

1. My topic of this lesson is "leadership and responsibility". Most people never thought about this but the bible is a great book to study on leadership. To warn you, these final 3 chapters includes a lot of lists of names. Some of them (from Nehemiah's perspective) are historical and some from his time era. Keep in mind Nehemiah was Israel's civic leader at that time. Decisions were made that effect the lives of those under him and "names are named here". OK, why should I care?
  - a) I'm well aware that not everyone reading this has some sort of leadership role. Most of us simply go through our lives dealing the best we can with the decisions our leaders make in life. Most of us don't even spend much time thinking about the responsibilities of other leaders in our community or our nation. We're just thinking, "You do your job and I'll do mine". However, tough decisions have to be made by our leaders that affect our lives. We're going to see examples of that type of leadership in this lesson.
  - b) If there was another word I'd use to describe these last three chapters, it's "accountability". The point is Nehemiah was well aware of the fact he was accountable to God for what he decides to do as a leader. His concern is that the Israelites obey God's laws. To be honest, we're much more likely to obey God if we're accountable to other people. It's like the idea that we're more likely to be working hard if we know the boss is watching!
  - c) To use a famous Old Testament biblical example, I'm willing to bet the Israelites were less likely to build a "golden calf" if Moses was standing right next to them! The point is we're easily distracted from living how God calls us to live because we tend to forget that we're accountable to God for our actions. Having Godly leaders or even other Christians in our lives remind us to live as God calls us to live as a witness for Him.
  - d) So if I'm not a leader in my church, why should I read this stuff? Yes I get that our leaders should study these lessons on accountability, but what about "me"? Why do I have to read all this stuff? For starters, God may raise you up to be a leader in some way. You could be a leader of a family or a large group. You may have to lead a child on how God expects us to live. My point is these chapters aren't just for them. It's for us to understand leadership roles and responsibility. It's to realize the concepts here apply to us either now or maybe one day. Therefore these chapters on leadership are something that affect all believers at some point in our lives.
2. With that sermon out of my system, let me see if I can summarize these three chapters in a fairly short handful of paragraphs. Bear with me:
  - a) The bad news is all of Chapter 11 and much of Chapter 12 is a list of names. As most of you know, I don't push memorizing them. I have to admit, I have this fear of meeting a few of these people in heaven and them telling me, "What do you mean you didn't have to memorize my name?" With that risk hanging over my head, realize these chapters do open with 66 verses essentially of just names. They are broken up in categories based on what these people do or where they're from. I don't believe they're here for us to realize who everybody was. (Yes, now I'm sure some of these guys will bonk me on the head in heaven one day.) The big picture idea is Nehemiah is called to be a leader over all of the people living there. That means he needs to know "who's who" and what their roles are in the community.
  - b) My point is with all respect to each of these saved people, keep in mind Nehemiah was in charge of all these people, therefore it's important for him to know "Who's who and who's doing what". Again the issue is leadership. If God calls us to be a leader, the first thing we have to know is who are we leading over, and what is the role of each person we lead. It's an issue here because Nehemiah orders one out of 10 people were to move to Jerusalem to repopulate the city. That's the main reason for this list of names. The idea is now that the walls are rebuilt, let's fill this city with people. So many are told to move!

- c) Anyway after a chapter and a half of naming names and jobs, we read of a ceremony they have to dedicate the wall. If you recall, the wall was finished in Chapter 6. So is this out of place? Most scholars argue that Nehemiah was busy dealing with other things like getting Israelites to move to Jerusalem, setting up other things, that he wanted to wait until it was a "full city" again, for this ceremony. So why should care about a wall dedication? It's not for the wall's sake. It was to tell the Israelites in effect, God's city is back to what He wants it to be His headquarters, so let's make this place the center of our lives. It is making Him, and fellow believers a core issue of our lives. Anyway, this ceremony takes place near the end of Chapter 12. To make it brief, it was a big parade with lots of singing, celebrating as they made Jerusalem a thriving city again.
  - d) That leads to Chapter 13 the last one of the book. It continues the thought of Chapter 12. Apparently you can't have a function in Israel without throwing in a bible study! One of the things discussed there was the fact that foreigners from what we call "Jordan" weren't allowed to be gathered. So apparently they got the boot from that ceremony. That led to a number of other problems Nehemiah had to deal with. Some of the enemies mentioned in the earlier chapters including a Samaritan leader had to be dealt with. Other problems did arise such as people selling stuff on the Sabbath. In short, the final chapter shows how it is that Nehemiah dealt with the Israelites not obeying God again.
  - e) If you recall in the end of the last lesson, they all took a vow to obey God. So now they're blowing it again. Why so soon? If you read Chapter 13 carefully, you'd notice Nehemiah left town for awhile to check in with the Persian leaders. He may have been gone for just a few months or it could have been a year or more. My point is "when the cat's away the mice will play" so to speak. That's when some of the old problems rose up again that we read about either in the book of Ezra or here in Nehemiah. I'll just say Nehemiah had to get tough and we'll read of him "cracking skulls" so to speak to get people to follow him!
