



Nehemiah 1-3

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Tape #7149
By Chuck Smith

Fourteen years after Ezra returned to Jerusalem the brother of Nehemiah, for some reason, went to visit Jerusalem and as he returned, Nehemiah got from him his impressions of what was going on at Jerusalem. The first chapter of Nehemiah actually takes place about nine years after the close of the book of Ezra. Ezra closes in about 457bc and then the book of Nehemiah picks up in about 446 BC, the month of December.

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month of Chisleu, [which is the month of December] in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan [Susa or Shushan the ancient capital of Persia] the palace, That Hanani, one of my brethren [brothers] came, [and he was an actual brother to Nehemiah according to chapter 7] he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, and were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem (1:1-2).

Nehemiah was a patriot. He was interested in God's people, he was interested in the restoration of the people to Israel he was interested in what was happening there in Jerusalem. And so his brother Hanani and these other fellows, having returned, he begins to question them concerning these very things.

And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven (1:3-4).

So Nehemiah, upon hearing of the conditions, the people are demoralized, they are in great affliction. The reason why they were being afflicted and in great reproach is because the city was just a rubble. They did not have any defenses, the walls being broken down. The people that lived in the area round about could send little sorties or forays against them and plunder them and it was just very demoralizing. They told of just the sad condition of the people and of the city itself and its affect upon Nehemiah. To show how true a patriot the man was, when he heard these words he just sat down and cried. He couldn't handle it and for several days he mourned and wept when he would think about Jerusalem.

It's hard for us to imagine the heart that those people have for Jerusalem. Remember the psalm, "If I forget thee Oh Jerusalem let my right hand forget her cunning...let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; (Psalm 137:5-6)". Today, it is interesting that there are those Jews that have that same kind of fervent love for Jerusalem. There are those living in Jerusalem who look with indifference upon the Jews that would live in Tel Aviv. They call Tel Aviv the pagan city of Tel Aviv. They sort of consider the Jews that are living in Tel Aviv as something less than true Jews, because if you're a true Jew, you'll want to live in Jerusalem. And those that live in Jerusalem, it's amazing, the love that they have for the city. There is something about that city. There is a special kind of a feeling in Jerusalem. And so often as we take groups of people with us over to Israel, as we first come into view of Jerusalem, there's just almost a spontaneous kind of a weeping; the awe, the joy, the excitement, Jerusalem. There's just something about the city that does inspire.

And so here's Nehemiah, he hears that Jerusalem is just a waste and his great love, (though probably he had never been there), yet his great love for Jerusalem because of it's place in the program of God, in the history of the people of God; he weeps, he mourns for several days. And he fasted. Now fasting is something that began as a custom among the Jews during the Babylonian captivity. They inaugurated several national fast days to mark the destruction of the temple, to mark the assassination of Gedaliah and other of

the significant events. We read of Daniel the prophet who was in Babylon fasting. We read of Ezekiel the prophet, also a prophet of captivity, and his fasting and here is Nehemiah. Ezra also is mentioned as fasting. It is a practice that became sort of popularized during the period of captivity as it was an affliction of the soul and of the flesh. And so he fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven. And then we have recorded for us the prayer of Nehemiah.

And said, I beseech thee, O LORD [YAHWEH] God of heaven, the great and terrible [awesome] God (1:5).

The word terrible in Hebrew is sort of awesome. It has changed its meaning in the English since the King James translation. And today terrible is something terrible but in those days the idea of the word is just an awesome thing.

that keepeth the covenant and mercy for them [those] that love him and observe his commandments: (1:5).

I've often said one of the most important things to a prayer is the address. Who are you addressing your prayer to? It makes all the difference in the world to know the one you are addressing in prayer. And I think that the beginning of our prayer is perhaps the most important part of the prayer as we really think about who we are calling upon, who we are asking to work in our behalf. And hear the tremendous address to the prayer. "I beseech thee Oh LORD [YAHWEH] God of heaven, the great and terrible [awesome] God, that keepeth [keeps] covenant and mercy for them [those] that love him and observe his commandments:"(1:5).

