Kings and Prophets 18-01-25

This is Thursday, the 25th of January, 2018. We continue our study of kings and prophets tonight. And we're going to be looking at the book of Nehemiah.

We have finished Ezra. And it concluded on what seemed to me to be something of a sour note. And I've seen professional artists who in giving a concert hit a wrong note and then to make everybody think that they planned it that way, when it comes around the second time, they'll play that same wrong note again.

And we're gonna see this wrong note repeated that we saw in Ezra in the book of Nehemiah. And we're going to take a look at some of the biblical principles involved. But here's the thing.

This is what we're going to look at tonight. And it is pertinent and helpful to you and me. How do we avoid this mistake? It seems there was no lack of earnestness and sincerity.

And those who trembled at God's word were involved. It seems like there was a concern for righteousness and doing the right thing and getting others to do the right thing. How could you go wrong in such a scenario? We're going to look tonight at what could have been done to avoid this series of decisions for our own benefit.

Let's begin by going to the Lord in prayer and we'll resume our study here in the Ezra and Nehemiah timeframe. Father, how grateful we are for this time of fellowship and of nourishment for our souls by looking at your word and gleaning its truths and its guidance, its insight, the light that it sheds on our path. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit will be evident as we take a look at these things and endeavor to understand them, that he will empower the presentation and the reception as we look together at these portions of your word, that we will see in our own lives the ways that we can improve our fidelity and our faithfulness and our clear understanding of your plan and purpose for us.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Well, you'll remember that at the end of Ezra, there is a great noise made about improper marriages and Shekinah in chapter 10, verse two, one of the sons of Elam speaks up and says, this is a great and terrible wrong and we've got to do something about it. And we saw potentially what some of his motivation is as his father's foreign wives and children are all banished, it leaves him sitting there to inherit it all.

Ezra and Nehemiah are contemporaries. They share some common experiences. We find Ezra mentioned in the context of one of the assemblies that is led by Nehemiah in the book of Nehemiah.

We're going to give the book a relatively light touch, Nehemiah. It's been well-traveled and well-covered. Nehemiah builds the wall, his sorrow.

One thing we do want to take a quick look at is the words of Nehemiah, the son of Hacaliah,

gives the time. He gets a report from Judah concerning the Jews who had escaped, who survived the captivity, concerning Jerusalem. They said in verse three, the survivors who were left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach.

The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire. So it was when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept and mourned for many days. I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Do you notice from our study last time when we looked and compared and contrasted the prayer that Ezra made and the prayer that Daniel made, just so far, which one does Nehemiah more closely seem to follow? Fasting and praying upon receiving news. This is really more along the lines of Daniel, isn't it? And you remember how we were looking for those pronouns and is God in view? Is God's will and God's plan and God's purpose and the insult to God's righteousness in view? Or is it we who have suffered under reproach and have been wrong? And is it more of a subjective look or is it an objective look at God's plan? Keep an eye on that as we continue this prayer. I said, verse five, I pray, O Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God, you who keep your covenant and mercy with those who love you and observe your commandments.

Please let your ear be attentive and your eyes open that you may hear the prayer of your servant, which I pray before you now, day and night, for the children of Israel, your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against you, both my father's house and I have sinned. Well, there's a note we didn't find in the Ezra prayer, but we did find in the Daniel prayer. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances which you commanded your servant Moses.

Remember, I pray, the word that you commanded your servant Moses saying, if you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations. But if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for my name. So what is Nehemiah doing here? He acknowledges that there was wrongdoing, God's righteous judgment fell upon it, but God also included a promise and Nehemiah is claiming the promise.

What did Daniel do when he was reading the book of Jeremiah, 70 years, and then the nation can return and he claimed that promise. If you return to me, keep my commandments, do them, though some of you were cast out, I will gather them from there, bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my name. Verse 10, now these are your servants and your people whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.

Oh Lord, I pray, please let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayer of your servants who desire to fear your name. And let your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king of Israel, and I am the king's cupbearer.

So he's gonna go to our desert seas. King asks him why he's sad. He explains that the walls of Jerusalem are broken down.

He'd like to rebuild it. The king says, how long will you be and when will you return in verse six? He gave the time, let letters be given to me for the governors in the region beyond the river that they may permit me to pass till I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph for timber to make beams. The citadel around the temple, the city wall and the house I will occupy, the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Notice he's not ashamed or embarrassed to ask for the king's help, including letters of safe passage where Ezra really wished he had had an armed escort not that long ago. He went to the governors, gave them the king's letters. And notice in verse nine, the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.

Nehemiah is not bashful. He says, look, security is a good thing. That's wise, it's prudent.

Ensure that I get there. So you can read through the rest of this. He is gonna go on to use the materials and recruit individuals and build this wall.

There is opposition. They have a lot of opposition. You may have heard of this newsletter called the sword and the trowel.

They have a sword in one hand and the trowel in the others. They rebuild the wall. Chapter four, verse six.

You can see in the previous part of chapter four, some more of this opposition. People are furious and indignant. They mock the Jews.

Verse three, Tobiah the Ammonite says, whatever they build, if a fox goes on it, it'll break down their stone wall. They're poor builders. It's a bad job.

It'll never last. He prays, hear O God, we are despised. Turn their reproach on their own heads and give them as plunder to a land of captivity.

Do not cover their iniquity. Do not let their sin be blotted out from before you, for they have provoked you to anger before the builders. And Nehemiah pretty much just commits them to God's care.

