

Under Attack

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Under Attack

Introduction

“There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard” (Ecc. 9:14-16).

God’s Wisdom Preserves God’s Institutions

The *family* is one of God’s wonderful institutions being violently attacked by Satan. It is like a *little city* under attack by a *great king*—a wicked, unrelenting tyrant. His attacks against the assembly which Christ *loved and gave Himself for* and against the individual children of God are unabating. Knowing his time is short, they are increasingly violent. *“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come”* (2 Tim. 3:1).

Satan knows that godly, happy Christian marriages and families have a tremendous impact for good on what, perhaps, he hates most in this world—Christ’s assembly. Strong marriage and family unions strengthen and multiply the assembly, while weak, faltering ones cause discouragement, disorder and disintegration in the assembly. The strength needed to oppose these *great bulwarks* that the enemy is building cannot be found in ourselves—it comes only from *He that is in you*.

The moral qualifications for spiritual leaders mentioned in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are quite striking, showing the importance of well ordered Christian families.. *“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife ... One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church [“assembly”] of God?)”* (1 Tim. 3:2, 4, 5).

In Titus 2 the elder sisters are enjoined to teach the younger to women *“to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”* What vital, foundational impact strong, godly Christian families have!

Using God’s Provisions

Our God has made divine and rich provision in giving principles which, if followed, will result in the preservation of marriages, families and the assembly. But only through the wisdom of the *poor wise man* (a lovely picture of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, despised by this world, yet the only answer to its great and eternal needs) can we be preserved.

Where is this wisdom to be found? In the Bible. Embracing, obeying, and holding fast the wisdom of

God’s precious Word is the key to survival for Christian families. Not only survival, but thriving in the very face of Satan’s horrendous attacks. May the spirit of Jeremiah be ours: *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart ...”* (Jer. 15:16).

Principles Of God’s Preservation

Again, we want to emphasize that though *Christian families* is the focal point of these meditations, these principles gleaned from God’s Word are appropriate and may be applied with profit to the assembly, our marriages, and individual lives as well.

A Journey Through Nehemiah

Dear parents let’s go together on a “journey” through the book of Nehemiah. We’ll find one who is a lovely Old Testament picture of the Apostle Paul (a spiritual father) and Timothy (a spiritual shepherd). As a spiritual father, Paul was *willing to spend and be spent* for the blessing of his spiritual children (2 Cor. 12:15). Timothy, as a shepherd, *cared with genuine feeling* how the saints were getting on (Php. 2:20, JND).*

In the divine account of Nehemiah’s day we’ll find morally similar circumstances to the difficulties, trials and outright attacks which beset Christian homes (*your home and family*) today. We also will see how Nehemiah—like the *poor wise man*—stood in the gap, and by his faith, love, and spiritual energy, rose up to repair Jerusalem (we will see Jerusalem as a moral picture of a Christian home), engaging and encouraging others in rebuilding its walls and gates. What blessing resulted from this *labour of love!*

Be assured that in your home you also may apply daily, in dependence on the Lord, these same divine principles to defend your beloved family against the enemy’s constant attacks. If continually used in faith and the fear of God, they will strengthen your family, and ultimately, the assembly. You will find your home to be one which experiences the *days of heaven upon earth*. How our God delights to reward faith (though often weak) and obedience. *“Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour”* (Matt. 15:28).

“If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt. 17:20).

“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17). *“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love”* (John 15:10).

**Above all, let us remember that in the account of Nehemiah we find a lovely picture of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, His heart of love and desire for His people’s blessing* (John 5:39, Luke 24:27).

Starting Out

As we start on our journey through Nehemiah, we will continually observe two themes: (1) The *individual faith* of Nehemiah and (2) the *unrelenting attacks* of the enemy seeking to destroy what Nehemiah and his followers rebuilt. Knowing that the enemy will constantly be attacking, how important to walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). “*Without faith it is impossible to please God*” (Heb. 11:16).

We also will find demonstrated in Nehemiah’s individual life four important principles, constantly in exercise, guiding him as he built: (1) *Intense interest* in the welfare of others, (2) *individual exercise* of heart to serve others, (3) *inexhaustible love* for others, and (4) *intimate identification* with the conditions that characterized the lives of others.

Parents desiring to protect and preserve their beloved children and home from the persistent attacks of the enemy must have these same four motives. At the same time it might seem unnecessary to remind dear parents that they are to be interested in and love their children. Yet, these particular moral principles go deeper—even beyond natural love and interest which all normal parents have for their children. This *interest*, *exercise*, *love*, and *identification* must be guided by the Spirit of God, acted on in obedience to the Word of God and in dependence and fellowship with Him.

May our blessed Lord be pleased to use the following pages of this meditation for the blessing and preservation of dear Christian parents, their precious *little flocks* and the homes in which they live.

“...all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings (Exo. 10:23).

“That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children ... as the days of heaven upon the earth” (Deut. 11:21).

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem ... And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof” (Zech. 8:4, 5).

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26).

□

Under Attack
— Nehemiah 1 —

Dark Days

“*Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews ... and concerning Jerusalem ... The remnant ... are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire*” (Neh. 1:2,3).

The home is the last (and only refuge) where parents may still exercise full authority and control in guiding, protecting, and caring for their children, but the family is under a terrible, increasingly vicious attack of Satan. The description in Neh. 1 is an apt moral depiction of the condition of many homes in these present *perilous times*. Christian homes (the enemy’s special target) are indeed under *great affliction and reproach*, especially in the measure they seek to obey God’s Word in this godless age (see Rom. 1:19-32).

The collapse of morality and the marriage union in Western lands has resulted in growing numbers of “single parent families”, “extended families” or even the abomination of “same gender parents”. Society no longer accepts God’s standard of “two parent, father and mother families” as found in His precious Word as a necessarily desirable or normal family pattern.

But such godlessness and spiritual blindness need not discourage or hinder faithful Christian parents, though it ought to produce *Nehemiah spirits* in them; spirits which pray and weep over the morally burned and ruined condition of the family sphere.

Dad and Mom! no career, achievement, service, wealth, hobby, possession, or anything else, is more important or more precious than building and maintaining a Godly Christian home where your dear children can be raised—brought up in the “*nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Eph. 6:4).

Deep Concern

Though in captivity, it was well with Nehemiah. He had a comfortable life and a good job in pleasant circumstances. He was in the enviable position of being the official *cup bearer* to the king of Babylon. Keeping the monarch happy by providing him wine and other pleasures, was an agreeable and prominent job. In practical application we may say that *the lines had fallen unto him in pleasant places* (Psa. 16:6). Yet his heart was still bound up with God’s dear people and center.

If deeply concerned by the family unit breakdown, parents also must be concerned that the worldliness which has led to this ruin is not allowed to enter their home, affecting the family God has entrusted to them.

Feeling Failure

“*And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven*” (Neh. 1:4).

Hearing of those dismal conditions, Nehemiah wept with a broken heart and contrite spirit. Though comfortable in Babylon, he was humbled (*fasting*) in the presence of God as he felt the awful ruin (*prayer*).

Beloved parents, brokenness of heart, humility of spirit, and submission of will are the *starting point* of preservation and blessing for your family. It is a day that requires you to exercise sober watchfulness and much prayer; “*let us not sleep ... let us watch and be sober* (1 Thess 5:6). “*the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer*” (1 Pet. 4:7).

Faith Acting

Nehemiah’s prayer is the expression of one who has *gone down* in the presence of God, and it is the only way to *come up* in blessing! His prayer, spoken in faith, is full of principles which may certainly bear fruit and joy in Christian homes. Let us notice (*and seek grace to apply*) them as they relate to our personal family lives.

The Key To Blessing

In verse 5, Nehemiah owns that the way to blessing is *obedience* to God. This also is the only way a Christian family may be preserved and enjoy God’s blessing—unwavering submission and obedience to His precious Word. What solemn and eternal issues rest on parents reading and obeying the Bible—God’s divinely perfect *family manual*!

Accepting Responsibility

In verse 6, Nehemiah, with suited humility, takes his place as being personally part of the sin and failure that resulted in the sad, ruined condition of Jerusalem and the people of God. He confesses, “*we have sinned against thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned*”. Nothing less than willingness to recognize one’s personal part in parental/family failure will bring healing to homes wounded and hurting from Satan’s attacks. God ever honors *reality and repentance*.

Getting To The Root

In verse 7, Nehemiah unflinchingly details their sin; the root, self-will, which led to disobedience of God’s Word. Disobedience will always allow Satan to infiltrate and work destruction within the bosom of Christian families. While not dwelling on parental failures to the extent that one becomes *swallowed up with overmuch sorrow* (2 Cor. 2:7), neither should parents be indifferent to the consequences their family will suffer from self-willed disregard of God’s Word. “*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*” (Gal. 6:7).

Faith In God's Promises

In verses 8 to 10 Nehemiah casts himself fully on God, recounting His grace in choosing Israel for blessing, while in mercy preserving them in spite of their disobedience. We also have this same resource of divine grace and mercy of which dear parents may constantly avail themselves (2 Cor. 1:3)!

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (Psa. 103:8).

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Resting In God's Power

Nehemiah next casts himself on God's love and power as the only source of his help. He doesn't *tell* God what should be done about the condition of Jerusalem, but intercedes with God to direct the *powers that be* that there might be restoration and blessing to what was in ruins. Beloved parents don't have wisdom to *tell* God *what* to do to preserve families or *how* it should be done. However, Dads and Moms can, in full confidence in our Father's love and wisdom, ask for all the wisdom needed—divine wisdom from our God and Father. He will not withhold from those who desire it.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jas. 1:5).

“As for God, his way is perfect” (Psa. 18:30).

“God...is able to do exceeding abundantly above all...we can ask or think” (Eph. 3:19, 20).

“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (Psa. 103:8).

— Nehemiah 2 —

Causes For Concern

The 2nd chapter begins with the words; *“And it came to pass”*. *Nehemiah* had been greatly humbled, feeling the sorrow and ruin that sin had brought in among the people of God. God had heard His dear servant's prayers, He knew his sorrows, and He (as in the days of Moses) was about to use Nehemiah as a deliverer—an answer was about to *come to pass*.

God hears and answers dear parents prayers in His perfect time and way. Perhaps as God began answering Nehemiah's prayers, it may at the first have seemed to him that they weren't being answered. His heart was burdened by the sad news of his people and Jerusalem's condition, that it affected his service for the king. This did not escape the monarch's notice.

Although *sorrow of heart* (v. 2) is the *beginning* of rebuilding and protecting our families, grief shouldn't be a continual characteristic of our homes.

Parents, rightly concerned about the world in which they raise their dear children, must be careful that their home not be a place of continual *tension, sorrow* and *anxiety*. If that happens, their children may look to the world to find security and happiness being denied them at home. Another has mentioned that when the prodigal had returned, *“musick and dancing”* was heard from a home that began to *“be merry”*. Let us seek that our home be characterized by the *“joy of the Lord”* which is our *“strength”*.

Nehemiah's heart was rightly saddened, but realizing his sorrow was causing distress in the palace he casts himself on the Lord—*so I prayed to the God of heaven*—a source of infinitely greater power than the Gentile king. Nehemiah received an *immediate* answer to his *instant* prayer (Rom. 12:12). This same unchanging God of love who controls all is still our unfailing divine resource. Parents can fully rest in Him, knowing that in every circumstance and trial of life, His purposes of blessing *will come to pass*.

Telling It Like It Is

God's answer to Nehemiah's prayer gave him *courage* to tell the king exactly what was troubling him, as well as *wisdom* to ask permission to help those he loved—good principles for our homes.

Parents can plainly, lovingly remind their children (without displaying excessive anxiety or sorrow) about the enemy who seeks to destroy the home God has given them. At the same time parents must, by example, show that the God, His Word and faith are the resources for grace, power and wisdom needed to withstand the enemy.

Every Need Provided

God abundantly answered Nehemiah's prayer, and

he will abundantly answer yours, dear dad and mom! Ask largely for what is needed to preserve your family from the enemy's attacks! Our blessed God is a liberal and free-hearted Giver! "*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*" (Rom. 8:32).

"*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue*" (2 Pet. 1:3).

The king granted Nehemiah authority, protection, and materials in order that he could go back to rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 2:5-9). God has granted Christian parents the same things (the Word of God applied by the Spirit of God) to build, strengthen and preserve the family sphere. However, the energy of faith is required to diligently use the *materials* God has given to build and defend families against Satan's attack.

Immediate Opposition

"*When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel*" (Neh. 2:10).

The moment Nehemiah appeared with the king's authority and command to rebuild God's city, the enemy also appears, grieved that someone had come to help the oppressed people of God.

Parents must soberly realize that there is an enemy—a very real and terrible foe—who is grieved with any desire to build and maintain a Godly Christian home (in separation from the world of which he is prince), where children may flourish in a healthy spiritual climate that promotes their growth and welfare.

Don't expect Satan's domain (the world) to applaud, encourage or help further your spiritual desire to act on the Word of God to protect your family. You will experience misunderstanding, disdain, hinderances, even anger, toward your efforts to separate from a world intent on destroying Christian homes and families.

Sadly, some of the strongest opposition may at times come from Christians who have made this *present world* a comfortable dwelling place. They live as Lot who thought Sodom looked better than the wilderness where his uncle lived. Abraham, however, enjoyed fellowship with God in the wilderness, while Lot living, in Sodom, was attacked by its depraved, corrupted citizens.

Dad and mom you must be *aware* of Satan and his power, but you need never *give in* to him or be *paralyzed* by him, unable to act for God because of fear. Learn well (and constantly use) the wonderful principle of daily, diligent separation from this *present evil world*. Such separation will result in sweet communion with the Father and a happy home (2 Cor. 6:17, 18).

The Need For Understanding

"*Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds*" (Prov. 27:23).

