

## **“The Book of Nehemiah” (Route 66)**

Let’s turn in our Bibles this morning to the Book of Nehemiah... One of my all-time favorite books of the Bible... It’s very EXCITING... It’s very linear, and easy to read...

And—like the books that we have looked at in recent weeks... the Books of Daniel, and Esther, and Ezra – the opening chapters of Nehemiah take place within the Persian Empire...

This is some FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER the Book of Ezra ENDS... it’s about 100 YEARS after that first wave of exiles returned to Jerusalem [under the leadership of Zerubbabel & Jeshua]...

And God is going to use Nehemiah to lead a THIRD WAVE of exiles... NOT to rebuild the temple – but to rebuild the walls surrounding the city of Jerusalem...

Now, I realize that may sound strange in OUR day-and-age, but—in ancient cultures—these city walls would have provided INVALUABLE SECURITY against attacking marauders and bandits... It would’ve kept families safe inside, but also from straying too far outside...

**AND** it would have protected the temple, which had now been rebuilt... David Guzik writes: *“Those living in an unwallled city lived in constant stress & tension; never knowing when they might be attacked & brutalized. Every man lived in... fear for his [family]. The temple [was] rebuilt, but [could] never be made beautiful, because anything valuable [could] be easily taken.”*

Now, as we’ve said with MANY of our studies, we will NOT have time to touch upon everything this morning... But we’ll pause along the way and draw-out some application... And, I think you’ll see – as we do – why this is one of my all-time favorite Books of the Bible...

And, I ALSO think—with Christmas just a few weeks away—we start to see a FASCINATING OLD TESTAMENT picture of Jesus in the Book of Nehemiah... So, Chapter 1 begins:

**“The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel...”** – Shushan was the WINTER CAPITAL of the Persian Empire, and the CITADEL was the FORTIFIED PALACE... He writes:

**“Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.”** – Verse 3 says: **“And they said to me, ‘The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is... broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.’”**

Nehemiah says—in Verse 4—**“...when I heard these words... I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”**

So, here’s the FIRST LESSON we’ll draw-out from the Book of Nehemiah... A person of faith will NOT necessarily ACCEPT that the way things ARE is the way things have to BE. Nehemiah HEARS of the state of affairs in Jerusalem, and is immediately moved to prayer.

He is just broken-up about this. He WEEPS and MOURNS and FASTS and PRAYS... We don't have time to read his entire prayer this morning, but it's AMAZING!

And it REMINDS us... As we LOOK AROUND at the state-of-the-world around us... as we READ THE HEADLINES... HOW DO WE RESPOND? – As BELIEVERS?

Do we COMPLAIN... do we WORRY... are we ANGRY? – Or do we PRAY? 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:7 says: **“...the end of all things is at hand...”**—Which I believe they ARE—**“therefore [WHAT?] be serious and watchful in your prayers.”** – THAT is how we should RESPOND...

Now, the last Verse of Chapter 1 tells us that Nehemiah **“was the king's cupbearer.”** – And—in Chapter 2, Verse 1—he writes: **“it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes...”** – So, Nehemiah has been praying for FOUR MONTHS...

He writes: **“When wine was before [the king]... I took the wine and gave it to the king. [And] I had never been sad in [the king's] presence before. Therefore, the king said to me, ‘Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.’”** – Therefore, Nehemiah writes: **“I became dreadfully afraid...”**

See, the king's cupbearer was a ROYAL POSITION... He was something like a BODYGUARD and an ADVISOR... and it was **FORBIDDEN** to be SAD in the presence of the king...

One author writes: *“The idea [is] that the king was such a wonderful person that... being in his presence [should] make you forget all your problems. When... Nehemiah knew the king noticed his sadness... [he] must have wondered if the [king's] next words would be, ‘Off with his head!’”*

But, Nehemiah speaks BOLDLY in Verse 3, and says: **“May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city—the place of my fathers' tombs—lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?”** – Verse 4 says: **“Then the king said to me, ‘What do you request?’”**

And, I **LOVE** the next two phrases... Nehemiah says: **“So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king...”** – This is what I love about how practical the book of Nehemiah is!

