

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

NEHEMIAH 7-10

Off the wall is an indoor soccer complex in Sacramento, California.

Off the wall is a company in Austin, Texas that removes graffiti.

Off the wall is a weeknight radio show that airs in New York City.

Off the wall is an art gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Off the wall is a restaurant on the Caribbean island of St. Croix.

And finally, *Off the Wall* is the subject of tonight's chapters... In chapter 7 we find Nehemiah coming down *off the wall* – and we discover what he does next...

It took Nehemiah and the builders just 52 days to reconstruct the walls of Jerusalem. It was an amazing accomplishment in a short period of time.

Up until now Nehemiah has focused on the *bricks*, but during the construction he realized how the *believers* themselves needed to be rebuilt. Once he comes down *off the wall* he turns his attention to another renovation project...

It took less than two months for Nehemiah to rebuild the walls. But it'll take him the rest of his life to rebuild the people who'll live and worship within those walls.

One day a young soldier was recommended to General Napoleon Bonaparte for advancement in rank. His commander told Napoleon that this young private had

played an instrumental role in the winning of a great victory.

Napoleon had one question... “What did he do the day after?”

The answer to that question is the mark of true greatness. A truly great person not only rises to the occasion to win a victory - he steps up the day after, and the next day, and the next... to see to it, the victory which was won is built upon.

Tonight’s chapters tell us what Nehemiah did on the 53rd day, and 54th day, and 55th day... and all the days following the completion of the walls...

Verse 1, “Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.” Notice, Nehemiah appoints two assistants to help manage Jerusalem... Hanani and Hananiah.

And what he says about these men illustrates three characteristics of a good leader... **He shows grace... He fears God... and he is above all faithful.**

Both the names “**Hanani**” and “**Hananiah**” come from the same root word. It means **grace**. “**Hanani**” is “*graciousness*”. “**Hananiah**” means “*grace of God*”.

And when you truly taste of God’s grace you become a gracious person.

There’s a baseball card worth more than a \$100. Its entitled “*Future Stars.*”

Three players are on the face of the card... The first two are Jeff Schneider and Bobby Bonner. Both had forgettable careers. The third man played 21 years for the Baltimore Orioles - appeared in 3001 games – 2,131 in a row – a record.

He collected 3,184 hits, 431 home runs, and 1,695 RBIs... This past summer this 3rd player was inducted into the Hall of Fame. His name is Cal Ripken.

If you talked to Jeff Schneider or Bobby Bonner, they'll say their baseball card is worth 100 bucks... *and it is...* but not because of their efforts or achievements.

It's because they share a relationship with Cal Ripken.

And this is how grace works... When you embrace Jesus - God puts you on a card with His Son. You share in all Jesus has accomplished. His stats add to your worth. You become valued because of your relationship with Jesus.

And a gracious person is willing to extend to others the grace God extends to them. The gracious person picks people up, and shares God's blessings...

Nehemiah showed great wisdom in placing the *Grace Brothers* in charge of Jerusalem. But they were also known as *faithful men – men who feared God*.

In 1 Corinthians 4:2 Paul says, “**Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.**” We're all stewards, or caretakers of God-given time, treasures, and talents - and it's up to us to be *faithful* to use them in ways that bring God glory.

And to be faithful you have to fear God. To reverence the Lord is to see Him as He is... with no limitations on His holiness, and no assumptions about His love.

Grace puts me on the same baseball card with Jesus – but the fear of God causes me not to take His grace for granted, and to be faithful to His callings.

Nehemiah continues in verse 3, “**And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."**

Nehemiah wanted the gates closed before daybreak, or shut after dark.

A saboteur could slip in under the cover of darkness – or raiders might launch a pre-dawn attack. He also established watch towers and posted guards.

Verse 4 explains the challenge Nehemiah faced after the walls were finished.

“Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt.” Jerusalem now had strong walls, but there were no inhabitants to enjoy the walls, and prosper within their protection.

Because of the lack of walls all the people had moved to the burbs.

This is a challenge that faces city planners today. How do you get suburbanites to leave behind the conveniences of the suburbs, and return to the inner city?

Perhaps you've seen this list... **"You are so suburban if..."**
Your lawn mower is more powerful than your first car.
Your kids have never crossed the street at a stop light.
You drive your van a block to get milk.
You have no idea if your town has a public bus service.
Your most recent night out was a parent-teacher conference.
You sometimes refer to summer as *"garage sale season."*
You jog 5 miles a day, but spend 30 minutes waiting for a closer parking space.

Because Jerusalem lacked walls of protection the Jews had settled in the surrounding cities. They'd migrated to the burbs where life was easier and safer.

