

Shoulder to Shoulder

Lesson 1

God's Sovereign Preparation

Nehemiah: His Personal Life

How did God prepare Nehemiah for his work? Let's look at Nehemiah's preparation by God.

- 1: He was placed into a position of influence by a sovereign God. *"I was cupbearer to the king"*
- 2: He faced evil during his life through the Assyrian empire. God uses evil to accomplish his purposes. This is one of the great mysteries of life, but look at these verses that encourage us when we face evil in our own lives:

The LORD replied, "Look at the nations and be amazed! Watch and be astounded at what I will do! For I am doing something in your own day, something you wouldn't believe even if someone told you about it. ⁶ I am raising up the Babylonians⁷ to be a new power on the world scene. They are a cruel and violent nation who will march across the world and conquer it. ¹ Habakkuk 1:6-7

"People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus of Nazareth by doing wonderful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. ²³ But you followed God's prearranged plan. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to the cross and murdered him. Acts 2:22-23

These two years of famine will grow to seven, during which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God has sent me here to keep you and your families alive so that you will become a great nation. ⁸ Yes, it was God who sent me here, not you! And he has made me a counselor to Pharaoh—manager of his entire household and ruler over all Egypt. Genesis 45:6-7

God's Intentional Purposes

There are four levels of understanding with which we might respond to our failure and to the evil, unjust and painful experiences that intrude into our lives.

- If there is a God, He was either removed, uninvolved, incapable of making a difference, or just didn't care about what was happening.
- Things happen. Evil, sin, painful experiences and failures are part of everyone's life experience. We either handle them and become stronger in the process, or we are unable to cope and become victims.

¹All verses quoted in this booklet are taken from the, *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. 1997. Tyndale House: Wheaton, Ill.

- God uses evil as good, as a tool in His hands to make us the people He has called us to be.
- The evil that we have experienced and the sins that have been committed against us, and even our own failures, are part of God's sovereign purposes for our lives.

It is the third and fourth levels that set our hearts free to respond to God, our circumstances and our relationships in such a way that we grow as godly people.

Issues to Keep in Perspective on this Subject

- God is never the source of evil, nor is He ever its cause.
- God does not need "evil" in order to fulfill His purposes.
- God's use of evil does not make it less evil.
- God's use of evil does not make me less culpable for my own evil, my choices, failures, and sins.

Note:

There is great debate in evangelical circles today about the power of God to know the future and to do something about the future. I believe you would benefit from reading the book review in Appendix A to gain some perspective on what is at stake for the church in this theological debate.

Shoulder to Shoulder

Lesson 2

Intimacy in Prayer

A major aspect of God's rebuilding our lives focuses on our intimacy with God and communion with Him in prayer.

Why are You Sad?

King Artaxerxes for whom Nehemiah worked could see Nehemiah was in pain for his people. Notice that Nehemiah expressed this pain to the Lord anticipating that God could work in the king's heart to bring help and perhaps change:

The king asked, "Well, how can I help you?"

With a prayer to the God of heaven, ⁵ I replied, "If it please Your Majesty and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried." Nehemiah 2:4-6

Look at how the book of Nehemiah begins and notice the prayer of Nehemiah from chapter 1:

When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I said, "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands, ⁶ listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! ⁷ We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, laws, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses.

⁸ "Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you sin, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹ But if you return to me and obey my commands, even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honored.'

¹⁰ "We are your servants, the people you rescued by your great power and might. ¹¹ O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you. Please grant me success now as I go to ask the king for a great favor. Put it into his heart to be kind to me." Nehemiah 1:4:11

Principles of Prayer for Broken Hearts

- 1: Desperate People Pray in Desperate Humility
- 2: Only Desperate People Pray
- 3: If we don't pray we will fall, fail, or faint
- 4: Desperate people know God will help

"And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks.

¹¹ “You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? ¹² Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! ¹³ If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” Luke 11:9-12

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why does Jesus tell that story of the unjust judge just prior to his exhortation to pray?
2. Is God like the unjust judge?
3. Why is your prayer life weaker than you want it to be?
4. How can your prayer life become a more effective framework in which God can rebuild your life and use you to rebuild those around you?

Shoulder to Shoulder

Lesson 3

Confidence in God Alone

Confidence in God

Running parallel to the theme of prayer in the book of Nehemiah is the theme of confidence in the person and character of God. Nehemiah prayed because his hope was in God, and every word and action in the book also reveals that his confidence was in God alone.

We should allow Nehemiah to mentor us in how to respond to the challenges and opportunities that he faced.

Why did Nehemiah, *“pray to the God of heaven and answer the king”*? He did this because he knew that God would have to move the heart of King Artaxerxes to give him the approval and the provisions for this great ministry.

Key Factor’s in Nehemiah’s Life

- 1: The Grace of God. Nehemiah explained his success in handling this burden by the recognition, *“God’s gracious hand was upon me”*. (2:18)

Nehemiah understood these things:

- a. God had put him in a strategic place
- b. But only God could rebuild God’s people

- 2: The Power of God: Nehemiah never failed to remember the greatness of God!

Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the leaders and the people and said to them, “Don’t be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your friends, your families, and your homes!” (4:14)

When you hear the blast of the trumpet, rush to wherever it is sounding. Then our God will fight for us!” (4:20)

Key Battles We Must Overcome to Have Victory

- 1: The Power of Culture: Our society sees weakness and vulnerability as obstacles to success. In God’s kingdom these are greatly valued.

- 2: The Power of Self Sufficiency: We are trained early in our society to figure it out through education, ability and determination.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful apart from me.

⁵ *“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:4-5*

- 3: The Power of Independence: It is easy for us to make plans without considering what God wants to do. Nehemiah knew that God had placed on his heart what God wanted!

Shoulder to Shoulder

Lesson 4

Looking at the Ruins

A Midnight Ride

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he did an amazing thing. He went to look at the ruins:

Three days after my arrival at Jerusalem, ¹² I slipped out during the night, taking only a few others with me. I had not told anyone about the plans God had put in my heart for Jerusalem. 2:11

When Nehemiah looked around he saw so much brokenness among the ruins that in some places his horse could not pass through. Now facing squarely the devastation of the city, he saw the full reality.

Let's Rebuild

Nehemiah challenged the people to rebuild the ruins that for years they had lived with. How did this happen?

- By the grace of God he was able to show them that God's time had come to deal with the rubble and the disgrace it represented.
- Because he had a vision the people were able to catch it and believe themselves.

Many of us have lived for years with brokenness rubble and shame in our marriages, families or lives. If we are to be involved in a rebuilding process we must see that this is God's time, that he is working, moving, and that it will be done. By God's grace, we, too, will sense that God is working.

Overcoming the Idol of Denial

Nehemiah and the people got the job done because they would not deny the reality of their problem. How does denial happen?

- Becoming involved in the busyness of life while all around us things are falling apart.
- Don't take serious the truth that we need the gospel to be saved today!
- We have too much pride to admit that we might be ruined or ruining ourselves or another.

Confronting the Rubble

What are some of the rubble areas of your life that you must quit denying:

- Anger
- Lust
- Greed
- Substance Abuse
- Spousal Abuse
- Codependency
- Pornography
- Masturbation
- Gambling
- Dead Religion
- Lukewarm Christianity
- Idol Worship
- Gossip
- Slander
- Disinterest
- Apathy

King David and Denial

King David had real issues in denying his sin. For over a year he denied his involvement in the murder of Uriah and the adultery he committed with Uriah's wife. It took the prophet Nathan to confront him to get him out of the lethargy of denial.

Why, then, have you despised the word of the LORD and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah and stolen his wife. . . . Then David confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "Yes, but the LORD has forgiven you, and you won't die for this sin. 2 Samuel 12:9, 11

It was said of David he was a man after God's heart, yet he still struggled mightily with denial. Why? Because as hard as living with sin is, confession of sin is even more painful, and we attempt to prevent ourselves from feeling pain.

The Gift of Pain

Godly sorrow leads to repentance and in repentance there is life because he who sows tears in the evening will come forth in the morning rejoicing.

Notice Psalm 73 and Asaph's process of dealing with pain and suffering, including the pain of regrets over failure.

