

STOP and PRAY



Prayers For Renewal and Spiritual Transformation

by Tom Bishop

Stop and Pray

So often we go plodding on trying one thing after another to solve the problems we face. The institutional church does the same thing. There is a new program or idea every week to save the world. This book is a call to Stop and hear what God is saying and then Pray as directed by the Holy Spirit. God has the answers. He alone has the plan for the great end time harvest.

These prayers for transformation and spiritual awakening are from the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah. These two books describe the revival that occurred through the rebuilding of the temple and the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. The Old Testament stories are examples for those of us alive in these last days. These two stories of renewal are examples of what God wants to do again. The steps they took in obeying God give us insight into things we can pray for now.

Read Ezra and Nehemiah and pray as you read because these prayers assume you know the stories. Pray these prayers alone and with others if possible. Build on these prayers with the specific needs you know about in your friends and your church body. Your fervent prayers are part of God's plan for a desperately needed spiritual transformation of our world.

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EZRA

Chapter 1

To fulfill His Word, God touched the heart of a heathen king and caused him to want to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Today, God is willing and able to touch the hearts of even lost people so they cooperate in rebuilding the crumbling spiritual foundations of our country. God is always ready for revival if His people will humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways.

Lord, stir up the hearts of people to rebuild the spiritual foundations of our country. Do whatever it takes to make sure we meet Your requirements for revival.1-2

God calls His people to return to Jerusalem for the task of rebuilding the temple. Today, believers are scattered and sidetracked into all kinds of trivial activities and are not yet focused on seeking first the kingdom of God.

Cause those who have wandered away from Your true church to return to an active relationship with You and with other believers. Rescue us from everything that distracts us from kingdom work. 3

Our government leadership pays lip service to the church in public. In private, they often oppose things the church supports and support things the church opposes.

Cause the leadership of our country to be sympathetic and supportive of Your church. Show them the practical benefit to society that comes through the church. 7-8

Chapter 2

This chapter tells about the children who come back out of captivity. More than ever, the children of our nation are captive to gangs, drugs, godless TV and music, sex and materialism. Multitudes of others have been cut off from life by abortion.

Bring our sons and daughters out of captivity. Show us how to reach those who are currently in bondage. 1

The media has played up the misuse of church funds by a few crooks so much that many people have significantly reduced their giving. Pray that God will continue to expose and cut off funds to any group that wastes or misuses kingdom money. Also pray that He will cause us to recognize and freely support those who are wisely and effectively using the monies they receive.

Lord, You see those organizations who are not using Your kingdom funds wisely. Cut off or significantly reduce their funds until they repent and change. Cause Your people to give freely of their time and resources to trustworthy groups who are seeking to rebuild and restore the church. 68

Chapter 3

The people worked together to rebuild and restore.

Unite Your people to work together for the restoration of the church. 9

We need those who clearly see what the church should be like and what the church should be doing. This way, we won't settle for anything less than what God wants.

Raise up those who see what the church could and should be. Anoint them to express this vision to the rest of the body. 12

Chapter 4

Many kinds of cults and religious groups pretend to be Christian. At the same time, they deny the deity of Jesus Christ and the way of salvation through faith in Christ alone for salvation. Pray that God will cause us to exclude them from any active role in the body of Christ.

Father, raise up people like Zerubbabel and Jeshua who prevent the world's ideas and the world's religious practices from coming into the church in any way. 1-3

We should expect false religions to unite in these last days against real Christianity. It is much safer to have them actively opposing us than to have them secretly slipping in and pretending they are part of us.

Keep us from being afraid though all the false, godless religions of the world unite against us in these last days. Expose and remove any false groups that have infiltrated the church and keep her pure. 4-5

The devil's crowd deceived the king into ordering work on the temple to stop. Don't be surprised if it one day becomes illegal or at least very difficult to share your faith with lost people. Efforts are underway to label it "religious harassment" to talk about Jesus in the work place. It is already extremely difficult to talk about Jesus in our public schools.

Father, protect us as godless people try to turn our government against Your church. Frustrate their plans and do not let them stop Your kingdom work. 6-24

Chapter 5

We definitely need people who can hear clearly what God wants done and can effectively speak God's desires to the body of Christ.

Father, raise up prophets who will help the church see what work needs to be done in this day. 1

Once the leaders knew what God wanted, they set their hearts to accomplish it. If God gives you an assignment, make sure it gets done, regardless of the opposition.

Lord, give us leaders who will guide Your people in these last days. Make sure we do the tasks You assign. 2

An honest review of our nation's history will clearly show that the Bible and Christian beliefs form the core of our laws, courts, constitution and all that made us a nation.

Open the eyes of the leaders of our country to see that Christianity is the foundation and glue that holds this nation together. Anoint people to clearly verbalize this to the nation. 17

Chapter 6

These verses are tremendous. The king tells the devil's bunch to, "keep away and leave the work on God's house alone." Pray that God will distract or order the devil away from His key works. We probably put up with much opposition that we could eliminate if we would fervently and consistently pray.

