



NEHEMIAH

Read Nehemiah 1

When Nehemiah learns the sad state of the people of Jerusalem, he offers a prayer of confession, acknowledging that Jerusalem's fate is the result of the people's sins. He also prays that God will return the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem. Nehemiah is determined to improve Jerusalem's situation and asks for God's blessing on this task.

Reflect: Consider the contrast between the evil that humans bring upon themselves and the response that God makes to those who repent. The prayer of confession strengthens Nehemiah for his task of improving conditions in Jerusalem.

Pray: A prayer for confession ought to precede a prayer for God's mercy. In your prayer, acknowledge your need for God's forgiveness.

Act: Prayer empowers the believer for action. Strengthened by the experience of God in prayer, consider what you ought to do in order to repair the damage caused to others by your sin.

Nehemiah Prays for His People

1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, ²one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem. ³They replied, "The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire."

⁴When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; ⁶let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. ⁷We have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses. ⁸Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; ⁹but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.' ¹⁰They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. ¹¹O Lord, let your ear be

attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to

your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!"

At the time, I was cupbearer to the king.

Read Nehemiah 2

Nehemiah was determined to improve conditions in Jerusalem by rebuilding the city's walls and gates. He did not let the difficulty of the task or the ridicule of others deter him from taking up the project.

Reflect: How often have we asked "What can one person do?" This question did not occur to Nehemiah. He saw a problem and worked to solve it, persuading others to join him in the project of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem.

Pray: Thank God for people who take the initiative in responding to the needs of the Christian faithful. Ask the Spirit to empower more people to begin addressing the problems of church and society.

Act: Offer your talents to those who have initiated projects designed to improve the lot of people in your neighborhood and your city. Commit yourself to the common good and the transformation of society according to values of the gospel.

Nehemiah Sent to Judah

2 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was served him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. ² So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This can only be sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors' graves, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" ⁴ Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves, so that I may rebuild it." ⁶ The king said to me (the queen also was sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a date. ⁷ Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may grant me passage until I arrive in Judah; ⁸ and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, directing him to give me timber to make beams for the gates of the temple fortress, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the gracious hand of my God was upon me.

⁹ Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent officers of the army and cavalry with me. ¹⁰ When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

Nehemiah's Inspection of the Walls

¹¹ So I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. ¹² Then I got up during the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the animal I rode. ¹³ I went out by night by the Valley Gate past the Dragon's Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. ¹⁴ Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to

the King's Pool; but there was no place for the animal I was riding to continue. ¹⁵So I went up by way of the valley by night and inspected the wall. Then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. ¹⁶The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest that were to do the work.

Decision to Restore the Walls

17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may

no longer suffer disgrace." ¹⁸I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!" So they committed themselves to the common good. ¹⁹But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they mocked and ridiculed us, saying, "What is this that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" ²⁰Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven is the one who will give us success, and we his servants are going to start building; but you have no share or claim or historic right in Jerusalem."

Read Nehemiah 3

People caught Nehemiah's vision for the restoration of Jerusalem's walls. They began the project and made the city a safe place in which to live once again. Volunteers began work on portions of the wall, guaranteeing the success of the project.

Reflect: The task of making our cities and towns safe and wholesome places where we can live and raise our children is the responsibility of all citizens. Christians too have their role to play in this task.

Pray: Do you make visible the presence of Christ? Pray that your life can be a transparent witness to Christ living within you.

Act: Though Nehemiah began as a single individual committed to the restoration of Jerusalem, he shared his vision with others, leading them to collaborate with him. What contribution can you make to your community in making your city or town a safe and wholesome place?

Organization of the Work

3 Then the high priest Eliashib set to work with his fellow priests and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set up its doors; they consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred and as far as the Tower of Hananel. ²And the men of Jericho built next to him. And next to them^a Zaccur son of Imri built.

³The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars. ⁴Next to them Meremoth son of Uriah son of Hakkoz made repairs. Next to them Meshullam son of Berechiah son of Meshezabel made repairs. Next to them Zadok son of Baana made repairs. ⁵Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.^b

⁶Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars. ⁷Next to them repairs were made by Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite—the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah—who were under the jurisdiction of^c the governor of the province Beyond the River. ⁸Next to them Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. Next to him Haniah, one of the perfumers, made repairs; and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. ⁹Next to them Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of half the district of^d Jerusalem, made repairs. ¹⁰Next to them Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house; and next to him Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs. ¹¹Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. ¹²Next to him Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of^d Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters.

^a Heb *him*

^b Or *lords*

^c Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d Or *supervisor of half the portion assigned to*

13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate; they rebuilt it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate.

