

Rebuilding What Was Lost
The Book of Ezra-Nehemiah



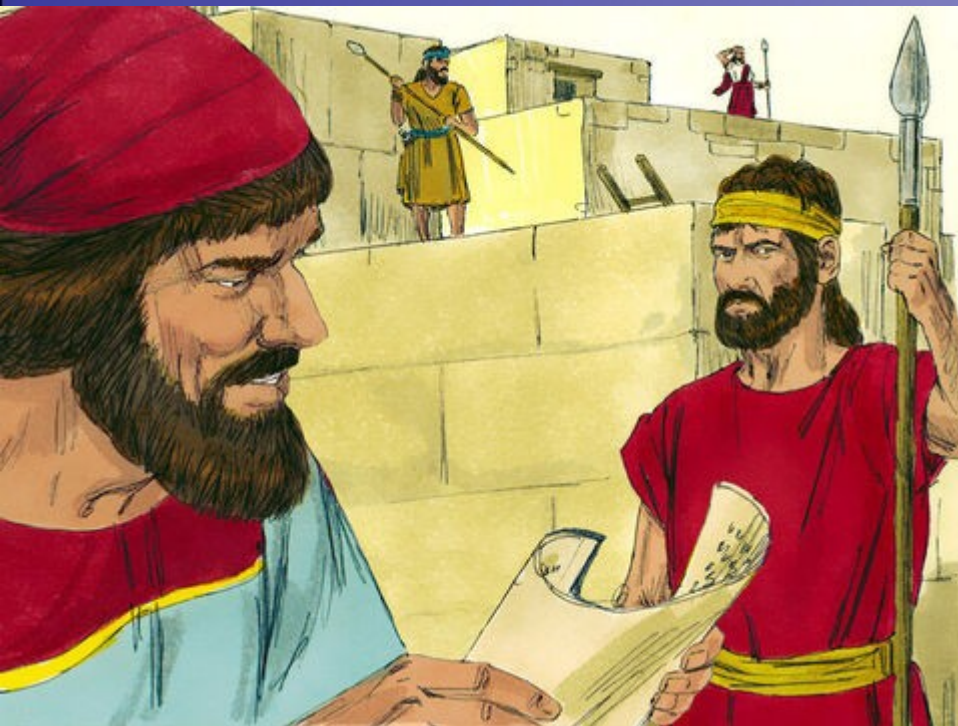
Rebuilding What Was Lost

- *A Little Bit of Background*
- *The Return*
- *Laying the Foundation*
- *Letters to Kings*
- *The Return of the Heroes*
- *After “The End”*
- *The Cupbearer to the King*
- *Nehemiah Comes to Jerusalem*
- *Rebuilding the Wall*
- *After “The End”*
- ***Making Things Right (Part 1)***



Making Things Right

- Nehemiah has built the wall. The End.
 - Where did we leave Nehemiah last week?
 - Please read Nehemiah 7:4
 - What's up with that?
 - Jews had been back in the area for a century
 - They'd rebuilt the Temple over a decade ago
 - In fact, wasn't Haggai's whole problem with the people of God that they had been rebuilding their own houses, but *not God's house* when they came back?



Making Things Right



Funky little teaching moment...

- Quick side-trip to Haggai...
 - Please read Haggai 1:1-4
 - Apparently, the people being condemned here *aren't* the general populace of Jerusalem
 - They're the *leaders*—the otherwise really pretty *decent* leaders like Zerubbabel and Joshua—and perhaps the people living in the suburbs and surrounding towns