¹ Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure. ² But as for me, I came so close to the edge of the cliff! My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.³ For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.⁴ They seem to live such a painless life; their bodies are so healthy and strong.⁵ They aren't troubled like other people or plagued with problems like everyone else.⁶ They wear pride like a jeweled necklace, and their clothing is woven of cruelty.⁷ These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for!⁸ They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others.⁹ They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth.¹⁰ And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words.¹¹ "Does God realize what is going on?" they ask. "Is the Most High even aware of what is happening?"¹² Look at these arrogant people—enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply. ¹³ Was it for nothing that I kept my heart pure and kept myself from doing wrong?¹⁴ All I get is trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain.¹⁵ If I had really spoken this way, I would have been a traitor to your people.¹⁶ So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is!¹⁷ Then one day I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I thought about the destiny of the wicked.¹⁸ Truly, you put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction.¹⁹ In an instant they are destroyed, swept away by terrors.²⁰ Their present life is only a dream that is gone when they awake. When you arise, O Lord, you will make them vanish from this life.²¹ Then I realized how bitter I had become, how pained I had been by all I had seen.²² I was so foolish and ignorant—I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.²³ Yet I still belong to you; you are holding my right hand.²⁴ You will keep on guiding me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny.²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth.²⁶ My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.²⁷ But those who desert him will perish, for you destroy those who abandon you.²⁸ But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign LORD my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.

The experience of Asaph as recorded in the 73rd psalm conveys three vital principles.

(1) First, the ultimate good in life is not prosperity, nor the absence of pain, but the nearness of God.

The prosperity of the wicked in Psalm 73 only caused the wicked to become more arrogant and to draw farther away from God. Asaph's pain was the instrument which God used to draw him even near to Himself than ever before.

(2) Second, pain serves the good purpose of putting life and death, pain and prosperity into perspective.

Asaph found that the problem of pain served to reverse his priorities. Before, Asaph saw prosperity as the highest good, and to be sought

at any cost. Now, Asaph can see the nearness of God to be the ultimate good, and worth the cost of suffering, and pain.

(3) Third, we can see from Asaph's experience that dealing with the problem of pain is a process.

Asaph had to work through the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. It was only after time and agony that he could profess the goodness of God and the preciousness of His presence. So it is for all of us.

Shoulder to Shoulder

Lesson 5

The Power of the Word

Carrying On a Great Work

Nehemiah knew that God was carrying on an eternal work. Therefore, he refused to be distracted from that work no matter the difficulty. Many efforts were made to destroy Nehemiah's efforts for God, but God gave him wisdom and helped to overcome the enemies.

The Enemies of Our Soul

God's Word tells us that our enemies are three in number. They are

1: The World:

World as "Age" (Gk *aiōn*; Heb *'olam*). In the Synoptic Gospels the world is conceived as a temporal reality with beginning and end. Beyond that it can also be a new world, "the age to come" in contrast with "this age," expressions that are found on the lips of Jesus. In Paul the present age is evil (Gal 1:4), being ruled by the "elemental spirits of the world" (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20), "the rulers of this age" (1 Cor 2:6; cf. Jn 12:31), "the god of this age" (2 Cor 4:4), "the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2), the "devil," "rulers," "powers," the "world rulers of this darkness," the evil spiritual powers in heavenly places (Eph 6:11-12). "This age" may also have the sense of "the present time" (Rom 3:26; 8:18; 11:5; 2 Cor 6:2; 8:13) and "the present age" (1 Tim 6:17; 2 Tim 4:10; Tit 2:12). This age/world is evil and opposed to God. It has a hostile character. It is opposed to God just as the wisdom of the world is opposed to the wisdom of God. God chose the foolish, the weak and the despised, and even those considered non-entities according to this world, which turn out to be the wisdom and power of God in the fulfillment of his purpose (1 Cor 1:18-28; 2:6-13; 3:18-19; 4:9, 13). This age is ruled by spiritual powers, and to it, fallen, unredeemed humanity belongs (1 Cor 1:20, 21, 27, 28; 2:12; 3:19; 5:10; 6:2; 11:32; 2 Cor 7:10; Gal 4:3; 6:14; Eph 2:2; Col 2:8, 20) and needs to be redeemed (Rom 3:6, 19; 2 Cor 5:19).

For Paul the notion of the coming age, explicit in Ephesians 1:21; 2:7 and implicit in Romans 8:18-25 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, implies the fulfillment of God's purpose in creation

when evil and corruption will be overcome. Christ is present and active in both the creation and reconciliation of “all things” (Col 1:16, 20.)²

2: The Flesh:

In the NT, flesh represents the natural, created human aspect. As such it is not sinful — merely weak, limited, and temporal. Because of its limitation, it is liable to sin, e.g., to set up the natural and human as God, neglecting the true God, and thus can even be regarded as mankind’s master (Gal. 5:17). It then becomes “sinful flesh,” with passions, indulgences, or “zeal, boasting,” etc. In 1 Pet. 2:11, e.g., the “passions of the flesh ... wage war” against the soul, and the believers are exhorted to have a good conduct among the Gentiles. In 2 Pet. 2:18 the passions of the flesh are labeled “licentious” and can barely be escaped. For John (1 Jn. 2:16) “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes” are not of the Father but of “the world,” which is darkness, in opposition to the light, which is God.

The contrast between flesh and spirit reflects in part the OT idea of the distinction between God and mankind (e.g., Jn. 6:63: “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail”) and is not always expressive of the contrast between sin and grace (e.g., Mk. 14:38, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”). But for Paul the “flesh” can oppose the Spirit (e.g., Gal. 5:17. “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit”; cf. Rom. 8:8f; Jn. 1:13; 3:6; 1 Pet. 4:6). Here flesh is the opposite of the Spirit, not because it is material but because it lives by its own standards. This contrast between spirit and flesh is reflected in Rom. 7:14), where Gk *sa•rkinos* (adjective of *sárx*) is translated “carnal” (NEB, NIV, “unspiritual”). Unlike the Gnostics, for whom the flesh as such is identified with evil (see GNOSTICISM III, IV), Paul is aware of the distinction between the flesh as created and as fallen (see BODY II; DESIRE). (The life “in the flesh” of Phil. 1:22–24 does not designate the sinful but the “weak, transitory nature of the physical body” [J. J. Müller, comm (NICNT [1955]), p. 62].)

Though flesh and sin are closely related, Christ redeemed sinful human flesh. In the incarnation Christ assumed assumed human flesh (Jn. 1:14) and lived as a human being (e.g., He. 5:7; 1 Tim. 3:16). It is in His flesh that Christ suffered (1 Pet. 4:1). Against the Gnostics, John taught that the flesh as such is not sinful. In fact, Christ’s incarnation and

²Ryken, L. 2000, c1998. *Dictionary of biblical imagery* (electronic ed.) (Pages 967–968). InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL

death are the occasion for the believer's fellowship with Him in the "eating" of His flesh (Jn. 6:52; As in the OT, the NT professes that one day "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Lk. 3:6; cf. Jn. 17:2).³

3: The Devil:

"Satan" occurs thirty-six times in the New Testament, eighteen of that number in the Gospels and Acts. The Greek term *satanas* is a loan word from the Hebrew Old Testament, and twenty-eight of the total occurrences are accompanied by the definite article. Often in the Gospel accounts Jesus is in contact with Satan directly or indirectly. He was tempted by Satan (Mark 1:13). In the famous "Beelzebub controversy" Jesus made clear his intention to drive Satan out of people's lives and to destroy his sovereignty (Matt. 12:26; Mark 3:23, 26; Luke 11:18). He liberated a woman "whom Satan (had) kept bound for eighteen long years" (Luke 13:16). Paul spoke of his being sent to turn people "from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18), and that the works of the "lawless one (were) in accordance with the work of Satan," in doing sham miracles, signs, and wonders (2 Thess. 2:9). Christ will come, he wrote, to overthrow that agent of Satan.

While the activity of Satan is carried out in "the world" (i.e., among those who do not acknowledge Christ as Lord), he also works against the followers of Christ. He influenced Peter's thinking about Jesus to the extent that Jesus said to his disciple, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matt. 16:23). He asked for all the disciples in order to severely test them (Luke 22:31). He "entered" Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:3), and "filled the heart" of Ananias (Acts 5:3). Believers can be tempted by Satan due to a lack of self-control in sexual matters (1 Cor. 7:5), and he can even masquerade as "an angle of light" to accomplish his purposes (2 Cor. 11:14). He tormented Paul by means of "a thorn in (his) flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). Some people even turn away from their faith to follow Satan (1 Tim. 5:15).

Satan opposes the proclamation of the gospel, snatching away the seed (the word) that was sown in people's hearts (Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12). He also "stopped" Paul from traveling to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:18).

Satan is regarded in the New Testament as "master of death and destruction," who carries out God's wrath against sinners. Twice we read of persons "handed over to Satan" for spiritual discipline by the church (1 Cor. 5:1-5; 1 Tim. 1:19-

³Bromiley, G. W. 2001, c1979-1988. *The International standard Bible encyclopedia* (electronic edition.) (Vol. 2, Page 314-315). Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids

20). This appears to mean that excommunication puts people out into Satan's realm, a sovereignty from which believers have been rescued (Col. 1:13; cf. Heb. 2:14–15). In other cases, Satan attacked the disciples of Jesus by “sifting” them (Luke 22:31), a figure that is enigmatic. It may have meant to test their faith (with the intent of destroying it), or, it may have meant “to separate off the rubbish” (I. H. Marshall). In any case, Satan was up to no good. He was able to “enter” Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:3; cf. John 13:27), resulting in that disciple becoming a betrayer of his Master. Peter's sifting may have brought about his threefold denial of Jesus.⁴

⁴Elwell, W. A. 1997, c1996. *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed.). Baker reference library; Logos Library System. Baker Book House: Grand Rapids

Shoulder to Shoulder

Lesson 6

Freedom from the Past & The Joy of the Lord

Taking Responsibility for Our Sins

Although the people of Israel had a past that was filled with rebellion and sin, it was still redeemed by God's mercy.