Today I hear many times people begin to address their prayers "Oh Eternal One, the great power of the universe" rather ambiguous. It doesn't speak much of relationship. Jesus said, "when ye [you] pray say, Our Father which art in heaven"(Matthew 6:9). It's warm, it's personal, it's close. In the new testament, the fourth chapter of the book of Acts, when the apostles had been threatened not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. When they came back to the other company of disciples, they shared with them the things that they had experienced; the persecution and threat. And so they began to pray and their prayer they addressed "Oh God, the creator of heaven and earth and everything that is in them"(Acts 4:24). Acknowledging the one I am talking to. I'm calling upon God, the creator of the universe, the one who has created every life form within the universe. And when I really begin to think about God as I am praying, when I think of the greatness of God, when I think of the power of God, the creating of the universe when I think of the wisdom of God, the creating of the life forms; suddenly as I am focusing upon God the one that I am addressing, suddenly my whole problem begins to come in perspective. So many times when I begin to pray I am pushed by my problems, by my difficulties and I am overwhelmed by the greatness of the problem that I face and I'm almost to the place of just hopelessness. This is so great, this is so big and I'm just overwhelmed by my difficulty, but as I begin to address my prayer, "Oh Lord, thou art God. You have created the heavens and the earth and everything that is in them", suddenly my problems begin to just melt down and they're nothing now because I see them in the light of God and in the light of his greatness and in the light of his power.

So here's Nehemiah, it seems like it's hopeless. The people have been back in the land now for many many years. But things are not going well. The people are discouraged, they're in great affliction. The wall of Jerusalem is still a rubble and they are being harassed by the people roundabout and that's so far away and seems like such an awesome thing to even hope Jerusalem would ever become a city of glory and beauty and power again.

Struck by the news, Nehemiah prays but as he prays, as he begins to talk to God the whole thing begins to come into perspective. "I beseech thee O LORD [YAHWEH] God of heaven, the great and terrible [awesome] God. that keepeth [keeps] his covenant and [his] mercy for him that love them and observe his commandments:" (1:5). You're the God that keeps his promises. For those that love you that obey you, you keep your promises to them. And that's good to remind yourself when you pray. I'm praying to the God who keeps his word and so we come to God in prayer on the basis of the promises that God has given to us. And I find it very helpful in my own prayer, as I begin to pray my prayers to just sort of quote some of the

promises of God. Not that he needs to be reminded of them; it helps me. He knows that he's promised these things. And I often say, "Lord, you promised that", and I will quote some of the promises as I pray for my benefit, as I realize God keeps his word. So Nehemiah says you're the God that keeps covenant. Mercy to those that love you and those that observe your commandments.

Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, (1:6).

So he's asking God to please listen more. Let your ear be open. God said that his hand is not short, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear. His hand is not short that he cannot save. But he said your sins have separated you from God (Isaiah 59:2-3). The problem is not on God's side. If there's a problem to prayer and an answer to prayer, the problem is on our side, it's not that God is unable. There's something wrong on our end and in Isaiah's case he said, "It's your sins that have separated you from God. When you lift up your hands they are filled with blood" (Isaiah 59:2-3) And so Nehemiah is saying,

Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest [might] hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night (1:6),

He really gave himself to prayer. Of course this is the proper thing when you are faced with the situation that's just beyond your capacity to deal with it. The proper thing is to just bring it before the Lord. And so with fasting and with prayer day and night, Nehemiah was waiting upon God as he prayed for Jerusalem and were the conditions of the city.

for the children of Israel, thy servants, and I confess the sins of the children of Israel, [then notice] which we have sinned (1:6).

He's not saying they have sinned, but which we have sinned, as he is making the confession. Of course, if you compare this to Daniel the ninth chapter, you find that Daniel and his prayer also identified with the sins as did Ezra in our study last week as, Ezra identified himself with the sins of the people.