Now Nehemiah has to convince *wall-workers* to become *city-dwellers*.

I think this is the challenge pastors and church leaders face...

In many ways, *church life* is like *city life*... It's congested and busy. We rub shoulders with diverse people. We get mad at folks and make people mad at us.

We're exposed to verbal graffiti – gossip and negativity. We drive by areas of the church that are rundown and need renewal. We learn that the church is not all it should be... And some Christians have retreated into isolation...

In essence, they're *spiritual suburbanites*.

Dave Goetz has a book he calls *"Suburban Christianity"*. In it he writes, **"The pokey local church is still the most fertile**

environment for spiritual development.

Disillusionment with one's church is not a reason to leave, but a reason to stay, and see what God will create in one's life and in that pokey local church.

What I perceive to be my needs may not correspond to my true spiritual needs.

Thinking that I know my true needs is arrogant and narcissistic. Staying put as a life practice allows God's grace to work on the un-sanded surfaces of my life."

As with Nehemiah, it's the job of church leaders today to build strong walls in the church - and then convince fellow believers to move back into town.

Verse 5, "Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return, and found written in it: These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city."

Nehemiah raided the Jerusalem archives, and found a 90 year old passenger list – a manifest – Ezra 2. It contained names of the first wave of Jews, who came with Zerubbabel, from Babylon, to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

These were the grandparents of the Jews who were living with Nehemiah.

And the names in this list conjured up memories of faith.

These were people who uprooted their families to follow in the footsteps of their ancestor Abraham. They left jobs, friends, and familiarity, and moved from Persia, across the Fertile Crescent, to the ravaged land of Judah and ruins of Jerusalem.

These were the people willing to lay it on the line to partner with God in a new work. Here's Nehemiah's point: *If these folks could move 1000 miles from Babylon to Jerusalem – couldn't the current Jews move from the burbs back into town?*

Let me summarize this list, because it's interesting how Nehemiah uses these names to give the Jews reasons to move back into the heart of Jerusalem...

Verses 8-38 talk about family groups - "the sons of" or a **relational connection**.

Verses 39-60 mention positions of service – or a **vocational connection**.

Verses 61-65 deal with the priests who couldn't prove their pedigree... God is called in to provide supernatural confirmation. A **spiritual connection** forms.

Verses 66-72 list folks who gave financially – forming a **sacrificial connection**.

This is also how you get connected to Calvary Chapel... or any church...

There're 4 ways... **If you sense you belong - or see where you can serve - or know that you're called - or invest financially...** you'll feel a connection.

Chapter 8, “Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.” Ezra the priest and scribe - returned to Jerusalem 13 years before Nehemiah, in 458 BC.

Now the 2 men *team up to build up* the people. It's now a walled city so public gatherings are possible. Ezra delivers a public reading of God's Word.

“So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the 1st day of the 7th month...

Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand...” Notice Ezra read the word to those who could understand.

Those too young to grasp the message were dismissed to children's ministry.

Here's a biblical basis for children's ministry. It does no one any good to hear what you can't understand. It's a sin to bore kids with the Bible. The Scripture needs to be presented on a level - and in a way - that it can be understood.

“And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.”

It reminds me of the great African leader, Menelik II, the founder of modern Ethiopia. King Menelik had a little known habit. When he got sick he would eat a few pages of the

Bible. He believed the paper had the power to restore his health.

In 1913 Menelik had a stroke, and became extremely ill. This time he tore out the entire book of Kings, and ate every page... And you know what happened to him? *He died...* Proving it's not the pages themselves that bring healing – it's the understanding and application of what we read that produces spiritual health.

So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him..." He lists the men at his right side and on his left.

Verse 5, "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

"Also 13 priests, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading." I love their format – it's what we follow at Calvary Chapel...

First, we read the book "distinctly." We pay attention to each word in its context.

Then we give the "sense"- what the author meant and his readers understood.

Finally, we illustrate and motivate and apply what we've read to life today.

This is called **expository teaching**. *Topical studies* start with a premise - then use the Bible to prove that premise. *Expository teaching* starts with a passage of Scripture - then uncovers its meaning in its context. **The Bible speaks for itself...**

The Hebrews returned from Babylon speaking the Aramaic language. The Scriptures though were written in Hebrew. The priests had much to explain.

Today, 2500 years later a Bible teacher still has much to explain.

The Bible is amazingly simple to grasp, but it's still a book written long ago, in far-away places, by people in different cultures. Bible teachers are important.

