should neither arraign the management of others nor make our own a standard.

He fairly reasoned the case with them, and showed them the evil of what they did. The regular way of reforming men's lives is to endeavor, in the first place, to convince their consciences. He lays it before them,

1. That those whom they oppressed were their brothers.

2. That they were but recently redeemed *out of the hand of the heathen*. The body of the people were so by the wonderful providence of God. "Now," he says, "have we taken all this pains to get their liberty out of the hands of the heathen, and shall their own rulers enslave them?"

3. That it was a great sin to oppress the poor (v. 9).

4. That it was a reproach to their profession. "Consider *the reproach of our Gentile enemies*; they will say, These Jews, who profess so much devotion to God, see how barbarous they are one to another." Nothing exposes religion more to the reproach of its enemies than the worldliness and hard-heartedness of the professors of it.

He earnestly pressed them not only not to make their poor neighbors any more such hard bargains but to restore that which they had got into their hands, v. 11. See how familiarly he speaks to them: *Let us leave off this usury*, putting himself in, as becomes reprovers, though far from being any way guilty of the crime. Though he had authority to command, yet, *for love's sake, he rather beseeches*.

He got a promise from them (v. 12): *We will give it back*. He sent for the priests to give them their oath that they would perform this promise. *In this way may God shake out of his house every man who does not keep his promise*, v. 13. This was a threat to which the people said *Amen*. With this *Amen* the people *praised the Lord*. This cheerfulness in promising was well, but that which follows was better: *The people did as they had promised*, and adhered to what they had done.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

The prospects of the poor people among the returned exiles were deplorable. There had been deficient rains and poor harvests, Hag. 1:6-11. They had mortgaged their lands to their richer brethren, and had even sold their children to pay the royal taxes and procure means of subsistence. The rich had taken advantage of their necessities, oppressing them with grievous exactions and heavy usury. (F. B. Meyer) **How did Nehemiah procure justice for the poorer Jews?**

**Show how Nehemiah's "holy anger" (Neh. 5:6) against sin is similar to the "holy anger" of Moses and Jesus.**

Ex. 32 Mark 3:1-6

**What is "holy anger"? What was Nehemiah's "holy anger" motivated by?**

Neh. 5:15 Prov. 19:23

### Nehemiah 6:1-19

Two plots against Nehemiah.

I. A plot to trap him in a snare. The enemies had an account that all the breaches of the wall were repaired, so that they considered it as good as done, though at that time the *doors of the gates* were off the hinges (v. 1); they must therefore now or never, by one bold stroke, destroy Nehemiah.

1. With subtlety they courted him to meet them in a village in the territory of Benjamin: *"Come, let us meet together to consult about the common interests of our provinces."* *But they were scheming to harm him.*

2. He declined the suggestion. His care was that the work might not cease; he knew it would if he left it ever so little; and *why should it stop while I go down to you?* Four times, he says, *I gave them the same answer*, v. 4.

II. A plot to terrify him from his work. This therefore Sanballat attempts, but in vain.

1. He endeavors to possess Nehemiah with an apprehension that his undertaking to build the walls of Jerusalem was generally represented as factious and seditious, v. 5-7. This is written to him in *an unsealed letter*, as a thing generally known and talked of, and Geshem will allege it as truth, that Nehemiah was aiming to make himself king and to shake off the Persian yoke. Now Sanballat pretends to inform Nehemiah of this as a friend—*"Let us confer together how to quell the report."* He hoped, like Judas, to kiss and kill. Nehemiah not only denied that such things were true, but that they were reported; he was better known than to be thus suspected.

2. Thus he escaped the snare and kept his ground. While we keep a good conscience, let us trust God with our good name.

He lifts up his heart to Heaven in this short prayer: O God, *strengthen my hands*. When, in our Christian work and warfare, we are entering any particular services or conflicts, this is a good prayer—*"Now strengthen my hands."*

The Jews' enemies leave no stone unturned, to take Nehemiah off from building the wall around Jerusalem. Now they try to drive him into the temple for his own safety: let him be anywhere but at his work.

I. How wickedly the enemies managed this temptation.

1. That which they intended was to bring Nehemiah to do a foolish thing, that they might laugh at him (v. 13): *That I should be intimidated*, and so they might *give me a bad name to discredit me*.

