

March 30, 2025

Nehemiah 7:1-3

1 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 and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many. *3* And I said to them, “Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes.”

Scriptures for further study:

Mark 12:28-30

1 Corinthians 11:27-28

1 Corinthians 14:23

1 Corinthians 14:33

1 Timothy 3:1-7

“Nehemiah appointed singers to lead the community in its adoration of God. For the past two months the building of the city’s walls and its attendant social problems had necessarily concentrated their attention, but the appointment of singers reminded the people that there is more to life than work and money. Their greatest priority was to ensure that God was at the heart of their personal, local and national life through worship.”

-Raymond Brown



The Hand of God Over Worship Nehemiah 7:1-3

BIG IDEA: The true strength of a church is tied to its priority for and protection of worship and leaders who can shepherd their people towards that end.

OUTLINE

1. The Priority of Worship

2. The Protection of Worship

3. The Appointment of Leaders

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. What indicators do people tend to reference when evaluating the strength of an organization like a business, civic club, or team?
2. Refer to Nehemiah 7:1. Along with the gatekeepers, Nehemiah appointed singers and the Levites because they led worship in the temple. What would cause Nehemiah to prioritize worship above something like appointing officials to manage specific areas of civic life? How is the primacy of worship seen in your church?
3. Refer to 7:3. According to the sermon, how is gatekeeping seen in your church? How do caution about taking communion and ordered worship reflect the character of God?
4. Refer to 7:2. What character traits does Nehemiah use to describe Hanani and Hananiah? Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7. What are the qualifications of a leader, according to Timothy? Why is character so important for the leaders of the church?
5. Read John 4:23-24. Where does worship fall on your list of priorities?

“The guards who are appointed according to v. 3 formed a king of home guard. They were to guard the more important strategic places and others would guard their own homes. It is clear that Nehemiah was still not certain that enemies were going to leave them alone. The city should therefore be guarded properly.”

-Charles Fensham

“If the heart is to be inspired in worship, then the mind must be informed. Faith must be grounded in spiritual certainties, and somebody must be responsible for communicating those great unchanging truths. So, Nehemiah made sure Levites were appointed to function as Israel’s teachers and pastors, and to convey to the people the great realities of the faith.”

-Raymond Brown

“The purpose of God in sending His Son...was that He might restore to us, the missing jewel, the jewel of worship; that we might come back and learn to do again that which we were created to do in the first place – worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, to spend our time in awesome wonder and adoration of God, feeling and expressing it. We’re here to be worshipers first, and workers only second.”

-A.W. Tozer

“Manifest indecencies and disorders are to be carefully kept out of all Christian churches, and every part of divine worship. They should have nothing in them that is childish, absurd, ridiculous, wild, or tumultuous; but all parts of divine worship should be carried on in a . . . composed, and orderly manner. God is not to be dishonored, nor his worship disgraced, by our unbecoming and disorderly performance of it and attendance at it”

-Matthew Henry

“Nehemiah showed qualities of good leadership in delegating authority. At the same time, he was careful to select men of integrity who feared God.”

Mervin Breneman

“As you study these biblical texts, you’ll see that about ninety percent of the qualifications are focused on a man’s character...therefore, any man who aspires to an officer in the church must give himself to the formation of godly character...and this is why the gospel is essential to spiritual leadership.”

-Robert Thune

Praise to Jesus. Spend time reflecting on the wonders of God: his mercy, peace, love, patience, gentleness, kindness, and suffering with us for us. Praise God for sending His Son that He might restore to us the missing jewel, the jewel of worship, that we might come back and learn to do again that which we were created to do in the first place! Praise God for the leaders in our church who have a heart for Him and a heart for the priority and protection of His church and worship.

Repentance through Jesus. Confess and repent through Jesus Christ for disregarding or disrespecting the leaders in the church whom God has appointed to guard the ministry of His Word and prayer.

Consecration for Jesus. Determine to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, to spend time in awesome wonder and adoration of God, feeling and expressing it. We’re here to be worshipers first, and workers only second, and pray for the leaders of our church. For the true strength of a church is tied to its priority for and protection of worship and leaders who can shepherd their people towards that end.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nehemiah 6 concludes with the completion of the wall despite great opposition. The enemies of the people of Judah attempted to cause them to fear. Nehemiah 7:1-4 describes Nehemiah’s response to the opposition, which was to appoint gatekeepers, singers, and Levites.