Parents can't effectively preserve their family and home unless they really understand (in the measure that we, as mere human beings, are able) the conditions of this world and the dangers arrayed by Satan against them.

David had followers, servants who were described as having *understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do* (1 Chron. 12:32). Parents, you must be like that—having an understanding of these present times (though always remaining *simple concerning evil*) in order to *know* how to guide and protect your children.

How To Gain Understanding

How can parents gain this vitally necessary insight, understanding and discernment? When God sent Ezekiel to cry against the self-willed Israelites, the prophet first had to come to where they were—to understand their circumstances. He *dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days* (Ezk. 3:15). To gain an *understanding of the times*, you must trouble yourselves to go where your children are, to *sit there* observing the conditions they face for *seven days* (God's perfect time). Get firsthand knowledge of the world they face.

God directed Ezekiel to pronounce strong, solemn words of denunciation against His beloved, but rebellious people, yet those words and the *spirit* in which they were uttered were tempered by the prophet himself first entering into and understanding their sorrows, difficulties and the conditions in which they lived.

To morally *sit where your children sit* requires that you maintain a constant, loving and tender *dialog* with them (as well as maintaining prayerful communion with the Lord). You have to daily trouble yourselves to *know* in reality what your children face and what they are thinking (Prov. 27:23).

For example, are they attending public school? Dads *and* Moms! you had better spend time in their classrooms seeing what goes on there. Carefully *read* the textbooks they study, *know* the activities they are involved in, and *understand* what your children are facing! This doesn't mean that you must be *occupied* with evil (Php. 4:8), but, as the *prudent man*, be able to recognize the dangers that exist in order to hide yourself and your family from them (Prov. 22:3, 27:12).

Parents, feed on the *richness* and *sweetness* of the Bible. Then feed your children what you have enjoyed. Its food neutralizes the poisons of this world, so eat heartily! "*Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good*" (Isa. 7:15).

Faith Acting

When considering the difficulties their children

face, parents may mistakenly reason something like this: “Things aren’t any worse today than when I was a kid—I made it through OK and so can they”.

Such thinking is not realistic and can be very harmful for your family. While it is true that man’s heart is unchanged—“*deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*”—the moral fabric of 21st Century society is greatly degraded from that of 100, 50, or even 25 years ago. Children are facing increased violence, open immorality and godlessness of a magnitude that most of us adults, when we were children, never faced.

We also know that our blessed God has not changed for *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever*. He may always be trusted—no matter how dark the day in which we live. Intelligent parental prayer for divine, necessary wisdom begins with parental understanding of the world their children face *today*, not the world they faced years ago.

Walking Before Talking!

In Chap. 2:12-16 we find that Nehemiah doesn’t spend time *talking* about what he should do—he simply does it! He inspects and then motivates. Parents need to be both family inspectors and family motivators.

His inspection of the ruin and needs of the city was made by night. Efforts to deal with the problems your children face should not become a public spectacle of your spirituality or faithfulness, for that is pride. Carry on this vital work of inspection and realization of family needs, quietly and humbly, as *in the night*.

Gideon provides a helpful example for parents. He was young, timid, and knew that he faced many enemies—yet in a remarkable display of obedience, faith and spiritual courage he destroyed his father’s idolatrous grove and altar. However, he did it *by night* for he didn’t yet have the faith of David who *ran* to meet Goliath. Still, though fearful that someone might notice his actions, Gideon carried out God’s command and was blessed.

Don’t *talk* much—*do* much! And do it in fear and trembling before God! Never allow a lack of courage to hinder you even when carrying on the spiritual protection of your family unnoticed and *at night*.

Be A Motivator!

In verse 17, Nehemiah does four things that are wonderful principles for Christian parents to follow. (1) He tells the truth about the condition of Jerusalem. (2) He stirs up his brethren to action—*that we be no more a reproach*. (3) Nehemiah encourages them—*I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me*. (4) Doing this, he is able to gain the desired response from his brethren. They answer, *Let us rise up and build*.

How important to spiritually and naturally motivate your children while protecting them and your home. Gaining their hearts (Prov. 23:6) requires more

than *exhortation* (stirring up). You must also use *edification* (building up) and *comfort* (binding up)—not only words, but in your daily *actions*! When motivated by love and tenderness, children are most likely to be eager in joining in fellowship with you in building a safe, separated home. The result will be that they too will say, by their actions, *let us rise up and build!*

The First Attack—Mockery

Verse 19 shows that the number of those opposed to rebuilding the wall had increased in their opposition of the Jews united desire to work. At first Nehemiah had been opposed by Sanballat and Tobiah (A Moabite and an Ammonite); now they are joined by Geshem the Arabian. Moab and Ammon, children of Lot the nephew of Abraham, now ally themselves with the Arabians, descendents of Ishmael and of Esau. Perhaps the most subtle attacks against godly Christian homes come from *religious* (professing Christian) elements of society.

Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to *curse* Israel. Ammon allied himself with Amalek to *fight* against and *oppress* Israel. Ishmael *mocked* the son of promise (Isaac) and Esau *despised* his birthright.

These enemies first united attack (v. 19) is one which mocks and despises God’s great work, while questioning Nehemiah’s authority and motives. Dad and mom, separating your home from the world is a *great work*. Expect to be mocked and laughed at for your “religious legality”. Realize that your God-given parental authority will be constantly challenged. Don’t be surprised nor intimidated by such opposition.

The First Defense—Refusing Intimidation

Nehemiah’s reaction was decisive and to the point—this faithful servant of God allowed no compromise. First, he reclines on the divine authority, infinite power and unfailing resources of God—“*The God of heaven, he will prosper us, therefore we will arise and build*” (Neh. 2:20). Parents may take that very same attitude in building their home because “*God is for us*”.

Next, Nehemiah summarily rejects the attempted intrusion of those who wanted to hinder that good work—“*ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem*” (v. 20). Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem had no claim on God’s promises of blessing (*portion*), they had no national title (*right*) to be in Jerusalem, God’s city, nor could they have part in God’s purposes of blessing for Israel (*memorial*).

Beloved parents, the same is true of you and your children. The world has no right or just claim of entrance into your home. Its attempts should be met with unequivocal rejection! The world—even if coming as an *angel of light*—does not belong there. Its godless customs, philosophies and habits must never be admitted into that blessed domain. Just say *no!*

“Love not the world ... all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (1 Jn. 2:15, 16).

A Red Flag

On the other hand, if the world, rather than mocking and opposing, seems friendly and complimentary of your efforts to separate from its influences, be especially careful! Something is wrong!

Remember the first recorded words of the enemy to the people of God in Ezra’s day (those who came back to rebuild the temple)—*Let us build with you for we seek your God as ye do* (Ezra 4:2)! Don’t be intimidated by the world’s ridicule, but neither be fooled by its offer of compromise. The enemy often will try to convince you in many different ways (as he tried to convince God’s people of in Nehemiah’s day): *“we seek your God as ye do”*. But you will never hear the world, guilty of the crucifixion of the Son of God, say *“Your God is our God, let us seek Him together”*.

You are only safe when fully and completely trusting the Lord alone. When that is so with dear parents, then you and your children will say *let us rise up and let us build!*

— Nehemiah 3 — Gates And Walls For The Home

The third chapter of Nehemiah presents parents with a divine treasure chest of principles for Christian homes. Here we read how Nehemiah and his followers began the work of rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls and gates. Of particular interest are the *names* of the gates as well as the *order* in which they are mentioned. The moral principles they present are vitally important to apply in building and protecting Christian homes today from being destroyed by the enemy’s attacks.

The Need For Walls

Jerusalem needed a wall to protect it from the enemies that constantly sought to gain entrance. Dad and Mom you too need a very strong moral wall of separation from the *“present evil world”* for your children because the world will constantly seeks to gain entrance. Don’t try to build that wall of protection against the world by “educating” your children about all the evils that exist. Feed your lambs constantly on *good food*—warn of evil only when absolutely necessary. *“I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil”* (Rom. 16:19).

The divine key for successfully building this wall is: *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”* (Php. 4:8).

Feed your lambs much on the divinely pure and wholesome principles and doctrines of God’s Word. Enjoy them, talk about them, and above all, *live* them in practical reality and in *love* for the Lord Jesus. That is the best way to build a strong wall around your family.

Beginning to build this wall requires personal exercise—love for and commitment to the Lord Jesus; and a personal walk in obedience to Himself. *“Him that honoreth me will I honor”*.

Not only be careful of your personal words and actions, but guard carefully the kinds of electronic entertainment media, reading material, toys, games—even clothing styles—allowed in your home. Each of these things can, if not carefully regulated, allow the world and its defiling habits a subtle entrance there and into the very lives of your dear children.

May your wall be high and strong, founded on the principles of God’s Word and held together by the mortar of personal love for Christ and for your lambs!

The Need For Gates

No matter how strong the wall around Jerusalem that Nehemiah wanted to repair, if there were no gates

there would be no way for God's people to enter into the blessing of being in God's center. Gates allow *controlled entrance* as well as provide a way for quick *removal* of harmful influences.

Your home also needs more than walls. It must have a way for the good to enter as well as a means of discarding harmful things that may already have gained entrance—in short, it needs strong gates that can be shut and locked as well as opened.

Locked Gates provide *security* against the deceptive efforts of the world to imperceptibly gain entrance into the very bosom of the Christian family. Because we live in the *last days* it is vitally important for parents to keep the moral gates of your home locked so that its habits, principles and philosophies not gain entrance, bringing harm to your children and home!

Gates For Administration

In Nehemiah we find a total of 12 gates built in the wall of Jerusalem. This is a lovely picture of the *administrative* perfection and completeness of the New Jerusalem mentioned in Revelation 21.

The Christian home, if properly protected with a moral wall and gates, will be a place where God's blessing may be administered for the good of the whole family. Dad and mom! the Lord wants this administration of blessing to always characterize your home. When that is so, it will be a place where children grow strong in *spirit, soul and body* (1 Thess. 5:23). This "administration", however, must be carried out in faithful obedience to God and His Word.

Love (spirit), order (soul), and discipline (body), are essential in forming the foundation of family administration. Always remember that Dad is the *head* of the home, responsible for its administration, while Mom is to "*rule*" the home (1 Tim. 5:14, JND) in the fear of God while submitting to her husband.

Gates For Responsibility

Though Nehemiah rebuilt 12 gates in Jerusalem's wall, only 10 of them are mentioned in the third chapter. This presents another important principle for Christian parents—the principle of *responsibility*.

Dad and mom, you are responsible before God to protect and build your home in the fear of God and in moral separation from influences of this world.

Sometimes Christian homes contain a motto; "Jesus is the Head of this house". While not wanting to be critical, this is not so. Jesus is Head of the church, Lord of all and to be owned as Lord by each believer. But He is not "Head" of the home. That is dad's responsibility, and if dad doesn't carry out that responsibility in faithfulness to the Lord, no one else can. The same holds true for the sphere in which mom is responsible to act. Fathers are responsible to *mold*, mothers to *nurture*. The

result of parents refusing to accept God-given responsibility in these spheres spells future family disaster.

"*He sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house*" (Est. 1:22).

(1) The Sheep Gate—Neh. 3:1

We will consider some helpful *family* principles suggested by the names of the first 10 gates. As we do, we will also consider the *order* in which they are listed.

The *Sheep Gate* is first. Parents, God has given you a *flock*—your family is that beloved *little flock*. Your home must have an entrance for them alone. It must be a solid and secure gate which only your children use; a moral, spiritual and natural entrance into safety and joy of your home that is theirs alone to enjoy.

Hospitality and care for others is important and encouraged in the Word of God (Rom. 12:3, Titus 1:8), but your children must know that they *come first*. They are your most important service for the Lord. God has given them to you that, like Hannah of old, you may give them back to Him for His service. See that keeping your *vineyard* (your family) takes precedence over any other ministry for the Lord. "...*they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept*" (S of S 1:6).

Parents must lead their children going *in and out* through this gate—shepherding them through a *crooked and perverse* world as well as guiding them to the *green pastures* and *quiet waters* of rest found in following the Lord Jesus (Jn. 10:3,4).

The sheep gate also suggests the vital importance of daily, in faith and with much prayer, presenting the gospel to your children. This is not the work of one parent—it ought to be the united effort of both. Evangelical zeal for other souls is wonderful (*do the work of an evangelist*—2 Tim. 4:5), but the most critical evangelical field you will ever have is right within the bosom of your home.

"*Thou shalt be saved and thy house*" (Acts 16:31) is a wonderful promise, but not one meant to comfort spiritually slothful or careless Christian parents. Speak often, in loving reverence, the blessed Name of Jesus from the time they are infants. Let them see your own personal love for the Him constantly displayed in your daily actions and words.

Keep this gate securely locked so that the *foxes* (little, unjudged sins) or the *wolf* (gross wickedness) not gain entrance and wreak havoc with your lambs. "*Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks*" (Prov. 27:23). "*An hireling ... seeth the wolf ... and leaveth the sheep ... and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep*" (1 Pet. 5:8).

(2) The Fish Gate—verse 3

The second gate mentioned is the *fish gate*. When calling Peter and Andrew, the Lord Jesus said, “*follow me and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matt. 4:19). How often we find the *gospel* mentioned in Philippians (which gives the pattern for *normal Christianity*). Sharing the gospel with the lost ought to be a normal part of Christian family life. The precious *old, old story of Jesus and His love* should form part of the fabric of *normal* daily family life and conversation.

A brother once recounted an incident that happened in the town where he lived. One day, standing outside the home of a family well known in the community as Christians, he overheard two children talking. As they walked by, one turned to the other and said, “That’s the house where they talk about Jesus”. May the *fish gate* characterize our homes—a place that “talks about Jesus”.

(3) The Old Gate—verse 6

The world’s moral standards and philosophies constantly change because its culture is built on the “shifting sand” of current, rapidly changing popular opinion. When life’s storms come (as they will in every home), if your home has been built on such unstable foundations, it will quickly fall to the violence and flood of difficulties that are uncontrollable.

