

# **Be a NEW MAN**

**Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Esther**

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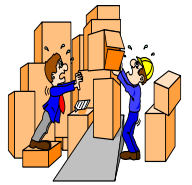


## **NEW GUIDANCE** (God's Will, Ezra 1:1 - 2:67)

How can I know what God wants me to do with my life?

## **NEW PEACE** (Fear, Ezra 2:68 - 3:13)

How can I handle my fear and uncertainty about following God's leading in my life?



## **NEW VICTORIES** (Obstacles, Ezra 4:1 - 6:14)

What about obstacles I encounter when doing God's will in our lives?

## **NEW PRIORITIES** (Priorities, Goals, Haggai 1:1 - 2:23)

How can I do everything God wants: home, career, marriage, etc.?



## **NEW TRUST** (Sovereignty of God, Zechariah 1:1 - 6:8)

How can I know how things will turn out?



## **NEW ASSURANCE** (Promises, Zech 6:9 - 8:23)

What does God expect of me? What does God promise me?



## **NEW RESPONSES** (Criticism, Ezra 6:15-22; 4:6-23)

How should I respond to unfair criticism?



## **NEW FUNCTION** (Shepherd, Zechariah 9:1 - 14:21)

How can I be a shepherd like Jesus to those under my care?



## **NEW ASSISTANCE** (God Uses Women, book of Esther)

How can God use my wife?

## **NEW POWER** (God's Hand, Ezra 7:1 - 8:36 [Neh 8:1-9, 18; 9:1-4])

How can I know when God's hand is on my life?



## **NEW MARRIAGE** (Marriage, Ezra 9:1 - 10:44)

How can I make my marriage more like what it should be?

## **NEW LEADERSHIP** (Leadership, Nehemiah 1:1-11)

What does God look for in a man He can use to lead others?

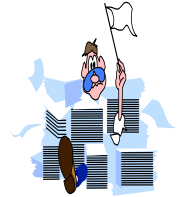


## **NEW OPPOSITION** (Impatience, Fear, Nehemiah 2:1-10)

What tools will Satan use against me when I try to lead for God?

## **NEW WORK LOAD** (Overwork, Nehemiah 2:11 - 3:32)

What can I do when I'm stressed from an impossible work load?



## **NEW ENCOURAGEMENT** (Discouragement, Nehemiah 4:1-23)

How can I overcome discouragement?

## **NEW PROBLEMS** (Problems, Nehemiah 5)

How should I respond when attacked from within?



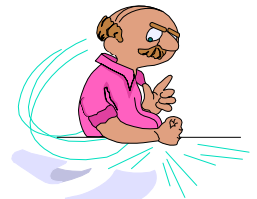
## **NEW ENEMIES** (Nehemiah 6-7)

How should I respond when personally attacked?



## **NEW REVIVAL** (Sin, Revival, Nehemiah 8 - 12)

What should I do when there is sin in my life?



## **NEW CHALLENGES** (Malachi, Nehemiah 13)

How can I stay faithful when life keeps throwing challenges at me?



(paper of chronology of Ezra, Nehemiah, etc.)

(insert Time Line of Prophecy paper of mine)



# **Be a NEW MAN**

## **NEW GUIDANCE**

**How can I know what God wants me to do with my life?**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 1999

**EZRA 1:1 - 2:67; 538 BC; PERSIA & JERUSALEM**

“Do you think God is calling me to be a pastor?” “I really love him, but do you think we should get married?” “Does God want me to quit this job?” “Should we buy this house?” “What should I do about \_\_\_\_\_?” These and other questions come up all the time. How are we to get the answers? As men we are responsible to lead and guide our family God’s way. But how are we to know just what God wants us to do? It can get quite confusing sometimes.

**CLOSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT** The place to turn for answers is the Bible. This article is the first in a series about Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Esther. These people lived from 538 to 432 BC. They close out the Old Testament. After 400 silent years John and Jesus come on the scene. This events of this time set up the conditions surrounding the birth of Jesus. Very few of us know much about these people and these times, yet they are very similar times to today. They are about a minority of believers living in an anti-God, post-Christian and very materialistic world. As we see how they lived before the first coming of Jesus, we can learn how to better live for Jesus in these pre-second coming days.

**BACKGROUND FOR EZRA** The Jews were taken captive by Babylon in 605 BC (Dan 1:1). In 586 Jerusalem was destroyed. God said they would be in captivity for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10). In 538 Cyrus let some of the Jews return (Ezra 1:1), roughly 70 years after they were first taken captive. Or the 70 years could be from 586 BC (when Solomon’s temple was destroyed) to 516 BC (when Zerubbable’s temple was completed). Either way, it shows that God remembers and keeps His promises, even when we don’t remember them.

**BEING ALLOWED TO RETURN TO JERUSALEM** On March 24, 538 BC, King Cyrus of Persia issued a proclamation that the Jews could return to Judea (Ezra 1:2-4). He wanted to establish a strong buffer state around his empire and he also wanted to please the local gods so they’d pray to his gods, Bel and Nebo for him (so it says on the Cyrus Cylinder, written by him in 538 BC). A total of about 50,000 Jews responded to the call to return (Ezra 2:1-67), a very small percentage of the total number of Jews in Babylon. Why didn’t more return? Were they too immersed in the materialism of Persia and didn’t want to leave the good life there? Had they forgotten God? Or didn’t God want them to return? How were the godly men who did want to know God’s will able to discern if God wanted them to move hundreds of miles away to a raw, barren land to make a new start or to stay with family and friends and live in comfort and ease? How were they to know God’s will?

**“GOD MOVED THEIR HEARTS”** There is a phrase that is used that explains why those who returned did so. “God moved their hearts” (Ezra 1:5) as he had “moved the heart of Cyrus” to allow them to return (Ezra 1:1; 2 Chronicles 36:22). God is in the business of moving hearts. Then it is up to men to obey Him. The same phrase is used of the Jews who gave toward the construction of the Tabernacle: “Everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the LORD for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments.” (Exodus 35:21) Notice the two elements that come into play here: God’s sovereign call (“moved their hearts”) and man’s free will (“everyone who was willing”). That’s the basis of how God speaks to us today.

“Moved their hearts” literally, in the Hebrew, means “stirred up the spirit.” The word, *`uwr* (oor); means to open the eyes, to awake (literally or figuratively). “So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty” (Hag 1:14; see also I Chron 5:26).

God does the stirring, the awakening. He does it by His Spirit. What He does is touch the spirit of man. The Hebrew word used is *ruwach* (roo'-akh); from wind or breath. It is the word commonly used for man's spirit as well as God's Spirit. Thus what happens is that God's Spirit stirs up, moves, man's spirit and then man is responsible to be sensitive to this and obey it. So how are we to know God's will – listen for His Spirit to stir/move our spirit. That's what He did to draw Jews back to Jerusalem in Ezra's day, too.

While that answers one important question, it brings up other unanswerable questions. On what basis did God choose whose heart to move to return (arbitrary choice, those most committed, those who needed to be weaned from materialistic Persia, etc.)? Why didn't He move in everyone's hearts? Shouldn't they all have returned? What about someone like Esther? Were there any who wanted to return but didn't have their hearts stirred? Did any go whose heart wasn't stirred? Did any not go whose heart God moved – either for a good reason (to serve God) or self-centered (escape debt., etc.)? Why did so very few spiritual leaders (priests) return – only 74 (Ezra 2:40)?

Then, too, are the questions about how God did this. Did He just move the hearts of the heads of the clans (the ones named in Ezra 2) or did He move the hearts of each one in the family?

**THE TRIP BACK** While we will never have the answers to those questions, do know about those who went back. Neighbors gave them money and materials to take back. We can assume God moved the neighbor's hearts so they gave generously (Ezra 1:6), as when they gave to the Tabernacle (Exodus 35:21). In fact, there are so many parallels between this return under Zerubbabel and the exodus from Egypt that could be called “Exodus # 2”. Here even King Cyrus was moved to contribute (Ezra 1:7-8).

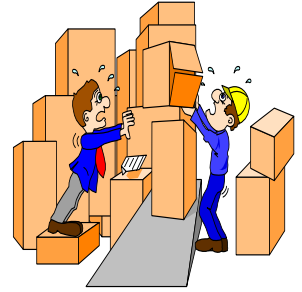
Everything we give and do is important to God, and we see that in the record of what was taken back in Ezra 1:9-11. Each person is important to God, too. Imagine how encouraging it was to Ezra's readers to see their names or those of their friends, listed in Ezra 2. That they made a difference was very motivational. Isn't it great that God has all of OUR names listed in His books in heaven and knows us by name, too (Ps 69:28; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 20:15; 21:27).

Another interesting note in this list is that those who returned to Bethlehem are listed – ancestors of Joseph, Mary and Jesus. They didn't know their crucial part, they just faithfully returned as moved by God. It may well be that God is using your faithfulness now to set things up for your grand children or great children. Time will show it.

Anyway, the 900 mile trip back took four months, but no details are given.

**KNOWING GOD'S WILL TODAY** So what do we learn from this? Listen to the “still, small voice” of God (I Kings 19:12) when He speaks to your spirit. Learn to identify His voice. Be sensitive. Use your free will to obey. God speaks to you just as He did to His people then. Just listen, then obey.

# **Be a NEW MAN**



## **NEW PEACE**

**How can I handle my fear and uncertainty about following God's leading in my life?**

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**EZRA 2:68 - 3:13; 537-536 BC; JUDEA, JERUSALEM, TEMPLE**

**BACKGROUND** God has moved in the hearts of some of the Jews to return to Jerusalem from captivity in Persia. Only about 50,000 responded, a very small percentage of the Jews who stayed in Persia. Nothing is recorded about the 900 mile, four-month return trip. Their sacrifice and obedience isn't the focal point. God is. They were glad to be allowed to return. We can focus on our cost, our sacrifice, too much, instead of on God and the privilege of doing His will.

**ARRIVAL IN JUDEA (Ezra 2:68-70)** When they arrived in Jerusalem a free will offering was taken to finance the rebuilding of the temple. The beautiful temple David had designed and Solomon built was totally destroyed. The people contributed over ½ ton of gold and 3 tons of silver. They were fully committed to serving God and had given up everything to follow Him to Palestine. That didn't mean it would be easy. Knowing God's will and doing God's will are two different things. Now that they were in Palestine, it was up to the men to actually carry out God's will. They must have naturally been a bit fearful and uncertain.

**ALTAR REBUILT (Ezra 3:1-7)** Three months after they arrived in Judea (Ezra 3:1) they gathered back in Jerusalem "as one man." This wasn't possible in Persian, but here among just those who are also committed, it is possible. God had two men who led. Jeshua was the priest, the spiritual leader. Zerubbabel, who led the people back, was the civil leader. God always has a division of responsibility, a plurality of leaders. That way they can support and encourage each other. They can work in their areas of strength and complement each other.

Their first priority was to rebuild the altar. This was where blood sacrifices were made, a picture of their sins being covered. This hadn't been a priority before, and they went into captivity. Now they know that worshipping God because innocent blood covered their sin is a top priority. This was why they came back. This was God's will for them. Life was hard there, especially compared to back in Persia. But they came in obedience. They got settled and gathered together to start the important work which they came to do. Still, it wasn't easy!

"Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices" (Ezra 3:3). They knew the Gentiles living around them would not like to see Jerusalem prosper again, and were likely to do what they could to keep the Jews spread out and ineffective. They didn't let their fear keep them from obeying God's will, though.

When we hear God's Spirit stirring our spirit and we obey, we will face opposition as well. The world, the flesh and the devil all will do what they can to keep us from carrying out God's will. They want us to be ineffective, too. Do not assume everything will be smooth sailing when you commit to follow God. Don't wait until the fear is taken care of. Obey despite the fear. Go by your mind, which knows God is in charge. Don't go by your emotions, which feeds fear. Fear is one of Satan's prime weapons in distracting us from doing God's revealed will in our lives. "What if" plagues our mind. The Jews came together for strength and encouragement, to follow God despite their fears. They needed each other. Christian fellowship is necessary for us to keep from being sidelined by fear, too. Sharing our fears, helping each other in areas of

threat or danger, just working together is a great help and encouragement. Thy Jews worked together, completely rebuilt the altar, and offered sacrifices to God. They knew the only way to approach God was “through the blood.”

**TEMPLE FOUNDATIONS REBUILT (Ezra 3:8-11)** Seven months later, in the spring of 536 BC (exactly 70 years after the first Jews were taken into captivity, as God promised through Jeremiah [25:11-13; 29:10]) they started rebuilding the temple itself. They had to start with the foundation. They placed 3 Levites in charge of the work (Ezra 3:9) and other Levites helped.

Now normally a Levite couldn't start ministering until 30 years of age, so they could settle into life and marriage as well as gain some maturity and experience (Num. 4:3). Today we are more concerned with youth, but God valued maturity and experience over youth. Thirty years was the age at which Jesus Himself started His ministry. If there was a real shortage they could drop that to 25 years of age (Num 8:24). Here the Levites were 20 years of age (Ezra 3: 8). This showed what a great shortage of priests there were (I Chron 23:24-27; II Chron 31:17). It seems unlikely God wouldn't move enough hearts – it must be that many stayed in prosperous Persia instead of following God to rural and backward Palestine. Perhaps they let their fear, as well as materialism, keep them from following God. How sad. What has happened to their descendants? Instead of being part of God's work in Palestine, with descendants who saw and heard Jesus, they became absorbed into the fabric of pagan Persia.

Still, those were making following and serving God did a good job. They laid the foundations and dedicated them to God with praise and thanksgiving. They didn't take credit for it themselves but gave credit to God (Ezra 3:10). This may be one reason that God doesn't remove the source of their fear – it causes them to lean on Him and give Him the credit for what is done. Is God allowing opposition and oppression to put fear into your path? He wants you to let Him work through you and then have you give Him the credit for it all.

**IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOUR PERSPECTIVE (Ezra 3:12-13)** What a noise must have been lifted: musical instruments like cymbals (Ezra 3:10), thousands of people loudly singing and praising God (v. 11a), shouts of joy (v. 11b, 12b) and weeping and crying (12a). Weeping and crying? Why would some be weeping and crying? They were older people who remembered the temple before it had been destroyed in 586 BC, 50 years earlier. Evidently this new one was no comparison! It was like a grand cathedral being replaced by a concrete block garage. And all they had so far was the foundation! The young people were comparing the current temple foundation to what was there when they arrived: rubble and burnt wood. They were joyful. The older people were comparing it with what was there when they left many years ago: one of the wonders of the ancient world. They cried. The different reactions were based on their perspective. Everything is relative. It's what you compare it to. Many times we are not appreciative of what God has done in our lives for we compare ourselves to someone or something else and so don't appreciate what we do have. The same thing will happen at the final dedication of the temple building (Haggai 2:1-9).

But God wasn't comparing buildings in the way they were. If His presence was there it had everything. If His presence wasn't there it had nothing. It was as simple as that. The same is true for us and what we do today. Follow His will. Obey Him. Don't look at outer circumstances or fear will discourage you. Don't compare with others or you disappointment will discourage you. Keep your eyes on Jesus, not your fears, not the past, not others, just Him!

# **Be a NEW MAN**

## **NEW VICTORIES**

**What about obstacles I encounter when doing God's will in our lives?**

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**EZRA 4:1 - 6:14; 536-518 BC; PERSIA, JERUSALEM**



**BACKGROUND** God has moved in the hearts of some of His people to return and rebuild Jerusalem. The ones who return rebuild the altar and lay a foundation for a new temple. They are in God's perfect will and, despite fear of opposition, obey His will. Still opposition comes.

**OPPOSITION FORMS (Ezra 4:1-5)** When you do God's will you WILL have opposition (Phil 1:29). We operate in (and against) Satan's world system. He attacks God's Kingdom by attacking us. When we line up on God's side, we are declaring war against Satan and his forces. He fights back!

The Jews found this out when they were doing God's will. Enemies materialized. Details aren't given about the opposition, for that isn't the main focus in the Bible, although it often is in our lives. It is mentioned to show it will happen, but God gets the credit and glory for all that happens. Humanly speaking it was impossible, but with God all things are possible.

**Plan 1: Infiltrate and sidetrack** At first these enemies pretended to be friends (Ezra 4:1-2). Deceit is one of Satan's first-line weapons. They told half truths as if they were all truth. "Yes, we sacrifice to your Jehovah, so let us come help you!" Their motives were wrong. They wanted to infiltrate and sidetrack the work – exactly what Satan has done in many families and churches today.

While what they said was true, it wasn't the whole truth. They did sacrifice to Jehovah, but also to every pagan god they knew of. They wanted to compromise Jehovah (II Kings 17:29-41). Often our most dangerous enemies are those within the church or group, the "weeds among the wheat."

Zerubbabel (the civil leader) and Jeshua (the spiritual leader) took a clear stand, even though it seemed to be very unpopular (Ezra 4:3). Would the others understand why all this free help was being turned down? Being a leader isn't easy.

**Plan 2: direct opposition** When their first plan didn't work, the enemies used a more direct plan. They undermined the true leaders by rumors and gossip (v. 4a). They used fear tactics to discourage the people in their work (v. 4b). Satan still tries to discourage those who are following God's will for their lives. They even hired men whose sole purpose in life it was to "work against" and "frustrate" the work of God's people (v. 5). What was worse, they did it from 536 through 520 BC! For seventeen years the opposition persevered! Imagine that! And God allowed it. He wanted to use it to make the people stronger as they came closer to Him. Never think that following God is the easy way to go. It's the right way, but not the easy way!

**OPPOSITION CONTINUES (Ezra 4:24)** Even after Cyrus died in 522 BC, the harassment continued. The enemies then turned their attack against the next king, Darius, during his reign. Thus for these 17 years there was no work on the temple – their smear and fear campaign worked! Why would God allow that? The people had their own free will choice to make: keep their eyes on God and persevere or put their eyes on their fears and quit. They chose the latter. They had such high, lofty goals when they arrived 18 ½ years earlier. Even God-inspired goals fail when our focus shifts. Starting off sacrificing all to do God's work doesn't guarantee we will

continue to do so the rest of our lives. Major obstacles can be faced, but often the slow, wearing grind of day-by-day struggles discourage us and we, too, quit.

Note, too, that the outside opposition brought the Jews closer to each other and to God. It brought out the best in them and made them stand up. However this fear and smear campaign within with highly successful. It wore the people down and separated them. Watch out in your family and church. Those 'inside jobs' by Satan are much more deadly than a full frontal attack. How is he working in your family? What about in your church?

**THE WORK RESUMES (Ezra 5:1-2)** Finally God intervened. In 520 BC He sent in reinforcements. Since the smear campaign against Zerubbabel and Jeshua had rendered them ineffective (4:5), God sent in the backups, Haggai and Zechariah. God sent them to help the leaders, to take the brunt off of them. When the people would no longer listen to their high priest and governor, God sent prophets to preach to them. The best known, whose message God has preserved in His Word, are Haggai and Zechariah. Their messages will be analyzed in upcoming articles. The result of their preaching was that the people turned back to God and resumed the rebuilding work. They wasted 17 years, but at least they were again active.

**OPPOSITION INCREASES (Ezra 5:3-5)** One would think that these enemies would not quit since their inner fear and smear campaign is no longer successful. Satan doesn't work that way, though. The enemies of God's people went back to their other strategy – attacking from without. Starting in early 519 BC the enemies challenged their right to rebuild the temple. They tried to put fear in the people by threatening to go to the local governor as well as national king - Darius (5:3-5). God worked in the heart of the Persian governor so he would give the Jews the benefit of the doubt until the charges made against the Jews could be thoroughly investigated. The governor had to be very careful to check out every charge for there was much political unrest seething in many locations. His very life was at stake.

**LETTER TO DARIUS (Ezra 5:6-17)** A copy of the report from the governor, which he sent to King Darius, is in the Bible. He reported that the Jews were, in fact, working hard on rebuilding their temple. He said that when he asked the Jews what right they had to rebuild the temple they told him that King Cyrus had authorized it in the first year of his reign, and even contributed much money toward it. He asked Darius to check the archives to see if there was any record of such a decree. Would Darius find the document?

**LETTER FROM DARIUS (Ezra 6:1-14)** The following year a letter came back from Darius. The news was good. The declaration was found. Darius decreed that the work could continue and that no one was to oppose or hinder it in any way. Now the Jews could continue with the support and protection of the local governor. Opposition without as well as within had ended – at least for a time. Opposition had turned to assistance. Perhaps that's one reason God allowed it. All things do work together for the good of those who love the Lord (Romans 8:28).

What about the opposition you are facing in carrying out God's will in your life today? Is it from without or within? Is there a smear or fear campaign going in your life? In your family? In your church? Persevere through it!!! Trust God and follow His leadership. Stick to what you know to be His will, no matter what. Don't be surprised by obstacles – climb over them!



# **Be a *NEW MAN***

## **NEW PRIORITIES**

**How can I do everything God wants: home, career, marriage, etc.?**

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**HAGGAI 1:1 - 2:23; AUGUST 29 - DECEMBER 18, 520 BC; JERUSALEM**

**BACKGROUND** As the Jews who returned to Jerusalem started rebuilding the temple, they faced opposition from without (which they resisted) and within (which they gave in to). Their enemies started a fear and smear campaign, and they became discouraged and quit building. For 17 years they were out of God's will. Their trust in Jeshua and Zerubbabel was undermined. Then God sent reinforcements: Haggai and Zechariah came and preached God's message. The people responded, repented, and resumed rebuilding the temple. Haggai preached 4 messages between August 29 and December 18 of 520 BC. They are recorded in the book in the Bible that carries his name.

**HAGGAI THE MAN** His name means "festival," so we assume he was born during one of the major Jewish feasts. He saw Solomon's temple destroyed (2:3) so he is now in his 70's. He is a man of great faith. He delivered four messages in four months, two on the same day. His book is the 2<sup>nd</sup> shortest in the Old Testament, next to Obadiah. He says God's word came THROUGH him TO the people. He saw himself as just a spokesman, a channel. That's all we know about him. But that's enough, for the focus is on the message, not the messenger.

**LORD ALMIGHTY** 'Jehovah Sabaoth' is the name God uses for Himself as He reveals Himself to the people who have returned from captivity. Literally meaning "LORD of Hosts," this title is used by the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi 90 times. Haggai's short message uses it 14 times. Why does He choose this title at this time in history? Literally 'Hosts' refers to a large group organized for war. What a comforting thought this must have been for the people. There they were, surrounded and oppressed, defeated and discouraged, and God shows up with millions of angels ready to do battle for them. No forces can stand against God and His angels! Victory is sure. This title alone preaches the message.

Remember this name. Use it when you are discouraged and feel overwhelmed. God is still 'LORD Almighty' today!

**MESSAGE 1: THE CHALLENGE TO RESUME REBUILDING (Haggai 1:1-11)** It was August 29, 520 BC, the time of the new moon, when people often went to God for guidance (II Kings 4:22-23; Isa 1:14). Haggai stands up and challenges them. He points out that, though they have worked hard in their fields, the harder they work the less they have. God has kept their crops from prospering. Why? Because their priorities are all wrong, that's why. They live in fancy, modern homes but neglect God's house. Their comfort comes before serving God. They are building their kingdom and neglecting God's Kingdom. Oh they make excuses about why they can't get back to rebuilding God's house: "It's just too dangerous at the moment, it's not God's timing to do it. When God wants us to rebuild it we will, but that's not what he wants now." However it's always time to obey God! They knew and followed God's will 19 years ago when the headed His Spirit stirring in their hearts and sacrificially gave up everything to come to Palestine. Now they are so busy building their own homes they don't have time for God's home.

“How can we do it all?” they ask. “There just isn’t enough time in a day to get everything done! We’d rebuild the temple if we just had the time!”

It was a vicious cycle for them. The harder they worked the less they had. God made sure their labor wasn’t prosperous for their priorities were wrong!

Some might wonder why God was so hard on these Jews in Jerusalem while He let those in Persia prosper. At least these left Persia to follow God back to Jerusalem! But these in Jerusalem had made a deeper commitment and God is holding them to it. They were more aware and accountable of what God wanted. That certainly applies to us today, too.

**RESPONSE: REBUILDING RESUMES (Haggai 1:12-15)** The response to this message was great! Everyone obeyed God’s message. They repented, turned from their self-centeredness and started following God. Their fear of people turned to ‘fear’ of God (v. 12). It seems they repented of their attitude to Joshua and Zerubbabel, too, for they started following them again. On September 21, 520 BC they restarted the work on the temple.

What did they do between August 29, when Haggai preached, and September 21, when the work restarted? Probably used the time to get organized, gather materials, maybe even harvest their figs and pomegranates. God understood and allowed them this time.

**MESSAGE 2: GOD’S PROMISE TO THE PEOPLE (Haggai 2:1-9)** However by one month later, October 17, progress on the rebuilding of the temple had slowed appreciably. There was 60 years worth of rubble to clean up, there were several festivals in the last month: Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles.

“Be strong” God tells them three times, “and work.” So much work, not enough time, and a building much less impressive than the one it was replacing caused the people to become discouraged. God tells them to not compare, but just do their best in faithfulness to Him. His Spirit being inside was what counted, not the size of the building. The same is true of us. It’s not our humble situation that counts, but how God uses it. We must look at God, not ourselves.

**ZECHARIAH STARTS PREACHING (Zech 1:1-6)** It was about that same time, October to November of 520 BC, that the prophet Zechariah also was used by God to preach to the people. While the people mean their recommitment 2 months before, they didn’t carry it out. God warned them to repent and turn back to Him. They were disobeying (v. 4), delaying (v. 5) and doubting (v. 6). Zechariah, too, calls them to complete recommitment, shown by actions.

**MESSAGE 3: THE PEOPLE ARE DEFILED (Haggai 2:10-19)** Haggai then delivered his final two messages (at least of those which are recorded) on December 18, 520 BC. Just because they were in the Holy Land didn’t mean they were holy! You can’t get holiness that way. In fact, they were defiled because of sin. Haggai encourages them to get and stay clean. Because of their positive response to this message God promises to bless their crops and labor. If they are faithful to Him He will be faithful to them!

**MESSAGE 4: ULTIMATE VICTORY WILL EVENTUALLY COME (Haggai 2:20-23)** Later that same day Haggai foretold the coming Day of the Lord, when God will set up His throne on the earth. Then all enemies will be removed and God’s people will live in peace and glory. God is reassuring them that He is sovereign and in control of the world and time: past, present and future. He will win. Therefore His people should trust Him, serve Him, and put Him first. He is to be our first priority, for we are His first priority!

# Be a *NEW MAN*

## NEW TRUST

How can I know how things will turn out?

By Jerry Schmoyer © 1999

**ZECHARIAH 1:1 - 6:8; FEBRUARY 15, 519 BC; JERUSALEM**



**BACKGROUND** The Jews that returned to Jerusalem from Persia started well, then stopped working on the temple for 17 years because of the threats of enemies. Under Haggai's preaching they recommitted themselves to the work, but it was hard going. God sent Zechariah to encourage them to continue. He did this by a series of visions showing them His sovereignty.

**ZECHARIAH THE MAN** 'Zechariah' was a very common name in the Old Testament. At least 30 separate men are mentioned with this name. It has a form of God's name at the start and means literally "Jehovah remembers" but came to mean "Jehovah is renowned." This Zechariah was eleventh of the twelve minor prophets. He was of priestly descent, a son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo (Zech 1:1 Zech 1:7), the chief of one of the priestly families that returned from exile along with Zerubbabel (Neh 12:4). Zechariah began his prophetic labors in the eighth month of the second year of Darius, 520 B.C. In the fourth year of Darius a deputation of Jews came to the Temple to inquire whether the day on which Jerusalem and the Temple were reduced to ashes by the Chaldeans was still to be kept as a day of mourning and fasting. Zechariah replied that, in the sight of Jehovah, obedience is better than fasting. Two other oracles delivered by Zechariah are recorded in his book of prophecies (Zech 9-11 and 12-14). Zerubbabel was presumably a young man when he began to preach. Tradition, on the contrary, declares that he was well advanced in years. He apparently survived Haggai, his contemporary (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). He was a poet as well as a prophet. Nothing is known of his end. The Targum says he died a martyr.