3. I want to wrap this up in two ways. The first is the obvious, we're reading about the importance of good leadership. Nehemiah keep track of people. He delegated responsibilities. He led all of the people to stick to their commitments to God. He got tough when necessary. He dealt with a few internal and external threats in these chapters. Bottom line, he acted like how a leader would be a good leader. Lessons in these chapters on what to do and how to handle problems. I noticed he doesn't have the hands off attitude of "If that's what they want, I'll let them be". Instead we are reading of him doing what's necessary to lead people how God wants them to be led.
- a) OK John, most of us are not church leaders. How does it apply? Obviously we don't have to "crack skulls" of our families even when we're ticked off. We don't physically push the people under us. The key is to understand our mission and our goals as leaders. Then we can lead as God wants us to lead in whatever situation. Most of us know that, but stating it again helps us to see how Nehemiah leads and puts that in perspective.
4. I also want to wrap up this introduction another way. This is the final non-prophet bible book. I was wondering why does it end this way? Obviously, life goes on. Yes, the Israelites got carried away in rituals and missing the obvious by the time Jesus shows up a few centuries later. I know the Israelites were later subject to the Greek Empire and then the Romans who destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 70AD. My question is why did God choose to end the narrative history this way? My joke is the Christian bible essentially begins with the start of the world, and ends with the end of the world, as we know it. Yet the Old Testament ends in effect with the Israelites promising to obey God's word (Chapter 10) and then blowing it again by the final chapter. What I speculate is simply the idea of "life going on as it always does".
- a) I've always stated that the history of Israel is a sad story of failure. If the bible ended that way, it's truly a tragic tale. That's why the story of Jesus is so necessary. However, most of us know that, so I'll let that go for now. Time for details.
  - b) Since this is the last lesson on Nehemiah, my bibliography follows the last page.

5. Chapter 11, Verse 1: Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. <sup>2</sup> The people commended all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.
  - a) By the time we get to Chapter 11 Nehemiah finished not only the construction of the walls of Jerusalem, but also finished dealing with significant internal and external threats to the nation of Israel. Remember that Nehemiah was the governor over that area. Israel was a part of the Persian Empire, but they were free to practice their own religion and go live in that land again after being kicked out there for seventy years.
  - b) So now that "all's that done", the next order of business was to repopulate Jerusalem. The wall was done but apparently the city was lightly populated. Nehemiah wanted that city to be the center of Jewish life and that meant forcing people to live there and make it their new home. Keep in mind Jesus said it was always His goal for His people to gather there like a "mother hen gathering her chicks", but the people refused (See Luke 13:34). All that I'm saying is Nehemiah as a leader is encouraging the Israelites to gather there and make that city a populated one so when all the Israelites gathered there for feast days, there will be homes for people to stay in.
  - c) With that background in mind, these verses say that "lots were cast" (think dice) as to who would permanently move to Jerusalem. Apparently, 1 out of 10 families were required to do so. Verse 2 essentially says that those who were not picked blessed those that were as the great moving process began.
  - d) So do these verses mean God wants us to move to Jerusalem? With all respect to that city it's not what the verses mean. What it does imply is that often we as Christians often have to make tough decisions such as relocating our lives if that's what God's will is for us. Yes I know this is a forced relocation and sometimes our leaders must "get the ball rolling" for say a congregation to use their lives for His glory.
6. Verse 3: These are the provincial leaders who settled in Jerusalem (now some Israelites, priests, Levites, temple servants and descendants of Solomon's servants lived in the towns of Judah, each on his own property in the various towns, <sup>4</sup> while other people from both Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem):
  - a) Verse 3 is the "overview" that will name names for the rest of the chapter. The point is the people who moved came from all sorts of backgrounds. Some were priests, some were the servants and some were descendants of those who came from the general area.
  - b) With that said, it's time to read way too many names of people long dead:
7. Verse 4: From the descendants of Judah: Athaiah son of Uzziiah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, a descendant of Perez; <sup>5</sup> and Maaseiah son of Baruch, the son of Col-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, a descendant of Shelah. <sup>6</sup> The descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem totaled 468 able men. <sup>7</sup> From the descendants of Benjamin: Sallu son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah, <sup>8</sup> and his followers, Gabbai and Sallai--928 men. <sup>9</sup> Joel son of Zicri was their chief officer, and Judah son of Hassenuah was over the Second District of the city.
  - a) As we go name by name in Chapter 11, keep in mind these are "family names" not just the names of people. For example, the last name listed in Verse 4 is "Perez". That name goes all the way back to Genesis as he was one of Judah's sons. My simple point is this group is able to trace their roots all the way back to "The" Judah the founder of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The only reason to care is simply the fact that while Nehemiah was taking a roll call, he was making sure this was the official "Jewish line". But can't anyone be a convert to that religion? Of course. The issue is about God's people and who is His people.
  - b) The second part of this list repeats the same process for the tribe of Benjamin.
  - c) In Verse 9 we get the leaders of Jerusalem that work under Nehemiah.

- d) Again, with all apologies if we meet these people in heaven, the reason these names are in the bible is to show that God's "chosen" were in Israel since the time the Persians "ran" the Middle East. The area around Jerusalem was effectively under Jewish control at this time.