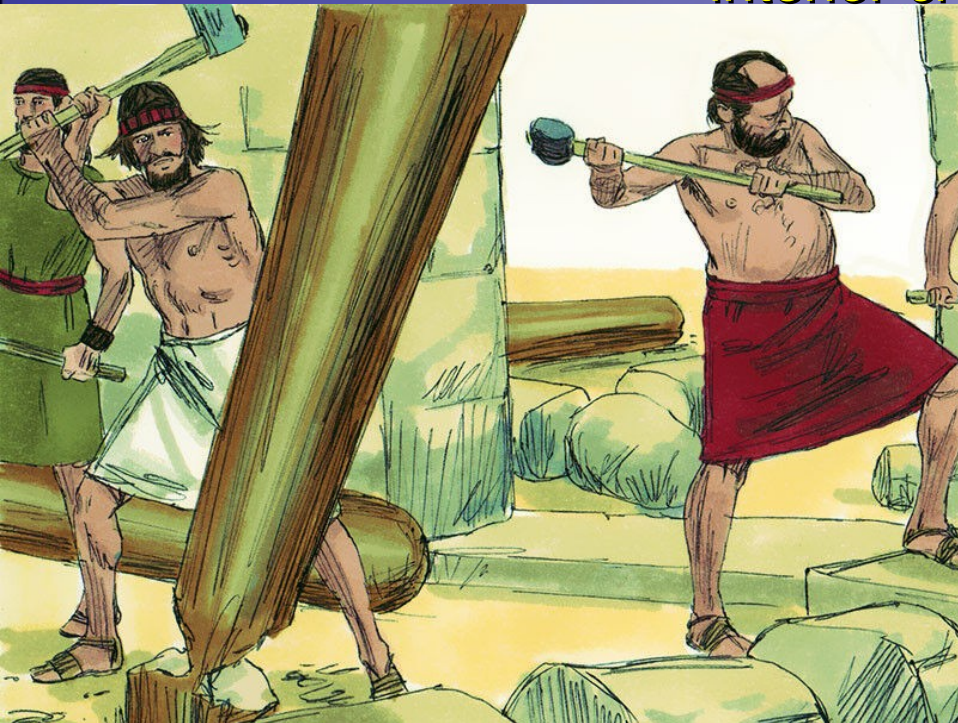


Making Things Right



Funky little teaching moment...

- Quick side-trip to Haggai...
 - Please read Haggai 1:1-4
 - Apparently, the people being condemned here *aren't* the general populace of Jerusalem
 - The issue in Haggai wasn't that the people in the area should have just prioritized building a Temple more than putting a roof over their own heads
 - The issue was that they didn't prioritize Jerusalem at all—not the Temple, not the wall, nor *any* of the interior civic structures that make the place work
 - And *beyond* that, their leaders weren't just “putting a roof over their heads”—they were building fancy, luxurious, paneled mansions in better “gentrified” neighborhoods and disregarding the City of God altogether
 - How can we apply this within our *own* contexts today?



Making Things Right

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 - Where did we leave Nehemiah last week?
 - Please read Nehemiah 7:4
 - What's up with that?
 - Nehemiah had rebuilt the wall—but now (as an act of worship), it was time to re-populate the city...



Making Things Right

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 - Where did we leave Nehemiah last week?
 - Please read Nehemiah 7:4
 - Please read Nehemiah 7:5-6
 - I love how Nehemiah sees this—
 - It's not some clever plan of *his*
 - It's a clever plan of *God's*
 - Nehemiah's greatest strength is that he *listens* well (which, of course, leads us back to the fact that— at his best—Nehemiah is a man of devout *prayer*)

