The Register of the Remnant and the Reading of the Law

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References: Nehemiah 7-8, Nehemiah 7:4; Nehemiah 7:5-6; Nehemiah 7:25-27; Nehemiah 7:60; Nehemiah 7:61-62; Nehemiah 7:63-65; Nehemiah 7:66-67; Nehemiah 7:68-69; Nehemiah 7:70; Nehemiah 7:71-72; Nehemiah 7:73; Nehemiah 8:1-3; Nehemiah 11:1-2; Ezra 2:68-69; Psalm 68:6; 1 Corinthians 11:28

The Need for Organization and Knowing the People

So, the book of Nehemiah, if you will turn there—Nehemiah—and we're going to start looking at the beginning, I believe, of chapter 7.

Yeah. We made just a few comments, I think, on the first three verses of chapter 7. When you go beyond that, you get into the list of those who had come to Jerusalem from Babylon and the other parts of the world to which they had been scattered. Let me just read a couple of verses at the beginning of chapter 7, beginning at verse 4. It says:

> [Nehemiah 7:5-6 NKJV]
> 5 Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return, and found written in it: 6 These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city.

And that's basically a simple introduction. Nehemiah had been blessed of God, and there was a good response. His wall—the wall of Jerusalem—had been built in 52 days, but there was a need to reorganize. And I guess organized, not just reorganized, but they had to put the nation together. In particular, there weren't very many living in Jerusalem. And I think Nehemiah basically said, "Who are these people? We've got to work with them. We've got to build a city. These people are here to help us, but who are they?"

And so as a manager, he basically said, "I want to know who my staff are." And from a biblical point of view, from an assembly point of view, we say, "Who are the people in our assembly? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses?"

And some of you were here today for the lunch. How many of you who were here today can name everyone who was here having lunch with us today? And some of you say, "I can't do that." Now, one of the reasons is because there are a lot of people in today who have never been in before. But Irene—you've got to pray for Irene—and the other lady, Yolanda number two, was here this morning. Both of them were brand new today. Sandy and Kathy were back. And Ehor was here today—first time he'd been here on Sunday. So it's just lots of people here. It's hard to know who they are.

Nehemiah said, "We're going to list all these people. We want to make sure that they are all the people of God." But there were some who weren't.

Who all is in the assembly at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel? Well, you'd say, first of all, if you're going to be in the assembly at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel, you'd have to be a born-again Christian. There are several who come; they're friendly people, we like them very much, but they have not told us yet that they're Christians. Some of them will tell you that they're not a Christian yet, and others I don't think really are sure. So that was part of it. But we also want to know enough about them to know what their spiritual circumstances are. Are they solid in the faith, or do they hold erroneous and possibly even destructive doctrine? We would want to know that. So it's important for us to know the people in the assembly.

And so you probably have got a prayer list or several prayer lists. And the question is, whose names are on those prayer lists? And it's one thing to know their name; it's another thing to know who they are. So we want to get to know them. I think that's part of Nehemiah's situation here. He's going to take action when you get to chapter 8, and it'll be good action. And he's going to start teaching them the truth of God. But before that, he wants to know who they are so that he can teach them the truth of God.

So that's my background to all this. The names are many, and I'm not sure that we're going to spend a lot of time on each one. Eric has got some good news for us, and he'll explain that. So I think, Eric, why don't you go ahead and give us some thoughts up to, but maybe not yet into, all those names?

And in verse 4, we read:

> [Nehemiah 7:4 NKJV]
> Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt.

So, if you go to chapter 11 and verses 1 and 2, we get kind of a background to this, because they're connected, these two portions. In verse 1 of chapter 11—and this is concurrent history:

> [Nehemiah 11:1-2 NKJV]
> 1 Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths were to dwell in other cities. 2 And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.

And as Harold has pointed out, the purpose of this register, this new genealogy, was to make sure that the city was properly populated with the Lord's people, because there were very few that were there. You remember when we looked at the wall being built, there were many who came—who built—there were the men of Jericho, there were others who came from villages surrounding. People came to help build the wall, and they were successful. But then they went back to their villages, and so we find that there's a lot of empty spaces, a lot of houses empty, and so on. And for a capital city, that would be a problem.

And so that's the main purpose of which Nehemiah wants to register. But it wasn't his idea. It was actually God's idea. We read that in verse 5: "Then my God put it into my heart." It was God's purpose that Jerusalem would be built up again. The people of God would inhabit the holy city, the glorious city—the city that had the rebuilt temple. The temple had been rebuilt, the walls had been erected. Now the sacrifices are being made. It's a place where the people of God can come and find seclusion and peace and safety. They can gather together as one, and you'll see that in chapter 8, the effect that that had on the population. It was a great effect, but they needed to have that background: the walls built, the temple there, and the separation from the nations outside, and all the outside influences that had been flowing back and forth through the many years that the walls had been falling down.

