

**“Be Steadfast”**  
Nehemiah 8-10

5/10-11/08

6 pm; 9 & 10:45 am

**OPEN** to Nehemiah 8 (**PAGE** 761)

## **INTRODUCTION**

Let’s say someone who has struggled with an addiction to alcohol gets to the point where he accumulates two years of clean time. The practice of his addiction has stopped. His life has begun to come back together. He’s holding down a job, paying his bills, growing spiritually. *That is a great accomplishment!*

If you were to have asked this person as he started the recovery process, “*Why is your life so broken?*” he would likely say, “*Because I can’t stop drinking. Alcohol has destroyed my life.*”

But after two years of sobriety if you were to ask him, “*So, what was it that caused your broken life?*” he would likely have a different answer.

It might sound like this, “*I didn’t know how to deal with the pain of my childhood, so I started drinking to numb the pain.*”

Or maybe, “*I didn’t know how to deal with the pressures of life, so I started drinking to escape.*”

Or maybe, “*I was so insecure that I started drinking to gain acceptance.*”

*Why this change?* Because now the person is seeing the root cause of their damaged life.

This applies to whatever kind of brokenness you are dealing with – once you start rebuilding, root issues come to clarity.

For the last five weeks, we’ve seen the Israelites laboring to rebuild the protective wall around their city.

And they get it done! We read in Nehemiah 6:15, “**So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.**”

Their wall is now rebuilt, the new gates are hung in place, and their city is secure. The wall that had been in ruins for about 140 years is now rebuilt! *And in 52 days!*

A wall that’s 12-15 feet thick; more than 15 feet high, made of boulders, rocks and cement. Ten new gates constructed and installed ... a wall that’s 1½ miles around! Built in 52 days! *And they knew that God had helped them!*

The wall was rebuilt, but Nehemiah knew the work wasn't completed.

You see, the wall was but a *symbol* of the people's relationship to God. The broken-down wall was a *result* of a broken-down relationship with God. The people walked away from God's covenant, so God as He had repeatedly warned, walked away from blessing them.

*The root issue:* They walked away from God.

*Now, the people are at a critical juncture.* Do they rejoice the wall is done, and return to living their lives apart from God? Or do they recognize the root issues and deal with them?

Nehemiah's next steps were to bring the people into a clear realization that God was again working among them and that He was extending to them an opportunity to renew their relationship with Him.

He is going to be steadfast until the entire mission is accomplished – until they deal with the root issues.

*To be steadfast ...*

### **I. Reflect on God's Word, Clarifying What Led to Your Broken Life** (Nehemiah 8)

**READ Nehemiah 8:2: "So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand."**

Nehemiah didn't waste any time. The wall was completed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of the Hebrew calendar. On the first day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month, they're all assembled together ... five days after the wall was completed.

I can see Nehemiah, as he's declaring the wall completed and sending the workers home, "*Remember to be back with your families in five days ... on the first day of the month.*"

What Nehemiah has planned, along with Ezra the priest, is for the people to understand what had caused their broken lives and city ... the root cause.

And to do that, he has asked Ezra, the spiritual leader, to expose the people to the Word of God. Let them hear and understand the Word of God.

And, so, they show up on the first day of the seventh month. The people know God has been at work in them and for them. It is undeniable as they looked at the completed wall. Nehemiah knows that now is the time, now that they see how committed God is to them, they need to see why they lost the blessing of this covenant-keeping God.

A platform has been constructed for Ezra to stand upon so that all the people can see him.

At daybreak, the people are already in place, anticipating what is going to happen.

Ezra steps onto the platform with 13 Levites standing to his right and left sides.

**READ** Nehemiah 8:5-8

Here's what appears is happening: There is no sound system, no microphones, so Ezra reads from the Scriptures in Hebrew.

The 13 Levites move off the platform and stand amongst the crowd. They translate what Ezra reads into Aramaic, their spoken language, and explain what it means. Much like we do today ... read the Scripture, explain its meaning.

v. 3 tells us this took place from daybreak until 12 noon ... about six hours.

As the people hear the Word of God read and explained, as, over the hours, it soaks into their hearts and minds, as they hear about the goodness and mercy of their God, and as they hear His law, and become aware of their disobedience, and how their people have lapsed into and out of obedience for generations, for centuries, they begin to grieve over their sins, over how they have trashed God ... and they begin to weep.

As they listen to God's Word and its meaning ... as they reflect on what God is saying and upon their own lives, it becomes clear to them what led to their broken-down wall and their broken-down lives.

After a while, after the lesson has soaked in, Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites tell the people to stop weeping.

**READ** Nehemiah 8:9-12

**“Holy.”** The closest I can figure as to what this would be like for us ... we gather to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. As the Resurrection is explained, people begin to weep because they realize the tremendous sacrifice Jesus made for their rescue from sin, and realize that their hearts and lives are far from God, and the Holy Spirit convicts them, and they begin to weep.

We would say, after a while, “Stop weeping! This is a day of celebration! Christ is Risen! Your sins are forgiven! Rejoice! Go home and celebrate! Have a great meal and then take some to your friends to share your joy!”

And so the people stop weeping and start celebrating. But, on the next day, we see that the lesson is still fresh in their hearts. All the heads of households gather to hear more of what God wants of them. They want to obey, they want to renew the covenant God has given them.

And then they take the next step ... they gather for a solemn assembly.