In a sense we are guilty of what's happening in the world around us because many times we have refused to take any kind of action against what is happening. We just sit back and we let it happen. We don't express our opinion. We are living in an interesting time in which the liberals have taken pretty much the control of the school system and of the press, of the media, and it is interesting how that things can be so distorted as they champion their liberal causes. They applaud the homosexuals because they have dared to stand up and proclaim their rights. They applaud the abortionists and they applaud everyone who speaks up for anyone who has a liberal cause because everyone has a right to speak his piece. But if you dare to speak out against some of these liberal things, then the liberals aren't so liberal. They are not willing to let you say your opinion against these things. So if you speak out against homosexuality then suddenly you become a narrow-minded bigot. And they will seek to silence you if you speak out against these liberal causes and so you realize they are not as liberal as they are declaring themselves to be liberal. They're liberal only for the liberal causes and they feel everyone has the right to express themselves in any liberal concept or idea, but if you try to express yourself in something that is righteous or holy or pure, you're a holier-than-thou twit. It's interesting how the liberals want to encourage the freedom of expression for everybody as long as you don't express something against their view and then suddenly you're in the position of the bad guy. By this they have pretty effectively silenced the voices against them. You see we don't want to be accused of being religious bigots and we don't like the accusations that they make concerning anybody who stands up for righteous causes and so we sort of sit back in silence and say, "Well, I guess everybody does have a right to do their thing". All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing: evil triumphing. When 17 million babies have been aborted, murdered in the womb and we don't say anything about it; evil triumphs. God sees, God knows.

It is interesting that during the democratic convention that just finished in Atlanta, everybody with a cause was there demonstrating in Atlanta this past week, all kinds of demonstrations for all kinds of liberal causes.

The only ones to be arrested in Atlanta in all of these demonstrations were a group of people who demonstrated against abortion at one of the abortion clinics, and they were placed in jail. They don't have a right to demonstrate, so every other group seemed to be allowed a right for demonstration. It's a sad day. But you see, by our not saying anything, by our letting things go, we then share in the responsibility in the condition of the nation. Too long we have just sat back and done nothing. We've been silent while the forces of evil have been at work bringing to pass legislation and laws and allowing decisions to come forth from the courts that have opened up the doors to pornography, to abortion, and all these things and we sit back. Now we see the conditions, we're surrounded by the conditions and we are so prone to say, "God they're so awful. Lord it's horrible what they're doing. Lord I can't stand it. It's such an evil place and these people that I'm looking at are so evil", but hey, I'm responsible too because I kept silent for so long. So Nehemiah says, "we have sinned [Lord]" (1:6).

[We] confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned (1:6).

So, when I come to God it is so important that I get this issue of sin cleared up and it is always cleared up by confession. "He who seeks to cover his sins shall not prosper, but who so will confess his sin the same shall be forgiven" (Proverbs 28:13). Now as God said through Isaiah, "My hand is not short, my ear not heavy but your sins have separated you from me" (Isaiah 59:1-2), so that your prayers are not being heard because of the sin that is there. It has broken the relationship, it has broken the communion.

So I first come to God with the address, recognizing the faithfulness of God and the holiness of God and the faithfulness of God to keep his promise; but now I need to take care of that which would separate me from God or hold back my petition. I deal with the issue of sin and he begins by the confession of sin. "God, I and my father's house we're guilty" (1:6). I've got to make that confession, I've got to get rid of the sin by the confession of sin if I am ever to get forgiveness of my sin.

We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgements, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. [God we are guilty, I'm guilty, my father's house is guilty.] Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst you servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: [Lord I remember that you said that and that you did, we've been scattered and here we are in Susa, the capital of Persia, far away from Jerusalem. Lord, you only kept your word. But you said,] But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of heaven, yet will I gather them from thence [there], and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. [Lord you promised that if we would keep your commandments that you would bring us back, though we were scattered to the furthest part of the world. To the North Pole or the South Pole you would bring us back to dwell in the land.] Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech [beg] thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear [reverence] thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, (1:7-11).