Nehemiah has been praying for four months... But he doesn't just take the attitude of, *“Well, if God's gonna do it, God's gonna have to do it.”*

Nehemiah has been PRAYING, and NOW he realizes that GOD has placed an opportunity before him to **ASK THE KING** for help... so, Nehemiah does BOTH THINGS at once! – He PRAYS TO GOD, and he ASKS THE KING!

I wish MORE of us would learn to do this... To pray **WHILE** we're in a situation... NOT to feel like we have to separate the two... but to realize that the two go hand-in-hand...

By the way – Nehemiah asks for EVERYTHING! – He even asks for materials to BUILD HIS OWN HOME! – It's CLEAR that he has been THINKING about this a LOT!

In Verse 5, he says: **“If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send ME to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.”**

ONE of the things that I LOVE about the Book of Nehemiah is how PRACTICAL it is... It isn’t that Nehemiah has been praying this prayer where he sort of just **“HOPES”** that God does **“SOME-THING.”** – Nehemiah’s prayer is a prayer that leads to ACTION.

He says: *“God, I KNOW that you want to DO SOMETHING... So, send ME to Jerusalem. Let ME the one that You use to address this situation.”* – We’ve mentioned the adage before: *“If not me, WHO? – And—if not now—WHEN?”*

We SEE that in the life of Nehemiah... And, would to GOD we would see it MORE OFTEN in the life of the church... Guys, this is the HEART OF CHRIST...

Isaiah 59 paints a BLEAK PICTURE of the Spiritual Plight of Man... Here’s a SNIPPET: **“Your iniquities have separated you from... God... your sins have hidden His face from you... your hands are defiled with blood... your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue... muttered perversity... Their feet run to evil... they make haste to shed innocent blood; Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; Wasting and destruction are in their paths... We look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind... as if we had no eyes... We look for justice, but there is none; For salvation, but it is far from us... Justice is turned back, righteousness stands afar off... Truth is fallen in the street... We are as dead men in desolate places.”**

But THEN we read: **“The LORD saw it, and it displeased Him... He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; Therefore His own arm brought salvation... His righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.”**

This is what I mean when I say Nehemiah is a FANTASTIC OLD TESTAMENT PICTURE OF JESUS... Nehemiah LEAVES a ROYAL POSITION and PERSONALLY RESPONDS to the NEEDS of his people...

Jesus LEAVES His ROYAL POSITION in heaven... to COMES HERE, and WALK AMONGST US, to PERSONALLY RESPOND to the SINFUL PLIGHT OF MAN!

Now—when Nehemiah ARRIVES in Jerusalem—he DOES SOMETHING IMPORTANT... In Verse 12, he says: **“I told no one what... God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem...”** – In Verse 13, he **“went out by night... and viewed the walls... which were broken down and... burned with fire.”** – **“the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not... told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.”**

Now, this is not DECEPTION... this is DISCERNMENT... Proverbs 29:11 says: **“A fool utters all his mind... But a wise man holds them back.”**

When Nehemiah **ARRIVES** in Jerusalem... He TAKES THE TIME to allow the VISION that God BIRTHED IN HIS HEART to CLARIFY... and FURTHER DEVELOP...

Again, I'm reminded of Jesus... Jesus walked among us as a "regular Person" (Capital 'P') for THIRTY YEARS... before He **EVER**... REVEALED WHO He WAS, or WHY He was HERE... God has a TIMING to the work He wants to do...

Now—in Verse 17—there DOES COME a point when Nehemiah GATHERS the people around him... and he appeals to **THEIR** SENSE of need... He says:

**“You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come... let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.”** – He says: **“I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words... So, they said, “Let us rise up and build.” [And] they set their hands to this good work.”**

There comes a point where—once vision has been BIRTHED... and AFTER it has been BATHED IN PRAYER... and ALLOWED TIME TO DEVELOP—there COMES A POINT when vision needs to be CAST to the people...