  - e) Keep in mind centuries earlier the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms. The Southern one was mainly the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin. That's why he's "obsessed" in naming the families from this group.
  - f) With that said, let's continue:
8. Verse 10: From the priests: Jedaiah; the son of Joiarib; Jakin; <sup>11</sup> Seraiah son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, supervisor in the house of God, <sup>12</sup> and their associates, who carried on work for the temple--822 men; Adaiah son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah, <sup>13</sup> and his associates, who were heads of families--242 men; Amashsai son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, <sup>14</sup> and his associates, who were able men--128. Their chief officer was Zabdiel son of Haggedolim. From the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; <sup>16</sup> Shabbethai and Jozabad, two of the heads of the Levites, who had charge of the outside work of the house of God; <sup>17</sup> Mattaniah son of Mica, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the director who led in thanksgiving and prayer; Bakbukiah, second among his associates; and Abda son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. <sup>18</sup> The Levites in the holy city totaled 284.
- a) Of the 12 tribes of Israel, one of them the "tribe of Levi" were the priests. Some of them were specifically full time priests and the rest of them assisted in other duties tied to the worship of God. The simple point here is besides those from Judah and Benjamin, there were a good bunch of men who returned to do priestly duties in Jerusalem.
  - b) Again, think like a leader. One has to know who he's leading over. Just as most of us had to deal with roll calls at different times in our lives, so Nehemiah is dealing with that here.
9. Verse 19: The gatekeepers: Akkub, Talmon and their associates, who kept watch at the gates--172 men. <sup>20</sup> The rest of the Israelites, with the priests and Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, each on his ancestral property. <sup>21</sup> The temple servants lived on the hill of Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of them. <sup>22</sup> The chief officer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica. Uzzi was one of Asaph's descendants, who were the singers responsible for the service of the house of God. <sup>23</sup> The singers were under the king's orders, which regulated their daily activity. <sup>24</sup> Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, one of the descendants of Zerah son of Judah, was the king's agent in all affairs relating to the people.
- a) Here we got everyone else on the government payroll: Gatekeepers (people who decide who and who can't come in the city), temple servants, chief officers, singers and finally a man who in effect reports to the Persian officials about what's going on. Again, if we are going to be responsible for overseeing a project we have to know "who does what".
  - b) Let me pause for the obvious question: Why doesn't the bible just say Nehemiah listed all of the people in the area so he knew whom to lead? Why all these names? For starters, it is to tell us that the Israelites who returned really are Israelites and we know their family line. That's important for no other reason than the Messianic line moved to that area. It's also to show how some of God's chosen sacrificed of themselves to make the effort to start anew not in Israel but some of them in Jerusalem as opposed to the family homeland.
  - c) And we should care because? It shows how Jesus really did come from a Jewish line. It is showing how God cares about His people gathering together to worship Him. Christians don't have to gather in Jerusalem but the point is we gather together to worship Him and everyone does their part from the leaders, to the servants to the singers to those in charge of who gets in and who sits there. (Think of them as the ushers and security men of that time era. My point is we get models of those responsible for various aspects of service in a church setting it sets up models for how we should act. OK then, back to "the list":

10. Verse 25: As for the villages with their fields, some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath Arba and its surrounding settlements, in Dibon and its settlements, in Jekabzeel and its villages,<sup>26</sup> in Jeshua, in Moladah, in Beth Pelet,<sup>27</sup> in Hazar Shual, in Beersheba and its settlements,<sup>28</sup> in Ziklag, in Meconah and its settlements,<sup>29</sup> in En Rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth,<sup>30</sup> Zanoah, Adullam and their villages, in Lachish and its fields, and in Azekah and its settlements. So they were living all the way from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom.
  - a) An interesting fact about these verses is names are not given, just the places they lived. I suspect it was for Nehemiah to realize, he's in charge of these places even though he does not have a list of the names of people at that moment. Some people think it's a subtle dig as people in these areas chose to live in the suburbs versus Jerusalem itself. I'll leave it at that. Anyway, we got towns not people listed here.
11. Verse 31: The descendants of the Benjamites from Geba lived in Micmash, Aija, Bethel and its settlements,<sup>32</sup> in Anathoth, Nob and Ananiah,<sup>33</sup> in Hazor, Ramah and Gittaim,<sup>34</sup> in Hadid, Zeboim and Neballat,<sup>35</sup> in Lod and Ono, and in the Valley of the Craftsmen.<sup>36</sup> Some of the divisions of the Levites of Judah settled in Benjamin.
  - a) Remember that the two tribal territories that made up the old Southern Kingdom (the one that got taken to Babylon) was that of "Judah and Benjamin". The latter was a small group in comparison to Judah but those who were from that family line are listed here.
  - b) So if all these family names are so important, why don't Jewish people know which tribe they're from today? The short version is when the Romans destroyed the Israel temple in 70 AD, all the family records were destroyed. I'd argue one reason God allowed that, was so no other "descendant of King David" could claim Messiahship! During that time, it was necessary to preserve family lines to know who was Jewish. The only way we know today who is Jewish is based on last names and the claims of that family. In Chapter 13, we will see an effort to separate non-Jewish people from being a part of these families. In order to know who should stay and who should go, we need to know the "family history", thus we have this list. OK, enough of that. Onto Chapter 12.