On October 31st the people returned for another observance. This time they fasted and dressed in sackcloth and sprinkled dust on their heads.² Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners as they confessed their own sins and the sins of their ancestors.³ The Book of the Law of the LORD their God was read aloud to them for about three hours.⁴ Then for three more hours they took turns confessing their sins and worshiping the LORD their God. Nehemiah 9:1-3

The Power of the Cross

The death of Christ is our "propitiation". What is propitiation?

There are four important NT passages. Rom. 3:25, , tells of Christ Jesus "whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime." According to He. 2:17, , "it behooved him [Christ] in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." In 1 Jn. 2:22; 4:10, Christ is called "the propitiation for our sins." ***Each of these passages puts forward the thought that God's opposition to sin is more than token. His wrath is exercised toward those who sin. But in that situation Christ is the answer; He provides the means of averting the divine wrath.*** It is this that the NT writers have in mind when they speak of propitiation. And this is an element in Christianity that we dare not surrender.⁵

⁵Bromiley, G. W. 2001, c1979-1988. *The International standard Bible encyclopedia* (electronic edition.). Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids

Repentance Without Regret

God can heal our minds and hearts of our past failure and sin. It is a part of the grace he brings to us when we repent.

I—yes, I alone—am the one who blots out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again Isaiah 43:25

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. Romans 8:1-2

For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow. 2 Corinthians 7:10

A Clean Conscience

Christ can cleanse our conscience from the sins of our past in order that we might be free to serve the Lord!

Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow could cleanse people's bodies from ritual defilement. ¹⁴ Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our hearts from deeds that lead to death so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. ¹⁵ That is why he is the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, so that all who are invited can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant. Hebrews 9:13-16

A New Commitment to Holiness

As God rebuilds our lives, He prepares us to live before Him in holiness and character. He uses us to help rebuild other lives as well.

“So we promise together not to neglect the Temple of our God.”

For Reflection

- How does your heart respond to the above? Is this something you have already experienced, or is it something which you have desired for many years?
- What new commitments to holiness do you personally need to make in order to walk into the future filled with hope?
-

Appendix A¹

Abstract

This essay debunks the philosophy espoused by Gregory Boyd in his work: *God of the Possible*. It is also an attempt to clarify Boyd's fundamental doctrine and to examine the alternative views he discredits. His philosophy must certainly be dealt with in any current dialogue on the sovereignty of God and brings renewed importance to an age-old debate.

It was recently posed to me that the evangelical church in America has become overwhelmingly saturated with the doctrines of the reformation; namely, the tenet of God's foreknowledge. I would instead argue that the evangelical church of America is either unwilling to take a legitimate stance on the issue or is entirely unwilling to prescribe such authority to our God. Both views are troublesome, but a perspective dependent upon the *openness* of God is important to debunk. In essence, the debate on the foreknowledge of God delves into the essence of God's character and His ability to govern man.

Boyd argues in his book *God Of The Possible*:

By definition, one cannot change what is permanently fixed. Hence, every time the Bible teaches us that God changes his mind it is teaching us that God's mind is not permanently fixed. This directly contradicts the classical understanding of foreknowledge. It means that some of what God knows regarding the future consists of things that may go one way or another. He adjusts his plans—changes his mind—depending on what does or does not take place (Boyd 75).

Boyd's argument depends primarily on the philosophy that certain parts of the future are unknown to God—as He is dependent upon human choice to determine that end. More simply, God cannot know what will happen in certain instances until man acts in accordance to our free will. Boyd simplifies it by stating:

Prior to creation, God possessed 100 percent of all power...When the Trinity decided to express their love by bringing forth a creation; they invested each creature (angelic and human) with a certain percentage of their say-so (Boyd 97).

I find this tenet troubling in its most elementary form, and potentially heretical in its most advanced. For if the doctrine of God's foreknowledge is not accepted, one must then argue that God's redemptive plan for man in the perfect work of Jesus Christ was a reflexive response by God to the actions of Adam. If God created Adam without knowing that his fall would occur shortly thereafter; we must explain away the assurance Paul gives in Ephesians 1:4-5 that

*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will...*⁴

How could the God of openness know, prior to even His creation of man, that man would choose to sin thus necessitating a perfect sacrifice in Jesus Christ. Boyd's logic falls short on this point as he merely gives a superficial response to this passage. He never discusses the dilemma he creates by claiming God was unable to truly know Adam's choice at the tree, but was able to know that there would certainly be a need for the sacrifice of Christ.

Boyd examines and discusses several well-known passages of Scripture to defend his belief, and formulates a cogent argument in favor of the openness of God. However, in defending the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, one must merely interpret these passages differently than does Boyd. For example, Boyd claims that the most blatant example of God's openness or ability to change His mind rests in Jeremiah 18.

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it (vv. 7-10).

Boyd can certainly defend his position with a perfunctory reading of this passage. He asserts that God is not a "unilaterally controlling God," but rather a God that examines the actions of his people and graciously responds. Boyd maintains that God's willingness to *relent* shows his gracious nature, but also shows that He is uncertain as to the potential outcome in this situation.

“How can someone sincerely intend to do something they are certain they will never do? And how can they truly change their mind if their mind is eternally made up?” (Boyd 77).

However, I think the theologian can honestly interpret this text and yet continue to adhere to a classical view. Boyd claims that to do so, the classical theologian must state that Jeremiah was speaking anthropomorphically. The anthropomorphic argument is a valid one, however, I don't think that is the only way to examine this text, or the proper way. In fact, I don't think that this text, in any way, speaks to or discredits the foreknowledge of God. It instead purports God's gracefulness to His people.

I believe that throughout the pages of Scripture, God clearly responds and reacts to the situations and actions of His Creation. His Word provides us a detailed account of that which has pleased and displeased Him since Adam. That is what took place in Jeremiah 18. One can state with certainty that God is an emotive being and at times is either grieved or angry with His creation (Genesis 6:5-6; 1 Samuel 15:11). However, emotions do not necessitate ignorance.

Boyd asserts that God's relenting in Jeremiah 18 shows His uncertainty regarding what was to occur. God presents a statement to His people concerning their actions, not his knowledge of those actions. Boyd argues that since God presented two possibilities, He must therefore be uncertain as to which would occur. I would assert that God is merely speaking as He does throughout all of Scripture and stating what is pleasing to Him and what is displeasing. If the people are disobedient, He is of course going to be displeased with those actions and present a consequence to that disobedience. If those same people then repent of that action, God clearly would extend His grace. How does that in any way discredit His knowledge of their actions from the beginning to the end? It merely describes the grace of God and His willingness to promote repentance among His people.

If we are to accept Boyd's interpretation of Jeremiah 18 and others like it, we must extend the results throughout all of Scripture. We then look to passages such as Ephesians 1, which we looked at prior to this, and wonder how a God unknowing of the actions of His creation would have established a salvific plan for that creation prior to its inception.

If we refuse to accept a traditional interpretation of the text, and maintain that Boyd presents a cogent argument, where does that leave the church today? Simply stated, if God is not a wholly

omniscient God, does it affect His people? I believe God speaks to this issue Himself in the book of Isaiah as He equates His power and glory with the ability to know what is to come.

“Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable.” (Isaiah 41:22-24)

“Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. Declare what is to be, present it—let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.” (Isaiah 45:20-22)

Here, we clearly see God’s unwillingness to allow the idols to be equated with Him. “Declare to us the things to come,” he taunts. God knows that there are none that are able to determine that which has not yet happened except for Himself. He alone has the ability to predict the future. He alone has the audacity to claim complete knowledge of that is and all that will be, and He places His pronouncement as the only true God on this test of foreknowledge.

Another passage, and quite possibly the most powerful is also found in the book of Isaiah.

“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.” (Isaiah 46:9-10)

What joy there is to know that our God has the ability to “make known” what has not yet come to pass. Boyd might argue that these statements by God merely predict His own actions, but the text does

not make that distinction. Regardless, several of Boyd's own examples examine things that God will or will not do.