The world’s standards of morality accepted as normal and desirable today were, a mere 20 years ago, viewed as socially inappropriate, unacceptable conduct. Today, society not only “tolerates”, it “celebrates” moral behavior God calls “abomination”. Wickedness it now terms as acceptable “alternative life styles”.

In professing Christianity things are no better. The precious, unchanging truths of God’s Word are twisted, rewritten, or thrown aside (2 Pet. 3:16)—all to satisfy the whims of man’s unregenerate religious heart. The *spirit* of apostasy (see Jude) is flooding Christian profession.

The *old gate* must be constantly used in order to never give up or dilute the precious, unchanging truth of God’s living Word. This gate will allow the family to enjoy blessing which comes only from walking in “*the good way*” and according to the “*old paths*” .

We add a gentle warning here: be careful of “modern language” translations of the Bible which attempt to make God’s Word “understandable”. The result often is a diluting of divine truth. Teach children to appreciate “old”, reliable translations God has blessed over hundreds of years (by reading from those translations). Difficult words found in them present wonderful opportunities to explain “*more perfectly*” God’s truth.

“*Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls*” (Jer. 6:16).

(4) The Valley Gate—v.13

Society is built on the principle of pride; self-seeking and self-importance. From their earliest years, children are encouraged to put “self” first and forward, to be “proud” of themselves, their efforts and achievements. “Humanism” teaches that “self” is the center of everything. Pride drives man’s efforts to “be all you can be” (a military slogan), to “reach for the stars” (an entertainment slogan), and become a “self-made man or woman” (a business slogan). But God’s Word tells us that “*the fear of the Lord is to hate pride*” (Prov. 8:13).

Children that are allowed to view themselves as the “center” of their little world will, when grown, be a trial to all. How much sorrow marriages, families and assemblies experience because personal pride has been tolerated, even encouraged, in childhood!

Children should never have to question their parents’ individual love, appreciation, or value of them—more importantly, God’s love for them. Teaching them humility, however, is vital to their happiness*. See that the “valley gate” built into your home is strong and secure. “*For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit*” (Isa 57:15).

*Complementing children is very important and very different from promoting a spirit of pride. Parents must wisely *encourage* and *direct* their children’s abilities, talents, and efforts. The world has plenty of praise available for a child who hears none at home.

(5) The Dung Gate—v.14

This gate was no doubt used specially for *carrying out* that which was undesirable and defiling. Morally, defilement can easily be contracted in the world and enter the home unnoticed. There must be a “gate” through which such harmful, corrupting influences are *cast off* (Rom. 13:12).

During the famine in Samaria (2 Kng. 6:2), the “*head of an ass*” and a small measure of “*pigeon dung*” sold for a very great price. In the terrible spiritual and moral famine existing today, a great price is set on foolishness (the “ass’s” head) and filth (“dove’s dung”). Western culture is saturated with and eagerly feeds on such wickedness. Parents must have a secure “dung gate” so that this spirit with its attitudes, conduct, conversation or other undesirable behavior can be daily discarded.

Homes that are to truly experience the “*days of heaven upon earth*” (Deut. 11:21) must be kept morally pure. Dad and mom, make sure that you *first* cut off the undesirable and impure in your own lives before you try to cut them off in your children’s. For example, if you watch soap operas or feed on similar godless entertainment, don’t be surprised when your children develop the very same appetite for such depraved moral corruption.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa. 139:23, 24).

(6) The Fountain Gate (3:15)

A fountain is a spring—something that continues to bring forth that which is fresh and pure from an unseen source. The world also has its springs of refreshment, however, they are anything but pure, only and always causing greater thirst and dissatisfaction in the heart.

An example of such “springs” is found in Genesis 14. The King of Sodom and his cohorts, to escape the judgment of those kings who had conquered them in war, fled to the “slimepits” (v. 10). In the original text these slimepits are referred to as “fountains of asphalt” or “springs of tar”—a black, smelly, sticky substance that traps rather than refreshes. What the world uses for springs of refuge and relaxation are merely places belching forth foul-smelling filth that traps and destroys, rather than protecting and satisfying.

Christians, on the other hand, have a *fountain of water, springing up into eternal life* (Jn. 4:14, JND). Dad and mom be sure that your home has a “fountain gate”—a place where the joy and refreshment found in Christ has daily entrance. A gate that you often personally use. *“If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink, and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters”*.

Don’t allow your home to become defiled by the filthy, sticky fountains of the world’s debased sources of refreshment. God had to say of His dear earthly people: *“For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water”* (Jer. 2:13).

The Spirit ever desires to bring the Person of Christ before our hearts as our constant, unfailing source of refreshment. Parents need to have a heart like Achsah, Caleb’s daughter. When Caleb gave her an inheritance in the land, she desired more, craving the *upper and nether springs* that her inheritance would be supplied with constant refreshment (Jud. 1:14, 15). Morally, the *upper springs* pictures being refreshed by a glorified Christ while the *nether* (‘lower’) *springs* pictures refreshment gained from enjoying our Lord’s walk as the perfect Man.

Dad and mom, if you don’t find your own enjoyment from these divine fountains—if you do not drink deeply of their refreshment—don’t expect a desire for their waters to develop in your childrens’ hearts. Use every circumstance of life to show them that Jesus Christ always is the unfailing Fountain source of lasting refreshment.

“the Spirit of truth...will guide you into all truth... He shall glorify me...he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (Jn. 16:13-15).

(7) The Water Gate (3:26)

Though the world contains innumerable books written to entertain, instruct or as historical accounts, its literary works sooner or later all become outdated and irrelevant. None of mans’ vast works of literature are *living*, nor are they always appropriate and applicable to every circumstance of life in every generation of man’s history.

God’s Word, the Bible, is etenal, living, ever current, always refreshing, containing guidance for every occasion of life. This divine Instruction Manual contains the secret of eternal life as well as the key to happiness in this life. It is the only Book by which a “*young man*” (or woman) can “*cleanse his* [“her”] way”, the only Book whose “living water” cleanses every footstep of life’s pathway (see John 13).

How vitally important that the Word of God be really loved, read, spoken, and used to direct every part of our lives. A family using the “water gate” finds a resource of divine wisdom and joy for every circumstance.

Notice too, that the *fountain gate* is mentioned *before* the *water gate*. The Bible, precious, divine and living, is not intended by its Author to be used merely as a book of poetry, a manual of rules, a record of moral virtues or a historical account. Even an unsaved person may find value in reading the Bible that way, but without faith in Christ, reading it only makes a soul the more solemnly responsible before God. Faith must partake at *the fountain gate* before feet can be cleansed and guided at the *water gate*.

Parents, don’t use the Bible as a “*do and don’t rule book*” with your children. Lovingly read from it as a source of delight, wisdom and light for your family.

“Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy words were unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by thy name, O Jehovah, God of hosts” (Jer. 15:16, JND Trans.).

“... thy law is my delight ... I will meditate in thy precepts.” (Psa. 119:77, 78).

“And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

(8) The Horse Gate (3:28)

The world puts a great emphasis on glory, strength and power. Whether militarily, politically, in business, entertainment, or sports, power is a supreme goal.

Strength and power are also necessary components of the Christian home, though certainly not as the world understands and uses them. We say: *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”*. He is ever our strength and parents must impart that same dependancy on His strength to dear children.

It will require strength and courage given of God, if your children are to live faithfully for Christ, defending their Christian faith in a godless world.

Parents who realize the vital necessity of unyielding moral courage and spiritual strength for themselves, to withstand the wiles of this *present evil world* must also understand that need exists just as much for their beloved lambs! See that your home has a solid, secure and well used “horse gate”.

“*God is our refuge and strength*” (Psa. 46:1).

“*That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*” (1 Cor. 2:5).

(9) The East Gate (v 29)

This is the gate which looks towards the rising of the sun. The world has been on a path walking away from God (“*to the East*”) until we come to the wonderful record of the “*wise men*” who “*came from the East*” seeking for the One “*born King of the Jews*” (follow that path in Adam, Cain, the tower of Babel, etc. to see man morally ever moving away from God “*to the East*”).

We also read in 2 Pet. 1:19 of the “*day star*” (speaking of the Lord Jesus coming for the church) which arises in the Eastern sky before the prophecy of the “*Sun of righteousness*” rising is fulfilled (Christ come in glory and setting up His kingdom in this world – Mal. 4:2).

The world scoffs at the thought of the Lord Jesus’ return—professing Christendom has also given up that bright and sure hope. Our Lord’s promised return should be a living reality, a source of daily joy and expectation for the whole family. Where this is so, children’s conduct will be daily formed by the realization that Jesus may come at any moment!

When children disobey they also need to be assured that there is in their home an “East Gate”—a way back to the joy and blessing their disobedience has denied them. How happy the home where children early learn (by parental example and teaching) the value of *repentance* (turning around and coming back to the Lord) as well as the joy of expecting the Lord’s coming (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

(10) The Gate Miphkad (v 31)

The meaning of this 10th gate suggests the thought of “review” or “inspection”. It is the last mentioned in chapter three. Parents have a solemn “responsibility” for how the care and nurturing of their children. Inherent in such a grave trust and responsibility is always being aware of the spiritual, moral condition of their lambs.

In Prov. 27:23 we read, “*Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.*” In other words, constantly *inspect them!*—not in a nagging or disparaging manner, but in grace and loving concern.

Christian parents can all too easily, passively neglect the vital process of tender loving “review” or “inspection” of their lambs. Though easy to *assume* that all is well, it’s vital, along with daily family prayer and reading, to encourage your children to seek fellowship

with those of *like precious faith*. This requires constant parental “inspecting” of their precious lambs (in a tender and loving spirit—never in a harsh, critical manner).

No normal dad or mom is unmindful or unconcerned about the physical and emotional welfare of their children. How *much more* important to be constantly aware of their spiritual “state” and “condition”. How are they growing in Christ, what influences are molding their lives, and with whom do they form friendships? Dad and mom make sure that the “gate Miphkad” is used daily!

“*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet, 3:18).

Two Gates Complete The Wall

We will now consider the two other gates *not mentioned* in chapter 3—one in Neh. 8 and one in Neh.12. Without them your home will not be a place where Christian blessing can be fully administered for your family.

(11) The Gate Ephraim (Neh. 8:16)

“*Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out*” (Deut. 28:6).

The name “Ephraim” means “double fruit”. Jacob pronounced a blessing on both Joseph’s sons—Ephraim and Manasseh—giving Joseph a “double portion” of blessing through them. How very much God wants to bless our homes! But we learn a solemn lesson in Ephraim for we read in Hosea 4:17 that “*Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.*” Later in Hosea we also learn that when Ephraim walked in the fear of God he was exalted, but when he turned away to worship Baal, he died (see Hosea 13:1).

How important that your home is marked by the enjoyment of the *spiritual blessings* that belong to us in our Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven as well as by natural joy. It is indeed vital to have and enjoy *honey* (the right joys of nature) with your children, but be careful that those natural joys don’t become *idols* displacing their love for and joy in the Lord Jesus.

If natural joys become so important that they are allowed to displace Christ as the supreme source of joy for your children, their appetite and desire for the Lord’s things will wain and eventually disappear. Don’t allow natural joys to so consume your family’s thoughts that reading and enjoying the precious Word of God and the Person of Christ fade to insignificance.

The last words of warning of the Apostle John to his beloved children in the faith are, “*Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen*” (1 Jn. 5:21). May those words be burned indelibly into the hearts of each dear parent! Make sure that your home includes the *Ephraim Gate* allowing your children to find natural *and* spiritual joys in their home—joys and satisfaction which they will realize this poor world will not and cannot give to them.

(12) The Prison Gate (Neh. 12:39)

Prison is not a nice place! Criminals, wrongdoers, those who are not fit for society, are shut away in such places. Prisons deny inmates liberty and freedom to follow their own will.

Lawyers defending guilty criminals often seek to excuse their crimes on the grounds that the person was at some time in life mistreated or abused. Parents must not give in to the spirit of this age which excuses, rather than punishes self-will. Appropriate punishment of your dear children is necessary if there is to be Godly order, respect of authority (respect of you as parents), and above all, the fear of God instilled in their hearts and minds. When they are young and tender there is hope.

God alone can give parents wisdom for when to punish, what kind of punishment is needed and the severity (even the necessity) of the punishment. If a Christian home has no “prison gate” it will quickly become a breeding ground for disaster and tragedy in the lives of its children who have felt no parental restraint.

The Word of God speaks of the *rod of correction* (Prov. 22:15) and of the necessity of chastening *thy son while there is hope* (Prov. 19:18). So vitally important is such correction that a father is instructed to not allow even the child’s tears to stop such punishment when needed.

Further, the writer of Hebrews encourages all believers with this same vital principle: “... *My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*” (Heb. 12:5,6).

Regarding the *Prison gate* let us listen to God’s Heavenly wisdom given for our earthly pathway.

“*He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes*” (Prov. 13:24).

“*Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell*” (Prov. 23:13,14).

“*The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame*” (Prov. 29:15).

Strong words, but issues of life and death are at stake! Be sure your home includes a well built *prison gate*.

Where these twelve gates morally exist in the Christian home, there will be happy, joyful parental administration of love and security in the fear of God. The result will indeed be a home where parents and children enjoy the blessings of God *as the days of heaven upon earth* (Deut. 11:21).

— Nehemiah 4 —

Withstanding The Enemy

We might think that because the gates were being *set up* and the wall around Jerusalem was being *built up*, the enemy would *give up* his attacks. But that is not the case in Nehemiah’s day nor will it be the case with Christian homes today. The enemy continues his attacks unceasingly—the fury and intensity of them increasing even as Christian parents, in faith, continue building and protecting their home and family.