12. Chapter 12, Verse 1: These were the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and with Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,<sup>2</sup> Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,<sup>3</sup> Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,<sup>4</sup> Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah,<sup>5</sup> Mijamin, Moadiah, Bilgah,<sup>6</sup> Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah,<sup>7</sup> Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah and Jedaiah. These were the leaders of the priests and their associates in the days of Jeshua.<sup>8</sup> The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and also Mattaniah, who, together with his associates, was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving.<sup>9</sup> Bakbukiah and Unni, their associates, stood opposite them in the services.<sup>10</sup> Jeshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim the father of Eliashib, Eliashib the father of Joiada,<sup>11</sup> Joiada the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan the father of Jaddua.
  - a) I'm willing to admit all of this endless name reading is boring. Yes there's other purposes to it as we'll discover in the second half of this lesson. (My plea to hang tough!) We're near the end of all this so again, hang tough. This is a historic list. I'll just say it's the list of the priests who have returned since the return began. It includes Ezra (end of Verse 1). We've got a case where Nehemiah had to work with a list of names he had in order to know who it is he's in charge of.
  - b) Yes I can give you some trivial details about these people or compare this list to the other places in the bible that lists these names. Let's just say Nehemiah did the best he could to keep track of who's who just as God calls leaders to do their best to keep track of names of people they're in charge of. Think of this endless list as a reminder that we're accountable to those who lead us and vice versa. The first step of accountability is to realize who they are, who is part of the community. Anyway, this section was a historical list of the Levites who in effect were on "government payroll" to work the temple and help the people draw close to God.
  - c) This leads us to our final list, the "priests" of Nehemiah's day:

13. Verse 12: In the days of Joiakim, these were the heads of the priestly families: of Seraiah's family, Meraiah; of Jeremiah's, Hananiah;<sup>13</sup> of Ezra's, Meshullam; of Amariah's, Jehohanan;<sup>14</sup> of Malluch's, Jonathan; of Shecaniah's, Joseph;<sup>15</sup> of Harim's, Adna; of Meremoth's, Helkai;<sup>16</sup> of Iddo's, Zechariah; of Ginnethon's, Meshullam;<sup>17</sup> of Abijah's, Zicri; of Miniamin's and of Moadiah's, Piltai;<sup>18</sup> of Bilgah's, Shammua; of Shemaiah's, Jehonathan;<sup>19</sup> of Joiarib's, Mattenai; of Jedaiah's, Uzzi;<sup>20</sup> of Sallu's, Kallai; of Amok's, Eber;<sup>21</sup> of Hilkiah's, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah's, Nethanel.
- a) A quick personal note. Been teaching the bible for 20 years now. I still learn after all these years and even these list of names which let's be honest, is some of the toughest parts of it to get through has their moments of interest. Yes they're not as interesting as most stories we get through it, but their here for a reason. No it isn't to learn Israel's history as much as it is to understand how it applies to our lives. By giving us these "endless list of names" it is a reminder that God cares about people and wants accountability. Reading all of these names reminds us that if God cares for all of them, He cares for all of us no matter what it is we do in our roles as Christians.
  - b) Anyway, this last group of people are the priests during Nehemiah's time. Remember he is in charge of all these people as the governor of that region. It also means he's in charge of religious ceremonies and making sure there's an adequate number of people to serve as priests to help people draw close to God. Thus the necessity.
  - c) I remember I once asked the head pastor of my church (a large one), what it is he does. He said in effect, "I sign checks and I keep tab on everybody here and what they do". I do see Nehemiah doing that and this endless section is the reminder that our leaders must keep a lookout on everybody he's over. We should care because it reminds us we're accountable to those over us as well.
14. Verse 22: The family heads of the Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan and Jaddua, as well as those of the priests, were recorded in the reign of Darius the Persian.<sup>23</sup> The family heads among the descendants of Levi up to the time of Johanan son of Eliashib were recorded in the book of the annals.<sup>24</sup> And the leaders of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua son of Kadmiel, and their associates, who stood opposite them to give praise and thanksgiving, one section responding to the other, as prescribed by David the man of God.
- a) Here we get the "leaders of the priests". With accountability there is also delegation. It's not possible for Nehemiah to watch over everyone himself, so here is an example of those called to lead over the other priests so "accountability can work it's way up the ladder".
15. Verse 25: Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub were gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms at the gates.<sup>26</sup> They served in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest and scribe.
- a) With the priests accounted for, the last step is other people on the "government payroll" in Israel at that time. Remember that gatekeepers decided who can and can't go in the city. A list of them were given in Verse 19 of the last chapter. That list was the historical records. The names here are the current guys.
  - b) The really good news is we're done with names. The rest of this lesson is going to cover a bunch of other things that happened in Nehemiah's day. With that said, let's move on.
16. Verse 27: At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres.<sup>28</sup> The singers also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem--from the villages of the Netophathites,<sup>29</sup> from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup> When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.