Father, do what is necessary to force the devil's workers to keep away from Your work. Force them to leave Your great end-time harvest alone. Stir us to pray for constant protection. Teach us how to use our authority to resist the devil and make him flee. 6-7

The Lord diverted the funds of the wicked into kingdom work. God tells us in Proverbs 13:22 that "...the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the righteous." We need to pray for a major transfer of resources from the sinners to those who can be trusted to use them for the kingdom.

Father, tax money is supporting and promoting new age religions in our schools and government agencies. Turn the tables and make funds available for kingdom work. 8-9

For years, the church has prayed very little. As a result, the world assumes our God is powerless and our prayers are worthless. Our leaders need to know by fresh examples that the prayers of God's people have tremendous impact.

Father, give us prayers that show our federal, state and local leaders the importance and power of the prayers of Your people. 10

Why should those who fight God's work go unopposed? For their own good, they need to know quickly they are resisting the King of kings and the Lord of lords. This will give them more reason to repent and believe.

Father, strongly resist those who are currently resisting the work You are doing through Your church. Make them understand that they are fighting You. 11

Remember, the author of this book is not Ezra. The author is the Holy Spirit of the Living God. God had this verse written. Read it and stand in prayer against those who oppose God. Pharaoh asked in Exodus 5:2, "Who is Jehovah that I should obey His voice...?" He found out soon enough.

Father, overthrow those who are trying to destroy Your church. Show us how to pray

against those who oppose You. 12

The people obeyed and got the task done right and on time.

Father, cause all Your end-time plans to be completed on time. 14-15

Repentance and turning from known sin are essential for those wanting a close intimate walk with God in the Spirit.

Lord, cleanse us for effective service. Make us aware where we have sinned and make sure we confess and repent. 20-21

Chapter 7

God found Ezra to be a godly man who knew His Word. He anointed him, gave him favor with the king, and used him in revival. The Lord is looking for such men, women, and youth today to use in bringing revival to the church and spiritual awakening to our land.

Father, You have a Spirit-filled remnant in most churches and in most cities. Give this remnant favor with those in leadership so Your plans are fulfilled. Father, keep Your hand of favor on them. 1-6

Ezra spent time in God's word. Each believer is primarily responsible for their own spiritual development. Don't expect others to do it for you. Get into God's Word. Spend as much time as you can in prayer alone and with others. Do what God tells you to do. Pray for others to do the same.

Father, raise up people who study Your Word, practice it and teach it to others. Anoint them for this task. 9-10

Whatever tasks God assigns you, do them with all your heart for God and don't look for the praise or approval of men.

Lord, make sure we are zealous to accomplish the kingdom work You assign us. Keep us from being deceived and doing things You don't want. 23

The government is looking for ways to tax the church and to silence the criticism of the church.

Lord, keep the government from imposing taxes on Your church. Don't let them legislate the church into silence. 24

We desperately need godly judges. Our legal system is a mess.

Father, appoint leaders and judges who know and obey Your word. Exalt those who teach our country Your ways. 25

God can change the hearts of our leaders or else remove them if we will pray.

Father, put Your ideas and plans into the hearts of our leaders. Remove those who consistently oppose You. 27

Chapter 8

They searched for godly spiritual leaders and God honored their search. Pray that God will elevate His choices into leadership positions in the church. Pray that He will remove any who are in the wrong place.

Lord, give us men of insight to be our spiritual leaders. Remove those who will not obey You and relocate those who are in the wrong positions. 18

Rather than presume on God for protection, Ezra called the people to fast and pray. God heard and answered their prayers.

Cause Your church to proceed with fasting and humility into the new things You have for us. Deliver us and our children from those the devil sends against us. Thank You for always hearing our prayers. 21-23

We must pick honest people to handle the church's funds. Even then, there must be a system of checks and balances so no one person can hide their activities from others. Recently, the treasurer of a church I once attended deceived the pastor and people and embezzled a large sum. He then disappeared. This weakened the church and hindered God's work. More than anything else, the financial aspects of the church should be open and available to the body.

Cause us to pick honest people to handle the finances of the church. Make sure no one person can steal and hide it from the body. Expose all cases of financial deceit within the body of Christ. 29-30

Jesus taught us in what we call the Lord's prayer to pray for protection from the evil one. We should do this regularly. God wants to protect us if we will ask.

Father, keep Your hand upon us and deliver us from the hand of our enemy and from the ambushes the devil sets up. 31

Chapter 9

The Lord calls us to come apart from the world and be different.

Lord, cause us, Your people, to separate ourselves from the sinful things the lost world is doing. 1

Wrong marriages with people from other nations introduced idolatry into Israel and caused them to go into captivity. Marriages between believing Christians and unbelievers set the stage for divorce and all manner of hurts. We need to take seriously God's command in 2 Corinthians 6:14 to "not be unequally yoked with unbelievers."