He finally got to the petition but it's good not to just rush in with the petition. We so often just rush right in and say God I need this and this and this in a hurry, if you can't do it in the next five minutes, I'll praise you anyhow. But we don't bother to establish relationship, proper relationship. Acknowledging who he is, acknowledging the faithfulness of God to keep his word, acknowledging our sin, I don't deserve it. But Lord you promised that you would be gracious and merciful to those who would call upon thee and who would confess their sins, you're faithful and just to forgive and merciful and your gracious Lord and we are your children. You've redeemed us by the blood of Jesus Christ, you've called us to be your children, you've drawn us unto yourself. Lord, we're in the straight, things are going bad, the condition of the nation is deplorable. God hear, God answer, God work, please Lord. It's on that basis that we approach God as we

establish the relationship, then we can bring our petitions, then we can offer our prayers unto God. He doesn't really get around to the petition until he has taken care of the relationship.

and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer (1:11).

The man he is referring to is, of course, Artaxerxes, who is the Longinmanus of secular history. Longinmanus began to reign over Persia in the 465 BC. This is the twentieth year of his reign, (in verse one), and they began their counting of the years from the beginning of the reign of the king. So Longinmanus began his reign in 465 BC, so this means this is 445 BC.

Now there was also a winter palace in Babylon and Nehemiah was in the palace. The main palace of Persia was at Susa or as called here, Shushan. The winter palace was in Babylon. The king had many cupbearers who would serve in a course. They would come and serve the king for a month or so. They were sort of like firemen, they work three days and have four days off and work three days and have four days off. And so they would work a month and have a month off and so you would have your course in which you know your time is coming. Being in Susa, it could be that the king had been in the palace in Babylon, which was the winter palace and it was wintertime, and that he had come back to Susa. And that Nehemiah realized that soon he would be standing before the king. It was actually coming springtime now because he had been praying for several months. He got the report in the month of December and it is now March. The king is returned from the winter palace in Babylon and he realizes I'm soon going to be standing before the king. I'm soon going to be bearing the cup to him. His desire is that God might give him favor in the eyes of the king, mercy in the sight of this man, because he was the king's cupbearer.

AND it came to pass in the month [of] Nisan, (2:1).

Now Nisan is the first month of the Jewish calendar. The Jewish calendar was predicated upon the lunar months and thus the Jewish calendar is quite often different from ours because it is predicated upon the lunar months. Now the third full moon after the winter's equinox was the Passover. That took place in the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish calendar. You'll find that the Passover varies quite a bit from our celebration of Easter. We usually celebrate Easter on the first Sunday after the third full moon after the beginning of the year. In other words, after New Years, the first Sunday after the third full moon is Easter. They go back to the winters' equinox which takes place in the twenty-second of December. So they can have a full moon in the month of December which will then move their first month up. Quite often, if there's a full moon between the twenty-second of December and the first of January, then the Passover would be pretty far removed from our Easter celebration. This particular year 445 BC, and of course it's easy for the astronomers to go back and they can tell you the position of the sky at any date in history. The universe is so well organized and it moves in such precision that they can of course up at the observatory at the planetarium they can take and adjust that thing and give you what the sky looked like at any date of any year. And they can project it there on the ceiling on the planetarium.

According to the astronomers, in the year 445 BC, the month of Nisan began at the equivalent of our fourteenth day of March on our calendar. So that he began, no doubt, his course of serving the king at the beginning of the month of Nisan, the year 445 BC which would have been the fourteenth day of March, that he began to bear the cup to the king.

...it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king [445 BC, he began reigning in 465], that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime [Now before this I had never been] sad in his presence (2:1).

It was an insult to the king if you were sad in his presence. An insult for which some of the Persian kings; they put their servants to death, you were insulting them. You should be happy that you have the chance to serve the king you should be joyful, after-all you can serve the king. If you were sad serving the king that could be a capital offense. When the king noticed his sad countenance he was fearful I mean it could have

been his life. But Longinmanus seems to be a pretty easy going fellow, according to the secular history and all. And interestingly enough, he was concerned with his servant.

Wherefore [Therefore] the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid [And Nehemiah said and I was really afraid] (2:2).

“Why is your heart sorrowful but your countenance is that you don’t look good” (2:2). Of course he had been fasting, he had been praying, and he had been mourning, weeping and all over this issue for over three months now; from December until the fourteenth of March. He had been mourning, fasting, praying over this thing and so it evidently showed on his appearance. Do you remember when Daniel and his friends were taken captive to Babylon and they were being groomed to stand before Nebuchadnezzar as counselors and all and how that Daniel came to Arioch and said, “Hey man, can’t handle all of these dainties and all the kings meet and all this kind of stuff, how about just letting us eat some whole grain food and vegetables” (Daniel 1:8). And Arioch said, “Are you trying to get me in trouble?” He said “If the king should see you not looking healthy and robust and all, it would be my neck. It would mean that I hadn’t been...” (Daniel 1:10). When you appear before the king you’ve gotta be happy, you gotta look good and robust and all. “If you come before the king and you’re looking like your aneishiated and sick then the king would have my neck” (Daniel 1:10). Daniel said, “Look, just feed us vegetables and grains for ten days and then if at the end of ten days and we start looking bad then we’ll go ahead and eat the meat and drink the wine but give us ten days” (Daniel 1:13). And so at the end of ten days, Daniel and his buddies looked so healthy, rosier cheeks than anybody else, the fellow said okay, for it. They were able to then not defile themselves with the kings meat and the kings wines and so forth.

Here is Nehemiah in a precarious position, been fasting, his countenance isn’t looking too good and yet he’s not sick. The king discerns “this is a sorrow of your heart.” And so he said “I was afraid” (2:2).

And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? (2:3).

Traditionally, the Jews do have tremendous respect for the dead and for the bodies of the dead. Today in Israel if you’re starting to build a building and you come across a tomb, the whole project stops, the rabbis are out there and they have to go over a ritual and you have to then take the bones and carry them off someplace else and bury them in a ceremonial way. A lot of issues, a lot of heated issues have come over the possibility of digging in a graveyard or where the dead were once buried. The tomb of Abraham, in Hebron, the cave of Mekkedah is a place where the Jews go and pilgrimage. They go there to pray and you’ll see them streaming in to that large building that was built by Herod over the cave of Mekkedah to pray. The tomb of David in the city of Jerusalem there on Mount Zion, again as you go in there you will see candles lit and you’ll see the men sitting there with their prayer books, these old men with their long beards and so forth, and they are praying next to the tomb of David. The tomb of Rachel is a special spot on the way to Bethlehem. Now the Persians also had the same kind of respect for the sepulchres, the tombs or the burial places of their ancestors. Nehemiah brings up the fact that “the sepulchres are lying waste, the city of his father’s and the sepulchres are waste and the gates thereof are consumed with fire”(2:3).

Then the king said unto me, For what dost thy make request [what do you want? What is your request?] So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king (2:4-5),

As we pointed out this morning, when we get to that place where we have been praying that God would do a certain thing. Now it would seem that maybe the door’s opening; the king says, “what is your request? So I prayed to the God in heaven” (2:4). It had to be a very quick prayer. It was a silent prayer. In his heart he just threw up one of those quick prayers. “Oh God, work now and bless now or help now Lord.” Those kinds of prayers that we so often throw up very quickly unto God; we don’t have time now to go into a long explanation or a detailed explanation, right now I need to get things done in a hurry. So it’s one of those

quick little prayers that rises from our hearts in the time of need and in a time of an emergency where quickly I say “Oh Lord help me, oh Lord guide me, oh Lord strengthen me, oh Lord protect me.” And between the king's question and his answer there was an important prayer throne up to heaven and he answered the king.

