

BUILD MY LIFE

"WHAT MATTERS TO GOD"

NEHEMIAH 7:4-73

Yogi Berra was the first to utter the absolute truth, "It ain't over till it's over." James I. Packer, the well-known Christian author, has repeated the same truth in slightly more sophisticated terms. Commenting on Nehemiah's rebuilding project, he writes: "There is always more to be done, and *the doing is not meant to stop until this life is over*. Even when the state of our health limits our doing to praying, as in old age it commonly does, that remains true. No doubt much of this passed through Nehemiah's mind on that momentous September day when the last gate was set in place and the wall was truly finished, for the work he had come to Jerusalem to do was not finished; indeed, it had hardly started and was going to require of him a great deal more effort yet" (*A Passion for Faithfulness*, 145 italics added). The governor's job would not be done until the city was repopulated. Before the walls were up, the city had been, in Packer's words, "an open city, broken-down, economically depressed, low in morale, under-populated (7:4), and in no way glorious for God" (145). The restoration of God's people to their land would not be complete until Jerusalem was bustling with men, women, and children again.

This Week's Core Competency

Giving Away My Life – I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

Christianity is better described as a life to be

*There is always more to be done,
and the doing is not meant to stop
until this life is over.*

– J. I. Packer

lived rather than a religion to be practiced. Whenever we are living in obedience to the will of God, as expressed in the word of God, we are *spending* or *giving away* our lives to fulfill God's purposes. Interestingly, giving away one's life is captured nicely in the paradigm for Christian living summarized in the three words: Belong, Become, Beyond.

Time that we spend in the pursuit of *Belonging*—to Christ, Christian community, and his Church—is time spent giving away our lives. Similarly, time that we spend in the pursuit of *Becoming* like Christ, whether it is time spent *intentionally* in the practice of spiritual disciplines—like prayer, solitude and silence, Bible study, worship, the deliberate exercise of spiritual gifts, evangelism, and the like—or whether it is time spent *incidentally* responding in a Christlike way to the circumstances life brings our way, both good and bad, is time spent giving away our lives. Likewise, time that we spend in the pursuit of going *Beyond* into our church, our neighborhood, and our world on *mission* is time spent giving away our lives.

Clearly, giving away one's life comes at a cost, generally counted in terms of *time* and *money*. This is evident in the Nehemiah project. People donated their time to rebuild the wall. Many spent more than seven weeks in the city, unable to return to their homes and routines until the work was finished. Devotion to the project paid off in the end, but neglect of their fields and vineyards in the meantime had its consequences (cf., 5:1-5). People also donated their money to rebuild the wall. They donated gold coins (41,000 darics weighing c. 769 lbs.), silver (4,200 minas weighing c. 2.5 tons), as well as nearly 600 garments for priests, not to

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mention the 50 (gold?) bowls donated by Nehemiah. All this was done in the spirit of David who said, "I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2Sa 24:24).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Nehemiah 7:4-73

(omitting the lists "of descendants")

4 Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. 5 So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families. I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return. This is what I found written there:

6 These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, 7 in company with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum and Baanah):

The list of the men of Israel . . .

39 The priests . . .

43 The Levites . . .

44 The musicians . . .

45 The gatekeepers . . .

46 The temple servants . . .

57 The descendants of the servants of Solomon . . .

63 And from among the priests . . .

64 These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. 65 The governor, therefore, ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there should be a priest ministering with the Urim and Thummim.

66 The whole company numbered 42,360, 67 besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 245 male and female singers. 68 There were 736 horses, 245 mules, 69 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys.

70 Some of the heads of the families contributed to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 darics of gold, 50 bowls and 530 garments for priests. 71 Some of the heads of the families gave to the treasury for the work 20,000 darics of gold and 2,200 minas of silver. 72 The total given by the rest of the people was 20,000 darics of gold, 2,000 minas of silver and 67 garments for priests.

