

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

FOUR QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Nehemiah 7:1-5; 70-72

July 30, 2023

For public use: See non-copyright comments at the end of the message.

We are now halfway through the book of Nehemiah. Before we begin our lesson on Nehemiah 7, let's recap what we have learned.

- Nehemiah was a Jew who was born away from Jerusalem and worked for a foreign king.
- He felt a call from God to go to his ancestor's homeland and help rebuild the wall around the city. The king blessed him and provided supplies.
- Jews had returned to Jerusalem some 100 years prior but had not rebuilt their wall. This was a disgrace.
- Nehemiah rallied the people to rebuild the walls, and people got behind the effort.
- They faced opposition but pressed forward.
- The wall was completed in record time.

In today's sermon, we are going to address four questions:

- Do you fear the Lord?
- Are you protecting yourself from the enemy?
- Do you recognize God's voice?
- How do you feel about giving?

1-DO YOU FEAR THE LORD?

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 7:1-2

After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the Levites were appointed. ² I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do.

EXPLANATION: Three distinct groups of people are listed here: the gatekeepers, the musicians, and the Levites.

1. The gatekeepers monitored what and who came into and went out of the city. They maintained security and kept order. In addition, temple gatekeepers had ceremonial duties.
2. Musicians played an important part in cultural and spiritual celebrations.
3. God had ordained that the Levites be set apart for temple service. These were the teachers of religious law and the ones who oversaw judgments.

These three groups were vital to the city's physical, cultural, and spiritual well-being.

In addition to appointing these three groups, Nehemiah selected two important men. The first was Hanani, Nehemiah's brother. Hanani was one of the men who first visited Nehemiah and delivered the news about the broken wall of Jerusalem. It makes sense that he would receive this appointment. The wall was likely as important to Hanani as it was to Nehemiah.

The second appointment was given to a man named Hananiah. He was the commander of the citadel. Citadel means a fortified structure. Although the specific citadel Hananiah commanded is not clear, this military experience would be a great asset for someone in this position. However, Nehemiah was more interested in two other qualifications. Hananiah was a man of integrity, and he feared God.

The original word translated integrity is emeth (EH-meth) and means firmness, faithfulness, and truth. It carries the connotation of stability. The English definition of integrity is "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles." Therefore, a man of integrity is both reliable and good.

The Hebrew word used here for "fear" is yare' (yaw-RAY). It has several meanings including, of course, to be afraid of or scared. It can also mean to stand in awe, to revere, or honor.

APPLICATION: Hananiah was a good man, a reliable man, and he was a man who feared the Lord. These days, we do not talk a lot about fearing the Lord. We

are more likely to hear about God’s love and our love for God, but is there a reason to fear God? What does the Bible say?

- Proverbs 9:10 reminds us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
- Ecclesiastes 12:13 says that we should fear God and keep his commands.
- Deuteronomy 10:12 tells us to fear the Lord and walk in obedience.
- Proverbs 8:13 proposes that to fear the Lord is to hate evil.

Wait a minute, you may say. Doesn’t God tell us more than 300 times to “fear not”? Yes, he does, but it’s clear from scripture that there is more than one type of fear. God does not want us to dread him. Obviously, he loves us and wants a relationship with us.

However, our God is a holy, perfect, and powerful God. We should definitely have a deep reverence and respect for who he is. God is not some jolly old grandfatherly figure winking at our sin. He is perfect and supreme, and an appropriate fear of the Lord recognizes and bows before him as ruler and king.

- Do you fear the Lord?

2-ARE YOU PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM THE ENEMY?

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 7:3

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 and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses.”

EXPLANATION: Nehemiah’s instructions remind me of the old saying, “Nothing good happens after midnight.” Nehemiah wanted the city locked up and secured well before that hour and did not want it reopened until the sun was high. He knew that a wall alone would not prevent attacks. So, he took extra precautions to prevent the enemy from slipping in.

APPLICATION: Being a Christian does not mean that we will not face opposition from satan. It’s not like satan says, “Oh well, they are already on God’s side. I’ll

just leave them alone.” On the contrary, satan hates God, and therefore, he hates God’s followers. Satan’s time and reach are limited. The only way he can hurt God is to hurt his followers. So, he will do whatever he can to wreak havoc on our lives and to prevent us from helping build the kingdom of Christ. Like Nehemiah, we should seriously consider the issue of security. I’m not talking about the security of salvation. I’m talking about the security of our minds and bodies.

What do you do to protect yourself and your family from the enemy?

- When we dabble in those weak areas of our lives, we open the door for the enemy and welcome him inside.
- We allow the enemy to get a foothold when we are selfish and when we refuse to forgive someone.
- We allow the enemy space in our lives when we are not growing as disciples of our savior.

Proverbs 4:23 tells us to guard our hearts. As long as we live in this world, we’ll have plenty of distractions and must be on guard against evil. There is a time to shut the door and open God’s Word and listen to the teaching of it. We have a responsibility to guard ourselves and our homes.