Although the Old Testament presents an infallible account of God's foreknowledge, perhaps the greatest proponent for an entirely omniscient God is Christ Himself. The gospel accounts ring with Christ's pronouncements of what was to come, and the gospel writers acknowledge His foreknowledge in several instances (Matthew 10:17-19; 16:21-23; 20:17-19; 26:21; 26:34; John 6:64; 13:19,21; 13:27-28; 13-36-38).

These are merely some of the instances given that show the gospel writers belief that Jesus had an ability to determine what things were to occur. Christ's declaration to Peter in regard to his betrayal is magnificent in the fact that it determines exactly how many times Peter will betray him and in a given frame of time. Jesus had a clear vision of every event that was to occur on that night. From his betrayal by Judas, to the little girl that confronted Peter causing him to deny, there was certainty in the mind of Christ.

Boyd speaks continually in his book about the comfort given by a God willing to change, and how an open view ties in comfortably with human experience. I however have found the exact opposite to be true in my life. I find great comfort in the knowledge that the God of perfect love has more than just a potential for my life. I find comfort that He knows perfectly the outcome of all that he has created and all that will ever be. I also find that fitting perfectly into the God I experience on a daily basis. My experience calls for more than merely fanciful hope on God's part; I find Him to be the active determination of all that is good and perfect in my life and in all of His creation.

Reviewed by:
Ben J. Helwig
The Chapel
Sandusky, OH

¹ Copyright ©1997-2001 Biblical Studies Press. This material is provided for personal study or for use in preparation of sermons, Sunday school classes, or other oral communication. This material may be quoted in written form but give credit where credit is due (author's name and web site address: www.bible.org). It may not be reprinted for commercial publication. It may be copied or reprinted for distribution as long as it is given away and no charge is made for copies, shipping or handling.

Appendix B

The Book of Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1:1 - 13:25

I These are the memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah.

Nehemiah's Concern for Jerusalem

In late autumn of the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. ² Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had survived the captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem. ³ They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been burned."

⁴ When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I said, "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unending love with those who love him and obey his commands, ⁶ listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! ⁷ We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, laws, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses.

⁸ "Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you sin, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹ But if you return to me and obey my commands, even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honored.'

¹⁰ "We are your servants, the people you rescued by your great power and might. ¹¹ O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you. Please grant me success now as I go to ask the king for a great favor. Put it into his heart to be kind to me."

In those days I was the king's cup-bearer.

Nehemiah Goes to Jerusalem

² Early the following spring, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never appeared sad in his presence before this time.

Early the following spring, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never appeared sad in his presence before this time.

² So the king asked me, "Why are you so sad? You aren't sick, are you? You look like a man with deep troubles."

Then I was badly frightened, ³ but I replied, "Long live the king! Why shouldn't I be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been burned down."

⁴ The king asked, "Well, how can I help you?"

With a prayer to the God of heaven, ⁵ I replied, "If it please Your Majesty and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried."

⁶ The king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked, "How long will you be gone? When will you return?" So the king agreed, and I set a date for my departure.

⁷ I also said to the king, "If it please Your Majesty, give me letters to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, instructing them to let me travel safely through their territories on my way to Judah. ⁸ And please send a letter to Asaph, the manager of the king's forest, instructing him to give me timber. I will need it to make beams for the gates of the Temple fortress, for the city walls, and for a house for myself." And the king granted these requests, because the gracious hand of God was on me.

⁹ When I came to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, I delivered the king's letters to them. The king, I should add, had sent along army officers and horsemen to protect me. ¹⁰ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of my arrival, they were very angry that someone had come who was interested in helping Israel.

Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem's Wall

¹¹ Three days after my arrival at Jerusalem, ¹² I slipped out during the night, taking only a few others with me. I had not told anyone about the plans God had put in my heart for Jerusalem. We took no pack animals with us, except the donkey that I myself was riding. ¹³ I went out through the Valley Gate, past the Jackal's Well, and over to the Dung Gate to inspect the broken walls and burned gates. ¹⁴ Then I went to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but my donkey couldn't get through the rubble. ¹⁵ So I went up the Kidron Valley instead, inspecting the wall before I turned back and entered again at the Valley Gate.

¹⁶ The city officials did not know I had been out there or what I was doing, for I had not yet said anything to anyone about my plans. I had not yet spoken to the religious and political leaders, the officials, or anyone else in the administration. ¹⁷ But now I said to them, "You

know full well the tragedy of our city. It lies in ruins, and its gates are burned. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and rid ourselves of this disgrace!"¹⁸ Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me, and about my conversation with the king.

They replied at once, "Good! Let's rebuild the wall!" So they began the good work.

¹⁹ But when Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab heard of our plan, they scoffed contemptuously. "What are you doing, rebelling against the king like this?" they asked.

²⁰ But I replied, "The God of heaven will help us succeed. We his servants will start rebuilding this wall. But you have no stake or claim in Jerusalem."

Rebuilding the Wall of Jerusalem

3 Then Eliashib the high priest and the other priests started to rebuild at the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set up its doors, building the wall as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and the Tower of Hananel.² People from the city of Jericho worked next to them, and beyond them was Zaccur son of Imri.

³ The Fish Gate was built by the sons of Hassenaah. They did the whole thing—laid the beams, hung the doors, and put the bolts and bars in place.⁴ Meremoth son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz repaired the next section of wall. Beside him were Meshullam son of Berekiah and grandson of Meshezabel, and then Zadok son of Baana.⁵ Next were the people from Tekoa, though their leaders refused to help.

⁶ The Old City Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid the beams, set up the doors, and installed the bolts and bars.⁷ Next to them were Melatiah from Gibeon, Jadon from Meronoth, and people from Gibeon and Mizpah, the headquarters of the governor of the province west of the Euphrates River.⁸ Next was Uzziel son of Harhaiah, a goldsmith by trade, who also worked on the wall. Beyond him was Hananiah, a manufacturer of perfumes. They left out a section of Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.

⁹ Rephaiah son of Hur, the leader of half the district of Jerusalem, was next to them on the wall.¹⁰ Next Jedaiah son of Harumaph repaired the wall beside his own house, and next to him was Hattush son of Hashabneiah.¹¹ Then came Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab, who repaired the Tower of the Ovens, in addition to another section of the wall.¹² Shallum son of Hallohesh and his daughters repaired the next section. He was the leader of the other half of the district of Jerusalem.

¹³ The people from Zanoah, led by Hanun, rebuilt the Valley Gate, hung its doors, and installed the bolts

and bars. They also repaired the fifteen hundred feet of wall to the Dung Gate.

¹⁴ The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Recab, the leader of the Beth-hakkerem district. After rebuilding it, he hung the doors and installed the bolts and bars.

¹⁵ Shallum son of Col-hozeh, the leader of the Mizpah district, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it, roofed it, hung its doors, and installed its bolts and bars. Then he repaired the wall of the pool of Siloam near the king's garden, and he rebuilt the wall as far as the stairs that descend from the City of David.¹⁶ Next to him was Nehemiah son of Azbuk, the leader of half the district of Beth-zur. He rebuilt the wall to a place opposite the royal cemetery as far as the water reservoir and the House of the Warriors.

¹⁷ Next was a group of Levites working under the supervision of Rehum son of Bani. Then came Hashabiah, the leader of half the district of Keilah, who supervised the building of the wall on behalf of his own district.¹⁸ Next down the line were his countrymen led by Binnui son of Henadad, the leader of the other half of the district of Keilah.

¹⁹ Next to them, Ezer son of Jeshua, the leader of Mizpah, repaired another section of wall opposite the armory by the buttress.²⁰ Next to him was Baruch son of Zabbai, who repaired an additional section from the buttress to the door of the home of Eliashib the high priest.²¹ Meremoth son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz rebuilt another section of the wall extending from a point opposite the door of Eliashib's house to the side of the house.

²² Then came the priests from the surrounding region.²³ After them, Benjamin, Hasshub, and Azariah son of Maaseiah and grandson of Ananiah repaired the sections next to their own houses.²⁴ Next was Binnui son of Henadad, who rebuilt another section of the wall from Azariah's house to the buttress and the corner.²⁵ Palal son of Uzai carried on the work from a point opposite the buttress and the corner to the upper tower that projects from the king's house beside the court of the guard. Next to him were Pedaiah son of Parosh²⁶ and the Temple servants living on the hill of Ophel, who repaired the wall as far as the Water Gate toward the east and the projecting tower.²⁷ Then came the people of Tekoa, who repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower and over to the wall of Ophel.

²⁸ The priests repaired the wall up the hill from the Horse Gate, each one doing the section immediately opposite his own house.²⁹ Next Zadok son of Immer also rebuilt the wall next to his own house, and beyond him was Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the gatekeeper of the East Gate.³⁰ Next Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section, while Meshullam son of Berekiah rebuilt the wall next to his own house.³¹ Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the wall as far as the housing for the Temple servants and merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate. Then he continued as far as the upper room at the corner.³² The other goldsmiths and merchants repaired the wall from that corner to the Sheep Gate.