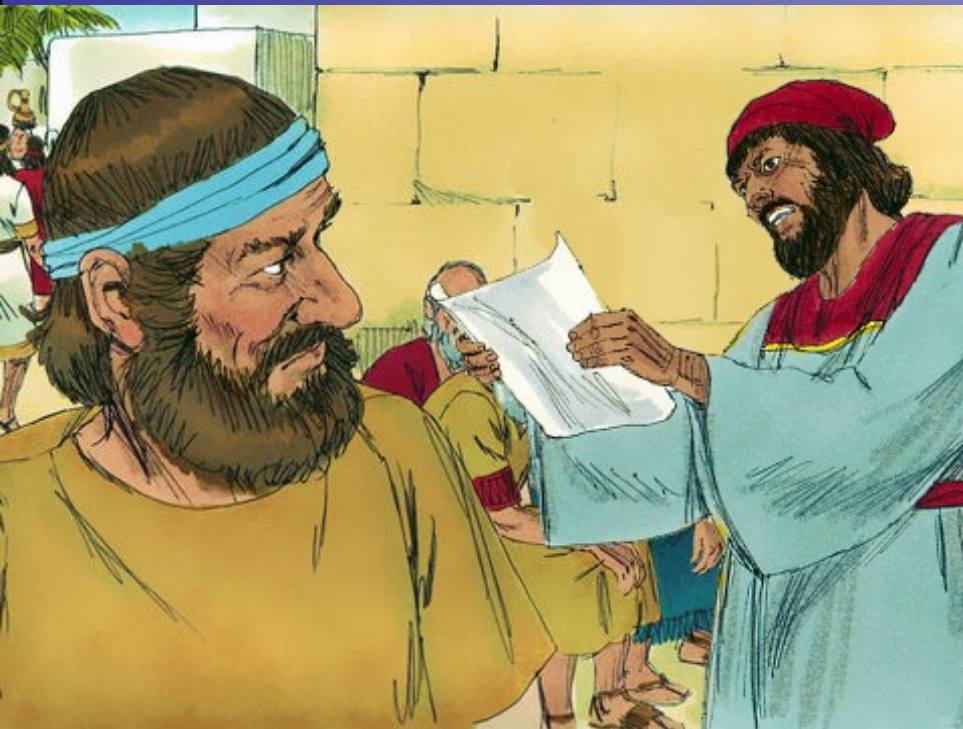


Making Things Right



Funky little teaching moment...

- Nehemiah proceeds to spend the next 54-55 verses listing who came from what family of Israel and then *another* couple of verses talking about the people who came back, but couldn't show what their family line was
 - Even *practicing priests* were kept from priesting if they couldn't show that they'd come from the proper priestly lineage
- Why was this so important to Nehemiah?
 - Would that level of "making things right" and honoring to God at every level be as important to most modern churches today?
(please discuss)



Making Things Right

- **Nehemiah has built the wall. The End.**
 - **Where did we leave Nehemiah last week?**
 - Please read Nehemiah 7:4
 - Please read Nehemiah 7:5-6
 - **Please read Nehemiah 7:70**
 - **What “work” is this, exactly?**
 - Is this restoration of Temple worship?
 - Is this restoration of the population of Jerusalem?
 - What sorts of things would that entail that might need additional funding?



Making Things Right

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- Where did we leave Nehemiah last week?



- Please read Nehemiah 7:4
- Please read Nehemiah 7:5-6
- Please read Nehemiah 7:70
 - What “work” is this, exactly?
 - So who *started* this offering to help those who were moving back into the deserted downtown areas?
 - And how much did he give of his own money? (that's over \$600,000—and *that's* just the *gold*)
 - What does that say about Nehemiah and his personal commitment to honoring what God laid on his heart to do?
 - Explain the modern phrase, “Put your money where your mouth is” —and how it relates here