### I. Reflect on God's Word, Clarifying What Led to Your Broken Life (Nehemiah 8)

*To be steadfast ...*

### II. Sincerely Confess the Sinful Behaviors and Attitudes that Led to Your Broken Life (Nehemiah 9)

**READ** Nehemiah 9:1-7 **“On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads.”**

**2 Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers.**

**3 They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God. (this was not rushed. It wasn't a 30 to 60 second “I'm sorry” and getting on with their lives. They had sinned greatly for generations against God, and now they were naming and confessing their sins)**

**4 Standing on the stairs were the Levites - Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani - who called with loud voices to the LORD their God.**

**5 And the Levites - Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah - said: ‘Stand up and praise the LORD your God, Who is from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be Your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise.**

**6 You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the Earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of Heaven worship You.**

**7 You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham.”**

From v. 8 through 35 they tell of God's great faithfulness in various circumstances, and then, how they walked away from God.

Their prayer ends with their current situation ...

**Nehemiah 9:36-38: “But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land You gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces.**

37 **Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings You have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.**

*They sincerely confess the sinful behaviors and attitudes that led to their broken lives*

*Attitudes:* “We can do life without You at the center, God. We will acknowledge You, but we’ll live how we think is best, and how the other people around us are living. Our hearts are half-full for You. That’s enough!” Arrogance, independence, idolatry.

*Behaviors:* Disobedience continually increased. Excusing and rationalizing disobedience increased. Then they blamed God for not blessing their disobedient lives, as if HE was the problem!

I encourage people who are rebuilding their lives to take the time to get alone and list their sins, write them down ... actions, attitudes, thoughts; people they sinned against. Take the time to do it thoroughly. And then confess them, and then destroy the list, because God has forgiven you!

**II. Sincerely Confess the Sinful Behaviors and Attitudes that Led to Your Broken Life**  
(Nehemiah 9)

*To be steadfast ...*

**III. Demonstrate Sincere Repentance By Committing to Specific Actions and Accountability** (Nehemiah 9:38-10:39)

(This is their plan to stay on track)

**Nehemiah 9:38: “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.”**

Nehemiah 10:1-27: the agreement is sealed by the leaders:

v. 1: Nehemiah

v. 1b-8: names of priests

v. 9-13: names of Levites

v. 14-27: names of leaders of the people

v. 28-39a: specific spiritual commitments that are made ...

commitments that are firmly based on God's commands ...

that address the root issues that have caused their **“great distress.”** (9:37)

They pledge spiritual faithfulness within their families

Nehemiah 10:30 **“We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.** (not racism; refusing to marry those who do not worship the true God).

They pledge to honor the Lord's Sabbaths

v. 31: **“When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forego working the land and will cancel all debts.**

They pledge to support the ministry according to God's instructions

v. 32-33: **“We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God:  
33 for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moon festivals and appointed feasts; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God.**

v. 34: **“We - the priests, the Levites and the people – have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law.**

v. 35: **“We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree.**

v. 36: **“As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there.**

v. 37a: **“Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and oil.**

v. 37b-38: “And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work.

38 A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury.

v. 39b: “We will not neglect the house of our God.”

They had separated their personal walk with God from their commitment to the ministry, the temple. So, now they are realizing that was wrong. God says that when we neglect His ministry, we are neglecting Him.

J.I. Packer, commenting on this section of Scripture, writes:

The people were “demonstrating a resolve to put God first in everything ... For the members of an economically depressed community to forego marrying foreign money and trading seven days a week, and to promise to pay redemption money for the firstborn ... to give substantially to the poor ... and to tithe everything regularly for the temple was bold, costly, and self-denying. But what it expressed in positive terms was a resolve to obey God at all costs, with no half measures, and to trust Him totally to bestow ... peace, well-being, harmony, prosperity – on His faithful, loving people.

“Israel’s overall commitment was thus something very much to admire. It was an expression of radical repentance, which meant a change of mind, heart and life; a gesture of full consecration, which meant being separated from other peoples to be the people of God; and a gateway into the life of faith, in which God would be relied on for everything. It models the commitment that should mark the Christian church today – Christians marrying Christians and setting up Christian homes; Christians viewing their time, life, health, wealth, abilities and influence as gifts from God of which they are stewards and on which God Himself always has first claim; Christians being generous in the face of human need and responsible in giving (tithing? at least! – and when one can, doing more) to maintain the church’s ministries and personnel.”

(A Passion for Faithfulness, pp. 162-163)

## CONCLUSION

If you had asked the average Israelite before the wall was rebuilt, “*So, what’s your problem?*” They would have said the problem was a broken-down wall. “*How can we have any sense of self-respect with the wall torn down? How can we have any respect from the nations around us when our protective wall lies in piles of rubble?*”

After the wall was rebuilt, after 30 days of dealing with the root issues through confession and repentance and a plan to stay on track with God, if you asked them, “So, what was the problem back then when the wall was torn down?” they’d answer,

*“We walked away from God ... in our thoughts, attitudes and actions. We lived self-directed lives. And, so, God let us go, and our lives became worse than the unbelievers around us. So, out of love, He disciplined us so we could see how good we had it when we walked with Him.*

*“So, now, we’ve confessed our sins and turned back to God. We’re going to walk humbly with Him, follow Him whole-heartedly, and enjoying His love and His blessings.”*

Walk this way!

*“Father in Heaven, thank You for showing me the path to walk so that I can experience a close relationship with You and walk in Your blessings!”*