14 Malchijah son of Rechab, ruler of the district of^a Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate; he rebuilt it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

15 And Shallum son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of^a Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he rebuilt it and covered it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars; and he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David. ¹⁶After him Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of^b Beth-zur, repaired from a point opposite the graves of David, as far as the artificial pool and the house of the warriors. ¹⁷After him the Levites made repairs: Rehum son of Bani; next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of^b Keilah, made repairs for his district. ¹⁸After him their kin made repairs: Binnui,^c son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of^b Keilah; ¹⁹next to him Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler^d of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the Angle. ²⁰After him Baruch son of Zabbai repaired another section from the Angle to the door of the house of the high priest Eliashib. ²¹After him Meremoth son of Uriah son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. ²²After him the

priests, the men of the surrounding area, made repairs. ²³After them Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite their house. After them Azariah son of Maaseiah son of Ananiah made repairs beside his own house. ²⁴After him Binnui son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the Angle and to the corner. ²⁵Palal son of Uzai repaired opposite the Angle and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah son of Parosh ²⁶and the temple servants living^e on Ophel made repairs up to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the projecting tower. ²⁷After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

²⁸Above the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each one opposite his own house. ²⁹After them Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. ³⁰After him Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam son of Berechiah made repairs opposite his living quarters. ³¹After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate,^f and to the upper room of the corner. ³²And between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.

Hostile Plots Thwarted

4^g Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he mocked the Jews. ²He said in the presence of his associates and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore things? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish it in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish—and burned ones at that?" ³Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "That stone wall they are building—any fox going up on it would break it down!" ⁴Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their taunt back on their own heads, and give them over as plunder in a land of captivity.

^a Or supervisor of the portion assigned to

^b Or supervisor of half the portion assigned to

^c Gk Syr Compare verse 24, 10.9: Heb Bavvai

^d Or supervisor

^e Cn: Heb were living

^f Or Hammiphkad Gate

^g Ch 3.33 in Heb

Read Nehemiah 4

There are many people who oppose Nehemiah's building project. They ridicule him and those working with him. Nehemiah fears that his opponents will destroy what has already been built, so he stations some of his workers as guards to prevent any damage to the completed portions of the wall.

Reflect: There will almost always be nay-sayers who oppose even the most worthy projects. Sometimes the opposition comes from sincere motives, but other times it is like the opposition of Sanballat, who saw a restored Jerusalem as a threat to his political position.

Pray: Those who work for the common good need your prayers. The opposition they sometimes experience can undermine their morale and impede even the best projects.

Act: Show your support to individuals and groups working for the common good. At the very least, encourage them in their work—better yet, find a way to join them.

⁵ Do not cover their guilt, and do not let their sin be blotted out from your sight; for they have hurled insults in the face of the builders.

⁶ So we rebuilt the wall, and all the wall was joined together to half its height; for the people had a mind to work.

^{7a} But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and the gaps were beginning to be closed, they were very angry, ⁸ and all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. ⁹ So we prayed to our God, and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.

¹⁰ But Judah said, "The strength of the burden bearers is failing, and there is too much rubbish so that we are unable to work on the wall." ¹¹ And our enemies said, "They will not know or see anything before we come upon them and kill them and stop the work." ¹² When the Jews who lived near them came, they said to us ten times, "From all the places where they live^b they will come up against us."^c ¹³ So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people according to their families,^d with their swords, their spears, and their bows. ¹⁴ After I looked these things over, I stood up and said to the nobles and the officials and the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, who is great and awesome, and fight for your kin, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

¹⁵ When our enemies heard that their plot was known to us, and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. ¹⁶ From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and body-armor; and the leaders posted themselves behind the whole house of Judah, ¹⁷ who were building the wall. The burden bearers carried their loads in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and with the other held a weapon. ¹⁸ And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. ¹⁹ And I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread out, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. ²⁰ Rally to us wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet. Our God will fight for us."

²¹ So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from break of dawn until the stars came out. ²² I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night inside Jerusalem, so that

^a Ch 4.1 in Heb

^b Cn: Heb *you return*

^c Compare Ck Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d Meaning of Heb uncertain

they may be a guard for us by night and our labor by day.”²³ So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me ever took off our clothes; each kept his weapon in his right hand.^a

Read Nehemiah 5

The economic disparity between the rich and the poor was another obstacle that hindered the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The heavy economic burden that had to be borne by the poor prevented them from contributing to the project. Nehemiah provides an example to the rich by taking action to improve the lot of the poor.

Reflect: Nehemiah asserts that the wealthy have achieved their status by extracting high interest from the poor, effectively keeping them in poverty. Justice requires the type of action taken by Nehemiah to end the oppression of the poor.

Pray: Pray for the success of efforts to change the economic system that prevents the poor from escaping their poverty.

Act: While acts of charity toward the poor can aid them in the short run, it is essential to support projects that seek to reform the system, allowing the poor to break out of the cycle of poverty.