73 The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of the Israelites, settled in their own towns.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 4.
- * Highlight "my God put it into my heart" in v. 5.
- * Circle "registration" in v. 5.
- * Circle "genealogical record" in v. 5.
- * Circle "darics" in vv. 70, 71, 72.
- * Circle "minas" in v. 71.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. The wall had been rebuilt and the gates set in place (7:1). Was Jerusalem *now* out of danger? Explain (cf., vv. 3-4).
2. Describe what *more* needed to be done to make the city secure (v. 4).
3. Derek Kidner links Nehemiah to "the practice of the presence of God" (see note on v. 5). Explain.
4. Explain why Nehemiah would want to take a *census*, enumerating the population by lineage (cf., 11:1-2).
5. The genealogical record Nehemiah found (v. 5) was *vastly* important at the time. How so?
6. Some laymen and some priests could not *demonstrate* they were descended from Israel (vv. 61-65). So what?
7. What does the list of *contributors* and their *contributions* add to the narrative?
8. Verse 73 ends on a *fitting* note. Explain (see note on v. 73).
9. **Discussion:** Talk about the importance of not stopping until the job is done illustrated in Nehemiah 7.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The opening of chapter seven marks the completion of the wall, but the completion of the wall does not mark the end of Nehemiah's story. The story is about the restoration of the Jewish people to their land in obedience to the covenant following their captivity in Babylon. Chapters 7-12 tell the rest of that story. One commentator writes: "Chapters 7-12 of Nehemiah's book have one sustained theme—namely, the restoring of the Jewish people in the holy city—*Israel Alive Again*, to quote the happy title of a recent commentary. The theme is dealt with in four sections: establishing the community, 7:1-73a; learning the Law, 7:73b-8:18; renewing the covenant, 9:1-10:39; peopling the city, 11:1-12:26. But it is a single topic, and one that is more easily grasped through an overview than by burrowing into the mass of detail that the text itself presents" (Packer, 139).

More specifically, he goes on to say: "These chapters bulge with lists of names, of which over 250 are of persons otherwise unknown. This is the sort of material, as was said earlier, that a modern writer would put in an appendix. That does not, of course, mean that these items were never of any importance. The family census of returned exiles in 7:6-73, which Nehemiah consulted as a check-list when, as he tells us, 'my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families' (7:5), and the roster of returned priests and Levite sub-clans that is reproduced in 12:1-26 were vastly important at the time: they made it possible to identify who was authentically Jewish and so a proper person to be part of the Jerusalem community, and also (even more important) to see who was qualified for temple ministry, which God had restricted to the Levitical blood line" (140).

Once the proper names listed in the genealogical record in Nehemiah 7 (cf., Ezr 2) are eliminated, there isn't much left to discuss. There is an introduction to the uncovered record, suggesting Nehemiah's intent to repopulate the city of Jerusalem (vv. 4-5), an interesting description of laypeople and priests who could

not find their family records and therefore, could not confirm their lineage (vv. 61-65), and a closing list of contributors to Nehemiah's project and their contributions (vv. 70-73).

The city was "large and spacious, but there were few people in it" (v. 4), apparently, because houses raised by Nebuchadnezzar had either *not* been rebuilt or *not enough* of them had. So, the city must have "had the air of a ghost town after most of the wall builders left Jerusalem and went home" (Leslie C. Allen and Timothy Laniak, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NIBC, 122). In any case, there was a housing shortage. What's more, before the walls were rebuilt, people likely preferred to live outside of the city for security reasons. Clearly, realizing God's vision for his people, the vision he gave Nehemiah, required repopulating Jerusalem, and to do that the governor intended to register the people by families first. Once he had that census data, he could spread any sacrifice entailed by relocating to the city equitably across the population.

A number of people "could not show that their families were descended from Israel" (v. 61). This proved problematic for those who were functioning as priests. They "were excluded from the priesthood as unclean" and were ordered "not to eat any of the most sacred food" (a portion of the offerings, with the exception of the burnt offering, were eaten by the priests) until their lineage could be verified.

The book of Nehemiah is both *individual* and *communal*. On the one hand, it's about Nehemiah and his vision to see the exiles returned to their land and living in obedience to their covenant. That vision required rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and repopulating the city. On the other hand, it's about the community of returnees without whom Nehemiah's vision could not be realized. Leaders of the community and members alike contributed to *vision* accomplishment. Those with resources contributed their money; those without contributed their labor. Many contributed both. Working together, they made it possible for the people to settle in Jerusalem and in the surrounding towns.

The Message of the Passage

Don't stop working until the vision God has given you has been fully realized, because the work's not over until it's over.

We don't want to be hearers of the word only, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Describe a "wall-building" experience of your own that stopped short of being fully completed.

Describe what happened that led to the unfinished project.

If you had it to do over again, explain what you would do differently in light of this passage.