Jerusalem was trampled down by the Gentiles, you might say, like it is today. And so even today, now, the most holy site in Israel—the Muslims control it: the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. They are there, and Jews have to almost get permission to go up now, and

they're just beginning now to be able to go up to pray. And they have not been able to for years and years. So in one sense, the most holy site in Israel is still controlled by Gentiles.

But here, back in Nehemiah's day, through the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah, the city once again is being built and the outside influences are being expelled, so that the true worship of the living God can take place in safety and exclude all other influences. As Harold has used the analogy of the assembly here: the world is invited in, but only when the gates are open for business, and they're excluded—as in the city, where they would exclude people from coming in to worship at the temple and so on. There were gatekeepers, people at watch.

And just so the church itself: only believers are members of the local church. And every true believer is welcome to fellowship. If their lives are right and their doctrine is good, then they are welcomed into the fellowship. That's all the credentials that one needs to get into an assembly.

Amen. Just that they love the Lord Jesus, they're walking in the light, and their doctrine is pure. So in the same way, there were gatekeepers in Jerusalem that kept out all the outside influence so that the worship of the true and living God could be understood.

So it's God that put it in his heart. And with Nehemiah, he was a man that walked with God. Amen. So many times his prayers—he has these short, quick prayers when he runs into trouble. He and the Lord are not very far apart. Amen. And that was one of the reasons for the success of Nehemiah: God could speak to him and he could speak to God. And regardless of his personality, the source of his power was his nearness to the God of Israel. Amen. And his desire to honor him in all things.

So he put it in his heart, it says in verse 5, to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. So that's the purpose. The main purpose is that, of course, there were too few living in Jerusalem, and he also wanted to know who was who.

There's a reason for that, because genealogy is very important. If you go to the opening chapter of the New Testament, the very first thing you encounter is a genealogy—the genealogy of the Messiah, the coming One. The Word would be made flesh, but he would be offered to the nation of Israel as their King. And so this was very important. The genealogy was extremely important. And we notice in verse 26, for example, that the men of Bethlehem, they were registered. And where was the Lord to be born? Well, it was in Bethlehem, wasn't it? And so there, probably his forebears—the Lord Jesus' forebears—would be registered among those men that were in Bethlehem. That's quite possible.

But notice back to verse 5 again: God's plan. Register the people, Nehemiah. And so where would he start? Well, first of all, he found a register already, and he'd make that his starting

point. He says, "I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return."

Reconciling the Genealogies: Ezra and Nehemiah

And you'll notice that when we studied the book of Ezra, there was another genealogy there as well—very similar, but not the same. There were two genealogies. And some have said, "Well, these are scribal mistakes"—of which I abhor the very term scribal mistake. Those scribes did not make those kind of mistakes. Amen. If they did make a mistake, the manuscript was torn up and it was started over again.

And so then we might look at: why were these two registers different? In Ezra chapter 2, you have—in Ezra chapter 2, if you begin that register, and here in Nehemiah chapter 7, we have a register. Now, I have a copy of these two registers side by side here. If someone is interested in just looking at them, I've got two here, and there are three of them. So I don't know, what are we going to do here? Can you put it up on Zoom? Yeah. Okay, I can put it on Zoom. Okay. Well, here, I'll give it over there. Thank you. I'll get you one; I'll make a copy for you after, but it'll come up on the screen.

Now, I won't spend a lot of time on this because I don't think it's all that important. However, you'll notice that you have the names on the left-hand side, and they all correspond. And then the next column is Ezra's account or genealogy, and then the one in Nehemiah in the next one. And then you find the differences between the two: either they are more or less. And the easiest way to reconcile this is that one was a register before they left, when they were assembled in Babylon before they went to Jerusalem. That's the one that we probably find in the book of Ezra. The one we have here in Nehemiah is a record of those that actually arrived in Jerusalem. So there were two registers.