Enemies Oppose the Rebuilding

4 Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuilding the wall. He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews,² saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers, “What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they are doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a day if they offer enough sacrifices? Look at those charred stones they are pulling out of the rubbish and using again!”

³ Tobiah the Ammonite, who was standing beside him, remarked, “That stone wall would collapse if even a fox walked along the top of it!”

⁴ Then I prayed, “Hear us, O our God, for we are being mocked. May their scoffing fall back on their own heads, and may they themselves become captives in a foreign land! ⁵ Do not ignore their guilt. Do not blot out their sins, for they have provoked you to anger here in the presence of the builders.”

⁶ At last the wall was completed to half its original height around the entire city, for the people had worked very hard. ⁷ But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the work was going ahead and that the gaps in the wall were being repaired, they became furious. ⁸ They all made plans to come and fight against Jerusalem and to bring about confusion there. ⁹ But we prayed to our God and guarded the city day and night to protect ourselves.

¹⁰ Then the people of Judah began to complain that the workers were becoming tired. There was so much rubble to be moved that we could never get it done by ourselves. ¹¹ Meanwhile, our enemies were saying, “Before they know what’s happening, we will swoop down on them and kill them and end their work.”

¹² The Jews who lived near the enemy came and told us again and again, “They will come from all directions and attack us!” ¹³ So I placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas. I stationed the people to stand guard by families, armed with swords, spears, and bows.

¹⁴ Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the leaders and the people and said to them, “Don’t be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your friends, your families, and your homes!”

¹⁵ When our enemies heard that we knew of their plans and that God had frustrated them, we all returned to our work on the wall. ¹⁶ But from then on, only half my men worked while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. The officers stationed themselves behind the people of Judah ¹⁷ who were building the wall. The common laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon. ¹⁸ All the builders had a sword

belted to their side. The trumpeter stayed with me to sound the alarm.

¹⁹ Then I explained to the nobles and officials and all the people, “The work is very spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. ²⁰ When you hear the blast of the trumpet, rush to wherever it is sounding. Then our God will fight for us!”

²¹ We worked early and late, from sunrise to sunset. And half the men were always on guard. ²² I also told everyone living outside the walls to move into Jerusalem. That way they and their servants could go on guard duty at night as well as work during the day. ²³ During this time, none of us—not I, nor my relatives, nor my servants, nor the guards who were with me—ever took off our clothes. We carried our weapons with us at all times, even when we went for water.

Nehemiah Defends the Oppressed

Nehemiah 5

About this time some of the men and their wives raised a cry of protest against their fellow Jews. ² They were saying, “We have such large families. We need more money just so we can buy the food we need to survive.” ³ Others said, “We have mortgaged our fields, vineyards, and homes to get food during the famine.” ⁴ And others said, “We have already borrowed to the limit on our fields and vineyards to pay our taxes. ⁵ We belong to the same family, and our children are just like theirs. Yet we must sell our children into slavery just to get enough money to live. We have already sold some of our daughters, and we are helpless to do anything about it, for our fields and vineyards are already mortgaged to others.”

⁶ When I heard their complaints, I was very angry. ⁷ After thinking about the situation, I spoke out against these nobles and officials. I told them, “You are oppressing your own relatives by charging them interest when they borrow money!” Then I called a public meeting to deal with the problem.

⁸ At the meeting I said to them, “The rest of us are doing all we can to redeem our Jewish relatives who have had to sell themselves to pagan foreigners, but you are selling them back into slavery again. How often must we redeem them?” And they had nothing to say in their defense.

⁹ Then I pressed further, “What you are doing is not right! Should you not walk in the fear of our God in order to avoid being mocked by enemy nations? ¹⁰ I myself, as well as my brothers and my workers, have been lending the people money and grain, but now let us stop this business of loans. ¹¹ You must restore their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and homes to them this very

day. Repay the interest you charged on their money, grain, wine, and olive oil.”

¹² Then they replied, “We will give back everything and demand nothing more from the people. We will do as you say.” Then I called the priests and made the nobles and officials formally vow to do what they had promised.

¹³ I shook out the fold of my robe and said, “If you fail to keep your promise, may God shake you from your homes and from your property!”

The whole assembly responded, “Amen,” and they praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

¹⁴ I would like to mention that for the entire twelve years that I was governor of Judah—from the twentieth until the thirty-second year of the reign of King Artaxerxes—neither I nor my officials drew on our official food allowance. ¹⁵ This was quite a contrast to the former governors who had laid heavy burdens on the people, demanding a daily ration of food and wine, besides a pound of silver. Even their assistants took advantage of the people. But because of my fear of God, I did not act that way. ¹⁶ I devoted myself to working on the wall and refused to acquire any land. And I required all my officials to spend time working on the wall. ¹⁷ I asked for nothing, even though I regularly fed 150 Jewish officials at my table, besides all the visitors from other lands! ¹⁸ The provisions required at my expense for each day were one ox, six fat sheep, and a large number of domestic fowl. And every ten days we needed a large supply of all kinds of wine. Yet I refused to claim the governor’s food allowance because the people were already having a difficult time.

¹⁹ Remember, O my God, all that I have done for these people, and bless me for it.

Continued Opposition to Rebuilding

6 When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies found out that I had finished rebuilding the wall and that no gaps remained—though we had not yet hung the doors in the gates—² Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message asking me to meet them at one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But I realized they were plotting to harm me, ³ so I replied by sending this message to them: “I am doing a great work! I cannot stop to come and meet with you.”

⁴ Four times they sent the same message, and each time I gave the same reply. ⁵ The fifth time, Sanballat’s servant came with an open letter in his hand, ⁶ and this is what it said:

“Geshem tells me that everywhere he goes he hears that you and the Jews are planning to rebel and that is why you are building the wall. According to his

reports, you plan to be their king. ⁷ He also reports that you have appointed prophets to prophesy about you in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Look! There is a king in Judah!’

“You can be very sure that this report will get back to the king, so I suggest that you come and talk it over with me.”

⁸ My reply was, “You know you are lying. There is no truth in any part of your story.” ⁹ They were just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could break our resolve and stop the work. So I prayed for strength to continue the work.

¹⁰ Later I went to visit Shemaiah son of Delaiah and grandson of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home. He said, “Let us meet together inside the Temple of God and bolt the doors shut. Your enemies are coming to kill you tonight.”

¹¹ But I replied, “Should someone in my position run away from danger? Should someone in my position enter the Temple to save his life? No, I won’t do it!” ¹² I realized that God had not spoken to him, but that he had uttered this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ They were hoping to intimidate me and make me sin by following his suggestion. Then they would be able to accuse and discredit me.

¹⁴ Remember, O my God, all the evil things that Tobiah and Sanballat have done. And remember Noadiah the prophet and all the prophets like her who have tried to intimidate me.

The Builders Complete the Wall

¹⁵ So on October 2 the wall was finally finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. ¹⁶ When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

¹⁷ During those fifty-two days, many letters went back and forth between Tobiah and the officials of Judah. ¹⁸ For many in Judah had sworn allegiance to him because his father-in-law was Shecaniah son of Arah and because his son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. ¹⁹ They kept telling me what a wonderful man Tobiah was, and then they told him everything I said. And Tobiah sent many threatening letters to intimidate me.

7 After the wall was finished and I had hung the doors in the gates, the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites were appointed. ² I gave the responsibility of governing Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah, the commander of the fortress, for he was a faithful man who feared God more than most. ³ I said to them, “Do not leave the gates open during the hottest part of the

day. And while the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut and bar the doors. Appoint the residents of Jerusalem to act as guards, everyone on a regular watch. Some will serve at their regular posts and some in front of their own homes.”

