

42. Two Leaders and a City

We come to the final stories of the Old Testament time period, specifically Ezra and Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

Malachi prophesied 35 years after the last mention of Nehemiah, although if Nehemiah was still alive, he would have been 78 years old. That is probable, so we can assume that Malachi was the last part of Nehemiah's influence.

Ezra was older than Nehemiah and returned from Babylon to Jerusalem 14 years before Nehemiah returned. Probably the largest of any group of people returned with Ezra. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah overlap each other.

Looking Forward. To understand the restoration of Jerusalem fully, we must point it forward rather than back.

God's purpose at this point in time was the coming of the Lord Jesus into the human experience. All of the key figures of this time, then, are forerunners of John the Baptist, the final Old Covenant prophet.

He (John the Baptist) will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He **will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"** (Luke 1:16-17)

A People Prepared. This is just as much God's commission on Ezra and Nehemiah, 400 years earlier as it was on John. To make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

God has hit me hard the last few days with my own commitment to His people. You see, there is no commitment to God except that it is also a commitment to His people. I have excused myself from such a commitment because of my inability with communication, especially long-distance.

Yet does God not say, inside this restoration word, that it is not by my ability, but by His Spirit? And so this lesson is a study on “covering.”

What Is God’s Covering? Here is a question we must ask. What is God’s covering for His people inside of Paul’s gospel and inside the liberty of the Spirit, yet containing that commitment of a watchcare for and a submission to one another?

And a question for me personally, that I must sift, is – how much of the anointing and power of God, His protection and the richness of the life we enjoyed in the move fellowship due to the presence of a godly covering?

What is the balance between liberty and commitment? And what causes us to be God’s body?

A Word Man. To make ready a people prepared for the Lord. – Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but a body you have fitted together for me.

“Me and Jesus got a good thing going – I don’t need nobody” is the ruling mindset in western Christianity.

Ezra was a word man. Ezra was a direct descendant of Aaron, although he was not high priest. He came to Jerusalem 16 years after the Haman threat was eliminated, with a commission **from Esther’s husband**. When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, the temple had been in use for nearly sixty years, but the city wall was still broken.

A Difficult Issue. The first thing Ezra was faced with upon his arrival in Jerusalem was the issue of pagan wives and their children. Twenty-six years later, Nehemiah will confront the same issue in the same way.

From an historical point of view, Ezra and Nehemiah were the beginnings of what would become the Pharisees in Jesus’ day. And until Jesus’ ministry began, the Pharisees were entirely inside God’s purposes for His people.

What we have here is a difficult issue, one that has been difficult for God all the way through. Prepared for the Lord – vs – religious and racial supremacy.

No Bible-Believing Israelites. This was the issue in Galatians 1 between Paul and Peter. Peter was racist and Paul was not. In fact, God had to deal directly with Peter, to persuade him not to be racist, but it took a while.

Yet at the same time, the role of the Pharisees for Christ must be understood. Without the Pharisees as a covering for God's people, there would have been no Bible-believing Israelites remaining for the coming of Christ.

Israel and Judah both, under the kings, cannot really be called a nation for God. There were times when the entire nation did not know that any manuscripts from Moses even existed.

Not Word Only. Ezra was a word man, and that was critical, but his covering over the people of Jerusalem was weak, for he did not build the wall. When Nehemiah arrived, the first thing he did was to inspect the wall, making the same circuit Jeremiah had made, and with the same tears, 140 years later.

The more I look at Ezra's role, the more I am convinced that he was responsible for the gathering together of all the scattered manuscripts into what would become the books of the Old Testament.

WORD is of critical importance – but not word-only.

Word versus Wall. Preston Eby was a word man, like Ezra. Sam Fife was a builder of the wall, like Nehemiah. And I have pondered for years the difference of fruit coming from their ministries.

Now, as I have said, except for a disagreement on two things, the word preached by Eby and Fife was almost identical. If you want to know what Sam Fife preached, read Preston Eby.