Nehemiah Deals with Oppression

5 Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish kin.² For there were those who said, “With our sons and our daughters, we are many; we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive.”³ There were also those who said, “We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine.”⁴ And there were those who said, “We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king’s tax.”⁵ Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others.”

6 I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints.⁷ After thinking it over, I brought charges against the nobles and the officials; I said to them, “You are all taking interest from your own people.” And I called a great assembly to deal with them,⁸ and said to them, “As far as we were able, we have bought back our Jewish kindred who had been sold to other nations; but now you are selling your own kin, who must then be bought back by us!” They were silent, and could not find a word to say.⁹ So I said, “The thing that you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God, to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies?”¹⁰ Moreover I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us stop this taking of interest.¹¹ Restore to them, this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the interest on money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.”¹² Then they said, “We will restore everything and demand nothing more from them. We will do as you say.” And I called the priests, and made them take an oath to do as they had promised.¹³ I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, “So may God shake out everyone from house and from property who does not perform this promise. Thus may they be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

The Generosity of Nehemiah

14 Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twenti-

^a Cn: Heb *each his weapon the water*

eth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. ¹⁵The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people, and took food and wine from them, besides forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. ¹⁶Indeed, I devoted myself to the work on this wall, and acquired no land; and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

¹⁷Moreover there were at my table one hundred fifty people, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. ¹⁸Now that which was prepared for one day was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and every ten days skins of wine in abundance; yet with all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because of the heavy burden of labor on the people. ¹⁹Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

Read Nehemiah 6

So determined were the Samaritan leaders to stop Nehemiah's project that they were ready to murder him. All the other obstacles they put in place failed to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. Their plot to eliminate Nehemiah failed as well, and the project was completed. Still, Nehemiah's enemies continued to harass him.

Reflect: It is ironic that attempts to do good for the greatest number of people engender opposition. Usually this opposition comes from those who believe that their interests would be harmed by efforts to contribute to the common good. How do you react when your status, power, or wealth is threatened?

Pray: Pray for an end to the opposition of entrenched interests that try to subvert attempts to do justice for the poor.

Act: Show your solidarity with people who work to bring about necessary change in society. Your standing with them will boost their morale and contribute to the creation of a just society.

Intrigues of Enemies Foiled

6 Now when it was reported to Sanballat and Tobiah and to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had built the wall and that there was no gap left in it (though up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), ²Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm. ³So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it to come down to you?" ⁴They sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. ⁵In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. ⁶In it was written, "It is reported among the nations—and Geshem^a also says it—that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall; and according to this report you wish to become their king. ⁷You have also set up prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'There is a king in Judah!' And now it will be reported to the king according to these words. So come, therefore, and let us confer together." ⁸Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done; you are inventing them out of your own mind" ⁹—for they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

¹⁰One day when I went into the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his house, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, tonight they are coming to kill you." ¹¹But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Would a man like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" ¹²Then I perceived and saw that God had not sent him at all, but

^a Heb *Gashmu*

he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ He was hired for this purpose, to intimidate me and make me sin by acting in this way, and so they could give me a bad name, in order to taunt me. ¹⁴ Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

The Wall Completed

15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ And when all our enemies heard of

it, all the nations around us were afraid^a and fell greatly in their own esteem; for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. ¹⁷ Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. ¹⁸ For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah. ¹⁹ Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence, and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

Read Nehemiah 7

The Levites were normally responsible for service in the temple. Nehemiah, however, entrusts them with guarding the gates of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's project was not just an example of urban renewal. By making it possible to repopulate the city, Nehemiah was providing a place for Jews to give expression to their faith in God. The service of the Levites as guards, protecting access to the city suggests that Nehemiah's project was a sacred work.

Reflect: Building homes, schools, and hospitals for the poor is a holy endeavor. Making it possible for people to live in dignity and safety, indeed, is making a place for faith.

Pray: What do you consider a "holy" work? Pray for those whose life's work is that of making the place where we live "the city of God."

Act: What would make the city or town where you live into a place that allows people to live in prosperity and peace? What can you do to make your city "the city of God"?

7 Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, ² I gave my brother Hanani charge over Jerusalem, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel—for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many. ³ And I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot; while the gatekeepers^b are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their watch posts, and others before their own houses." ⁴ The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few and no houses had been built.

Lists of the Returned Exiles

5 Then my God put it into my mind to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who were the first to come back, and I found the following written in it:

6 These are the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had carried into exile; they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his town. ⁷ They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah.

The number of the Israelite people: ⁸ the descendants of Parosh, two thousand one hundred seventy-two. ⁹ Of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy-two. ¹⁰ Of Arah, six hundred fifty-two. ¹¹ Of Pahath-moab, namely the descendants of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred eighteen. ¹² Of Elam, one thousand two hundred fifty-four. ¹³ Of Zattu, eight hundred forty-five.