2. The tools they made use of were a pretended prophet and prophetess, whom they hired to persuade Nehemiah to quit his work and retreat for his own safety. The pretended prophet was Shemaiah, of whom it is said that he was *shut in* his own house, under pretence of seclusion for meditation. Nehemiah went to his house to consult him, v. 10. Other prophets there were, and one prophetess, Noadiah (v. 14), who were in the interest of the Jews' enemies.

3. The pretence was plausible. These prophets suggested to Nehemiah that the enemies would come and slay him, *by night*. They pretended to be much concerned for his safety. They very gravely advised him to hide himself in the temple until the danger was over. If Nehemiah had been prevailed upon to do this, immediately the people would both have left off their work and thrown down their arms, and everyone would have fled for his own safety; and then the enemies might easily, and without opposition, have broken down the wall again.

II. Nehemiah vanquished this temptation, and came off conqueror.

1. He immediately resolved not to yield to it, v. 11. *"Should a man like me run away? I will not go in. I will rather die at my work than live in an inglorious retreat from it."*

2. He was immediately aware of what was the cause of it (v. 12): *"I realized that God had not sent him, that he gave this advice, not by any divine direction, but with a plot against me."* Two things Nehemiah dreaded;

(1) Offending God: *That I would commit a sin by doing this.* Sin is that which above anything we should dread; and it is a good defense against sin to be afraid of nothing but sin.

(2) Shaming himself: *That they might discredit me.*

3. He humbly begs of God to reckon with them for their wicked plots against him (v. 14): *Remember Tobiah, and the rest of them, O my God, because of what they have done.*

Nehemiah is here finishing the wall of Jerusalem, and yet still has trouble created by his enemies.

I. Tobiah, and the other adversaries of the Jews, had the humiliation to see the wall built up, despite all their attempts to hinder it. The wall was finished *in fifty-two days*, and we have reason to believe they rested on the sabbaths, v. 15. Many were employed, and what they did they did cheerfully, because they loved it. When the enemies heard that the wall was finished before they thought it was well begun, they *lost their self-confidence*, v. 16. They envied the prosperity and success of the Jews, grieved to see the walls of Jerusalem built. If it were of God, it was to no purpose to think of opposing it; it would certainly prevail and be victorious.

II. Nehemiah had the vexation despite this, to see some of his own people treacherously corresponding with Tobiah. Many in Judah were in a strict but secret alliance with him to advance the interest of his country, though it would certainly be the ruin of their own. They were *under oath to him*, not as their prince, but as their friend and ally, because both he and his son had married daughters of Israel, v. 18. See the harm of marrying with foreigners; for one heathen who was converted by it ten Jews were perverted. They had the impudence to court Nehemiah himself into a friendship with him. They were so false as to betray Nehemiah's counsels to him. Thus were all their thoughts against him for evil, yet God remembered him with favor.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

How often Satan tries to call us off from our work for God! He cannot endure to see us engaged so eagerly on our Master's business and therefore raises up all sorts of hindrances and hostilities. Amid all these we have but one duty to perform. We must lose ourselves in our work. Ours to reply, "I am doing a great work, I cannot come down; why should the work cease?" If we will see to God's business, he will see to our safety. False friends, who prophesy in God's name, are more to be dreaded than open foes. We must learn to discern the spirits. The counsel which savors of self is always to be suspected. Note that Nehemiah considered that to have fear would have been to sin. But God was with the little band through dangers, and the wall was finished in spite of all opposition, 1 Cor. 15:58. (F. B. Meyer) **Is fear sin?**

**Show how God gave insight to Nehemiah from the deceptions of his enemies.**

Neh. 6:3, 8, 9, 11, 12 & 19

**What did the completion of the work prove to those who had tried to hinder the work?**

**What would cause God to allow people to be deceived and fall into various traps in life?**

Jam.1:13-15

### **Nehemiah 7:1-73**

God says concerning his people (Isa. 62:6), *I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem.* This is Nehemiah's care here; for dead walls, without living watchmen, are but a poor defense for a city.

I. He appointed *the gatekeepers, singers and Levites*, in their places to their work. God's worship is the defense of a place, and his ministers, when they mind their duty, are watchmen on the walls.

II. He appointed two governors or consuls, to whom he committed the care of the city, and gave them in charge to provide for the public peace and safety. Hanani, his brother, who came to him with the news of the desolations of Jerusalem, was one, a man of approved integrity and affection to his country; the other was Hananiah, who had been ruler of the palace. Of this Hananiah it is said that he was a *man of integrity and feared God more than most men do*, v.2.