Now, it makes sense because, remember, the first return, of course, was under Zerubbabel, not with Ezra. Ezra came a number of years later. But when Ezra brought his smaller company up, they stopped at a river, and they assembled all the people, and they stayed there for three days. And no doubt Ezra would have made a record of those that had assembled. And it would make sense. If you're going to go for a journey, and you've got 50,000 people, you'd want to make sure that you had everybody registered. You get on an airplane, and they take your name and so on, and make sure that everyone there is accounted for. That's the responsibility of the leaders. And so Zerubbabel and Jeshua the high priest, they would very likely have assembled their company before they began their journey, because they want to travel together and make sure that they have provisions, make sure everyone is okay for the journey, and they check everything over and make a register,

and then they would set out. And that's the record we find in the book of Ezra. Ezra records Zerubbabel's census, whereas the record of those that came back, that actually arrived in Jerusalem, we find in Nehemiah.

And the differences are that there's a note at the bottom of this, you'll notice, and I'll just read that:

> "The list in Ezra 2 is probably that of the returnees taken before they departed from Babylon, whereas the list found in Nehemiah 7 is that of those who actually arrived in Jerusalem. That is, some joined the returning exiles after their departure..."

Which makes sense. There's always somebody late coming in the door, is there not?

> "...whereas others may have turned back for some reason or another. The main disparity is that of the Azgad clan."

All or part of the 1,100—the Azgad clan—there's 1,100, yes. It's about one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten—the tenth from the top. There's 1,100 people more that were registered that came back than were registered that left Babylon. That's quite a number. And so the writer here suggests that all or part of the 1,100 could also have been among the poor left in the land at the time that they were deported, so that they were left in the land, but when Zerubbabel arrived in the land, he found these people of the Azgad clan and he included them in the genealogy. And then, of course, small changes could also be due to births and deaths on the route. It would take them, I think, about four months, maybe more with that number of people. They would be a long time on the way; they would be on the journey. And so there would be births and deaths; there would be people coming and leaving, and so on. And so that accounts for the discrepancy.

Also, as I've examined very carefully the introduction to both of these genealogies, I find that it's very plain in Nehemiah chapter 7 and verse 5, which we've been looking at. You'll notice what it says in the last sentence of that verse. He says, "I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return." They had come up; they had arrived. Now, the ESV—what does the ESV read there, Ashton? Verse 5 of chapter 7, the last sentence there: "I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first." So that wording sounds very much like they had come up; that was there. Notice again what is in the second chapter

of Ezra, where it just mentions those who returned to Jerusalem—they were on their way, it sounds like. So even the wording, very carefully looked at, would support that idea. And that's the easiest way for this problem, if some people make it a problem, to explain it. It's natural to have a genealogy, a record of who is leaving, and also a record of those who arrived. So that's very plain and simple.

I don't have any other comments on that genealogy itself, with the exception, as I mentioned, a register, a genealogy, was very, very important. Number one, God is interested in the individual—very much so. And when I read the names, there's name after name after name after name in the Bible—thousands of names. God is interested in the individual. All the other religious writings of men, they're not even interested really in men. But the God of heaven is interested in men. We read that his delights were with the children of men. And we have the great privilege as Christians to please our Father, to bring pleasure to him. How seldom we're able to do that in a consistent way! But we do at times, even when we're broken in spirit and feel we've failed the Lord. You know, he's like a tender father, and he loves us even when we're broken and feel having no worth to come to him. And so that's the first thing I would notice about a genealogy.

The second is, of course, the genealogy of the King himself, our Lord Jesus Christ. And the other thing which has been mentioned: it's important to know who the seed of Israel really are. Those porters and gatekeepers at the various gates—they were specially appointed men with discernment, and they may have had this genealogy in their hands. They could use that; they could look it up. It's a record: "What is your business here, sir? This is God's holy city. What is your business?" And so those are some things that I see in the importance of this genealogy.

The individuals—you could probably spend years going over these places, the places where these people are from and their names themselves. Every name has a meaning in Scripture; you could draw a lot of spiritual truth out of it, of which I think we have to pass over because we don't have time to do that. Otherwise, we'd never finish the eighth chapter or the seventh chapter of the book of Nehemiah. And we're trying to get through it before the end of the year, are we not? Well, I think we would get a cheer if we did; we might get something else if we didn't.

The Significance of the Assembly Family

So, all right. Well, so just a few comments then as we go. These are genealogies. And the genealogy usually is my father, my grandfather, and the family. And interestingly, these genealogies appear to be more related to cities or villages rather than always people. For

example, verse number 26—the children of Gibeon, 90 and 5; that's verse 25. Verse 26, the children of Bethlehem and Netophah: 104 score and eight. Verse 27, the children of Anathoth:

> [Nehemiah 7:25-27 NKJV]
> [25] the sons of Gibeon, ninety-five; [26] the men of Bethlehem and Netophah, one hundred and eighty-eight; [27] the men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight;

Well, now, Gibeon, Bethlehem, and Anathoth are all names of small villages or cities that we've read about elsewhere in the Bible. So these aren't necessarily family-related genealogies; these are, in many respects, community-related genealogies.

