

VENTURING BEYOND

Going deeper in this week's message topic through Intentional Intimacy with the Almighty God

When the Jewish people were given the grant of return to their land, Israel as it was known, and its once beautiful city of peace—Jerusalem—was in utter shambles. The Babylonian destruction and captivity had taken its toll. Through determined leadership and the providence of God, Israel returns to rebuild. They experience success by the mighty hand of God and the leadership of the likes of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and later, Ezra and Nehemiah.

We see a drastic turning point during the rebuilding of the walls in Nehemiah before their completion. (In the Hebrew bible, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are one.) As they are rebuilding and facing extreme terror from opposition, Nehemiah discovers many wrongs taking place among them. In chapter 5, he hears the outcry of the afflicted and destitute of the people (Neh. 5:1). (Much of the injustice was done by their own people!) Many are poor and burdened by heavy taxes and bad dealings (vv. 2-5). Nehemiah delivers swift judgement, "You are exacting interest, each from his brother" and, "you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!" (vv. 7-8; they were clearly disobeying God's law in Exodus 22: "If you lend money to any of My people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him" v. 25).

Nehemiah beseeches them to return all goods, property, and family members to make things right (vv. 9-11). The people did heed his words (vv. 12-13). God blesses their obedience and the work on the walls is eventually completed. And vitally important, the reading of God's law by Ezra and others to the people follows: "They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Neh. 8:8). They celebrated with the proper feast, for it was the seventh month, and renewed the covenant (8:13-10:39). As we join together each Lord's day to hear God's very word to us in Christ, may we respond with humble and contrite hearts, "Amen, Amen," bowing our heads and lifting our hands and hearts to God in worship (8:6).