III. He gave orders about the shutting of the gates and the guarding of the walls, v. 3, 4. The city, in compass, was large. The walls enclosed the same ground as formerly; but much of it lay waste, for the houses were not built; so that Nehemiah walled the city in faith, and with an eye to that promise of the replenishing of it which God had recently made through the prophet, Zech. 8:3ff. Though the people were now few, he believed they would be multiplied and therefore built the walls so as to make room for them. The care of Nehemiah for it. He ordered the rulers of the city themselves,

1. To stand by, and see the city-gates shut up and barred every night.

2. To take care that they should not be opened in the morning until they could see that all was clear and quiet.

3. To set sentinels who should, in case of the approach of the enemy, give timely notice to the city of the danger; and, as it came to their turn to watch, they must post themselves *near their own houses*, because of them, they would be in a particular manner careful. The public safety depends on everyone's particular care to guard himself and his own family against sin, that common enemy. They were made aware that *unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain*, Ps. 127:1.

Nehemiah knew very well that the safety of a city, under God, depended more on the number and valor of the inhabitants than on the height or strength of its walls; and therefore he thought fit to take an account of the people, that he might find what families had formerly had their settlement in Jerusalem, that he might bring them back, and what families could be influenced by their religion, or by their business, to come and rebuild the houses in Jerusalem and dwell in them. It is the wisdom of the governors of a nation to keep the balance even between the city and country, that the metropolis be not so extravagantly large as to drain and impoverish the country, nor yet so weak as not to be able to protect it.

I. From where this good plan of Nehemiah's came. He admits, *My God put it into my heart*, v. 5.

II. What method he took in pursuing it.

1. He called the rulers together, and the people, that he might have an account of the present state of their families—their number and strength, and where they were settled.

2. He reviewed the old *genealogical record of those who had been the first to return*, and compared the present accounts with that; and here we have the repetition of that out of Ezra 2. There are many differences in the numbers between this catalogue and that in Ezra. What differences there are we may suppose to arise either from the mistakes of transcribers, or from the diversity of the copies from which they were taken. Or perhaps one was the account of them when they set out from Babylon with Zerubbabel, the other when they came to Jerusalem. The sum totals are all just the same there and here, except of the singing-men and singing-women, which there are 200, here 245. An account of the offerings which were given towards the work of God, v. 70ff. differs much from that in Ezra 2:68, 69, and it must be questioned whether it refers to the same contribution; here the governor, or chief governor, who there was not mentioned, begins the offering; and the single sum mentioned there exceeds all those here put together; yet it is probable that it was the same, but that followed one copy of the lists, this another; for the last verse is the same here that it was Ezra 2:70, and Ezra 3. Blessed be God that our faith and hope are not built on the niceties of names and numbers, genealogy, and chronology, but on the great things of the law and gospel.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

### **With the workers' hearts tested and proved do you think they were just as great a testimony as the completed walls and gates?**

It was probable that Nehemiah returned to the Persian court on the completion of the first part of his work, the building of the walls, and he left Hananiah and his brother in charge until he had been able to obtain a prolongation of his mission.

### **What notable qualities did Hanani and Hananiah have to be appointed leaders under Nehemiah?**

Neh. 7:2

### **Why was the registration of the returned Jewish exiles necessary?**

### **Nehemiah 8:1-18**

An account of a solemn religious assembly, and the good work that was done in that assembly.

I. The time of it was the *first day of the seventh month*, v. 2. That was the day of the *Feast of Trumpets*, which is called a *day of rest*, and on which they were to have a *sacred assembly*, Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1. But that was not all: it was on that day that the altar was set up, and they began to offer their burnt offerings after their return out of captivity, a recent mercy in the memory of many then living.

II. The place was in the *square before the Water Gate* (v. 1), a spacious broad square, able to contain so great a multitude, which the court of the temple was not; for probably it was not now built nearly so large as it had been in Solomon's time. Sacrifices were to be offered only at the door of the temple, but praying, and praising, and preaching, were, and are, services of religion as acceptably performed in one place as in another. When this congregation thus met in the street of the city no doubt God was with them.

III. The persons who met were all the people, who were not compelled to come, but voluntarily gathered themselves together by common agreement, as one man: not only men came, but women and children. Little ones, as they come to the exercise of reason, must be trained up in the exercises of religion.

IV. The master of this assembly was Ezra the priest.

1. His call to the service was very clear; for being in office as a priest, and qualified as a scribe, the *people told him to bring out the Book of the Law* and read it to them. v. 1.