Dr. Donald Campbell once wrote, **"Ezra and his helpers were the first in a long line of expository preachers who explained the Bible. This method of preaching has been blessed by God down through the centuries and continues to be an effective instrument for bringing Christians to spiritual maturity.**

Topical and textual preaching may often be inspiring and helpful but the spiritual benefits do not compare with those resulting from a preaching ministry like Ezra's. Blessed indeed are the believers who are privileged to sit under expository preaching of the Scriptures." You and I are certainly among the "blessed" bunch.

Verse 9, “Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep.” For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.” The Word of God created a genuine sorrow and repentance.

Sometimes we need to weep, but at other times tears can drown out faith.

Rather than mourn over their sin, Nehemiah knew the people needed to focus on God’s forgiveness. God had given them a new beginning. “At times we need to recall how far we’ve fallen. At other times we should recall how far we’ve come.”

If I look at where I need to be, I can get depressed. I’ll cry too. But though I’m not where I need to be... or want to be... I’m certainly not where I use to be!

Nehemiah and Ezra sense that it is time *to rejoice... not regret.*

“Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD.

Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” I love this statement.

The joy of the Lord gives us wings to rise above our circumstances. It fortifies us in times of trial and persecution. Joy is the *secret up the Christian’s sleeve.*

Hebrews 12 tells us Jesus endured the cross, and despised the shame... for the joy set before Him. Joy was His strength!

The promise of joy delivered Him. And when you're called on to bear a cross the joy of Jesus will deliver you too.

The shortest verse in the English Bible is John 10:35, "Jesus wept." But the shortest verse in the Greek Bible is 1 Thessalonians 5:16, "Rejoice evermore."

Jesus experienced sorrow for a season, so you and I could rejoice forever.

But there's more to this verse... Notice, "*the joy of the Lord is your strength.*"

There is *a joy under the Lord*... this is the joy of being alive - natural pleasures.

There is *a joy in the Lord*... this is the joy derived from what we have in Christ.

And *a joy from the Lord*... this is supernatural joy that flows straight from God.

But Nehemiah is not talking about joy *under the Lord*, or *in the Lord*, or *from the Lord* - but **the joy of the Lord**... *And what is it that the Lord rejoices over?*

God takes joy in His people. He loves us and thinks fondly of us. It's knowing that God doesn't regret saving me, or grows weary of me, or views me as excess baggage... but that He like me and takes joy in me – *this gives me strength.*

Once, in a severe thunderstorm – the sky filled with lightning flashes – a little girl stood in the living room's picture window, and shouted, "I think God is trying to take my picture." *Just maybe He is...* If God has a refrigerator, your picture hangs on the door. If God has a wallet, your photo is in the plastic

window. If God collects trading cards - it's not baseball players - He has a card for each of His children.

Zephaniah tells us, God “rejoices over you with gladness.”

Verse 12, “So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved. And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.” Understanding of God’s Word brought joy!

”Now on the second day” This was the day after the initial reading by Ezra. “The heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

“And they found written in the Law (the exact location was Leviticus 23:23-44), which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the 7th month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, “Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written.”

As Ezra read the Law it dawned on the Jews the Feasts of Tabernacles was upon them. They built outdoor booths or huts to remind them of their journey through the wilderness, and God’s provision. It was a wonderful celebration.

“So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the

days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness.

Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast 7 days; and on the 8th day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.” The feast lasted 8 days. And each day Ezra read the Word. Reading the Bible became a daily habit. *Is it your habit?*

John Bunyan once said of his life, “I was never out of my Bible.”

It’s tragic, but a Barna survey showed that half of all Americans never read the Bible at all. The majority of born-again believers read it only once or twice a week.

Here’s the breakdown: 18% read the Bible between 3 and 6 days a week – 37% read it just once or twice a week – and 23% never read the Bible at all.

I love what one author wrote, “Read the Bible, and read it again, and do not despair. Don’t think that the will and mind of God are locked up from you. Even if you lack commentaries and expositions; pray and read, and read and pray... *for a little from God is better than a great deal from man.*” A little each day adds up.

After the F16 fighter jet was first manufactured a flaw was discovered - a blind spot in the pilot’s range of visibility. He couldn’t see directly behind him. American engineers spend millions trying to adjust the radar sensors to correct the problem.

All their engineering efforts failed. But the Israelis had a

quick and effective fix. They mounted rear-view mirrors in the cockpit. A \$36 mirror solved the problem.

And here's the moral of the story... Often the key to future success is the ability to look behind you. We all need a **spiritual rear-view mirror**. We need to recall what's gone on behind us – *victories won, defeats endured, lessons learned*.

Chapter 9 could be called, "[Israel's Rear-view Mirror](#)".

