

Read the Whole Bible with Pastor

Monday (October 30) – Nehemiah 5, 6

In the Law of Moses, God had forbidden His people from charging interest on loans to fellow Israelites, but after the return from Babylon, many of the wealthier Jews have begun to “walk in the reproach of the nations” (v. 9) by exacting usury from their brothers. Even worse, the poor are being forced to sell themselves into slavery in order to pay off their loans. Nehemiah severely rebukes the nobles and leaders, and to their credit, they immediately repent of their sin. It is especially difficult to be brought to repentance in matters that impact the pocketbook, and in this case, the nobles and leaders are a good example to us today.

In Chapter 6 Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, enemies of God, employ various strategies to cause the people to fear and cease rebuilding the wall. They even use backdoor family connections to try to get to Nehemiah, but he is fearless because He trusts in God. The entire wall is finished in a miraculous fifty-two days!

Tuesday (October 31) – Nehemiah 7

After the wall is rebuilt, Nehemiah discovers a genealogical registry of the exiles who have returned from Babylon. When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, they likely numbered between two and three million. Now the entire nation of Israel has been reduced to just over 42,000 people. At its peak the Missouri Synod had between two and three million members, though now we are about half of that. If it seems as though our synod is dying, consider how much more devastating it would have been to have returned to Jerusalem with only 42,000! But the Church is not dying now, nor was it in the days of Nehemiah. We do not measure the health of the Church according to the number of members, but by faithfulness to the Word of God. Even if only two or three remain, where the Word of Christ is preached in truth and purity and the Sacraments rightly administered, there we find the true Church of Christ. He will build His Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Wednesday (November 1) – Nehemiah 8

In Chapter 8 we find some of the pattern that we use today in the Divine Service. First, the Word of God is read to the people, who are attentive to what they hear (v. 3). Then Ezra and the Levites help the people to understand what has been read. In other words, the pastors preach a sermon that explains and expounds on the biblical text that was just read. Note that while preaching, Ezra does not walk around in front of the people. Instead, he stands on a platform made of wood (the pulpit), as our pastors continue to do today.

Even though God had commanded that the Israelites keep the feast of booths every year, it had not been kept since the days of Joshua. Now, for the first time in hundreds of years, God’s people return to the faithful practice of their fathers. Did some of them complain, saying, “But we’ve never done it this way before?” Perhaps so. Sometimes the Church loses a good and faithful practice for generations or even centuries, before it is finally and properly restored to use.

Thursday (November 2) – Nehemiah 9

Once again we find parts of the Divine Service in the Israelites' worship of God. They gather together and confess their sins (v. 3) just as we do when we gather today. The pastors, that is, the Levites, then lead the people in remembering the history of God's saving work among them, recounting the Exodus, the Conquest of Canaan, and the Exile into Babylon.

Friday (November 3) – Nehemiah 10, 11

A big snare to God's people has always been intermarriage with unbelievers. God warned against this through Moses, and now, under Nehemiah, the people renew their covenant with God, promising that "we will not give our daughters as wives to the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons." Intermarriage is still a big problem today. Scripture forbids marrying outside of the faith, and so we must impress this upon our young people. What's more, they should strongly be encouraged to marry, not just any Christian, but another faithful Lutheran. I tell my daughter that when she first meets her future husband, he may not yet be a Lutheran, but he certainly will become one before the wedding day.

When David numbered the Levites, there were 38,000. Nehemiah numbers them in Chapter 11 and there are only 284 (in Jerusalem). Faithful pastors are a great blessing from God. Let us pray that He continues to send laborers into His vineyard!

Saturday (November 4) – Nehemiah 12

Just as we might gather to dedicate a new fellowship hall or some other building that is not a church, the Israelites gather to dedicate the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah divides the people into two groups, each led by a choir, and they walk the boundaries of the city walls as they offer praise to God. The historic Church observes a similar rite during the Rogation Days (Monday and Tuesday before Ascension). In this rite the pastor and people process around the boundaries of the parish while singing the Litany.

Sunday (November 5) – Nehemiah 13

In the final chapter, Nehemiah discovers that Tobiah, enemy of God, has been given a room inside the temple! Nehemiah forcefully throws Tobiah out. Some people have the idea that a good pastor is always meek and gentle. Not so. A good pastor fearlessly adheres to God's Word, even when doing so is bound to upset some people. Nehemiah also shuts the gates on the merchants who had hoped to do business on the Sabbath. And he physically contends with Jews who had married pagans: "I cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair" (v. 25). One of the high priest's sons had married a daughter of Sanballat, another enemy of God, and Nehemiah drove him out. May God grant such men to His Church today, men who fearlessly and boldly hold fast to His Word, no matter the consequence.

The book of Nehemiah brings us almost to the end of the historical half of the Old Testament (around 400 BC). The second half of the Old Testament will consist mostly of the poetic and prophetic writings.