2. His post was very convenient. He stood in a pulpit or tower of wood, *which they made for the word, for the preaching of the word*, that what he said might be the more gracefully delivered and the better heard, and that the eyes of the hearers might be on him, Luke 4:20.

3. He had several assistants. Some of these stood with him (v. 4), six on his right hand and seven on his left. Others who are mentioned (v. 7) seem to have been employed at the same time in other places near at hand, to read and expound to those who could not come within hearing of Ezra.

V. The religious exercises performed in this assembly were not ceremonial, but moral, praying and preaching. Ezra, as president of the assembly, was the people's mouth to God, and they affectionately joined with him, v. 6. He blessed the Lord as the great God, and the people *lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!"* and bowed down in reverence.

The people were wounded with the words of the law that were read to them. The law shows men their sins, and their misery and danger because of sin. Therefore when they heard it they *all wept* (v. 9): it was a good sign that their hearts were tender, like Josiah's when he heard the words of the law. They wept to think how they had offended God.

They were healed and comforted with the words of peace that were spoken to them. It was one of the solemn feasts, on which it was their duty to rejoice; and even sorrow for sin must not hinder our joy in God, but rather lead us to it. Ezra was pleased to see them so affected with the word, but Nehemiah observed to him, and Ezra concurred in the thought, that it was now unseasonable. This day was holy and therefore was to be celebrated with joy and praise, not as if it were *a day to afflict their souls*. They forbade the people to *mourn and weep* (v. 9): *Do not grieve* (v. 10); *be still, do not grieve*, v. 11. They commanded them to testify to their joy, to put *on the garments of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness*. They allowed them, as a sign of their joy, to enjoy feasting. But then it must be,

1. With charity toward the poor: *"Send some to those who have nothing prepared that your abundance may supply their lack, that they may rejoice with you."*

2. It must be with piety and devotion: *The joy of the Lord is your strength*. Holy joy will be oil to the wheels of our obedience.

The assembly complied with the directions that were given them. Their weeping was *stilled* (v. 11) and they *celebrate with great joy*, v. 12. Those who *sow in tears shall reap in joy*: those who tremble at the convictions of the word may triumph in the consolations of it. They celebrated, not because they had the fat to eat and the sweet to drink, and a great deal of good company, but because they *now understood the words that had been made known to them*. The darkness of trouble arises from the darkness of ignorance and mistake. When the words were first declared to them they wept; but, when they understood them, they rejoiced, finding at length precious promises made to those who repented and reformed and that therefore there was hope in Israel.

The next day after, though it was no festival, the chief of them came together again to hear Ezra expound (v. 13). Now the priests and the Levites themselves *along with the heads of all the families, gathered around Ezra to give attention to the words of the law*, they came to be taught themselves, that they might be qualified to teach others. Now, they being by testing made more aware than ever of their own deficiencies and his excellencies, on the second day their humility set them at Ezra's feet, as students of him.

It is probable that Ezra, *in accordance with the wisdom of his God, which he possessed* (Ezra 7:25), when they applied to him for instruction out of the law on the second day of the seventh month, read to them those laws which concerned the feasts of that month, and, among the rest, that of the Feast of Tabernacles, Lev. 23:34; Deut. 16:13.

1. The divine appointment of the Feast of Tabernacles reviewed, v. 14, 15. *They found written in the Law a commandment concerning it*. This Feast of Tabernacles was a memorial of their dwelling in tents in the wilderness, a representation of our tabernacle state in this world. The conversion of the nations to the faith of Christ is foretold under the figure of this feast (Zech. 14:16); they shall come to *celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles*, as having here no continuing city. The people were themselves to gather branches of trees (they of Jerusalem got them from the mount of Olives) and to make booths, or arbors, from them, in which they were to lodge.

2. This appointment religiously observed, v. 16, 17.

(1) They observed the ceremony: *They lived in booths*, which the priests and Levites set up in the courts of the temple; those who had houses of their own set up booths on the roofs of them, or in their courts; and those who did not have houses, set them up in the streets. All their holy feasts, but this especially, were to be celebrated with joy.