In Nehemiah 9 the Jewish leaders stand on the stairs of the Temple, and the Levites recount God's faithfulness to Israel throughout the nation's history.

Verse 1 begins, "**Now on the 24th day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.**"

These were displays of grief and sorrow. "**Sackcloth**" was a coarse fiber – stiff burlap – it irritated the skin. Israel's rear-view mirror had caught a glimpse of their forefather's mistakes, and they realized they were inclined to repeat them...

"Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers."

Notice they not only confess their own sins, but "***the iniquities of their fathers.***"

The people realized that the state of the Jews in Nehemiah's day was the cumulative effect of generations of disobedience. Sins were passed down.

A couple of years ago the Faculty Senate of the University of Alabama issued an apology for the university's role in slavery prior to the Civil War. A professor stated their intent was not to stir up 100 year old hurts, but to correct an error.

Sometimes a right attitude today requires admitting the sins of yesterday.

If we don't want to repeat the sinful actions of our forefathers, the first step is to agree that their actions were sinful. This is what the Jews of Nehemiah's day did.

“And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.” The time period called **“the day”** probably referred to a waking day, or 12 hours. This meant they read the Bible for three hours - then spent another 3 hours confessing their sin, and worshipping God.

Notice, the Jews spent as long assimilating what they'd read as they spent reading. Reading the Bible is not like reading a newspaper or a novel. A cursory view is not enough. *You go through the Word then the Word goes through you.*

Verse 4 tells us, **“Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God. And the Levites, (all 8 of them) said: "Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise!"**

“You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the

heaven of heavens, with all their host...” God made the heavens in layers. The earth’s atmosphere is the **first heaven**. What we call “outer space” is the **second heaven**. The spiritual dimension where angels reside – is what Paul called the **third heaven**.

God made “the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.” All creation worships!

Verse 7 begins Israel’s history. “You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram, and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and gave him the name Abraham;

“Abram” meant “father”. “Abraham” meant “father of many nations”. The name change reflected the blessing God bestowed on Abraham and his descendants.

He says of Abraham, “You found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him To give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashites - to give it to his descendants.”

And notice what the Levites say about God’s promise of the land to Israel. “You have performed Your words, for You are righteous.” God ties His righteousness – *His very character and reputation* – to His promise to give the land to Israel.

This is why the Palestinians today are fighting a losing battle. Before the land belonged to the Arabs – even before the land belonged to the Hebrews – even before it belonged to the Canaanites, etc. – the land belonged to God... and God chose to give it... not just to Abraham, but also to “his descendants.”

Verse 9, "You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heard their cry by the Red Sea. You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his servants, and against all the people of his land. For You knew that they acted proudly against them. So You made a name for Yourself, as it is this day."

James 4:6 tells us, "God resists the proud..." And the classic example was the haughty pharaoh. If you don't believe God can take a proud person down a notch or two just ask Yul Bryner. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Notice too, verse 10 says at the exodus God "made a name" for Himself. His humbling of Egypt put the world on notice that the true God dwelt in Israel.

"And You divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors You threw into the deep, as a stone into the mighty waters." The Hebrew's Egyptian pursuers sunk like a large rock.

"Moreover You led them by day with a cloudy pillar, and by night with a pillar of fire, to give them light on the road which they should travel."

"You came down also on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments."

"You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, and commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, by the hand

of Moses Your servant.”

Verse 15, “You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, and brought them water out of the rock for their thirst, and told them to go in to possess the land Which You had sworn to give them.” God gave them manna – the original *wonder bread* – “*angels’ food*” as the Psalmist called it. Manna was Israel’s supernatural sustenance for 2 million people, 6 days a week, for 40 years.

God also told Moses to strike a rock, and water gushed out to quench the people’s thirst. We’re told that rock traveled with Israel through the desert...

God gave the Hebrews food. He gave them water. In fact, sixteen times in this prayer we’re told “*God gave*” to His people... Hey, *our God is truly a giving God.*

Verse 16 breaks the flow, “**BUT...** Despite all God gave to them, we’re told...

“They and our fathers acted proudly, hardened their necks, and did not heed Your commandments. They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage.”

The little twerp -Edward G. Robinson... Despite all God had done, at the border of the Promised Land, the Hebrews succumbed to their fears, and stumbled in unbelief.

And if you didn’t know God you might expect Him to abandon them.

Yet the next verse tells us, “**But You are God, ready to**

pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them.”

It was God’s amazing mercy... and more is on display in verse 18...

"Even when they made a molded calf for themselves, and said, 'This is your god that brought you up out of Egypt, 'and worked great provocations, yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness.”

