

Nehemiah 1:1-13:31

Sunday 8/22/2004

Last week, we really put some weight on the bar for your spiritual exercising. We gave you one of those sermons that pulls everything we have been through so far together. We gave you a lot of material last week that really helps you understand everything we have already said.

One of the things we did, if you remember, we laid out once we got to this point, and that is what I told you. This point of your Bible, where you are right here at the captivity, is a crucial point in your Bible. It is that change and that dispensation to the time of the Gentiles. A lot of things are happening, and it is a key place to be able to stop and be able to pull everything together.

I showed you last week how the Old Testament, the structure of it, falls into three categories. Then we talked about the 70 years of captivity, and I showed you how the books that we have already talked about are built around that captivity in three phases.

One of the amazing things we talked about was the two times that Israel goes into captivity and the two times they return. We talked about how history always repeats itself. When they go into captivity and return the first time, it brings about the first coming of Christ. When they go into captivity and then return the second time, which was in 1948, we see the second coming of Christ.

Then, if that was not enough, we defined and talked about premillennialism, postmillennialism, and non-millennialism, and showed you how the order of the books in your Bible at this time lays out everything that you need to know. By now, if you are doing any kind of study on your own at all, and you are walking through this as we go, I do not know of a better way to teach you the Bible. This is an orderly fashion, the way that you would just learn it. If I was teaching in a college class someplace, this is how I would do it. It would not go into as much detail, but you have the benefit of getting that.

We saw how it all pulls together, and we saw that in the Book of Ezra, inspirationally. They go back and they begin to rebuild the temple. We saw how that was a picture of your body, how they laid the foundation, a picture of a man getting saved there in the early part of Ezra. As soon as they start to build that temple, your body, the adversary shows up. We made this spiritual application, pulling the whole thing together, showing you how once you get saved, this is why you have the conflict that you have. This is why once you really get saved and you try to do what is right with God, the devil is going to come knocking on your door.

The adversary shows up, and it defines them very clearly as someone who simply wants to weaken your hands and frustrate your purpose. I have said it many, many times, and I say it again today: when you get saved, God saves you because He has something that He wants you to do. He has a purpose for you. The devil, on the other hand, understands that he cannot get your soul in hell. He understands that he wants to frustrate that purpose to keep you from ever fulfilling all that God wants you to do. That is what we looked at last week.

I. The Book of Nehemiah: Doctrinal and Practical Application

Today, we are going to look at the Book of Nehemiah. In this great book, we see doctrinally where last week we saw them go back like they did in 1918. In the Book of Nehemiah, we see that the nation of Israel begins to rebuild the city. They begin to rebuild the city, just like I showed you last week that they did in 1948 when I showed you the two exoduses and the two returns there of all that takes place. What you are seeing basically in the Book of Nehemiah is what we are living right now.

The Book of Nehemiah, from a practical standpoint, is a book that shows you some incredible things about your life once you get saved. We are going to talk about that. Doctrinally, we touched on this a great deal last week. It shows you what is happening in the Middle East right now.

There are three books in your Bible that fit into that progression that we talked about last week that are very important books: the Book of Ezra, which we saw last week, Nehemiah, and the Book of Esther, which we are going to talk about next week. Those three books are very crucial for you as far as understanding where you are at, why God has saved you, what God is doing in your life, and what God is doing in the world. Anything that Fox News, CBS, ABC, or any other news association puts out on the television or the radio, any talk show host, anybody that you listen to, the material they are talking about is the material that is covered in the Book of Nehemiah and the Book of Esther, or the beginning of Esther anyhow. So we see that these books are very important for finding out where we are at for God doing what He is doing with the nation of Israel.

II. Breakdown of Nehemiah and the Concept of the Church

The breakdown of Nehemiah is very simple. I always give you this breakdown so you can put it in your Bible someplace.

- Nehemiah 1-6: Deals with Nehemiah leading the Jews and the physical building of the walls and the city of Jerusalem.
- Nehemiah 7-13: Deals under the leadership of Ezra, and Ezra focuses on the spiritual building and the people and the worship coming back to God the way that it should.

With that in mind, you have a great picture here. Last week we talked about the Book of Ezra, and I showed you how from a practical standpoint—and we are going to deal with the practical today because I laid out the doctrinal last week, so we are going to focus on the practical this week. Last week I showed you how the Book of Ezra is a picture of the day that you get saved.

Your Bible says:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

The day you got saved, you laid a foundation in your life. 1 Corinthians 3 says that foundation is Jesus Christ. The rest of your life you build upon that foundation. That is why the Book of Ezra is so important from a spiritual standpoint. Chapter by chapter, it shows you what to expect and what you need to do once you get saved and lay that foundation, and then how to build upon that foundation with all the adversity and all the things that are going to come in exactly the way it is going to figure in your life.

When we come to the Book of Nehemiah, the Book of Nehemiah teaches us the New Testament concept and the definitions of once you become a Christian, what do you do with your Christianity? It lays out the concept of the church, and it lays out for you and for me what purpose God established the church and how to build the church.

Remember, I have kicked this verse many, many times, but it has been a couple of weeks, so I will say it again. 1 Corinthians 10 tells us that the things in the Old Testament were for our examples and our ensamples. We learn by them. The illustrations of the stories that take place and the things that happen, it is all a picture of exactly where you and I are at and what we are accomplishing or trying to accomplish in our lives by the stories in the Bible. So I want to talk to you today about that aspect.

Let us ask God to bless us today as we delve into His Word. Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, and we love You today. We ask You, Father, to take the Word of God, make it real in our hearts, make it real in our lives. Father, may we learn and understand all the things that You have for us today. Help us to lay aside all the things, Lord, that so burden us throughout the week and just focus today on You and Your Word in our lives as individuals, because that is all that really matters anyhow. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' sake, for His name we ask it. Amen.

