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| <b>Series:</b><br>Nehemiah, Healthy Walls   | <b>Reference:</b><br>Nehemiah 7 | <b>Title:</b><br>Construction to Reinstruction | <b>Date:</b><br>6.18.17 |
| <b>Website Writeup:</b>   |                                 |  |                         |
| Construction on the walls & gates have been completed. Nehemiah now begins rebuilding community. The construction had brought them together as a people of common faith, now they continue to reconstruct this crippled faith community; construction to re-instruction. These people had been formerly a part of the Babylonian Captivity which lasted about 70 years. They'd been taken captive & the Temple had been destroyed - they'd been ravaged & enslaved. They'd lost all sense of spiritual identity as the people of God but under Nehemiah's lead they are being resurrected once again! |                                 |  |                         |

## Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

### UPG Prayer of the Day...

The Manga Kanuri are a tall stately, dignified people of almost a million located in Niger. They've practiced Islam for more than 1,000 years & remain almost 100% muslim with only a few believers among them. During the region's three months of rain, they struggle to raise enough food to feed their family & animals for the entire year. Many say they're closed to outside influences. However, Christian workers trying to reach the Manga Kanuri report they are friendly, helpful & open.

### Sermon...

Remember, Nehemiah has returned to rebuild the walls & gates, they've completed the work in 52 days despite the adversarial advances of others. But his work isn't done, now construction has been completed, re-instruction must proceed. Let's read the first 7 verses of chapter 7 to see what's happening...

*<sup>1</sup> After the wall had been rebuilt & I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers & the singers & the Levites were appointed. <sup>2</sup> I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity & feared God more than most men do. <sup>3</sup> I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut the doors & bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts & some near their own houses."*

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

*<sup>6</sup> These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive (they returned to Jerusalem & Judah, each to his own town, <sup>7</sup> in company with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum & Baanah): The list of the men of Israel:*

So, construction on the walls & gates have been completed. Take note of what Nehemiah does now; he begins rebuilding community. The construction had brought them

together as a people of common faith, now they continue to reconstruct this crippled faith community; construction to re-instruction. Remember, these people had been formerly a part of the Babylonian Captivity which lasted about 70 years. They'd been taken captive & the Temple had been destroyed - they'd been ravaged & enslaved.

In Indonesia you don't see too much of the Dutch influence in architecture although they'd occupied Indonesia for 300 years running up to the end of WWII. Why is that? It's because when they were overthrown & run out of the country, Indonesians destroyed all visual reminders of the Dutch. Structures & visuals have the ability to evoke strong past memories or emotion as well as to generate unifying power. Structures have the ability to bring people together & give identity; likewise they have the power to psychologically enslave. And, the absence of visual reminders enables us to forget; out of sight, out of mind.



Remember when Iraq fell, one of the first images we have emblazoned on our consciences is the statue of Saddam being toppled in the city square. No one will ever look on that statue again in any other way than that - falling down, weak & defeated - a regime overthrown. Formerly it evoked either fear, respect or you might argue both, but no more.

In Russia all icons of Lenin & Stalin were ripped down after the fall of communism - visual reminders of something past. And likewise, when an occupying force enters an area they destroy these structures to further break down the resistance from the people they're occupying. They seek to breakdown belief structures to minimize resistance. Rome did this to some extent, Islam does it today, if you remember the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhist statues in Afghanistan in 2001.



And it happened with the Hagia Sophia in Turkey.



In 1453 Sultan Mehmed laid siege to Constantinople, in a desire to convert the city to Islam. Shortly after the city's defenses collapsed, pillagers made their way to the Hagia Sophia, a famous large church & battered down its doors. The building was desecrated & looted, and occupants enslaved or slaughtered; some of the elderly & sick were killed, the remainder chained. When the Sultan & his cohort entered the church, one of the Ulama climbed the pulpit & recited the Shahada, transforming at once the church into a mosque.

I say all that to remind you that the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 BC with the start of the Babylonian Captivity, and that had had a profound & devastating effect on the Jewish community - it was the center of who they were in worship & faith & why they're rebuilding now.

Think about this in our context. One of the idyllic pictures of America which adorns many of our calendars is the small town with the church steeple extending above the trees in the fall. A visual reminder of Jesus. Imagine the difference you would feel if that picture changed in the next 50 years - a mosque, a Buddhist Temple, or nothing at all? What if you drove through Ardmore in 50 years & all these church buildings were gone - there would be no visual reminder of God's Grace; God's story would be more quickly forgotten. It's a deeply psychological issue. I think God is creative in how he designed the Temple, and all these different traditional practices to lead us back to himself, but these people had lacked this for so long, at least in completeness.