And I said unto the king, If it please the king [and he said if it pleases the king], and if thy servant have [has] found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest [I would that you would] send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? And when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. [I told him how much time I wanted there] (2:5-6).

“So it pleased the king to send me” (2:6). The prayer was answered. “God give me favour in the sight of this man”, the prayer is answered.

Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me (2:7-8).

And thus on the fourteenth day of March, 445 BC the king gave the commandment unto Nehemiah to go back to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, to restore and rebuild the wall. An extremely important date for Daniel chapter nine declares “And from the time the commandment goes forth to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem unto the coming of the Messiah The Prince will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. And the walls shall be built in troublous times” (Daniel 9:25). As we read on in Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the wall, we read how that they were built in troublous times. You'll be coming to it as we move through Nehemiah. How that they worked a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other. One guy worked and one guy watched for the enemy. It was not an easy task. The walls will be rebuilt in troublous times. But after the sixty-two sevens, or the completion of the four hundred and eighty-three years, shall the Messiah be cut off, but not for himself or without receiving anything for himself.

So this extremely important date, March 14, 445 BC, when Artaxerxes gave him the letters and commissioned him to go back and to rebuild Jerusalem. It's only a matter of simple mathematics, but not so simple because you have to transpose from the Babylonian 360 day year to the Julian 365 and a quarter day year to come out at the date in our Julian calendar when this would come to pass. The easiest way is to transpose the thing into days. So 483 years of 360 day years would be 173,880 days. Add that to the 445 BC March fourteenth, taking in account the leap-years and so forth and it brings you out to April 6, 32 AD. The day that the Messiah should come from the time the commandment goes forth to restore and rebuild Jerusalem unto the coming of the Messiah the prince. The day that was prophesied by the psalmist in Psalm 118, “This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, save now, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Psalm 118:24-25). The day that Zachariah had prophesied, “Rejoice ye daughters of Zion. Shout for joy ye daughters of Jerusalem for your king cometh unto thee, but he is lowly, he is riding upon a donkey.” And on April 6, 32 AD Jesus was in Bethany with his disciples and he said “Go over into the city and there you will find a donkey that is tied upon which a man has never sat, untie him and bring him to me and while you're untying it and the owner says why are you untying. my donkey just tell him that the master needs him.” The disciples went into the city and on the corner where Jesus said there was a donkey that was tied, and as they were untying him the master, the owner said “why are you untying my donkey” and they said, “The master needs him”, and they brought the donkey to Jesus and they began to lay their garments in the path and they took up palm branches. Jesus sat on that donkey and began to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, as the disciples waving their palm-branches began to quote the one hundred and eighteenth psalm as they said “Hosanna, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of

the Lord. Blessed be the king.” And you remember the Pharisees said, “Lord you better rebuke your disciples, that’s blaspheme”, and Jesus said, “Listen carefully fellows, I’m going to tell you once and I want you to get it. Verily Verily I say unto thee, if they should at this time hold their piece, these very stones would start crying out.” Then as he looked at Jerusalem, he began to weep. He said, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killeth the prophets and all that had been sent to thee by God, if you only new the things that belong to your peace in this thy day, but they are hid from your eyes.”

“This Thy day”. The day that the Lord has made, the day of rejoicing and gladness and yet it was a day of sadness for the nation of Israel because Isaiah predicted he was despised and rejected by man. “He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief and he was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we were healed. For all of us like sheep have gone astray”. We all turnabout to our own ways but God laid on him the iniquities of us all. It pleased the Father that he should bare the sins of many and he will be numbered with the transgressors in his death that he’ll make his grave with the rich.” All of these things were fulfilled that very week. As Daniel said, “The Messiah will be cut off,” and the Messiah was cut off, he wasn’t crowned, he didn’t receive the kingdom and the Jews were dispersed shortly thereafter when Titus came with a Roman legion and destroyed Jerusalem.