The Book of Nehemiah, which we are going to focus on today, talks to you about the concept of the church. The church is also in the Bible called the Body Mystery. It is called the Body Mystery because it is one of the seven mysteries in the Bible. We have talked about this before, and in time we will come through those and we will lay them out, either through our one-on-one Bible studies or some in our little group with the guys and with the gals. We will work it out as time goes on because they are things you need to know, and sometimes they come up in our Bible study.

The Body Mystery is one of the seven mysteries in the Bible, and the Body Mystery has to do with the church. Paul is given the designation of being the man who reveals that Body Mystery. God saved him on the road to Damascus down there in Acts 8. God called him for one purpose only: that purpose was to take the Body Mystery and reveal it to the Gentiles. When Paul gets

saved, he spends three and a half years in Arabia on Mount Sinai, right where Moses was. During that three and a half years, God reveals Himself to Paul as far as what He wants Paul to do.

Paul is a very unique individual. In fact, Paul himself said that the ministry that he got, he did not get from another apostle. He did not get it from somebody else. He got it directly from God. His calling to lay out the church is called the Gospel of the Grace of God. Paul was in tune with it and understood his calling for it, that Paul calls it "my Gospel," showing you the personal aspect that he was the one that God chose to reveal the Body Mystery, the church. What he does, he reveals those concepts throughout his writings in the New Testament.

The most intimate writing is the Book of Ephesians. The Book of Ephesians in the New Testament is much like Song of Solomon in the Old Testament. It is a very intimate book. In that book, he lays out the intimacy of the relationship between a husband and wife in a physical sense and compares it to Christ and the church in a spiritual sense. It is the Book of Ephesians where he really lays out that Body Mystery to a great degree. But all of his writings are reinforcing all of the doctrines that are now given to the church.

I want to explain biblically what the concept of the church is because we live in a time period and we use the word many, many times. How many times have you heard me say the Laodicean Church or the Philadelphian Church or the Church at Ephesus? Today, if we are so out of touch with the Bible anyhow, the average concept of the average Christian is that when we talk about the church, we are talking about a particular building. That is simply not true.

Because we meet in a building and we are the church, it just becomes synonymous after time that because it is a place where the church meets, that is called the church because that is where the church meets. But the truth of the matter is, you have got to understand this if you are ever going to figure out the Bible, because the true church of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with a building anywhere.

Let me just explain to you how this got into the mess that we got into. If you study your Bible and you go back to the Book of Acts, you will find there that there are two places that you begin to walk down history to find the true line and the false line. The true line comes out of Antioch. The false line comes out of Alexandria and in Rome. We find from that not only two lines of a biblical line and a non-biblical line, we find the two Bibles that we are faced with, and we also find the two aspects of doctrine that we are faced with.

Of course, in time, you are going to find that the Roman Catholic Church becomes the foremost authority in the world during the Dark Ages. When she comes to power, she influences the world in such a way that it has never really been influenced like that any other time that I know of in history. Not in a good way, but in a bad way. Her teachings and her false teachings impact everything in the world. Because of that, we see it in music. We see it in art. We see it in literature. Her grasp on the world and her false teachings impacted the world in such a way that it really shaped and formed many of the things that we deal with today.

Believe it or not, there was what we call an architecture of theology that came into being during this time. The Roman Catholic Church fostered the idea and the concept that the church was a

building. Because of that, that is why through their architecture of theology, they built great cathedrals. Their cathedrals were beautiful and splendid even in the ninth century, in the twelfth century. You go to Europe today, and the focal point is the cathedrals. They were built very high with high steeples. The reason why they were is because they wanted that building to stand above everything else. They did not have skyscrapers back then. They had grass huts, and two-story buildings were the norm. But this church, whenever you saw the city skyline, the thing that was predominant was the steeple and the cross that you knew where the church was.

They are very beautiful. They came up with the idea of stained glass windows. So when the light comes through, it filters the light in holy colors. It gives an aura of spirituality. The way the windows are set and the openings in the ceilings are designed in a theological effect to bring the light down, to shine at certain times, to give that mystic effect of how beautiful and serene God must be because of the lighting. It is all like a set stage to present God.

The truth of the matter is, they understand or they believe that the church is Christ. In fact, in the Roman Catholic Church, up on the altar, there is a little box up there where God lives. God lives in the wafers and the hosts that are consecrated. So they built this beautiful building around all of this. Even in America, there are some big cathedrals. But in the littlest podunk town that you go to, if it was a Catholic church, it may not be as big, but it will be a scaled-down model of the big cathedrals that you find in Europe. Why? Because in their teaching, there is an architecture in theology that God lives in this house, and this house is God's. So the building is holy, and the building is holy.

That is why in Europe, they do not do it much over here anymore because it is against the law. In Europe, if you go into the Catholic church, you know what you find? You find you are walking on dead people. They are buried in the floor. They are buried in the walls. You know why? To them, that is what it means to die in Christ. For you and for me, we believe what the Bible teaches that when I get saved, my life is hid and I am dead in Christ spiritually. They do not believe the church is spiritual. They believe the church is literal. So when somebody dies, depending on how much money you got, if you got buried in the church, you are dead in Christ because the church is Christ. That is how they think of it. That is why over in Europe, you will see many times that they cannot get you in the church. They put a cemetery out by the church, and you are buried on church property. If you are a werewolf or a vampire, that was the thing. That is hallowed, consecrated ground. You cannot come out and bite people if you are buried because it is holy because they look at the building and the ground as God's place.

Bible-believing Christians never believed that. Bible-believing Christians believe that a building is absolutely nothing. It means nothing. In fact, in Acts 1, 2, and 3, they are meeting in homes. In the early parts of the United States, this is where we got the concept of the open-air tabernacles. This is where we got the idea of the old camp meetings. This is what is commonly called the brush arbor meetings. Open-air tabernacles, people meeting in the fields because the meeting places were not big enough to hold all the thousands of people. When George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield in particular, when he would preach around the Boston, New England area in the 1700s, 1750s, 1770s, there would be literally 20,000, 30,000 people

that would come. There was not any building on earth. God was there, and God came down, and people got saved.