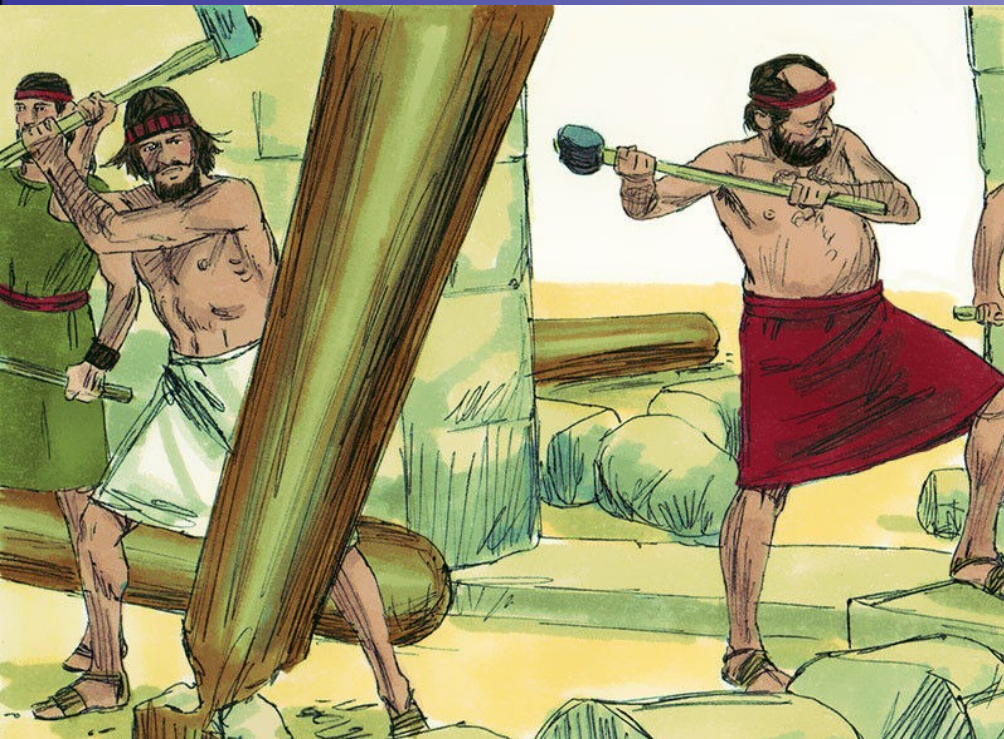
Making Things Right

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 - Please read Nehemiah 7:4
 - Please read Nehemiah 7:5-6
 - Please read Nehemiah 7:70
 - **Please read Nehemiah 7:71-72**
 - That's a combined total of \$23,700,000 in gold and \$1,845,000 in silver from everyone else in Judea for a grand total of \$26,145,000 (not even counting how much those bowls and garments were worth)
 - I'm not really impressed by large amounts of money, so why am I going into all of this?
 - How important did the people of Judea see re-populating the City of God and bringing it back to working order to be?
 - They didn't *all* move in, right?
 - So this is people paying over \$26 million to help *other* people move in from the suburbs to help reinvigorate a dilapidated urban center



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- I'm not really impressed by large amounts of money, so why am I going into all of this?
- **How this would have been a conscious repudiation of the self-centered priorities and "gentrified" lifestyle choices that God had spoken against through Haggai?**