In Nehemiah 4:1-3 Sanballat “mocks” the Jews as being *feeble* and their building as *rubbish*. Make no mistake, dear parents, that is exactly what the world thinks of the Godly precepts you are using to build your home. Remember that the precepts are *God’s*—the world in all its wisdom cannot understand and does not care for His infallible, divine wisdom which is yours for every step in your journey through this life.

In verse 2 Sanballat mockingly asks five questions which in moral principle are the same used today—questioning everything Christian parents do to build and preserve a godly home (see JND. Trans.).

(1) “*What do these feeble Jews?*”—questioning the *motives* and the *ability* of Christian parents to raise their children for Christ.

(2) “*shall they be permitted to go on?*”—questioning the God-given *authority* Christians parents have over their children and home.

(3) “*Will they offer sacrifices?*”—questioning if Christianity answers the real needs of your children.

(4) “*Will they finish in a day?*”—questioning whether Christian parents have enough time to effectively mold their children’s lives for Christ.

(5) “*Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, when they are burned?*”—questioning whether there exists necessary materials, wisdom and strength to build a strong home from the all too evident, sad failure and ruin of professing Christianity.

Christian parents should expect opposition and misunderstanding from the world. You will be accused of being bigoted and prejudiced because you do not allow your children to develop tolerance of other (“alternative”) life styles or religions. You’ll be accused of using your “Christianity” to hold back and restrict your children from developing into good, tolerant, “global citizens”.

The answer to all such challenges and questions is the same—a cry of help in dependence upon our loving God—“*Hear, O our God*”. At the same time remember that God never expects parents to “tolerate” anything He calls sin and abomination. He desires us to remember that we are passing through this worlds as *pilgrims and*

strangers—citizens of heaven (Eph. 2:19).

The Danger Of Foxes

Tobiah continues his mockery by describing the Jews' building efforts as so feeble that even a "fox" could ruin them—"even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (v. 3). Yet this very mockery contains a solemn warning that parents must carefully heed. As you build the wall of protection around your home be very careful of foxes for they will indeed "knock" down the wall of separation (no matter how strongly built) if they're allowed to enter your home.

In the Song of Solomon 2:15 we read, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes." Your children are those tender grapes, fruit God has given you to bring joy—to Himself, to you, to other believers and to those without Christ. But if little foxes are allowed to slip into your home (little, unjudged sins—innocent seeming, yet worldly habits which subtly dishonor the Lord), the vine will be damaged (communion and joy in Christ). "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). Oh! beloved parents! don't allow those seemingly harmless, little worldly habits, ways, and pleasures into the sanctuary of your home—those little foxes, though they may seem cute and harmless, eventually will destroy the tender grapes.

Open Conflict

"... when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it" (VV. 7,8).

When the enemy's mocking and scorning doesn't intimidate and paralyze the efforts of Christian parents, it will begin to attack in open warfare. We can't know all the ways that Satan will wage his war against Christian families, but our God does! There is a wonderfully sure and simple way to guard against all attacks whenever they come.

Verse 9: "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them". The Lord Jesus in Gethesame's garden told his sleepy disciples to watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Peter didn't heed that advice and ended up denying the Lord Jesus. Dad and mom! watch and pray continually against attack—don't become morally sleepy and complacent in the easy, comfortable world in which we live.

Can Christians Be Enemies?

Yes, sad to say, it may be so. In vv.10-12 we find even some of the people of God attempted to discourage dear Nehemiah. "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much

rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall".

Perhaps the most difficult attacks to withstand come from worldly Christians, those who rather than supporting and encouraging your efforts to protect your family, discourage and condemn them—often by labling you as being "just too legal".

In Nehemiah's time some of the Jews had compromised their hearts and ways, having open fellowship with their enemies. Perhaps it was easier for them to "get along" peacefully rather than accepting the persecution that was sure to come from living faithfully for Jehovah. "... all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Don't expect spiritual encouragement from Christians who have compromised with the ways of the world. Evil communications corrupt good manners. If you form close fellowships with believers who morally live as earth dwellers*, eventually you'll see your family hurt by their fleshly habits. Oh! beloved Christian parents! Be careful of the harmful influences world embracing Christianity produces—influences which may cause far more harm than the violent open attacks of the world.

* An "earth dweller" refers to Revelation where people who have rejected God and His testimony follow the political entity referred to as "the beast", happy that they are rid (they think) of God—the world now fully belonging to them. "And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets [God's testimony] tormented them that dwelt on the earth" (Rev. 11:10).

Even real believers can in their habits become earth dwellers, living as though Christian hopes, joys and satisfaction are found in this world. It has crucified the Lord of Glory, its rightful King and believers who refuse to live here as pilgrims and strangers—a heavenly people called out of this Christ-rejecting world—may cause and reap great sorrow.

Guerrilla Warfare

"Our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease" (v. 11).

The enemy now threatened to sneak unnoticed into Jerusalem to stop the work. The world will try to "sneak" unnoticed into your home as well. There are many "windows" in 21st Century life which if not carefully guarded, allow harmful infiltration.

Be careful of the books, magazines, and electronic devices allowed in your home and be diligent in controlling them. Be wary of the world's verbal slang (especially sports and advertising slogans and words), its dress styles and codes of conduct. These moral perversions can slip in undetected. Parents need to daily put the meal—Christ (2 Kngs. 4:39-41) into the pot of children's experiences, thus

neutralizing undetected poison.

The world entering the home unnoticed isn't the only subtle hinderance. "*And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.*" Those worldly Jews (v. 12), sympathetic to the enemy's ways, tried 10 times to undermine the work by threatening Nehemiah! Again we plead with dear parents, don't give in to pressure from worldly Christians to compromise with the world and its ways—they'll not easily give up pressuring you!

Arming And Alarming

Nehemiah armed all the people building so that if the trumpet sounded an alarm all would gather together and fight the enemy. "*And I ... said unto ... the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses*" (v. 14). In the battle for the preservation of families we have the encouragement of knowing that God is with us—"*If God be for us who can be against us*". Notice also that the people were encouraged to *fight for your brethren*. But in order to fight they must have appropriate weapons and skill to use them!

How can parents arm their families against attack? **Saturate** yourselves and your children with the precious Word of God! **Live** what you read! **Pray!** Do this daily!

When the "trumpet" sounded an alarm (v. 20) everyone was to gather to the place of attack. They weren't to decide if the alarm was 'sounded' in the right way, or if the 'trumpet blower' did a good job in sending the alarm. Those building Jerusalem were only to be interested in one thing—listening for the trumpet's alarm, calling to battle.

God uses servants (prophets—*forth tellers*) of His choosing to sound an alarm because of dangers they see arising in your home, not because the one used may seem acceptable to you. Don't disregard the *alarm* God sends through another Christian just because the one God uses to bring the alarm has painfully obvious personal failures in their own life.

Listen carefully and act quickly when you hear God's alarm of danger in your home. Don't disregard or reject the *trumpet sound* because the messenger He uses has personal faults or is ungracious in the way God's alarm is delivered to you.

Constant and Consistent

"*So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing*" (v. 23).

Sometimes parents may allow their children to act differently within the privacy of the home—the gar-

ments of practical Christianity are *put off*, so to speak. **Be consistent!** Don't allow irreverent attitudes or actions to be displayed by your children in the privacy of your home that you would not want them to display publicly.

It is also vitally important, dad and mom, that your own garments be *washed* daily. **Keep faith and a good conscience** (1 Tim. 1:19), **keep short accounts** (1 Jn. 1:9), **keep thyself pure** (1 Tim. 5:22), and **keep yourselves in the love of God** (Jude 21). One of the greatest spiritual injuries parents inflict on their children is being hypocritical. Children immediately sense such a spirit when displayed by their parents.

Be the same kind of Christian in your personal conduct at home that you are in public; *don't change your garments*. Your children, who know you better than anyone else, know when you are *changing*, or, not *washing* your Christian garments (actions and character). What terrible, life-long wounds might be avoided in Christian parental living godly, consistent lives at all times.

"*And He said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him ... My servant Moses is ... faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth ... not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?*" (Num. 12:6-8).

— Chapter 5 —
Sometimes The Enemy Is “Us”

Defending our homes would be easier if dads and moms knew *when* and from *where* the attacks might come. Even more comforting would be the assurance that their brethren in Christ would always be there for them, to support and help during times of special battles. Unfortunately, this is not always the case as the first 14 verses of this chapter prove. These sad, though instructive verses tell of some impoverished Jews who had to borrow against their belongings, even selling their children into servitude in order to buy food and pay their taxes. Also their lands, the possession and heritage that Jehovah had given to them, had to be put up in some cases, for collateral against their loans.

Further, these poor Jews were so deeply mired in debt that they had no power to redeem their children or their lands (the collateral) from their creditors. Wealthy Jews had evidently loaned the necessary funds to them but then charged them the added expense of interest (*usury*) on those loans—something clearly forbidden by God. Jehovah’s commandment was, “*If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury (interest)*” (Ex. 22:25).

Nehemiah, in righteous indignation, rebuked the guilty ones and they seemed genuinely sorry for their ways, promising to stop. The happy result was that the whole congregation *praised the Lord* (Neh. 5:14).

Don’t Forget Or Wrong The Poor

Some families, enjoying many spiritual and natural blessings, might yet tend to forget the struggles and needs other Christian families may be experiencing (especially the spiritual needs— “*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted*”—Gal. 6:1).

Struggling Christian families may be going through difficulties because of ignorance of God’s ways, or perhaps because trials allowed of God, other circumstances, family personalities or things which cause pressures that have impoverished their home.

Counsel and guidance may be offered in prayerful dependance and humility. However, the danger is that such help might be offered in a spirit of expecting or requiring something in return—such as demanding certain actions or changes in those who have received the help. Such demands are, in principle, like usury. Those being helped may be totally incapable of paying anything back. Seek grace to set at *liberty* those under bondage and trial, rather than increasing their load!

May we all be tender hearted, ever willing and

eager to encourage and help one another, seeking to support Christian families who may be struggling, *without* expecting or demanding anything in return.

Such a spirit comes from *agape* love, a love that is “*kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you*” (Eph. 4:32). How it must grieve our blessed Lord when those of His own display a *demanding* rather than gentle, *supporting* spirit towards brethren experiencing deep family struggles. Let us all seek grace to be *helpers* and *encouragers* (rather than *demanders*) of one another.

Setting An Example

Nehemiah set a wonderful example for the people to follow in caring for each other’s needs. As the officially appointed *Tirshatha* (“governor”—Neh. 8:9), he had the right and authority to demand financial support from the oppressed people just as governors before him had required of them. This dear servant sets a sweet, wonderful example of self-denial, service and love by (1) *not collecting his wages*, (2) *continuing in the work of this wall*, (3) *refusing to buy land*, (4) *requiring his servants to work on the wall* (v. 16), (5) *preparing an abundant table for those who were with him in the work* (v. 17), (6) *preparing the choicest of sustenance each day for his guests* (all at his own expense), and (7) *not requiring the bread of the governor* (salary) because of the heavy bondage (v. 18).

These seven principles may be used with much profit by Christian families, helping to support and encourage each other as each builds a home safe and protected from the world. We may summarize them in this way: (1) make no selfish personal demands, (2) be personally involved when needed, (3) refuse to put self first, (4) use personal talents and possessions for the blessing of others, (5) share personal joy and faith in the Lord with others, (6) give the best (not the left-overs) to others, and (7) recognize with compassion the condition of families experiencing special trials and needs.

Displaying these things towards other Christian families is to display 1 Corinthians 13 love (*charity*) in reality and truth. May we be exercised and have wisdom from our God, to act thus in the Spirit and grace of Christ.

— Chapter 6 —
The Danger Of Compromise

Nehemiah's enemies, found that scorning and mocking did not work, nor had threatened open warfare worked—nothing Sanballat and Tobiah attempted to do had hindered Nehemiah and the Jews from building the wall. So it is that the enemy begins to lay a different snare in order to draw Nehemiah away from the work, while undermining his influence, energy and leadership in Jerusalem. They say: “*Come let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono*” (Neh. 6:2).

Outwardly, this new attack seems harmless, friendly and innocent. (1) It encouraged *friendship* rather than fighting (*let us meet together*). (2) It was to take place in a seemingly *harmless* place (*one of the villages*). (3) There seemed no hidden *danger* involved (*in the plain of Ono*).

However, dear Nehemiah immediately discerned the evil intent of this innocent but deceptive invitation—they thought to do me harm. Parents, prayer and communion with the Lord alone can give you such discernment when the world comes as a friend.

Dad and Mom, if you are drawn into compromising with what seems a harmless, innocent appearing world, your family will suffer. Today it has a host of organizations and activities that have been created and promoted—appearing harmless—solely to deprive children of the moral security and authority of their parents and home. Dads and moms! be ever so careful of all those supposedly healthy, harmless activities promoted by the world that crucified our dear Saviour—activities promoted as a way of keeping your children from falling prey to the very evil and danger that it is guilty of providing!

Drugs, violence, immorality, perverted entertainment—all are rampant and acknowledged by the world to be destroying children and families. It desperately creates a host of *activities* supposedly provided to protect your children from these awful degradations. But its real intent is to cause Christian parents to stop building walls of *separation* from itself. This *present evil world* does not have the best interests of your beloved children at heart. It wants to stop you from separating them from it and its influences in your home.

The Appropriate Response

Nehemiah's response is quick, decisive and noble. May God grant parents to give the same clear, unequivocal message to the world, no matter how friendly and helpful it may seem. He said, “*I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you*” (Neh. 6:3).

Dad and mom! consider the work of protecting your home from the harmful influences of this world as

one of the greatest works you will accomplish in this world—a *great work* indeed! Even if you *compromise* with the world, you'll never bring it up to your level of spiritual exercise before the Lord. Concession with the world demands that you leave your work and *come down* to its level. The world will have gained its wicked ends—the wall of separation you have been building will cease, and you, now on its level, will have lost the ability to keep your children and home separated from its deadly influences.