It was a fact that they thought that the church building was anything. They understood what the Bible teaches that the church is you and me. The church is a spiritual body that when you and I get saved, we are born into God's Christ church. It has nothing to do with the building. True Bible believers always put the emphasis on the individual people.

We get lost in the concept because we all have our little clubs. In Bible Christianity, especially with the Baptists today, you will find what they call fellowships. You will have the South Side Fellowship. You will have the Baptist Bible Fellowship. You will have the Northwest Fellowship. You will have the Southeast Fellowship. You will have the Southwest by Northwest by East West Fellowship. Everybody has got a fellowship. Those fellowships exist because they have a school. Those schools are their Bible colleges. They send all of their young people to those schools, and they develop their little people right there, and then they send them back out to start churches. But they are always associated with that little fellowship. You have this group, you have this group, you have five or six groups. Usually all the groups hate each other. Every other group thinks that they are the true group. Most of them, there have been volumes and volumes and reams and reams of paper written by men who all they do is castigate the other groups and would never have them preach. If you have somebody from another group come in to preach, you are an anathema, a curse. God cannot be with you. Of course, within those little organizations, you always have your little hierarchy from the Baptist Pope right down to the Cardinals. That is all that it is, because everybody wants to walk into a little power grid.

Here is the truth, and here is what the Bible teaches, and here is what we believe. What I believe is what the church believes. I do not care who you are and what you are. If you are saved, you can be a Northern Baptist, a Southern Baptist, a Left-End Baptist, a Back-End Baptist, or a Backward Baptist. I do not care. You can be anything in the world as long as you believe what the Bible teaches. I do not care who you are with. I do not care if you are up, down, left, or right. As long as you are saved, whether you like it or not, we are all in the same church. Because it is not a building, it is not a denomination, and it is not a fellowship. It is the body of Jesus Christ that every saved, born-again believer is in. You might as well have fellowship with them now because I know you are not going to like this, but you are going to spend an eternity with them, so you better get along with them.

I think some stupid Baptist athletes think when you get to heaven this will be the Southern Baptist section, this will be the Northern Baptist, this will be the GRB, this will be the Bible Baptist Fellowship. You will not need a big area for that. There will be all these different groups around here, and we will all just kind of be fighting up there. No, that concept comes because we believe that the building is the church, and it is not. The body of Christ is the church. The church is spiritual. It is Christ's body. That is why when Paul wrote, have you ever noticed this when he writes? He says to the church at Rome, to the church at Corinth. Is he writing to one church? No! There are probably, when he wrote the Book of Romans and he wrote to the church at Rome, there are probably a thousand churches in Rome, meeting in homes all over the place. But they are all members of one church, the body of Christ. So he does not address them individually. He

does not say that the 5,252 churches that wrote, except the ones over there that do not do this and do not do that. He says to the church, because Paul understands the concept that individual groups, local assemblies meeting in homes, all make up the true church. As long as you believe the Bible, you love the Bible, and you follow what the Bible says, you are part of Christ's church if you are saved. This is a teaching that is far today from what is being taught.

The church simply means "called out." In fact, if you want to get technical about it, there are five churches in your Bible. There are five churches. This is the only one that is empowered, but there are five called-out assemblies in the Bible. We do not have time to get into that. A New Testament biblical local church, that is what we are. We are a group of believers that have decided together to meet together, being part of Christ's church. In that, it is easy to get confused that we are a church, and we are. But we are a local assembly based on the body of Christ's mystery that we were born into, that we are any better or any worse than anybody else on the face of this planet that is saved. We can have fellowship with anybody or anything that has the same like-mindedness and love for the Word of God as we do. The issue has always been and will always be the authority of the Word of God and doctrine. Those are the only things that divide us.

Every New Testament biblical local church in the New Testament, all down through history, did not put the emphasis on a building. They put the emphasis rather on the Word of God. They spent more time working with the true church than the building. I am going to tell you this, and I am not fighting anybody, so if you think I have somebody in mind, I do not. I am just telling you. The bottom line is this: you look around this country today, and you see some of the most absolutely beautiful, magnificent buildings of places, churches, places of worship, and the whole world you ever saw. I am telling you, inside are the most shallow, unbelievable Christians who know nothing about the Bible, who know nothing about life, who know nothing about the relationship with God. You never, never, never have your outside building in better shape than you have your inside building. You spend the emphasis on the people inside. Everything else will take care of itself. Unfortunately, in the world that we live in, that does not happen. But that is not our problem. It will not happen here.

III. God's Plan: Old Testament vs. New Testament

With that Bible concept in mind and explaining that, if you grasp that, you have learned a great lesson, a piece of the puzzle here. Let us look at the Book of Nehemiah. In the Old Testament, God has a plan. God has a purpose. What He does in the Old Testament, we know this already because we have studied it already and we have talked about it hundreds of times. He is establishing His plan through the Kingdom of Heaven. We know that Jerusalem is the central, most important part of that plan.

In the Old Testament, God gave them three things to accomplish that plan:

1. The land, the literal, visible land of Jerusalem.
2. The law through Moses.
3. Leaders or kings.

By this, He establishes the monarchy of the Kingdom of Israel by giving them three things to accomplish this plan that is right in the place of Jerusalem where He wants this thing to accomplish.

In the New Testament, God has a plan. Much like the plan of the Old Testament but different. This plan where Jerusalem was the center of the Old Testament, the church is the center of this one. Individual men and women born into the church of Jesus Christ who meet together in local assemblies understanding the commission that God has given us to fulfill that plan. Where Jerusalem was the central part of God's plan in the Old Testament, the church is the central part in the New Testament where we establish the Kingdom of God. We have talked about the difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven from day one.