(2) They attended the reading and expounding of the word of God during all the days of the feast, v. 18.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

**Why did Ezra assemble the people? What purpose is there for celebrating the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles?**

**When Ezra read and explained the word of God, what was the first response of the assembly? The second response?**

Neh. 8:11-12 Ps. 19:8 Ps. 119:162

## Why must the peoples sorrow spoken of in Neh. 8:9 be turned to joy at this time?

Neh. 9:11-12

**Should it be the same in our worship of God; times of sorrow for the sins we have committed but times for rejoicing for being delivered from those sins?**

### Nehemiah 9:1-38

A general account of a public fast which the Israelites kept, probably by order from Nehemiah. It was a fast that men appointed, but *the kind of fast God had chosen*; for,

1. It was a day *to humble oneself*, Isa. 58:5. Probably they assembled in the courts of the temple, and they there appeared in sackcloth and in the posture of mourners, with earth on their heads, v. 1. They were restrained from *weeping*, Neh. 8:9, but now they were directed to weep.

2. It was a day *to loose the chains of injustice*, and that is the fast that God has chosen, Isa. 58:6. Without this, spreading sackcloth and ashes under us is but a jest.

3. It was a day of communion with God. *They fasted for him* (Zech. 7. 5); for,

(1) They spoke to him in prayer. Fasting without prayer is a body without a soul, a worthless carcass.

(2) They heard him speaking to them by his word: for they read in the Book of the Law that, in the glass of the Law, we may see our deformities and defilements, and know what to acknowledge and what to amend. The time was equally divided between these two. Three hours they spent in reading, expounding, and applying the scriptures, and three hours in confessing sin and praying; so that they stayed together six hours, and spent all the time in the solemn acts of religion, without saying, *Behold, what a weariness is it!*

An account how the work of this fast-day was carried on.

1. The names of the ministers that were employed. They are twice named (v. 4, 5). Either they prayed successively, or, as some think, there were eight different congregations at some distance from each other, and each had a Levite to preside over it.

2. The work itself in which they employed themselves.

(1) They prayed to God for the pardon of the sins of Israel and God's favor to them.

(2) They praised God; for the work of praise is not unseasonable on a fast-day; in all acts of devotion we must aim at this, *to give to God the glory due to his name.*

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

## How does the history of Israel reveal the forbearance of God?

### To what national sins did the people plead guilty?

### What did the Israelites do during their time of fasting? Was their worship of God more intense during this time?

Self examination is necessary to reveal the sin and failure in our lives but the more we look upon ourselves the more discouraged we become. **After our acknowledgment of our sin and failure what should our focus be on?**

1 John 1:5-10

### Nehemiah 10:1-39

When Israel was first brought into covenant with God it was done by sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood, Exod. 24. But here it was done by the more natural and common way of sealing and subscribing the written articles of the covenant.

I. The names of those public persons who, as the representatives and heads of the congregation, set their hands and seals to this covenant. Nehemiah, who was the governor, signed first. Next to him twenty-two priests signed. Next to the priests, seventeen Levites signed this covenant, among whom we find all or most of those who were the mouth of the congregation in prayer, Neh. 9:4, 5. Those who lead in prayer should lead in every other good work. Next to the Levites, forty-four of the leaders of the people submitted to it for themselves and all the rest.

II. The concurrence of the rest of the people with them, and the rest of the priests and Levites, who signified their consent to what their chiefs did. With them joined,

1. Their wives and children; for they had transgressed, and they must reform.

2. The converts of other nations, *all who had separated themselves from the neighboring peoples*, their gods and their worship, *for the sake of the Law of God*, and the observance of that Law. See what conversion is; it is separating

ourselves from the course and custom of this world, and devoting ourselves to the conduct of the word of God. And, as there is one law, so there is one covenant, one baptism, for the foreigner and for him who is born in the land. The concurrence of the people is expressed, v. 29. *They joined their brothers* one and all.

III. The general purport of this covenant. They laid on themselves no other burden than this necessary thing, which they were already obliged to by all other engagements of duty, interest, and gratitude—to *follow the Law of God and to obey all his commands*, v. 29.

IV. Some of the particular articles of this covenant, such as were adopted to their present temptations.

1. That they would not intermarry with the heathen, v. 30.

2. That they would keep no markets on the Sabbath day, or any other day of which the law has said, *You shall do no work on it*. The Sabbath is a market day for our souls, but not for our bodies.