Now, the social structure of the Jews was very different from the social structure of the Western world today. In the ancient world, in the days of the kings and in the days of the judges, families inherited land, and the land of the forefather would be divided amongst his posterity. And each one would get a little less land, but the people on the land were people of the same family, and the neighbors would be the same neighbors. So if originally, in the days of Joshua, there were 40 families that went to a particular community, each family would have posterity, but the 40 families would be interrelated—intermarried, maybe—but the communities stayed together.

All of which is encouraging to me. God loves families. He loves individuals in the family, but he loves assembly families.

So the question was put to us just before the meeting: "How long has 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel been here?" And the answer is 80 years. Now, during that time, well, who was here? And you go back to the original families, and you say, "What happened to them?" And some of them are still here, and others have gone a long way away. But in the days of the children of Israel, they would have stayed together far longer. We have the distressing issue in our Western society, and from a business point of view, the company says, "You work for us; we will transfer you wherever we want to transfer you." And so your boss comes up to you one day and says, "We've got a new job for you. You've been transferred, and you're going to go there whether you like it or not." And many people have said, "I'm not going," and others have gone. We also say, "You're 17 years old now; you've got to go to university." Where will you go to university? "Well, you've got to go to some other city to university." I thought that is crazy. My sister thinks it's daft. And we both graduated from university and went to UBC.

And we were both delighted that we didn't go to the University of here, there, or 28 other places. Why? We got to stay with our community family.

So God has a focus on natural family and community family. And today we have a natural family and an assembly family. And frankly, we've got a responsibility to our assembly family. It was kind of encouraging today: she came up to me and said, "Hello." I said, "It's good to see you, but you've got to give me your name again." She said, "Fanny." I said, "Fanny?" She said, "Yeah, Larry's daughter." Well, I said, "When were you here last?" "Oh," she said, "maybe 20 years ago." Okay, is she part of the family? Of course she's part of the family! She looked around the building; she didn't even know we had an elevator, and she was delighted to be here. She lives in China, but she's part of our family.

There was another family. Eric was here this morning. I said, "Eric, it's good to see you." And Eric's family—his brothers, his mother and father—were in fellowship with us here at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel 40 years ago, probably 50 as well. And interestingly enough, most of them were in fellowship with the exception of Eric. But Eric has been in this chapel on two occasions in the last 40 years. Now, my question is: is he part of the family or not? Well, I don't know his theology; I'm not sure that he's truly born again. I don't think he was back in those early days. But he's part of the family in the sense that we have responsibility to him. He has responsibility to us. We're all part of the same assembly family. His mother and father and brothers were here. His mother and father were a great blessing in this assembly.

All of which says: are these names important? Yes, they're all family. We have a responsibility to our family, and we should reach out, especially to our family. The Lord says in one of the Psalms, I think—I'm not sure, but the line goes like this:

> [Psalm 68:6 NKJV]
> God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; But the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

And I say that's wonderful. So I embrace those at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel. You're all part of our family. Frankly, we've got a big family, and we rejoice in that. And we want it to be bigger. And some of us have got to get a better registry of names.

All these names are here. Do you think Nehemiah memorized all these names and all their posterity? I'm not sure that he did, but he had it in a registry. Did God memorize their names? Yep. That's the good thing: he's got it all written down. He knows who I am. He

knows where I belong. He knows who's near to me in a family, in an assembly, in a spiritual relationship. It's all really, really good news.

Purity in the Fellowship and the Priesthood

So these lists go on. Again, I think there were some 42,000; we'll see when we get to the end. I'm going to pick up reading here, not in the entire story, but let's go to verse number 60. It says:

> [Nehemiah 7:60 NKJV]
> All the Nethinim, and the sons of Solomon's servants, were three hundred and ninety-two.

These Nethinim were the descendants of the men of Gibeon. And they were Gentiles—they had been Canaanites—but they were brought into the assembly because the men of Joshua had accepted them without consulting the Lord. They came in and they were accepted. Praise the Lord.