**THE VISIONS** All 8 visions were the same night, February 15, 519 BC (Zech 1:7). "Vision" is some derivative of Heb. haza, to "perceive"; Grk. harao; or of ra'a, to "see"; optomai). They were supernatural presentations of certain scenery or circumstances to the mind of a person while awake (Num 12:6-8). Visions are experiences similar to dreams through which supernatural insight or awareness is given by revelation. But the difference between a dream and a vision is that dreams occur only during sleep, while visions can happen while a person is awake (Dan 10:7). In the Bible, people who had visions were filled with a special consciousness of God. The most noteworthy examples in the Old Testament of recipients of visions are Ezekiel and Daniel. The purpose of visions was to give guidance and direction to God's servants and to foretell the future. Daniel's vision, for example, told of the coming of the Messiah (Dan 8:1,17).

**VISION 1: HORSEMAN AMONG TREES (Zech 1:8-17)** In this first vision Zechariah sees God send angels patrolling throughout the earth. They report back to God the Son ("angel of the LORD") that the world is at peace and rest under Persia's rule (v. 11). Still, Jerusalem is trodden down by Gentiles, oppressed and afflicted by her enemies (v. 12). It's not that God has brought judgment on Jerusalem, all He has done is withhold His mercy (v. 12). God doesn't need to send judgment or punishment on anyone. All He does is stop showing mercy and the inevitable result is judgment. We are much more dependent on God's mercy that we could ever imagine! God had allowed the Gentile nations to oppress Israel so they would turn back to God.

They have gone too far, though, and God will now judge them for their sin (v. 15). He will again show mercy to Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt (v. 16). Peace, comfort and prosperity will again reign over His people (v. 17).

God is sending this message to His people through Zechariah to encourage them to persevere in their work. They will prevail because God will prevail. God is in sovereign charge of everything, so there is no reason to fear, doubt or quit. As they do God's will, they will be opposed, but ultimate victory is theirs because God is sovereign over all!

**VISION 2: 4 HORNS & 4 CRAFTSMAN (Zech 1:18-21)** God assures them that He is in control of all Gentile powers, even those which have oppressed the Jews. He will overcome them.

**VISION 3: MAN WITH MEASURING LINE (Zech 2:1-13)** Zechariah sees someone, perhaps God the Son, measuring Jerusalem as someone would do who owned it and was planning restorative repairs to it. He tells the Jews to flee Persia and Babylon and return to Jerusalem for safety, where He will protect them. Then He jumps ahead to when He will return and set up His kingdom on earth. Wait patiently and persevere in faith is the message from God.

**VISION 4: CLEAN GARMENTS FOR THE HIGH PRIEST (Zech 3:1-10)** Next Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest at that time standing before God with Satan accusing him. His filthy garments show His guilt and sin, as well as that of all the Jews. God the Son intervenes, defending His people, saying they are "a burning stick snatched from the fire" (3:1). God the Son affirms that He has provided clean garments and removed their sin (3:4). Again the vision then moves to a future time when God the Son will set up His throne on earth and rule and reign from it. Then peace and security will last forever.

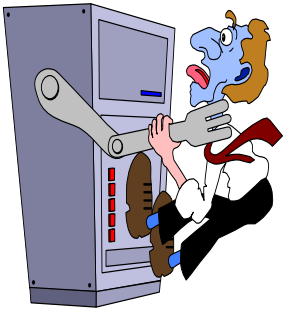
**VISION 5: GOLD LAMPSTAND AND 2 OLIVE TREES (Zech 4:1-14)** In a pictorial way God shows His light and glory will one day fill the whole earth. "Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit," says the Lord Almighty. God sees all and knows all and He is sovereign over all that Jerusalem is facing.

**VISION 6: FLYING SCROLL (Zech. 5:1-4)** A vision of a very large, open scroll flying through the air reminds them that God knows their sins and they must deal with them. He is sovereign to judge (withhold mercy) as well as bless.

**VISION 7: WOMAN IN A BASKET (Zech. 5:5-11)** The whole wicked world system, which finds its fullness in Babylon, is under God's control and will one day be judged. Have no part with it!

**VISION 8: 4 CHARIOTS (Zech. 6:1-8)** Similar to Vision 1, God again reaffirms His sovereign control over the world and nations. He will bring victory in His time.

All this is to reassure the Jews laboring in discouragement that they should persevere in faith, for God would bring victory in His time. That should be our encouragement today, too. As we seek to follow God's will for our lives, we must remember that God is in total control of everything. We can't look at circumstances or current obstacles, but only to the future when our sovereign God will rule and reign over all His (and our) enemies. Remember that!



# **Be a *NEW MAN***

## **NEW ASSURANCE**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 1999

**ZECHARIAH 6:9 - 8:23; FEB. 16, 519 BC & DEC. 7, 518 BC; JERUSALEM**

**BACKGROUND** Zechariah's 8 night visions (1:7 - 6:8) were sent by God to encourage the people and remind them that He was in charge of everything. Even though they were having opposition and difficulties in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple, He would ultimately give them success. One day he would rule and reign on earth, in Jerusalem and in the temple. God follows that up (Feb 16, 519 BC) with a prophecy about the Messiah who will rule on the throne in Jerusalem (6:9-15) and a bit later (Dec. 7, 518 BC) four messages from Zechariah explaining what God expected of them and what He would do to help them (7:1 - 8:23).

**JOSHUA CROWNED** (Zechariah 6:9-15; February 16, 519 BC) After his night visions, God told Zechariah to do something strange. He was to take gold and silver that was brought back to Jerusalem from Babylon, make a crown, and put it on Joshua the high priest at that time. What is so strange about this is that only someone from the tribe of Judah can be king, while priests must come from the tribe of Levi (family of Aaron). How could Joshua be both?

The mystery is compounded when God calls Him the "Branch," a title the Jews believed belonged to the Messiah (v. 12). This One would build the temple and rule from it. This is obviously far beyond what Joshua the priest could do. He was only a picture of the One who was to come. The crown wouldn't stay on him but would be kept in the temple awaiting the Branch who would fulfill this prophecy (14).

This was further encouragement to the Jews that their work was not in vain but would ultimately succeed. Final and total success would come when the Messiah, God Himself, took over the temple rebuilding and filled it with His presence and glory.

God again continues to encourage His people to persevere through present difficulties by keeping their eyes on the future. That's why God has given us so much information in the Bible about His return for us and our future with Him in heaven and then ruling on earth. In fact, that's how Jesus comforted and encouraged His disciples the night before He was crucified (John 14). Perhaps if we studied and remembered the great future God has for us, and how He will ultimately defeat all His enemies on this earth we can better persevere through our difficult and dangerous times on earth.

**MESSAGE 1: REBUKE FOR WRONG FASTING** (Zechariah 7:1-7; Dec. 7, 518 BC) The occasion of this message was when Jews living outside Jerusalem sent messengers to ask the officials if they still had to keep on observing the various fasts that were part of Jewish traditions (v. 3). Clearly implied is that they were tired of it and wanted to be able to stop. It was just something where they were going through the outer motions without real meaning. God's message to them through Zechariah dealt with this, their poor attitude toward fasting. They were just going through the motions. It had become an external act devoid of real meaning. They weren't doing it for God, it was just habit.

We, today, must make sure we don't just go through the motions of what God would have us do: devotions, prayer, Bible study, fellowship, church and Bible study attendance, giving our money, singing, etc. It's easy for that to happen, but it is wrong and dangerous!

**MESSAGE 2: WHY THE JEWS WENT INTO CAPTIVITY** (Zech 7:8-14; Dec 7, 518 BC) In fact, it was this same attitude toward God and spiritual things that caused God to have the previous generation go into captivity in the first place. God says He is more concerned with the inner motive than the outer action. Actually both must line up. Service to God and others is a must, but our motive must be love and compassion, not just going through the motions.

Unfortunately the Jews never learned this lesson. Jesus Himself continually reprimanded the religious rulers about this. The situation continues today. We, too, can be guilty of being more concerned about our outer actions than our inner attitudes. Watch out!

**MESSAGE 3: MILLENNIAL CONDITIONS** (Zech 8:1-17; Dec 7, 518 BC) Having clearly communicated what He expects of His followers, God now reminds them of what He will do to help them. He never gives us commands without also promising what we need to meet those requirements. God reminds them that serving Him with the right motive is the way to go. He will prosper them for it. This will all result in a future day when Jerusalem is restored and all is peace and security. Jerusalem will be the center of the world and people from everywhere will come to worship God there. God promises He will be faithful and right to His people (v. 8).

**MESSAGE 4: MILLENNIAL CONDITIONS** (Zech 8:18-23; Dec 7, 518 BC) Getting back to the issue of fasting, God tells them that their fasts will turn into feasts when the Messiah comes to sit on His throne in Jerusalem. Gentiles will no longer oppose Jerusalem, they will come from everywhere to worship there. The Jews will be witnesses by word and example to God's love and grace (v. 23). Their godliness will attract others to God, as should be true of us today.

**WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF HIS FOLLOWERS** A study of this passage shows that God expects His people to diligently obey Him, but with pure motives. He demands true justice to all and mercy and compassion shown to all and especially to the needy. He tells them to not plot evil. He encourages them to be honest, true and peaceful. In effect, He is repeating what He told them in the beginning, to love Him and others. *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9)* When Jesus quoted this He added that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is the same as God told the Jews in Zechariah's day. If we are to be like Jesus we are to do the same thing ourselves.

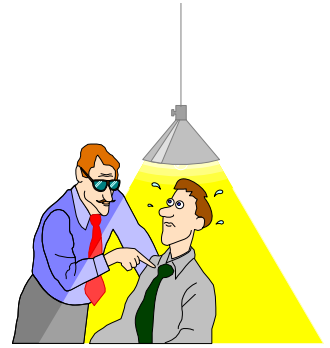
**WHAT GOD PROMISES US** Whenever God expects something from us, He promises to enable us to do it. He promised the Jews He would bless them, always be with them, be faithful and righteous to them, provide their needs, and use them to bless others. He promises He will return and set everything right, establishing His kingdom in Jerusalem forever. In other words, He promises to love them and show it. This is just what He expects us to do. He loves us so we can love Him back. His promises are what we have to go on now, just like the Jews back then did, too. He promises us His Spirit to fill us and produce the fruit of love in us (Gal. 5:22).

# **Be a NEW MAN**

## **NEW RESPONSES**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 1999

**EZRA 6:15-22; 4:6-23; MARCH 12, 516 BC - 465 BC; JERUSALEM**



**BACKGROUND** Finally, 70 years after it had been destroyed, the temple was rebuilt and dedicated (March 12, 516 BC). It had taken 21 years for the Jews who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem to complete the work. There were many distractions and much opposition along the way. Eventually the work was completed and, among great worship and many sacrifices, everyone celebrated (Ezra 6:15-17). Then they reinstated the Passover which commemorates the first deliverance from captivity and move into the land 900 years ago (Ezra 9:19-22). This, too, had been neglected for the last 70 years. The Jews were truly at a high point – close to God and faithful to Him. It had been many years since the nation had been this close to God, many years indeed. But what happens when we get right with God and live for Him? That's right, opposition begins. That's what happened to the Jews, too. Opposition came in the form of criticism from their enemies among the nations surrounding them.

**CARRYING THE DONKEY** A father and son once took a donkey to the market. The father sat on the donkey and the boy walked. Onlookers said, "What a terrible thing, a big strong man sitting on the donkey's back and the poor boy has to walk." So the father got off and the boy got on the donkey. People then said, "How terrible, this strong man walking and the little boy sitting." So they both got on the donkey's back, but then others remarked: "How terrible, two people sitting on one donkey." So they both got off the donkey. Then people said, "This is crazy! The donkey has nothing on his back and two people are walking." When they arrived at the market, they were both carrying the donkey! If we always allow ourselves to be influenced by what others think and say, we may find ourselves "carrying the donkey" more often than we like. Trying to please everyone just doesn't work. How, then, should we respond to criticism? If trying to please everyone doesn't work, should we just always ignore all of it? What about the hurt and pain it causes? Let's look to God's Word to see how to respond.

**THE CRITICS** All the criticism seems to have come from two men, Rehum and Shimshai (Ezra 4:8-9). It's now 485 BC, about 30 years since the temple was dedicated and the Passover reinstated. They have been doing all they could to oppose the Jews throughout this time, but when a new ruler took over in Persia they found a more receptive ear.

They implied there were many others who shared their sentiments (Ezra 4:9-10) but in effect it was just the two of them (v. 23). One of the first give-aways of ungodly criticism is when someone says "everyone," "they," "lots of others," etc. They hide behind numbers, making it out to be that they are just the spokesmen for a large group who agree. They imply that they are in the minority. Instead of saying "I have a concern," they let on that many have expressed the same feelings and concerns they have. In fact, they often come across as if they are doing you a favor by being the ones to pass these opinions on to you.

**THE CRITICISM** What these two men did was write a letter to king Xerxes (called Ahasuerus in Esther) in Persia, who ruled the whole area at that time (Ezra 4:6-16). They started by calling themselves 'servants' (v. 11) and saying that they were only concerned for the king's welfare (v. 14). This is another sign of ungodly critics – they pretend their motives and loyalties are 100% pure and true. They only want what is best for the king, they claim. In reality these men were

jealous of the prosperity the Jews were finding in their new walk with God. They wanted to be the strongest, most prosperous people in the area but the Jews were surpassing them. They couldn't do anything themselves, but if they could get the king to stop the Jews ...