So, they had lost not only their visuals to a great extent, but over that time, they had lost much of the practice of their faith; they were unable to practice, at least to the extent they wanted all the sacrifices, holidays & festivals. And, it seems that they had even forgotten about some of these traditions, as we will see later in Chapter 8. Those particular religious rites were set up to reinforce community, to root them in their identity with a saving God; that they would remember the story of God's love & His pursuit of them.

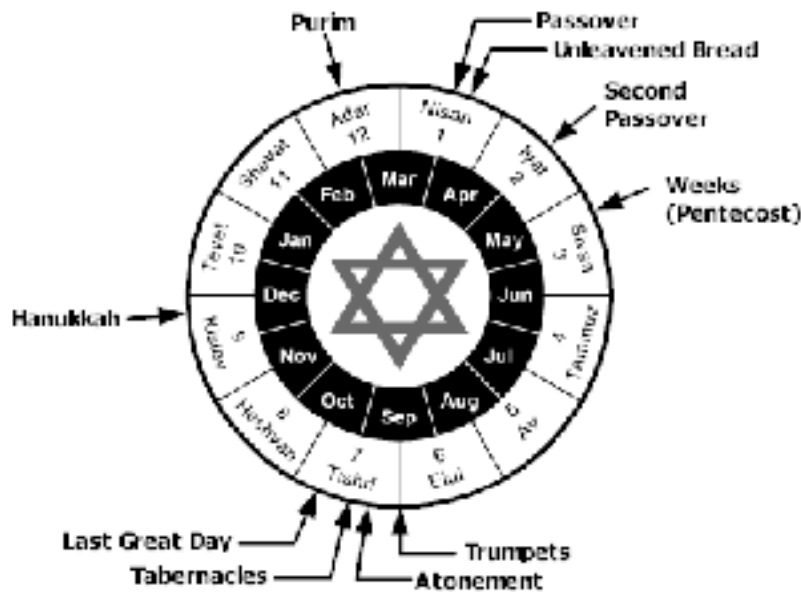
Tradition & religious practice has gotten a bad rap in recent years. A lot of people will say now, *'Why do I have to go to church? Can't I practice my faith/spirituality on my own?'* Maybe that's because people have grown to rely on the practices or traditions,



instead of what they point to - we've not allowed these practices to remind us, or lead us back to Christ. They've become meaningless in & of themselves. The answer to the question of practicing your faith on your own is 'no' in the Christian Tradition. Do you have to gather for a worship service, yes! - God is community, God is found in community, God works through community, and God is experienced in community. Philip Yancey is quoted as saying *Christianity is not a purely intellectual, internal faith. It can only be lived in community.* On our own human wisdom replaces God's.

This is the reason we gather to worship, to pray, to baptize, to marry, to practice the Lord's Table, to give back & to hear the story told again & again. To reinforce in our minds & hearts, the everlasting story of a gracious God - that in itself is a worshipful experience - God is worshipped when we're shown to hunger after him & utilize these practices to experience him. There's a reason why we worship in song and/or prayer in our Community Groups before you start anything else - because as a smaller community it helps to center your mind on Christ, to allow the Spirit room to calm you & open your heart to listening well. The act of gathering & certain tradition are important. They reinforce faith, remind, solidify & cause growth. The Israelites hadn't had this for years, at least to its fullest extent! Imagine how spiritually starved they'd become.

The Jewish calendar's filled with feasts & festivals throughout the year.



And, one of the greatest is the Day of Atonement. Many Jews have falsely regarded this as a day of sadness, for the reason that they weren't to wear sandals, have sex, bathe, eat or drink & many other things - however, everything prescribed on that day was to lead the worshiper to understand how much God loved them in provision & grace over them. How these wonderful things originate & are a gift from Him are not to be taken lightly or for granted. The whole ritual performed at Temple & home, was outlined to bring reconciliation between God & people, as well as person to person.



The Israelites had been brought back by Ezra & Zerubbabel years earlier to rebuild the Temple - which tells us that God's at work through a number of personalities & the whole community to reconcile them to himself! To reignite their faith - not just to reconstruct, but re-instruct! He places certain godly men of integrity in positions; people who are who they say they are. People who exhibit a love of God far more than others. What damage it does to a church when people are put into leadership that don't love Jesus. When leadership exhibits a heartfelt passion for Christ, plainly in love with God & his story, they in turn love people - that's infectious & pleasures take their proper place. But these people have to have integrity - it's not enough to love Jesus, but that love of Christ has to be shown in how they live. It's not that they're perfect, but are they transparent, are they who they say they are? Is what you see what you get?