Verse 61:

> [Nehemiah 7:61-62 NKJV]
> 61 And these were the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not identify their father's house nor their lineage, whether they were of Israel: 62 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and forty-two;

There were those who couldn't establish that they were part of the people of God. And we've referred to it earlier: the people of God are those who've been born again. It's all very simple. You can't be in the family unless you've been born into the family. In the case of the Christian, he's got to be born again. If you can't show that you're born again, then you're not part of the family. And you can say, "I want to be baptized." You can say, "I want to be in fellowship. I want to come to the meetings. I want to help here. I want to do this. I need to do the preaching." But if you're not born again, you're not part of the family. And these could not show their father's house; they were not part of the family.

Verse 63 says:

> [Nehemiah 7:63-64 NKJV]
> 63 and of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Koz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name. 64 These sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but it was not found; therefore they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled.

They were priests, at least they said they were, but their genealogy could not prove that they were. And so the conclusion of verse 64 is, therefore, were they as polluted put out of the priesthood?

Have you been born again? You're part of the assembly. Have you not been born again? You're not part of the assembly. You say, "But I like to put money in the collection." Thank you very much. "I like to work here and there." That's good. But you're not part of the assembly unless you've been born again. You've got to be born again. And this principle is here.

Verse 65:

> [Nehemiah 7:65 NKJV]
> 65 And the governor said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim.

This priest, Urim and Thummim being hard to define precisely, but basically they were those who were able at particular times to verify the truth of God. And so if a priest came with Urim and Thummim, then he may be able to verify the genealogy of these people. But until then, these people called themselves priests; they just could not eat of the priestly food.

All of which says that it is most important that the people of God have a sound, solid, perfect, born-again experience. You've got to be born again. There must be proof of your being born again. I heard the story a while ago about a man who said, "Yes, I'm a Christian." "When were you born again?" "Well, it was 15 years ago." "What did you do?" He said, "I prayed the sinner's prayer," and he had a good testimony. And then somebody said to him, "What have you done since?" He says, "I really haven't done very much." "Have you been in fellowship anywhere?" "No." "Have you read your Bible?" "No." "Do you like to pray?" "No." Fifteen years, and you haven't done anything! You can't prove to me you were born again. You can

prove to me that you said some words. But if you're born again—a man who's been born, when he's 15 years old, he doesn't look like a baby anymore. And we've got to be the same.

So verse 66 says then:

> [Nehemiah 7:66-67 NKJV]
> 66 Altogether the whole assembly was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty,
> 67 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred and forty-five men and women singers.

I think it's wonderful that these people had servants, and their servants were counted part of the family as well. They came in by the grace of God; they came in as believers, and they were part of the number. So the Lord reaches out to those who are serving, working with the families of God, and I just see that as a picture of the grace of God.

So maybe that's a good place to break off now. Eric's probably got a lot of comments, and we'll break here, and then we'll carry on on verse 70 later.

No, I don't have any on that—you mean on the lengthy genealogy? Well, it's interesting, just on that verse 65. They were excluded from the priesthood, verse 64 and 65, but they were not excluded from the nation itself, it would seem. Because the governor said to them they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest consult with the Urim and Thummim. And of course, that won't take place until our Lord Jesus comes again, our great High Priest. And then these folks, their line, their genealogy, they probably then will be able to be picked up again as priests and serve during the millennial kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. But until then, they were put out of the priesthood. It doesn't mean to say that they were put out of the nation, but put out of the priesthood.

Now, the only way that we could possibly make an application for us today is that in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, where Paul writes to the Corinthians:

> [1 Corinthians 11:28 NKJV]
> But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

In other words, there was examination—examination of themselves before the Lord. And of course, believers today have none other than our great High Priest himself. He has come; he is our High Priest today. And so there is no priest that needs to be put out of the priesthood. Today we're all priests. And the only time we can't function as a priest is if we're not walking in holiness before the Lord. And then our worship then is not accepted; we're, in a sense, put out of the priesthood until we confess before our Lord Jesus Christ.

And of course, the Urim and Thummim, I believe, are an aggregate of the stones that were worn upon the breast of the high priest. And so they were lights and perfections. And that is us: he bears us on his heart as he goes into the most holy place; we're there with him. But that application that I make there then today is that as priests, we are holy priests. We should be holy. And in order to offer up, as Peter says, our sacrifice of thanksgiving, we need to have holy lives, examining ourselves if we're not. So just that application, I think, from that one Scripture.

Assets for the Work: Animals and Offerings

All right, well, verse 68:

> [Nehemiah 7:68-69 NKJV]
> 68 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, 69 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

And you say, "What? What has that got to do with it?" And remember now that Nehemiah was in the business of rebuilding the city. And would horses, camels, mules, donkeys be important for rebuilding the city? Yes!

