

Lifting Up The STANDARD

“When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isaiah 59:19).



Challenging And Encouraging God's Remnant To Remain Faithful

A BIBLE REVIVAL

Nehemiah Chapter Two

THE CONTEXT:

In 722 BC, the Assyrians came in and deported the ten northern tribes of Israel, and they were taken into captivity, and Nehemiah confessed the reason for their captivity in Chapter 1, verse 7. He said, “*We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.*” God had warned them—*You do it the way I say or they that hate you will rule over you, and you will be brought into subjection under their hand.*

That sort of thing is happening again today. It seems the only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history. In any event, in 605 BC, the Babylonians came in and sacked Jerusalem and carried away the other two tribes, who also went into judgment. As a result of their rebellion all of God's people are in bondage in Assyria and in Babylon.

In 539 BC, there was a power shift in the world, and the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians. The Persians allowed the Jews to return to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. Zerubbabel and Joshua led the first return. You can read about that in Ezra Chapter one through Chapter six. The Temple was rebuilt, and at that time, the prophets that God had on the scene were Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. In 458 BC, Ezra led the second return, and we read about that in Ezra Chapters seven through ten.

In 445 BC, we find the story we're looking at now where Nehemiah came back to rebuild the walls of the city. It was Nehemiah's first term as the governor of Jerusalem, and the king of Persia gave him the right to do that. We find that in Chapters one through twelve. Then in 424 BC, Nehemiah's second term as governor begins in Chapter thirteen. There's a gap of almost twenty years between Chapter twelve and Chapter thirteen, and we'll see that a lot happened between those years.



APATHY REIGNED: When Nehemiah came, he found that the remnant had become apathetic, that is, they had no interest anymore in building anything. They were building their own houses. And as I mentioned, Haggai was at that time God's prophet, and Haggai said in Chapter one, verses two through seven:

2 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.

3 *Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,*
 4 *Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?*
 5 *Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.*
 6 *Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.*
 7 *Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.*

This sounds to me like a lot of Christianity today. Haggai went on to say to them:

8 *Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house—that is God’s house he’s talking about—and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.*
 9 *Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.*
 10 *Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.*
 11 *And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.*
 God says, “*This is what you’re getting. You make your choices, and choices have consequences.*” and that's the way it was at that time.

ONE HAPPY PROPHET: (Unlike Jeremiah’s response - “*the people, obeyed.*”)

Verse twelve says that “*all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God...*” There is a very important word in that verse, and that word is “*remnant.*” This is the remnant. This was the small group of people who really wanted to do God's will, but they became discouraged, they got sidetracked, they started building their own houses. They had gotten to the place of *apathy*. We've mentioned before that if we want to look at the world in this age in which we're living, we can describe it in one word, and that word is “*anarchy.*” If we want to look at Christianity in general, there's one word that will describe Christianity, and that word is “*apostasy.*” But the biggest problem we can have today in this hour is if the remnant, if that little group that really wants to do right becomes apathetic. *Apathy* is the thing we need to be careful of, and that is what happened with the remnant in the Book of Nehemiah.

When Haggai came on the scene and started to preach to these people, then “*all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD.*”¹³ *Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD.*” There was a complete turnaround, and it says in verse fourteen, “*...all the remnant of the people...came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.*” There was a big revival amongst the remnant in Ezra's day when he was building the Temple, because God had Haggai there to stir them up and they obeyed “*the voice of the LORD their God.*”

THE CAUSE OF THE APATHY:

The main reason for the apathy was the fact that their relationship with the Lord had been neglected. They had been back in the land for many years, struggling to rebuild things, however, when Nehemiah returned the sheep gate was still in shambles. The first gate out of all of the gates that are mentioned here is the sheep gate. The sheep gate represents our relationship with Christ as Christians.

BUILDING IN THE POWER OF THE FLESH:

Their relationship with the Lord had been neglected. The sheep gate needs to be built first so all the rest of the gates can lean against it. We can build the fish gate, which represents soul winning, and we can build the valley gate, which represents humility, and we can build the dung gate, which represents getting all the garbage out of our lives—we can build all those gates, but unless we build the sheep gate first, the other gates will fall over. We need that sheep gate for the other gates to lean against. If our relationship with Christ is not what it should be, all of our efforts will be done in the power of the flesh.

FOCUSING ON WHAT BECAME MORE IMPORTANT TO THEM:

We find that they became more interested in building their own houses than they were in doing anything for God. We need to understand this in this age in which we live. **This is extremely important. A pastor's main responsibility is to help the people in the church to maintain their relationship with**



Jesus Christ. In years gone by—and not that many years—the focus changed. Rather than focusing on helping the sincere Christian how to have a good relationship with the Lord, the focus changed to getting a big church. In an effort to get a big church we began to market the ministry. We turned our focus on men who had the personality that could draw a crowd. Men who could entertain the young people were invited to speak at our youth meetings. That's why we're in such a mess that we're in right now. We don't need entertainment.