3. That they would not be severe in exacting their debts, but would observe the seventh year as a year of release, according to the law, v. 31.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

### **Why was it necessary for the Jews to separate themselves from Gentiles in regard to marriage and the Sabbath?**

Ex. 20:8-11

Ex. 30:12-18

Ex. 34:10-17

Neh. 9:14

Mal. 2:10-16

Matt. 6:33

### **What covenant was made and upon what four duties was particular emphasis placed?**

#### **Nehemiah 11:1-36**

Many of the children of Judah and Benjamin dwelt in Jerusalem; for, originally, part of the city lay in the lot of one of those tribes and part in that of the other; but the greater part was in the lot of Benjamin, and therefore here we find of the children of Judah only 468 families in Jerusalem (v. 6), but of Benjamin 928, v. 7, 8. Though the Benjamites were more in number, yet of the men of Judah it is said (v. 6) that they were valiant men, fit for service, and able to defend the city in case of an attack. Judah has not lost its ancient character of a lion's cub, bold and daring. Many of the priests and Levites settled at Jerusalem. Of those who did the work of the house in their courses here were 822 of one family, 242 of another, and 128 of another, v. 12-14. It is said of some of them that they were *able men* (v. 14). Some of the Levites also came and dwelt at Jerusalem, yet but few in comparison, 284 in all (v. 18), with 172 gatekeepers (v. 19), for much of their work was to *teach the good knowledge of God* up and down the country, for which purpose they were to be scattered in Israel.

It is said of one of the Levites that he had *charge of the outside work of the house of God*, v. 16. The priests were chief managers of the business within the temple gates; but this Levite was entrusted with the secular concerns of God's house, the collecting of the contributions, the providing of materials for the temple service, and the like. Those who take care of the *outside work* of the church, the serving of its tables, are as necessary in their place as those who take care of *its inward work*, who give themselves to the word and prayer.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

### **What words are used to describe Jerusalem in Nehemiah 11:1 and how important is Jerusalem to Jews today?**

#### **Nehemiah 12:1-47**

The dedication of the wall of Jerusalem.

I. The meaning of this dedication of the wall. It was not done until the city was pretty well replenished, *ch.* 11. It was a solemn thanksgiving to God for his great mercy. They devoted the city in a unique manner to God and to his honor, and took possession of it for him and in his name. This city was (as never any other was) a *holy city*, the *city of the Great King* (Ps. 48:2 and Matt. 5:35). They put the city and its walls under the divine protection, confessing that *unless the Lord watches over the city* the walls were *built in vain*.

II. With what seriousness it was performed, under the direction of Nehemiah. The Levites from all parts of the country were summoned to attend. There was a general rendezvous, v. 28, 29. They *purified themselves*, v. 30, then the people. Then they purified *the gates and the wall*. This purification was performed by sprinkling the *water of cleansing* (or of *separation*, as it is called, Num. 19:9) on *themselves* and the *people*, the walls and the gates—a symbol of the blood of Christ, with which our consciences being *cleansed from acts that lead to death*, we become fit to *serve the living God* (Heb. 9:14). The leaders, priests, and Levites, walked around on the wall in two companies, with musical instruments, to signify the dedication of it all to God (v. 36). They had a rendezvous where they divided themselves into two companies. Half of the leaders, with several priests and Levites, went on the right hand, Ezra leading their procession, v. 36. The other half of the leaders and priests, who gave thanks likewise, went to the left hand, Nehemiah bringing up the rear, v. 38. At length both companies met in the temple, where they joined their thanksgivings, v. 40. The crowd of people, it is

likely, walked some within the wall and others without. The people *greatly rejoiced*, v. 43. Their shouts, coming from a sincere and hearty joy, are here taken notice of; for God graciously accepts honest zealous services.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

### What did the joyful march around the walls say?

Heb. 13:15

### Nehemiah 13:1-31

Israel was not to mingle with the nations, nor allow any of them to incorporate with them.

I. The law to this purport happened to be read *on that day, in the hearing of the people* (v. 1), on the day of the dedication of the wall. They found a law, that the Ammonites and Moabites should not be naturalized, should not settle among them, nor unite with them, v. 1. The reason given is because they had been injurious and ill-natured to the Israel of God (v. 2), had not shown them common civility, but sought their ruin. This law we have, with this reason, in Deut. 23:3-5.

II. The people's ready compliance with this law, v. 3. See the benefit of the public reading of the word of God; it reveals to us sin and duty, good and evil, and shows us in which we have erred. They *excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent*, which had of old been a snare to them, for the *mixed multitude fell a lusting*, Num. 11:4. These they expelled.

III. The particular case of Tobiah, who was an Ammonite. He had the same enmity toward Israel that his ancestors had, the spirit of an Ammonite, witness his indignation at Nehemiah (*Neh. 2:10*).