So who's in the assembly? And we say, "Well, these brethren, these sisters are all in the assembly. What do they bring with them?" Well, one man says, "I've got this set of abilities." Another man says, "I've got that." Someone else says, "I can do this." Someone says, "I've even got a car that I could use." Bill Whiting says, "I have a small car, but if I had a bigger car, I could bring more people to Sunday school." So he went out and bought a van. You can imagine some of these men saying, "I'd like to be part of the rebuilding of the city. I'm going to go get a new horse. I'm going to get a new camel."

And so they seem to me, when you first read it, I said to myself, "Harold, those animals don't sound like people. What are they doing in this list?" And the answer is that they are assets that the Lord could use. Could the Lord use any of your assets? And the answer is maybe he could. Maybe he can use this ability, that ability. And so you say, "Well, maybe I could be used there." Some man says, "I'm a good bookkeeper." "Oh, we might be able to use that in the assembly; somebody's got to keep the books." Another man says, "I'm an accountant." Well, that could be used. Another man says, "Well, frankly, I'm pretty good at mechanics. I can repair things." Okay, you've got a job! There's lots to be done in the family. And so Nehemiah's responsibility is to take these people and to begin to build them into the city and use them to build the city. And their horses and donkeys and their camels are important.

Verse number 70:

> [Nehemiah 7:70 NKJV]
> And some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly garments.

Now, frankly, I can never really put a proper value on a thousand drams of gold or basins—I don't know what that is—but 530 priest garments: how much would that be worth? And so you say, "Well, you can always go down to the street and go to a store and you can buy a suit." What's a good suit cost you these days? Well, it's been a while since I bought one. I don't know: 200? 300? 400? Ashton says 5,000. You could pay an awful lot of money for some really fancy clothes. Now, the priest garments were among the fanciest of clothes. So let's say, for sake of argument, just for easy mathematics, $500 a suit and 530 priest garments. How much is that, all you mathematicians? 500 times 530—somebody can do that. Over 25,000. Close to 30,000. That's a fair amount of money, okay? In Canadian dollars? Well, even more in American dollars!

So you sit back and you say, this man was generous. He's trying to organize the city. Have you ever heard of politicians who enter politics poor and end up rich? When was the last time you heard of a politician who entered politics rich and ended up poor? Who? I didn't want to be a politician under those circumstances! But that's what happened to Nehemiah. Nehemiah became a rich man—he gave away a lot. I think when he was finished, he was worth a whole lot less.

Do you remember the stories of missionaries? You ever heard of a missionary who became a missionary when he was rich and he gave it away? And the answer is yes. There's all kinds of stories. I think of C.T. Studd. He became a marvelous missionary to China, among other places. He started out rich, and he gave it away and gave it away and gave it away. The other fellow whose name I can't remember—I always associate him with milk. He's the milkman. What's the name of the big milk company in the United States? Carnation? Not Carnation. No. Anyway, he was born rich, and his family owned this great big milk company. And if I can remember, you'd say, "Oh, yeah, I've heard of them." And he decided he was going to become a missionary to the Muslims in North Africa. I think he died when he was 37 years old. He'd given away most of his money by the time he died. Amazing.

Many people follow this man, Nehemiah, for many reasons. A lot of missionaries follow him because he was generous.

All right, verse 71:

> [Nehemiah 7:71 NKJV]
> 71 Some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the treasury of the work twenty thousand gold drachmas, and two thousand two hundred silver minas.

That's 20 times as much as Nehemiah gave! And 2,200 pounds of silver. Wow. 2,200 pounds of silver. I can't remember what a pound of silver is worth today, but it's a lot of money. So there were quite a few rich men in Israel at the time. The city was burned down. It was weak, small. The walls had been broken down, but there were still men of wealth, and they joined with Nehemiah. Nehemiah didn't do all this alone. Nehemiah had men of God laboring with him, if you like, in the assembly, and each one did what he could. Some of them simply said, "I got some money. I'm going to help you." Good for you.

Verse 72:

> [Nehemiah 7:72 NKJV]
> 72 And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priestly garments.

The rich people gave 20,000, and the poor people—more of them, but they gave as well. The poor people gave as much as the rich people. That's very encouraging too. Three score and

seven priests' garments. So, they didn't give as many as Nehemiah gave, but they gave priests' garments.

Verse 73:

> [Nehemiah 7:73 NKJV]
> So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.