The plan was to slant what was happening in a way that would cause Artaxerxes (also called Xerxes) to see the Jew's prosperity as a threat to him. Thus they told the king that the Jews were rebuilding Jerusalem so they could fortify and rebel against Persia. Then the king would no longer have their tax money (Ezra 4:13, 16). Note that money, to them, is the bottom line of everything. This shows their real motives. They say, though, that the Jews are the ones with greedy motives. They say their motives are to keep back the king's due and not pay their taxes. This is another sign that criticism is ungodly: they criticize the motives of others. We've all had that happen from time to time, and it's awful. The more you try to do to spread the truth, the worse things seem to get. Today, as then, the critics go behind the back of the person they are criticizing and talk to others. These men never asked the Jews their reasoning or sought to really know them. They go behind a person's back and gossip to others. It's deadly!

As proof and support, they turned to the past reputation Jerusalem had for independence and control, as in the time of David and Solomon. They asked the king to check and see if Jerusalem wasn't a city that liked to rule itself instead of being ruled by others (v. 15). Taking something from the past, even something good, and giving it a 'spin' to make it seem like something wrong, is a very successful tactic of ungodly critics.

Still, God is in sovereign charge, isn't He? Would He let such an unfair and untrue thing succeed against His people? Previous kings had given permission to rebuilt Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4). They were in obedience to Persia and God, surely God would protect them! Right?

**THE CONCLUSION** The king checked into the records and found Jerusalem to be an independent city, the capital of the Jews. Without checking he believed the accusations of Rehum and Shimshai that the Jews' motives were greed and rebellion. He ordered them to stop all building in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:17-23). Why would God allow ungodly criticism to succeed and stop His work? I don't know, God never says why. He didn't tell the Jews then, and He doesn't tell us today.

One thing we do know, though, is that the Jews resisted. They didn't just rollover and quit. They had to be "compelled by force" (v. 23) to stop. It's so easy to get worn out by ungodly criticism and just quit. If not, there's the temptation to fight it which means we get down on their lever and end up losing anyway. The other mistake is to try to appease the critics and win them to our side by following their advice. This will never work, either.

We don't even know who the leaders were in Jerusalem at this time. Zerubbabel had passed from the scene and Ezra hadn't arrived yet. Whoever it was, though, they persisted. They didn't quit easily. They had enough maturity to know that all godly leaders will be persecuted. If you carry the ball, you are going to get tackled -- sometimes for a loss.

They must have known these men who were doing this. When we consider the source we can better know how to respond. They kept their focus on God and saw Him in control of all. If He allowed this opposition to stop them, He must know what He is doing.

Their job was to make sure they didn't do anything to give their enemies justifiable actions to criticize. Jesus Himself said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12). Note the word "falsely." Stay faithful to God no matter what. Remember, it's what God thinks that matters, not what anyone else thinks.



# **Be a *NEW MAN***

## **NEW FUNCTION**

**How can I be a shepherd like Jesus to those under my care?**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

**ZECHARIAH 9:1 - 14:21; After 480 BC; JERUSALEM**

**BACKGROUND** Finally the temple is rebuilt and worship reinstated by those who returned to Jerusalem from Persia with Zerubbabel. This brought attacks and criticism from neighbors, but the Jews stayed faithful. Time passes. Zechariah had received visions from God 20 years earlier and passed them on to the people to encourage them to live for God. Now God gives him another message to deliver, his final prophecy, and its a long one!

**THE PROPHECY** This 'oracle' (9:1) is about two times in Israel's future: 1) the First coming of the Messiah, including His rejection (chapters 9-11) and 2) the Second coming of the Messiah when He is enthroned for the Millennium (chapters 12-14). When things are tough in the present it's always good to look to the future. That is where hope lies, and it reminds us that God is in control of everything.

**ALEXANDER AND JESUS** Alexander the Great and his conquests are prophesied (9:1-8), about 150 years before they happened. Zechariah is showing that God gets the credit for Alexander's conquests, not Alexander, because God wanted him to conquer. He foretold it and brought it to pass. God comforts the people with the fact that his city and temple will be spared (9:8) and Alexander spared Jerusalem several times.

Then comes the prophecy of God's King who will come and bring peace to Israel (9:9-17). This was a prophecy of fulfilled by Jesus during the Triumphal Entry, and Matthew as well as John quote this passage to show Jesus fulfilled it (Matthew 21:5; John 12:15). God then looks forward to when this King will rule and reign in Israel, bringing deliverance and peace to all (9:10-17).

**TRUE AND FALSE SHEPHERDS** Most will reject God's King when He comes to deliver the people, however. Instead they will follow impostors – false shepherds. The shepherd analogy is something the Jews would have readily understood. Before being taken to Babylon they were mostly shepherds, and still many of them raised flocks of sheep or goats. They knew how a shepherd went before the sheep searching for water and food. He would protect them, comfort them, rescue them, and watch out for their welfare. Then he would bring them safely to the sheepfold at night and guard the door with his own body. The life of a shepherd was not easy. There was much danger and hardship. Wild beasts had to be fought off, robbers defeated, and dangers overcome. A shepherd willingly did this out of love for the sheep.

However not all shepherds loved their sheep. Some just 'fleeced' the sheep for their own benefit (10:1-5). They didn't care about the sheep, only how they could use them for their own benefit. The Jews will reject their True Shepherd, however, and turn instead to the false shepherds. Despite the fact that their Shepherd will provide all their needs (Psalm 23), they turn to false shepherds instead.

Jesus, the good shepherd, will regather Israel as a shepherd regathers his sheep, bringing them back into His fold (10:6-12). This brought hope and comfort to those listening to

Zechariah, knowing the future would bring better than the present. Before that, however, would come desolation, judgment and disaster because of their rejection of the Messiah (11:1-3).

When the Good Shepherd, Jesus, came to lead His people they rejected him and were scattered by the Romans (11:1-9). When Jesus came He claimed to be this shepherd. *"Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"* (John 10:7-11).

The reason for their ejection (11:1-3) is that they first rejected the Messiah (11:4-17). This refers to His first coming, but culminates in their acceptance of the Antichrist as their shepherd (11:15-17). Since they ran from the good Shepherd, they are open to a worthless shepherd stepping in and taking advantage of them. That is what will happen.

**ORACLE # 2** Now Zechariah moves ahead in time to the end of the Tribulation when the Messiah/Shepherd will return to defeat His enemies and establish His 1000 year Millennial kingdom on earth (12:1-14:21). Physical deliverance of Jews from Gentile oppression is first prophesied (12:1-9).

Then spiritual deliverance for the Jews is also foretold (12:10 - 13:6). The Jews will repent with weeping and mourning for having rejected their Messiah (12:10). The Holy Spirit will then be poured out on them (12:10). They will be forgiven and cleansed (13:1-6). Because the Shepherd was slain (13:7a) the sheep scattered (13:7b), but eventually they will return to their Shepherd (13:9).

Zechariah, or I guess we should say God, closes with more information about just what will happen when Jesus returns at the end of Armageddon to establish His kingdom (14:1-21). Then everything will be turned to perfection. What a reminder that was to the poor Jews as they struggled to make it day by day. We, too, must keep our minds on God's ultimate victory for us and not focus on the trials and difficulties of today. Today will soon be over.

**SHEPHERDS TODAY** It's comforting, too, to know that Jesus is our Shepherd today as well (Heb 13:20; I Peter 2:25; Rev 7:17; Psalm 23). He is our Shepherd in heaven, but He also provides 'under-shepherds' to watch over us in this life (I Peter 5:1-3). The Bible says that pastors are 'under-shepherds.' Under shepherds were those who took care of some one else's flock. Someone above them was ultimately responsible for the decisions and provision of the sheep. The under shepherd had all the help and assistance he needed, all he had to do was ask for it. He wasn't alone in caring for the sheep.

That is also true of fathers and husbands. Men are to shepherd their family. They must provide, protect, feed and guide them as a shepherd does his sheep. However it is important to remember that our families aren't ours, they are ultimately God's. He will give us the guidance, teaching, help, etc., we need to lead our families. It makes it much easier knowing we have Someone to turn to whenever we need Him. Actually our attitude should be one of caring for someone else's family (God's) and doing just what He wants done. If we do only what He wants for our children and wife we will be far ahead, our families will be better, and we'll have more peace. After all, who could do a better job with your family than God? Think of yourself as their shepherd, but remember you are their under shepherd.

**Be a NEW MAN**

# NEW ASSISTANCE

How can God use my wife?

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

ESTHER; 473 BC; PERSIA



## ESTHER: PROVIDENTIAL CARE

TITLE: After the main character

AUTHOR: Unknown (possibly Mordecai)

DATE of WRITING: About 473 BC

PLACE of WRITING: Shushan, Babylon

TIME COVERED: 10 years (483 - 473 BC)

RECIPIENTS: Jews dispersed in Persian Empire.

KEY VERSE: *4:14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"*

KEY WORD: The Jews (51 times); also Jew and Feast

PURPOSE: To study how all the Jews were saved from extermination by Esther

THEME: God's providential care

One day a Christian man had an orchard of thousands of trees. His whole family depended on it for food. One morning he found half-grown apples being destroyed by strange worms. Every tree was affected. The family gathered and prayed, then spent the whole day picking off worms, but they multiplied far faster than they could be picked. Weary from working all day at top speed and desperate, they prayed and went to sleep. Early the next morning they started to see hundreds of strange birds landing on the trees. They stayed all day eating worms but never hurt the trees or apples. They spent three days there, then left. All the worms were gone and the crop was saved. Coincidence? No way. Our sovereign God was in control of the whole thing. He cares for and provides for His own. Unfortunately we forget about that. When we do, we should read the book of Esther!

**DANGER TO GOD'S PEOPLE** (Esther 1 - 3) A sordid story unfolds (Esther 1) in the first chapter of Esther. The scene is the great Persian city of Shushan. After a series of banquets (really great drunken orgies) King Ahasuerus (Xerxes in secular history) commands his queen, Vashti, to provide the entertainment for the grand finale. Because of her own standards of modesty, she refused and was banished from the kingdom forever. Therefore the king began a world-wide search for a new queen.

A Jew named Mordecai, who had a minor job at the palace, entered his cousin (who he was raising) in the contest and she won! Now it must be noted that the Jews were not to remain in Persia. They should have returned with Ezra or Nehemiah, but didn't want to leave the prosperity and fine living in Persia for the poverty and difficulties of Jerusalem. Thus they were out of God's will. As a result there is no mention of God's name, prayer or sacrifices in the book of Esther. Still, God keeps His promises to protect His people.

After Esther is made queen Mordecai overheard a plot to kill the king, told Esther, and she reported it (Est 3). The plot was stopped and the king saved. That's all part of God's plan.

The plot thickens when Haman, the prime minister and favorite of the king, pushes through legislation to have all the Jews in the kingdom killed. His hatred for Mordecai, who won't bow to him, makes him miserable. That sets the scene for God's deliverance. He uses

Esther to save her race and influence her stepson Artaxerxes to allow Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls.

**DELIVERANCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE** (Esther 4 - 10) When Mordecai hears about the plot to destroy all Jews he is really upset and sends word to Esther, asking her to intercede for her people, even though it may mean her death. To speak out to the king was forbidden, and to reveal that she was a Jew could also mean her death. However she courageously does so, inviting the king and Haman to a banquet she would have just for them (Esther 5).

Meanwhile Haman is miserable because of his hatred of Mordecai. His wife says he will feel better if he builds a large scaffold and anticipates his killing of Mordecai, so he has it built.

One night the king had a hard time sleeping (one of those little things that God uses in a big way). He read from his histories and discovered Mordecai's work in saving his life, and the next day finds out that Mordecai was never rewarded for it. He determines to take care of this.

When prideful, self-centered Haman comes to work the next day the king asks he which he thinks the king should do to honor a man he deeply appreciates. Thinking the king is referring to him, Haman lays out his own prideful dreams of glory and honor, only to find out the king meant it for his enemy Mordecai -- and he had to be the one to honor Mordecai! Talk about a bad day at the office!

Later that day, when Haman showed up for the banquet with Esther and the king, she revealed his legislation to destroy all Jews. The king was furious at how he was tricked and left the room to get control of his anger. Haman fell upon Esther begging her for mercy, and when the king entered he thought Haman was attacking Esther. He had Haman killed immediately on his own gallows! Not only that, but the Jews were allowed to kill those who wanted to destroy them. In addition, Mordecai was elevated to Haman's job as top advisor to the king! Talk about a happy ending!

Even today the Jews celebrate this important deliverance as the Feast of Purim. They give gifts, eat together, and children reenact the events in the book of Esther (similar to the way we celebrate Christmas). Truly this is a wonderful reminder of God's sovereignty and His providential care of His people, even those who are out of His will. What a great God we have!

**GOD USES WIVES TODAY** Of special interest to men is the fact that God used a woman (actually two) to help Ahasuerus. First, when he was getting away from what was right his wife, Queen Vashti, took a stand letting him know that what he was doing was not right. Then Esther showed him his wrong in signing the decree against the Jews. The first time he was wrong because of his lust and pride, the second was because of ignorance. God still uses wives in these areas, as well as others, to help show men where they have gone wrong and what to do to follow God. While it is true the man is the leader because women can be misled when in leadership (I Timothy 2:11-15), there are other times when a woman's perception, sensitivity and intuition can help a man. That's why we need each other to be one. Worse off is the man who doesn't appreciate the helpful advice his wife can give and know when and how to use it. It's an invaluable resource from God that every man must tap into!

# **Be a NEW MAN**

## **NEW POWER**

**How can I know when God's hand is on my life?**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

**EZRA 7:1 - 8:36; 458 BC; PERSIA to JERUSALEM**



Where would we be without God's working in our lives? Suppose, men, God had never in any way intervened in your life, from birth to now. If God had totally let you go your own way and let things just happen, what would you be like now? What would your life be like, if you were even still alive? Thank God He has His hand on us from birth on. Often, though we don't recognize this and therefore don't thank Him for it. We live as if it is all up to us to make a go of it in life, raise our children, meet our wife's needs, and hold down a job. Carrying all these responsibilities in our own strength can cause stress, burnout and defeat. It doesn't have to be that way. Ezra shows us a better way.