God’s word came to pass, God kept his promise but man failed to receive. As John said, “He was in the world and the world was made by him but the world knew him not. He came to his own and his own received him not but as many as received him, to them gave ye the power to become the sons of God even as many as believed upon his name.” Jesus always creates a division; those who receive and those who don’t receive, those who believe and those who don’t believe. Let me tell you, if you choose to believe in Jesus Christ there is adequate evidence to support your choice as being a reasonable, sound, logical choice. As God said, “Come now, let us reason together.” Salvation is an extremely reasonable, logical thing. When you look at the prophecies and the fulfillment of the prophecies it is reasonable and logical to assume that Jesus Christ was the promised messiah. No one else showed up on that day to make the claim. And anybody show up now they’re too late.

You can choose to believe and you can support that belief with all kinds of evidence where he showed himself alive after his death by many infallible proofs. And if you choose to believe and to receive him, the evidence of God’s work by his spirit in your heart will be all the proof you’ll ever need as he begins to change and transform your life into the image of Jesus as a man becomes like his god. If you choose not to believe, you can find all kinds of excuses for not believing. Logical excuses “like there are so many hypocrites in the church”, powerful excuses like, “I was disappointed by a pastor”, but excuses wont stand in that great day when you stand before God. “So many churches, I didn’t know what church to believe”, powerful excuse not to believe in Jesus Christ, only he’ll say “hey, I didn’t ask you to believe in a church, I asked you to believe in me.” “I didn’t want to go to heaven ‘cause so many hypocrites in the church”, that doesn’t make sense does it because you’ll spend eternity with all the hypocrites. So man manufactures excuses for not believing but there’s plenty of reason to believe.

So armed with these letters,

Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. [He came with a contingency from the Persian army] When Sanballat the Horonitte, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. [Getting over jetlag. It was a long journey on horseback, it’s tiring and so he just sort of rested for three days] And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither I told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: [He kept his mission a secret. He didn’t want to spring on him yet what he was going to do. He didn’t let them know he was there to rebuild the wall and to fortify the city] neither was there any beast with me, save

[except] *the beast that I rode upon [on]. And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well (2:9-13),*

So this would be the gate at the bottom of Ophel at the pool of Siloam, the wall used to be on down, it's not where it is in the present day on up from the hill of Ophel but it went all the way down around the bottom.

"And so I went out by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well" (2:13). The interesting thing they called it the dragon well because the Spring of Gihon has a pulsing kind of a flow. There are sometimes when the water is just barely flowing out but then the water begins to really rush through. You get a much greater flow. The flow of the Spring of Gihon fluctuates. We found that to be true one time to our...we've been through the tunnel that goes through the Spring of Gihon to the Pool of Siloam and usually the water is only...they say how deep is the water. Well, it gets the bottom of your shorts wet, but it barely gets above your knees, maybe sometimes your thighs. This one time we went through when they had that thrust of water, the bigger flow of water, and we were up to our chins going through it. The thing is, it's only in places about four feet high, four and a half feet high, and you have to go through squatting and of course you hold your head back up next to the ceiling and it's dark so you hold your hand above your head so you don't hit any rock above your head. We...I was concerned because in some places we only had about six inches between the top of the tunnel and the top of the water. After we went through a group of children were going through and they got caught and some of them were drowned.

Now the story that they tell you is that over the mouth of the spring there is a sleeping dragon and that when he's awake he swallows the water so that it causes the flow to be less but when he goes to sleep, then all of the water comes surging through and the water is higher. So they have this story of the sleeping dragon that guards the spring and evidently this old legend or story goes way back to Nehemiah's time because it was called the spring of the dragon in the scriptures. That story is still told by the Arabs and all today, the reason for the different ebb in flow of the spring. They really don't know why it does so they developed so often a story to explain the ebb of flow in the Spring of Gihon.