Father, keep our believing children from dating or marrying unbelievers. Teach us how to

identify those who are only pretending to be Christian. 2

Read Ezra's prayer in these verses. It fits us perfectly today. We can use almost the same words as we call out for mercy and deliverance. Just as Ezra identified with the sins of his people, we can identify with the sins of the church and pray for revival.

O Father, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You. Our sins have risen over our heads and our guilt reaches to the heavens. All our lives we have played church, neglected prayer and sought our own ways. Open our eyes to Your truth and deliver us from our bondage to the world's ways. Revive Your church in these last days. Keep anything that is impure or unclean from being part of Your church. Form in us a strong commitment to do all we can to prevent our believing children from marrying unbelievers. Show us our areas of sin and disobedience and insure we repent and turn from sin and walk in Your ways. 6-15

Chapter 10

When the leaders repented and wept before the Lord, the people quickly followed.

Cause our church leaders to see where the church is disobedient and repent. As the leaders repent, cause the people to repent and return to You. 1

The leaders not only repented, but they took steps to forsake their sin and obey God's commands.

Father, see to it that we go beyond being sad about our sin. Make sure we stop things we know to be wrong and start doing what is right. 2-3

After the leaders got their lives cleaned up, God began to work powerfully in the people.

Father, cause us to experience Your presence, tremble before You and turn from our wicked ways. 9-12

God's love and His blessings are so wonderful that we sometimes forget He is also perfectly just and hates sin. A quick look around our country reveals the tremendous amount of shaking, breaking and loss that is occurring because of God's judgement on our sins.

Father, cause Your people to repent so You can use us to help this lost world to see how much pain and suffering they are experiencing because of their sin. Show us how to cooperate with You so Your fierce anger can be turned from our land. 14

As usual, there were some prominent people and some religious leaders who opposed what God was doing. However, most of the people obeyed God.

Father, make sure we never oppose what You are doing. Don't let Your work be stopped, no matter who opposes it. 15-17

NEHEMIAH

Chapter 1

Most of the people in Jerusalem thought there was nothing that could be done to rebuild the city. When Nehemiah heard of the condition of Jerusalem, he wept, mourned, fasted and prayed for days.

Father, in many ways the church is in great distress and reproach. The walls have been broken down and the world has flooded into the church. Open our eyes to the true condition of the church and set us to fasting and praying for revival. 3-4

Nehemiah remembered that God had promised in 1 Chronicles 7:14 to heal and restore if His people would meet His requirements. The unchanging requirements are that God's people humble themselves, pray, seek His face and turn from their wicked ways. Nehemiah sets his heart to do just that.

Father, cause us to humble ourselves, pray, seek Your face and turn from our wicked ways. Hear our prayers. Stir us to pray day and night until revival comes. Work in us so we confess the sins of the church and our country and recognize where we have not obeyed Your word. 5-7

Nehemiah remembers that God had promised to scatter His people if they were unfaithful. He also remembered that God promised to gather them again if they would confess their sins and obey His word. He promised to bring them to the place where His name was or, in other words, He would bring them into His presence.

If only the church could realize how real the presence of God can be and how absent He is from most of what we call worship services. We also need to see how we have been scattered as a nation. We are scattered from our close relatives. The grandparents are usually far from the grandchildren. We are scattered as marriages are failing by the millions and the children are shuffled from one parent to the other.

Our worship of jobs, success, careers and the good life has cost the church dearly. It has also robbed the world of good examples since most church people look and act just like the world. The only difference is on Sunday. They sleep in. We sleep in church. They play golf. We play church. If we would seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then God would work through us in ways that would draw the world to Him.

Father, we have sinned and You have justly scattered us in many ways. We hardly know where to begin to come back or to help others come back to You. Jesus, our Shepherd and Redeemer, guide us in confessing where we have sinned. Lead us, Your sheep, back into Your ways and into Your presence. Make sure we truly do seek first Your kingdom and receive all You want us to have. Make us successful in all we do as we fully obey You day by day. 8-11

Chapter 2

The sadness Nehemiah felt was given by God and reflected how God felt. Are you willing to let the Lord open your eyes to see the devastation of families through divorce, the destruction of children by drugs, gangs and godless teachers? Can He show you what the devil plans to do to our nation and the devil's plan to make Christians and Christianity despised by the world? Can God show you what the church could be compared to what she is? The more fully your heart is broken by the things that grieve our Lord, the more intense and powerful your intercession will be.