**BACKGROUND** It's been 79 years since Zerubbabel led 50,000 Jews back to Jerusalem from Persia (Babylon). They tried to rebuild the altar and temple, but faced much opposition and discouragement. Haggai and Zechariah preached, encouraging the people to trust and obey God. There were periods of faith and moving ahead, but most of the time was spent in defeat and discouragement. Now God is going to again move the heart of the king (Artaxerxes) and a Jewish leader (Ezra) so that a second group can return.

**"THE HAND OF THE LORD MY GOD WAS ON ME"** Eight times in Ezra 7-8 and Nehemiah 2 this phrase is used (see Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). Ezra clearly recognized that anything he accomplished was by God's grace and help. He knew he was just God's instrument, His 'under shepherd' as it were. Thus he didn't see this work as being His work to do on his own. He didn't even see it as something he had to do with God's help. He saw it as God's doing with him just being God's chosen vessel, the channel God used to accomplish His work. What a better way to look at things!

**EZRA THE MAN** Ezra was well educated in the Old Testament Scriptures (Ezra 7:6, 10). As a scribe he was also a teacher, the same position as 'Rabbi' in the New Testament. Jewish tradition says that Ezra knew the whole Old Testament by heart: all the consonants that were written as well as every vowel and punctuation mark that was passed on only by memory. He is credited with writing I and II Chronicles as well as Ezra and is recognized as the one who gathered the various books of the Old Testament and form them into our canon today. He edited them, added endings (such as to Joshua, etc.), and compiled them into the form we have today. He is also the acknowledged inventor of the synagogue. The synagogue kept the Jews together when out of the land, and still does so today. Our church was built on the plan and function of the synagogue. Thus Ezra was quite a man. Still, he wasn't able to accomplish anything without God's hand being upon him, as he so often repeats.

What God accomplished through him was gathering 5,000 Jews and taking them back to Jerusalem. That meant their being willing to go, the king being willing to let them go, the resources to make the trip being available, and the trip safely made. Ezra recognized this was well beyond his human ability and could only be done in God's power and strength.

**OBSTACLES FACED** Note that just because God's hand was on him didn't mean that everything would go smoothly and simply. That wasn't the case. God did work in the king's heart to allow them to go (7:27-28) and send a letter with his authority to protect them (7:11-26). However not many Jews wanted to leave the good life in Persia to return to their homeland where life was much harder and less prosperous. Only 5,000 of the hundreds of thousands in Persia were willing to return (8:1-14). Worse yet, NO Levites were willing to go. They were necessary for the function of temple worship, so 258 of them had to be compelled to go (8:15-20). This must have been disheartening for Ezra.

Another difficult issue was whether to ask for a military escort or not (8:22-23). Ezra had made it clear their God was with them and protecting them, so he thought asking for soldiers would be a poor testimony (although under the same circumstances Nehemiah did have a military escort). To make things worse, they were taking, among other things, 40 tons of silver and almost 4 tons of gold (7:22; 8:26). There is a fine line between trust and practicality on one hand and lack of faith on the other. We trust God but lock our doors and wear seat belts. There is no one, simple answer to this tension. We each must seek God in prayer as Ezra did.

To carry that much silver and gold safely, Ezra divided it among various men who were making the trip back (8:24-30). He made an exact record of who had how much. When they got to Jerusalem all of it was turned over and counted (8:33-34). This not only held them accountable so they wouldn't be tempted to take any of it, it kept their name clean in case any suspected them of keeping some for themselves. Just because God is sovereignly working doesn't mean we aren't to use common sense and practical matters. Trusting God is one thing, presuming is another. We are not to put God to the test by our carelessness.

**SAFE TRIP** Ezra and his small group left April 8, 458 BC and arrived in Jerusalem on August 4, 458 BC. In 4 months they covered 900 miles. Going is slow with animals, elderly, children and all the supplies they had with them. They were thankful to God for their safe arrival and worshipped Him for His provision (8:35-36).

**LESSONS FOR MEN TODAY** It's important for men today, too, to realize that all we accomplish is because of God's hand on us. It's not for us to do in our own strength. We are just His tools. We don't have to ask Him for help with our job, we do have to have an attitude that it is all His job and He'll show and guide us in the parts He wants us to do.

The text does say that Ezra "devoted" himself to knowing, obeying and teaching God's Word (7:10). That is the one thing we see about Ezra that gives us a clue to his spiritual success. He was devoted to God's word, committed to knowing and obeying it. He wanted to know and do God's will in all areas of his life. When we have that kind of attitude then God will make sure we know His will and have His power.

Men, whatever God has for you to do, remember that 'His hand is upon you.' He is in sovereign control over everything in your life. Even the negative consequences we suffer are under His control. Sometimes His hand is upon us to discipline us to make us more like Jesus. Even then, though, it is a hand of love.

Picture in your mind the very Hand of God being on you in a real, physical way. It's comforting to think of, isn't it? It assures us we won't go wrong. It means we'll never be alone. It proves we are loved and important to Him. What more could we ask for than to have the Hand of God Almighty on our lives!



# **Be a *NEW MAN***

## **NEW MARRIAGE**

**How can I make my marriage more like what it should be?**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

**EZRA 9:1 - 10:44; AUG. - DEC. 458 BC; JERUSALEM**

**BACKGROUND** It has been 80 years (538 BC to 458 BC) since Ezra led his group of people back to Jerusalem from Babylon. Thus the grandchildren of the ones who returned are now in the forefront. The people have again drifted into sin, and the leaders bring the problem to Ezra.

**THEIR SIN THEN** In general, the sin of the people was in being like the world around them (Ezra 9:1-2). The majority were open to or involved in accepting the practices of their pagan neighbors. This especially was true in the area of marriage (v. 2). They were no longer keeping the Law of Moses, as God had given it, but were conforming to the sinful patterns of those around them. Worst of all, they didn't see this as wrong. This bothered some of the leaders who came to Ezra about the problem.

Specifically, the problem was that Jewish men were marrying non-Jewish women (v. 2). At first this may not seem so terrible, but remember that God explicitly forbid it (Exodus 34:11-16; Deut 7:1-4). This is repeated in the New Testament by Paul - we are not to be unequally yoked in marriage (II Corinthians 6:14). If the things of God are important to us they will form our values and priorities, our motives and our view of everything. If our mate doesn't share those exact same values, to the degree we do, we won't be able to pull together correctly in marriage. We will settle to the level of the lowest common denominator – the one with less Godly values. This is what the Jews were doing in Ezra's time.

They could have justified it: not enough Jewish women, good business practice to unite with neighboring businessmen, being deeply in love, etc. the more who did it the easier it became for others to do. Sensitivity was dulled and God's principles abandoned. Sin is still sin.

**OUR SIN NOW** We live in a time when god's marriage laws and principles are being broken left and right as well. Sex before marriage, even living together before marriage, has become an accepted norm. Same-sex relationships flourish. Believers date, get involved with and then marry mates who don't share their spiritual values. Divorce is seen as a viable option if any difficulties arise in a marriage. Even among those who stay together, God's ways are often neglected for the ways of the world. Men don't take the leadership roles in their families. They are more apt to let their wife lead by default and then follow whichever way the family is drifting. Often it is the children who take the lead in the families downward spiral to more and more sensual and material pursuits. Parents, especially men, hesitate to take a strong spiritual lead in their children's lives and instead let them 'enjoy' all the 'pleasure' the world provides. The values and priorities of Christian families is often not much different than those of the world. For example, the divorce rate among Christians is higher than among those who don't claim to be Christians! It's easy to see how a Godly minority can drift into the ways of the world around them, isn't it? Still, that doesn't make it right. But what are we to do?

**EZRA'S REACTION** What Ezra did was react in anguish. He tore his clothes, pulled hair from his head and beard, and sat down appalled (Ezra 9:4). After several hours he fell on his knees and confessed their sin to God (v. 5). Why was He making such a big deal about something so

little? Because it wasn't little. It only seemed little. It was the reason the nation went into captivity in the first place! Didn't this generation learn from previous generations?

Ezra prayed, identifying himself with God's people (like Daniel had done, 19:5-6, 8-11, 13, 15-16). The nation stood or fell together. Even though it wasn't his sin, he shared their sin and guilt as one of their people. He was responsible for allowing it, and he would suffer the consequences along with the rest. He prayed asking God for mercy (Ezra 9:6-15). He said the land was 'polluted by the corruption of its peoples, made impure by their detestable practices' (v. 11). He didn't pass blame, make excuses or justify the sin. He confessed it.

**STEP 1 - CONFESS SIN** That is the first thing we must do when we see our sin in any area, including marriage and family. Don't pass blame, make excuses or justify the sin. Just confess it! See it as sin against God Almighty. Humble yourself and repent. Throw yourself on God's mercy. This step **MUST** be taken. Follow Ezra's example. In fact, pray the prayer he prayed in Ezra 9. Change it to apply it to your own situation.

**EZRA'S ACTION** However, Ezra didn't just confess their sins. He did something about it. When sin has been confessed it must also be turned from. It's not enough to confess our family failures and sins, we must then, by God's power, turn from them to a more godly way of living.

**STEP 2 - TURN FROM SIN** Ezra didn't force others, he set an example (Ezra 10:1), which others picked up (v. 2). The male leaders came to Ezra recognizing their sin and suggesting they make things right with God (v. 3). This meant sending their unbelieving wives and their children back to their pagan neighbors. This must have been very hard – but then consequences of disobedience always are. As in other sin, the innocent suffer – the wives who were marrying for life in good faith, and especially the children who were born to them.

We can't force others in our family to change, but we can change ourselves. We can take a humble servant attitude to things and set an example for others. Let them notice and be convicted by God, then change. Change can't be legislated, not real lasting change. It must come from within. This is especially important for men, for we are the leaders in our families, too.

Our wives and children often are the ones who suffer from our sins, so the sooner we confess them and make them right the better. Often correcting the sin hurts, too – pulling children out of worldly activities, stating what we feel is right when our wife doesn't agree, etc.

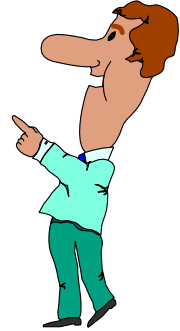
In order to get everyone to obey, they issued a proclamation that had severe consequences for disobedience (Ezra 10:7-8). The majority responded well, but a few didn't (v. 15). Not everyone will go along quickly and easily when you want to have your family start serving God.

The leaders didn't act rashly but made sure the women weren't converts to Judaism and God. They didn't want to judge hastily and be wrong. They were patient but thorough (v. 16-17) as we must be with our children and families.

They ascertained exactly where the sin lie and worked to correct it (v. 18-44). It was hard, but it had to be done. Then growth and prosperity could come.

God wants to bless our families, too, but first we must make sure we put aside all sin. Do it now.

**Be a NEW MAN**



# NEW LEADERSHIP

What does God look for in a man He can use to lead others?

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

NEHEMIAH 1:1-11; NOV-DEC 446 BC; SUSA (Persian Winter Palace)

**BACKGROUND** Since the Jews have gone into captivity in Babylon, Zerubbabel has led one small group back and Ezra another. The Jews back in Palestine have been struggling financially and spiritually. Now God is about to bring a third group back to the land in order to get things there ready for the coming of the Messiah.

**NEHEMIAH TAKES THE SPOTLIGHT** Things went well for the Jews for awhile after their turning from the sin of intermarriage. However the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem had been stopped by Artaxerxes almost 100 years before when the Samaritans complained (Ezra 4:12). This not only left them defenseless but was a bad testimony to their gods (Neh 1:3). The worth of a god was determined by how well he protected and provided for his people. If he couldn't even keep a wall around them he was seen as a very poor god! Thus the God of Israel was mocked and ridiculed because the walls and gates were broken down for so long. This bothered Nehemiah. Even though he wasn't responsible for the problem, it bothered him for the sake of his brethren in Jerusalem as well as for the sake of God. This shows us the first trait of a competent leader as seen in Nehemiah.

**MARK 1. A CLEAR RECOGNITION OF THE NEEDS** Nehemiah didn't live in a dream world but in reality. He saw the problem for what it was, not magnifying it nor depreciating it. It's easy for men today to blind themselves to the problems in their marriage, family or personal life and just go on as if they don't exist. If the problem isn't recognized it will never be solved.

Some go to the opposite extreme and are always and only looking for problems, seeing every thing as major. These perfectionists can't enjoy the good in their lives and family. They do more harm than good by magnifying every little thing.

Men, are you aware of the needs in your life, your marriage and your family? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 in each area, one being the extreme of ignoring problems or of magnifying them and ten being a balance awareness of the problems.

**MARK 2. A PERSONAL CONCERN WITH THE NEED** After identifying himself with the problem, Nehemiah felt the problem inside. He took it upon himself as being his problem as well as theirs. A common response today would be: "Whose fault is this?" "Who messed up?" "Who's to blame for this?" It certainly wasn't Nehemiah's fault. Why hadn't anyone reapplied for approval to rebuild? Why were they still afraid of their neighbors?

Nehemiah didn't blame. He had compassion. The first step is KNOWING the problem. The second step is doing something about it because you are personally concerned.

Men, that 'problem' you see as so big in your wife – what are YOU doing to help it? Have you ever honestly considered what you are doing to make it worse instead of better? Are you letting someone else, like your wife, take responsibility for problems in your marriage or family which you, as the man, are responsible for? Do you inside think that you wouldn't be having the difficulties you face with your children if she were somehow a different kind of mother to them? What are you doing to help her be a better person and mother? How would you want her to treat you if things were reversed? How does Jesus treat you in your areas of weakness and need? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 on how personally concerned you are with the problems you see in the lives of others around you.

**MARK 3. TAKING THINGS TO GOD IN PRAYER BEFORE ACTING** Men are great for coming up with instant solutions to every problem, and then wanting to get right to action solving

those problems. Sometimes we will send up a short prayer on the way, asking God to bless what we are doing, or even to help us do it. Instead we should do like Nehemiah did – seek God's wisdom and guidance first of all (Nehemiah 1:5-11). Nehemiah didn't come with a solution He wanted to 'sell' to God, he came with an open, neutral heart awaiting God's will. In other words, he prayed the solution, not the problem. Remember that Nehemiah worked closely with the most powerful man on earth, but God didn't go to him. He went to One even greater – God Himself. Men, rank yourself on how consistent you are in coming to God for guidance and wisdom, not just for help with your own plan. On a scale of 1 to 10, where do you stand?