^a Another reading is saw

^b Heb *while they*

¹⁴ Of Zaccai, seven hundred sixty. ¹⁵ Of Binnui, six hundred forty-eight. ¹⁶ Of Bebai, six hundred twenty-eight. ¹⁷ Of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty-two. ¹⁸ Of Adonikam, six hundred sixty-seven. ¹⁹ Of Bigvai, two thousand sixty-seven. ²⁰ Of Adin, six hundred fifty-five. ²¹ Of Ater, namely of Hezekiah, ninety-eight. ²² Of Hashum, three hundred twenty-eight. ²³ Of Bezai, three hundred twenty-four. ²⁴ Of Hariph, one hundred twelve. ²⁵ Of Gibeon, ninety-five. ²⁶ The people of Bethlehem and Netophah, one hundred eighty-eight. ²⁷ Of Anathoth, one hundred twenty-eight. ²⁸ Of Beth-azmaveth, forty-two. ²⁹ Of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty-three. ³⁰ Of Ramah and Geba, six hundred twenty-one. ³¹ Of Michmas, one hundred twenty-two. ³² Of Bethel and Ai, one hundred twenty-three. ³³ Of the other Nebo, fifty-two. ³⁴ The descendants of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred fifty-four. ³⁵ Of Harim, three hundred twenty. ³⁶ Of Jericho, three hundred forty-five. ³⁷ Of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty-one. ³⁸ Of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred thirty.

³⁹ The priests: the descendants of Jedaiah, namely the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy-three. ⁴⁰ Of Immer, one thousand fifty-two. ⁴¹ Of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred forty-seven. ⁴² Of Harim, one thousand seventeen.

⁴³ The Levites: the descendants of Jeshua, namely of Kadmiel of the descendants of Hodevah, seventy-four. ⁴⁴ The singers: the descendants of Asaph, one hundred forty-eight. ⁴⁵ The gatekeepers: the descendants of Shallum, of Ater, of Talmon, of Akkub, of Hatita, of Shobai, one hundred thirty-eight.

⁴⁶ The temple servants: the descendants of Ziha, of Hasupha, of Tabbaoth, ⁴⁷ of Keros, of Sia, of Padon, ⁴⁸ of Lebana, of Hagaba, of Shalmal, ⁴⁹ of Hanan, of Giddel, of Gahar, ⁵⁰ of Reaiah, of Rezin, of Nekoda, ⁵¹ of Gazzam, of Uzza, of Paseah, ⁵² of Besai, of Meunim, of Nephushesim,

⁵³ of Bakbuk, of Hakupha, of Harhur, ⁵⁴ of Bazlith, of Mehida, of Harsha, ⁵⁵ of Barkos, of Sisera, of Temah, ⁵⁶ of Neziah, of Hatipha.

⁵⁷ The descendants of Solomon's servants: of Sotai, of Sophereth, of Perida, ⁵⁸ of Jaala, of Darkon, of Giddel, ⁵⁹ of Shephatiah, of Hattil, of Pochereth-hazzebaim, of Amon.

⁶⁰ All the temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants were three hundred ninety-two.

⁶¹ The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not prove their ancestral houses or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel: ⁶² the descendants of Delaiah, of Tobiah, of Nekoda, six hundred forty-two. ⁶³ Also, of the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, of Hakkoz, of Barzillai (who had married one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by their name). ⁶⁴ These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but it was not found there, so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean; ⁶⁵ the governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until a priest with Urim and Thummim should come.

⁶⁶ The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred sixty, ⁶⁷ besides their male and female slaves, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty-seven; and they had two hundred forty-five singers, male and female. ⁶⁸ They had seven hundred thirty-six horses, two hundred forty-five mules,^a ⁶⁹ four hundred thirty-five camels, and six thousand seven hundred twenty donkeys.

⁷⁰ Now some of the heads of ancestral houses contributed to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand darics of gold, fifty basins, and five hundred thirty priestly robes. ⁷¹ And some of the heads of ancestral houses gave into the building fund twenty thousand darics of gold and two thousand two hundred minas

^a Ezra 2.66 and the margins of some Hebrew Mss: MT lacks *They had ... forty-five mules*

of silver. ⁷² And what the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand darics of gold, two thousand minas of silver, and sixty-seven priestly robes.

⁷³ So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel settled in their towns.

Read Nehemiah 8

With the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls complete, reconstituting the people's religious life becomes possible. Ezra reads and explains the Torah to the people, who cannot contain their emotions as they hear again the words that are to shape their lives. Nehemiah leads them in a festive celebration.