This is what I do when I am vandalized. Somebody breaks into my car and takes stuff. Hasn't happened lately, thank the Lord.

But it's happened to me in the past. It's probably happened to some of you. God knows who they are, where they are, why they did it.

And my prayer is let that event and that act and that occasion be an opportunity for them to be confronted with their sinful and evil ways and come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ or be

renewed to a relationship with him. And failing that, I commit them into God's hands. Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.

Everything I have came from God. And if somebody takes stuff God gave me, then it's on their head. And they can either, hopefully it'll be the last straw and they'll realize that they need help and they'll turn to the Lord.

But if that doesn't happen, then I say imprecatory prayer time. This is what Nehemiah is doing here. He says, these people are incorrigible, they're unrepentant.

They are anti-God and therefore anti-God's people. Oh Lord, take care of them. And then he just dismisses it out of his soul.

And that's the best thing to do. Verse six, chapter four, Nehemiah. So we built the wall and the entire wall was joined up to half its height for the people had a mind to work.

This is a wonderful, godly principle. Wonderful, godly attribute and characteristic. A mind to work.

A mind to work, especially when it is something we can construe as the Lord's work. Something we do in the name of the Lord, we do as unto the Lord. One of my dad's favorite memory verses, something he inscribed in the front of my Bible when I left home.

Whatsoever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord. Heartily as unto the Lord. They had a mind to work.

So others become angry and they conspire in verse eight to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. Nevertheless, we made our prayer to God and because of them, we set a watch against them day and night. He didn't say, well, we're trusting the Lord.

God will strike them with lightning and confusion. Same thing as when he left home and had the king's armed escort. He sets a watch and has some armed guys there.

Strength of the labors is failing. There's so much rubbish. We are not able to build the wall.

Adversaries said they will not know or see anything till we come into the midst and kill them and cause the work to cease. We were told 10 times, from whatever place you turn, they will be upon us. So verse 13, Nehemiah undaunted, positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall at the opening, set people according to their families with their swords, their spears and their bows.

I looked and arose and said to the nobles and the leaders and the rest of the people, do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome. And fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses.

It happened when our enemies heard that it was known to us that God had brought their plot

to nothing. We returned to the wall, everyone to his work. From that time on, half my servants worked construction.

The other half held spears, shields, bows and wore armor. Leaders were behind all the house of Judah. Those who built on the wall, those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand, they worked at construction.

With the other, they held a weapon, sword in the trowel. Every one of the builders had his sword girded as a side as he built. One who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

Notice the combination of dedication to the work and awareness and preparedness against attack. And it's a good model for us. It goes without saying that even as we dedicate ourselves to trying to please God in what we say and what we do, the efforts that we undertake, we should also be watchful and on our guard.

The enemy of the devil roams the earth, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him steadfast in the faith. Jesus told Peter, Satan desires to sift you like wheat, but I prayed for you that your faith will not fail.

And afterwards, return and strengthen your brethren. Verse 20, chapter four, Nehemiah, wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.

It's a combination of preparedness, diligence, careful planning, good communication. And when you come to the end of what you can do in human effort, look to the Lord. Do what you can with what you've been given and then leave the rest to him.

We labored in the work. Half the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. At the same time, I said to the people that each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day.

Neither I nor my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except everyone took them off to wash. Always ready. I think that's, is it Semper, Semper Paratus? Semper Fidelis is always faithful.

I think Semper Paratus may be always prepared, always faithful, something like that. Someone will tell me if I'm wrong. I think that's the Coast Guard motto, isn't it? Semper Paratus, always afloat.

I don't know my Latin well enough. Now, chapter five. There was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.

Those, there were those who said, we, our sons and our daughters are many. Let us get grain that we may eat and live. There were some who said, we've mortgaged our land and vineyards and houses that we might buy grain because of the famine.

Others said, we borrowed money for the king's tax on our land and vineyards. Yet now our

flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children. Indeed, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves.

Some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It's not in our power to redeem them for other men have our lands and vineyards. I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

After serious thought. Now, contrast Ezra. When Shekinah brings him the news about all of these wives and offers the solution that they all be banished away.

Does Ezra say, after serious thought, after I went to the Lord in prayer, he just tears his clothing afresh. He seems to be operating in a very impetuous and impulsive way. Nehemiah sits down after serious thought.

I rebuked the nobles and rulers and said to them, each of you is exacting usury from his brother. I called a great assembly against them and said, according to our ability, we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us? They were silenced and found nothing to say.

What is the difference in the case that Nehemiah makes here? This is a very commonly repeated principle in the law of Moses. You do not take advantage of your brother when he's down. It is recounted in the year of Jubilee regulations.

It is recounted in when a man has to sell himself, you will allow him to be redeemed by a relative or redeem himself. There has to be hope, there has to be a way out. Do not, if he has to pawn his coat, take his cloak also and this sort of thing.

There's a lot of guidance that has not been rescinded and is not time bound or circumstance bound regarding Israelites not taking advantage of each other and charging usurious interest on one another. So this is a very clear case and that's why these people, when they are brought up, have no response, they have nothing to say. They've absolutely been doing to their brethren the very thing that foreigners have recently done.

So he said, what you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? I with my brethren and my servants am lending them money and grain. Please let us stop this usury.

Restore now to them this day their land, their vineyards, their olive groves, their houses, a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil that you have charged them. They said, we will restore it and we will require nothing from them. We will do as you say.