Just as God gave them three things in the Old Testament to accomplish that, the plan, the law, and the kings, God gave us three things in the New Testament to accomplish this:

4. The Holy Spirit of God. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit of God did something that had never done before. It came and indwelt believers, and that was the first thing that He gave us.
5. The complete, absolute Word of God. Never before had the Word of God been completed. By 90 AD, when John writes the Book of John, the Gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and the Book of Revelation, it is all finished. Now we have the second thing that He gave us, the Word of God.
6. The local church as the vehicle. Where the Holy Spirit of God is our guide and the Word of God is our roadmap to accomplish this plan, we have the Holy Spirit of God that is the light that guides us. We have the Word of God which is the roadmap that the light shines on. We have a job to do. If I gave you a light and a map in the middle of the night and said, "Get to St. Louis in the next three hours," there is one thing you need to do to get there. It is a vehicle. God has a plan, and when He went back to heaven and He gave us the plan, He gave us the Holy Spirit of God as the light, He gave us the Word of God as the map, and He gave us the local church as the vehicle by which we get there. It is as simple as that. That is why the concept of the church is so important.

The church being you. That is why the building aspect, and I am not fighting it. I do not think there is anything wrong with it. I am not saying that there is not a day that we will have to say, we will have to buy a building. I am not saying that we will not. I am just saying the thing that I am not going to do is right now sacrifice the most important thing, which is you, to do something that means absolutely nothing at this point. You can take this to the bank: never in my mind will there ever be anything more important in this church than you and the Word of God. There will never be anything that takes precedent. Anything I say, anything I do, any activity we have will only be for one thing, and that will be to help strengthen you in the Word of God because you are the body and the building of Jesus Christ. To build some great big edifice with stained glass windows that makes you come in and feel all warm and fuzzy and spiritual does absolutely nothing for you if you leave not knowing what the Word of God says. That is the way it has to work.

I told you in the Book of Ezra, they scraped off the foundation and they began to rebuild the temple, a picture of you getting saved. In the Book of Nehemiah, they build the city and the walls, and that is a picture of how to build a church. It is a picture of what you need to have and I need to have in my life. I do not know if you know it or not, and I have told you this before. The Bible says that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost. The Bible says the day you got saved, you laid a foundation on that which is Jesus Christ, and then the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3 that you are to be a wise master builder, and the rest of your life you are to build on that foundation.

When I look at you, here is what I see. I know I introduce you, I know you call you by name, and I know all of you, and I love all of you. When I look at you, I know your family, I know your kids, and I know all of that, but here is how I look at you. I look at you as a building in various stages of completion of construction. Some of you just laid the foundation and are beginning to put the first foundational blocks on it. Some of you have the walls up and the windows framed. Some of you have the walls up, the roof on, and are working on the interior. You are all in different stages of spiritual growth.

My job is to help you read the plans. My job is to tell you, you do not want to build your house on a foundation of eggshells. Do not put cardboard boxes on the first course and then try to build the house on it; it will not hold. My job is to show you how to build it by reading the architectural plans by the greatest architect of building men and women the world has ever seen and help you build your building right. That is my job, that is all I do. In its most simplistic form, that is what I do. I am a general contractor. I just help you understand what you need to do.

In Matthew 5:14, it simply says:

Matthew 5:14

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

That is a great little concept because also in the Book of Matthew, you are told to let your light shine. We take our little kids down here and we sing a little song, "This little light of mine, I am going to let it shine." We talk about the fact that we are a light that shines. Back in the Book of Judges, in the battle of Gibeon there with Gideon, they had to take a lamp and a light and a pitcher. It has a picture of our light. You and I are individual lights. The more we are in tune with God, the brighter we light. The moment you get saved, you are a light. The more you get into the Word of God and the more you grow, the brighter your light becomes. Pretty soon, people in this church age, this world is in darkness. That is why the Bible said, Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world." This world is in darkness, and you are the only light this world has. When Christ went back, when He was here, He was the light. But He went back to heaven. That is why He said, "I am the light of the world," but you are the light of the world. That is why He said:

John 14:12

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

He went back to heaven, and now He has turned it over to the church. You and me, the men and women who are saved, part of the body, who have decided in a local assembly to be what? I will tell you what we are. If you are a temple and you are a temple and you are a temple and you are all temples, then you are all buildings. We have a little city right here. We have a little city. Where I can shine bright by myself, and you can say, "Boy, we get everybody together and we are really bright." That is how people get saved. That is how people find out about God. In the darkness, they see the light on a hill, and the Bible says, "A city on a hill cannot be hid," and they see the light. Because men do not like darkness, when they want to know the truth, they move to the light and they find the light. The more we get into the Bible, the more we learn the Bible, the more every one of you focuses on building your temple individually, the brighter we will be. You know why? Because this church is only as strong as its weakest member. You can have a chain that has got like an anchor chain that has got couplings in it as big as that. It is still only as strong as its weakest link. That is true of the body of Christ. That is why there is always work to be done in training the body of Christ. That is why the devil attacks the body of Christ. This church is a city made up of individual men and women in the body of Christ who provide light in the night, the church age.

IV. Opposition and the Nine Gates of the Church

In a city, around that city, Jerusalem, they are rebuilding it. Where I said Ezra shows you how to build the temple, then this one here, Nehemiah, shows you how to build the church. So they had a city, and they were building the city because the city was going to be the light to the world. Around that city was a wall. The wall is the protection of the Bible doctrine. Walls kept things out. Walls gave boundaries to who was within. Walls protected you. It was the walls that kept the enemy from coming in. The walls are a picture of the doctrine of the church that are found in the Word of God that keeps heresy from coming in. The one safe place you ought to have in your life where you can go and know that what you get is pure, is safe, and 100% what God is, that you can rest in it, ought to be in the church that you go to because the city had a wall around it. That wall is a picture of Bible doctrine. It is protection.

In the Book of Nehemiah, they rebuild not only the city, they rebuild the walls. Very frankly, what you have got in the Book of Nehemiah ought to be taught to every young ministerial student in the world. Every young man that wants to learn how to build a church, it ought to be church building 101 out of the Book of Nehemiah. Yet Nehemiah is not taught in any place around this world anywhere other than maybe a few people that believe the book of how to build a church. It is God's program. Everything is in the Word of God. The Bible contains its own system to study the Bible. The Bible contains its own system for laying out dispensations. The Bible covers itself in every angle, and it certainly covers itself. You do not think God would call a young man to preach and build a ministry without giving him the pattern for doing it. That pattern is found in the Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is a definitive book on how to build a New Testament biblical local church at any time, any place, anywhere. So we are going to talk about it now, and we are going to lay it out chapter by chapter.