Reflect: Religion ought to be liberating and joyous. Does your life with God make you happy? Does it make life worth living for you? Obedience to the divine will ought to be liberating. Is it for you?

Pray: Pray that God will give you the gift of joy. It is the consequence of leading a life worthy of the gospel and being a source of blessing in the lives of others.

Act: We find our truest self and truest happiness when we serve others. Look for what you can do for others this day.

Ezra Summons the People to Obey the Law

When the seventh month came—the people of Israel being settled in their towns—¹ all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. ² Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. ⁴ The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites,^a helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸ So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” ¹¹ So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” ¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing,

^a 1 Esdras 9.48 Vg: Heb and the Levites

because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

The Festival of Booths Celebrated

13 On the second day the heads of ancestral houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to the scribe Ezra in order to study the words of the law. 14 And they found it written in the law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the people of Israel should live in booths^a during the festival of the seventh month, 15 and that they should publish and proclaim in all their towns and in Jerusalem as follows, “Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make

booths,^a as it is written.” 16 So the people went out and brought them, and made booths^a for themselves, each on the roofs of their houses, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. 17 And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths^a and lived in them; for from the days of Jeshua son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing. 18 And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the book of the law of God. They kept the festival seven days; and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance.

Read Nehemiah 9

A communal confession of sin follows as the people of Jerusalem hear the Torah and recognize that they and their ancestors have not led lives in accord with its values. The people acknowledge that the evil that came into their lives was a consequence of their infidelity and pledge to God and each other that they will be faithful to the Torah that Ezra and Nehemiah have read and explained to them.

Reflect: Confession of sin is an acknowledgment of personal responsibility. It is the first step in reordering one’s life. Confession frees us to make new choices in life—choices that will bind us closer to God and each other.

Pray: Honestly assess your life with God. Ask pardon for your failures to live the ideals of Jesus Christ in your life.

Act: Make a good confession. Receiving the sacrament of reconciliation frees us to become new persons in Jesus Christ after receiving the forgiveness that God offers in this sacrament.

National Confession

9 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads.^b 2 Then those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors. 3 They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth part of the day, and for another fourth they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God. 4 Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherubiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God. 5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.”

6 And Ezra said:^c “You are the LORD, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you. 7 You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham; 8 and you found his heart faithful before you, and made with him a covenant to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite; and you have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous.

9 “And you saw the distress of our ancestors in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea.^d 10 You per-

^a Or *tabernacles*; Heb *succhoth*

^b Heb *on them*

^c Gk: Heb lacks *And Ezra said*

^d Or *Sea of Reeds*

formed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted insolently against our ancestors. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day.¹¹ And you divided the sea before them, so that they passed through the sea on dry land, but you threw their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters.¹² Moreover, you led them by day with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire, to give them light on the way in which they should go.¹³ You came down also upon Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments,¹⁴ and you made known your holy sabbath to them and gave them commandments and statutes and a law through your servant Moses.¹⁵ For their hunger you gave them bread from heaven, and for their thirst you brought water for them out of the rock, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you swore to give them.

16 "But they and our ancestors acted presumptuously and stiffened their necks and did not obey your commandments;¹⁷ they refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them; but they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them.¹⁸ Even when they had cast an image of a calf for themselves and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies,¹⁹ you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness; the pillar of cloud that led them in the way did not leave them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night that gave them light on the way by which they should go.²⁰ You gave your good spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and gave them water for their thirst.²¹ Forty years you sustained them in the

wilderness so that they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.²² And you gave them kingdoms and peoples, and allotted to them every corner,^a so they took possession of the land of King Sihon of Heshbon and the land of King Og of Bashan.²³ You multiplied their descendants like the stars of heaven, and brought them into the land that you had told their ancestors to enter and possess.²⁴ So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands, with their kings and the peoples of the land, to do with them as they pleased.²⁵ And they captured fortress cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses filled with all sorts of goods, hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive orchards, and fruit trees in abundance; so they ate, and were filled and became fat, and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

26 "Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their backs and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies.²⁷ Therefore you gave them into the hands of their enemies, who made them suffer. Then in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hands of their enemies.²⁸ But after they had rest, they again did evil before you, and you abandoned them to the hands of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you rescued them according to your mercies.²⁹ And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your ordinances, by the observance of which a person shall live. They turned a stubborn shoulder and

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

stiffened their neck and would not obey. ³⁰Many years you were patient with them, and warned them by your spirit through your prophets; yet they would not listen. Therefore you handed them over to the peoples of the lands. ³¹Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

³²“Now therefore, our God—the great and mighty and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love—do not treat lightly all the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings, our officials, our priests, our prophets, our ancestors, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until today. ³³You have been just in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly; ³⁴our kings, our officials, our priests, and our ancestors have not kept your law

or heeded the commandments and the warnings that you gave them. ³⁵Even in their own kingdom, and in the great goodness you bestowed on them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you and did not turn from their wicked works. ³⁶Here we are, slaves to this day—slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts. ³⁷Its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins; they have power also over our bodies and over our livestock at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.”