1. How wickedly Eliashib the chief priest took this Tobiah in to be a lodger even in the courts of the temple. He was allied to Tobiah (v. 4), by marriage first and then by friendship. His grandson had married Sanballat's daughter, v. 28. Probably some other of his family had married Tobiah's. It was expressly provided by the law that the high priest should marry *one from his own people*, else he *will defile his offspring among his people*, Lev. 21:14, 15. In the courts of the temple, out of several little chambers used as storerooms, he contrived to make a state room for Tobiah, v. 5. That Tobiah the Ammonite should be entertained with respect in Israel, in the courts of God's house, as if to confront God himself; this was next to setting up an idol there. An Ammonite must not *come into the assembly*; and shall one of the worst and vilest of the Ammonites be courted into the temple itself? Well might Nehemiah add (v. 6), *But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem*. If he had been there, the high priest dared not have done such a thing.

2. How bravely Nehemiah, the chief governor, threw him out, and all that belonged to him, and restored the chambers to their proper use. When he came to Jerusalem, and was informed by the good people who were troubled at it what an intimacy had grown between their chief priest and their chief enemy, *he was greatly displeased* (v. 7, 8). Nehemiah has power and he will use it for God. Tobiah shall be expelled. He does not fear his resentments, or Eliashib's, but expels the intruder, by casting forth all his household belongings. Our Savior thus *cleansed the temple*, that the *house of prayer* might not be a *den of thieves*. And thus those who would expel sin out of their hearts, those living temples, must throw out all those things that are the food and fuel of lust. The temple stores shall be brought in again, and the *vessels of the house of God put in their places*; but the chambers must first be sprinkled with the water of purification, and so cleansed. Thus, when sin is cast out of the heart by repentance, let the blood of Christ be applied to it by faith, and then let it be furnished with the graces of God's Spirit for every good work.

Another grievance (v. 10-14) redressed by Nehemiah.

I. The Levites had been wronged. Their *portions had not been given to them*, v. 10. The Levites were so modest as not to sue for them; *for the Levites and singers had gone back to their own fields*. This comes in as a reason either,

1. Why their payments were withheld. The Levites were non-residents: when they should have been doing their work about the temple, they were at their farms in the country; and therefore the people were little inclined to give them their maintenance. Or rather,

2. It is the reason why Nehemiah soon perceived that their dues had been denied them, because he missed them from their posts. "They have gone to get a livelihood for themselves and their families from the soil; for their profession would not maintain them." A scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry.

II. Nehemiah laid the fault on the rulers. Nehemiah began with the rulers, and called them to an account: "*Why is the house of God neglected?*" v. 11. Why are the Levites starved out of it?"

III. He did not delay to bring the dispersed Levites to *their posts* again, and set them in *their stations* (as the word is), v. 11.

IV. He obliged the people to bring in their tithes, v. 12.

V He provided that just and prompt payment should be made of the Levites' stipends. Commissioners were appointed to see to this (v. 13)

VI. Having no recompense from those for whom he did these good services, he looks up to God as his paymaster (v. 14): *Remember me for this, O my God.* Nehemiah was a man much in pious extemporaneous prayers. He only prays, *Remember me, not Reward me.*

Another instance of that blessed reformation in which Nehemiah was so active (v. 15-22). He revived Sabbath-sanctification, and maintained the authority of the fourth command.

I. The law of the Sabbath was very strict and much insisted on, and with good reason, for religion is never in the throne while Sabbaths are trodden under foot. But Nehemiah discovered even in Judah this law was wretchedly violated.

1. The farmers trod their winepresses and brought home their grain on that day (v. 15), though there was an express command that *during the plowing season and harvest they must rest* on the Sabbaths (Exod. 34:21).

2. The carriers *loaded their donkeys with all kinds of loads*, and had no scruples about it, though there was a particular proviso in the law for the cattle resting (Deut. 5:14) and that they should *carry no load on the Sabbath day*, Jer. 17:21.

3. The hawkers, and peddlers, and petty traders, who were men of Tyre, that famous trading city, *sold all kinds of merchandise* on the Sabbath day (v. 16).

II. The reformation of it.

1. *He warned those who profaned it*, v. 15, and again v. 21.