In Nehemiah 1 and 2, you have three great concepts. These concepts are absolutely crucial in our lives for serving God. What you have in Nehemiah 1 and 2 is very simply this: you have the right man in the right place at the right time. Three things you want to remember: the right man, the right place, and the right time. Timing is everything. God's timing is certainly everything. These two chapters simply show God behind the scenes, setting up the events, getting ready for the man that is the right man to do the right job at the right time in the right place. That man is Nehemiah.

If God ever calls you to do something, Nehemiah 1 and 2 will be the most refreshing, assuring thing you could ever get your hands on because those things can be very strenuous. Those things can be very stressful when you do not know what is out there and you do not know what to do and you do not know how to respond and you have decisions to make about this or that. Nehemiah 1 and 2 is the place you can rest because it shows you the procedure of the right man in the right place at the right time.

Nehemiah 1:11 says he is the king's cupbearer. In other words, Israel is still in the captivity, and God has orchestrated the events to get the right man, Nehemiah, in the right place, the king's cupbearer, at the right time. God is the orchestrator of the events in your life when you are doing what He wants you to do. The hardest thing for you and me to do is to turn our lives over to God to the point where we give God the authority in our life, the license in our life, to use us as the right man in the right place, wherever that may be, at the right time according to His timing. You know why? Because we all are control freaks, every one of us. The bottom line, and it keeps us from serving God more than anything else, is you do not want to give up control of your own life. That is it. You say, "But I am a nice person." You are a control freak on top of it. That is the way we all are. We all have that problem. We want to take charge. We do not want to give God the license. We are afraid He cannot do it. So, "I will do it, God." That will work wonderfully, will it not? As Dr. Phil says, "And how is that going for you today?" It will not go for you. That is the biggest problem we have.

In Nehemiah 1:3, he hears a report. It says, "Nehemiah, Jerusalem is in disarray. Jerusalem is destroyed. The walls are broken down. It is an absolute mess. It is unbelievable what they have done in destroying the city of God." He hears that, and when he hears that, he weeps. It moves him terribly. Jerusalem, the greatest city on the face of the planet, the place that was God's program in the Old Testament, is destroyed. The walls that were given for protection are knocked down. This is what the wisest man that ever lived said, and this shows you how the Bible goes together when he wrote in the Book of Proverbs 25:28 about your life and my life.

Proverbs 25:28

He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, and without walls.

What happens when your life collapses? You know why some of you were an absolute mess in your life before you got saved, or before you get into the Word of God, you were so emotional. You made dumb decisions. Why? Because you were defenseless. You have no walls up. You are like a city without walls because you have no rule of your own spirit. That is your emotions. You do not make good decisions. You make bad decisions. You have no value system in making

judgments in your life, so you make them after your own spirit. That is the worst thing you could ever do. He weeps because the walls, the city, is broken down.

In Nehemiah 2:1-2, he brings wine into the King. The Bible says that Nehemiah was always happy-go-lucky. That is why he spilled wine over the floor because he skipped as he came in. He is happy-go-lucky. On this day he is sad. He is frowning. He is down in the dumps. The King says, "What is the matter, Nehemiah? You are usually all beboppy. You are always happy. What are you all down in the dumps for?" He told his story about his beloved city. He told the story about Jerusalem and the story of God and what God had done and why he was so burdened. The King got burdened. In Nehemiah 2:6, the King, and this is a strange thing here, it says the King, and in a little parentheses, "the queen sitting by him." There is a strange thing with that little gal right there. It is Esther, probably, but we will not be able to go there. But that is probably who this is. Behind the scenes, God is orchestrating the events with the right man in the right place at the right time.

Let me tell you a personal story. Many, many years ago, when I got saved, I entered into a process in my life to learn the Bible. I did not know where, when, and how, but I knew at some point God was going to use me to preach. I do not know how I knew that. Maybe I just wanted Him to, I do not know. But I knew this: I knew there was never going to be any way I could until I learned that book. So I dove into it. I mean, I did not do it like some of you do it. I jumped into it the way the Bible lays it out. I went after it the fastest, quickest way because I knew I did not have a lot of time. I also knew I was dumb, and I had to do it the easiest way there was. So I worked that thing through, worked that thing through, worked that thing through.

One day, out of the clear blue, I got a phone call from a guy who did not even know me, a guy that I did not even know how he knew who I was, and he said, "We want to fly you out to Kansas City. We would like to talk to you about coming out and working in our high school department." Let me tell you my predicament now. I worked at the Hoover Company after I got out of the Army where they make vacuum cleaners. If yours crapped out on you shortly after you bought it, that is probably one that I put together. I drove a fork truck. I did not do them. I ran over people's feet, chased them around. Back in 1972, there was a recession, and Hoover Company laid off everybody, and I got laid off. I had, we were just married at that point, a short time, and Barb was working at, her family ran a grocery store. I did not, we did not have a job, and her brother who was running the grocery store said, "Well, you know what, you are my brother-in-law. We need to take care of you. I am going to show you, teach you how to be a produce manager. I am going to show you how to, we will take you in the family business, and you have got to be here, you are part of the family." My wife worked there. So he taught me. I did not know nothing about produce. I mean, apples and oranges, I did not know anything about it. I mean, I did not know the tricks to keep lettuce looking fresh when it is not so you will buy it, and then I will not have to deal with it, and it is no good for you, and you think it is your fault, but I learned those things. Every morning, I would get out there and put that stuff in the cold water, and that is why I say to you many times, "Let us pray." That is how it works. Sometimes I would sing "Revive Us Again" because they were so far gone, I did not think I would get the color back in them, but I did. He spent a lot of money, sent me to all kinds of seminars, fruit seminars. Got to be careful saying

that today, but back then it was okay. I went to seminars. I knew my avocados from my peaches. I knew everything. I would get in my, you would walk into that store, and my display case and my thing down there was just beautiful. I mean, the colors, blending the colors, I mean, they taught you how to be artistic, and they taught you that people buy produce because not they want it because of how it looks. You get the colors all right, the lady looking down there going boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, and I had them going down there boom, boom, boom, boom. I got them. They bought everything.