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 4 **but** "Nehemiah was sensitive to the long-term needs of the community. The wall was necessary, but Jerusalem was not safe if it was underpopulated" (Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NAC, 219). "The best solution to the city's vulnerability was to see it well populated. Now that self-respectability and the potential for defense had been reestablished, the possibility of encouraging some of the Jews to live there was realistic. The question was who?" (H. G. M. Williamson, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 16, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 271).

v. 4 **houses had not . . .** The Hebrew expression may denote: "not enough houses were built" (see F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT, 211).

v. 5 **my God put . . .** "Of all biblical characters, Nehemiah is perhaps the most explicit on 'the practice of the presence of God'. Here his sense of being divinely prompted (5a) to summon the people for enrolment was to be borne out by the events it set in motion, namely the heart-searchings and re-dedication to be recounted in chapters 8-10. Meanwhile his immediate concern was to get his people rightly orientated, sure both of their inheritance and their calling" (Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, TOTC, 112; see Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* [various publishers]).

v. 5 **registration** "The purpose of the gathering was to draw up a census of the population, on the basis of which an equitable decision could be taken as to who should be moved into the city" (Williamson, 271). "Nehemiah wanted the sacrifice of living in Jerusalem to be distributed justly among the families. The genealogical list here has a different purpose from the one in Ezra 2; here it is used to choose those who would live in Jerusalem" (Breneman, 219).

v. 5 **genealogical record** "This is not a list of the people who accompanied Nehemiah to Jerusalem in 444 B.C. but a record of those who returned with Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua in 537 B.C. (v. 7). It is almost identical to the list in Ezra 2 . . . Why did Nehemiah repeat this list? Apparently, he wanted to encourage the Jews to move into Jerusalem (11:1-2). This was one of the goals of the return. To determine who were pureblooded Israelites, he did some research and uncovered this list. There may have been a need to validate claims to property rights and similar matters as well. Nehemiah then used the list as the basis for his plan (cf. 11:1-24). The repetition of this list also confirms God's faithfulness in preserving His chosen people and God's loyal love in bringing them back into the land that He promised to give their ancestors. It is a second witness to His faithfulness and love, the first list being the first witness. The Nehemiah of verse 7 therefore is not Nehemiah the wall-builder (cf. Ezra 2:2)." (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Nehemiah," 2019 ed., 40-41, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/nehemiah.pdf). For a treatment of the differences in the two lists see Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 687-86). "Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 are to the Old Testament what Hebrews 11 is to the New Testament: a listing of the people whose faith and courage made things happen" (Warren Wiersbe, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament History*, 668). "The importance of family records was twofold: for settling claims to property, and for ensuring that the restored community had an unbroken descent from the original Israel" (Kidner, 45).

v. 70 **darics of gold** 41,000 darics (cf., "drachmas"—NKJV, NASB), c. 769 lbs.

v. 71 **minas of silver** 2,200 minas (v. 71) + 2,000 minas (v. 72) = 4,200 minas, c. 2.5 tons.

v. 73 **people . . . and** Cf., "So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Temple servants, and some of the common people settled near Jerusalem. The rest of the people returned to their own towns throughout Israel" (NLT; cf., 1 Esdras 5:46).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Some parts of the Bible are difficult to read and even more challenging to understand. Honestly, I sometimes wonder why God put a particular piece of information or list in his book. Please tell me I'm not alone! Nehemiah 7 seems to be one of those head-scratching chapters. However, if God gave us an easy Bible, we would not be challenged understand him, to draw close to him or desire his word. Now, we could dismiss this chapter as a list and move on, but every word of God is important, so, let's tackle this together with our families. What a great opportunity to share with kids how God's word never returns void but will be used to accomplish his desires and achieve his purpose (Isa 55:11). Help kids navigate through this challenging passage by sharing 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Pray with your kids and ask God to open your eyes to what he wants you to learn in this week's study. Ask God to give each of you understanding of the passage and patiently wait for the Holy Spirit to reveal himself. God's word is an amazing blessing and is to be treasured, even the parts we don't understand. We are praying for your study to be rich and your conversations to be deep this week!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Neh 7:4-73

1. What was the problem with the city from verse 4?
2. What did God put in Nehemiah's heart to do?
3. Who contributed to the work? How did they contribute?

What Do You Think

Why do you think more people were needed to live in Jerusalem?

What R U Going To Do

How do you support the church? Take a step this week by volunteering at church or at a local compassion agency. Consider giving financially to one of the many summer mission trips through Pantego Bible Church.

Core Comp

Giving Away My Life – I give away my life to help with God's work.

Memory Verse

Psalm 105:3 – *Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.