Questioning Parents' Motives

Four times Sanballat tried to persuade Nehemiah to *come down*. From every side, the world will attempt to get Christian parents to compromise. If that doesn't work it will accuse you of being tyrants who will not allow your children to make personal choices or enjoy their rightful “personal freedoms”. It will do just the same as Sanballat when he accused Nehemiah, saying to you in effect: “You just want to be a king, a dictator, forcing your children to do what you want, denying them liberty and stunting their personalities”.

Sanballat, after purposely misrepresenting Nehemiah's true desire, sends yet another supposed offer of help: *Come now therefore and let us take counsel together* (v. 7). But once again, faithful Nehemiah boldly labels Sanballat's accusations for what they are—wicked lies. “*There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart*” (v. 8). Dads and moms! you don't owe the world any excuse or answer when it's trying to destroy your home and children! Nor do you need to argue or debate with its lies and innuendos. You are building a place to protect your children, a home in which Jesus Christ is owned as Lord—all of that the world hates. Don't give in nor be “intimidated” by its lies. And never stop building in order to *come down* to its ungodly level!

Christians Who “Sell Out” Are Not Allies!

Shemaiah, Noadiah the prophetess, and the rest of the prophets, as well as the nobles of Judah—what a list! These were not just the people of God—Nehemiah's brethren—these were they who took the place of having special insight into God's mind as Jerusalem was rebuilt.

Yet they had all *sold out* to the enemy (“*he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him*”-v. 12). Don't be shaken by real believers who seem to be getting along quite well with the world, while pressuring you to stop being so legal and restrictive with your family.

Christians who have quite happily settled down in this world, enjoying and making the most of it that they can—morally becoming *earth-dwellers*—will never be true allies of parents trying to keep their children separated from its harmful influences. Such don't want

— Chapter 7 —
Builders And Hearers

to separate from what they enjoy, nor does their conscience like it much when other Christians do separate.

These Christians who have “sold out” and who, at the same time, give you “Christian advice” for raising your families just can’t be trusted. Had Nehemiah listened to Shemiah, he would have committed a terrible sin by entering the house of God which was not open to him (he was not a priest or a Levite). He would have done it in a spirit of fear. What powerful ammunition Sanballat would then have had in undermining Nehemiah’s work! Failures in Christian parents, who try to separate their families from the world are quickly seized upon and used as reasons to stop that good work. Seek grace to not fail. If you do fail confess it to the Lord, but never give up your exercises just because others’ criticism is discouraging and causing you fear!

The Worst Mistake Is to Quit Building!

Your mistakes will be quickly spread as a *reproach* (v. 13) by the enemy (every parent who seeks to faithfully raise their children for the Lord’s glory and in separation from the world, will make mistakes). Don’t give up! You have wonderful assurances from the God who loves you and encourages the good work of separating your family from the world. When failure happens, remember: “*If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 Jn. 1:9.), and too, “*God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*” (2 Tim. 1:7).

Some very well-known and respected leaders in professing Christianity (*nobles*) encourage compromise and affiliation with the world. Many *are sworn unto* the enemy through a variety of unequal yokes (vv. 18,19). Pray for them, but leave them with the Lord. Remember that as you seek to build a moral wall of protection around your home, it will be perceived by all *that this work was wrought of our God* (v. 16). Take heart then beloved dads and moms! Follow your personal exercises before the Lord and don’t give up! Build!

In Nehemiah 7:1-4 we have pictured a Christian home that is properly protected from the world’s influences—with strong moral walls and gates. Such happy homes have four wonderful characteristics—protection (*porters*), happiness (*singers*), service (*Levites*), and order (*ruler*). The home as an institution of God is *large and great*—that is, He has instituted the sphere of *family* for all mankind. Yet we must admit that there are *few* who truly value and occupy the wonderful city of the family as God desires it be enjoyed.

Christian parents must not allow themselves to be swayed by the humanistic philosophies and opinions of spiritually blind, ignorant people who (though in the majority) have no appreciation of the family unit as it has been instituted of God. Though few may dwell there (the city of the family), it is God’s safe refuge for Christian parents. Be *of good courage*—occupy and delight in this wonderful city!

The rest of chapter seven contains a roll of names of the families who returned from Babylonish captivity to rebuild the temple and the city. Although 42,360 souls sounds like a great company, it was very small in comparison to the multitude that left Egypt on the passover night (see Exodus 12—some Biblical scholars have estimated 2 million souls left that night).

There aren’t many today who desire to maintain and build their families according to the divine instructions found in the Word of God. Just as each one who returned was noted by God in the day of Ezra and Nehemiah, so too, parents whose exercise is to build their home in the fear of God, are of individual importance to Him. Our blessed God is interested in the smallest detail, concern or difficulty Christians parents face. Trust Him for all!

Although the world has no real interest in (or encouragement for your efforts) be assured that our all wise, loving God is indeed divinely interested in every circumstance of your household. In faith seek His will and direction in all things “*for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Heb. 13:5).

— Chapter 8 —
The Way To Great Gladness

“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel” (v.1)

This chapter contains a vital key to providing delight and satisfaction for children dwelling in protected, separated Christian homes. In materially well favored Western lands—especially the North American continent—the world presents much to attract the hearts of our children. Parents who have built a moral wall and gates to keep the world out must also see that their home is a place that supplies joy. When joy is lacking, children seek the pleasures provided by the world to fill a vacuum which ought not exist in Christian homes. One vitally important key to providing joy and satisfaction is the daily, reverent reading of the precious Word of God as a family—as one. Don’t allow reading the Bible to become something that *we have to do*. Read and enjoy the Bible so that your family may say: *“How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth”* (Ps 119:103).

“Drinking In” (Not “Drowning In”) His Word

“...men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month” (v. 2)

Daily reading of the Bible with your children ought to a very special ‘family time’ in your home; not viewed by them as a ‘boring duty’. Use wisdom and care in *how* you read it, *what* passages you read from it, and *how long* you read from those passages with your lambs.

Here are some helpful principles for reading the Word of God in the family, found in Neh. 8:1-12.

(1) *“And all the people gathered themselves together as one ... and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses”* (v.1). Family reading is just that—for the family. Gather your family together as one to hear. Even young children who may not understand, will benefit from the regular habit of reading together the Word of God. Read the Word when all your family is present together (daily, as much as you possibly can). *“That from a child thou has known the Holy Scriptures”* (2 Tim. 3:15).

(2) *“and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month”* (v. 2). This was the day in which the *feast of trumpets* was to be celebrated (see Lev. 23:24). The family reading is a time when the *trumpets* (The Word of God—Old and New Testament) are to be sounded for the warning and guidance of our families—the *first day* tells us that *sounding* (reading) them is vital.

(3) *“And he read therein from the morning until midday”* (v. 3). You may only be able to read for a few minutes, but those minutes should be when your family is at rest (*morning until midday*) and before the *heat of the day* (problems and trials) intrude into family life. *“early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is”* (Psa. 63:1).

(4) *“before the men and the women, and those that could understand”* (v. 3). What a happy privilege for parents to read the Bible to their lambs *who can understand*. Seek wisdom from the Lord to explain difficult passages in His Word to your children in a way that they are able to understand. Read from reliable translations of the Bible, taking time to explain complicated words or verses in a simple way.

(5) *“and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law”* (v.3). Expect your children who are able to understand to be attentive while you read. At the same time *have an understanding of the times*. Don’t read for *too long* at a time. Remember that *“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child”* (1Cor. 13:1). Your lambs’ attention spans will not be the same as an adult.

(6) *And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose ... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up”* (vv. 4,5). Be reverent and dignified in the way you read (*a pulpit of wood*) and expect reverence for the Word of God to be displayed by your children (*he was above all the people—all the people stood up*).

(7) *“And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God”* (v. 6). Include a time of prayer including praise and worship when reading the Bible with your family.

(8) *“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading”* (v. 8). Take time to explain in simplicity what you read—but only as you understand it for yourself. The most effective explanations of Scripture for children will not be long, deep expositions. Rather, they will be what you have personally enjoyed and understand for yourself. Simplicity is best!

Enjoying And Sharing The Lord Jesus

Read the Bible with your family in order that there will be joy (not sorrow) found there for your children. Of course there are very solemn things in Scripture and you must be faithful in explaining them. The result of reading the Word of God with your family ought to be that *“the joy of the LORD is your strength”* (v. 10).

There are three things which especially resulted from this joy. (1) The people were to *eat the fat* (read so that your family enjoys the richness of the *blessed*

Person of the Lord Jesus). He is found everywhere in Scripture—“*they are they which testify of me*” (Jn. 5:39).

(2) They were also to *drink the sweet*. Enjoy with your children the wonderful *work* the blessed Saviour accomplished to God’s glory and our eternal blessing as well as the perfect example of His life.

(3) Afterwards the people were not to forget others for whom *nothing is prepared*. How happy the family that seeks to *do the work of an evangelist*—as a family. But remember too, dear parents, personal enjoyment of the Person and work of our Saviour comes first. We can’t share with others what we are not enjoying for ourselves.

What was the result for the people who heard the Word of God in Nehemiah’s day? “*And there was very great gladness*” (v. 17). This is exactly what the world deceptively promises your children but can never give them.

But you can.

Read (and *live*) the precious Word of God with your children, and as you do, the home which you have built will be filled with *very great gladness*. “*Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord*” (Jn. 20:20).

— Chapter 9 — Seven More Keys

In Nehemiah 9 we find seven helpful principles that parents can apply in building, protecting and enjoying a happy, blessed, Christian home and family. How encouraging to observe that the heart of the people was knit together as one in their spiritual exercises. Such unity of spirit in the home is indispensable if it is to withstand Satan’s attacks. Dad and mom, be ever mindful that one of his chief devices to ruin your home is to bring a spirit of divisiveness between you both or between you and your children.

Let’s briefly consider these seven “keys” as they may be, in moral principle, applied to the family sphere.

(1) Reality of Heart

“*Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them*” (v.1).

It is interesting that before the feast of tabernacles, just ended, the people had been told to not “*mourn or weep*” (Neh. 8:9) for the “*joy of the Lord is your strength*” (Neh. 8:10). Now they gather together displaying deep humility and sorrow, both in spirit and actions. They had rightly “*feasted*”, then they “*rightly*” *fasted*.

A happy home will be one in which Christ is a living reality. Where this is so there will be real joy in the Lord. How important, when sin and failure has come into the home, that parents own the failure rather than seeking to hide it. True humility, guided by the *wisdom that is from above*, does not allow fleshly pride to hinder *godly sorrow that worketh repentance*.

(2) Righteous Actions

“*And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers ...*” (v. 2).

The people did not wear sackcloth as a mere vain show of religious piety. There was true humbling of heart causing them to willingly separate from relationships dishonoring to Jehovah. Such separation from defilement is imperative for those who “*... walk in the light, as He is in the light*” for this results in “*fellowship one with another*” (1 Jn. 1:7). Parents must themselves be morally separate from this *present evil world*, daily walking in practical righteousness, if the enemy’s attempts to destroy their family are to be thwarted.

(3) Ready Confession

“*... and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers*” (v. 2).

In Nehemiah’s day the people accepted their personal part in the sin and failure of God’s people. The

principle of honest confession of failure is so important! If dad or mom portray to their family an “I’m always right, I don’t make mistakes” attitude, never willing to own that they may fail or may be wrong, eventually childrens’ confidence in them will badly shaken. Being willing to admit to your children, “I was wrong” won’t undermine or weaken God-given parental authority.

(4) Reverence and Worship

“And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God” (v. 3).

The orderly and reverent reading of God’s Word (*“stood up in their place”*) not only produced repentance, but gave liberty to worship Jehovah. The importance and lasting blessing of reverent, daily family reading of the Bible cannot be overemphasized. *Reverent* is the key word here in relation to family blessing resulting from this happy activity. Never treat the Word of God in jest or lightness. *“I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name”* (Psa. 138:2).

Habitual, reverent reading of the Bible produces a foundation from which worship and praise to God (even from little children; see Matt. 21:15) will result.

(5) Remembering God’s Goodness

(Read vv. 4–26). The ways of Jehovah’s grace, longsuffering and goodness with the Israelites are here recounted to those gathered together. Dad and mom, do you desire your beloved lambs to be truly happy, contented and obedient? Don’t make criticism, fault-finding, and reprimand the principle results of family reading. Most certainly discipline, reproof and exhortation for you lambs will, at times, be necessary. But don’t create an atmosphere where the Bible is viewed by your children only as a tool used for their discipline and correction. Find in God’s Word a source of His infinite love, grace and goodness displayed, and together with your children, delight in His wonderful blessings and care. He does *“exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”* and with His beloved Son, has *freely given us all things*. Enjoy!

(6) Repentance and Mercy

(Read vv. 27–37). The people expressed sorrow and repentance for their sin and failure as well owning God’s unfailing, longsuffering mercies and compassions to them in all their waywardness.

There are times when it will be necessary for parents to take the lead in expressing genuine sorrow and repentance for the results of self-will. Our God, who

giveth more grace, will grant parents the needed discernment for when to do this with their family. Tender parental hearts and consciences are requisite if families are to be preserved.

(7) Renewed commitment

“And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, our Levites, [and] our priests are at the sealing” (v. 38, JND Trans.).

Dad and mom, it’s not enough to just *talk about* failure and repentance with your children. In Nehemiah’s day the leaders of God’s people displayed a public, godly example in *doing* something about the failure that had led to their present distress.

Parents must take the lead in setting an example of earnest, renewed commitment and dedication to the Lord when there has been failure in the family by their actions, not just their words. The lambs will follow!

— Nehemiah 10 —
More “Keys” For Happy Homes

This chapter begins with a lengthy, detailed list of the individual names of those who “sealed” the covenant recorded in the previous chapter. Seven “categories” of these names are specially noted by the Spirit of God as being “sealers” of the covenant. We would like to consider these categories as suggesting further moral principles that, if applied, will help preserve the family from Satan’s unceasing attacks.