Lord Jesus, open my eyes to see what You see and feel how You feel about the condition of the church and the world. Do what You need to do in my heart so I can intercede for the church and for the world like You want. Give me the grace to not turn loose until You send a mighty, sweeping spiritual renewal to our nation. 1

The king noticed that Nehemiah was sad. Nehemiah was worried because it could cost one his life to be sad before the king of Babylon. Our world doesn't have time for sad people either unless it is to show them momentarily on TV in relation to the day's tragedy. God loves godly sorrow so much that He collects and keeps a record of the resulting tears (Psalm 56:8). Can the Lord give you sadness, remorse and tears over the godlessness of our nation? In Psalm 126:5, the Lord tells us, "Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting."

Lord, fill me with godly sorrow over the sins of Your people and this nation. Lead me to weep, repent and pray in ways that allow You to cleanse and heal Your church and to begin to heal our land. Use me to help others to become the intercessors You want. 2-3

When Nehemiah was questioned by the king, he prayed because he wanted to speak what God gave him to speak. In Matthew 10:18-20, Jesus promised us the right words when we are brought before the world's leaders. We need to be "prayed up" and ready so the Lord can speak through us whenever He wishes.

Father, whenever we get to speak up for You, give us exactly the words You want spoken. Make sure we speak in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. 4

Because Nehemiah was humble and obedient, God gave him tremendous favor with King Artaxerxes. The king gave him permission to rebuild Jerusalem and a "blank check" for all the resources needed.

Your prayers and intercessions will allow God to raise up those who will strengthen and rebuild the church. In Proverbs 13:22, God tells us, "The wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous." God is willing to tap the wealth of the world for use in His kingdom whenever His people are right with Him.

Father, cleanse me and everyone I can influence so You can give us favor and resources to build Your kingdom. Bring forth godly people like Nehemiah who can lead the church in the task of rebuilding the spiritual foundations of our nation. Day by day, transfer abundant resources into the hands of those who will use them for Your kingdom. 5-8

The devil's crowd was not very happy when they heard that Nehemiah was coming to help God's people. The devil today strongly resists those who are praying and seeking to bring revival to the church. Don't be surprised by opposition. Expect it but just be sure your heart stays right with God.

Father, keep me from being discouraged when the devil opposes what You are doing through me. Keep me encouraged and make sure I do and say exactly what You want. 9-10

The first thing Nehemiah did was secretly survey the extent of the damage. Probably the thing the church needs to realize is the damage the devil has caused and how much he has infiltrated the church with his thinking and his ways. The church needs to see that what we are doing isn't working and has allowed our country to get into a terrible mess. The destruction of Jerusalem was caused completely by the Jews and their sin. The condition of our country is totally the fault of the church which has essentially been asleep for over fifty years. Lost people do not have God's power to overcome sin. The church must be salt and light and we have not done the job.

Father, cause the leaders in Your church to see the full extent of the damage. Cause them to see it is time to rebuild. Open their eyes to what You want them to do. Make sure we keep Your plans secret until it is time to reveal them. 12-15

Nehemiah gathered the leaders of God's people and pointed out the true condition of the city. Then He told them what God had already done by providing resources through King Artaxerxes. He told them God's plan to rebuild. They were ready to join God in what God was doing.

Father, call out leaders who know what You want to do. Use them to call the church to the task of rebuilding. Cause the church to respond wholeheartedly to the call to revival and rebuilding. 17-18

As the devil's bunch hear what God is doing, their resistance intensifies. They accuse Nehemiah of rebelling against the authority of the king. As we seek revival, those who are content with the "status quo" will be up in arms. Nehemiah told the Jews that God would give them success. He also told the devil's bunch they had no part in the rebuilding.

Keep us from being discouraged in any way when the enemy resists us. Make sure we know our hearts are right with You. Cause us to recognize and remove those the devil has slipped into positions of power in the church. Keep them from having any part in the revived church and make them powerless to hinder Your work. 19-20

Chapter 3

This chapter shows the effectiveness of different kinds of small groups. Let's look at some of them. In verses one and three, we see a family group. Sometimes, we are tempted to believe that we can't share spiritual things with close relatives. This should be the first place we share. We have just experienced times with both Marcia's family and mine where we spent several vacation days sharing and praying together and equipping each other for kingdom work. Doesn't it make sense that God would want to answer many of your prayers for revival by touching those related to you?

Father, work deeply in me, my family, and all my relatives. Cause us to be those You can use in the coming spiritual awakening of our country. Cause us to share how You are working in our lives. Draw lost relatives to Yourself so none of the family gets left out. 1,3

In verse two, we see the men of Jericho at work. These were the men of a small town uniting for a kingdom task. We really know a revival work is underway when it captures the men. In Wales, England, during the revival of 1903-1904, God captured the coal miners. In Kentucky in 1801, the men all over the state loaded their families in wagons and headed for Cane Ridge Meeting House for a time of revival. This summer, 1996, thousands of men gathered at strategic locations across the country to worship, pray, study and fellowship together at Promise Keeper rallies. When God captures the man, He usually gets the rest of the family. Let's pray that God will draw men to Himself and capture them for kingdom work.