The word translated “provocations” in verse 18 means “to scorn or belittle”.

God continually did awesome deeds for His people, and they responded by degrading and belittling those works. They failed to appreciate God.

Verse 19 "The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, to lead them on the road; nor the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way they should go." Despite His people’s failure God remained faithful to the Hebrews.

“You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst.” Don’t miss a vital point from verse 20... the Holy Spirit is called God’s “good Spirit”.

There are lots of Christians who come out of non-Charismatic churches that are afraid of the Holy Spirit – and His supernatural gifts. They run for cover at the first hint of speaking in tongues, or a prophetic utterance. Remember the Holy Spirit is a “good Spirit”, and His ways are not to be scorned or belittled.

Verse 21 “Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness, they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out And their feet did not swell.”

Evidently the *Great Physician* is better than *Dr. Shoals*.

"Moreover You gave them kingdoms and nations, and divided them into districts. So they took possession of the land of Sihon, the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan." These were the nations the Hebrews conquered east of the Jordan, before they crossed the river...

Verse 23 tells us, "You also multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and brought them into the land which You had told their fathers to go in and possess."

So the people went in and possessed the land; You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands, with their kings and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they wished."

"And they took strong cities and a rich land, and possessed houses full of all goods, cisterns already dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and grew fat, and delighted themselves in Your great goodness." You would think such blessing would produce a thankful people...

"Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations."

Novelist, John Steinbeck, once said, “If you want to destroy a nation, give it too much – make it greedy, miserable, and sick.” It’s been said, “For every 100 men who can withstand adversity, there’s only one who can withstand prosperity.”

Prosperity can ruin not only a nation, but a church, even an individual.

A person can become so attached to the blessings that he forgets the Blessor. We can turn God’s gifts into idols – and worship the gifts instead of their Giver.

Verse 27 “Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them; and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies.” Men like Gideon, Samson, Samuel, David, Elijah, Hezekiah fought battles to liberate the Jews.

Verse 28, "But after they had rest, they again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies, and testified against them, that You might bring them back to Your law. Yet they acted proudly, and did not heed Your commandments, but sinned against Your judgments, 'Which if a man does, he shall live by them.' And they shrugged their shoulders, stiffened their necks, and would not hear. Yet for many years... 850 years to be exact...

The people would sin and turn from God. To get their

attention God would raised up an enemy to oppress them. They would cry out for mercy. Then God would respond with deliverance... Only to see them return to their sinful ways...

For 8½ long centuries, almost a millennium, this cycle of sin was repeated.

Finally God threw the knock-out punch. Verse 30, "You had patience with them, and testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands."

Since they worshipped idols God sent them to live among the idolaters.

The Assyrians swept into Israel and scattered God's people to the ends of the earth. Then the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and took the Jews captive.

Verse 31 breathes hope, "Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful."

Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and mercy: do not let all the trouble seem small before You That has come upon us, our kings and our princes, our priests and our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day."

"However You are just in all that has befallen us..." And here's their history in a nutshell – verse 33... "for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly."

The leaders of the Jews accept the consequences of their

actions. They're not formulating excuses, or dodging blame, or sidestepping responsibility. They admit the truth, and say to God, "You are just in all that has befallen us." They repent.

Once, the Prussian king, Frederick the Great was touring a Berlin prison.

All the prisoners claimed to be innocent, and begged for a pardon – except one inmate. Frederick called the man over, and asked if he was guilty.

He replied, "Yes! Yes, I'm guilty and I deserve my punishment."

Frederick immediately ordered the jailor, "Release this guilty wretch at once. I won't have him kept in this prison where he'll corrupt all the fine innocent people who live here." Hey, an honest admission gained the man a pardon.

And this is what our confession accomplishes... 1 John 1:9 promises, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." *The only sin God won't forgive is unconfessed sin.*

Verse 34, "Neither our kings nor our princes, our priests nor our fathers, have kept Your law, nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies, with which You testified against them. For they have not served You in their kingdom, or in the many good things that You gave them, or in the large and rich land which You set before them; nor did they turn from their wicked works."

"Here we are, servants today!"

“And the land that You gave to our fathers, to eat its fruit and its bounty, here we are, servants in it! And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, because of our sins; also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle at their pleasure; and we are in great distress. And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it.”

We’ll learn in chapter 10 that the Jews take an oath to walk in God’s ways, and the leaders seal it with their signatures. They put their name on the dotted line.

Which leads to our question? Are we willing to put our name on the dotted line? Confess our sins – repent? Are we willing to follow God, let Him change us?