And the WAY these people respond is EXACTLY what every leader DREAMS of... The people don't say, *“That’s a good vision, Nehemiah... We’ll PRAY for you! – We HOPE you BUILD THE WALL, Nehemiah.”* – They say: *“WE will RISE UP and BUILD.”* – And **“they set THEIR HANDS to this good work.”**

See, the vision for God's work had BEGUN in the heart of one man... but it can never be ACCOMPLISHED through the **EFFORTS** of one man... It takes **PEOPLE**...

And, I LOVE Nehemiah Chapter 3 because Nehemiah takes the time to WRITE DOWN ALL THE PEOPLE who built the wall, and WHAT PARTICULAR PORTION they worked on...

Again, this is a GREAT OLD TESTAMENT PICTURE of the work of JESUS, and the BUILDING OF THE CHURCH...

In Matthew 16, Jesus says: **“I will build My church...”** – Ephesians 2 calls Him **“the chief cornerstone.”** – BUT, Ephesians 4 speaks of: **“the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the”**—BUILDING UP—**“of the body of Christ...”**

Jesus GIVES TO THE CHURCH various “spiritual gifts” for this purpose: Leading, Teaching, Giving, Serving, Prophecy, Healing, Mercy, Faith, Discernment, Speaking in Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues... **“FROM whom”**—Ephesians 4:16 says...

**“From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what EVERY JOINT supplies, according to the effective working by which EVERY PART does its share... THAT causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”**

You'll hear us SAY around here: *"Every member is a minister."* – The church is ONLY BUILT **effectively** when EVERY PART is DOING **THEIR** share... The church is NOT meant to be SPECTATOR-oriented... it's meant to be PARTICIPANT-oriented...

I play ONE PART, as the Pastor... I possess CERTAIN GIFTS... But the church is not BUILT if I just do my PART... but OTHER PEOPLE don't use THEIR GIFTS to do THEIR PART...

No more than the WALL in Nehemiah's day would have been built if NEHEMIAH had gone out to DO ALL THE WORK... Chapter 3 lists **EVERYBODY** who worked on the wall...

And, Chapter 4, Verse 6 says that **"...the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, [because] the people had a mind to work."** – Chapter 6, Verse 15 says: **"...the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days."**

FOR CONTEXT... This wall had LAIN IN RUINS for about a 150 YEARS... but these people BUILT THE ENTIRE THING in 52 DAYS! – WHY? – Because they EMBRACED A VISION... they had a MIND TO WORK... & they WORKED TOGETHER to do THEIR PART

The CHURCH would do GREAT THINGS in the world today for the Kingdom of God... if we **ALL** had a MIND TO WORK... and if we **ALL** WORKED TOGETHER around a COMMON VISION and USED OUR GIFTS to PLAY OUR PART...

David Guzik writes: *"We have such **small ideas** of how God can use us. God used a man named Nehemiah to set right a 100-year-old problem in less than two months – and the same God sits on a throne in heaven and [wants to] work through **us** today."*

Now, we're not talking about a work where **WE** get the credit... Nehemiah 6:16 says: **"when... our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around... saw these things... they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God."**

See, the PEOPLE DID THE WORK... But GOD GOT THE GLORY... THAT'S what we want, right? – It's been said: *"It's better to attempt GREAT THINGS for the Kingdom of God and FAIL, than to attempt NOTHING for the Kingdom of God and SUCCEED."*

Now... As we said when we studied Ezra, and Haggai, and Zechariah... ANY TIME God does a work, there is ALWAYS opposition... And there IS in Nehemiah's day...

Chapter 2, Verse 10 says: **"When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard"** that Nehemiah had come to Jerusalem, **"they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel."** – Verse 19 says: **"Sanballat... [and] Tobiah... and Geshem the Arab... laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"**

I call these three *'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.'* – They show-up ALL throughout the narrative... But WHENEVER THEY DO, Nehemiah knows EXACTLY how to RESPOND...