- a) Way back in my lesson introduction, I pondered why is there a wall dedication ceremony here near the end of the book when the wall itself was done in Chapter 6? Maybe it's due to the fact Nehemiah had to deal with other issues such as internal and external problems or getting the city filled with people before he dedicated the wall. Either way, we're now a good time after the wall was finished and now it's "party time again" to hold a ceremony to dedicate that wall to God. In my life I've been to ceremonies where churches dedicate their new buildings to God and they use this section of Nehemiah as justification. We do it as a reminder that the things we do for God, are well, for God and having a party at the end of it all is a reminder why we gather as His people in the first place.
  - b) Keep in mind Jerusalem was roughly the size of nine football fields. If you've ever been to a "mile square park" or maybe Central Park in New York, from the ground it's impossible to see the whole thing. Only from an elevation does one grasp the size of it. Anyway, it's time for a parade of people to sing, play musical instruments and surround the city with a time of praising God. I was wondering how thick the wall was and did any of them have a fear of heights? Anyway, Nehemiah organized this parade and it was an organized time to sing praises and call the people in and near the city to praise God from this wall.
17. Verse 31: I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate.<sup>32</sup> Hoshaiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them,<sup>33</sup> along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam,<sup>34</sup> Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah,<sup>35</sup> as well as some priests with trumpets, and also Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph,<sup>36</sup> and his associates--Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani--with musical instruments prescribed by David the man of God. Ezra the scribe led the procession.<sup>37</sup> At the Fountain Gate they continued directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east.
- a) So why up on the wall? Why not find a big open space and have everyone sing together? What's the deal with all these people up on the wall? I suspect part of it was to symbolize the wall being built and giving God the credit for the job being done. The spectacle had to be a "witness" to the area that the Israelites "are back, organized and here to stay"!
  - b) I don't think the point for us, isn't so much the where, as it is just the idea of gathering as a entire say, church or community to praise God. I've been to Christian gatherings in a large baseball stadium and I go to a small bible study group every week. There are advantages and disadvantages to both types of gatherings. A large group makes a powerful sound. It can draw people to see what the fuss is all about. I've read of people who got saved when they were just curious about the event and ended up giving their lives to Jesus. The work that a Billy Graham has done is a marvelous example. I also seen God do great things in a small group setting, so both have their place. The point here is that we get tradition and a sense of community being played out here. The text says some of the instruments go back to the days of King David (the design of them, not the actual ones).
  - c) The good news is we don't read of any fear of heights and the walls that surround the city of Jerusalem were filled with people praising God through singing and music instruments as they walked around the city.
  - d) It may help to remind ourselves that Jesus will rule the world one day from this city. So as we read about honoring this city, remember that it's Jesus desire that His people gather in that city to be close to Him. So in eternity, how will millions of believers get close to Him? That's one reason why I argue we exist in more than three dimensions in heaven, but that is God's problem to figure out.
  - e) As to why it was up on the walls, my guess is part of it was creativity to do it differently. I think it's about being a witness to nonbelievers in the area. If it's God's will for a wall to be rebuilt it will be done as the city is now thriving again and used for His glory!

18. Verse 28: The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people--past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall,<sup>39</sup> over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard they stopped.
- a) Nehemiah isn't the "you guys go walk the wall, I'll be here on solid ground" type. He did the walk and led one of the two processions. I picture a parade around the walls. I don't know how they got over the gates, unless there's a walking bridge over them. It had to be a spectacle to watch a large group of grown men singing and playing instruments as they walk along the fence line of this city!
  - b) So why chronicle all this stuff? Why not just say, "Everybody formed a line as we walked along the city walls to praise God? Why mention all the different gates and list all of those people mentioned? What's the deal here? Yes we get the Nehemiah leadership issue. Still why should we care about all of this? The idea is God's city was filled with people who're praising Him. No it doesn't mean we have to move to Jerusalem. It does mean at times it's a good idea to organize our group, church or community to honor God. Why, because if we have our focus on Him, we're more likely to live like He desires we live! No we won't be perfect, but we're still to use our lives to honor Him, and this is an example of it here!
19. Verse 40: The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials,<sup>41</sup> as well as the priests--Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets--<sup>42</sup> and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam and Ezer. The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah.<sup>43</sup> And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.
- a) We learn here the celebration wasn't just everyone walking the fence! The choir took their place at the temple along with some officials. Animals were sacrificed and the choir sang. Yes I could get into animal sacrifices and the fact Christians don't do that as Jesus paid the complete price for our sins. The important point is "everyone" gathered together to honor God and that's always a good thing. In fact, if you ask me why all of this is in the bible, I'd argue that God loves obedience and loves when His people get together to honor Him. It's always worth mentioning in detail when such gatherings are happening.
20. Verse 44: At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites.<sup>45</sup> They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the singers and gatekeepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon.<sup>46</sup> For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.<sup>47</sup> So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron.
- a) I'm the first to admit, these two chapters are tough to get through. By the way Chapter 13 is different and far more interesting in my book. While Chapter 11 was mostly a list of all the Israelites who were around, Chapter 12 was mostly a big celebration. I wanted to take on all three as they give great examples of good leadership skills.