I called the priests and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, so may God shake out each man from his house and from his property who does not perform this promise. Even thus may be shaken out and emptied.

All the assembly said amen and praise the Lord. The people did according to this promise. Notice the only people that are held to an oath are the priests who are the ones who administer the worship life in Israel.

And what is the penalty if they fail to hold this promise? Is it a man-made punishment? He says, so may God shake out each man from his house and property who does not perform this promise. Anybody who breaks this promise, who goes back on this policy, may God deal with him. May God do so to him and more also.

So it is left to the divine prerogative if people continue to abuse their brethren. Quite different and quite a contrast, wouldn't you say, to the Ezra scenario. From that time I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah from the 20th year to the 32nd year of King Artaxerxes.

12 years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions. The former governors laid burdens on the people took bread and wine from them, 40 shekels of silver. Servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so because of fear of God.

I continued to work on the wall. We did not buy any land. My servants were gathered there for the work at my table, 150 Jews and rulers besides those who came to us from the nations around us.

That which was prepared daily, one ox, six choice sheep, fowl, every 10 days and abundance of wine. In spite of this, I did not demand the governor's provisions because the bondage was heavy on this people. Look at Nehemiah's sensitivity to the burden on the people.

He's very aware of their situation and he eases it to the maximum extent that he has ability. Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people. He doesn't expect recompense from the people or from the king.

He just asks that God remember him and you remember, we have a wonderful promise. God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and your labor of love, the perseverance of your hope as you minister to one another. You got some more Sanballat drama here in chapter six and chapter seven.

Once the wall was built and the doors were hung, the gatekeepers and singers and Levites been appointed. He gives charge of Jerusalem to his brother, Hanani. Hananiah, the leader of the citadel, faithful man, feared God more than many.

Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be open until the sun is hot. When they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors, appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station, another in front of his own house. The city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not rebuilt.

God put it into my heart to gather nobles, the rulers and the people that they might be registered by genealogy. I found a register of the genealogy of those who'd come up in the first

return and found written in it. You remember, we looked at this when we first started Ezra, the comparison of these two lists.

Look at chapter eight 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, this is not the water gate hotel, this is the water gate, two words.

They told Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. Ezra brings it before the assembly of men and women, all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. 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, the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood, which they had made for the purpose. At his right hand stood Mattathiah, Shema, Ananiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, Maaseah. At his left hand, Paddaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashem, Hashbanana, Zechariah, and Meshulam.

Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people. He was standing above all the people. And when he opened it, all the people stood up.

You have a tradition in many churches now that for the scripture reading portion of a traditional worship service, the pastor will ask everyone to stand. And it is based on this passage. Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.

All the people answered, amen, amen, while lifting up their hands. It's biblical to lift up your hands. It's a little bit scary sometimes to see people raising their hands, but it happens in the Bible.

So you can't really object too strenuously. They bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. List some others who helped the people understand the law.

People stood in their place. They read distinctly from the book in the law of God, and they gave the sense and helped them to understand the reading. This is the archetype, the principle of reading the word of God, and then attempting to help understanding, comprehension, perception.

Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest, Levites who taught the people said to them, this day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep. For the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.

He said, go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

The Levites quieted the people, be still the day is holy, do not be grieved. People went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly because they understood the words that

were declared to them. And how many of us have had the scriptures opened to our understanding by God's Holy Spirit? And it brings tears to your eyes, sometimes of sorrow when we realize our shortcoming, sometimes of joy and of appreciation to God for including us in his plan and sending his son, the Lord Jesus, to die on our behalf and to offer us the free gift of eternal life by simple faith, to see the beauty of God's provision and his promise and the great hope that lies before us, to see the incredible character and person of the Lord Jesus Christ and the wonderful gifts that have been given to us in this age.

It can bring you to the point of tears and it's a wonderful thing to have these eternal truths brought to our mind in that way. Then they celebrate the Feast of Booths. You'll remember the seventh month is the time of the fall feasts and on the first day, you would normally have the Day of Atonement and then, I'm sorry, Rosh Hashanah, the Feast of Trumpets.

On the 10th, you have the Day of Atonement and then a few days later, you have the Feast of Booths. And so they announced and proclaimed in verse 15, bring olive branches, oil trees, myrtle trees, palm branches, branches of leafy trees, make booths as it is written. So they went out and brought them in and you remember this is one of the feasts that will be celebrated in the millennial kingdom and anybody that doesn't do so on them, what will happen? On them will be no rain.

The whole assembly, verse 17, made booths sat under them since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun until that day, the children of Israel had not done so. Now that's pretty scary. If it hadn't been done since the days of Joshua, what does that comprise? What does that include? Remember when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem, no Feast of Booths.

Solomon builds the temple, no Feast of Booths. Kingdom divides, you get the southern kingdom of Judah from Rehoboam on down, no Feast of Booths. According to this, this had fallen by the wayside from the time of Joshua, the son of Nun until that day, the children of Israel had not done so.

One of the signal commands for them was when you enter into the land, observe this Feast of Tabernacles and remember what God has done for you in bringing you out of the land of bondage and sojourning until you reach the land of promise. Also day by day, verse 18, from the first day until the last day, he read from the book of the law of God. They kept the Feast seven days and on the eighth day, there was a sacred assembly according to the prescribed manner.