Headship

(1) “And at **the head** of those that sealed were Nehemiah the Tirshatha [‘governor’], the son of Hachaliah” (Neh. 10:1). In order that the family sphere provide blessing and joy, God has established spiritual and natural headship with dad. Dad, you must be *faithful in taking* this place of God-given responsibility (in love and grace as well as with firmness).

For a time, when children are young, headship and order is easily maintained, even by a demanding spirit and a cold set of rules. A truly happy home with obedient, contented, children requires much more than rules: tender, and faithful exercise of headship. Rules are necessary, but the spirit in which they are applied must be in love, patience, and consistency; not a harsh spirit of demanding.

Dear mom, you too have a vital role to play in the happiness and blessing of your home. It is your special domestic sphere with responsibilities (1 Tim. 5:14). Motherhood is such a vitally important ministry. We would beg dear Christian moms to not ‘leave’ that God-given sphere. If you don’t fulfil your role as a godly mother, no one else can do it for you.

Worship and Praise

(2) “... these were **the priests**” (V.8). The next category mentioned concerns those who were appointed to offer worship and praise to Jehovah—the priesthood. Earlier in Nehemiah the people were told that “*the joy of the Lord is your strength*”. Heartfelt worship, praise and joy in the Lord are necessary parts of daily life for Christian families. Lovingly speaking of the blessed Lord Jesus, bringing Him into every part of the daily fabric of family life is, we may say, the only way to properly build the *ark* into which children are placed for their safety and protection against Satan’s attacks.

The Joy of Serving

(3) “... And **the Levites**” (V.9). These were also priests, but not those who offered sacrifices to Jehovah. Their ministry was one of *service* rather than *worship*. We find in 1 Peter 2:5,9 that believers are both *holy priests* and *royal priests*—able to *worship* and *serve* our blessed God.

In Gal. 5:13 we read the way in which we are to serve; “*by love serve one another*” and in Acts 20:35 we

read of the joy resulting from such service; “*it is more blessed to give than to receive*”.

Children should be taught to look upon their daily actions as being part of a loving service that pleases and honors the Lord Jesus. How wonderful when parents instill in their children an attitude of *servicing* rather than a spirit of *expecting to be served*. A family consisting of happy, contented children is one which knows, practically, the joy of *servicing* others. The house of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15) is a lovely example of just such a home, but our Lord Jesus is ever the perfect example—“*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister ...*” (Mark 10:45).

Remember, however, that the service of the *priests* (worship) comes *before* that of the *Levites* (service). If your personal life does not clearly display genuine love and joy in the Lord Jesus, neither will your children have Him as the chief Object of their hearts. In a home where *love* for Him is not evident, children will look at *service* for Him as a hard, dull and dreary task.

Valuing Family

(4) “... and **their brethren**” (v. 10). How wonderful to be able, by faith, to call God “Father” (Gal. 4:6)—to be assured that one is a member of the family of God (Rom. 8:16). In Eph. 5:1 God’s children are commanded: “*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children*” and are also instructed to live as “*children of the light*” (Eph. 5:8). These and many other passages show that there is a certain conduct suited to children in the family of God.

What an important principle to teach children from their earliest years! Remember that loving care for one another in the natural family sphere creates a natural desire to care for “brethren” in Christ.

It is so sad (and harmful too) when parents allow children—brothers and sisters—to bicker, fight and argue with each other, rather than teaching them to display gentle, loving, caring spirits.

The story of Joseph and his jealous brothers (Gen. 37) solemnly pictures the result of children in a family who from their earliest years never seemed to learn to love and care for one another.

“*Finally, be all of one mind, sympathising, full of brotherly love, tender hearted, humble minded*” (1 Pet. 3:8, JND Trans).

Being Respectful

(5) “... **The chief of the people**” (v.14). One of the most insidious, injurious characteristics of Western culture in the past 100 years has been the constant erosion of “respect for authority” at every level and sphere of society. This is but one solemn result of the increasing spirit of apostasy now flooding once “Christian” lands. In North America (and many other lands

too) it is considered both “politically and socially correct” to “*speak evil of dignities*” (2 Pet. 2:10).

This wicked unchristian spirit can easily affect and harden the tender hearts and consciences of children. If dad and mom display a criticizing spirit towards those in authority, or allow their children to display that spirit, it won't be long before children begin to think and speak that way of their own parents. God not only requires children to “*obey parents in all things*” (Col. 3:20), but commands them to “*honour thy father and mother*”. Honor and respect are taught best by parental example.

“*Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing ...*” (Rom. 13:7, 8).

Compassion for All

(6) “... *And the rest of the people*” (v.28). None can measure God's infinite value of each individual soul, save as displayed in the gift of His beloved Son. “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...*” (Jn. 3:16). What priceless, loving value our God places on each soul!

If children are to develop the vital trait of humility, they must learn that each individual soul is important to God. While parents must never allow children to become “copycats” of the abominable life styles which myriad multitudes of Godless “heroes” of entertainment, sports, and other spheres present to them, it is critical they learn that God loves and desires to bless *all men everywhere*.

When each member of the family views others of equal importance, humility and care will naturally flow without children being tempted to accept and follow evil habits. Though written to believers, Php. 2:3, 4 (JND Trans) contains a beautiful principle for developing this spirit in children: “*let nothing be in the spirit of ... vain glory, but, in lowliness of mind, each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves; regarding not each his own qualities, but each those of others also*”.

Holy Living

(7) “... *all they that had separated themselves ...*” (v. 28). Without true moral separation from the ways of this *present evil world*, Satan can quickly destroy Christian homes. Heed the warning of 1 Cor. 15:33: “*Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners*”.

Dad and mom, if you allow your children free, unsupervised contact with this world don't be surprised when its evil influences draw their hearts from the Lord Jesus, from you and from your guidance. “*Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord*” (2 Cor. 6:17).

Unity—A Successful Defense

Another important secret of maintaining a happy family secure from Satan's attacks is found in verse 29: “*They clave to their brethren ... 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, and his judgments and his statutes”.

We often quote the precious verse in Psalms 133, “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*” (v. 1). The question for families is, do we practice that divine principle in our homes? Is there a “cleaving together” in love for the Lord and one another, and a desire for oneness of mind? If it's not so in our homes how can it be so in the assembly or any other area of our lives? Teach your lambs from their earliest years to “cleave” to each other in loving submission and care for the welfare of one another.

The Importance of Separation

Over and over in the account of Nehemiah we see the important principle of moral separation from this *present evil world*. It is very strikingly presented once again in verse 30: “*And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons*”.

In moral application beloved parents this teaches that if there is to be “fruit” and “joy” in your family, you must not allow your children to mix and compromise with the moral ways of this godless world (keep your *daughters* from forming associations with the *people of the land*).

Furthermore, if your family is to have spiritual strength to survive Satan's attacks, do not allow the affections of their hearts to become attached to the world (don't take the world's *daughters for your sons*).

Business As Usual?

The sabbath day was a day of rest specially set aside by Jehovah and to be faithfully observed by Israel. During those sad times when Israel had taken up with heathen idolatry, the sabbath was given up, or simply observed as a “ritual” rather than a spiritual “reality” ordained by the Lord. In v. 31 we find the people desiring to keep the sabbath in reality.

In Christianity the “Lord's Day” is significant (see Rev. 1:10). Though not “under law” but “under grace”, the *first day of the week* is evidently a day that the Word of God claims as “*the Lord's day*”. This appeals to believers whose hearts are attached in love for Christ to treat that day differently than the other six days of the week.

The “first day of the week” is mentioned in Scripture in three distinct characters; each one having very important principles for the defense of our families from Satan's attacks.

(1) One of the most fundamental truths of Christianity is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from among the dead. The “*first day of the week*” when the blessed Lord Jesus rose triumphant over death, the grave (hades) and Satan, is mentioned in every gospel (see Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; Jn. 20). Dear parents make sure

that your children see in your actions a practical, joyful and loving display of reality regarding His resurrection. This reality is one of the “essential tools” your children must have to defend their faith. Don't weaken that tool by treating the Lord's Day just like any other day of the week.

(2) In Acts 20:7 it is plain that the “normal habit” of early believers was to remember the Lord Jesus in His death on the “Lord's Day”. Remembering Him in death is a wonderful privilege, but even more, it is the answer of genuine love for our Saviour and *His desire* for us to remember Him. The joy of gathering to fulfil His blessed request ought to have a noticeable effect on parents. If children observe their parents just “going to meeting” because “that's what we do on Sunday morning”, they will develop little desire to “*this do in remembrance of Me*” for themselves.

(3) In 1 Cor. 16:2 we find that “*the first day of the week*”—the Lord's Day—is a time when we also have the privilege of “*practical giving*” to the Lord. 1 Corinthians refers to *laying aside* an offering of money to Him. It is very striking to read (JND Trans.) that this “*laying aside*” of money was to be done “*at home*”. Dad and mom, do your children see you spending the week *laying aside* for the *Lord's Day*; not only in financial ways, but also feeding on Him spiritually and finding ways to use His day for Himself?

Make no mistake. If you spend the *Lord's Day* just as the world does, it will become virtually impossible to keep the world's ways out of your home. The world does not think of the “Lord's Day” as being anything more than just another day for work, recreation, shopping or relaxing. Don't allow these otherwise right and necessary activities to so fill the Lord's Day that your children no longer view it as a day set aside *by and for* our Lord.

God First—Assured Joy

As we continue through the book of Nehemiah, gleaning precious treasures of divine principles to guide and defend our families against the enemy's constant attacks, the most vital principle of all is displayed with remarkable clarity in chapter 10:32-39. Simply stated that principle is, **God first**.

Nehemiah's record of the covenant with Jehovah made by the people displays their desire to be faithful to Him in everything. It ends with giving to Jehovah the **first** and the **best** of all they were and possessed.

Let us consider the list: (1) *Money* for providing all necessary things for the sacrifices and maintenance of the temple. (2) People were designated to provide the *wood* necessary for fueling the fire of the altar. (3) The *firstfruits* of all that was produced from the land (the best fruit) was for Jehovah. (4) The *firstborn* of their sons, flocks and herds were dedicated to Jehovah (5) All that was needed to fill God's house with *abundance* and

to *care* for those who served Him (the Levites). In all of these things written in the covenant of Nehemiah and the people, Jehovah, His house, His servants, His sacrifices—all came *first*.

If this precious principle—“**God first**”—guides *every* action and word of parents, as they raise their family and seek to protect their home, what wonderful blessing will most surely result!

What We Have

Wealth has always been valued and sought after by man in his alienation from God who created him and loves him. Rather than loving God, our wicked hearts by nature love riches. The Bible tells us that “... *the love of money is the root of every evil*”, warning that its love brings great *sorrow* (1 Tim. 6:10, JND Trans.).

Dad and mom, if the Lord has entrusted you with material wealth, make sure that your children see that He who has given it to you is exceedingly more precious than the material abundance that He has given.

Parental attitude towards wealth will be a great molding factor in what children choose to pursue in their life. May it be always by “*God first*”.

What We Are

In verse 34 some of “*the priests, the Levites and the people*” were selected (by *casting lots*) to provide the *wood offering*. This can picture to us the importance of *willing service* (whatever it may be) rendered for the Lord. In 1 Cor. 16:15 we read of “... *the house of Stephanas ... that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints*”. This dear family, we may say, happily provided the *wood offering*. In Rom. 12:1 the apostle desires “... *that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service*”. In Scripture *wood* often is a picture of humanity. How happy (and safe from the enemy's attacks) is the home where parents and children delight to be, as it were, *wood*, offering themselves wholly and fully to serving God in every area of life.

Giving Our Best

It was the *best* of their fruit that was given to the Lord, not the leftovers. Let's learn the solemn lesson from God's Word, through the prophet in Mal. 1:8: “*And if ye offer the blind ... and if ye offer the lame and sick ... offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee ... saith the LORD of hosts*”. To whom (or ‘what’) do your beloved children see dad and mom giving the *best* of your time, service, and material goods?

Important Priorities

The *firstborn* of the Jew's sons, flocks and herds were dedicated to Jehovah. If our homes and families are to be safely protected from Satan's attacks, our *priorities* in life must be unreservedly dedicated to our blessed God. Children may “hear” dad and mom talk

about “putting God first”, but if what they see practically in their parents’ lives is “God last”, they too will develop priorities which leave Him last.

Storing and Providing

The Jew’s abundance was stored in the temple “*chambers*” for use as needed in sacrifices and in providing for the Levites who had no inheritance in the land. In like manner, parents need to *store up* spiritual and material abundance in their *chambers*.

Dad and mom, we lovingly ask again, are you enjoying the Lord personally and daily in your heart and life? You can’t *store up* His rich provisions in your home if you aren’t diligently *tilling* your spiritual inheritance (Prov. 13:23). He has given us *exceeding great and precious promises*. Are they being stored in the *chambers* of your home, that you can enjoy and share them with your children? When children find true joy and satisfaction provided for them from your *chambers*, they won’t look to the world to find satisfaction from its chambers.

— Nehemiah 11—

Practical Commitment

We noticed that the theme found in the previous chapter might be characterized by the words *God first*. The theme we find in chapter 11 might be characterized by the words *practical commitment*.

The *holy city*, Jerusalem (chp. 11:1), now protected by strong, completed walls and gates with bars and locks, needed to be populated. What profit was a safe city if no one lived there?

So it is with Christian families. God has provided the institutions of marriage and family for our joy and blessing. The Christian home is, we may say, a *city* protected by walls and gates. However, unless parents make the commitment to *use* that blessed *city of refuge*—practically living what a Christian family ought to be—the blessing God intends for it will be lost.