  - b) Anyway this final section deals with other duties of the priests. The main issue here is over the "stuff" collected for the priests. If people were paying "tithes" to the priests for all their service to God, the stuff has to be stored somewhere. In Verse 47 we get a mention of who else gets use of the "tithes".
  - c) Think of this as Nehemiah keeping tabs of who's on the government payroll so to speak! I know it's a requirement, but the underlying issue is leadership and distribution.



- d) I have to admit, if I was writing the bible, I'd skip all of this. I'd summarize both chapters as "The Israelites organized who was who and verified who was an Israelite. Then they all had a big celebration for the wall dedication. Then Nehemiah organized all those who did work the temple to make sure everything was "kosher"". There, that's a summary of these two chapters in a few thoughts. So why all these details? I doubt we'd remember most of this stuff five minutes from now. One reason is to show what leadership is like if it's done well. Part of it was to show obedience to God and celebrating when people work together to make a difference for Him. Keep in mind that God cares about the jobs we do when it's for Him. While we read of priests, musicians and gatekeepers here, they are all important to God because it's people using their gifts and talents for His glory. A related reason is to show that Nehemiah organized and made sure all those who should be on the "payroll of the government" (so to speak) were taken care of.
  - e) Remember the role of the leader of a leader is to care for those he or she leads. That's why in effect these chapters are here. With that said, time for the final chapter of this book.
21. Chapter 13, Verse 1: On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, <sup>2</sup> because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing.) <sup>3</sup> When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent.
- a) If there is one thing I've learned from studying Nehemiah is he can't do anything without organizing a bible study around it. Yes he had the parade to honor God. Yes he listed all of the groups that were supported through the giving to the "church". Now that that's all settled, time for people to learn a little more about what God expects of them.
  - b) In this bible study, they read from Deuteronomy 23:3-5. At that time, God told Moses that no one from the Ammonite or Moabite nation was allowed to be among the gathering at a honoring of God at the tabernacle. If you think about it, it's a strange command. It is one thing to punish a group back then, by why punish them for all time? Why punish people who want to become Jewish here, roughly a thousand years later? The issue isn't to make converts suffer. The issue is to realize there will always be people opposed to teaching of God's word and spreading the fact of His existence.
    - i) The good news is these Israelites figured that out. They didn't just exclude people from those two nations (essentially what is the nation of Jordan today) but also all of foreign descent.
    - ii) Think about it this way: We had a bunch of chapters to figure out who exactly was an Israelite. Now that it's established, it's easy to say, "Wait a minute, you and you don't belong here!" Yes they can still worship God (if they convert) but they're still considered "second class citizens" in the sense they're not Israelites. Keep in mind, before Jesus "did His thing" the only way to salvation was through a conversion to Judaism. Realize the Jewish philosophy is one doesn't have to become Jewish as to be saved. One has to react well based on what one knows about God. Therefore a separation of the Jewish people is not to look down on others, it's just to realize the Jewish nation was called by God and therefore must separate themselves from the rest of the nations to honor God as well, a Jewish nation. To this day, if you and I convert to Christianity and are not Jewish, they consider us "saved" because we're honoring the God of the bible if we live accordingly.
  - c) With all that understood, the Israelites "kicked out" all those who came to this party who were not from Jewish descent.
    - i) Again it wasn't done out of hatred or a lack of respect for converts. It was to show how God has separated the Jewish nation to be His people just as He is separating a nation today of Christians to be His people). OK, I've beaten that point to death, we can move on to Nehemiah's next bit of business as their leader.

22. Verse 4: Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah,<sup>5</sup> and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests.
- a) A little background will be helpful here. Eliashib was the head priest at that time. The text implies he was related to Tobiah. (That would be wrong as it was required for the priests to only marry within the priestly tribe.) Even if it was just a friendship, you may recall, if you've read earlier chapters Tobiah was one of the opponents to building the wall. He is a Amorite and may have been a leader of that nation.
  - b) The sin here is the temple was and is only supposed to be used for God's use. If a room is used for a "relative" to keep stuff as opposed to store things intended for temple use or of the use of temple servants as listed in Verse 5, that's wrong.
  - c) Let me put it this way: As a real estate appraiser, I've appraised many churches and seen a lot of storage rooms in such buildings. They are always used for "stuff" related to use in church or Sunday school service, or for the musicians, etc. No problem with that. To see a church use rooms for other purposes is not honoring God with that place. I understand a church is the members and not the building, but to not use the building for church use is not honoring God in my "lousy opinion".
  - d) OK, then, back to Nehemiah.
23. Verse 6: But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission<sup>7</sup> and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God.<sup>8</sup> I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room.<sup>9</sup> I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.
- a) Since Nehemiah was the governor of that area, it'd be required of him to have to travel to visit the "hire up's" every now and then. We don't know if this was Nehemiah's only trip away from there. We just know he left. Best estimate is that was a 50-60 day journey on a camel or donkey each way. As I said in the introduction a dangers of a leader being out of the picture is "while the cat's away the mice will play" so to speak.