Everything is great. You gotta give Nehemiah two thumbs up all the way to this point. Now on the 24th day of this month, the children of Israel were assembled with fasting sackcloth dust on their heads.

Those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers 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. Then, Yeshua, Bonnie, Codmiel, Shebaniah, Bonnie, Sherabiah, Bonnie, and Canani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the Lord their God. The Levites, Yeshua, Codmiel, Bonnie, Hashbaniah, Sherabiah, Udijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah said, stand up and bless the Lord your God forever and ever.

Blessed be your glorious name, exalted above blessing and praise you alone are the Lord you made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their hosts, the earth and everything on it, seas and all that is in them. You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships you.

Go on, this is a wonderful hymn of praise, evidently written for the occasion. It rehearses the history of Israel in great detail. You go for about three pages in your Bible.

Verse 36, chapter nine, Nehemiah, here we are servants today, the land that you gave to our fathers to eat its fruit and its bounty. Here we are servants in it. It yields much increase to the kings you've set over us because of our sins, they dominion over our bodies and our cattle at their pleasure and we are in great distress.

Because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it. Our leaders, the Levites and our priests seal it. Then there's a list of all of these that put their seal on this document.

The rest of the people, 1028, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethanyim, all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding, these joined with their brother and their nobles and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses, the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord. Notice Lord our Lord there, you see the first one is in small caps and the second is not. You see that in your New King James? Just a quick reminder, when you see Lord in small caps, that is a reflection of the Tetragrammaton, the YHWH.

And so this is the Yahweh our Adonai. But in English, because they translate both words the same, you have Lord, small caps, Our Lord, simply capitalized. One of the few places you find both of those juxtaposed.

His ordinances and his statutes, we would not give our daughters as wives to the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons. If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we will not buy it from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day, forgo seven years produce and the exacting of every debt. We made ordinances for ourselves to exact from ourselves yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of God, for the showbreak, regular grain offering, regular burn offering in the Sabbath, new moons, set feasts, cast lots among the priests, the Levites and the people, bringing the wood offering to the house of our God according to our father's houses at the appointed times year by year to burn on the altar of the Lord our God as it is written in the law, and to bring firstfruits to the ground and the firstfruits of all.

Now, here's where I submit to you, in the book of Nehemiah, we begin to diverge. How does this section begin? Verse 29 of chapter 10, all of these above named joined with their brethren, their nobles and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law. Now, what did we say last time about the valid covenants in scripture? Who originates, who authors valid covenants pertaining to the people of God? God does.

We don't write an oath and send it up to God. Even vows that were made were individual, personal and private. Paul made some vows, we mentioned that last time, I remember he shaved his head at Cancria because he had a vow.

We don't know what the vow was, personal. What transpires between a child of God and his heavenly father is not what we're talking about here. What we're talking about here is a corporate vow, a covenant authored by man and dedicated to God, placing restrictions and requirements on everybody in the group.

Only God authors covenants with groups. It's just a truth of scripture. And you could say, well, that's kind of a tautology because you're just excluding any covenant that's not made by God and saying that it's not godly.

Yeah, pretty much. And here's why. Keep looking at this.

Made ordinances to an extra tithe, an extra tax that's not in the law of Moses. Requirements for different ones to provide wood and other things on a non-voluntary basis. Even though it is supposed to help the altar that is kept burning and offer sacrifices according to God's law, this is an extra.

When you start adding to scripture, you start adding to God's requirements. We've seen what happened in Acts with the Jews trying to put burdens and requirements on the new Gentile believers. And even when they realize that that's a bad idea, they still can't just release them to grace.

They say, well, if you'll refrain from things strangled, why not refrain from murder or refrain from adultery? But don't drink blood and don't eat something that's been strangled. We place on you no other burden. And why place that burden? It's just almost impossible for us to not have expectations from others.

And this is the beginning, as I said. And you get the idea that Nehemiah was doing great until Ezra showed up and started reading the law. And now Ezra's been talking, and it's kind of like men from James and James coming in.

And when you confer with somebody that's got this mindset, you start drifting in that direction and deciding, well, sure, that makes sense. That's a good idea. At the point that Ezra shows up in the book of Nehemiah, in my view, you start to see cracks in what had been going so well and was so solidly built.

Everything up to Ezra's appearance, I can't find anything but blessing, approbation, following the pattern of great men like Daniel and the best days of David and Moses in the execution of this task. As soon as Ezra shows up, you start again seeing this legalistic taint. And it just gets worse as you head toward the end of the book of Nehemiah.

So verse 35, we made ordinances to bring the first fruits to the ground, first fruits to the fruit of the trees, year by year to the house of the Lord. Don't need an ordinance for that. There's already an ordinance in the law of Moses.

Don't have to add to it. Don't have to specify it. God's word is enough.

Remember now, this is an oath and a curse attached to this. Bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle as it is written. If it's written in the law, why are you making another oath? Firstborn of our herds and flocks to the house of our God, to the priests who minister to the house of our God, to bring the first fruits of our dough, our offerings, fruit from all kinds of trees, new wine and oil, the priests of the storerooms of the house of our God, and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, that the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities.

The priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites. When the Levites receive the tithes, Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the room of the storehouse. Children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, the new wine, the oil to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are, where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are.

We will not neglect the house of our God. Well-intentioned, wonderful objective, but it is the doing of it that starts to fall apart. Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem.

