

## **February Teaching Theme:** The Book of Nehemiah

讲员 Speaker: Betty Tian / Dr. Ted Moon

题目 Topic: Dedication

经文 Scripture: Nehemiah 10-12

**Monthly Theme:** As we enter a new year, we will spend some time walking through the book of Nehemiah over the next nine weeks. Although Nehemiah is its own book in our English Bibles, the whole book is actually Ezra-Nehemiah together. So as we approach Nehemiah, we have to keep in mind that we are coming into the story 3/4th of the way through. If we go back to the beginning of the story in Ezra, we are told that God moved King Cyrus' heart to let the Israelites return to their land to fulfill the prophecy spoken by Jeremiah (Ezra 1). The hope that exile will not be forever should trigger the reader to pick up all the other prophetic hopes of return, including hope for the Messianic King, God's presence in the Temple, and God's Kingdom to be established. We must keep these hopes in mind as we read to the story to properly understand both the ups and downs. Most characters in the Biblical narrative, including Nehemiah, are deeply flawed individuals who have a mix of successes and failures - just like you and me. And this mix of success and failure we will keep confronting as we move through the story of Nehemiah. Let's see what we can learn from Nehemiah's story.

### 二月 **February:** 尼希米記 **Nehemiah**

February 6th - 尼希米記: 與神立約 The Covenant (尼希米記七至八章 Nehemiah 7-8)

February 13th - 尼希米記: 認承罪孽 The Confession (尼希米記九章 Nehemiah 9)

February 20th - 尼希米記: 落成典禮 The Dedication (尼希米記十至十二章 Nehemiah 10-12)

February 27th - 尼希米記: 功敗垂成 The Failure (尼希米記十三章 Nehemiah 13) (聖容主日 Transfiguration Sunday)

### **Resources:**

[Sermon Video](#) (Betty Tian)

[Sermon Slides](#) (Betty Tian)

[Sermon Video](#) (Dr. Ted Moon)

[Sermon Slides](#) (Dr. Ted Moon)

[Overview: Ezra-Nehemiah \(Bible Project\)](#) [English]

[Overview: Ezra-Nehemiah \(Bible Project\)](#) [Mandarin]

\* If your group hasn't watched the overview video yet, please do so.\*

### **Discussion Questions** (Pastor William R. Horne):

- (1) Read Nehemiah 10:28-39 together. What observations do you make, and what stands out to you? How would you summarize the passage?
- (2) Israel promised to re-establish the sacredness of marriage. What is the heart behind Israel's commitment in Nehemiah 10:30, and what principles can we draw from it for today concerning marriage?

- (3) Israel promised to re-establish the sacredness of the Sabbath. What is the Sabbath? How do Sabbath laws differ today for the Christian? Why is maintaining a Sabbath rest an important spiritual discipline?
- (4) Israel promised to re-establish the sacredness of "God's house." What is God's house for the Christian (compared to Ancient Israel), and how can we better care for it?

**Important Notes** (Pastor William R. Horne):

Notes on Q1: As you read through this chapter, make sure you recall the context from both the [Monthly Theme](#) section and the [Bible Project video](#). Context is key to understanding the movements of the story.

Notes on Q2: The understanding of marriage in Ancient Israel can be confusing for us (and Ancient Israel) as National-Cultural-Ethnic Identity was tied so closely with religious and spiritual identity. The heart of original commands in the Torah for Israel not to "give their daughters and sons in marriage" to those from neighboring nations was spiritual in focus, as these neighboring nations followed after other gods and did not live by the ethics of Yahweh. This correlation between marriage and religious commitments in King Solomon's life, which we are told had his many wives and concubines, led "his heart away from the Lord" (1 Kings 11). [Note Solomon's problem with marrying multiple wives and his lack of loyalty to Yahweh over time]. So the concern for Ancient Israel correlating foreign marriage with lack of allegiance to Yahweh is valid. However, what becomes more confusing over the story of the Hebrew Bible, is Israel's unclear motivations and inconsistent application in following this marriage principle. We see this in the story of Ezra-Nehemiah, where we are never fully clear on if the principle is being applied because of cultural and ethnic differences or spiritual concern (and probably both mixed closely together, which we will see in Nehemiah 13). God never commanded Israelites to divorce foreign spouses if they were already married (which Ezra mistakenly commands), nor were they to exclude foreigners in general from the assembly of God's people (which Israel wrongly does multiple times, including in Ezra-Nehemiah). We also see cases both ways throughout Israel's story of "mixed-marriages" leading to idolatry or "mixed-marriages" leading to a greater revelation of the Kingdom of God (think of Ruth, Rahab, Zipporah, Asenath, etc.) Israel's inconsistency and unclear motivations in applying the principle should teach us how to use Scripture. We must be wise and careful with application, not making jumps or drawing hard lines where the Scripture does not or is not clear.