Nehemiah Registers the People

⁴ At that time the city was large and spacious, but the population was small. And only a few houses were scattered throughout the city. ⁵ So my God gave me the idea to call together all the leaders of the city, along with the ordinary citizens, for registration. I had found the genealogical record of those who had first returned to Judah. This is what was written there:

⁶ “Here is the list of the Jewish exiles of the provinces who returned from their captivity to Jerusalem and to the other towns of Judah. They had been deported to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. ⁷ Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. This is the number of men of Israel who returned from exile:

⁸ The family of Parosh	2,172
⁹ The family of Shephatiah	372
¹⁰ The family of Arah	652
¹¹ The family of Pahath-moab (descendants of Jeshua and Joab)	2,818
¹² The family of Elam	1,254
¹³ The family of Zattu	845
¹⁴ The family of Zaccai	760
¹⁵ The family of Bani	648
¹⁶ The family of Bebai	628
¹⁷ The family of Azgad	2,322
¹⁸ The family of Adonikam	667
¹⁹ The family of Bigvai	2,067
²⁰ The family of Adin	655
²¹ The family of Ater (descendants of Hezekiah)	98
²² The family of Hashum	328
²³ The family of Bezai	324
²⁴ The family of Jorah	112
²⁵ The family of Gibbar	95
²⁶ The peoples of Bethlehem and Netophah	188
²⁷ The people of Anathoth	128
²⁸ The people of Beth-azmaveth	42
²⁹ The peoples of Kiriath-jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth	743
³⁰ The peoples of Ramah and Geba	621
³¹ The people of Micmash	122
³² The peoples of Bethel and	123

Ai	
³³ The people of Nebo	52
³⁴ The citizens of Elam	1,254
³⁵ The citizens of Harim	320
³⁶ The citizens of Jericho	345
³⁷ The citizens of Lod, Hadid, and Ono	721
³⁸ The citizens of Senaah	3,930

³⁹ “These are the priests who returned from exile:

The family of Jedaiah (through the line of Jeshua)	973
⁴⁰ The family of Immer	1,052
⁴¹ The family of Pashhur	1,247
⁴² The family of Harim	1,017

⁴³ “These are the Levites who returned from exile:

The families of Jeshua and Kadmiel (descendants of Hodaviah)	74
⁴⁴ The singers of the family of Asaph	148
⁴⁵ The gatekeepers of the families of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai	138

⁴⁶ “The descendants of the following Temple servants returned from exile:

Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth,	
⁴⁷ Keros, Siaha, Padon,	
⁴⁸ Lebanah, Hagabah, Shalmal,	
⁴⁹ Hanan, Giddel, Gahar,	
⁵⁰ Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda,	
⁵¹ Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah,	
⁵² Besai, Meunim, Nephusim,	
⁵³ Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur,	
⁵⁴ Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha,	
⁵⁵ Barkos, Sisera, Temah,	
⁵⁶ Neziah, and Hatipha.	

⁵⁷ “The descendants of these servants of King Solomon returned from exile:

Sotai, Sophereth, Peruda,

⁵⁸ Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel,

⁵⁹ Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-hazzebaim, and Ami.

⁶⁰ “In all, the Temple servants and the descendants of Solomon’s servants numbered 392.

⁶¹ “Another group returned to Jerusalem at this time from the towns of Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer. However, they could not prove that they or their families were descendants of Israel. ⁶² This group included the families of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—a total of 642 people.

⁶³ “Three families of priests—Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai—also returned to Jerusalem. (This Barzillai had married a woman who was a descendant of Barzillai of Gilead, and he had taken her family name.) ⁶⁴ But they had lost their genealogical records, so they were not allowed to serve as priests. ⁶⁵ The governor would not even let them eat the priests’ share of food from the sacrifices until there was a priest who could consult the LORD about the matter by means of sacred lots.

⁶⁶ “So a total of 42,360 people returned to Judah, ⁶⁷ in addition to 7,337 servants and 245 singers, both men and women. ⁶⁸ They took with them 736 horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁹ 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

⁷⁰ “Some of the family leaders gave gifts for the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold coins, 50 gold basins, and 530 robes for the priests. ⁷¹ The other leaders gave to the treasury a total of 20,000 gold coins and some 2,750 pounds of silver for the work. ⁷² The rest of the people gave 20,000 gold coins, about 2,500 pounds of silver, and 67 robes for the priests.

⁷³ “So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Temple servants, along with some of the people—that is to say, all Israel—settled in their own towns.”

Ezra Reads the Law

Now in midautumn, when the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled together as one person at the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey.

8 So on October 8 Ezra the priest brought the scroll of the law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. ³ He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people paid

close attention to the Book of the Law. ⁴ Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform that had been made for the occasion. To his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah. To his left stood Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. ⁵ Ezra stood on the platform in full view of all the people. When they saw him open the book, they all rose to their feet.

⁶ Then Ezra praised the LORD, the great God, and all the people chanted, “Amen! Amen!” as they lifted their hands toward heaven. Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

⁷ Now the Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah—instructed the people who were standing there. ⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage. ⁹ Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were interpreting for the people said to them, “Don’t weep on such a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the LORD your God.” All the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the law.

¹⁰ And Nehemiah continued, “Go and celebrate with a feast of choice foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don’t be dejected and sad, for the joy of the LORD is your strength!”

¹¹ And the Levites, too, quieted the people, telling them, “Hush! Don’t weep! For this is a sacred day.” ¹² So the people went away to eat and drink at a festive meal, to share gifts of food, and to celebrate with great joy because they had heard God’s words and understood them.

The Festival of Shelters

¹³ On October 9 the family leaders and the priests and Levites met with Ezra to go over the law in greater detail. ¹⁴ As they studied the law, they discovered that the LORD had commanded through Moses that the Israelites should live in shelters during the festival to be held that month. ¹⁵ He had said that a proclamation should be made throughout their towns and especially in Jerusalem, telling the people to go to the hills to get branches from olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and fig trees. They were to use these branches to make shelters in which they would live during the festival, as it was prescribed in the law.

¹⁶ So the people went out and cut branches and used them to build shelters on the roofs of their houses, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of God’s Temple, or in the squares just inside the Water Gate and the Ephraim Gate. ¹⁷ So everyone who had returned from captivity lived in these shelters for the seven days of the festival, and everyone was filled with great joy! The Israelites had

not celebrated this way since the days of Joshua son of Nun.¹⁸ Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God on each of the seven days of the festival. Then on October 15 they held a solemn assembly, as the law of Moses required.

The People Confess Their Sins

9 On October 31 the people returned for another observance. This time they fasted and dressed in sackcloth and sprinkled dust on their heads.² Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners as they confessed their own sins and the sins of their ancestors.³ The Book of the Law of the LORD their God was read aloud to them for about three hours. Then for three more hours they took turns confessing their sins and worshipping the LORD their God.⁴ Some of the Levites were standing on the stairs, crying out to the LORD their God. Their names were Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Kenani.

⁵ Then the leaders of the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah—called out to the people: “Stand up and praise the LORD your God, for he lives from everlasting to everlasting!”

Then they continued, “Praise his glorious name! It is far greater than we can think or say.⁶ You alone are the LORD. You made the skies and the heavens and all the stars. You made the earth and the seas and everything in them. You preserve and give life to everything, and all the angels of heaven worship you.

⁷ “You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him from Ur of the Chaldeans and renamed him Abraham.⁸ When he had proved himself faithful, you made a covenant with him to give him and his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Girgashites. And you have done what you promised, for you are always true to your word.

⁹ “You saw the sufferings and sorrows of our ancestors in Egypt, and you heard their cries from beside the Red Sea.¹⁰ You displayed miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, his servants, and all his people, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians were treating them. You have a glorious reputation that has never been forgotten.¹¹ You divided the sea for your people so they could walk through on dry land! And then you hurled their enemies into the depths of the sea. They sank like stones beneath the mighty waters.¹² You led our ancestors by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night so that they could find their way.

¹³ “You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and instructions that were just, and laws and commands that were true.¹⁴ You instructed them concerning the laws of

your holy Sabbath. And you commanded them, through Moses your servant, to obey all your commands, laws, and instructions.

¹⁵ “You gave them bread from heaven when they were hungry and water from the rock when they were thirsty. You commanded them to go and take possession of the land you had sworn to give them.¹⁶ But our ancestors were a proud and stubborn lot, and they refused to obey your commands.

¹⁷ “They refused to listen and did not remember the miracles you had done for them. Instead, they rebelled and appointed a leader to take them back to their slavery in Egypt! But you are a God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to become angry, and full of unfailing love and mercy. You did not abandon them,¹⁸ even though they made an idol shaped like a calf and said, ‘This is your god who brought you out of Egypt!’ They sinned and committed terrible blasphemies.¹⁹ But in your great mercy you did not abandon them to die in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud still led them forward by day, and the pillar of fire showed them the way through the night.²⁰ You sent your good Spirit to instruct them, and you did not stop giving them bread from heaven or water for their thirst.²¹ For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness. They lacked nothing in all that time. Their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell!

²² “Then you helped our ancestors conquer great kingdoms and many nations, and you placed your people in every corner of the land. They completely took over the land of King Sihon of Heshbon and the land of King Og of Bashan.²³ You made their descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and brought them into the land you had promised to their ancestors.²⁴ They went in and took possession of the land. You subdued whole nations before them. Even the kings and the Canaanites, who inhabited the land, were powerless! Your people could deal with them as they pleased.²⁵ Our ancestors captured fortified cities and fertile land. They took over houses full of good things, with cisterns already dug and vineyards and olive groves and orchards in abundance. So they ate until they were full and grew fat and enjoyed themselves in all your blessings.

²⁶ “But despite all this, they were disobedient and rebelled against you. They threw away your law, they killed the prophets who encouraged them to return to you, and they committed terrible blasphemies.²⁷ So you handed them over to their enemies. But in their time of trouble they cried to you, and you heard them from heaven. In great mercy, you sent them deliverers who rescued them from their enemies.