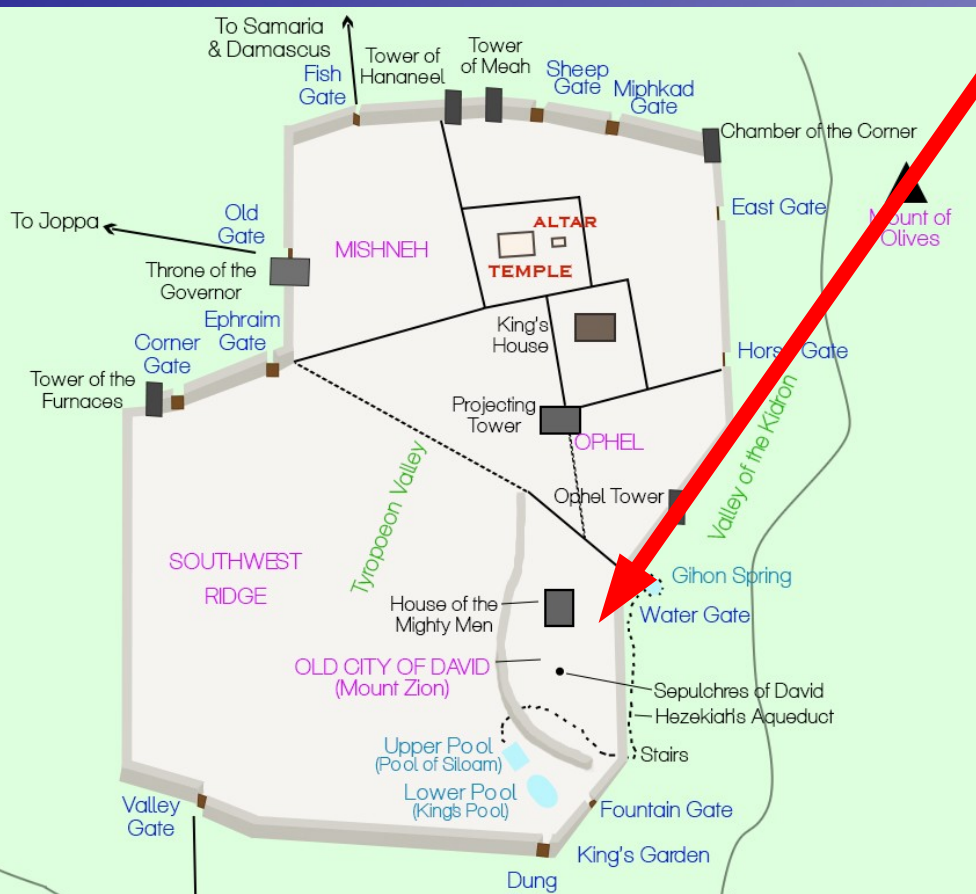


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 - Please read Nehemiah 7:73-8:1

That's near the center of town, right next to the "Monuments" section of the city and the summit of Mount Zion

- Why choose *this* area to read the Bible from, instead of doing it in the Temple?



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 - **Please read Nehemiah 7:73-8:1**
 - What does it mean that the people assembled “as one man” for this public assembly—why is that such a quietly significant detail?
 - Okay, it's a little thing, but I also love that this is the point where we finally get to see Ezra and Nehemiah on stage at the same moment in our narrative...



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 - Please read Nehemiah 7:73-8:1
 - Please read Nehemiah 8:2-3
 - That's six straight hours of non-stop reading from the Bible—why would Nehemiah have him do that?
 - This is first time in a century that the Word of God has been read aloud to the people—and the first time that most of these people have ever heard it
 - They'd grown up as the “people of God” but had never cracked open the Bible
 - Sometimes we get so used to having the opportunity that we forget what a *privilege* reading the Bible is
 - How can we apply this today?



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 - This is first time in a century that the Word of God has been read aloud to the people—and the first time that most of these people have ever heard it
 - **So why does Nehemiah repeatedly refer to the people “who were able to understand” here?**



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 - Please read Nehemiah 8:2-3
 - Please read Nehemiah 8:4-6
 - Describe this particular worship service



- Why was simply hearing the Word of God this powerful to the people?
 - How can we too often take that simple profundity for granted today?
 - What can we do to remind ourselves of the immensity of what it means to be able to read God's Word?
(without falling into the ironic trap the Catholic Church did and thus declare the Bible too holy to read)



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 - Please read Nehemiah 8:7-8



- Why does Nehemiah keep emphasizing the importance of people being able to understand?
 - 1) It suggests that the people didn't *naturally* understand it—that they needed to be taught and exhorted
 - Either because Hebrew had become a *second* language to them or because they'd never really been *taught* anything about God



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- Why does Nehemiah keep emphasizing the importance of people being able to understand?
 - 1) It suggests that the people didn't *naturally* understand it—that they needed to be taught and exhorted
 - 2) It suggests that to God, it's important that people *truly do understand*
 - God doesn't want mindless ritual carried out by sock puppets