Except, Eby presented God as One who could become how we know Him, One who carries all. Sam Fife's view of God could have become the All-Carrying One, but after his death, Buddy Cobb re-established Calvinism and removed that possibility.

Looking at the Fruit. Now, again, it's not my purpose to make a big deal out of any of these men. The big deal is the issues of God, and I must include these men, because through them, God burned in me the meaning of these issues.

When I look at the fruit of Preston Eby's ministry, I see a people who are able to know God as He is, but who refuse any part of His city, of being a people prepared.

And when I look at the fruit of Sam Fife's ministry, I see a people who are willing to be prepared as God's city, but who refuse to live inside the Holiest because of their false definition of God.

A Faithful Ministry. In the restoration of Jerusalem, God put Ezra and Nehemiah together, but in the move fellowship, although Sam Fife and Preston Eby were together in its beginnings, God did not keep them together. And I have to accept that.

Yet the primary quality of the ministry in the move is that they have been faithful for decades to be a godly covering for God's people. But when I look at those who were taught by Preston Eby, I see – "Every man for himself," with little regard for the Father's Desire – a Body prepared for Him.

This is why I identify with Jeremiah and Nehemiah, weeping over God's people, over His broken city.

My Direction. In the early months of 1993, right after God had begun to speak to me concerning Blair Valley, I read a book on Nehemiah titled *Pass Me Another Brick* by Lester Sumrall. This book and Nehemiah's example impacted my heart very much and pointed me in a direction that has not changed from then until now.

I want to say, "But I am incapable," but all I hear is, "That's true, but be strong and do the work, for I am with you." I want to ask for your forgiveness for not being a covering to you, and I ask God for His grace to do what He intends.

What is a Godly covering? What is God's balance between liberty and commitment?

The Progression of Restoration. Nehemiah is not mentioned in the book of Ezra, but Ezra shows up many times in Nehemiah's story.

Here is the progression of the restoration from God's point of view. Altar – Word – temple – separation – Word – the wall of Jerusalem – Word – the celebration of Tabernacles. This is God's pattern for the restoration of the Church into the completion of Christ.

Building the wall of Jerusalem represents God's covering for His Church. And building that covering and separation are two sides of that same thing. Let's keep Nehemiah in mind towards God's covering.

Separation. What alliance has the temple of God together with idols? For we are the **living temple of God, as God has said, "I will dwell inside of them, and I will walk about among them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people." Therefore, "Come out from the midst of them and be separate and marked off by boundaries," says the Lord, "and touch nothing impure, and I will welcome and receive you. And I will be Father into you, and you will be sons and daughters into Me," says the Lord All-Carrying (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).**

– Be surrounded by the wall of Jerusalem. – And the purpose? – I will walk about among them.

Being the City of God. We are not interested in the many, many imperfect coverings over God's people in history and today. We are interested in knowing and being that city of God that is the completion of Christ, the Body of God, that our Father can walk this earth as us.

We are well able to be and to do what God intends.

Nonetheless, Nehemiah's example holds, for the opposition to the building of the walls of Jerusalem, that place of protection that allows God to walk this earth, that opposition is crafty, constant, and large. The wall begins with – we are members of one another.

Impacting One Another. It does not matter that we are scattered thousands of miles apart. What I DO in private impacts you much more than I realize, and what you DO in private impacts us.

If I were to say, "I can do whatever I want," I would not be speaking the truth, for I am involving you and you are deeply affected in your own personal life and walk with God, whether you know what I do or not.

But covering is not control. The only way I could be a covering to you is if you yourself made me so, and vice versa. **And that's the first principle of Godly covering, it is entirely reciprocal –** submitting one to the other.

A Shared Word. Now, in the progression of God's restoration, "Word" shows up three times. The first is the word from Haggai and Zechariah and the second two is the word provided by Ezra. As Amos said, "Two cannot walk together except they be agreed."

It is a safe thing for me to say that we share the same Word. Without a shared word, both of union with Christ and of the revelation of Christ, we cannot even begin.

Having that shared word, then, allows us to place the first step of covering – and that is knowing one another.