Note that Nehemiah starts off praising God (v. 5). He didn't complain, blame, criticize, whimper or whine. He praised God for God's greatness, especially for His loyal love. We must get our eyes off ourselves and onto God in order for anything in life to work as we want it to.

Next he confessed their sin, acknowledging his responsibility as part of the people (v. 6-7). We, too, are accountable for the sins of America for we are part of it.

Then he claimed God's promises, given to Moses (8-10). He acknowledges that God faithfully kept His promise to scatter the Jews if they disobeyed. Now He wants God to keep the other part of that promise, to restore them if they repent and turn back to Him. He knows they, at least a solid minority of them, have done so.

Finally he asks God (petition) for something (11) – to answer their prayers for Jerusalem and to 'give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.'

**MARK 4. BE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE NEED YOURSELF** As Nehemiah thought and prayed, it became obvious God has something for him to do with the answer to his own prayer (11). He didn't just pray for God to send somebody else to do it, but was available to be used by God for that very purpose. When God gives us a burden to pray about something, sometimes that is a prelude to asking us to do something about it. Jesus told His disciples to pray for the fields which were white to harvest (Matthew 9:38). Soon they are the ones being called to go to those fields. Men, are you available to be used by God to meet those problem situations in your wife and family? Maybe God wants YOU to be the one to help your wife through a hard time or to take on the challenge of a difficult child. Rate yourself 1 to 10 on your availability to be used by God to answer your own prayers.

Before you say you are unable to meet those problems that arise in your life, remember that Nehemiah was 800 miles away from Jerusalem. That was a 4 month trip – quite a commute! He had a top job in the administration, being the 'right hand man' to the king (11). It seemed there was nothing he could do – but God used him when he became available.

What about you? Are you asking God to help you recognize the needs of those in your family? Are you personally concerned with having those needs met? Do you go to God first with the problem, praying the problem and not your solution? Are you available to meet that need yourself should God so choose? Find which one of these marks is your weakness and write down several things you can do to improve your leadership competency. Learn from Nehemiah. You will benefit, your family will benefit, and the kingdom of God will benefit.

**Be a NEW MAN**



# NEW OPPOSITION

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

**What tools will Satan use against me when I try to lead for God?**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

**NEHEMIAH 2:1-10; MAR 445 BC; SUSA to JERUSALEM**

**BACKGROUND** Zerubbabel, the cup bearer to king Xerxes, prayed about the terrible situation of the Jews in Jerusalem with the walls still unbuilt. He awaited God's timing and leading in what to do about the problem. For four months he prayed and God seemed silent. Nothing happened. Then God started things working.

**TOOLS TO DISCOURAGE LEADERS** One of Satan's most successful tools to discourage men is **impatience**. It's hard to be patient. That doesn't come naturally to anyone. Men especially are geared to action, to doing something, to solving problems by positive action. We need to learn patience, awaiting God's timing to act. In the military men must learn to follow orders before they are given the authority to give orders. The same is true for Jesus' soldiers.

Nehemiah was patient. He prayed, using the time to prepare by gathering information and making plans, but he awaited God's timing. He was patient. He didn't rush ahead on his own, nor did he lose his burden and concern to have the problem of Jerusalem taken care of.

A second tool against men when they can't solve a problem is **discouragement**. Nehemiah must have been discouraged that for 150 years nothing was done to build Jerusalem. It was thousands of miles away and seemed impossible for him to be able to do anything. He couldn't leave the king's employment. It would have been easy to get discouraged.

The only solution was to mention the problem to the king, Xerxes, but this was dangerous. **Fear** is the third problem men need to watch out for. Xerxes is the one who had ordered the newly-started work on the walls to stop because he distrusted the Jews' motives in wanting to rebuild. Also, anyone not in a happy mood around the king could be severely disciplined or killed at the king's whim. Truly Nehemiah was in a difficult position.

We men today find ourselves in such situations. We can get caught between our boss and our wife. We can face financial problems that don't seem to go away. There can be relationship problems with our wife or between our children that we just can't seem to heal. It's easy to get impatient, discouraged and fearful in leading our families for God. When was the last time you gave in to your wife or a child to avoid their response if you said what you really felt? That's fear. When was the last time you got frustrated and took things into your own hands without patiently praying and waiting on God? That's impatience. What have you given up on being changed but instead just try to 'live with it'? That's discouragement. Instead patiently persevere and God will work in His way at His time.

**GOD OPENS A DOOR** Then God provided an opening. Xerxes noticed that Nehemiah was looking sad and asked him what was the problem (Neh. 2:1-2). Nehemiah used this opening to bring up the subject about the troubles in Jerusalem (v. 3). The walls and gates are still broken down, and everyone then knew that implied that the city's god was unable to protect and defend it. He was defeated and humiliated, and thus His people were seen as 'losers.'

Xerxes then asked Nehemiah what he wanted to do about the problem (v. 4). Nehemiah immediately prayed to himself (v. 4) and laid out before Xerxes a plan he had developed in his mind while he was patiently praying and waiting (v. 5). After asking for some more detailed information (v. 6) which Nehemiah had at his fingertips, the king gave him permission to go to Jerusalem and start rebuilding walls. Note that Nehemiah had used the time while waiting to

research the problem and develop a detailed plan for the solution (v. 7-8). He didn't just 'shoot from the hip.'

It's a good thing he had planned ahead, too, because when he finally got to Jerusalem several months later (v. 9), Gentile neighbors opposed to his work. Without the king's signature and orders, work certainly would have been stopped again. God is behind it this time, though, and it will succeed. It all hinged on Nehemiah's prayerful patience and planning.

**PRINCIPLES ON PREPARATION** There are lessons here to be learned about preparing to face opposition. Defeating Satan's tools of impatience, discouragement and fear are only the beginning. Replacing them with positive action is the next part of the solution.

**1. Changing a heart is God's specialty.** Nehemiah left that up to God. He didn't manipulate, force, play games, scheme, trick, deceive, etc. That is never right. The end never justifies the means. We need to pray for God to change the heart of our boss, child or wife when they are clearly wrong and stubbornly opposing God. Only God can change a heart.

**2. Praying and waiting go hand in hand.** It goes against human nature, especially male nature, to patiently wait for God's action and/or direction. Still, we must persevere in prayer and not just give up. Nehemiah never lost his burden to help Jerusalem, even after four months of praying with no outward results.

**3. Faith is not a synonym for disorder or a substitute for careful planning.** People of faith need orderly minds. Planning ahead is proper and godly. In the American Revolution the soldiers had a saying, "Trust in God, but keep your powder dry." God is organized and orderly, and He wants us to be that way, too. He doesn't want us to be lazy. We can't just sit around always waiting for God to come do everything.

**4. Opposition is to be expected when God's will is carried out.** It's rare to follow God without any opposition. Nehemiah wasn't surprised. He didn't panic. It's like he knew it would come and was prepared to persevere anyway. That's what our attitudes should be to it, too. When you walk by faith you WILL run into people who walk by sight! It may be a friend, relative, fellow employee, boss, or even sometimes a wife or child. Opposition doesn't mean you are going the wrong way, it often means you are going the RIGHT way.

Thus from Nehemiah we men can learn some practical lessons about what to do when faced with problems that can't be solved and removed quickly. God wants to make us like Jesus, so we must learn to respond as He would: with patience and faith. Think of a situation in your life that applies to this. Which tools is Satan using against you: impatience? Discouragement? Fear? Which principle on preparation is God trying to teach you: to trust Him to change someone's heart? To persevere in prayer? To plan while waiting? To not be defeated or surprised by opposition when you do carry out God's plan? Remember Nehemiah. When God's hand is upon us (v. 8) He will carry us through.

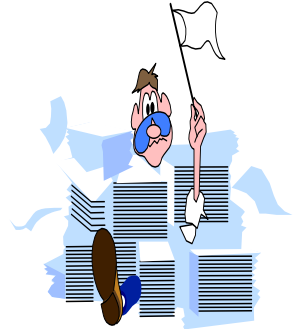
**Be a NEW MAN**

**NEW WORK LOAD**

**What can I do when I'm stressed from an impossible work load?**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

## NEHEMIAH 2:11 - 3:32; AUG 445 BC; JERUSALEM



**BACKGROUND** Nehemiah has arrived in Jerusalem to help them rebuild the walls, which have been in disrepair for 150 years. A city without strong walls or gates was seen as a city with a weak god. Thus others looked on the God of Jerusalem as unable to care for His people. This really bothered Nehemiah and he wanted to do whatever he could to remedy the situation.

**A GODLY START** What do you do when faced with an impossible work load, more than seems humanly possible to get done? Usually we rush about in a panic, pushing and forcing, trying to get it all done as quickly as possible. Or else we get discouraged and don't attempt to solve the problem but just live with it. Nehemiah did neither when he arrived in Jerusalem.

It's been a full year since he first was burdened to help the Jews in Jerusalem rebuild their walls. For 4 months he prayed, then the king allowed him to come back to work on the problem. The planning, packing and trip back took another 8 months.

He must have been very impatient to finally get started, but the first thing he did when he got there was take 3 days off (Nehemiah 2:11)! That seems strange to us, but I think there was a very good reason for that. He didn't just fly off in any direction. He rested so he would be able to make the best judgments possible. He acclimated himself to the place and people. He got to know the situation first hand as well as develop relationships with the people he would be working with. While no immediate results are seen from this kind of 'work,' it is essential for the long range success of a project. Too often we get off to a quick start but without the proper foundation or direction. Then all our super energy fails and we have to start over. We can easily do more harm than good in the long run. Nehemiah didn't make these mistakes. He gathers information and paces himself. He doesn't rush. He isn't in a hurry. God never is.

**FACT FINDING** A decision is only as good as the information it is based upon. Until all the facts are known we shouldn't be coming to conclusions. Nehemiah knew this. Set out at night with a few trusted men to survey first-hand the situation of the walls (v. 12-16). He didn't give orders and force others to obey, even though as the king's representative he could have done so. He knew that isn't the best way to motivate people to action. He didn't let the officials know his plans or reasons until he had them formulated and ready to go. He was patient and thorough in his planning. He anticipated rejection and opposition of his plans, so moved carefully. He didn't bully his way through.

Nehemiah went at night for privacy, so he wouldn't have a lot of questions and speculation to answer. He could focus on the problem that way. He knew the key to handling an impossible work load is to work smarter, not harder. He was a man who acted, not reacted.

Notice, too, that he didn't go completely alone. He took some top-quality spiritually mature men with him, ones hand-picked by him. These were men who could give additional information and point out things he may have missed. Various perspectives of a problem are better than just one. Others see things we may miss. Also it was helpful for him to have some support, encouragement, and someone to bounce his ideas and thoughts off of. Too often as men we make major decisions about our careers, finances, homes, families, children and futures without consulting other godly men. We miss much godly help that way. Every man needs some other godly men to stand with him, like Aaron and Hur upheld Moses' hands in his time of warfare prayer when they fought Amalek (Exodus 17).

**GOING PUBLIC** After thinking and praying, asking God for wisdom and listening to His guidance and direction, Nehemiah took his plan to the leaders in Jerusalem (v. 17a). While he had authority, he knew it worked much better to have those with influence over the people committed to following him. He knew it works much better to motivate people from within than

without. Bribes, fear of punishment, threats, etc., appeal to our selfishness and motivate from without, but when inside we see a reason for something the motivation is much greater. Motivating a child to do school work because they need to know these things for their future than to use threats of punishment to force them to go through the motions.

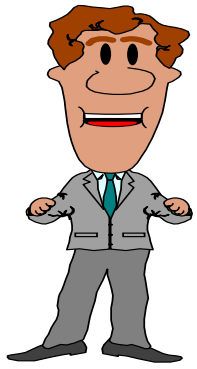
Nehemiah didn't scold, use guilt or blame them for their failure to rebuild the walls. He identified himself with them ("we," "us" v. 17). He didn't just stop with the problem but presented his solution, thus giving them hope and a vision. He encouraged them by showing how God was behind them (v. 18). They picked up his vision and agreed to the plan (v. 19).

**FACING OPPOSITION** No major work project gets pulled off without opposition, and Nehemiah had his share. Neighboring Gentiles opposed (v. 19) and mocked them. Since they had intermarried and had major business investments in Jerusalem, they had a lot of influence (Nehemiah 6:17-19) but Nehemiah stood firm (Nehemiah 2:20) and persevered.

Other opposition came from some of the nobles among the Jews who felt they were too good to work (Nehemiah 3:5). There will always be those within who won't cooperate. Nehemiah ignored them and went ahead with the work any way.

**DIVISION OF THE WORK LOAD** A central part of Nehemiah's plan was to have the work divided so each section of wall had a group of people assigned to it (Nehemiah 3:2-32). On top of that, he assigned everyone to work on the section of wall closest to their home (v. 23). This showed great wisdom. They wouldn't have so far to travel to work and back, they would take pride in their work for they would see it all the time, their family would see them working or loafing, and if attacked by their enemies the men wouldn't flee for their own homes but would stand where they were to protect their own homes and families. Breaking down work into manageable sections and spreading out the work load is important. Having helpers take pride in their work and being motivated by the importance of it instead of greed or fear are also key principles in getting a big job done. Can you imagine how having their names recorded in the Bible with the section of wall they rebuilt was a positive motivation to them?

Nehemiah never used failure, guilt or power to force his way. He patiently trusted God, awaited God's timing, gathered his facts, bounced his ideas off a few trusted advisors, and then implemented them. He did his best to sell the reason for what he was doing, not just force outer obedience. All these principles apply to us as husbands and fathers today. They aren't always easy to follow, and sometimes we must just pull rank and force an issue. Still, from Nehemiah we can glean some important lessons about how to face an impossible work load and accomplish what needs to be done.