²⁸ “But when all was going well, your people turned to sin again, and once more you let their enemies conquer them. Yet whenever your people cried to you again for help, you listened once more from heaven. In your wonderful mercy, you rescued them repeatedly!²⁹ You warned them to return to your law, but they became proud and obstinate and disobeyed your commands. They did not follow your regulations, by which people will find life if only they obey. They stubbornly turned their backs on you and refused to listen.³⁰ In your love, you were patient with them for many years. You sent your Spirit, who, through the prophets, warned them

about their sins. But still they wouldn't listen! So once again you allowed the pagan inhabitants of the land to conquer them.³¹ But in your great mercy, you did not destroy them completely or abandon them forever. What a gracious and merciful God you are!

³² "And now, our God, the great and mighty and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of unfailing love, do not let all the hardships we have suffered be as nothing to you. Great trouble has come upon us and upon our kings and princes and priests and prophets and ancestors from the days when the kings of Assyria first triumphed over us until now.³³ Every time you punished us you were being just. We have sinned greatly, and you gave us only what we deserved.³⁴ Our kings, princes, priests, and ancestors did not obey your law or listen to your commands and solemn warnings.³⁵ Even while they had their own kingdom, they did not serve you even though you showered your goodness on them. You gave them a large, fertile land, but they refused to turn from their wickedness.

³⁶ "So now today we are slaves here in the land of plenty that you gave to our ancestors! We are slaves among all this abundance!³⁷ The lush produce of this land piles up in the hands of the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They have power over us and our cattle. We serve them at their pleasure, and we are in great misery.

³⁸ "Yet in spite of all this, we are making a solemn promise and putting it in writing. On this sealed document are the names of our princes and Levites and priests."

The People Agree to Obey

10 The document was ratified and sealed with the following names:

Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah.

The priests who signed were Zedekiah,² Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,³ Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah,⁴ Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,⁵ Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,⁶ Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,⁷ Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,⁸ Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These were the priests.

⁹ The Levites who signed were Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui from the family of Henadad, Kadmiel,¹⁰ and their fellow Levites: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,¹¹ Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,¹² Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,¹³ Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

¹⁴ The leaders who signed were Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,¹⁵ Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,¹⁶ Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,¹⁷ Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,¹⁸ Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,¹⁹ Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,²⁰ Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,²¹ Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,²² Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,²³ Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,²⁴ Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,²⁵ Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,²⁶ Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,²⁷ Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

²⁸ The rest of the people—the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, Temple servants, and all who had separated themselves from the pagan people of the land in order to serve God, and who were old enough to understand—²⁹ now all heartily bound themselves with an oath. They vowed to accept the curse of God if they failed to obey the law of God as issued by his servant Moses. They solemnly promised to carefully follow all the commands, laws, and regulations of the LORD their Lord.

The Vow of the People

³⁰ "We promise not to let our daughters marry the pagan people of the land, nor to let our sons marry their daughters.³¹ We further promise that if the people of the land should bring any merchandise or grain to be sold on the Sabbath or on any other holy day, we will refuse to buy it. And we promise not to do any work every seventh year and to cancel the debts owed to us by other Jews.

³² "In addition, we promise to obey the command to pay the annual Temple tax of an eighth of an ounce of silver, so that there will be enough money to care for the Temple of our God.³³ This will provide for the Bread of the Presence; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, the new moon celebrations, and the annual festivals; for the holy offerings; and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel. It will also provide for the other items necessary for the work of the Temple of our God.

³⁴ "We have cast sacred lots to determine when—at regular times each year—the families of the priests, Levites, and the common people should bring wood to God's Temple to be burned on the altar of the LORD our God, as required in the law.

³⁵ "We promise always to bring the first part of every harvest to the LORD's Temple—whether it be a crop from the soil or from our fruit trees.³⁶ We agree to give to God our oldest sons and the firstborn of all our herds and flocks, just as the law requires. We will present them to the priests who minister in the Temple of our God.³⁷ We will store the produce in the storerooms of the Temple of our God. We will bring the best of our flour and other grain offerings, the best of our fruit, and the best of our new wine and olive oil. And we promise to bring to the Levites a tenth of everything our land produces, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our rural towns.³⁸ A priest—a descendant of Aaron—will be with the Levites as they receive these tithes. And a tenth of all that is collected as tithes will be delivered by the Levites to the Temple of our God and placed in the storerooms.³⁹ The people and the Levites must bring these offerings of grain, new wine, and olive oil to the Temple and place them in the sacred containers near the ministering priests, the gatekeepers, and the singers.

"So we promise together not to neglect the Temple of our God."

The People Occupy Jerusalem

11 Now the leaders of the people were living in Jerusalem, the holy city, at this time. A tenth of the people from the other towns of Judah and Benjamin were chosen by sacred lots to live there, too, while the rest stayed where they were.² And the people commended everyone who volunteered to resettle in Jerusalem.

³ Here is a list of the names of the provincial officials who came to Jerusalem. Most of the people, priests, Levites, Temple servants, and descendants of Solomon's servants continued to live in their own homes in the various towns of Judah,⁴ but some of the people from Judah and Benjamin resettled in Jerusalem.

From the tribe of Judah: Athaiah son of Uzziah, son of Zechariah, son of Amariah, son of Shephatiah, son of Mahalalel, of the family of Perez;⁵ and Maaseiah son of Baruch, son of Col-hozeh, son of Hazaiah, son of Adaiah, son of Joarib, son of Zechariah, of the family of Shelah.⁶ There were also 468 descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem—all outstanding men.

⁷ From the tribe of Benjamin: Sallu son of Meshullam, son of Joed, son of Pedaiah, son of Kolaiah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, son of Jeshaiiah;⁸ and after him there were Gabbai and Sallai, and a total of 928 relatives.⁹ Their chief officer was Joel son of Zicri, who was assisted by Judah son of Hassenuah, second-in-command over the city.

¹⁰ From the priests: Jedaiah son of Joarib; Jakin;¹¹ and Seraiah son of Hilkiyah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, the supervisor of the Temple of God;¹² together with 822 of their associates, who worked at the Temple. Also, there was Adaiah son of Jeroham, son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, son of Malkijah;¹³ and 242 of his associates, who were heads of their families. There were also Amashsai son of Azarel, son of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, son of Immer;¹⁴ and 128 of his outstanding associates. Their chief officer was Zabdiel son of Haggadolim.

¹⁵ From the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni;¹⁶ Shabbethai and Jozabad, who were in charge of the work outside the Temple of God;¹⁷ Mattaniah son of Mica, son of Zabdi, a descendant of Asaph, who opened the thanksgiving services with prayer; Bakbukiah, who was Mattaniah's assistant; and Abda son of Shammua, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun.¹⁸ In all, there were 284 Levites in the holy city.

¹⁹ From the gatekeepers: Akkub, Talmon, and 172 of their associates, who guarded the gates.

²⁰ The other priests, Levites, and the rest of the Israelites lived wherever their family inheritance was located in any of the towns of Judah.²¹ However, the Temple servants, whose leaders were Ziha and Gishpa, all lived on the hill of Ophel.

²² The chief officer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, son of Hashabiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Mica, a descendant of Asaph, whose family served as singers at God's Temple.²³ They were under royal orders, which determined their daily activities.

²⁴ Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, a descendant of Zerah son of Judah, was the king's agent in all matters of public administration.

²⁵ Some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath-arba with its villages, Dibon with its villages, and Jekabzeel with its villages.²⁶ They also lived in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth-pelet,²⁷ Hazar-shual, Beersheba with its villages,²⁸ Ziklag, and Meconah with its villages.²⁹ They were also in En-rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth,³⁰ Zanoah, and Adullam with their villages. They were also in Lachish and its nearby fields and Azekah with its surrounding villages. So the people of Judah were living all the way from Beersheba to the valley of Hinnom.

³¹ Some of the people of Benjamin lived at Geba, Micmash, Aija, and Bethel with its surrounding villages.³² They were also in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah,³³ Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim,³⁴ Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat,³⁵ Lod, Ono, and the Valley of Craftsmen.³⁶ Some of the Levites who lived in Judah were sent to live with the tribe of Benjamin.

A History of the Priests and Levites

12 Here is the list of the priests and Levites who had returned with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the high priest:

- Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,
- ² Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,
- ³ Shecaniah, Harim, Meremoth,
- ⁴ Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah,
- ⁵ Miniamin, Moadiah, Bilgah,
- ⁶ Shemaiah, Joarib, Jedaiah,
- ⁷ Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, and Jedaiah.

These were the leaders of the priests and their associates in the days of Jeshua.

⁸ The Levites who had returned with them were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who with his associates was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving.⁹ Their associates, Bakbukiah and Unni, stood opposite them during the service.

¹⁰ Jeshua the high priest was the father of Joiakim.

Joiakim was the father of Eliashib.

Eliashib was the father of Joiada.