The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of 10 to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, nine-tenths to dwell in other cities. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. These are the ones who dwelt in Jerusalem.

In the cities of Judah, everyone dwelt in his own possession. So they made it possible for volunteers. It wasn't a plum to go dwell in Jerusalem.

It was better to dwell out on your own land. But some men volunteered, but then they also cast lots and they forced some to move to Jerusalem. So he lists all the ones that went ahead and went.

And in verse 27 of chapter 12, the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem, they sought out the Levites in all their places to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, thanksgiving, symbols and stringed instruments. Singers gather from all over. Verse 30, the priests and Levites purified themselves, purified the people, the gates and the wall.

I brought the leaders upon the wall, appointed two large Thanksgiving choirs. One went to the right hand toward the trash gate. One went to Hoshiah and half the leaders of Judah, Azariah,

Ezra, Meshulam, all these others are listed.

Verse 38, the other Thanksgiving choir went the opposite way. I was behind them with half of the people on the wall going past the tower of the ovens as far as the broad wall. And he gives a lot of details here of the gates and the verse 40, the two Thanksgiving choir stood in the house of God.

Likewise, I and half the rulers with me. Another big long list. Verse 43, that day they offered sacrifices, rejoiced.

God had made them rejoice with great joy. Women and children rejoiced. Joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

Then more appointments of those who have charge of various things and rights of purification. Chapter 13, on that day, they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people. So far, not too bad.

You've got an oath that's going to start putting pressure on people to give lest you be cursed. But in chapter 13, on that day, they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people and it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God. Sound familiar? They had not met the children of Israel with bread hired Balaam against them.

Our God turned the curse into a blessing. When they heard the law, they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel. Before this, Eliashib the priest having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God was allied with Tobiah.

He prepared for him a large room. So basically, Tobiah gets an apartment in the temple precincts that was supposed to be used for storing temple stuff. And so Nehemiah had taken a leave and came back.

And in verse seven, he came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. He grieved me bitterly. So I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room, commanded to cleanse the rooms, brought back into them the articles of the house of God, grain offerings and frankincense.

Also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given to them. Each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. So despite their wonderful human oaths and threats and promises and curses and all the rest of it, people didn't bring these prescribed tithes.

God wasn't in it. The people's hearts weren't in it. And so the Levites said, well, I'm not getting paid.

Why should I stick around here? So they went back to their fields. So Nehemiah says, I

contended with the rulers and said, why is the house of God forsaken? Gathered them together and set them in their place. Notice the guys were staying because of money and they left for lack of it.

Remember there were volunteers who said, I'll go and live in Jerusalem. You don't have to cast lots. You don't have to bribe me.

I'll go and live because I believe in this. I believe we need to build up the city and so on. But a lot, and remember what a difficult time Ezra had getting any Levites to come at all.

They didn't, they thought it was a hardship assignment. And so as soon as there wasn't enough money, well, a lot of them bugged out. Most of them left.

House of God is forsaken. Gathered them together and set them in their place. All Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse.

And I appointed as treasurers Shalamiah, Zadok the scribe, Padaiah, Hanan, the son of Zechor, son of Mattaniah. They were considered faithful and their task was to distribute to their brethren. Remember me, oh my God, concerning this and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for its services.

But notice Nehemiah doesn't re-invoke that oath and that promise or embark on trying to curse people that failed. He gets faithful men to set the system back up. These faithful men aren't there for the money.

They're there because they believe in the work. They're committed to the work. They understand that it is of God and it is a service to God and that's why they do it.

In those days I saw people in Judah trading wine presses on the Sabbath. This is verse 15 of chapter 13. Bringing in sheaves, loaded donkeys with wines, grape figs, all kinds of burdens.

They brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. Men of Tyre dwelt there, brought in fish and goods, sold them on the Sabbath.

So I contented with the nobles of Judah and said, what evil thing is this that you do by which you profane the Sabbath? Now once again, last time Nehemiah accused people directly of doing something wrong, it was true and it was current, right? They were charging interest and being usurious toward their brothers. It was a current, active, and proper rebuke based on God's law that hadn't gone out of style. It wasn't based on a command that was for the moment or for a particular time in Israel's history.

As long as the law pertains, so do those provisions. Here again, 10 commandments. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, right? You're profaning the Sabbath day.

Didn't your fathers do this and God brought a disaster on us and our city? You bring added

wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath. So at the gates, as it began to be dark, I commanded the gates to be shut. Notice he doesn't attack people who are coming in.

What does Nehemiah have control of? He's the governor, so he operates what he has control over. He can say when the gates are open and when they're shut. So if he shuts the gate, it's gonna be pretty hard for them to bring stuff in.

So on the evening before the Sabbath, he shut the gates and didn't open them until after the Sabbath. Posted servants at the gates, so no burdens will be brought in. This is the smaller gate where people can walk through, not the big wide gate where you bring your animal transportation.

Merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem. Once or twice, I warned them and I said, why are you spending the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time on, they came no more on the Sabbath.

I commanded the Levites, they cleansed themselves, go and guard the gates to sanctify the Sabbath day. It's a part of the Levites' job, part of the worship life in Israel. Remember me, this is the third time we've seen it now.

Remember me, oh my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of your mercy. Now, as we conclude the book, verse 23, in those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. Half their children spoke the language of Ashdod and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.

I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them, and pulled out their hair. Who does this remind you of? Who's the hair-pulling, beard-plugging, clothing-ripping guy? Ezra, Nehemiah, Nehemiah, Nehemiah. He was doing so well.