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. What is the role and purpose of the singers and Levites mentioned in verse 1? What does this tell us about what is important for God's people? (They played an important role in the re-establishment of worship in Jerusalem again. As the people of God our primary purpose is to worship God and to bring Him glory. We are made to worship; therefore, we are most joyful and peaceful when we live out God's purpose in life.)
2. What qualifications does Nehemiah mention in verse 2 as support for his appointment of Hanani and Hananiah? What do we learn about God's qualifications for the leaders of His people? (These two men were described as faithful and God-fearing. Leaders of God's people need to be competent or know how to do their calling. But what God values the most is that the leaders of His people need to center their entire lives on Him and live faithfully. This reminds us that the focus of our lives needs to be on God and following His ways. Remind your children that we can only do this through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.)
3. What does verse 3 teach us about the threat of the enemies of God? (We are reminded once again that the Israelites still need to be careful to guard against the attacks of their enemies.)
4. The rest of the book of Nehemiah will bring the focus from the rebuilding effort to focus on the people of God. What does this tell us about the buildings that God leads His people to build? (Our buildings are important as they are meant to point us to Christ. They are a part of the means that God gives us to grow and build us into Godly people.)

Scriptures for further study:

Psalms 84

1 Corinthians 10:31

John 4:23-24

Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 1

FOR STUDENTS

1. What are some things that people consider to be signs of strength in a person, a team, or an organization? What do you think makes a church strong?
2. Read Nehemiah 7:1. Why did Nehemiah appoint gatekeepers, singers, and Levites first? What does this tell us about his priorities, and how can we apply this lesson to the church today?
3. In Nehemiah 7:2, Hanani and Hananiah were chosen because they were faithful and God-fearing. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7—why is character so important for church leaders? How should this shape the way we view leadership in our own church?
4. Read Nehemiah 7:3. The gates were guarded carefully to protect the city. How does this relate to the role of church leaders today in guarding the ministry of the Word and prayer? How does ordered worship (like communion and structure in a service) reflect God's character?
5. Where does worship fall on your list of priorities? Read John 4:23-24—what kind of worship does God desire? How can you grow in making worship a central part of your life?
6. What does Nehemiah 7 teach us about the importance of both physical buildings and the spiritual life of the church? Why is it important to focus not just on the “walls” (external things) but also on spiritual growth?

FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. Verse 1 reminds us that the goal all along has been not so much the rebuilding of the walls as the rebuilding and renewing of the spiritual life of God's people. The establishing of gatekeepers, Levites, and musicians shows that the spiritual life was and is the central priority for God's people.

QUESTION: Is your relationship with God and your worship of God your highest priority?

QUESTION: In what ways is it possible for a person to think (falsely) that their life is a success because of their outward appearance ("the walls are built up" and impressive) but fail to see that there must be a corresponding spiritual and moral strength?

2. In Nehemiah's time, the Levites took on the responsibility of teaching and educating the people. The gatekeepers had the role of protecting God's people. And the singers and musicians had the function of leading God's people in worship.

QUESTION: If we allow these three offices to stand for three categories of our lives (i.e., discipleship, moral protection, and inspiring worship), how would you evaluate yourself currently? Are you growing in discipleship? Are you guarding your life morally? Are you finding yourself being more and more inspired in worship? Ask the Lord that he encourage and strengthen you in each of these areas.

3. Great leaders, like Nehemiah, know when to delegate responsibilities to others, and they also know the kind of people to whom they should grant such authority. Hanani and Hananiah are men who had integrity and who feared God.

QUESTION: Why is it not enough to give authority to people who have professional competency but who lack these qualities of faithfulness and respect for God?

QUESTION: Are these the same qualities you are endeavoring to experience more of in your own life as well?

The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



The Ancient of Days, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork and artist.

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Blake's poem "Europe", depicts a world filled with suffering based on the political climate of Europe and politics in England in the 1790s. It is appropriate in light of the suffering of God's people described in Ezra and Nehemiah. The artwork by Blake serves to remind and encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances. William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to connecting the prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible with the events in his country; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)

Introduction to Nehemiah

From January to May 2024, we heard sermons from the Book of Ezra. The introduction to Ezra, recorded sermons, and discipleship resources can be found on our church website at this address: <https://www.fpcrome.org/pdd-ezra/>

Ezra and Nehemiah were, for centuries, received as one book narrating the return of God's exiled people to their land, as under Persian rule they were allowed to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem. These two books cover three different waves of returning exiles, from 538 to 433 BC. But they tell one story: the restoration of God's covenant people according to his Word—which they are now called afresh to obey.

This restoration required, first of all, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of ceremonial worship. The first leader, Zerubbabel, led the initial wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to accomplish this goal (Ezra 1–6). The second wave came more than half a century later, led by Ezra, who rebuilt not the temple but the people, teaching them—and calling them to obey—the law of Moses (Ezra 7–10).

Thirteen years after Ezra arrived, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He first led the people to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1–6). Then, along with Ezra, he sought to restore the people (Nehemiah 7–13) as God's holy nation, followers of his Word.

The restoration was not complete, however. These books picture God's people regathered but struggling; they are poor subjects of a foreign king; their city is devastated; enemies oppress from without; sin threatens from within. We see the faithful hand of God mercifully preserving his people according to his promises. We also see the dire need for the perfect fulfillment of God's promises in the salvation accomplished by his Son. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible.)