- Do you fear the Lord?
- Are you protecting yourself from the enemy?

3-DO YOU RECOGNIZE GOD’S VOICE?

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 7:4-5

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

EXPLANATION: The wall was finished, but there was still a lot of work to be done in reestablishing Jerusalem as a thriving city. Much like today, a census would help determine the needs of the community and the resources and manpower that were available. It would help Nehemiah determine and organize the city defenses

and solidify who would serve in the various political and religious offices. In addition, it would be a historical record of this new beginning. There was only one problem.

King David had once conducted a census, and his doing so deeply displeased the Lord. In fact, the punishment for that act resulted in the loss of 70,000 lives (2 Samuel 24). Perhaps that is why Nehemiah made it clear that this census was the Lord's idea and not his own.

APPLICATION: Why would God so severely punish David for conducting a census and then, many years later, want Nehemiah to conduct one? How did Nehemiah know that God had initiated this thought? How do we discern between God's voice and our own?

The first key is to examine God's word. Nehemiah likely knew the story of David. While he recognized that David had sinned by taking a census, he also probably knew about other censuses that God had commanded and blessed. Nehemiah knew that if God had allowed others to conduct a census, then the census itself was not a problem.

In order for us to know whether a thought is from God or ourselves, the first thing we have to do is examine God's word. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 reminds us that scripture is both relevant and powerful. Numbers 23:19 assures us that God will not change his mind about something he's already decreed. If what you are thinking or planning is in opposition to God's word, you can be certain it is not from God.

The second step to discernment is examining your own heart. More specifically, according to Psalm 26:2, you should ask God to examine your heart. The problem with David's census was not the census itself. A census is a tool like a hammer. If you use a hammer to build a toybox, and the toybox falls apart the first time your child drops a pound of blocks inside, I can guarantee that the hammer was not the problem. The problem was with the person who used the hammer. The problem in David's case was David, specifically his heart and motivations.

Nehemiah's census was God's idea. If you are having trouble deciding whether something is from God or a result of your own desires, search God's Word and ask God to search your heart and reveal any sinful intentions. If he does, then you will have your answer. Repent, nix the idea, and start from scratch asking for direction and wisdom.

- Do you fear the Lord?
- Are you protecting yourself from the enemy?
- Do you recognize God's voice?

4- HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT GIVING?

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 7:70-72

Some of the heads of the families contributed to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 darics of gold, 50 bowls and 530 garments for priests. ⁷¹ Some of the heads of the families gave to the treasury for the work 20,000 darics of gold and 2,200 minas of silver. ⁷² The total given by the rest of the people was 20,000 darics of gold, 2,000 minas of silver and 67 garments for priests. ⁷³ The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of the Israelites, settled in their own towns.

EXPLANATION: From verse 6 through 70, we read Nehemiah's record of the people who had repopulated Jerusalem. As with most projects, this census did not go off without a hitch. In fact, some of the people who were serving as Levites could not prove that they were actually from the tribe of Levi. Therefore, they were excluded from the temple responsibilities and benefits until the matter could be settled.

In verses 70-72, the list changes from people to things that various people had given to the rebuilding. Nehemiah was assessing the resources that were available as well as the people. These gifts were important to the community and were therefore recorded for everyone to see.

ILLUSTRATION: I heard of a church that published everyone's name and the amount of their giving for each business meeting. But what if we tallied it as it's done in Nehemiah, by groups: by Sunday School class or age ranges, and publicized

those figures? Or maybe we could tally it by occupation. A friend of mine in Texas was constantly reminded by a senior adult that the seniors were keeping the church afloat. He asked his financial secretary to review the giving. She told him the person who made the claim was wrong. It was the middle-aged group that was giving the largest amount.

APPLICATION: We have no plans to publish giving, and I don't even know what people give, but I doubt that it bothered the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In fact, they probably felt really good that these gifts were accounted for. It demonstrated their contributions to the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

What a person gives is between that person and God. God sees, and God knows. We should not give for pride's sake or to impress others, but we should take our giving very seriously. Again and again, God makes it clear that his people should be a giving people. Giving should not be something we have to do or something we do begrudgingly. We should consider it an honor and a privilege to contribute to God's work. We should give in a way that ensures we have nothing to be embarrassed about—regardless of who sees.

INVITATION: Nehemiah's story continues to encourage us to look deeply at our own lives as well as our contributions to God's work. I ask you to seriously consider the questions we addressed today:

- Do you fear the Lord?
- Are you protecting yourself from the enemy?
- Do you recognize God's voice?
- How do you feel about giving?

If you are not a Christian, these questions are also relevant to you. You cannot fear the Lord if you do not have a personal relationship with him. The Bible says that you are either for God or against him. There is no in-between. However, you can recognize God's voice. He is the one calling to you right now, telling you it's time to repent of your sins. He wants you to give your heart to him and allow him to be Lord of your life. The altar is open if you want to come pray.

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at www.thbc.com. Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA