

## Ezra, Nehemiah and Restoration

Franklin Church of Christ  
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January 4, 2004  
AM Worship

### Introduction:

Recently, we heard a great lesson from Max Dawson regarding 10 keys to Nehemiah's success in restoring Jerusalem's wall. I am not sure he was aware of how truly appropriate a study from Nehemiah was for us. Of course, it was appropriate to all Christians. Our goal is to restore the Christianity of the New Testament in our own lives and rebuild the church as described in the New Testament. But it was also appropriate to this congregation very specifically. Just as the Jews came back into the Promised Land after years of trouble, we see ourselves serving God following years of troubles. Just as they wanted to restore and rebuild God's temple, we want to restore and rebuild this congregation back to the strength God wants us to have. As we look through 2004 and beyond, we need to see ourselves as builders. We are building the Lord's temple (**Ephesians 2:19-22**). I would like to sprinboard off of Max's lesson by looking at seven important concepts of restoring and rebuilding not just from Nehemiah, but also from that other great book of Israel's restoration – Ezra.

### Discussion:

- I. What we build must be based on God's Word.
  - A. When the first exiles returned to Israel, they rebuilt God's altar and sacrificed according to God's Word (**Ezra 3:2**). In **Ezra 9-10**, many of the men of Israel divorced their wives and put their children away because their marriages violated God's Word (**Ezra 9:10-12; cf Deuteronomy 7:3**). In **Nehemiah 8**, the people assembled to hear the Word of the Lord read and explained, they then restored the Feast of Tabernacles according to what was read (**Nehemiah 8:2-3, 8**). The Israelites relied on God's Word to restore and rebuild their nation.
  - B. As we strive to build God's temple in Franklin, we must use God's Word as our guide. **Ephesians 2:20** said our temple is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Paul was using a figure of speech called Metonymy. The foundation is not men themselves, but rather the revelation that came through those men as Ephesians 3:3-5 demonstrates. We are to build this church on that foundation. As **II Peter 1:20-21** affirms, this Bible came from the Holy Spirit. We must live by it and build from it.
- II. We must be prepared for drastic changes that we do not expect.
  - A. Since the Jews were not directing their own steps, but the Word of God was, when they wanted to restore God's nation, they encountered drastic changes that many evidently had not expected. According to **Ezra 1:5**, the people who returned were people who wanted to rebuild the house of God. They wanted to turn away from idolatry and restore the proper worship of the one true God. However, about 52 years after they had returned and completed the temple, Ezra arrived with the second wave of returning exiles and discovered that many of the Israelites were still married to foreign women, which had been condemned in **Exodus 34:13-16**. Certainly, they wanted idolatry destroyed, but were they prepared to rip their homes asunder to accomplish the goal? According to **Ezra 10:1-3**, they were.
  - B. It is easy to say we want to build this church on the Bible. It is much more challenging to do it. The fact is, as we study our Bibles, we may find drastic changes we need to make. But we must remember that we are to do God's will, no matter what the cost. This goes along with the Lord's words in **Luke 14:25-35**. We must be willing to do whatever the Lord asks of us, no matter how shocking or drastic. Otherwise, we cannot be His disciples.
- III. We will have opposition.
  - A. Both books demonstrate the work of those opposed to the Lord and His people. In **Ezra 4**, the adversaries who first tried to infiltrate the forces of God's people (**Ezra 4:2**) and then discouraged them (**Ezra 4:4-5**). Their tactics kept the temple from being completed for 21 years. **Nehemiah 2:19; 4:1-3** recorded the same kind of opposition when the Israelites built the walls.
  - B. We will have opposition. People will try to discourage us. They will "hire counselors" against us. They will mock us and what we are trying to build. We must remember Jesus' words in **John 15:18-21**. Jesus had enemies and so will we. We must be prepared for opposition and we must be prepared to keep on serving the Lord anyway.