Then I got this phone call. I had not even done this for probably four or five months. Now I got this phone call of what I have dreamed for all my life, the opportunity of a lifetime. What am I going to do? I flew out to Kansas City, never told my brother-in-law because I did not know what to do. Came back. I mean to tell you what, I was dying. I felt so bad. I wanted to do this all my life. Now I found like I was in a place where I could not do it because of family. Her Barb's family was on the same, and I thought what a terrible testimony that would be. What am I, and I was in a dilemma. I remember coming back on that plane from Kansas City, knowing what I wanted to do, the burden and fire in my heart like you will never know. Not knowing this, I did not know where this was all going to go and what we would all do in these last days. But I just knew, and I did not know what to do. I will never forget. The next morning I was so, I was sick. I did not sleep that night. I did not know what to do. I am caught in the middle. If God ever taught me a lesson about the right man and the right place and the right time, He taught me a lesson I never forgot. I do not know how He found out about it. But my brother-in-law found out the opportunity that I had. He knew where my heart was. He is an unsaved man, or was, I do not know if he is now or not. He called me into his office and he says, "Bob," he said, "you are fired." I said, "I am fired?" He said, "You know what, buddy, I know about the opportunity you got. I know that has been your heart in your life. Do not you worry about this place. You go do what God has called you to do." Right man, right place, right timing. Never forgot. You only have to give you one of those. If you are paying attention, it will carry you through the rest of your life. The whole key to that is the Holy Spirit of God in your life. What follows here in this chapter of this book is a picture when God's man in God's timing in God's place has a burden to build the church, men and women. God shows him how to do it and also shows him the opposition to expect when he began to do it. It is incredible.

In Nehemiah 3, they begin to rebuild the walls. As they begin to build the walls, the Bible says there are nine gates in these walls. Nine gates. I do not know if you know what you know about the Bible or not, but let me just say this to you. There are certain numbers in the Bible that mean certain things. I know you can make anything mean anything with numbers. I know that. My rule of thumb is this: if the Bible does not lay it out clearly, then do not go there. But there are certain numbers that are just, you cannot, I mean, there is no way you can get around it. The number nine in your Bible, there is no question about. Number nine in your Bible is fruit bearing. You say, "How do you know that?" Because in Genesis 9:1, Noah is told:

Genesis 9:1

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.

When Abraham gets Isaac, the promised fruit, he is 99 years old. There are nine fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23, which is the ninth book in the New Testament. Galatians has nine letters in its spelling. Those nine fruits of the Holy Spirit are found in verse 22 and 23. Add them up, it is nine. Nine in your Bible is fruit bearing. These nine gates are a picture of what you and I have to have in our lives in this church to be successful and be fruitful. It is as simple as that. It is so easy. He says, "You have a plan to build your church, brother?" No, I have nine of them. Nine in your Bible is fruit bearing. Just in case you have not put it all together yet, the book you have in your hand says "Holy Bible," nine letters. If you have a King James, count it up, nine letters. I think it is a 1611, six and three is what? That is the book that you bear fruit with. These nine gates are the entryways into this city. In your life and my life, as we build this New Testament local assembly and we understand who we are, we know that as we build the doctrine around this church, we have got to have basically nine gates in this church to reach people for Christ. My friend, we might as well get into them.

➤ 1.) The Sheep Gate (Nehemiah 3:1): The first gate is the gate where they brought in the sheep to be sacrificed, and it points to me and to you. That is a number one gate in this church and a number one thing we do for what we do. Everything we do is what He did for us. I am just going to be very plain and very honest in some of these and just tell you if you do not understand what Christ did for you and your life of sacrifice, that is probably why you are the way you are. That is probably why you are indifferent. That is probably why you are doing your own thing. That is probably why you are so far out in left field, you could not even catch the ball if it came your way. You have to understand sacrifice. The thing that will hold this church together, the thing that will get us through the toughest times in the world, the things that will get you through the toughest times in your life, is understanding what Christ did for you on Calvary's Cross, His sacrifice, making it possible. Now you and I must sacrifice.

➤ 2.) The Fish Gate (Nehemiah 3:3): We know that Jesus said:

➤ 3.) The Old Gate (Nehemiah 3:6): The old gate would be the history, the heritage, taking men and women and showing them where they have come from so they know where they are going, so they know where they are at. Having your children raised in an environment that teaches them the biblical side of things. They understand the landmarks and all the things that go along with it. That you can understand why we believe what we believe, why you have the Bible you have, why we hold true to what we hold true, why we do things we do.

➤ 4.) The Valley Gate (Nehemiah 3:13): The valley gate has to do with compassion. The way you win men and women today is to understand the culture that you live in is a insane asylum run by the inmates. There are more people