You will notice that he mostly concentrates on Moab and Ammon. There's a stronger biblical case for Moabites and Ammonites than there is for the mixed peoples of the land that Ezra focused on. Anybody that can't trace a genealogy back through Israel, Ezra sent them packing.

This is a second and a later event. This is not coterminous with what Ezra had done some years earlier. But Nehemiah, he didn't do this when people were bearing burdens on the Sabbath, which is on the tables of the law.

By the way, I may have mentioned this last time, whenever you see little depictions of the tables of the law with Moses, and you see the two little tombstone-looking things, and there's five commands on one and five on the other, go back and read the description of those tablets, and then ask yourself if that's right. What really amuses me is to see them, and people say, well, I'm gonna get it right, so I'm not putting the commandments in English, I'm putting them in Hebrew, and so they're written allegedly in Hebrew, but the script that they are written in is the square Aramaic script that didn't come into use until centuries and centuries after that time. So

if you want a genuine representation of the laws on the Ten Commandment tablets written with the finger of God, go back and read carefully, and what you're gonna see is you're gonna need one that you can hang from a string, or put in a flipping frame, because the tables are written on both sides.

They are written on both sides. Anyway, this isn't even on there. Married in Ammonite.

It's not adultery, it's not fornication, it's not coveting, it's not anything that you find written on the tablets, but he is so much more angry about this than he is about breaking the Sabbath, that he curses them, smacks them, and pulls out their hair. Made them swear by God, you shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons for yourselves. Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him who was beloved of his God.

God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, pagan women caused even him to sin. Pagan women caused him to sin.

Are these women called pagans? Some of them haven't learned Hebrew, haven't learned Aramaic yet. Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women? Now, there's no evidence in the passage that they are pagan, and what does pagan mean anyway? If you take a look at this, and let's just take a look right quick. We'll go to, have you got the word there in your text? Our internet's honking up my machine.

Can you read it? It's a 1327. It looks like it's starting to work here. Let me see if I can pull it up.

Yeah, here it is. It's a nakariot, nakariot, which is the plural from nakar, N-A-K-A-R-I-O-T. N-A-K-A-R, or nakariot, and it simply means foreign.

What's the difference in foreign and pagan? Foreign means you're not from these parts. Pagan means you're a ne'er-do-well when it comes to idolatry or some sort of cultish anti-God worship life, right? Pagan is not a valid translation for this word. Nakri, as an adjective, comes from nakar.

Nakri, N-A-K-R-I, means foreign, alien. It's used in Genesis 31, 15. Are we not reckoned by him as Nakriot? Nakriot.

Are we not reckoned as foreigners? This is talking about Laban and Jacob. Of course, they're not, all of them are God-worshippers. So what is the condemnation here? Verse 28, one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Elisha, the high priest, was a son-in-law of San Ballat, the Horonite.

Therefore I drove him from me. What do we know about San Ballat? You remember back several chapters ago, we skipped lightly over the opposition from San Ballat. So it's particularly odious that San Ballat, one of the dwellers in the land, has got a son-in-law.

The high priest's son has married San Ballat's daughter. Remember me, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I cleansed them of everything foreign.

I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites each to his service, bringing the wood, offering firstfruits at appointed times. Remember me, O my God, for good. His prayer is the same, but the law of Moses already has detailed instructions about this.

And when the temple was a building, both David and Solomon made provision for who would do what among the priests. It's all been laid out. You can enforce it, you can call people back to it, but you don't invent lots and new systems for accomplishing what's already in God's Word.

We're going to close here with a real quick survey now of this marriage question, lest you have any doubt. And my original observation when we began this evening, what does this mean for us? In other words, if I'm right in my understanding of both Ezra and Nehemiah that they went astray in purging out these foreign wives, what is the key to not making that mistake? Both of them harken back to the historical record where God told Moses, when you all go into the land, do not intermarry with the women of the land, because they will lead you into idolatry. Now, if there's no further contact with those cultures, because they got wiped out, what, 900 years earlier? All of the Ites, the Horites and the Archites and the Jebusites and the Hittites and all of those that were mentioned.

Nehemiah makes an issue out of the Ammonite and the Moabite. But since that time, do we not have some exceptions? We talked about Ruth, the Moabitess, who married into Israel, who claimed God as her God and becomes a grandmother of David himself. And suppose that they even were mistaken and should not have married these foreign wives.

But they entered into a marriage contract, a marriage covenant with those wives. What do you do once you have done such a thing? I commend your attention to the situation in the book of Joshua chapter 9. Let's turn there real quick. There is another time when the people of God made a faulty choice in establishing a covenant with foreigners.

It came to pass, all the kings on this side of the Jordan and the hills and the lowland and the coast of the sea, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites heard about the victories of Joshua in the land. They gathered together to fight with Joshua with one accord. When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they worked craftily and went and pretended to be ambassadors.

They took old sacks, put on their donkeys, old wineskins, torn and mended, old patched sandals, old garments, moldy bread, came to Joshua at Gilgal and said, we've come from a far country, make a covenant with us. Notice, they know the word of God because they know that people from a far country are allowed to make covenants and it's only the immediate occupants of the land that are to be exterminated. Men of Israel said to the Hivites, perhaps you dwell among us, how can we make a covenant with you? They said, we're your servants.