¹¹ Joiada was the father of Johanan.

Johanan was the father of Jaddua.

¹² Now when Joiakim was high priest, the family leaders of the priests were as follows:

Meraiah was leader of the family of Seraiah.

Hananiah was leader of the family of Jeremiah.

¹³ Meshullam was leader of the family of Ezra.

Jehohanan was leader of the family of Amariah.

¹⁴ Jonathan was leader of the family of Malluch.

Joseph was leader of the family of Shecaniah.

¹⁵ Adna was leader of the family of Harim.

Helkai was leader of the family of Meremoth.

¹⁶ Zechariah was leader of the family of Iddo.

Meshullam was leader of the family of Ginnethon.

¹⁷ Zicri was leader of the family of Abijah.

There was also a leader of the family of Miniamin.

Piltai was leader of the family of Moadiah.

¹⁸ Shammua was leader of the family of Bilgah.

Jehonathan was leader of the family of Shemaiah.

¹⁹ Mattenai was leader of the family of Joarib.

Uzzi was leader of the family of Jedaiah.

²⁰ Kallai was leader of the family of Sallu.

Eber was leader of the family of Amok.

²¹ Hashabiah was leader of the family of Hilkiah.

Nethanel was leader of the family of Jedaiah.

²² During the reign of Darius II of Persia, a list was compiled of the family leaders of the Levites and the priests in the days of the following high priests: Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua. ²³ The heads of the Levite

families were recorded in *The Book of History* down to the days of Johanan, the grandson of Eliashib.

²⁴ These were the family leaders of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, and other associates, who stood opposite them during the ceremonies of praise and thanksgiving, one section responding to the other, just as commanded by David, the man of God. ²⁵ This included Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, and Obadiah.

Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were the gatekeepers in charge of the storerooms at the gates. ²⁶ These all served in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, son of Jehozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest and scribe.

Dedication of Jerusalem's Wall

²⁷ During the dedication of the new wall of Jerusalem, the Levites throughout the land were asked to come to Jerusalem to assist in the ceremonies. They were to take part in the joyous occasion with their songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, lyres, and harps. ²⁸ The singers were brought together from Jerusalem and its surrounding villages and from the villages of the Netophathites. ²⁹ They also came from Beth-gilgal and the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built their own villages around Jerusalem. ³⁰ The priests and Levites first dedicated themselves, then the people, the gates, and the wall.

³¹ I led the leaders of Judah to the top of the wall and organized two large choirs to give thanks. One of the choirs proceeded southward along the top of the wall to the Dung Gate. ³² Hoshaiiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them, ³³ along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, ³⁴ Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, ³⁵ and some priests who played trumpets. Then came Zechariah son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, a descendant of Asaph. ³⁶ And finally came Zechariah's colleagues Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani. They used the musical instruments prescribed by David, the man of God. Ezra the scribe led this procession. ³⁷ At the Fountain Gate they went straight up the steps on the ascent of the city wall toward the City of David. They passed the house of David and then proceeded to the Water Gate on the east.

³⁸ The second choir went northward around the other way to meet them. I followed them, with the other half of the people, along the top of the wall past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, ³⁹ then past the Ephraim Gate to the Old City Gate, past the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel, and went on to the Tower of the Hundred. Then we continued on to the Sheep Gate and stopped at the Guard Gate.

⁴⁰ The two choirs that were giving thanks then proceeded to the Temple of God, where they took their places. So did I, together with the group of leaders who were with me. ⁴¹ We went together with the trumpet-playing priests—Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah—⁴² and the singers—Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam, and Ezer. They played and sang loudly

and clearly under the direction of Jezrahiah the choir director.

⁴³ Many sacrifices were offered on that joyous day, for God had given the people cause for great joy. The women and children also participated in the celebration, and the joy of the people of Jerusalem could be heard far away.

Provisions for Temple Worship

⁴⁴ On that day men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the gifts, the first part of the harvest, and the tithes. They were responsible to collect these from the fields as required by the law for the priests and Levites, for all the people of Judah valued the priests and Levites and their work. ⁴⁵ They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as required by the laws of David and his son Solomon, and so did the singers and the gatekeepers. ⁴⁶ The custom of having choir directors to lead the choirs in hymns of praise and thanks to God began long ago in the days of David and Asaph. ⁴⁷ So now, in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, the people brought a daily supply of food for the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Levites. The Levites, in turn, gave a portion of what they received to the priests, the descendants of Aaron.

Nehemiah's Various Reforms

¹³ On that same day, as the Book of Moses was being read, the people found a statement which said that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be permitted to enter the assembly of God. ² For they had not been friendly to the Israelites when they left Egypt. Instead, they hired Balaam to curse them, though our God turned the curse into a blessing. ³ When this law was read, all those of mixed ancestry were immediately expelled from the assembly.

⁴ Before this had happened, Eliashib the priest, who had been appointed as supervisor of the storerooms of the Temple of our God and who was also a relative of Tobiah, ⁵ had converted a large storage room and placed it at Tobiah's disposal. The room had previously been used for storing the grain offerings, frankincense, Temple utensils, and tithes of grain, new wine, olive oil, and the special portion set aside for the priests. Moses had decreed that these offerings belonged to the Levites, the singers, and the gatekeepers.

⁶ I was not in Jerusalem at that time, for I had returned to the king in the thirty-second year of the reign of King Artaxerxes of Babylon, though I later received his permission to return. ⁷ When I arrived back in Jerusalem and learned the extent of this evil deed of Eliashib—that he had provided Tobiah with a room in the courtyards of the Temple of God—⁸ I became very upset and threw all of Tobiah's belongings from the room. ⁹ Then I demanded that the rooms be purified, and I brought back the utensils for God's Temple, the grain offerings, and the frankincense.

¹⁰ I also discovered that the Levites had not been given what was due them, so they and the singers who were to conduct the worship services had all returned to work their fields. ¹¹ I immediately confronted the leaders and demanded, "Why has the Temple of God been neglected?" Then I called all the Levites back again and restored them to their proper duties. ¹² And once more all the people of Judah began bringing their tithes of grain, new wine, and olive oil to the Temple storerooms.

¹³ I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah, one of the Levites, in charge of the storerooms. And I appointed Hanan son of Zaccur and grandson of Mattaniah as their assistant. These men had an excellent reputation, and it was their job to make honest distributions to their fellow Levites.

¹⁴ Remember this good deed, O my God, and do not forget all that I have faithfully done for the Temple of my God.

¹⁵ One Sabbath day I saw some men of Judah treading their winepresses. They were also bringing in bundles of grain and loading them on their donkeys. And on that day they were bringing their wine, grapes, figs, and all sorts of produce to Jerusalem to sell. So I rebuked them for selling their produce on the Sabbath. ¹⁶ There were also some men from Tyre bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise. They were selling it on the Sabbath to the people of Judah—and in Jerusalem at that!

¹⁷ So I confronted the leaders of Judah, "Why are you profaning the Sabbath in this evil way? ¹⁸ Wasn't it enough that your ancestors did this sort of thing, so that our God brought the present troubles upon us and our city? Now you are bringing even more wrath upon the people of Israel by permitting the Sabbath to be desecrated in this way!" ¹⁹ So I commanded that from then on the gates of the city should be shut as darkness fell every Friday evening, not to be opened until the Sabbath ended. I also sent some of my own servants to guard the gates so that no merchandise could be brought in on the Sabbath day. ²⁰ The merchants and tradesmen with a variety of wares camped outside Jerusalem once or twice. ²¹ But I spoke sharply to them and said, "What are you doing out here, camping around the wall? If you do this again, I will arrest you!" And that was the last time they came on the Sabbath. ²² Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and to guard the gates in order to preserve the holiness of the Sabbath.

Remember this good deed also, O my God! Have compassion on me according to your great and unending love.

²³ About the same time I realized that some of the men of Judah had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. ²⁴ Even worse, half their children spoke in the language of Ashdod or some other people and could not speak the language of Judah at all. ²⁵ So I confronted them and called down curses on them. I beat some of them and pulled out their hair. I made them swear before God that they would not let their children intermarry with the pagan people of the land.

²⁶ “Wasn’t this exactly what led King Solomon of Israel into sin?” I demanded. “There was no king from any nation who could compare to him, and God loved him and made him king over all Israel. But even he was led into sin by his foreign wives. ²⁷ How could you even think of committing this sinful deed and acting unfaithfully toward God by marrying foreign women?”

²⁸ One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest had married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, so I banished him from my presence.

²⁹ Remember them, O my God, for they have defiled the priesthood and the promises and vows of the priests and Levites.

³⁰ So I purged out everything foreign and assigned tasks to the priests and Levites, making certain that each knew his work. ³¹ I also made sure that the supply of wood for the altar was brought at the proper times and that the first part of the harvest was collected for the priests.

Remember this in my favor, O my God.