  - b) Anyway, when Nehemiah returned, he found out about a room in the temple being used as a storage room for the Amorite leader, "because he was related to the high priest". All this means is when Nehemiah returned and discovered this, he took action by having that room cleared out and once again it got used as it was intended to store grain to be used by the priests at the temple. This may be "no big deal to the average Israelite" going about his or her day, but the important point is the leader was leading properly and doing what had to be done in order to honor God. Just to warn you, things are about to get worse:
24. Verse 10: I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and singers responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields.<sup>11</sup> So I rebuked the officials and asked them, "Why is the house of God neglected?" Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts.
- a) We all know the expression "actions have consequences". Well with the lack of grain for the priests to live off of, many of the priests and servants of the priests left the temple as they needed to eat, so they went back to their home town to work the fields. Nehemiah's reaction was to take action. I picture him saying, "Hey, what's the deal here? Why have the servants returned to their hometowns and neglected their duties here?" I can see the response as "Not enough food for them", and it went downhill from there!" Can I prove it was the lack of grain that caused it, no, but it seems logical as these verses follow the last little section. Anyway, Nehemiah is seen here restoring order to the temple service.

- b) I'm betting the Israelites feared Nehemiah because let's be honest, he had the power of the Persian government supporting him. No matter the reason we should respect or fear our leaders, whether we like it or not they're in charge and we should encourage them as they try to do the right thing. The point here is that Nehemiah saw a problem and dealt with it as a good leader should.
  - c) Speaking of dealing with problems, we're back the "grain in the storerooms" again. Here we read of Nehemiah putting people in charge that I assume he trusted to make sure food got distributed as needed as we'll read below:
25. Verse 12: All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and oil into the storerooms. <sup>13</sup> I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because these men were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their brothers.
- a) Apparently word got out that temple service is back to what it was. The good leader was back in town, and word got out quickly as people brought their "tithes" (paid in grain and wine and oil) to the storage room. Nehemiah picked trustworthy men to be in charge as to take care of distribution.
26. Verse 14: Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.
- a) The first time I read this, I thought it was egotistical. Or he thought, God won't remember what he's done unless I remind him. I don't think it was like that. I think Nehemiah wants to remind himself that he wasn't a leader because he was the king's food taster or because he was picked for this job, but he realized it was his job to serve God no matter what it is he was called to do. He's thinking out loud that our job in life is to serve God in his role as a leader and he's trying his best to fulfill that role.
  - b) Since that's on his mind, he's got more issues like this to deal with.
27. Verse 15: In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. <sup>16</sup> Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. <sup>17</sup> I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing--desecrating the Sabbath day? <sup>18</sup> Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath."
- a) Time for a "Sabbath" discussion. The basic idea is we're to work six days and rest (giving honor to God) on the seventh day. What about policeman, doctors and soldiers? Yes one has to make exceptions and I'm sure the Israelites understood that.
  - b) So what would motivate Israelites to do business on the Sabbath? Part of it may be simple greed. After all foreigners were bringing stuff in to sell on the Sabbath, so I suspect it's just about increasing one's wealth. For some people work is their life and they get addicted to their job over having a personal life. The reason God wants us to take a day off, is simply to take time to appreciate life and all that He's done for us. To take a day to focus on God makes us more grateful for the life we have. Yes I know there are emergency situations. I know there are times where violating one's Sabbath is a necessity. I'm just saying one will appreciate life much more when one takes such a day off. I'm well aware denominations debate over this stuff. I'm saying it's best for our lives when we obey that commandment.
  - c) Speaking of violating that commandment, Nehemiah got tough on the Israelites for doing just that. Yes foreigners were hanging outside the gate waiting for violators. Yes Israelites were willing to work on the Sabbath for one reason or another. Nehemiah led well as he did what could to prevent the violation of this commandment.

- d) Keep in mind that people have a need to worship something. If the Sabbath wasn't going to be a big deal people would turn to something else. Those "something else's" is how the Israelites were kicked out of the land when the Babylonians conquered them.
  - e) What about nonbelievers? This isn't about them. They refuse to acknowledge God as the center of their lives. The issue's about being a good witness for Him. One way we do that is to take time to honor God as God. Thus a day of rest is something we should do!
28. Verse 19: When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. <sup>20</sup> Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. <sup>21</sup> But I warned them and said, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. <sup>22</sup> Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.
- a) To keep it simple, Nehemiah took action as the leader to require people to honor God on the Sabbath. That meant kicking out the foreigners hanging out by the gates. It meant he locked the gates during the Sabbath so no one could get in or out. (Yes I'm sure there was exceptions for emergencies.) The emphasis again is on leadership and the fact Nehemiah took action to deal with it. I know it was "only" in Jerusalem and he couldn't control those other places in Israel. Still I give him credit for doing what he could to encourage those in the area to worship God as He intends us to. He even got the Levites to purify themselves (A ritual to be ceremonial clean to perform their rituals). Bottom line is Nehemiah worked to honor God in all that he was called to do as a civic leader!