busted and broken and unhappy out there looking for the answers. The church has failed to give them the answers. You know why this country is the way it is today? I will tell you why. I hinted at it before, even said some things before, but I will tell you the bottom line. In my day and age when I was growing up, this was the late sixties and the early seventies. Some of you remember those times. We had what they call hippies. Now it is hard to find a hippie today. They are on the endangered species list. They are like Tyrannosaurus rexes. There are not many of them around. But in my day, a hippie was somebody who rebelled against the establishment. The norm in most Christian areas was short hair. That is another whole farce. If the hair touched your ears, you were ungodly. They wore clothes that were out of touch. They had a message. They were seeking. When they came, and I know this is true and I am about to say, when they came to Baptist fundamental Bible-believing churches, they were turned away because they did not have the right length of hair. Their clothes did not match up with the people that were there. So they were told, I know this is true. I have seen it happen. I have seen it happen more than I want to know that I have seen it happen. I have seen them met by the doors by the Deacon hierarchy and saying, "Do not you come back here and you get some clothes and you get your haircut, hippie." They were turned away. Now we walked away and said, "Well, I will tell you what, we sure protect." Those same hippies that were looking for their answers and have their own agenda are now the leaders of this country because the church failed to have compassion to take them in the way they were, to hear their issues, to debate their issues, and point them to an absolute standard that gave them what they seek. They wanted free everything. They wanted free love. They wanted no work. They wanted to be free from the bathtub. They wanted to be free from everything. Now, I do not have a problem with that because I have a book that will set you free. It is just not the same kind of freedom. A lot of people are looking for things, and they do not know what they are really looking for. You know that is true? If there ought to be one place where the church is tolerant as people who are looking, but because they did not meet our little criteria of what we thought somebody looking for the truth should be like, like me, we turned them away, and we lost them. We lost not one generation. We lost five generations. That is why this country is in the mess that it is in today because the people that we turned away 30 years ago are now running this country, and they are a lot worse now than they were then. We still have not figured out why. Compassion. The church made up of men and women in this local assembly need to be compassionate to people who are less fortunate than we are,

passionate to people, letting them be where they are at, but holding the standard of the Word of God to show them the truth.

➤ 5.) The Dung Gate (Nehemiah 3:14): This is the only gate where nobody goes in, but stuff comes out. This is the dung gate. I am not crude. I am just telling you the bottom line. If you get offended by that, my goodness, better stay home and not cross the street. You can get hit with a car. But I just have to say some things. I just have to tell you here that this is the gate where they took out the trash. One of the things you have got to understand, and I said this a couple of weeks ago, I told you that the litmus test for people is the Word of God, truth. I am not so naive that I understand that in the day and age that we live in, if there ever was a day and age that everybody wants the truth. I fully understand that not everybody is going to appreciate what this ministry is about. Because there are people who are looking for what they want to hear. I am not so stupid or naive in my life that I think that this ministry, or really any ministry, is for everybody. This ministry is based on the truth of the Word of God as clearly as I know how to lay it out. I try to keep it as biblical in everything that we do. I figure that that is the test case. Some people like it, some people do not. Some people come for a while. We have got people that have their own churches that need to visit with friends or whatever. I am not talking about that. I am talking about people that are out there looking around. We have had them come in, and we just say, "You know what? That is not what I like. That is not what I am looking for." That is fine. That is fine. I understand that the body has to have a process of elimination. The process of elimination is truth. I am telling you. We want to get everybody we can and keep everybody we get. You do not want to do that. You do not want people, a member of anybody that does not understand the Word of God or want to understand the Word of God and want to accept the Word of God. They are just going to cause you problems. That is not what we are about. God has called us to peace. I do not care what a person believes. I really do not. I could care less. I just know what the Bible teaches, and I know what my responsibility is, and I know what God is going to hold me accountable for teaching. So we take that. Those that want to come, fine. Those that do not want to come, no problem. See you at the judgment of Christ.

➤ 6.) The Fountain Gate (Nehemiah 3:15): The fountain gate is fellowship. The Bible talks about the fact that in 1 John 1:5-7 it says:

➤ 7.) The Water Gate (Nehemiah 3:26): The water gate is the preaching ministry. Water in the Bible is the type of the Word of God. We are going to talk about this a little bit later on when we get into Nehemiah 8. But this gate here has

to do with this church, has to have a Bible teaching, Bible preaching ministry. It has to be based on the Word of God, putting out water, giving you food, giving you what you need. Nothing in this world refreshes like a good cold drink of water to your soul. That is the Word of God.

➤ 8.) The Horse Gate (Nehemiah 3:28) and 9.) The East Gate (Nehemiah 3:29): These gates are together. The horse gate and the eastern gate both stand for the same thing, the second coming of Christ. There is a double emphasis on this gate because in any church, the emphasis ought to be on the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not out here like we are going to live forever. We are dug in. We are an outpost. We are holding on the last, we are holding on the last graves of the battle waiting for the Lord to come back. We know He is coming back. The emphasis of any church needs to be focused on two things:

V. The Ministry of the New Testament Local Church

In Nehemiah 4, 5, 6, and 7, you might know a man by the name of Sanballat that shows up. Now we see the opposition that comes when you build God's church. Going down through those chapters, it is kind of unique. The Bible says that they were grieved. There were people that were actually upset that somebody came to help the children of Israel put it all back together. The Bible says they laughed and they mocked them. The Bible says they conspired against them. The Bible says they made false accusations against them. The Bible says they lied against them. The Bible says they laid traps for them. When you come down through those chapters, you see how the opposition will always be when you try to do something for God. The opposition is going to come, and it will lie about you. It grieves them. They will laugh at you. They will make fun of you. They will do all of these things. But I will tell you what. Nehemiah 4:6 is a great verse. In spite of all the opposition, in spite of all the lies, in spite of being grieved, in spite of mocked and laughed and conspired against the accusations, the lies and the traps, the Bible says:

Nehemiah 4:6

So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

You see, when you get the mindset to do what God wants you to do, and you understand what the work is, the opposition does not bother you. They cannot stop you. You just move on and do what God wants you to do.

VI. The Ministry of the New Testament Local Church

In Nehemiah 8, 9, and 10, we find the ministry of the New Testament Bible-believing local church. When you get into Nehemiah 8 here and you read down through here, sometimes just take Nehemiah 8 and read verses 1 through 12.

Nehemiah 8:1-4

And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.

And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

You know what is distinctive about the Baptist churches? Baptist churches always have a pulpit in the middle. You go to every other church in the world, it is either over here or over there or someplace else. But in Baptist churches, this thing was started. Now other churches copy it. But the Baptist church always had their pulpit in the middle because they understand Nehemiah 8, and they realize they put it in the middle because they always wanted the focus of the church to be the preaching of the Word of God.