Integrity & passion are important issues. If a leader is still an infant in the faith, trying to gain approval of others or God by what they do, they end up compromising & perverting the Gospel. If someone indulges in a private ongoing sin life, but puts on the spiritual face at church in leadership, their ministry is hamstrung & damaging. *Likewise, knowing about God isn't enough either, you must know God. Someone may live life to the letter of the law & be the most learned person in the room, but if they're not in love with Jesus, ministry is powerless & even damaging.*

*If Vinny shows himself to play music impeccably, but isn't walking with Jesus, his ministry seriously lacks, and is actually damaging - it lacks that power to lead them to the throne of God. His true ministry, as well as mine, isn't fully in the technical aspects, the preparation, the knowledge, but is found in the heart coupled with those things behind it - it's found in how he loves God & loves others. The majority of his ministry isn't on stage, but in the quietness of his times of fellowship with Jesus & others under his lead. Intellectualism is damaging, we need people who not only know something about God, but also know him intimately. We need to know our leadership is in love with Jesus. Integrity & passion are paramount for leadership - but also for all of us.*

*So, Nehemiah chooses godly people & reinstates the priestly order with care, and from verses 8-68 records everyone for the sake of rebuilding the community. He also stays vigilant against attack & orders them to wait until later in the day to open the gates so there could be no surprise attack. Since he knows, although they're progressing, there will be attack & setback.*

*This reminds me of us. We constantly seek to nail down all the different people who attend Six:Eight, what role we play, picking leadership & placing them in certain areas, having people fill the logistical roles, and so on. On top of this we want to get back into the Word with a vigilance through our Community Group's! I am encouraged by the reports, and I want to exhort you to find your place here - In chapter 7 Nehemiah relates the names of all these people who'd returned from captivity. Everyone seems to have a place & role in rebuilding the spiritual life of the community - you do as well - we must remember that!*

*We then wrap up in verses 70-72 where we're reminded of the importance of resources. Nehemiah hasn't only calculated the people, but the horses, camels & donkeys as well as*



the financial giving of the people. It takes resources to be a community & to move the Kingdom God forward. He says:

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

If my calculations are correct that's close to 3 tons of gold & silver donated, not to mention the garments & other items. Now notice, these are the same people Nehemiah had confronted about usury & greed in the chapter before! There's something happening in this community - the work they'd experienced together had brought them together. They had, in a spiritual sense, used the Dung Gate & expelled those things standing in their way of experiencing God. Now we're seeing transformation, of not only people, but also institutional structures. It's true, where your treasure is, your heart will be also. What we give to, defines what we think is important - money's definitely a spiritual issue. Do we give towards the kingdom? Do our resources flow into the church in order to see the Kingdom move forward? We have opportunity to reach this community, but need resources to do that.

At times we've prayed for Six:Eight to grow in size. Is that because we're about numbers? You bet! Totally about numbers, I want more people, money in the bank & resources to reach this community, alleviate suffering & bring blessing! I don't want to be limited, rather have abundance in order to establish a stronghold of Christ's kingdom here.

#### In conclusion:

- Structures & Tradition are important
  - church & practice lead us back to the story of God
- Integrity & Passion are important
  - especially in leadership
    - emotionalism is shallow
    - intellectualism is cold
    - spiritual maturity brings health to the community
- Resources are important
  - everyone counts
  - finances are a spiritual issue

**Community Group Leader Questions:**

1. Describe someone of passion & integrity in Christ, how by example did/do they lead you to Jesus?
2. What is Church? What are those things that we practice as community & why are they important?
3. What are those traditions which hold meaning for you in a church setting? Explain.
4. What are your personal practices which hold meaning to you? Describe them (quiet times, personal worship & prayer, walks in nature, etc.)
5. How is a giving of time, talent & treasure (tithe) an expression of worship & faith? From where does it originate in the hearts of the Israelites at that time, and from where does it originate in you?
6. Six:Eight was, and maybe still is in the construction stage. We built a church from the ground up together, and now we are in the instruction stage, learning Truth through the Word of God. What are some of the Truths you have learned or relearned as a result of being a part of this church? How have they transformed you?
7. Israel had been in captivity, had their Temple destroyed, lost identity in God, but now have been called back, rebuilt and are deepening their faith once again. Have you ever gone through a time when you've been taken away from Jesus, but then been brought back rebuilt & re-instructed? Share what that journey was like.
8. What if the day comes that there are no, or very few church buildings or Christian iconography & symbols in American society...will you still walk with Jesus when it is absolutely & totally counter cultural & even detrimental to career, family & life? This is the condition many Christians live under in other countries where they are the minority - pray for the church across the world together to be strengthened to walk with Jesus well despite the adversity they face.