Knowing One Another. A short time ago, some suggested that we create a chatroom where we can share freely. I looked at that, but then I remembered the story of the next chapter of my life, a story I must plunge into, and I freaked out and dropped the idea. Please forgive me.

Yet as God hits me in the forehead regarding my own commitment, this is the first step He places before me.

And so, you can download the Telegram app to your cell phone and your computer. I will send you the link and we can begin sharing one another's lives, and coming to know each other's hearts and ways. I want to get to know each of you better, just as you now know me pretty well.

To Ask. The second principle of Godly covering is to ask, and that asking goes in two directions, that is, reciprocity.

But asking in both directions is the difficult thing; in fact, it is the difference and the essence of covering.

The first direction of asking is this. – NEVER make a judgment concerning anyone without asking that person first. This is the hardest part of walking together, for we are so accustomed to and LOVE making judgments about other people out from our ignorance of them and our exaltation of ourselves.

To Submit. The problem is that what you do DOES impact me, big-time. And so the answer is for me to share the contortions of my own emotions WITHOUT assuming that I am right. Assuming that I know anything of you or your heart or what God is doing in your life without ASKING YOU, is arrogance and contempt, the sin of Adam.

The other side of asking is also difficult, yet it is the essence of being covered. And that is to ask concerning anything major one might think to do, anything that would impact us as the Body of Christ and as members of one another.

And that means submitting ourselves to the sensibilities of other people, even to choose against our own inclinations.

Levels of Decision-Making. Selling our home was one thing, a big enough of a decision that I should have asked you for your witness. But buying a property is a much bigger deal.

There is no question that our buying a property will impact each one of you in ways I have not considered. The truth is, I have no right to impose such a thing on you without your input. – We are members of one another. I would far rather be moving to a property that is the beginnings of a community of Christ, if that were possible.

“Come out from the midst of them and be separate and marked off by boundaries,” says the Lord, “and touch nothing impure, and I will welcome and receive you.”

The Importance of Covering. This is the meaning of Nehemiah building the wall of protection around the city of Jerusalem, just before the second recorded keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles in Old Testament history. **We ARE one another’s protection.**

You see, there is no belonging without entering into a “separation” that is “marked by boundaries.”

I KNOW the meaning, the value, and the importance of covering, and the great costliness. When God says to me, “Here is your commitment, Daniel,” my only answer is, “As You say, Lord Jesus.” Let’s learn what God means together.

Reading for Next Time. The final lesson of this series is Malachi. For that, read the entire book of four chapters. We will also be drawing conclusions from the entire study.

The book of Malachi figures large in my knowledge of God and of His calling upon my life, and has done so from my early years in the move.

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For **He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver**; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Let's Pray Together. This time we are praying for ourselves. God cannot do through us for others anything more than what He is doing inside our fellowship together. Our willingness to know God with us together then becomes the authority by which the Spirit touches others.

"Father, we want You to be at home in our hearts, as You are. And we know that we together are Your dwelling place.

"Father, we give ourselves to You, with all the willingness of our hearts, that You might establish Yourself as You are inside our gathering together. Father, show us Your ways; show us how You connect us together.

A Covering of Protection. "Father, we know that we must be built as a wall together, as a wall around Your city, the New Jerusalem, before that same wall can extend from us around all Your people.

"Father, forgive us for our inability to be a protection for one another, a place of safety and belonging. Father, we know that you made us incapable, so that You might be all that we lack.

"Father, we ask You to teach us to be a wall and covering of protection for one another, not as has been known through this in-part time, but as You mean by Your Spirit. Father, we are willing to be Your covering for one another and to be covered by You through one another.

Honor and Care. “Lord Jesus, we ask that You would enable us to know one another and to know the meaning of belonging and respect.

“Lord Jesus, we ask that You would cause us to judge those personal decisions that impact one another, that we might practice Your reciprocity together in regarding one another’s lives. Lord Jesus, we ask that You would be our submission one to the other in all honor and care.

“Lord Jesus, we know that You are already the all-connection that causes us to be part of each other’s lives. Lord Jesus, make us together to be the Father’s Home.”