Father, do what is necessary to capture the men in cities across our country. Gather them into small groups where they can be encouraged and disciplined. Put them to work in things that will count for eternity. Set them free from anything that wastes their lives. Show them how to get their whole family involved in kingdom work. 2

In verse six we see two men working together to repair a strategic gate. It really helps to have a close godly friend who holds you accountable. God tells us in Proverbs 27:17 that iron sharpens iron. That is what a small group of two or three men or women does for each other. Jesus always sent His disciples out in groups of at least two. Paul had Barnabas or Silas. He also had a young Mark or Timothy. The older men were discipling these young men. Let's pray that God will begin to team people across the land and that we will experience intense times of discipling each other.

Father, thank you for what You are already doing through Promise Keepers and other groups to bring men, women and young people into accountability groups. I pray You will do this first for pastors and church leaders so none are isolated and all have a close friend and spiritual partner. Also Father, work powerfully to bring men out of their isolation and give them a godly male friend with whom to share, pray and fellowship. Do the same for the women and youth. Give us all the proper balance as you make us part of small and large groups. 6

Throughout the rest of chapter three, we see people from all walks of life working on the walls. The kingdom work of today is the same. We need all kinds of people doing all kinds of things to build the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit is the director of the work. He calls each of us to our tasks. There were perfumers, priests, goldsmiths, Levites, politicians, temple servants and many others working. Each man set himself to the task at hand.

Father, don't let me ever criticize those You are using in Your kingdom work. Make sure I get my part done well and that I encourage everyone I can. Show us all our kingdom work and make sure we do it with all our heart. 8,17,22,26,31.

We see the ladies show up in verse 12 as the daughters of Shallum helped their father make repairs. Although we don't see them in other places, they were doubtless doing more than their share of the work. They always do. For the last 50 years, most of the men have been on spiritual

vacation. They have abdicated many of their roles and the women have stepped into the gap. It is time again for men to be the spiritual leaders at home, at church and in the community. This doesn't mean the women should slack up any. The older should teach the younger. They should gather wherever possible with others for prayer. Finally, they should embrace their role of being the spiritual challenge in the home.

Father, thank You for all the godly women across our country and all they have done for the kingdom. Take them deeper in their relationship with You. Don't let possessions or the other temptations of the world distract them. Set the older women to discipling the younger women. Don't let any of the gifts and talents You have placed in women go unused. Raise up many intercessors and prayer warriors from the women. Give each their proper kingdom role. 12

Chapter 4

As the devil sees restoration and revival begin, he begins to fight against it. Often he tries to stop God's work by ridicule and mockery. He hopes to prevent others joining God's work and to demoralize those who are working. Today he extensively uses the media to ridicule the church. The media points out every mistake and failure and conveniently overlooks the successes and victories of God's people. Today, it is almost impossible to get the truth through the secular media.

Nehemiah's response was to stand against them in prayer. He asked the Father to deal powerfully with them. The other response was to keep on working. Soon they had the wall up to half its height and totally connected around the city.

Father, see how the world is mocking Your church. See especially how they jump on everything that contains a hint of revival. Father, certain banks, entertainment networks, Hollywood, the secular media and others are trying to destroy Your church. Using Nehemiah's words, I ask You to return their reproach back on their own heads. Give these groups up to plunder and cause them to be taken over by others. Never forgive the sins of these companies for they have demoralized Your church.

At the same time Father, keep Your people working. Join us with other believers all around the world. Make sure everyone is doing the work he is supposed to do. 1-6

When the devil's workers saw that mockery did not stop the work, they were furious. They began to conspire together to fight against Jerusalem and cause a disturbance in it. Today, the devil is building a united opposition against the church. He is trying to cause disturbances in the church. He also tries to create fear. When we are full of fear, soon we begin to doubt and our faith is weakened. Rumors began to fly in Jerusalem as attacks were predicted repeatedly. For a time, the enemy's plan worked. The people began to confess that their strength was failing and that the job was too big. When Nehemiah saw their fear, he reminded them that God was great and awesome. He called them to fight for each other and to not be afraid.

Father, keep us from being afraid of the devil's threats. Keep Christian teachers from being afraid to speak out for You. Keep Christian workers everywhere standing against the devil's attacks. Don't let fear stop us from doing the tasks You assign. Teach us how to stand together and fight for each other. 7-14

When the devil's forces knew their plan had been discovered and that the people were armed and ready to fight, they gave up their plan to attack. It is one thing for the devil to sneak up on a person who is alone and unsuspecting or a church that is asleep. It is a far different matter for him to take on a Christian with his armor on, ready to do spiritual battle. The devil always lost when he took on Jesus in a fight. When we put on the armor, we are dressed in Jesus, look like Jesus and walk in the power of Jesus. Notice in verse 23 that they never took off the armor and were always ready to fight. It is the same for us. Once we put on our spiritual armor, we never take it off until we get to heaven and our battle is over.