Dear dad and mom it’s not enough for you to *know* God’s desires for a Christian home and family. You must make a *daily commitment* to put His divine principles into practice in your home. Knowledge of divine principles is very important; *using* that knowledge is absolutely vital in defending your family and home against Satan and this present evil world. There is little value in knowing something if it is not practically used.

Godly Order and Authority

Let’s notice some principles found in Nehemiah 11 showing how the *holy city* was occupied for blessing (enjoyment of the protection provided by the walls and gates). These principles need to be morally applied and put to use in our families as well.

The very first words (v. 1) are so important: “*And the rulers* (“princes”) *of the people dwelt at Jerusalem ...*”. *Rulers* were to administer and control the city responsibly and in an orderly way—authority and submission morally characterized Jerusalem.

Such order and authority must also be found *and* followed in Christian homes—God’s order as marked out in His Word. Wives are to *submit* to husbands (Eph. 5:22), husbands are to *love* their wives (Eph. 5:25), wives are to *reverence* (respect) their husbands (Eph. 5:33) and husbands are to *honour* their wives (1 Pet. 3:7). Children are to *obey* their *parents in the Lord* (Eph. 6:1) and to “*honour thy father and mother*” (Eph. 6:2), while fathers are commanded, “*provoke not your children to wrath*” (Eph. 6:4).

The wife is to “*guide*” (1 Tim. 5:14; “rule”, JND Trans.) the domestic sphere while her husband is responsible to maintain spiritual and natural headship over this blessed sphere. These divine principles are not difficult to understand, but they do need much prayerful dependance upon the Lord to work out in daily life.

Where the order of God given authority is the observed and practiced principle of Christian homes, what joy, safety and blessing results!

Is It A Place of Desire?

Another principle we find in these early verses is that the people were *willing* to dwell in Jerusalem: “*the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem*”. Previously, those who were to dwell there were selected by the casting of lots, but now we find some who *wanted* to live there.

Oh! dear dad and mom, do seek grace and wisdom to make your home a place that your children “want” to be in—a place so special and precious that they have no wish to find something more satisfying in the world! In Deut. 11:21 the Lord’s desire for His beloved people is “*That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children ... as the days of heaven upon the earth*”.

Such family “days” require that dad and mom make sure each of their children knows beyond any doubt that they are individually loved, understood, and cared for. When Noah built the ark, God told him to build “nests” in it (Gen. 6:14; JND Trans.)—that which speaks of safety, comfort and supply for *each* inhabitant. How blessed the home that is morally characterized by having a “nest” for each child.

A Place of Courage

We find at least twice in the list of those who are mentioned as dwelling in Jerusalem that they were “*valiant men*” or “*men of valour*”. Committed Christian parents are well aware of the moral courage needed to build and occupy a Godly home in this world, but it is equally important that children also gain that same courage, learning to be thankful, while appreciating the great blessing of living “in a Christian home”. They will need much courage to withstand the constant taunts of being from a “religious”, “weird”, or “different” family. They too will need courage to not give in to constant pressure from peers to act and dress like the world, talk like the world, and enjoy its defiling entertainments. Oh! may parents and children be *valiant men*.

There’s More

Not only do we read of those “*valiant men*” who were committed to living in and defending Jerusalem, but we also find recorded *Levites, porters, the Nethinims, and singers* mentioned as well. Others of the remnant that had returned from captivity are recorded as dwelling in villages and cities in the land and near Jerusalem.

Let’s briefly consider a few more precious and vital principles gleaned from this detailed list of returned captives, for the blessing and safety of our homes. “... *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*” (Rom. 15:4).

It’s Everyone’s Business

It’s good for parents to teach children responsibility by giving them special tasks to fulfil. Just as the Levites were specially separated to serve Jehovah and His people (v. 15)—each having a specific service to carry out (Num. 3)—so each one in the family ought to realize both the responsibility and joy of serving others (rather than always being served).

We also learn from Leviticus 27:1-7 that God placed a value on everyone in the congregation of Israel. The person’s age and gender determined that value. While it is very important that parents teach children that each of them have responsibilities in the home, dads and moms need Godly wisdom to determine the amount of responsibility of which each child is capable and at what age such responsibilities are appropriate.

A child who feels no responsibility becomes one who “*sleepeth in harvest ... a son that causeth shame*” (Prov. 10:5). If the responsibility given is too great or given too soon, however, children can become overburdened. Col. 3:21 contains an important warning: “*Fathers, do not vex your children, to the end that they be not disheartened*” (JND Trans.).

Is Everyone Watching?

There were twelve ways (gates) to enter Jerusalem, and though each gate had locks and bars, there had to be *porters* who knew when to unlock and open the doors and when to keep them closed. The word “*porter*” as used here means “*doorkeeper*” (v. 19). If the enemy is to be kept out of the home, it must have more than moral doors and locks. There must also be those who *keep* those doors, diligently watching that the enemy not gain entrance. The chief responsibility for *watching* what enters the doors of the home belongs to parents. Again, how important to teach children to be *watchers* as well—so valuing their home that they too, in their measure, become *doorkeepers* that no actions, habits, language, or other God-dishonoring manners are allowed entrance.

Everyone is Important

Some believe that the *Nethinims* were special servants (possibly slaves) given to the Priests and Levites to carry out menial tasks (see 1 Chron. 9:2; Ezra 8:17,20). Perhaps they originally were the Gibeonites who were made “*hewers of wood and drawers of water*” by Joshua (Jos. 9:21). There seem to be two things that characterize the *Nethinims*—(1) their service was evidently not an outwardly important, glorious or noticeable service such as the Priests and Levites had, and, (2) in Nehemiah’s time they are specially mentioned as dwelling in *Ophel* (v. 21). *Ophel* is a tower that was built into the wall around Jerusalem, evidently very near the temple.

How blessed the Christian home where each

member quietly serves in love the good of the home. Parents will, of necessity, carry out the most prominent services connected with preserving, and defending the family sphere. But there is very much service which is carried on, often unnoticed and unappreciated by others.

Dad and mom, encourage quiet, humble service in your children by your own actions. Loving service shown by example in action speaks far more effectively to children than words that merely seem to make demands of them (see Prov. 10:19).

Is Everyone Happy?

Singers are also specially mentioned (vv. 22,23). Joy, expressed in many ways, is vital for defending Christian homes. In Luke 25:15 the elder son heard *musick and dancing* as he neared his father's house. Dad and mom, what do your children hear in their home—*singing or complaining and criticism?*

Communion with the Lord is the way to finding wisdom necessary to make your home a place of joy. Perhaps little is more damaging to the tender hearts of lambs in Christian homes, than parents whose Christianity does not display itself in joy and happiness—in spiritual things as well as the realm of natural things.

"Rejoice evermore" (1 Thess. 5:16).

"...rejoice in the Lord" (Php. 3:1) .

"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8).

Is your home a place of joy and rejoicing, or tension and discontent? Your children are the first to know and the most affected by its true condition.

"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (1 Jn. 1:4).

— Nehemiah 12— The Testimony of Joy

"Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off" (Neh. 12:43).

The very concept of "family" has been so effectively undermined by Satan and the world in this 21st century that the spiritual foundations which are the true strength of the "family unit" are systematically being destroyed. Facing such difficult times, Christian parents may wonder how it can be possible for their home to so *rejoice* that it's *great joy is heard even afar off*.

With the unparalleled growth of immorality (corruption) and violence marking these once Christian lands, responsible parents often find they are obligated to spend so much time "warning" their children of all the dangers and wickedness that exists, the sweet innocence, joy, and peace that ought to mark childhood years is often effectively stolen away.

The account recorded in Nehemiah 12, however, is both striking and encouraging. It provides dear parents, seeking to defend their families against Satan's unending attacks, more very helpful principles. Dad and mom, take courage! In the very midst of such unspeakable moral darkness as you face today, the Lord desires your home be marked by such deep joy, that the world will "hear" your "rejoicing" (happiness).

Where are the Soldiers?

It is quite amazing to consider that in this very chapter that speaks of the "rejoicing" and "great joy" in Jerusalem that was heard "*afar off*", there is **not one mention of soldiers** protecting the city against its enemies so those in it could rejoice! Why?

We might sum the answer up in these verses: "*Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them [those in the world]: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world"* (1 Jn. 4:4,5), and "*... when he [Jehosaphat] had ... appointed singers unto the LORD ... that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children ... which were come against Judah; and they were smitten"* (2 Chron. 20).

Little wonder that the enemy is helpless against a home that is truly enjoying the Lord, singing and rejoicing in, and because of, love for Himself! This kind of rejoicing and confidence only comes from parents having faithfully built strong moral walls and gates to protect their home and family.

But Can it Work?

But how can families “rejoice” when, for example, their children, rather than learning the “fire drill” at school, have to learn what to do when someone enters the school with weapons to kill and destroy? How can families “sing” when instead of telling children, ‘be sure you’re home from the park in time for supper’ they must be warned, ‘stay in our yard where we can always see you and don’t ever talk to strangers’?

The violence and depravity children face today is awful beyond description. Wise parents won’t disregard this terrible reality. But, while being “*wise as serpents*”, do remember God is infinitely greater than the evil and He *never faileth*.

When the Lord Jesus was about to leave this world He prayed the Father for His beloved disciples who He was leaving (physically)—“*I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil*” (Jn. 17:15). Parents may pray that same prayer in confidence, for their precious lambs. I would pass on what a dear brother, now home with the Lord, once said to a group of young parents: “Christian parents can find much comfort and assurance from God’s Word regarding the salvation and preserving of their children, but *careless* Christian parents can’t!” Do be very careful that the walls around your home are strong, founded on the Word of God; your gates solid, braced with morally strong bars and locks, able to keep out the world’s influences.

Singers not Soldiers

Parents, if you’ve built strong moral walls and gates for your home, you have every reason to rejoice. (And, as with Nehemiah and his people, the foundation you stand on when rejoicing are the very walls you’ve built to protect your family). You will enjoy *singers* rather than needing *soldiers*. “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*” (Psa. 46:1—written “*To the chief Musician ... a song upon Alamoth*”).

Joy Every Day

See to it that every day your beloved little flock experiences the joy of working, playing, laughing and being together. When your children are enjoying life in their home with dad and mom, they will also enjoy reading the Bible, praying and singing hymns together as well. A home flowing with natural and spiritual joy will burst forth in a *song* that will indeed be heard *afar off*.

— Nehemiah 13—

The Importance of True Separation

“*Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude*” (Neh. 13:3). The people, though having rebuilt the temple and the wall around Jerusalem, were not walking practically in their daily lives as a people wholly separated to Jehovah. *Outwardly* they had done all required to rebuild God’s House and Jerusalem’s wall to protect it from defilement. Morally, however, many of the people of God evidently had little personal exercise to separate from defilement in their individual lives.

Hearing and Doing

In view of this failure it’s encouraging to read that when the people heard *the law* (God’s Word to Moses), they *submitted* to it and *separated* from what had defiled them. Dad and mom, at times you may also find things dishonoring to God that have gained entrance into your home unnoticed. If you find things that deaden heart love for the Lord Jesus or defiles your lambs’ tender consciences, keeping Jesus from being a reality to you and them, remove them in the fear of God (even the little things—*little foxes*). The solemn result of refusing this is that your home will remain unprotected when Satan attacks.

Firmly but Gently

But *how* are you to know if those kinds of harmful things (habits, possessions, etc.) which can so easily defile your home’s Christian atmosphere and purity have gained entrance? And if you do find they have, *what* can you do to get rid of them. And even more, *how* best can they be removed?

We lovingly suggest the following four things for parents to consider—*read, ask, seek* and *act*. **Read** God’s Word with a tender conscience (Psa 119:11). **Ask** Him for wisdom (Jas. 1:5) and discernment (1 Chrn. 12:32). Then **seek** grace (Jas. 4:6) and courage (Josh. 10:25; Php. 4:13) to **act** on what God shows you.

Taking and Giving

If defiling things have found entrance into your home, don’t give up and don’t make excuses! If you have truly owned to the Lord your failure, know that He will be with you and help you to be firm and resolute in dealing with them. Begin by ridding *yourself* of them *first*! Remember also that what you’ve allowed and now must remove, has to be replaced with something *better* or you will quickly lose your children’s confidence in your love for them. “*Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good*” (Isa 7:15). “*...eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared...*” (Neh. 8:10).

Failure of the Most Responsible

There are two solemn failures recorded in the next

few verses of this chapter from which very important family principles may be gleaned. The first is quite obvious; the second not as marked, yet a result of the first. Do prayerfully consider these “applications”.

Dangerous Alliance

“And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah: And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests” (vv. 4,5).

Because of Eliashib’s terrible failure in becoming allied with the enemy, there was no *acceptable service* (Levites), no *joy* (singers), no *protection* (porters), and no *worship* (priests) for God’s house in Jerusalem. Oh! what awful havoc is wreaked in Christian homes and families not morally separated from the world! Parents, do be very, very careful of the *moral alliances* and *compromises* you make and allow in your home!

Dangerous Absence

vv. 6-8: *“But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for ... came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king: And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me sore...”*

Dads especially must spend much time away from home. Few dads are able to *provide for his own house* by working at home. Dear dad, be watchful that the demands of your work not subtly draw you so far from your family you no longer are able to *discern* when the enemy attacks. This certainly doesn’t mean you should never travel, for often, today’s jobs require travel. But don’t allow work (or anything else) to cause your *moral influence* to be *absent* from you children’s lives.

It was during Nehemiah’s absence that Eliashib formed the alliance which brought such grief. Don’t be a “morally absent” parent! Children need constant reassurance of your love, your interest in all that affects them—that in heart and spirit you always are *with* them!

Contending or Complacency?

“And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber.”

Nehemiah’s absence was when the full results of compromise and alliance with the enemy took effect and such sad problems *within* Jerusalem developed. Though of necessity parents at times are *away* from home, such necessary absences need not become the means of allowing the world to gain a place in your home.