- IV. But we must not prejudge or assume who will bring opposition.
- A. While the Jews faced opposition, they also had some surprises regarding who opposed them and who did not. Nehemiah faced opposition even from among the supposed prophets and priests of Israel (**Nehemiah 6:10-14;13:4-5**). Just because a person was a Jew, did not mean they would support God's will. However, Nehemiah received surprising support from one who had previously opposed the Jews, Artaxerxes (**Ezra 4:7-22; Nehemiah 2:1, 5-6**).
  - B. We must not assume or prejudge who will bring opposition. We can very easily have an us/them mentality. If they are not "one of us," then they will probably not want to hear the truth. But if they are "one of us," then anything they do must be valid. Just because someone is a member of a "church of Christ" or even a member of this church does not mean they will ultimately be friendly to God's cause. Just because they are not Christians, does not mean they will not accept the truth when they hear it. While we must be prepared for opposition, we must not assume or prejudge from whom it will come.
- V. Leaders must lead the way, the rest must follow.
- A. After Cyrus gave his decree to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, the first thing said is that the "heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites" led the way (**Ezra 1:5**). Then after the 21 year break in working on the temple, the text claims that Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the governor and the high priest, began to build the temple (**Ezra 5:2**). When the unfortunate incident with the foreign wives occurred the people turned to Ezra to lead them through it (**Ezra 10:4**). When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, who can doubt that he was the people's inspiration to build the wall (**Nehemiah 2:17-18**). In **Nehemiah 5**, when Nehemiah learned that Jews had been charging usury and taking advantage of their brethren, he demonstrated that he led by example (**Nehemiah 5:14-19**). The leaders led the way. But we need to remember the other side of this, the people had to follow. One of the amazing facts of leadership is that it is voluntary. In reality, neither Ezra nor Nehemiah could force any of the Jews to do any of the things they did. They were only leaders, because the people followed them.
  - B. Our leaders must lead. Too many churches have men who are named leaders, but typically spend most of their time wondering what is happening. Leaders need to look to the future and see where we need to be going. Leaders need to stir up our hearts to do the work. Then they need to lead the way by example. But, we also must follow them. We must submit to them (**Hebrews 13:17**). We are not to cheer our leaders on their way, but follow and work with them.
- VI. We must all be willing to work.
- A. According to **Nehemiah 3**, everyone from the high priest (**vs. 1**) to goldsmiths and perfumers (**vs. 8**) helped build the wall. **Nehemiah 4:6** claimed they quickly built the wall to half of its height because the people had a mind to work.
  - B. We also must have a mind to work. All of us must have that mindset. The work is not for the elders, the deacons and the preacher. The work is for the Christians. **Ephesians 4:16** says every joint supplies work. You may not do the same thing as the person sitting next to you, but you need to be doing something. What work are you doing? Are you teaching anyone? Are you inviting anyone? Are you encouraging anyone? Are you helping anyone? If we are going to build this church up, we must all have a mind to work.
- VII. We must be prepared to work through internal difficulties.
- A. In **Nehemiah 5:1-5**, Nehemiah learned that some of the Jews had taken advantage of their poorer brethren. They were exacting usury and even taking those who were unable to pay as slaves. In **Nehemiah 5:6-11**, Nehemiah rebuked the nobles and rulers and commanded them to restore the lands and fields to the other Jews. In **Nehemiah 5:12**, the nobles and rulers said they would comply. One might think that among God's people, difficulties like these could be avoided. That, however, is not the case. Even among God's people troubles arise. They had to work through these problems and then live with each other afterwards. This even meant that some seemed to get a raw deal. They had let people borrow money when the king's taxes were due or when the famine was great and now they were restoring what they had taken as collateral and were requiring nothing.

- B. We need to be willing to do the same. That is, work through internal issues that come up. We will have people problems. We will rub each other the wrong way. Some of us will take advantage of the others and then need to be rebuked for it. Others will have to give up their claims to rights in order to maintain peace. But we must work through all of this and focus on being united with one another. As **I Corinthians 6:7-8** said, sometimes we will even have to be willing to be wronged in order not to do wrong to others. We must live peaceably with all (**Romans 12:18**).

**Conclusion:**

No doubt, we have a great deal of work ahead of us this year and the years to come. However, just as He was with these Jews, God is with us. His good hand will prosper us (**Ezra 8:18, 22; Nehemiah 2:18; Acts 11:21; Hebrews 13:5**). We must rely on Him and do His will. Remember **Ephesians 3:20** – God is able to do more than we can even ask or think and He can do it through us.