Notice also that half worked and half stood guard always. Think of it this way for us: Half should be doing the work of ministry and half should be at prayer, carrying on spiritual warfare. That would give the devil fits.

Father, keep us always ready to fight. Make sure we put on and keep on the full armor You give us. Keep alert those who are to sound the alarm when the enemy attacks. Make sure we have some working and some engaged in prayer warfare always. Cause us to join with others for big tasks. Keep us totally trusting in and relying on You always. 15-23

Chapter 5

What the devil could not accomplish by threats or by armed force, he tried to do from within. By inciting greed in the rich, the nobles and the rulers, many were brought into poverty and bondage. Today, some are getting rich and powerful at the expense of others in the body of Christ. Some congregations have nothing and others have great luxury. There are many believers who do much of the work but have very little authority or say in the direction of the church. Most of the power and authority is concentrated in the hands of a few. Using guilt and fear, many leaders control and manipulate and essentially enslave their followers. In other churches, a few do the work while the rest are just there for the "show." This is not God's plan. Nehemiah confronts it head on and the nobles and rulers promised to change. Nehemiah shakes out his garment and asks God to shake out and separate those who did not keep their promise.

Father, bring an end to the great imbalance in Your church. Stop those who are taking advantage of Your kingdom workers. End all slavery within the church. Set free those held in bondage by fear, guilt or human control. Shake out and separate those who do not stop taking advantage of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Father, where our sons and daughters are enslaved to the world or have left the church because of the abuses they have seen, bring them back. Bring an end to everything within Your church that hinders the work of the kingdom. Cause the body to speak out against everything that is wrong. Raise up Nehemiahs who will lead the church into cleansing and freedom. 1-13

As a leader, Nehemiah felt he should not take the food allowance that was rightfully his. He refused it because of the tremendous burden the people were already carrying. He fed and cared for many people out of his own resources. He did not use his position to accumulate houses and lands because he feared God.

Father, cause us all to use the resources You have entrusted to us for Your kingdom. Keep us from hoarding resources that we don't need. Don't let us ever forget that from whom much is given, much is expected. Remind us, as needed, that we will all stand before Your judgment seat and give an account for everything we have done with the resources You have given. 14-19

Chapter 6

Seeing that the wall was almost complete, the devil begins to focus on Nehemiah, the leader, to try to destroy him. He tries to lure Nehemiah out of the city where he would be unprotected and could be put to death. When this did not work, he began to accuse Nehemiah of setting himself up to be king. Nehemiah simply replies with the truth and keeps on working. Again, the devil's goal was to destroy the leader if possible or at least frighten and discourage him so he would stop doing God's work. Nehemiah prayed to God for strength and continued the work.

Father, keep us and our leaders from being lured into an ambush and destroyed. Cause us to see right through the devil's plans and schemes. Don't let us or our leaders ever become so frightened and discouraged that we stop our kingdom work. Strengthen our hearts and our bodies for the work ahead. 1-9

When the devil sees that he can't get Nehemiah outside the city, he tries to use some Jews to destroy him within the city. They prophesied that Nehemiah should flee to the temple and go inside where only the priests were allowed and shut the door so he would be safe. When the devil can't destroy God's leaders by secular attacks, he tries to use people within the church to pull them down. Here, he tried to get Nehemiah to disobey God's law and go into the temple.

Today, he gets leaders involved in immorality, misuse of funds or anything to discredit them. So often, the devil uses "church members" to do his work. Shemaiah, a false prophet, was hired to help destroy Nehemiah. Many so-called Christians today will say what the devil wants them to say if the price is right.

Father, work powerfully to keep Your leaders from being tricked into foolish mistakes that neutralize their ministry. Protect them from immorality and greed. Keep them from being attacked with false accusations and lawsuits. Cut off those in the church who are opposing Your work. Expose false prophets who are not speaking Your word. Keep Your leaders from being deceived and led into sin. 10-14

In 52 days, the wall was completed. Revival can come quickly and accomplish tremendous results. Real revival shatters the devil's confidence and causes everyone to recognize that God is at work. Note that even after the revival described in verses 17-19, the devil still had his supporters in Jerusalem. They were committed to supporting Tobiah, the devil's man. They told Tobiah everything Nehemiah did and constantly praised Tobiah in Nehemiah's presence.

We must realize that revival doesn't solve all the problems of the church or nation. Every revival has had its detractors who were sure the revival wasn't from God. Historically, the detractors often come from the ranks of those who were touched in the prior revival and have grown cold and tradition bound.