In Chapter 2, he says: **“I answered them, and said... ‘The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build...’”**

In Chapter 4, we read: **“Sanballat... was furious... and mocked the Jews... and said, ‘What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? [And] complete it in a day?’”** – **“Tobiah... said, ‘Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.’”** – Which, I SUPPOSE is an insult???

Verse 8 says: **“ALL of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.”** – But HERE we see ANOTHER PICTURE of the PRACTICALITY of Nehemiah...

He says: **“We made our prayer to our God, AND... we set a watch against them day and night.”** – He says: **“I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall... and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.”** – And, he SAID to the people: **“Do not be afraid... Remember the Lord, great and awesome, AND fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”**

He writes, **“from that time on... half... my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the”** weapons... **“...with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one... had his sword girded at his side as he built.”** – THAT is how we STAND AGAINTS the ATTACK of the ENEMY in our lives...

IN ONE HAND, we’ve got the SWORD OF THE SPIRIT—the WORD OF GOD... And with the OTHER HAND—WE’RE DOING THE WORK... It’s been referred to as *“The Sword and the Shovel.”*

We don’t become so obsessed with the WORK that we are never in the WORD... But our relationship with the WORD should never keep us from DOING THE WORK...

Also, Nehemiah tells the people: **“Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. [And] Our God will fight for us.”** – I think that’s a GREAT PICTURE of CORPORATE WORSHIP!

Times when we COME TOGETHER, and—as 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 20:22 says—**“when they began to sing and... praise, the LORD set ambushes”** against their enemies... **“and they were defeated.”**

Now—in Chapter 6—these enemies CHANGE THEIR TACTICS a bit... Verse 2 says: **“Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, ‘Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono.’”** – But Nehemiah says: *‘Oh no!’*

**“I am doing a great work... Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”** – He says: **“they sent me this message four times”** – So, they’re just BLOWING-UP Nehemiah’s phone! – And, he says: **“I answered them [four times] in the same manner.”**

THEN “Sanballat sent his servant to me... with [a letter] in his hand.” It said: “It is reported among the nations... that you and the Jews plan to rebel... that you may be their king. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim [you as king]!” Now, these matters will be reported to [king Artaxerxes]. So come... let us consult together.”

So, this is **INTIMIDATION**... They try to GET Nehemiah to GO INTO THE TEMPLE to HIDE... But, Nehemiah writes: “Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!”

And he writes: “Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.” – And, he was hired “that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me.”

So, Nehemiah WRITES him, and says: “No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart.” – Which is a FANTASTIC response... Alistair Begg—that GREAT PREACHER—talks about how he would keep a stack of ‘Thank You’ cards in his desk.

And—if somebody wrote a FALSE ACCUSATION against him—he would pull out one of those cards... write a message, and sign it... And—off to the side—he’d write the scripture reference Nehemiah 6:8... So, when somebody looks it up—it says: “No such things as you say are being done... you invent them in your own heart.” – THAT’S GENIUS!

Now, in Chapter EIGHT, Ezra is back on the scene, and he leads a REVIVAL by reading from the Book of the Law... Chapter 8 says: “Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding...” And “he read from it... from morning until midday... and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law... And Ezra blessed the LORD...” And “the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground... So, they read distinctly from the book...” – “And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.”

This is the kind of “REVIVAL” that will RESULT when people UNDERSTAND God’s Word...

SO... In Chapter 10, the people REAFFIRM THEIR COVENANT with God... And, there are THREE MAIN THINGS which they say:

- In Chapter 10, Verse 30, they say: “**We [will] not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons...**”
- In Verse 31: “**If the peoples of the land [bring] wares or... grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath...**”
- And—in Verses 32—39—they say: “**We shall bring the [grain] offering, of the new wine and... oil, to the storerooms... where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are... we will not neglect the house of our God.**”

They say they're NOT gonna have UNGODLY RELATIONSHIPS... They're not gonna WORK on the SABBATH... and they won't FAIL to support the PRIESTS in the WORK OF GOD...