Those Who Signed the Covenant

^{38a} Because of all this we make a firm agreement in writing, and on that sealed document are inscribed the names of our officials, our Levites, and our priests.

10^b Upon the sealed document are the names of Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah; ²Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, ³Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, ⁴Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, ⁵Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, ⁶Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, ⁷Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, ⁸Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these are the priests. ⁹And the Levites: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; ¹⁰and their associates, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, ¹¹Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, ¹²Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, ¹³Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. ¹⁴The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, ¹⁵Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, ¹⁶Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, ¹⁷Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, ¹⁸Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, ¹⁹Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, ²⁰Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, ²¹Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, ²²Pelataiah, Hanan, Anaiah, ²³Hoshea, Hananiah, Hashshub, ²⁴Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, ²⁵Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, ²⁶Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, ²⁷Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

Summary of the Covenant

²⁸The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to adhere to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, ²⁹join with their kin, their nobles, and en-

^a Ch 10.1 in Heb

^b Ch 10.2 in Heb

Read Nehemiah 10

The people of Jerusalem are serious about reconstituting their religious life. The heads of families sign an agreement, accepting the Torah as the guiding principle of their moral lives. They are not satisfied with generalized statements of commitment but they pledge to take specific actions to give witness to how serious they are.

Reflect: Our relationship with God needs to find expression in the concrete actions that we take. Our Christian commitment involves living lives worthy of the gospel. It is our responsibility to allow the ideals of the gospel to transform our lives.

Pray: Does your prayer empower you for service? Be specific as you pray that God will help you to make moral choices consistent with your Christian commitment.

Act: Resolve to take action to repair the hurt and damage you have brought into the lives of others by your selfishness and sin. Make a positive contribution to the lives of others.

ter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his ordinances and his statutes. ³⁰ We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons; ³¹ and if the peoples of the land bring in merchandise or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy it from them on the sabbath or on a holy day; and we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

³² We also lay on ourselves the obligation to charge ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: ³³ for the rows of bread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed festivals, the sacred donations, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. ³⁴ We have also cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, by ancestral houses, at appointed times, year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law. ³⁵ We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our soil and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the LORD; ³⁶ also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our livestock, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks; ³⁷ and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our soil, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our rural towns. ³⁸ And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. ³⁹ For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the storerooms where the vessels of the sanctuary are, and where the priests that minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers are. We will not neglect the house of our God.

Population of the City Increased

11 Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem; and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in the holy city Jerusalem, while nine-tenths remained in the other towns. ² And the people blessed all those who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.

Read Nehemiah 11

The entire city—not just the temple—is holy. What makes the city holy is the presence of people who are committed to serving God. The restoration continues with the repopulation of Jerusalem. The presence of the community's leadership and a significant portion of Judah's population in the city ensure that the reconstitution of Jewish life in Jerusalem will continue.

Reflect: The repopulation of Jerusalem is a most significant step in ensuring that Jewish life will continue. Though Jerusalem and Judah are very small elements in the Persian Empire, the significance of the return of Jewish life to Jerusalem is a momentous event.

Pray: Remember all refugees who are longing to return to their homes after peace has been restored. Pray that their repatriation may occur quickly and peacefully.

Act: The plight of political and economic refugees is often forgotten. There are many people cut off from their homelands. Learn what you can do to alleviate their suffering and sense of alienation.

3 These are the leaders of the province who lived in Jerusalem; but in the towns of Judah all lived on their property in their towns: Israel, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants, and the descendants of Solomon's servants. ⁴And in Jerusalem lived some of the Judahites and of the Benjaminites. Of the Judahites: Athaiah son of Uziah son of Zechariah son of Amariah son of Shephatiah son of Mahalalel, of the descendants of Perez; ⁵and Maaseiah son of Baruch son of Col-hozeh son of Hazaiah son of Adaiah son of Joarib son of Zechariah son of the Shilonite. ⁶All the descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were four hundred sixty-eight valiant warriors.

7 And these are the Benjaminites: Sallu son of Meshullam son of Joed son of Pedaiiah son of Kolaiah son of Maaseiah son of Ithiel son of Jeshaiiah. ⁸And his brothers^a Gabbai, Sallai: nine hundred twenty-eight. ⁹Joel son of Zichri was their overseer; and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in charge of the city.