29. Verse 22 (cont.): Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.
- a) As I said earlier, I don't think it's ego, but his way to remind himself of why he was called to be witness to God. There's nothing wrong with reminding ourselves why we do what we do as a witness for God, as long as we're not motivated to try to gain "brownie points" by such statements.
30. Verse 23: Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. <sup>24</sup> Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. <sup>25</sup> I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. <sup>26</sup> Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. <sup>27</sup> Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?"
- a) Here we get the last problem Nehemiah dealt with. Israelites marrying foreign women. If you've studied Ezra and Nehemiah this problem has been around for awhile. So what was the motivation to marry foreigners. I suspect it is simply the "grass is greener on the other side" syndrome. As the Israelites married foreigners, their children started speaking those languages of the foreign spouses. One of the reasons why God wanted to keep this nation "pure" was so that there would be a Jewish nation when the Messiah showed up. I gave a lecture in an earlier lesson on the danger of marrying non-believers. The short version is it always causes problems. Yes I know it's a complicated issue especially when one spouse gets saved after marriage. Anyway, the bottom line is God wanted the Israelites to marry within the nation as problems occurred historically when it was violated.
  - b) Notice Nehemiah was "no wimp". He beat some of those men and pulled hair out of those who violated it (Verse 25). Nehemiah also told the story of King Solomon who lead them to a downfall by marrying lots of foreign women.

- c) Bottom line again, Nehemiah saw ways the Israelites were not living as a good witness for God and as their leader took harsh measures to say in effect, "Hey, are we God's witnesses to the world or not?"
31. Verse 28: One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. And I drove him away from me. <sup>29</sup> Remember them, O my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites. <sup>30</sup> So I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign, and assigned them duties, each to his own task. <sup>31</sup> I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the firstfruits.
- a) The problem of marrying foreign wives even affected the priesthood. One of the sons of the high priest was a foreigner. It is against the Jewish law for the priest to marry outside of the faith. So Nehemiah got tough with him and basically forced a divorce there on the spot! I get the impression Nehemiah didn't stop there based on the rest of the text.
  - b) The final thing we read of is Nehemiah making sure there were supplies there the priests can use for their service.
  - c) One has to admit, this isn't the most exciting lesson. It was a lot of details about how they were organized as a people, how they worshipped God and how Nehemiah "kicked butt" to keep the Israelites in line. So couldn't the bible just say what I wrote here and save us a lot of reading? Why all these details? Part of it was to show what God expects of leaders as a witness for Him. Part of it is to give examples how we can be a witness for God.
  - d) To me, the underlying issue isn't that we have to do "A, B and C" to be pleasing to God. We can't earn His love. The issue is about how to be a good witness for Him and what is the best way to live out our lives. Accountability and good leadership are usually needed to keep us on the "straight and narrow" and Nehemiah does a good job of that.
  - e) So why in effect end the Old Testament this way? Because it ends with God showing how to be a good witness for Him no matter what the role we were called to. Did the Israelites mess up? Of course. But so do you and I. When we do, we confess our sin, turn from it, and then make an effort once again to live as God wants us to live as a witness for Him.
32. Verse 31 (cont.): Remember me with favor, O my God.
- a) When Nehemiah was alive, I doubt he thought his book would ever be organized as part of a bible collection. He thought he was just doing his best to be a witness for God in the role he was called to do. We never know how God will use us. In effect he ends what we consider the Old Testament on a positive note showing how with good leadership and a little accountability we can each be a good witness for God. What if I don't have anyone to act as a leadership role for me? What if I can't find a good church to get involved with? I would say do the best we can in the situation we're in and ask God to help us be the type of witness for Him that he desires.
33. With that said, thanks for studying Nehemiah with me. On the next page is my sources that I did use for writing these lessons. Time to close in prayer.
34. Heavenly Father, none of us can ever be the type of witness You desire us to be. All we can do is use what time we have left as a witness for You. May the Spirit guide us so that we use our time as You desire and our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen

## Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted me to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in preparation of my lessons. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) (no copyright on that version); the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #7 below. The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189; "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text used in these lessons (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over these lessons. The specific commentaries on Ezra are listed first, and then bible-wide commentaries. They're listed in alphabetical order by author. References to audio commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on Nehemiah by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>.
2. Commentary on Nehemiah by Bob Davis. They are available for free in MP3® format at <http://northcountrychapel.com/studies/>.
3. Commentary on Nehemiah by David Guzik. It is available for free in text format. The web address is [http://www.enduringword.com/library\\_commentaries.htm](http://www.enduringword.com/library_commentaries.htm) Mr. Davis quotes a lot of famous authors from the 19th and 20th Century on these books and I've used some of those quotes.
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9. I also refer sometimes to J.P. Moreland apologetic ministry which is at [www.jpmoreland.com](http://www.jpmoreland.com) and Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at [www.str.org](http://www.str.org) I also quote from Dennis Prager on many Jewish issues. He is a nationally syndicated radio broadcaster. See [dennisprager.com](http://dennisprager.com).
10. My apology if I have quoted someone else and I have forgotten to include them in this list.
11. Also grateful for "Google" and "Wiki" web site to look up specific facts stated in these lessons.