Well... in Chapter THIRTEEN... Nehemiah writes: **“...in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I... returned to the king.”** – So, Nehemiah RETURNED to his duties in the Persian Empire for ABOUT 10—12 years... But, when he comes back, ALL IS NOT WELL...

One author writes: *“Nehemiah left... after [a]... revival... But the real test of revival... is in the long term. It is seeing where we are with the Lord ten years after a season of great work.”*

And—at FIRST—Nehemiah discovers that a PRIEST named Eliashib is ACCOMODATING Tobiah by ALLOWING HIM to—essentially—“rent a room” in the temple!

Now, Tobiah was one of the TROUBLE-MAKERS from the earlier chapters... So, what does Nehemiah do? – Does he *“love the sinner, and hate the sin?”* – No, Nehemiah says:

**“[When] I... discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God... it grieved me bitterly... [and] I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God...”**

Nehemiah is like, ‘*Get outta Dodge!*’ – Now, Nehemiah DOES this because: **A)** Tobiah was CLEARLY an ENEMY of God’s people, and **B)** this was the HOUSE OF GOD!

This reminds of me Jesus making a **“whip of cords”** in John 2, and driving-out those **“in the temple... who sold oxen and sheep and doves...”** – **“He poured-out the changers’ money and overturned the tables... And... said... “Take these things away!”**

And the **“disciples remembered... it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.’”**

Now, there are people who will DISAGREE with me, but... 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3 and 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4 **BOTH** call the CHURCH **“the house of God.”** – And, I believe that we should be ZEALOUS—PASSIONATE—for the STATE of God’s House...

I do not believe that we should ACCOMODATE COMPROMISE, or FALSE DOCTRINE, into God’s House... and when we SEE it creeping in, we need to THROW IT OUT!

Now, the NEXT thing Nehemiah has to deal with... the PRIESTS were being overlooked in their SERVICE... the people WEREN’T bringing the TITHES to the House of God as they should... (which they SOLEMNLY PROMISED they would, right?!)...

THEN, he has to deal with people who were **“treading-out the wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys...”** – He says: **“What evil thing is this... [that] you bring... wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”**



THEN—JUST like the Book of Ezra—the people AGAIN intermarried with the Pagan people groups... So, these were the **THREE SPECIFIC THINGS** they COVENANTED in Chapter 10... And this was **SPECIFICALLY FORBIDDEN** by God... in Deuteronomy 7!

Nehemiah writes: **“I... saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.”**  
– He says: **“Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.”**

Here’s **WHY** this is such a big deal... Remember what the Old Testament **IS**... This is **‘Salvation History.’** – All through His Word, God has been making promises—to the JEWS—that a Messiah, this Deliverer, would come and **SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS**...

**BUT**... if the people can’t understand the JEWISH LANGUAGE... then those PROPHECIES—those PROMISES—are going to be LOST... Ezra had said that the people took pagan **“daughters as wives... so that the HOLY SEED [BECAME] MIXED with the peoples of those lands.”**

See, this is why being **UNEQUALLY YOKED TOGETHER** is a **BAD IDEA**... Scripture says: **“What fellowship [does] righteousness [have] with lawlessness? What communion [does] light [have] with darkness? What accord [does] Christ [have] with Belial? What part [does] a believer [have] with an unbeliever? And what agreement [does] the temple of God [have] with idols?”** – For [we] **ARE** the temple of the living God...”

One of the **BIGGEST LIES** of the enemy—that has done **SO MUCH DAMAGE** to the Christian community—is that *“Missionary Dating”*—or *“Missionary Marriages”*—are a **GOOD IDEA**...

No, what it **DOES** is... It starts one down a path toward **COMPROMISE**, where... you’ll have to decide one day how to **RAISE YOUR KIDS**... and what to teach them about **SALVATION**, and heaven and hell, and human sexuality, and creation, and gender, and the roles of men & women.