# **Be a *NEW MAN***

## **NEW ENCOURAGEMENT**

**How can I overcome discouragement?**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

**NEHEMIAH 4:1-23; AUG-SEPT 445 BC; JERUSALEM**

**BACKGROUND** Nehemiah has arrived in Jerusalem to help them rebuild the walls, which have been in disrepair for 150 years. He rested, gathered information, and surveyed the walls in private (at night). Then he told his plan to those who shared his vision, and they helped spread the word to the people. The work on the walls had begun.

**OPPOSITION TO REBUILDING** God's work seldom goes forward without opposition. There are always some who will resist and oppose change and progress. This doesn't surprise us, but the fact that God doesn't immediately and completely remove all opposition often does surprise us. Nehemiah did everything right: prayer, organization, listening to and obeying God, etc. However that doesn't guarantee that everything will flow smoothly. Actually the opposition is part of God's plan and will. Nehemiah needs it, and so do the people, as part of their own spiritual growth and maturity.

**OUTSIDE CRITICISM** First, Sanballat and Tobiah mocked the Jews for trying to rebuild their walls (Nehemiah 4:1-3). They were leaders of neighboring tribes who didn't want to see Jerusalem strengthened and rebuilt.

**RESPONSE OF PRAYER** Nehemiah doesn't answer the criticisms or try to criticize back. Instead he takes it all to God, asking God to deal with them (v. 4-5). He knew he was following God's directions and therefore their opposition was really to God, not him. He knew he shouldn't take it personally. There's an important lesson in that for us, too.

**REASONS FOR DISCOURAGEMENT** In his prayer Nehemiah said that "the strength of the laborers is giving out" (v. 10). There were several reasons they were discouraged. **1) Loss of strength** (10a) They were worn out but not near done. Elijah was discouraged when he was physically drained after the victory at Mt Carmel. **2) Loss of vision** (10b) They were becoming discouraged because of the enormity of the task still before them (v. 10b). They weren't looking at the final product but at the work load. They needed to take it one day at a time, one shovel full at a time. They saw it as an insurmountable task. **3) Loss of confidence** (10b) They were at a dangerous place: halfway done. The initial exhilaration had worn off. The motivation of seeing a job almost at its end hadn't set in. The middle of a project is a hard, discouraging place to be. **4) Loss of security** (11) They became afraid that their neighbors would come and kill them. They were fearful of the opposition and threats made against them.

**DEALING WITH DISCOURAGEMENT** You can't ignore discouragement. It doesn't just go away, it gets worse. It's like driving with a flat tire. Ignoring it won't fix it! It must be dealt with head on. What did Nehemiah do to counter the discouragement the people were feeling?

**1. UNIFY YOUR EFFORTS TOWARD A GOAL** (13) Nehemiah took some time off from the work to reorganize, 'retool.' He reorganized the people and the work so that they could protect themselves from any possible enemy attack while working. Positive action was taken. He even armed the women and children. This would look like a larger army to their enemies, and would certainly keep the men from running if an attack came.

**2. DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO THE LORD** (14) In addition, he challenged them to replace their fear with faith in God. They needed to look at the Lord, not the rubbish that needed to be removed nor the enemies who were threatening to attack. God alone is the One to be feared (Deut. 3:22; 20:3; 31:6). Claim God's promises, focus on the greatness of God, not the problem.

**3. MAINTAIN A BALANCE IN THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS** (14) Nehemiah told them to trust the Lord completely, but also armed them to fight off any attack. Faith and works. Each must be done 100%, as if they are the only one. Trust God completely. Do your best to do all you can. And do both of these at once. Our battles are spiritual. We must trust God to give us victory, but we must skillfully fight, using all the weapons at our command.

**4. MAKE SURE YOU AREN'T IN IT ALONE** (20) Nehemiah also planned so that if one part of the wall was attacked, a trumpet would sound and people were to rally there to help with the fight. That helped the people know they weren't in it alone. If they needed help, it would be available. We, too, need to have others we can call on when discouraged. We need those who will rally around us to help us through those times.

**5. DEVELOP A "SERVING OTHERS" MINISTRY** (21-22) Nehemiah wanted everyone to stay in Jerusalem at night, inside the walls where it was safe. This meant sacrifice for all. For those from without Jerusalem it meant giving up their own homes to help their brothers in the city. For those in the city it meant sharing their housing and food with others. When we serve each others we get our eyes off of ourselves and onto others with needs. This is why Jesus so challenged His disciples to wash each other's feet.

Let's learn these lessons from Nehemiah. When opposition increases, don't get discouraged. Instead, push ahead even harder. When you face difficulties it just shows you are moving in the right direction. Any dead fish can float with the current, it takes a live fish to swim upstream against the current.

By the way, tradition says that Nehemiah himself was the hardest, most sacrificial worker of them all. He didn't expect others to do anything he wasn't willing or able to do. He set the example for them. We must do the same. We men can't sit back and expect our wives or friends to do it all. We must take the forefront in fighting discouragement in our lives and in the lives of those in our families. We must take the lead and move ahead against the enemy. We must be like Nehemiah: reorganizing, encouraging, strengthening both faith and works, using our weapons of spiritual warfare, and setting an example by being in the forefront. As men that is our responsibility. We are the men. We are to lead in the battle.

# **Be a NEW MAN**



## **NEW PROBLEMS**

**How should I respond when attacked from within?**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

**NEHEMIAH 5:1-19; SEPT 445 BC; JERUSALEM**

**BACKGROUND** Work on the walls has begun. Criticism and threats from those living near Jerusalem have been handled by trusting God for help while arming themselves as they worked. Now that outside opposition has been resisted, Satan moves to his second trick – inside opposition. That can be worse in a nation, business, church or family.

**PROBLEMS FROM WITHIN** It seems there was a famine (Nehemiah 5:3) and therefore **food was in short supply**. This bothered the women (v. 1) as well as the men. They made their concern for their families heard. As the saying goes, “If Mamma ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy!” Working on the walls kept them from working on what crops they had.

In order to get money to buy food, others were **mortgaging everything they had** to get money to buy food (v. 3). It wasn’t easy to get money for food, because most coined money went to the king’s tax (v. 4-5). Thus inflation was high (about 50%). **Money was borrowed at a very high interest rate**.

What could a person do when all money and resources were gone? What did one have to exchange for food for his family? Just his children. Some Jews were forced to **sell a child into slavery** in order to have food to keep the other children alive (v. 5b). That was very difficult but sometimes the only way to save the lives of other children.

This really bothered the people, though. Naturally, morale was really low and this distracted the people from continuing to build the walls.

**NEHEMIAH’S RESPONSE** When Nehemiah found out about what was happening he was very upset. In fact, he was **very angry** (v. 6). There are times that we, as fathers and husbands, need to get angry at the sin around us, even the sin within our families. “Be angry but sin not,” Paul says. When someone gets hurt, when something unfair happens, etc., we as the leaders should be angry at it as Nehemiah was.

However when we get angry we lash out. Nehemiah didn’t do that. Instead he “pondered” what to do. Literally ‘ponder’ means ‘to give ones self advice, to counsel oneself.’ He listened to God, let God speak peace and wisdom to his mind – not so he wouldn’t do something, but so he wouldn’t do the wrong thing. He wanted to do the right, positive thing, not just lash back and take revenge on those whom have hurt us.

Then he channeled his anger into a positive action to set things right. He **confronted the situation head on**. “You are exacting usury from your own country men!” (v. 7). Nehemiah knew that this was against God’s Word (Ex 22:25; Lev 25:35-38; Dt 23:19-20; 15:7-8). He knew what God expected in the situation and applied God’s Word to it. This is what we as men must do when problems arise within our families. Look at the situation in light of what God’s Word says and then confront the sin head on. It may be a rebellious teen, a child being cruel to siblings, a mate who does or says unloving things, or some worldly practices or attitudes that have slipped in, Whatever it is, it must be confronted.

Nehemiah then **took positive action**. He called a meeting of everyone to deal with the problem (v. 7). He told them what was wrong in what they were doing. He had been buying Jews back from slavery, but here they were selling others into slavery (v. 8). They were willingly disobeying God.

Not only was what they were doing wrong for them, it was a **bad testimony for those watching them** (v. 9). As fathers and husbands we are responsible for our families testimony to those around us. Showing Jesus by our lives is the best way to attract others to Him.

Then Nehemiah gave a **specific plan to correct the situation** (10-11). He told the rich Jews, who were taking advantage of the others, to immediately give back the possessions and interest they had received. The response of the people was immediate and positive. "We will give it back!" (v. 12a) they all agreed. It was the right thing to say, but Nehemiah knew it took more than a few words to right the situation.

Because of this Nehemiah led them in **taking an oath** (12b). They needed to do more than say they'd do differently. They needed to make the commitment to God, for the sin was against God. They needed to be accountable to God. They needed God's help to keep what they promised. Nehemiah showed them the importance of keeping their promise by acting out what would happen if they didn't – they would be rejected (v. 13).

**NEHEMIAH'S EXAMPLE** Then Nehemiah seems to do something unexpected. He tells about what he has been doing to help (v. 14-19). He hasn't been taking his allotted government food. This is to save the locals taxes to buy such food for him. In fact, he was serving 3 meals a day to about 200 people, all at his own expense!

He didn't tax the people as was his right as governor. He could have speculated in land, confiscating or buying prime property for low prices in order to resell them for a large profit. He could have done any number of things to become rich from the circumstances, but he didn't. He set an example of servanthood.

**MEN AS SERVANT LEADERS TODAY** We as husbands and fathers today must take our example from Nehemiah. We must serve, not be served. Instead of thinking about ourselves, we must realize that we are to serve our family. We start this by example. It doesn't matter what is fair, who is right or what our need our. We are to follow Nehemiah's example. Even more we are to follow Jesus' example. We are to be servants.

What a privilege to be a servant to our wife or to our children. In doing so we show them Jesus. We set an example of what God is like. Who are we to expect them to be the first to give in, to yield, to show love even when hurt. If we don't set an example in that it won't happen in our family. As men god will fill us and enable us to put others first and serve. His spirit's power is available within each of us who let Him fill and use us.

Being a servant to our wives and children is perhaps the hardest thing we will have to do. It doesn't come naturally at all. Our flesh rebels against it. The world and the devil oppose it. And for good reason. There is nothing more powerful than the example of a servant leader. It can change hard hearts and get through barriers that seem insurmountable.

Be a servant leader to your family. Be Jesus to your wife and children.



**Be a NEW MAN**

# NEW ENEMIES

How should I respond when personally attacked?

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

NEHEMIAH 6-7; SEPT-OCT 445 BC; JERUSALEM

**BACKGROUND** Work on the walls is continuing, but not without opposition. The greed of rich Jews has caused them to take advantage of the poorer Jews in Jerusalem. Nehemiah got angry and set things straight. The enemy still doesn't stop the opposition, however. Now Nehemiah is attacked personally.

**SCHEME 1: ASSASSINATION (v. 1-4)** 'Almost done' is a dangerous time, for it's easy to let our guard down and coast in. It's a time when we can start patting ourselves on the back for a job well done. Pride is up, guard is down. That's when David sinned with Bathsheba. Nehemiah is almost done rebuilding the walls, but Satan's artillery is hitting closer and closer to home. Now he takes a direct hit – in fact several!

It all seems innocent enough. The enemies of the Jews invite Nehemiah to a peace conference about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Nehemiah correctly suspected treachery (v. 2b) so he refused to go. He told them his presence was needed in Jerusalem. What a good example Nehemiah is to men today! He wasn't blinded by pride and ego, or he would have gone. He didn't think he could do everything by himself (bring peace between Jews and Gentiles). He recognized that leaders are more susceptible to attack and must watch themselves closely.

He also persevered in what he knew was right. Four times they tried to lure him away (v. 4). Many men today make a good start but continued temptation or difficulties wear them down and they give in. When the enemy perseveres against us, we must persevere even more!

**SCHEME 2: SLANDER (v. 5-9)** When Sanballat and the other Gentile enemies of the Jews realized he wouldn't come they tried a different tactic. They tried spreading false accusation against Nehemiah, ones to get him in trouble with the authorities back in Babylon. The insinuation was that he was going to revolt against Babylon by making himself king, and the threat was that Sanballat was going to tell Artaxerxes, the king of Babylon. Of course, it was worded in such a way as to imply he was only trying to 'help' Nehemiah (v. 7) by offering to get together and talk about this. What Christian leader hasn't faced manipulation by someone who was 'only trying to help' him?

The enemy was trying to use fear to discourage him, to take the heart out of him so he wouldn't continue doing God's work. Men, is that happening to you today? Don't be surprised, it's one of Satan's best weapons against those who would serve God. Nehemiah knew he was weak against all of this, so he prayed for God's strength and protection (v. 9b). That's the place we need to turn to right away, too. There's no other place for us to turn but to God. Sometimes He allows those situations to arise just so we will turn to Him more. Why is it that prayer is so hard for some men? Jesus Himself spent hours and hours in prayer. If He needed that contact with His heavenly Father, don't we?

**SCHEME 3: TREACHERY (v. 10-14)** Sanballat realizes that he won't be able to lure Nehemiah out of Jerusalem in order to kill him. So instead of stopping and giving up, he gets even more deceitful. Our enemy doesn't quit, he just gets nastier and dirtier in his tactics.

Sanballat hired a priest who was a close friend of Nehemiah's to betray him. The plan was for the priest to lure him into a part of the temple where only priests could go, thus making him subject to the judgment of God (v. 10). He did this by pretending to be thinking of Nehemiah's welfare. He encouraged Nehemiah to flee to the temple for safety and protection. He might have even said something like, "God told me to tell you to ...."

Nehemiah kept his mind in control of things and didn't let his emotions take over. Even though a trusted friend has betrayed him he didn't over react. He knew God's standards and principles and he knew he was no exception to them. That's one of Satan's tricks today, too. He'll have us think we are an exception to God's Word and we can get away with something the Bible forbids because of the special circumstances we are in!

Don't ever think the end justifies the means! There are no exceptions. We reap what we sow. God NEVER leads us contrary to His Word.

Even when a close, trusted friend, even a pastor (this man was a priest) gives advice that doesn't line up 100% with God's word we aren't to be misled. Adam let Eve influence him against what he knew was right and look at the consequences. There is NEVER a 'good reason' to sin! It seems there were many religious leaders who were giving wrong advice to Nehemiah (v. 14). It doesn't matter how many tell us something, it's what God and the Bible say that really matters!