In Nehemiah 8:1, you find that they are like one man. They are unified. Nehemiah 8:3 says they are paying attention to the Word of God. They have respect to the Word of God in Nehemiah 8:5. The Bible says in Nehemiah 8:8 that they read distinctly and they gave the sense and they caused them to understand because the Bible has doctrinal, inspirational, historical meanings to it. Nehemiah 8:7 says the older men and women helped the younger ones understand what the Bible was saying.

The Bible says in Nehemiah 8:9:

Nehemiah 8:9

And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest, the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

You know what the one man unity and the attention to the Word of God and being taught to respect the Word of God and being taught the Word of God distinctly and older people helping the younger people all brought about? It brought about Nehemiah 8:9, and all the people, they fell in love with the book and fell in love with the author of the book. You cannot help it. That is our church.

Now where do we go from here? Look at Nehemiah 8:10:

Nehemiah 8:10

Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Unity one man, Nehemiah 8:1. Nehemiah 8:3, attention to the Word of God, respect the Word of God. Nehemiah 8:5, read it distinctly. The older ones helping the younger ones in Nehemiah 8:7, people falling in love with the book and the author of the book. In Nehemiah 8:10 he says this:

7. Enjoy the Word of God. Hey, enjoy it. It is your book. God gave it to you. Enjoy it. Love it. It is a joy in your life. It is the strength of your life. Teach your kids. Love that book.
8. After you love it and you get filled with it, take it to others that do not have it.

That is the job of this church. You enjoy it, but do not stop there. You take the book to somebody else and have them get it.

I told you when we started this church, we just were not going to jump into a lot of stupid things like most Baptist churches do. What we are going to do is biblically and do one thing at a time as God showed us and God led us. I told you about missions. I told you the fact that we were not just going to go out there and send us a list of missionaries so we can send money because most missionaries are idiots. I want to put our money where our mouth is. I have just been holding back on it, telling the boys to hold back on it until we found where God made it so clear.

A number of years ago, let me tell you this story first. You know those wide margin Bibles you get? Let me tell you something. I told you this when we started our church. If we really believe what we say that we need to be part of putting out that book to people that do not have it. I told the boys, I said, "You know what? We tell our people to tithe. We teach our people to tithe. This church needs to tithe." There is an organization that puts King James Bibles in the hands of people in 50 different languages. They are worldwide, and they send around, and I just said, "Write a tithe check off what we got in the bank and send it to them."

A number of years ago, I met one of their boys. Some of you were with me on that trip. We went to Brazil, Dr. Finini, to teach his church. Steve Bracken, Senior, back there was a missionary down there at that time. In fact, he was our contract contact going down there. I will never forget, Steve called me, and he said, "We are having a problem with the King James text down here." He says, "You are coming down to do discipleship." You have got to understand this guy, Dr. Finini, he was like the Billy Graham of South America. I mean, he is the number one guy, whatever he says you do. Around the country. I mean, when they have a national crisis, the president calls him and puts him on the phone and on TV, and he calms the people. This guy was incredible. This guy was going either way. We were going down to teach him discipleship. Steve Senior called me on the phone, and I am glad you are here today, Steve, because you can verify everything I am saying. He called me up on the phone and said, "Hey, look, all the Bible professors down here from the Bible colleges want to know if you will debate them on the issue of the King James Bible and settle this issue once and for all. What is the national thing?" I said, "Sure, let us do it." He said, "There are about 20 of them." I said, "Well, 20 against one book. That is probably pretty good odds. Let us do it."

So we go down there, and on the Saturday we got down there. We had worked the whole week. On Saturday was the big debate. All the, I mean, they got into this big auditorium. The place was packed out. They were pushing it. Dr. Finini was behind the scene doing the whole thing and laying the whole thing out. God brought into my path a man down there, Thomas Gilmore. Thomas Gilmore is a missionary to South America. His ministry is primarily to the Jews, the nation of Israel, but he does everybody. He is a great guy, and he is pro-King James, and he came up to our meetings, and he translated me for one night, and he fell, and we, and I worked together, and he was a great translator, and we work really well together. He says, "Oh," he says, "Can I translate for you this thing?" And I said, "Sure." This, because I really was comfortable with him translating. So you can, the translator is tough. You find the way you can work with them. So I said, "Yeah, that is great." So everything was built. We got there. The place was packed. Saturday. I mean, everybody from everywhere was coming in there to hear this shootout between me and them guys, on the issue of the authority of the Word of God. Lo and behold, Dr. Finini is up there, and he is the big guy, and he set this whole thing up, and lo and behold, none of them show up. Dr. Finini lost so much face over that, he was so angry. He came to me, and he said, "We had slotted four hours for this debate." He says, "You take all four hours and teach these people why the King James Bible is the Word of God." When we were done, Dr. Finini came to me, and he said, "You know, I am going to do this." He said, "There will never be any other translation put in this country through our organization, other than the King James Bible." Thomas Gilmore called me a couple of weeks ago. He was in this country. In fact, he had a schedule. He was going to be here, and he could not make it. You know what he told me? He brought it up, and he says, "Bob," he said, "That was the most life-changing concept in my life." He said, "Since that time, through that debate and through the organization that we sent the tithe to, there have been 7 million King James Bibles going to that country.

You know what we are doing? We are enjoying the book. We are loving it. We have the greatest time on Thursday night. We have the greatest time in everything we do, but this does not stop there. Let us send portions to those that do not have any. Let us send that Bible out around the world. I have an organization that will do it. They put them out everywhere. They will send people down here to show us what is going on and teach. I mean, it is the, it is. It is just one of those things I told you, I am not wasting our money that God gives us, that your money that you tithe. I am not going to put it on some foolish guy. I do not know what he is doing. Not when I have a place that will put in 7 million Bibles in one country and put Bibles around this world where that truth is put out. They translate the King James Bible into every language, almost on the face of this planet. I am telling you what, they are a great organization. That is what this church is all about.