We need the pure, straightforward kind of preaching that Haggai was preaching. When we feel we have to motivate through emotions, the spiritual values go down the drain.

“AN YE FATHERS”

The pastor's main responsibility should be to help the people in his church maintain their relationship with Jesus Christ. Now let's move on to the home, because there are two areas of leadership: One is pastors and one is parents, and specifically the fathers. The Bible says, “*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4).

HAGGAI TOOK HIS RESPONSIBILITY SERIOUSLY:

God was stirring up the heart of Haggai to do his job, and he was doing a very good job of stirring up the hearts of the *people* to get their hearts right and their relationship with the Lord the way it needed to be. God was also working in the heart of a young man called Nehemiah. Who was Nehemiah? He was not a prophet; he was not a priest; he was not a king; he was not a scribe; he wasn't a Levite. Nehemiah was a young man with a government job who loved the Lord and had a basic desire to do what God wanted him to do. That's the kind of person the Lord can use.

We read in Nehemiah Chapter two:

1 And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.

2 Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid,

3 And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

4 *Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.*

5 *And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.*

6 *And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.*

7 *Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;*

8 *And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.*

9 *Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.*

NEHEMIAH WAS SAD:

In verse one we read: “*And it came to pass in the month Nisan...*” That is four months later. Nehemiah prayed for four months, “*day and night.*” We read, “*...in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.*” This word “sad” is very interesting. In verses two and three we read:

2 *Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid,*

3 *And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?*

We find this word "sad" three times in these few verses. In verse one and verse two, the Hebrew word is the same, but when we get to verse three, it's a different word, and that word is translated "grieved" in Chapter two and verse ten where we read, “*Sanballat and Tobiah were very grieved that Nehemiah had come to rebuild the walls.*” So we read in verse two that when this began to happen, Nehemiah said, “*Then I was very sore afraid.*” He was afraid. It's so interesting to read about this fellow Nehemiah. He was not one of those spiritual giants in the Bible. We look at Moses and say he was not afraid of the king's commandment. This is Nehemiah, a man, like I said, with a government job but a real burden of the heart to do right, and like Esther, he came on the scene for such a time as this. He was available, and like Isaiah, he said, “*Here am I; send me.*” We have Nehemiah saying, “*Yes, Lord, use me. Use me in any way You can.*” In verse three he said to the king that his countenance was sad, and that's the same word as had been translated *grieved* in Chapter two. He said he was *grieved* because “*my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire.*”

This was smart. After a lot of prayer, Nehemiah came up with the sepulcher thing before he mentions the gates. Why? Because the tombs of the dead were very sacred to the Persians, and he knew that this would touch the heart of the king. So he mentioned the sepulcher and he also mentioned, of course, the fact that the gates thereof are consumed with fire. Another thing that would be important to these Persians would be to have walled cities.

“LET ME PRAY ABOUT IT”

In verse four we read, *“Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.”* He kept the king waiting while he prayed to God, and it's a good thing he did because we're going to see what he got from the king as a result of his prayers. He didn't just say, *“Here's what I request. Let me go back to see what I can do to help them.”* No. He said, *“Let me pray about it,”* and if there's anything we need to learn from everything that we're looking at here is the power of prayer.

I'd like to challenge you to get into the little Book of Haggai—just two little chapters. He was preaching in those days, and people were listening to him. He said in Chapter 1:5, *“Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; **Consider** your ways.”* Then he said in verse seven, *“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; **Consider** your ways.”* And then in verse eighteen of Chapter two he said, *“**Consider** now from this day and upward...”* What are you going to do from this day and upward? Haggai said to **consider** it, and that's what we need to do. What are we going to do? Sit around and listen to some more messages about revival? Or will we **consider** our ways, and let God get a hold of our hearts, and make sure that our relationship with Jesus is what it should be?

The Lord had warned them back in Deuteronomy 30:9. He said:

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

THEY CHOSE WRONG:

In Moses day they chose, but they chose wrong. They ended up in bondage in Assyria; they ended up in bondage in Babylon, but the Lord heard the cry of Nehemiah, and we see here that revival begins. And it can begin for us if we will just listen to God. He said, *“I...record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”* **We have no choice but to choose.**

FairHavens Baptist

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"Strength For Today And Bright Hope For Tomorrow"



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Like These**

A short daily message in word and music to help with strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow in the troublesome days.

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