So he went out by that gate down there by the Spring of Gihon,

And to the dung port, [the gate where they took out all the garbage and refuse out of the city] and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: [probably around to the area of the Pool of Bethesda] but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. [There was such rubble he couldn't even get his animal through, whether it was a donkey or mule or whatever] Then went I up in the night by the brook, [the Kidron] and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; [he just kept it all silent and went out at night, went riding and was examining the condition of the walls all the way around the city] Neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. [He had still kept his mission a secret]. Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fires: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. [That the enemy just can't come in with their raiding parties and rip us off at their leisure. Let's go ahead and build up our defenses.] Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me (2:13-18).

Hey fellas, I got the permission of the king so let's go for it. Now they had begun this work way, way, way back in the first group Jeshua and Zerubbabel but they were halted by a decree from the Persian king of that time. Now they take up the work again under Nehemiah having the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem

And they said [let's go for it] Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work (2:18).

There was excitement in Jerusalem. Now they had these guys that were the countryside guys,

But when Sanballat the [who was a] Horonite, and Tobiah the servant the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian. heard it, [that we were starting to build the walls] they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king? (2:19).

And so we find that these fellows are gonna seek to oppose their building of the wall. This is the first attempt at opposition and it is through scorn, “they laughed us to scorn, and despised us”(2:19). Opposition through scorn is a hard thing to overcome, that’s what the liberals have done that’s why we’ve been so quiet. They scorn anyone who speaks up against their liberal causes and it is a powerful tool to stop people from decent enterprises to scorn them. None of us like to be scorned, mocked, laughed at. So they said, ”What do you guys think you’re gonna do? Are you going to rebel against the king?”(2:19).

Then answered I them, and said unto them, the God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem(2:20).

Scram guys, you don’t belong here and the God of heaven will help us and we’re gonna rise and build. Now chapter three tells, and we’re not gonna deal with chapter three except that if you want to read it, it tells you the portions of the wall, the gate that the different groups worked on. The priests working on one side, the nobles, the different families, the different areas, the Tekoites came and took a part of the wall and so the whole wall went up at one time. In other words, they didn’t start at one place and just gradually go around, they started all the way around the city at once and the various gates and all. They were just working the whole wall at once. Now the fascinating thing, as you get into the descriptions of some of these areas where they were building the wall, as they came up to the broad wall.

Today in Jerusalem you can stand and you can look and see a portion of the wall that Nehemiah and these people were building. You can see the broad wall and where they brought the wall up to the broad wall You can see it today the archaeologists have uncovered it and it’s so fascinating to stand there and see the walls and realize these were the walls that were built by Nehemiah and the people that he inspired when he came back from Persia. And that to me is always just such a thrilling thing, to take the Bible and to read the description here out of chapter three and then see where a portions of those walls that were built by them have been uncovered and you can see them today, there in Jerusalem. God’s word is such an exciting thing because it translates and is verified by the things that you can see today; God’s word verified as true as you can see the very wall that Nehemiah and the people worked on there in Jerusalem.

May the Lord be with you to guide and to bless you this week. May he be your strength, your help. And I would encourage some of you who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ, as Nehemiah in his heart silently prayed and said, “O Lord help me”, I would encourage you even now as you stand here before the Lord and you have made a choice to receive Jesus Christ as your Saviour. Within your heart you just pray O Lord, forgive me my sins. Make me your child. Come in and take over my life.” Oh you’d be amazed at the changes you’ll experience this week as God, by his love, begins to work in you. You’ll be amazed at the peace that comes over your life, the joy that you’ll begin to experience, the power of God’s spirit that will begin to work in you, changing you, revolutionizing you, giving you victory. God Bless you and may you walk in the peace and the joy and the victory of our Lord this week. In Jesus’ name. Amen.