Father, stir Your people to rebuild the foundations of our country. Cause it to be a speedy and successful work. Move so powerfully that the world recognizes that You did it. Father, drive out those within the church who are supporting and speaking up for the devil. Cleanse Your church in these last days and then cleanse our land. 15-19

Chapter 7

Once the wall was rebuilt, Nehemiah began to place godly, faithful, reverent men in the positions of leadership. These men were to appoint others to help guard the city. They were to ensure the gates were not opened in the morning until the city was awake and on guard. They were to shut the gates in the evening before dark. Nehemiah wanted to ensure that he protected God's people and did not lose anything God had accomplished.

Father, raise up faithful, godly, reverent leaders. Cause them to appoint the same kinds of people under them. Strengthen those who keep guard over Your church and give the enemy no chance to invade or slip in. Remove anyone currently in leadership who will not obey You. 1-4

God put the desire in Nehemiah's heart to assemble the people. They set about to decide who were Jews and who were not. They excluded from the priesthood those about whom there was some question.

Father, cause Your people to come together and become acquainted with each other. Exclude those who are not clearly sold out to You from leadership roles. 1-69

As the people came together, their first response was to give to the work of the kingdom. Nehemiah led the way with his gifts and then the others gave generously.

Father, as revival comes, make sure Your people give generously of their time and their resources to support Your work. 70-72

Chapter 8

All the people gathered at the west gate to hear Ezra read from God's word. He read from dawn to noon. The people were very attentive to God's word. During revival, people are hungry for God's Word. (There is such a lack of hunger for and knowledge of God's word today in our country.) Revival also releases those rivers of living water that flow from the Holy Spirit within us.

Father, revive Your people and fill them with a tremendous hunger for Your Word. Father, especially fill our youth with Your Word. Use us to make Your Word known to our nation. Do whatever is necessary to cause Your rivers of living water to flow through us and out upon others. 1-3

Ezra stood with eleven godly men and opened God's Word. The people stood out of respect for the Word. Ezra prayed and the people lifted their hands and answered, "Amen." Then they bowed low with their faces to the ground and worshiped the Lord. Then the priests and Levites read God's Word and explained it to the people so they could understand. It is amazing how much of God's Word people can absorb when their hearts are right with God.

Father, prepare the hearts of the people and raise up teachers who will focus on teaching them Your pure Word. Create in us a deep reverence and respect for Your Word, the Bible. Work in us so we really worship You with all our hearts. 4-8

How wonderful to have the leader of the nation and the leader of the church lead the people back to God and His Word. When the people saw what they had missed because they had not obeyed God's Word, they began to weep. Here, they were told that weeping was not appropriate because it was a time of celebrating God's goodness. The people obeyed and began to celebrate a great festival. They gave gifts to those in need. The joy of the Lord became their strength.

There is certainly a place for weeping and repentance and it comes in the next chapter. However, the repentance would not have been as deep and complete had the people not first experienced God's goodness. In Romans 2:4, God tells us that His goodness and kindness lead us to repentance. The people were so happy because they finally understood God's Word. They probably realized how much He wanted to bless them.

Father, cause us to know when it is time for weeping and when it is time for celebration. Cause Your people to really understand Your Word. Make us understand how much You love us though we don't deserve Your love. Lead Your church into times of joyful celebration and sharing with those in need. Lord, fill us with joy. Then, fill us with Your strength. Bring forth leaders who will point the people to You and Your Word. 9-12

The next day all the leaders of the people met with the priests and Levites to talk about the words of the Law. They discovered it was time for the Feast of Booths. They instructed the people to collect branches, make booths and sleep outside in them. Everyone rejoiced in this step of obedience to God's law. For seven days, Ezra read to them from God's Word. All of this prepared them for a solemn assembly.

Father, cause our churches to realize when You want them to set aside special times to feast on Your Word. Cause us to be quick to obey the instructions You give. Prepare us for times of solemn assembly, fasting, and repentance. 13-18

Chapter 9

In this chapter, Israel gets serious about repentance. They assembled and fasted, wearing sackcloth with dirt on their heads. They separated themselves from unbelievers. The people confessed not only their sins but also the sins of their ancestors. They read from God's Word for a fourth of the day and then confessed and worshiped for a fourth.

Many churches have proclaimed solemn assemblies in our country. It would be great if whole denominations called their people to a week of solemn assembly. We could confess our sins such as pride, lack of love for those of other races, divisions, greed, waste, and self promotion. We could call out to the Lord to set us free from the demonic forces of control, politics, and religious stuff. The church could ask that Jesus bring us into true unity with each other.

Father, we have sinned as a church. We have lost the zeal to live wholeheartedly for You.

We have forgotten that You bought us with a price - the death of Your Son, Jesus. The church has neglected taking the gospel to the whole world. We have excluded those of different races from our fellowship. We have mistreated the Jewish people and helped harden them to the gospel. The church has allowed and cooperated with demonic forces of control and manipulation to get people to do what she wanted. We have tolerated political forces that have divided churches and denominations. The church has allowed many believers to fall into religious practices that are not real Christianity. We have let them remain trapped in dead traditions, fleshly works, idol worship and worship of men or institutions.