So, he built the walls and then he established a foundation. He took the people, identified them, and began, if you like, to organize them. And they, in turn, began to respond. And all this was done by the seventh month. He made some big changes in that first year. Sometimes, you see, you know, 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel has been around for 80 years. We don't make lots of changes very often. Sometimes you've got to make changes and you want to make them right. But I just—I marvel at this man. I think he was a good administrator. He probably would do a good job at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel.

All right. Well, that's the end of the chapter. And that's not a bad thing for us to get to the end of the chapter. And Eric, there's a few minutes left on our clock if you wanted to say some more before we get into chapter 8.

We have a list here that Harold has gone through of the gifts that were brought up when Nehemiah came. Notice that it says that in verse 70, the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the work. I take it that the work of the rebuilding of the wall, rebuilding of Jerusalem—there was a lot of funds that were needed to purchase iron for the gates and for the timber and for the porters and for the masons and the shepherds, and the support of people as they worked. This was all for the work of the building of the city itself.

There's another list found in Ezra chapter 2. It's a completely different list there. If you turn back to verse 69 of Ezra chapter 2, verse 68, it says:

> [Ezra 2:68-69 NKJV]
> 68 Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place: 69 According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one

> thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments.

This was in the time of Zerubbabel, and these were gifts that were brought up from Babylon, or from Persia, as it was then. So the purpose of that offering that was sent from Babylon was to build the temple. The offerings here that were brought by Nehemiah—they were for the work of the rebuilding of the walls. That's why you have such a difference in the amounts of money and silver and gold and garments and so on that were given. So just a little pointing out that there's no discrepancy in the Scripture. One was for the temple itself, it says directly, and this was just for the work of which Nehemiah had come up to do. There's no contradiction in the Scriptures.

Preparing for Chapter 8: Proclaiming the Word of God

All right, so the question is: what's next? And so I tried to summarize what we've had so far in the book of Nehemiah. And the first few chapters was they had to build the wall. The first five chapters, the building the wall; the wall was done. Chapter 6, we've got a discussion of a lot of the opposition that was found there—discussions of Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem and so on. So you build the wall and then you defend the work of God. And then chapter 7, you get to know the people. And what comes after that? And the answer is chapter 8.

And what's chapter 8 all about? Chapter 8 is: teach the people. You know who they are now. You know how many they are. You know where they're from. You know where they're living. And so the issue is they've got to be taught.

16th Avenue Chapel basically has two great responsibilities. Number one, we've got to teach people about the Lord so that they trust the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. And then they've got to be taught in order to grow as Christians so that they will be mature. We need discipleship. It isn't just evangelism we need; we need discipleship. Now it's easy to focus on one and not the other. It's very hard to keep a balanced program going. But the Lord has got to be gracious to us.

Nehemiah said, "All right, we've got all kinds of things going." Well now, we've got a reorganization of the people to a certain point, but they have got to be taught. They've got to be taught the truth of God. And so chapter 8, verse 1 says:

> [Nehemiah 8:1 NKJV]
> [1] Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.

Now, this is all taking place in the seventh month. It's just basically at the end of harvest season, and the people have got a little more time. And harvest has come in, which means they've got food in the bank, and they've got a little more time to rejoice. It's the time of the Feast of Tabernacles that we read about in many places, especially Leviticus 23. The Feast of Tabernacles was a feast where people were commanded to rejoice before the Lord. And so I think they gathered themselves together, verse 1, at the command of Nehemiah. And they gathered together to rejoice. It's almost, if I can use the phrase, it's almost their Thanksgiving Day.

We have Thanksgiving Day in October in Canada. They have Thanksgiving Day—yesterday, a couple of days ago—in the United States.

It's this week, I think.

This week, yeah. Okay. So I've always asked the question: why is our Thanksgiving Day earlier than their Thanksgiving Day? And the answer is because our harvest comes in earlier and our frost comes in earlier. It's warmer down there; they can harvest far later than we can. We don't get our crops in and they're going to freeze in the field. So we have an earlier Thanksgiving Day. But Thanksgiving Day in Israel was in the seventh month, and most of the crops were in by then. They had time to rejoice.

So they all got together to rejoice. And Nehemiah says, "This is a great time for a Bible conference." Are Bible conferences good? Yep! What do you do in a Bible conference? Well, the idea is you take some solid time and you spend a lot of time around the Word of God. A Bible conference is often good if it's a few days. Roy and I have in the past been involved in what we call the Digging Deeper Conference. And it's a conference for men that's held up in Kelowna at Morningstar Bible Camp. And it usually ran from Monday through Friday for men. And men would take a whole week off, and we'd have Bible teaching morning, afternoon, evening. Good times. Good Bible conference.