10 Of the priests: Jedaiah son of Joarib, Jachin, ¹¹Seraiah son of Hilkiah son of Meshullam son of Zadok son of Meraioth son of Ahitub, officer of the house of God, ¹²and their associates who did the work of the house, eight hundred twenty-two; and Adaiah son of Jeroham son of Pelaliah son of Amzi son of Zechariah son of Pashhur son of Malchijah, ¹³and his associates, heads of ancestral houses, two hundred forty-two; and Amashsai son of Azarel son of Ahzai son of Meshillemoth son of Immer, ¹⁴and their associates, valiant warriors, one hundred twenty-eight; their overseer was Zabdriel son of Hagedolim.

15 And of the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub son of Azrikam son of Hashabiah son of Bunni; ¹⁶and Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the leaders of the Levites, who were over the outside work of the house of God; ¹⁷and Mattaniah son of Mica son of Zabdi son of Asaph, who was the leader to begin the thanksgiving in prayer, and Bakbukiah, the second among his associates; and Abda son of Shammua son of Galal son of Jeduthun. ¹⁸All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred eighty-four.

19 The gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon and their associates, who kept watch at the gates, were one hundred seventy-two. ²⁰And the rest of Israel, and of the priests and the Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, all of them in their inheritance. ²¹But the temple servants lived on Ophel; and Ziha and Gishpa were over the temple servants.

22 The overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani son of Hashabiah son of Mattaniah son of Mica, of the descendants of Asaph, the singers, in

^a Gk Mss: Heb *And after him*

charge of the work of the house of God.²³ For there was a command from the king concerning them, and a settled provision for the singers, as was required every day.²⁴ And Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, of the descendants of Zerach son of Judah, was at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people.

Villages outside Jerusalem

25 And as for the villages, with their fields, some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath-arba and its villages, and in Dibon and its villages, and in Jekabzeel and its villages,²⁶ and in Jeshua and in Moladah

and Beth-pelet,²⁷ in Hazar-shual, in Beer-sheba and its villages,²⁸ in Ziklag, in Meconah and its villages,²⁹ in En-rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth,³⁰ Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, Lachish and its fields, and Azekah and its villages. So they camped from Beer-sheba to the valley of Hinnom.³¹ The people of Benjamin also lived from Geba onward, at Michmash, Aija, Bethel and its villages,³² Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah,³³ Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim,³⁴ Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat,³⁵ Lod, and Ono, the valley of artisans.³⁶ And certain divisions of the Levites in Judah were joined to Benjamin.

Read Nehemiah 12:1–26

Both priests and Levites served in the rebuilt temple. The former were responsible for sacrificial worship and the latter were singers and performed other functions during worship. Both positions were hereditary; hence, genealogies were of utmost importance in supporting the legitimacy of temple personnel.

Reflect: While genealogies may not be very interesting reading, they do underscore the importance of connections with the past. The priests and Levites of Nehemiah's days were able to serve because of these connections. Continuity as demonstrated by the genealogies provides legitimacy.

Pray: Participate in the liturgical prayer of the church with care and dignity.

Act: The liturgy provides Christians with a connection to their predecessors in the faith. Recognize and value your contribution to the church's worship.

A List of Priests and Levites

12 These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,² Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,³ Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,⁴ Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah,⁵ Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah,⁶ Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah,⁷ Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, Jedaiah. These were the leaders of the priests and of their associates in the days of Jeshua.

8 And the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who with his associates was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving.⁹ And Bakbukiah and Unno their associates stood opposite them in the service.¹⁰ Jeshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim the father of Eliashib, Eliashib the father of Joiada,¹¹ Joiada the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan the father of Jaddua.

12 In the days of Joiakim the priests, heads of ancestral houses, were: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah;¹³ of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan;¹⁴ of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph;¹⁵ of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai;¹⁶ of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam;¹⁷ of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai;¹⁸ of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan;¹⁹ of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi;²⁰ of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber;²¹ of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

22 As for the Levites, in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, there were recorded the heads of ancestral houses; also the priests until the reign of Darius the Persian.²³ The Levites, heads of ancestral houses, were recorded in the Book of the Annals until the days of Johanan son of Eliashib.²⁴ And the leaders of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and

Read Nehemiah 12:27–47

The people of Jerusalem celebrate the completion of Nehemiah's rebuilding project with a liturgical celebration. Led by the priests and Levites, the people give thanks to God. The people also determine to make contributions that will support the temple's personnel.

Reflect: The book of Nehemiah underscores the importance of tangible realities in the life of faith. How much value do you place in the tangible realities connected with faith in Jesus Christ (e.g., religious institutions such as church buildings, schools, and charitable institutions, as well as the personnel who staff them)?

Pray: Remember the priests and religious who were significant in the development of your life with God. Pray that their ministries may be authentic and effective.

Act: Choose a religious institution or religious community to support not only with your prayers but also with the monetary resources with which you have been blessed.