2. He reasoned with the rulers concerning it, took the nobles of Judah to task, v. 17. He charges them with it: *You do it.* They did not carry grain, nor sell fish, but, they condoned those who did, and did not use their power to restrain them, and so made themselves guilty, as those magistrates do who bear the sword in vain. They set a bad example in other things. If the nobles allowed themselves in sports and recreations, in idle visits and idle talk, on the Sabbath day, the men of business, both in city and country, would profane it by their worldly employments, as more justifiable. He reasons the case with them (v. 18). If they did not take warning, but returned to the same sins again, they had reason to expect further judgments: *You are stirring up more against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath.*

3. He took care to prevent the profanation of the Sabbath, as one who aimed only at reformation. If he could reform them, he would not punish them, and, if he should punish them, it was but that he might reform them. This is an example to magistrates to be heirs of restraint, and prudently to use the bit and bridle, that there may be no occasion for the lash. He ordered the gates of Jerusalem to be kept shut from the evening before the Sabbath to the morning after, and set his own servants to watch them, that no loads should be brought in on the Sabbath day, nor late the night before, nor early in the morning after, lest Sabbath time should be encroached on, v. 19. He threatened those who came with goods to the gates, telling them that, if they came again, he would certainly lay hands on them (v. 21). He charged the Levites to take care concerning the due sanctifying of the Sabbath, that they should cleanse themselves in the first place, and so give a good example to the people, and some of them should *go and guard the gates*, v. 22. Then there is likely to be a reformation, in this and other respects, when magistrates and ministers join their forces. The cure he administered was lasting. In our Savior's time, we find the Jews in the other extreme, over-scrupulous in the ceremonial part of Sabbath-sanctification.

4. He concludes this passage with a prayer (v. 22).

One instance more of Nehemiah's pious zeal for the purifying of his countrymen as a special people for God (v.23-31).

I. They had corrupted themselves by marrying foreign wives. This was complained of in Ezra's time, and much done towards a reformation, Ezra 9 and 10. Nehemiah, like a good governor, enquired into the state of the families of those who were under his charge, that he might reform what was amiss in them, and so heal the streams by healing the springs. He found that many of the Jews had *married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab* (v. 23). He talked with the children, and found they *were foreigners*, for their *speech betrayed them*. The children were bred up with their mothers, and learned from them and their nurses and servants to speak, so that they could not speak the Jews' language, or not purely, but *half in the language of Ashdod*, or Ammon, or Moab, according as the country was which the mother was a native of.

II. What course Nehemiah took to purge out this corruption.

1. He showed them the evil of it, and the obligation he lay under to witness against it. He quotes a precept, to prove that it was in itself a great sin; and makes them swear to that precept: *You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons*, etc., which is taken from Deut. 7:3. He quotes a precedent, to show the pernicious consequences of it, which made it necessary to be censured by the government (v. 26): *Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned?*

2. He showed himself highly displeased with it, that he might awaken them to a due sense of the evil of it: *He rebuked them*, v. 25. He showed them how frivolous their excuses were, and argued it heatedly with them. When he had silenced them he *called curses-down on them*, that is, he pronounced the judgments of God against them, and showed them what their sin deserved. Ezra, in this case, had plucked out his own hair, in holy sorrow for the sin; Nehemiah plucked out their hair, in a holy indignation at the sinners.

3. He obliged them not to take any more such wives, and separated those whom they had taken: *He purified them of everything foreign*, both men and women (v. 30), and made them promise with an oath that they would never do so again, v. 25.

4. He took particular care of the priests' families, that they might not lie under this stain, this guilt. He found, on enquiry, that a branch of the high priest's own family, one of his grandsons, had married a daughter of Sanballat, that notorious enemy of the Jews (*Neh.* 2:10; 4:1), and so had, in effect, twisted interests with the Samaritans, v. 28. It seems this young priest would not send away his wife, and therefore Nehemiah *drove him away from him*, deprived him, degraded him, and made him forever incapable of the priesthood. Josephus says that this expelled priest was Manasseh, and that when Nehemiah drove him away he went to his father-in-law Sanballat, who built him a temple on Mount Gerizim, like that at Jerusalem, and promised him he should be high priest in it, and that then was laid the foundation of the Samaritans' pretensions, which continued to our Savior's time. Here are Nehemiah's prayers on this occasion.

(1) He prays, *Remember them, O my God*, v. 29. "Lord, convict and convert them; remind them of what they should be and do, that they may come to themselves."

(2) He prays, *Remember me with favor, O my God*, v. 31.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

Nehemiah, having finished what he undertook, completing the wall around the holy city, returned to the king his master. **Show how easy it was for corruptions to creep back into Jerusalem during his absence? Can sin easily creep back into our lives if a strong stand is not taken against it? Why is a strong stand not taken against particular sins?**

Matt. 6:21

**What was Nehemiah asking God for when he prayed "Remember me with favor, O my God"?**