Who are you? Where do you come from? They said, from a very far country your servants have come because of the name of the Lord your God. We've heard of his fame and all that he did in Egypt, all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who are beyond the Jordan, Sihon king of Heshbon, Og king of Bashan, Ashtoreth. Therefore elders all the inhabitants of our country said, take provisions, go on a journey, meet them, say to them, we're your servants, make a covenant with us.

This bread we took from our provisions on the day we departed, look at some dry and moldy wineskins, look they're cracked and torn, our sandals are old. Men of Israel took some of their provisions, they did not ask counsel of the Lord. They goofed.

Notice that in remedying a situation of making what they believe to be bad covenant marriages with women of the land, neither Ezra nor Nehemiah consult with the Lord. That's what happened here. Joshua made peace with them, made a covenant with them to let them live.

The rulers of the congregation swore to them, much as you enter into a covenant promise when you get married, right? Happened at the end of three days after they made the covenant, they heard that they were their neighbors who dwelt near them. They came to their cities on the third day. Their cities were Gibeon, Kephira, Be'eroth, and Kiriath Jareim, very famous town.

Children of Israel did not attack them because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel. They complained against the rulers. The rulers said, we've sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel, therefore we may not touch them.

This we will do, we'll let them live, lest wrath come upon us because of the oath which we swore to them. Let them live, but they can serve. They can be hewers of wood, haulers of water for the congregation as the rulers promised them.

And if you skip down verse 26, he did them, delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel. They did not kill them on that day. Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord, in the place of which he would choose even to this day.

Now, what do we have at the end of Nehemiah? A little bit of a labor shortage of the house of God. They also have an abundance of people that they believe they should not have made covenant promises with. What is the biblical solution that presents itself? Allow them to remain, but press them into service for the city of Jerusalem and for the house of the Lord.

If they knew their scriptures, if they had seen the guidance of God's dealing with them in the past, that would have been an option to consider. Instead, two wrongs don't make a right. But notice, God did not say, well, you were deceived, it was wrong, therefore, rescind your covenant.

They honor the covenant. They are very careful to honor the covenant, because they have made it in the name of their God. In the same way, if you make a bad bargain, what does Ezra do?

Break the promise.

Shoo them away. Turn them into widows and orphans. What does the Word of God say about widows and orphans? Exodus 22, verse 22, do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan.

They take one passage of scripture, don't intermarry. This would be like us taking something out of the Old Testament and saying, don't shave the corners of your beard. Take something out of context, out of time, out of place, and make application.

Look at the number of times God talks about His attitude toward widows and orphans, and ask yourself if we should make any. God Himself, Deuteronomy 10.18, defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. Deuteronomy 10.18. Deuteronomy 14, 28, and 29, At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce, and store it in your towns, so that the Levites, who have no allotment or inheritance of their own, and the aliens, the fatherless, and the widows who live in your towns, may come and eat and be satisfied.

The very same provision made for the Levites, that Nehemiah is so concerned about, is to be made for the widows, the fatherless, the orphans, the aliens, the foreigners, the nakri. Deuteronomy 24.14, Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien, living in one of your towns. Deuteronomy 24.17, Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice.

Do not take the cloak of a widow as a pledge. Deuteronomy 24.19-21, When you are harvesting your field, do not go back and get a sheaf that you overlooked. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless, and the widow.

Now, these families that they are divorcing and sending away, suddenly become all three, don't they? They're already alien, they're nakri, now they're fatherless, homeless, and widowed, as it were. So that the Lord your God may bless you and the work of your hands, make provision for them. When you beat the olives from your trees, don't go over the branches a second time.

Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless, and the widow. When you harvest grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless, and the widow.

Deuteronomy 27.19, Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless, and the widow. And all the people shall say, Amen. What did all the people promise and swear to? We'll get rid of them.

We'll push them out. They'll be gone. A curse on anybody who doesn't our injunction.

What does God say? Cursed is the man who withholds justice from those people. Psalm 12.5, Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise, says the Lord, I will protect them from those who malign them. Psalm 68.5, A father to the fatherless, a

defender of widows is God in His holy dwelling.

Psalm 82.3.4, Defend the cause of the weak and the fatherless. Maintain the rights of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy.

Deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Psalm 146.9, The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but He frustrates the ways of the wicked. Proverbs 15.25, The Lord tears down the man's house, but He keeps the widow's boundaries intact.

Proverbs 22.22, Do not exploit the poor because they are poor, and do not crush the needy by legal means. Do not crush the needy in court. Now, remember the situation in Ezra when he was haranguing them all about the marriages? What was the environment like? Do you remember? Remember when he had them all standing outside? What was going on weather-wise? It was a driving, pounding rain, right? He said the people were trembling because of the Word of the Lord and because of the pounding, driving rain that they were all out in, which is not exactly a sign of trouble.

Proverbs 28.3, A ruler who oppresses the poor. By the way, all of these scriptures were in existence, available and known to Ezra and Nehemiah. Nehemiah could have stood up, Ezra could have stood up and read these scriptures.

Proverbs 28.3, A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops. Isaiah 1.17, Isaiah, within living memory of some of these people, Learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. Isaiah 3.14-15, The Lord enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of His people.

It is you who have ruined My vineyard. The plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the faces of the poor, declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty.

That, by the way, verse 15 is another one where you have both Yahweh and Adonai, translated Lord with the different typefaces, declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty, declares Adonai Yahweh Sabaoth. Isaiah 10.2, To deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of My people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless, an indictment. Let me just give you two more that I have in red ink here.