And, the reality is: Christians and NON-Christians **DO NOT SEE THOSE THINGS** the **SAME WAY**... Scripture says that **“the natural man”**—or the NON-BORN-AGAIN PERSON—**“does NOT receive the things of the Spirit of God, [because] they are FOOLISHNESS to him; nor can [they] know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”**

So, through these “mixed marriages”—and I **DON’T MEAN RACIALLY**, by the way... I mean **IDEOLOGICALLY**—these people were **LITERALLY** raising a generation of Children who could no longer understand the **WORD OF GOD**!

**PARENTS**... How are **WE** doing when it comes to this??? – This is **SATAN** trying to **POLLUTE**, and **CORRUPT**, and **PERVERT** the purposes of God! – To **DEAFEN** the **‘Spiritual Senses’** of God’s people so that they **CAN’T DISCERN TRUTH**...

This is what is happening in the world today—and **SADLY**—in many **CHURCHES**... Nehemiah says: **“Did not [even] king [Solomon]... sin by these things? [Even though]... there was no king like him, who was beloved of... God... Pagan women caused even him to sin.”**

Again, Ezra had to deal with THIS SAME THING just 15 YEARS BEFORE... Nehemiah says: **“I contended with them and cursed them... [I] struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons...”**

And, we’ve TALKED about this before, but—when **EZRA** dealt with this situation—he says: **“I tore my garment... and plucked out some of the hair of MY head and beard...”**

So, EZRA pulled out his **OWN** HAIR AND BEARD when he learned about this... Nehemiah pulled out **THEIR** hair and beard! – And, I gotta admit... I am MUCH more of a Nehemiah than I am an Ezra! – I’m gonna pull out **YOUR** hair & beard if I see you sinning!

But WHO WAS RIGHT, and WHO WAS WRONG? – Well, the interesting thing is... the PEOPLE REPENTED in BOTH INSTANCES...

We run into PROBLEMS in the Body of Christ when the Ezra’s think the Nehemiah’s should do the way THEY do... or the Nehemiah’s think the Ezra’s should do it like THEM...

The reality is: We have BOTH TYPES in the Body of Christ, and God wants to USE BOTH... We need to TRUST the WISDOM OF GOD to RAISE-UP LEADERSHIP... that **HE** wants to use for HOW and WHEN He CHOOSES to ADDRESS various situations...

Nehemiah says: **“Thus, I cleansed them of everything pagan.”** – And—in the last Verse of the Book—he says: **“Remember me, O my God, for good!”**

David Guzik writes: *“At the end of it all, Nehemiah knew [that] he did his best to make the people of God strong, safe, secure... pure, worshipful, and obedient. But Nehemiah [also] carried a sense of failure... The people made a solemn covenant... that they would not do three things. This makes a point vividly clear: the law – rules, vows, promises – are all powerless to stop sin. The Old Testament... illustrates this. When the nation was... born at the Exodus, despite miracles, displays of God’s glory, and revelation of the law, the people sinned, by crediting a gold calf with their deliverance from Egypt. Now—at the **END** of the Old Testament... Nehemiah [is] pulling [his] hair out... because they couldn’t keep their promises to God. If we could be saved by our own promises, by our own commitment to Jesus, then His death would be... unnecessary. We aren’t saved by a vow we make, or a leaf we turn over, but by trusting in Jesus... Only the grace of God, alive and flowing in our lives, can give us the power to overcome sin.”*

And I look FORWARD to celebrating the BIRTH of Jesus with you in just a few weeks... But—BEFORE WE GET THERE—we’ve got ONE MORE BOOK of the Old Testament to cover next week... It’s by an ITALIAN AUTHOR named MA-**LAH**-CHEE...

I’m kidding... it’s MALACHI... Another GREAT, little Book of the Bible... If you’ve studied it before, I encourage you to read it in the coming week—it’s only FOUR CHAPTERS LONG...

And then, join us next Sunday... That’s where our journey through the OLD TESTAMENT concludes as we CONTINUE on ‘Route 66’ through the Bible...