There is a huge difference between parents being, at times, *physically* absent from home, and being

morally absent. It is when parental watchfulness and carefulness is absent that Satan is provided a wide open door for his attacks. “Morally absent” means not being prayerfully engaged daily with the spiritual condition of your children and home. They must ever be assured that, in love, you are concerned about every single thing that affects them and their home, though you are not *physically* able to be always with them. “*Be well acquainted with the appearance of thy flocks*” (Prov. 27:23, JND Trans.).

God First

It is solemn to consider Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Eli was well aware of the wickedness that his two sons committed, profaning the office of priesthood to Jehovah (see 1 Sam. 2:22-33). Yet he seemed incapable of dealing with their moral and spiritual depravity (perhaps he had lost his spiritual energy). The Lord warned dear Eli: “*them that honour Me will I honour*” (see also Mal. 1:6; Jn.5:23). Dad and mom, have a tender conscience and exercised heart concerning every action, habit, possession or word allowed in your home. If you find *anything* dishonoring to Him has gained entrance, don’t be *complacent*—deal with it immediately and in full dependence on God. This is the only way your home and family can be preserved and blessed—*God first!*

Grieving Isn’t Enough

In verse 8, Nehemiah is deeply grieved over the defilement that had entered the very house of God during his absence. He was more than grieved—he was *zealous* in correcting what dishonored Jehovah. “*Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.*”

At times, in grace, humility and firmness, parents will need this spirit; one of commanding that those things—habits or other—be cleansed, be taken out of the home. As with Nehemiah, remember the importance of not only *casting out* but of *bringing in* to your children something better than what you taken away.

Dealing With Discouragement

Nehemiah also found that during his absence, provision had not been made to care for and sustain those who served the Lord and those who sang praises to the Lord. In v. 10 we read that Nehemiah “*perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field.*”

Another subtle, but very serious problem that enters Christian homes if parents are not *morally present* every moment, is *discouragement* and *discontentment* of their children because their needs are not being met. When this occurs, children feel denied *satisfaction* and *joy* in the very first place it ought to be found—their

home. This results in their *fleeing* to the *fields* of this world, trying there to find enjoyment and fulfillment that ought to always be provided at home.

Dad and mom, there are *portions* which each of your children need and require if they are to render willing, happy obedient service and joyful singing in spirit. This happy atmosphere is very much a part of defending the home against attack. Be assured that the world will offer many pleasant appearing *fields* to your children in which they can occupy themselves if you don't make sure such provision is provided in your home. "Then I proclaimed a fast ... that we might ... before our God, ... seek of Him a right way for us, **and for our little ones, and for all our substance**" (Ezr. 8:21).

Order and Responsibility

"Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place (Neh. 13:11).

These next verses morally teach the necessity of *order* and *responsibility* in a Christian home in order to withstand Satan's attacks. The world is marked by disorder, confusion and irresponsibility. Our blessed God is *not the author of confusion*. Uproar and confusion comes from Satan and causes great damage when allowed in homes (see Acts 19:24-41; 21:27-40 as striking examples). Each family member has a '*place*' in the home that is theirs to fulfil. If they do not, only sad confusion and disorder result.

Dad, your place is head of your home, but *head* doesn't mean being a *dictator* who only gives orders and demands obedience. You are responsible for *spiritual* and *natural* headship carried out in the *spirit of grace* (as well as firmness). As you raise the precious flock God has entrusted to you, remember His instruction: "*Fathers, do not vex your children, to the end that they be not disheartened*" (Col. 3:21, JND Trans.). This most certainly doesn't mean dads are ever to give up their God-given role as head, even when they fail, but be very careful of the *spirit* in which you carry out headship.

Moms are specially seen in Scripture as *nurturers*. How vitally important dear mom, that you daily seek wisdom and energy from the Lord to fulfil this role. The Western World, where the light of Christianity once shown so brightly, has taken the lead in teaching mothers to forsake their God-given role as *nurturers at home*. No one and nothing can replace a mother who nurtures her precious flock *at home*. The best day care centers, the finest preschool environments can't provide *mothering nurture* for your precious little ones. God has entrusted them to your care *in the home*, mom (1 Tim. 5:14), and if you don't fulfill your role as *mother* (though you may be a very successful *business woman*), none else can.

There are many Old Testament accounts (especially in the Kings and Chronicles) which show the lifelong effect for blessing or ruin that mothers had on their children. There may be times when mothers can't be home for very valid reasons. The Lord understands and gives grace for each situation, but don't forget that it was a *mother* who cried out to the Lord Jesus for her daughter; "*Lord help*" (Matt. 15:25).

Indifferent Inhabitants

Nehemiah next had to deal with two more difficult problems that, if left unchecked, would eventually work ruin *inside* the gates and walls built to protect Jerusalem. The first was perhaps the most difficult for it involved his own people, his Jewish brethren.

"In those days I saw in Judah some treading winepresses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading them on asses; as also wine, grapes and figs, and all manner of burdens; and they brought them into Jerusalem on the sabbath day; and I protested in the day on which they sold the victuals. (Neh. 13:15, 16). There was a loss of the fear of Jehovah and reverence for His covenant concerning the "7th day" of rest (Saturday-the sabbath). This resulted in the Jews treating the sabbath as any other day though it had been set aside by Jehovah as a covenant day of rest for His beloved people.

The once Christian Western world is quickly sliding deeper into the darkness of heathen idolatry. Increasing marks of this awful slide are rampant violence and immorality. The danger for true believers lies not in openly embracing such depravity, but in considering such sin as being just a 'normal part of life' for the dark day in which we live. Such depravity is not normal! Yet our hearts so easily become hardened by this spirit of the world because of the awful flood of wickedness in which we live. The result is that we no longer feel the grief, sorrow and righteous anger at such godlessness that our Lord felt in perfection when He walked here as Man.

If this hardening of spirit happens, it becomes easier for the *little foxes that spoil the vine* to creep into the home with their corrupting influences in that place which should be a refuge from such defilements.

Dad and mom be careful that you don't begin tolerating, little by little, the subtle influences of this *present evil world*. Satan may not bring a flood of filth all at one time to destroy your home. His way is a subtle and wily attack of undermining Christian foundations little by little, using innocent seeming, worldly habits and philosophies as his all too effective tools.

If not carefully watched and faithfully dealt with (in grace, not harshness), eventually the very foundations of Christianity which support your home will be undermined. Further, your beloved little flock will

begin, without concern or exercise, to forget what is pleasing to God while adopting worldly habits.

Adamant Adversaries

“Men of Tyre...brought fish and all manner of ware, and sold it on the sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem...I set some of my servants at the gates, so that no burden should be brought in on the sabbath day. And the dealers and sellers of all kind of ware passed the night without Jerusalem once or twice. And I testified against them, and said ... if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth they came not on the sabbath”.

How bold the world’s assaults on Christian homes! Even though dear Nehemiah set *watches* to insure that the people of God within Jerusalem observed the Sabbath as Jehovah had commanded, the world in its terrible, arrogant boldness, refused to submit to Nehemiah’s right and godly desires.

Don’t be surprised (or disheartened) if the world *outside your home* pays no heed to the godly order you seek to maintain *inside your home*! The stark reality is that the world does not care what you think! It, directed by its prince, will work openly, brazenly, and diligently to deride and neutralize every godly exercise that you seek to maintain in your home.

What was Nehemiah to do? The men of Tyre had no interest or intention of complying with Nehemiah’s directions for that would mean a loss of what they most wanted from God’s people—their riches.

“NO” Is Necessary

The world wants the *riches* your dear lambs have the potential of providing to it. Their talents, desires, energies and efforts can be wasted on the world (in order to enrich its godless life-styles) or they can, through parental prayer, diligence, love and firmness be developed, protected and preserved for the Lord to use for the blessing of His dear people.

That requires unyielding firmness to face the shameless, continual, arrogant attempts of the world to corrupt your home. Parents often have to use the word “no” for the good and blessing of their beloved lambs. “No” is vital to use in withstanding the world. Say ‘no’ when necessary and mean what you say!

You may have to “*lay hands*” on whatever it is that corrupts your lambs and by *force*, rid your home of its evil influences. Do it! The words spoken by the prophet of Jehovah to Eli who had not restrained his sons from the actions that corrupted and discouraged the people of God are solemn: “*them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed*” (1 Sam. 2:30). May God grant parents courage to stand unmovable against all of Satan’s defilements.

The Conclusion

We now come to our final meditations from Nehemiah for providing principles to defend Christian homes and families against the constant, vicious attacks of Satan. Let us notice 7 things that dear, faithful Nehemiah met and dealt with to the glory of God and for the blessing the Jews, Jerusalem and himself. May these principles be a further help and encouragement to each dear Christian parent desiring to defend and preserve their precious lambs and home.

Divided Affections

v 23 “*In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab*”. It seems as though we are often made to feel the sorrow of divided affections for Christ and for the world. How tragic the results of having heart affections attracted by this “*present evil world*” while trying to raise our dear children in separation from it. “*No man can serve two masters...*” (Matt. 6:24).

Ashdod, Moab and Ammon were all nations that proved their enmity against the people of God time and time again. Tobiah, a chief adversary of Nehemiah and those who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, was a Moabite. Though the Jews were painfully aware of Moab’s enmity against Jehovah and His beloved earthly people, their hearts still were captured by that which appeared so beautiful, alluring and harmless—the daughters of Moab.

The world has a multitude of beautiful, appealing things that may quickly capture the heart affections of *careless* Christian parents. Once such ‘associations’ are formed, they quickly gain entrance into the home and family, fatally undermining the very Christian foundations parents have sought to preserve.

Disastrous Results

v 24 “*And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people.*”

The disastrous results of these heart associations were very painfully evident to any Godly person (such as Nehemiah). Children born to these mixed unions were well able to communicate in the language of the world—Ashdod (a commercial-financial center) and the language of their mothers’ native lands (idolatry). The priceless heritage of the language of God’s beloved people was unknown to these children.

How is it in your home, beloved parents? Do your children understand and communicate in the wretched, debased slang of this *present evil world*, while finding God’s precious Word (the rich language of His dear people) uninteresting and unintelligible?

Why do we see so many *modern English phrases* of the Bible? Is it possible that this is one sad result of familiarity with the world while being unfamil-

iar and unable to comprehend, appreciate or speak using the precious language of God found in His Word? May the Lord exercise our hearts! The preservation and happiness of your precious lambs depends on what your heart affections embrace. What language do you speak?

Determined Action

v 25 “*And I contended with them...made them swear by God ...Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves*”.

Nehemiah’s reaction to this sad condition was one of righteous indignation (Eph. 4:26, 27). He acted for the glory of God without concern that others might consider him a very *hard, legal* and *intolerant* individual. Yet he would allow no compromise with, or unions formed between, God’s people and the idolatrous nations round them. Dad and Mom, the eternal well-being of your beloved children rests on your willingness to take a firm, unyielding stand of separation from this world and its allurements—a kind of stand that often will be looked upon in derision and disgust by others.

Dishonor to God

v 26 “*Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him...nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin.*”

Don’t be fooled into thinking that you can *play with fire and not get burned*. The wisest man born in this world (apart from the blessed Son of God) was fooled and deceived into dishonoring God by the numerous marriage unions he formed with godless, idolatrous women. Solomon’s many marriages became his shame, marred his glorious reign and eventually caused the awful division among the people of God. What a terrible price to pay for trying to satisfy unguarded, unrestrained heart affections!

Dealing With Deceit

v 28 “*And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.*” Perhaps nothing was more dishonoring to God than one in the high priestly lineage being allied by marriage to the chief adversary of God. Astounding as it seems, the Word of God solemnly records the depths to which that most privileged of all Jews—the high priest—had fallen through marriage with the worst enemy of Jehovah, the God he served on behalf of the Jews! What sad confusion and dishonor to the glory and majesty of the Lord!

Don’t assume that such a sorrow as this mixed marriage produced won’t happen *morally* in your home. Carelessness about habits, entertainments, language, and recreations allowed bring a lifetime of reaping grief, watching your precious lambs form ‘unequal yokes’

with those who have no love for Christ. Be faithful and be fearless! Immediately and decidedly act to stop such yokes from being formed before they gain a hold over the hearts of your children. This requires that sometimes (as with Nehemiah) you will have to *chase away* what may defile and hardened their tender hearts and consciences. Be resolute. Consider the coming reaping time!

Designating Godly Order

v 30 “*Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business;*”. It’s not enough to *chase away*—you must also *replace* and *set in order* the breach left when separating your children from defiling influences that may have crept into your home. Read the Word of God diligently, daily and in dependence on the Lord for guidance—then *do it!* **Do** what it says—*obey* the Spirit’s leading. It may be very painful to *cleanse* your home from what brings irreparable spiritual harm to your precious lambs, but remember God’s promise: “*them that honour me I will honour*” (1 Sam. 2:30).

Depending on God’s Grace

v 31 “*Remember me, O my God, for good.*” The very last words recorded in Nehemiah are full of comfort and encouragement for parents seeking to defend home and family against Satan’s attacks. No parent is perfect, but every Christian parent ought to have a *perfectly formed judgment* and *desire* to keep their home a refuge from the world. Be willing to defend your home at all costs against those things which will corrupt and defile this last and only safe haven you have.

“*Thou shalt be saved and thy house*” (Acts 16:31) is a wonderful promise of God meant to encourage diligent, exercised Christian parents (not careless ones)! Don’t be careless or indifferent with the precious treasures God has entrusted to you! Be faithful every moment, prayerfully bringing your precious lambs up in the *nurture and admonition of the Lord*. Remember God’s promises when facing the desperate battle with Satan for your home.

“*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*” (Jas. 4:7).

“*Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee*” (Deut. 31:6).

“*... He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Heb. 13:5).

Douglas Nicolet

The Christian Shepherd, Inc.

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