In terms of applying the heart of Yahweh's marriage principle today, it is absolutely true and wise that one should marry a spouse who is also following King Jesus. To think that one could follow well after Jesus when the person they are to be "one flesh" is not is simply naive. The marriage covenant is most beautiful when both spouses seek to live like Jesus and mutually submit to one another - putting the other's good first. But, let's say you are married and you later turn to follow Jesus, and your spouse does not? Should you get a divorce? No, certainly not! Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7 that this is not the path. Paul tells us that God's grace is sufficient in this situation, and God can work towards salvation and sanctification for the unbelieving spouse through the believing one. Ezra made this mistake earlier, thinking divorce was the answer in the story in the book of Ezra, when he and the leaders made a divorce decree splitting up families - this was never the heart of God.

Notes on Q3: From the beginning of creation, God set apart the 7th day for Sabbath (šabbāt (שַׁבָּת)) contains the idea “to stop”) and from here the Bible sets out a larger pattern of “7s” connected to rest.

- Sabbath was set by Sunsets, so Sundown Friday through Sundown Saturday was the Sabbath and no one was allowed to work, markets were closed etc.
- Every 7th Year was a Sabbatical Year so all debts were forgiven and the land couldn't be planted on (wild trust in God's providence)
- Every 49th year (7 x 7) was the year of Jubilee. In the year of Jubilee all the following happened: the return of all Israelites to their ancestral lands and families, the observance of the fallow (not planting on the land like the 7th year), the fixing of prices for the sale of land (except for houses in cities) in relation to the occurrence of the Jubilee, the redemption of the land of next of kin, special land regulations for Levites, and the freeing of defaulting debtors and all Israelite slaves. The text justifies these prescriptions in terms of two basic principles: God's ownership of the land (25:23) and His undisputed possession of all Israelites as His slaves (25:55).

Can you imagine a world that fully operated by these 7 patterns? It would be a beautiful place.

For the Christian we learn that Jesus is the Ultimate Sabbath rest for us in Hebrews 3:7-4:11 thus pointing us to where we should find our ultimate rest. From this place the early church commended Sabbath practice but for Gentile believers it was not held with the rigidity of the Jewish faith (Sundown Friday through Sundown Saturday). The Christian should maintain Sabbath rest habits and patterns in their week, guarding a 24 hour period of rest. When we practice Sabbath rest we are doing three important things (1) Recognizing our Human Limitations (you are finite! Embrace it); (2) Trusting in God as our Source (not work or production or wealth); and (3) Resisting the “Culture of Now” surrounding us.

We live in a “Culture of Now”

- We must constantly work to get ahead.
- 24/7 society of consumption
- Achieve, Accomplish, Perform, Possess.
- Restless Anxiety
- Multitasking - the drive to control more and do more.

**When we participate in a Sabbath we are showing trust in God, resistance to a culture of now, and our actions speak prophetically to the world of Jesus ultimate rest.**

Notes on Q4: For Ancient Israel, God's house was the Temple, where at some point in Israel's History, God's presence dwelled. (In the story of Ezra-Nehemiah we do not see God's presence descend on the temple). The temple was to be the place where God and Humanity meet. But, even Ancient Israel recognized that God could not be contained to a building, it was just a symbol pointing to the reality that all of creation is God's temple. To neglect the house of God was to neglect what that symbol pointed to - a gracious God who is King of the Universe. After, the temple is destroyed and Zerubbabel comes back to rebuild it, the hopes were God's

presence with Israel would be restored, but it is not. The later prophets spoke about this temple (and its people) as hopelessly corrupt. But, the prophets also spoke of a day when God would bring about a new temple, and God's Spirit would fill all of creation. Jesus the Messiah becomes this ultimate temple - the place where God's presence and rule meet humanity. And through Jesus the Ultimate Temple, he promised this rule and presence of God would spread all over creation through his people - many mobile temples, filled with the Spirit of God. The vast and groundbreaking Christian claim is that the new temple is the community of God's people where God's rest, rule, and presence are evident through the Holy Spirit. This is what we call the Church. **SO - it is essential we care for and steward our physical buildings well, but to truly care for God's House and reestablish its sacredness is to care for the community of God's people and to see the sacredness in our fellow human-made in the Image of God.** "You all are like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5).