Jeshua son of Kadmiel, with their associates over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, section opposite to section. ²⁵ Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates. ²⁶ These were in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and in the days of the governor Nehemiah and of the priest Ezra, the scribe.

Dedication of the City Wall

27 Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with rejoicing, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. ²⁸ The companies of the singers gathered together from the circuit around Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; ²⁹ also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. ³⁰ And the priests and the Levites purified themselves; and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.

31 Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall, and appointed two great companies that gave thanks and went in procession. One went to the right on the wall to the Dung Gate; ³² and after them went Hoshaiah and half the officials of Judah, ³³ and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, ³⁴ Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, ³⁵ and some of the young priests with trumpets: Zechariah son of Jonathan son of Shemaiah son of Mattaniah son of Micaiah son of Zaccur son of Asaph; ³⁶ and his kindred, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God; and the scribe Ezra went in front of them. ³⁷ At the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went straight up by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east.

38 The other company of those who gave thanks went to the left,^a and I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, ³⁹ and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Old Gate, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard. ⁴⁰ So both companies of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; ⁴¹ and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; ⁴² and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jeho-

^a Cn: Heb *opposite*

hanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. ⁴³They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. The joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

Temple Responsibilities

44 On that day men were appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the law for the priests and for the Levites from the fields belonging to the towns; for

Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered. ⁴⁵They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon. ⁴⁶For in the days of David and Asaph long ago there was a leader of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. ⁴⁷In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers. They set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the descendants of Aaron.

Read Nehemiah 13:1–3

Some Jews looked upon Gentiles as threats to the loyalty that they owed to God. Isolation from Gentiles and their influence was a means of protection. Basing the decision to separate themselves from Gentiles on Deuteronomy 23:3, the people of Jerusalem sought to insulate themselves from influences that were incompatible with their commitment to God.

Reflect: Have you made accommodations with attitudes and values that are contrary to the gospel? Are you willing to take a counter-cultural stand when your commitment to the gospel requires it? The Christian life sometimes calls for us to take “the road less traveled.”

Pray: Fidelity to Christ sometimes requires difficult choices. Pray that you may always prefer the values of the gospel to the values of the culture.

Act: Examine your lifestyle. Determine to separate yourself from that which undercuts an authentic commitment to Christ.

Foreigners Separated from Israel

13 On that day they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, ²because they did not meet the Israelites with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. ³When the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

The Reforms of Nehemiah

4 Now before this, the priest Eliashib, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, ⁵prepared for Tobiah a large room where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. ⁶While this was taking place I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes of Babylon I went to the king. After some time I asked leave of the king ⁷and returned to Jerusalem. I then discovered the wrong that Eliashib had done on behalf of Tobiah, preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. ⁸And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the room. ⁹Then I gave orders and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

10 I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them; so that the Levites and the singers, who had conducted the service, had gone back to their fields. ¹¹So I remonstrated with the officials and said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” And I gath-

Read Nehemiah 13:4–31

Nehemiah's memoirs conclude with a description of the actions that Nehemiah takes to ensure correct religious observance. He rids the temple of materials brought in by Tobiah, his rival from Samaria, gives the Levites and other temple personnel their proper wages, criticizes people for their failure to observe the Sabbath properly, and objects to marriages between Jews and Gentiles.

Reflect: Are you silent in the face of evil or do you make your voice heard when you witness evil done to others? There are times when we have to speak out against injustice or other crimes committed against the poor and powerless.

Pray: Ask God for the determination of Nehemiah, who was committed to the future of his people, believing that fidelity to the religion of their ancestors was the way to the future.

Act: Lend your voice to those who speak for the poor and the powerless. Determine to act on your religious values, making your voice heard.

ered them together and set them in their stations. ¹²Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. ¹³And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses the priest Shelemiah, the scribe Zadok, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan son of Zaccur son of Mattaniah, for they were considered faithful; and their duty was to distribute to their associates. ¹⁴Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

Sabbath Reforms Begun

15 In those days I saw in Judah people treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys; and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day; and I warned them at that time against selling food. ¹⁶Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of merchandise and sold them on the sabbath to the people of Judah, and in Jerusalem. ¹⁷Then I remonstrated with the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the sabbath day? ¹⁸Did not your ancestors act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring more wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath."

19 When it began to be dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the sabbath. And I set some of my servants over the gates, to prevent any burden from being brought in on the sabbath day. ²⁰Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem once or twice. ²¹But I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they did not come on the sabbath. ²²And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.

Mixed Marriages Condemned

23 In those days also I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; ²⁴and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples. ²⁵And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and

pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. ²⁶Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. ²⁷Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?"

²⁸And one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I chased him away from me. ²⁹Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priests and the Levites.

³⁰Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; ³¹and I provided for the wood offering, at appointed times, and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.