One of the best conferences I ever went to was a prayer conference. And there was a group of men who got together—I think it was in, I can't remember, maybe Chicago, maybe someplace like that—and they were talking. A group of us got together from this continent, probably 80 or about 100 of us, and we got together to pray Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,

Thursday, Friday. We spent Monday morning, Monday afternoon, Monday evening, Tuesday morning, Tuesday... and we prayed all week long, about 100 of us. What do you think that kind of a meeting was? Well, frankly, it was a good meeting. We just prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed. We'd have an odd sermon here and there; sermons would often go maybe 10 or 15 minutes, and then we'd pray, and then we'd pray. Do you think God blessed? Yeah. And that prayer meeting has carried on every year since I was there maybe 10 years ago. It's carried on every year. Sebastian went to it one year. You ask him whether he thinks it was a good meeting; he'll tell you it was wonderful.

Nehemiah says, these men have been working hard. They worked building the wall, and then they went back to their farm, and they did the work that they hadn't done when they were building the wall, and all their other work, and they were probably exhausted, and then they came to rest from their labors. They came to Jerusalem, and Nehemiah said, "We are going to feed them the Word of God."

So verse 2 again:

> [Nehemiah 8:2 NKJV]
> 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.

Who would be all that could hear with understanding? Well, answer: children, especially teens. But it wasn't just an old folks' meeting. You know the big problem in the world today, don't you? There's a law in China, and it simply says this: children under the age of 18 cannot attend church meetings. They've got the same law in the land of Israel: children under 18 cannot attend church meetings. What a terrible thing! Nehemiah said that's nonsense. We are going to gather all who can hear with understanding. And he did that upon the first day of the seventh month.

Verse 3:

> [Nehemiah 8:3 NKJV]
> 3 Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

It's a marvelous thing, the reading of the law of God. You have a Bible and you read the Bible at home. Why don't we read the Bible more publicly? It's probably a good thing. I've only heard of it done once. One day Norm and I were here at the chapel and our father was the preacher. He got up and he read about the building and the inauguration of the temple of Solomon. He started to read, and he read for five minutes, and then he read for ten minutes, and then he kept on reading for fifteen minutes, and he kept on reading, and then finally he sat down. I thought to myself, "That was a strange kind of a meeting. I wonder whether that was good or not." I believe the Lord was good with my father when he did that. And he basically said, "It's good to read publicly the truth of God."

Our responsibility is not to—what's the word I want?—it's not to proclaim the words of men. Our responsibility is to proclaim the truth of God. Moses said every seven years the entire nation is to get together and they are to listen to the reading of this law. And I think that's probably what Ezra did—probably read those same verses from Deuteronomy. But there's a great power. There's a great power associated with the collective hearing of truth. Right?

I marvel at the riots that are going on in the world today. How does it happen? A bunch of people get together and somebody inflames them, and they all go off together to do something bad. When was the last time they all got together and somebody gave them wise counsel and they all got together to do something that was good? Maybe because it doesn't happen very often, because it's not too often we get together for that which is good. I think that Ezra and Nehemiah and those who were doing the preaching and so on—we'll get into the detail of it next week—I think they were doing a good thing.

So Eric, I've just sort of begun chapter 8. Do you have any introductory words for us on chapter 8?

Next week.

Now, I've got one other announcement. And that is that I announced today that Precious Seed magazine is available upstairs. We got, I don't know, 10 or 15 copies, and so it's a good magazine. The theology is solid, the teaching is deep, it's good for you to read. And I emphasize that because on page number 6, there is this article, and it's entitled "Nehemiah, a Man of Precepts," and it's part number 11. But the interesting thing is it discusses Nehemiah chapter 8. So if you want a preview of Nehemiah chapter 8—and frankly, a better sermon than you're going to get from Eric or me—then read this chapter. Get the copy upstairs, take it. There's good stuff, and it's got good wisdom from Nehemiah chapter 8. I've only read a couple of paragraphs, but they're good. You read them, and Eric and I will read them, and we'll have some more on chapter 8 next week.

All right, I'm going to get someone to close in prayer, please. The Lord bless us. Thank you all for being here tonight.

Our Father, we thank you, Lord, that we have not changed. Man has not changed since Nehemiah's day 2,500 years ago. We thank you, Father, that your Word has not changed. It can meet the needs today as it met the needs then. We pray, Lord, that you would bless our time next week and through this week. Bless each one, Lord, in whatever endeavors, if you be not come. And so we ask, Lord, that you keep us and our loved ones. And we just give you thanks then in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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