How could Nehemiah stand against all this? Again he goes to God in prayer (v. 14). He prayed when he heard the walls were broken down (1:4), about the ridicule of the workers (4:4-5), about the plot to attack the city (4:9), about the slander against him (6:9) and about the plot here (6:14).

**WALLS COMPLETED** Because of his faithful perseverance the walls were completed 1 month after Nehemiah first heard they were down! This victory discouraged the enemies who were trying to prevent it (v. 16). However they didn't quit, they never do.

Tobiah, a leader of the Gentiles who, like Sanballat, was opposing the Jews, kept up a campaign of lies and threats against Nehemiah. Jewish nobles were allied with him by marriage (in disobedience to God's law) and they kept spreading his criticisms of Nehemiah among the Jews. They stayed loyal to Tobiah because they were making money through their business contracts with these Gentiles. It can be very discouraging to have friends become disloyal just over money. It's easy to become angry and bitter when that happens. Jesus faced the same thing, though, with Judas and others. We must follow His example in not letting anger build inside. We must allow ourselves to feel the hurt as hurt and work it through as hurt. That's the only way.

**PEOPLE NAMED** Nehemiah 7 gives the names of those who had been the first to return. It is a list similar to Ezra 2. While it might not be interesting reading to us now, it would have been if we had been living when Nehemiah wrote it or soon after. Imagine seeing the name of a friend there. Better yet, imagine seeing your own name there! Knowing that God Himself noticed and remembered was certainly very humbling as well as encouraging. It set an example for generation after generation who could look back to an ancestor who was so honored. Men, remember that God still keeps His lists and writes down our faithful deeds. He will reward and bless us for all eternity based on them. They pass on down to our children and grandchildren as well. What is God writing about you? What can you do to improve it? Do it now!

# **Be a NEW MAN**



## **NEW REVIVAL**

**What should I do when there is sin in my life?**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

**NEHEMIAH 8:1 – 12:47; OCT 445 - 444 BC; JERUSALEM**

**BACKGROUND** The walls are repaired and all the various attacks against Nehemiah and the Jews have been resisted by God's strength. Now its time for spiritual rebuilding to begin.

This is the first recorded revival in the Bible. Nehemiah 1-7 shows the reconstruction of the walls. Nehemiah 8-13 show the reinstruction of the people. The fact that God helped them complete the wall rebuilding shows them their need of Him, and renews their hope for better things to come. They are ready to again take their place as God's covenant nation.

**EZRA** Ezra is the leader of the revival. He is a scribe and priest who arrived back in Jerusalem 14 years before Nehemiah. His preaching and teaching was interrupted by Nehemiah's wall-building. Now the people are ready to listen again. They are motivated to want to know more about God and serve Him. God uses both Nehemiah (civil leader) and Ezra (spiritual leader) together as a team.

Ezra is truly an outstanding man. Tradition says he knew the whole Old Testament by heart. He is credited with being the man God used to assemble the Old Testament in the form we have today. He edited the books, adding endings where they were incomplete. He wrote his own summary of history from God's perspective – I & II Chronicles. He installed the newer square Hebrew characters as the norm and standard. He is also credited with instituting the synagogue system while in Babylon. This has kept the Jewish nation together for 2,500 years. It is also the basis of the church today. We owe much to this man of God.

Anyway, there was something about the wall being rebuilt and greed being dealt with by Nehemiah that paved the way for this revival. It could have been discouraging for Ezra, who had not seen results to his preaching for 14 years, and then had his preaching interrupted by Nehemiah's building project! What a lesson is perseverance and faithfulness Ezra is!

**REVIVAL** When the Feast of Trumpets began (Oct 445 BC) the people requested that Ezra again teach them. They finally had an appetite to learn. Women and well as men came to learn, even children listened to Ezra. They didn't send the children off separately but taught them the deep truths of God's Word, too. For six hours a day Ezra would read and expound God's Word to them. He taught what it meant, then applied that to their present situation. He didn't entertain them, but taught the basic truths of God's Word. That's what men today need to teach to their churches and families, too! By the way, everyone stood to listen for those 6 hours. Ezra stood on a high wooden platform. Other priests whom he had trained helped him.

**REVIVAL RESPONSE** The people responded to God's Word in a total way that is a pattern for us today and shows what real revival is. **1. Intellectual Response** (6-8) The people mentally affirmed what Ezra said. They agreed with God and humbled themselves by bowing in worship. **2. Emotional Response** (9-12) The people repented of their sins with weeping and mourning. Revival doesn't start in our emotions but usually reaches out to touch them. RE-vival refers to bring something back to life that once had life but had lost it. We don't lost our salvation, but do

loose the joy of it. When we come back to God it is a moving experience that touches all parts of our being. **3. Volitional Response** (13-18) The people decided to start obeying God again right away by observing the Feast of Trumpets which had been neglected along with the rest of God's laws and regulations. It took 2 weeks to get everything ready, but their joy was great when they again followed God (v. 17). Why do we ever think we can find real joy apart from obedience to God? Why do we, too, continue to run after poor substitutes?

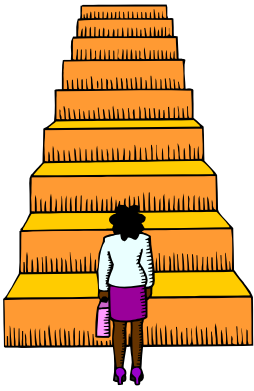
**REVIVAL RESULTS** When the feast was over the people still didn't go home. They wanted to stay for more teaching, fasting, confessing of sin and worship! They spent 6 hours a day there: 3 in teaching, 3 in response to that in confession and worship. How thrilled Ezra must have been! Men, God will reward your faithfulness and bring a day when you will say "It was all worth it." Persevere.

**REVIVAL PRAYER** An example of their prayers during the revival is given in Nehemiah 9:5-38. In fact, it's the longest recorded prayer in the Bible. The pattern of the prayer is to show God's grace and power (similar to Psalm 78, 105-106). God's power and grace are shown by His work in history: creation (6), Abraham's Covenant (7-8), Egypt and the Red Sea (9-11), through the desert (12-21), during the conquest of Canaan (22-25), through the judges (26-28), through the prophets (29-31) and in their present situation (32-37). This is an excellent pattern to follow in praising God. Use these very words yourself to praise Him. In your own life, go through everything you can think of from your birth that shows God's grace and care. That is not only a great way to worship God, but it is a tremendous faith-builder!

**REVIVAL COVENANT** In response to God's great care and grace, the people make a binding agreement (9:38) to put God first in all things. They put it in writing and signed it, always a good practice to help us take seriously our promises to God as well as a way of helping us remembering past promises. Nehemiah was the first to sign (10:1), followed by 83 other men. As men we must take the lead spiritually, not letting our wives or children do that. We must be in front trusting God and challenging them to do the same. We must set an example for them to follow, not just try to keep up with them.

Following the pattern of Near East covenants, this one starts with a preamble (9:5-6), a historical prologue (9:7-37), a record of acceptance of the covenant (9:38-10:29) and then a list of stipulations (10:30-39). They promised God they would not intermarry with unbelievers (10:30), that they would keep the Sabbath Day and year (10:31), that they would support the temple financially (10:32-33), that they would provide wood and other necessities for the burnt altar fire (10:34), that they would give of their firstfruits to God (10:35) and that they would be faithful in paying their tithes to God (10:36). Notice that some are deeply spiritual promises (deep Sabbath, tithe), others deal with their relationships (not intermarry), and still others with the mundane activities of daily life (wood for the fire). God cares about all these areas, and real revival results in change in all areas of our daily lives. Sometimes it seems like God doesn't send revival today because He knows we really don't want to change all that much. We want the spiritual highs that come but aren't willing to pay the price of a changed life. Are you?

**JERUSALEM POPULATED** Now that Jerusalem's wall is rebuilt and God is back in first place, lots are cast to see who will move into Jerusalem to populate it (11:1-2). There wasn't enough room for everyone. Those so chosen have their names recorded in Nehemiah 11-12. Then the wall is dedicated with prayers and a parade (12:27-43). What an example of revival this is!



# **Be a *NEW MAN***

## **NEW CHALLENGES**

**How can I stay faithful when life keeps throwing challenges at me?**

By Jerry Schmoyer © 2000

**NEHEMIAH 13:1-30; Malachi; 443-432 BC; JERUSALEM**

**BACKGROUND** Jews have returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. The walls have been rebuilt and the people revived. Now come the final events before the Old Testament closes and 400 years of silence come until John the Baptizer steps on the scene. Too bad it couldn't have been a happier end!

**NEHEMIAH LEAVES** Nehemiah was recalled to Persia (13:6) April 1, 433 BC. His brother replaced him while gone. The people soon slipped into sin. The groundwork have been set before he left. Revival doesn't last forever. In fact, for a revival period to last through a whole generation is rare. Each generation needs its own reviving, it can't coast on its parent's relationship with God.

Nothing is recorded about the 11 years since the revival to where we pick up the story in Nehemiah 13. By looking between the lines and also at Malachi we can build a pretty clear picture, though, of a people who slowly drifted back into their old sinful ways. Once established, sinful patterns are very hard to break!

**ENTER MALACHI** Malachi lived and ministered during the time of Nehemiah, who was the leader. Malachi was the prophet who preached to the people. Almost 90% of the book was spoken directly by God. The book concludes with a call to repentance. This book is a link, a bridge between the Old and New Testaments.

**COMPASSION** (1:1-5) The book opens with God clearly declaring His love for His people, but they doubted His love. "How can you love us?" they asked in their doubt and self-pity. God answers by saying His actions in the past prove His love. No matter what they did or didn't do, God still loved them. He wants His people to feel loved and secure and to respond to that love by loving Him in return.

**COMPLAINT** (1:6 - 3:15) God expects and deserves the total honor and devotion of His people, but often He doesn't receive that. In Malachi's day the leaders were leading the people astray because of their unfaithfulness. While outwardly claiming to follow God, they married unbelieving Gentiles and let them bring their heathen idols into Israel. Throughout the nation the family was breaking down and divorce was common. Because God hadn't judged their life styles they said God approved of what they were doing! They didn't support God's work and workers financially as they were commanded to do. They were prideful and arrogant. They needed to repent, to "change their mind" and reverse their direction. They needed to do a U-turn, an about-face, in attitude and action. If they don't there will be judgment from God.

**CONDEMNATION** (3:16 - 4:6) There is a faithful minority in Israel and God promises to remember them even though they will suffer the consequences the whole nation faces. The majority, though, need to repent or suffer judgment. Unfortunately they didn't repent when Malachi preached or even later. The book ends with a promise of coming judgment unless God's messenger's message of repentance is accepted. Mal 4:5-6 "See, I will send you the

prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

This prophet is to be like Elijah. He will preach a message of repentance like Malachi did. If the people repent, they will be forgiven and restored. God so deeply desires this that He will soon send His Messiah, but first He will send this messenger to prepare the way for Him (3:1-6). With this call to repentance and promise of a coming messenger the Old Testament closes. Four hundred years later the New Testament opens with John, who fulfilled Malachi's prophecies, coming preaching the same message of repentance.

God's message of repentance is still being delivered today. He wants and deserves our whole being, not just some parts some times. Anything less must be repented of and changed. God still loves His people and welcomes them home. The longer we put off repentance the more we will have to repent of and the less time to repent in!

**NEHEMIAH RETURNS** We don't know what happened to Nehemiah in Persia, just that the king needed him back there. A year later he was able to return to Jerusalem – April 19, 432. The first thing he did when he saw the people had drifted back into sin was just what Ezra had done to begin the previous revival. He read God's Word to them (Nehemiah 13:1-2). He read passages that dealt with the sins the people were guilty of. This showed that it was God they were disobeying, not Nehemiah. A man must take a stand against sin, even by those in his own family. He must do it lovingly and by standing behind God's Word.

**Sin 1: Gentiles in the Temple** (13:1-9) Tobiah, one of the Gentile leaders who had opposed the building of the walls, was able to convince the high priest to let him have one of the temple store rooms for his own merchandise. This was in direct violation of God's law which forbid Gentiles from entering that part of the temple. Nehemiah got righteously indignant at this compromise. Again people were putting profit before God's law.

**Sin 2: Not Tithing** (13:10-14) Greed again is behind this sin, for instead of sharing with the priests the people kept all their money and crops for themselves. Therefore the priests had to work to feed themselves and weren't available to carry out their spiritual duties.

**Sin 3: No Sabbath** (13:15-22) In order to have more time to earn a profit, God's Sabbath rest was being neglected. We certainly have secularized the Sabbath principle today as well. It's important for men to still lead their families in a day of rest and worship.

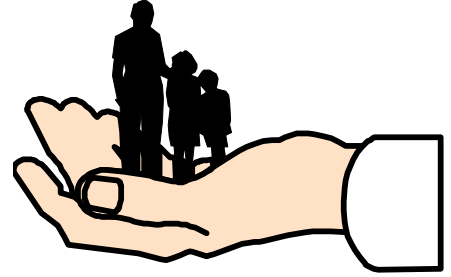
**Sin 4: Intermarriage** (13:23-28) Despite their promise to not do so, the people again marry Gentiles who have not converted to Judaism. The principle of the unequal yoke must be observed, or the results are disastrous. Nehemiah was furious, hitting and pulling their hair. Didn't they learn from Solomon's evil example?

Nehemiah responded with prayer again (13:29), as he always did whatever the situation he faced. Then he purified the priests and made provisions for their needs so they could spend their time ministering to people. Nehemiah knew wrong had to be dealt with, sometimes severely. It couldn't be ignored or avoided. Action must be taken, but action backed up by lots of prayer. Men today must do the same thing. Either we pray and don't take a strong stand, or we take a strong stand without praying enough. Learn from Nehemiah, it takes both for anything to succeed! God bless you as you serve Him as a man of God!



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From the lives and history of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Esther learn how to know and follow God's will for your life and family.

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