This is Isaiah 58.6-7, Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen? To loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away your own flesh and blood? Not to turn away your own flesh and blood. What happens once they marry one of these gals and have children? Those children are their own flesh and blood. God says, you know the fast that I delight in? It's not even the Feast of Booths.

It's not even the Day of Atonement. It is not to turn away your own flesh and blood. Isaiah 58.6-

7. And finally, Jeremiah 22.3. Remember Jeremiah, the weeping prophet right before, in the days of Josiah, right before they went out under Nebuchadnezzar? This is what the Lord says, Jeremiah 22.3, Do what is just and right.

Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. This is just a small subset of the number of passages that talk about God's care for and demand that his people care for those who are not powerful, who are not blessed with provision and so forth.

One passage, he says, don't intermarry because they will lead you into idolatry. If idolatry is not an issue, if there is no, quote, paganism, as it's mistranslated in your Bible, it's just because they're foreign. This indiscriminate, you could almost say bigoted response is invade against time and time and time and time and time again in the law, in the prophets, and in the writings.

All three witnesses of God's word in existence in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah weigh against this, and yet one passage is taken in isolation, out of context, parts of it left out, qualifications left out, and applied to abuse thousands of women and children and send them packing with no means of support. So what do we learn from this? If we are looking to God's word prayerfully and in the power of God's spirit for guidance and for direction and for what we should do, we want to do what Nehemiah did in former days, stop and think carefully. Consider over time what it is we're going to do and look at the whole counsel of God.

Are there other passages that also pertain? There are passages that say, when it's up to you, live at peace with all men, but there are other passages that say, get out from among them, touch not the unclean thing. There is a time to try to reconcile and there is a time to separate. How do we know which one it is? Well, look at the context of those passages, look at the goal that they have in mind.

If the goal in forbidding a marriage, it doesn't say dissolve marriages that already exist, it doesn't say don't marry somebody like Ruth whose heart is fully committed to the Lord, it says don't marry women that are going to drag you into their idolatrous practices and bring their anti-God ways into your homes and teach them to their children. There is a purpose, there is a goal in mind and all of these things have to be weighed prayerfully, looking for that path that will please the Lord. You get the idea that Ezra doesn't carefully consider, he doesn't go to the Lord and pray, he doesn't ask for wisdom and guidance, he doesn't ask that God show him the right path, how best to deal with this situation, but there is no precedent in the word of God.

I thought I found a precedent, this is my closing thought. I thought, well, look at Abraham and Hagar. He married a foreign woman, he married an Egyptian, so to speak, and had a son with her, Ishmael, and when Sarah says, I want them gone, God tells Abraham, hearken to the voice of Sarah and let him go.

And you say, aha, this seems like a pretty close parallel. What is the context? What is the issue?

What does God say when he tells Abraham to go ahead and have Hagar move out? There is an issue of inheritance. The son of the bond woman is not going to inherit with the son of the free woman.

And as long as Ishmael and Hagar remain there, the inheritance that God has designed to go to Isaac is in jeopardy, right? The issue is inheritance. He doesn't divorce Hagar, in fact, ample provision is made for her. God makes covenant promises and fulfills them to Ishmael.

They are just not the promises that belong to Isaac. They are not the in-the-household promises. But lest you think that's a weak rejoinder, remember what happens after Isaac is born, and after he grows up, and after he inherits, what does Abraham then do after the death of Sarah? Keturah, 17 sons, right? Not from the house of Laban, not from his father's kinfolks.

We don't know exactly where Keturah comes from. But those 17 men become Arab princes, the heads of Arab nations and clans and so forth. And God doesn't say, get the hence, drive them forth, because you've already got a son.

Because now the inheritance is not in doubt. It's not an issue. So we've got to be considerate, look at everything in Scripture, go to God in prayer, seek His will, seek His guidance.

We have the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have the presence and the power of both the Spirit and the Word to guide us in the way that we should go. A quick knee-jerk response that tends to require a lot of action and put a lot of penalties on other people is probably not going to be the right way.

It reminds you more of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the Levin of Herod, the Levin of the Pharisees, than it does the gracious teaching that says, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who despitefully use you, care for those who are in need. That's the heart of God, and that's what we're seeking to follow and seeking to have formed in our own hearts and souls. So it's a caution.

These things are included for our instruction to remind us of how important it is to be careful when we think we know what the Word of God says. If we begin to start to control the lives of others, we want to be very sure that we're on solid biblical ground, that God is going to bless, that the Lord Jesus is going to be glorified, that God the Father is going to be pleased, and His glory is going to be reflected in that situation, that others will see Christ in us and be drawn to Christ and to God, not driven away by self-righteousness, by legalism, by holier-than-thou attitudes and actions. And it's avoidable.

It is a matter of heart. It is a matter of seeking. God says, Ask and it will be given.

Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. And so when we're wondering which way to go, what is best, we look at the Word of God, try to take in the full counsel of God, prayerfully in the power of the Spirit.

We look for that answer that will most glorify God, that generally is sacrificial to self and beneficial to others. That's the law of love. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word. We thank You for the guidance that You provide us through Your Spirit and the light You shed on our path through Your Word. And we pray that as we go forward into the coming days and weeks that these truths will be a beacon and will enable us and motivate us to live the life to which we've been called and to prepare us for service both now and in the ages to come.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.