Father, forgive us and change our hearts and minds. Don't allow us to tolerate stuff that is not Christianity in our churches. Give us very sharp discernment to know what is of You and what is the devil's counterfeit. Use us and these prayers to set Your people free. Separate us from worldly things, Teach us how to worship You in spirit and in truth. 1-3

The remainder of the chapter contains a prayer of repentance prayed by the Levites. First, they blessed God. Then they rehearsed all God had done for them and how they had rebelled and sinned. They ended by telling God they were going to write down the steps they were going to take to obey Him.

Father, cause Your glorious name to be blessed and exalted above all blessing and praise. We are Yours. You made everything that exists. You are righteous and always keep Your promises. Thank You for being a God of forgiveness. Thank You for being gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness. Thank You so much for never forsaking us. More than ever before, work in us through Your Holy Spirit to instruct us and to ensure we obey You. 4-38

Chapter 10

This chapter summarized the steps the people were going to take in obeying God. They were not going to give their children in marriage to pagans. They were going to honor the Sabbath. They were going to put God first in everything by giving Him the first fruits of everything. They promised to take care of the house of God.

We should decide that with God's intervention, we are not going to allow our children to date and marry unbelievers. We should determine how best to set aside time to focus on God and worship Him. Our giving should be from our best and should clearly remind us that all we are and have are God's.

Father, work mightily through Your people so our children do not date and marry unbelievers. Teach us what You want from us on the Lord's day. Make sure we give of our first and best. Make sure we know and never forget that all we are and all we have are Yours. Cause us to take care of our bodies because they are Your temples. Cause us to build up and strengthen the body of Christ. 28-39

Chapter 11

Some people relocated to Jerusalem for the sake of the temple and to help protect the city.

Father, locate us where You want us so we are available for the kingdom work You have for us. 1-36

Chapter 12

In this chapter, the Jews dedicate the wall to God. One choir led half the people one direction around the city walking on top of the wall. A second choir led the other half the other direction. They met at the temple. The day was spent worshiping and praising God.

Father, bring forth leaders, choirs and musicians who will help us really praise and worship You. 22-47

Chapter 13

As they read God's word, they found that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God. Again, they took action to obey God's Word. The Ammonites and Moabites had corrupted Israel by intermarrying with them and bringing their pagan religions into Israel.

Father, cleanse Your church from all idolatry and all fleshly activity. Remove those who are bringing the world's practices into the church. 1-3

Nehemiah had to leave for a time and Eliashib, the priest, gave the devil's man, Tobiah, a room in the temple. When Nehemiah came back, he quickly threw Tobiah's stuff out of the temple and cleansed the room. The devil constantly seeks to slip his people or his stuff back into the church. We need those who can discern this and help keep the church and her teaching pure.

Father, show us how and where the devil has brought his people and his stuff into the church. Make sure we remove them. Use us to help keep Your church and what we teach pure. 4-9

After the priest compromised with the devil, the people broke their vows and quit giving and supporting the Levites. The Levites had to leave the temple and go to other work. There are many today who should be supported fully by the body so they can use their full energy and time for kingdom work.

Heavenly Father, make sure we keep giving. See to it that those you have called into full time service have all they need so they can do the work You have assigned them. Keep our leaders from turning away from You in any way. 10-14

The people broke another promise by neglecting the Sabbath. They were openly buying, selling and working on the Sabbath. Nehemiah quickly ended the outward violations but I wonder if the hearts of the people really changed.

Father, through Your Holy Spirit, change our hearts so we obey You whether anyone is watching or not. 19-22

Finally, the Jews had quickly intermarried with the women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. The

church has many members who are divorced because they married unbelievers and the marriage did not last. Also, many of God's people are out of church and so are their children because of an unbelieving spouse.

Many Christians rate looks, intelligence, social status and income potential far above Christian beliefs and character when evaluating a potential mate. They usually live to regret it. Only rarely - through God's grace and mercy - does the unbelieving spouse come to know the Lord. Usually the believer is drawn away from her relationship with the Lord.

God had Nehemiah deal very harshly with this issue because of its potential to destroy families and destroy the Jewish nation. He had Paul write to Christians that believers were not to be yoked to unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18) for the very same reason.

Father, open the eyes of the whole church to the seriousness of this issue. Raise up more leaders who will help our children enter only into godly marriages to other believers. Make sure we show mercy and extend help to those who made wrong choices in the past. Help them to repent and become strong advocates of doing marriage Your way. 23-29

Nehemiah worked tirelessly to purify God's people and strengthen their faith. A better way to say this is that God gave Nehemiah the grace to keep on it the task He gave him.

Father, in these last days, use us to purify Your church and to strengthen and equip Your people. Lord, send revival to Your church. Give us the grace to keep on doing the tasks You assign. Lord, You are the only hope for our nation. 30-31