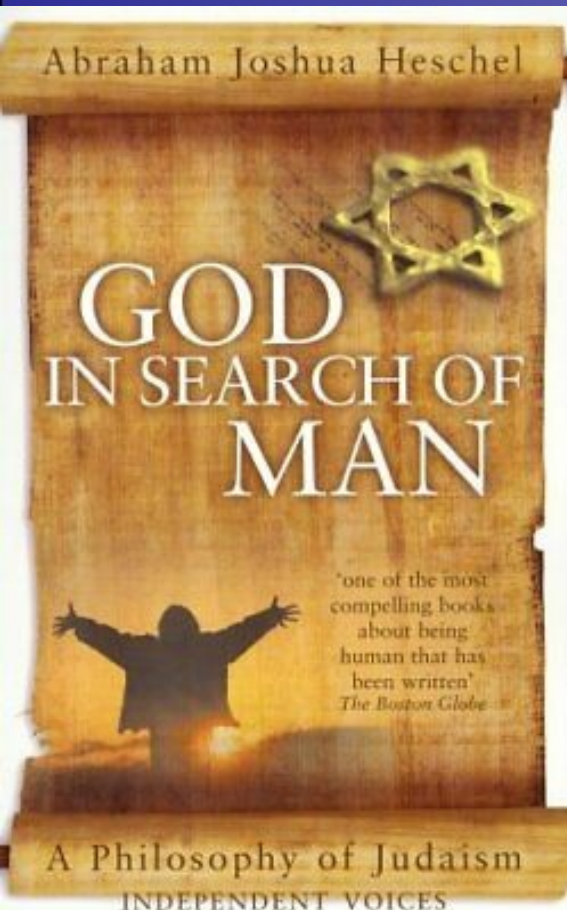


Making Things Right



Funky little teaching moment...

- Abraham Joshua Heschel was a Polish-born American rabbi and philosopher
 - In his book, *God In Search of Man*, he wrote,
 - “When faith is replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain—its message becomes meaningless... We teach children how to measure and weigh, but fail to teach them how to revere, how to sense wonder and awe. Modern man fell into the trap of believing all enigmas can be solved and wonder is a form of ignorance. Mankind will not perish for want of information, but for want of appreciation...”
 - At its core, worship is neither an intellectual thing nor an emotional thing, but rather a spiritual thing and a relational thing—an expression of the soul that God is worthy, and that we as His children are connected to Him in a truly meaningful way
 - So why would Nehemiah want the Levites to make sure that Ezra’s reading of the Word was less of a recitation and more of a real Bible Study?



Making Things Right

- Nehemiah has built the wall. The End.
 - Where did we leave Nehemiah last week?
 - Please read Nehemiah 8:9
 - Why? Why would they be *mournful*?
 - Well, they just heard Deuteronomy 27:26—
“*Cursed* is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.”
 - Or, as James 2:10 would later summarize—
“Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at *just one point* is guilty of breaking *all* of it.”
 - If this is the *first* time that they've heard what it was that they'd been *supposed* to be following *all along*, then why might they be mournful?



Making Things Right

- Nehemiah has built the wall. The End.
 - Where did we leave Nehemiah last week?
 - Please read Nehemiah 8:9
 - Why? Why would they be *mournful*?
 - And yet, what was Nehemiah's take on the Law?
 - Why was he joyful, even though this was probably the first time that *he'd* probably ever heard most of this stuff as well?
 - Sure, maybe it was hearing God show grace to those who had become eunuchs but who then had later turned *back* to worship YAHWEH
 - But beyond that, when we think about holy things today, we tend to think about being *sober*, and thus about being *somber*, and thus about being *dour* because we know that we're so *un-holy*
 - But how should we feel and behave when we reflect on what it means that our God has nonetheless *chosen* to make *us* holy?
 - How should Heschel's "wonder and awe" naturally bring us joy?



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 - Why was he joyful, even though this was probably the first time that *he'd* probably ever heard most of this stuff as well?
 - Stop for a moment and genuinely ponder this:
 - When you think of God in your own mind, what is your mental picture?

Is He an unapproving Lord who's never happy with you and is always judging?

or

Is He the awesome Dad who knows exactly who you are and what you've done, but never stops loving you?

or

Maybe the key question to ask is if you feel a relationship with Him, or just an obligation to Him?

