

# THE OPEN SQUARE AND THE WALL

David Baker, prepared for the Apostles' Fellowship word, Sunday, 11 July 2021  
Transcription of recording, slightly edited

## The prayer of Daniel

Hello, everyone, and welcome to session eleven on 'The Seventy Weeks prophecy'. In our last session, we considered the way in which the prayer of Daniel was answered.

Daniel prayed that *the Lord would open His eyes*, not only on the desolate sanctuary, but also *on the city* which was called by His name. Dan 9:18. We identified that a city is, firstly, its inhabitants; it is a dwelling place for *a multitude of households*.

So, when Daniel was praying that the Lord would open His eyes on the city that was called by His name, he was asking for the Lord to *meet the people* themselves – eye to eye, and heart to heart.

## The answer to Daniel's prayer in the time of Ezra

We asked the question, 'When was this prayer answered?'

It was certainly answered in the time of Ezra when he returned and confronted the people about the mixed culture in their marriages and in their households. This initiated a season of restoration.

By faith, Ezra declared, 'And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and *to give us a peg in His holy place*, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage.' Ezc 9:8.

## Jesus Christ is the Peg in the holy place

We have considered all of the elements to that verse, and we made the point that Jesus Christ is the Peg in the holy place, and He is our great High Priest according to the Order of Melchizedek.

He is ministering to us our participation in His finished work when the word of the cross is proclaimed to us, and a spirit of grace and supplication enables us to turn, and to look upon Him whom we have pierced. Zec 12:10.

The outcome of that is that we meet Christ eye to eye, and heart to heart. The fear of the Lord, then, is that He is motivating us to 'flee for refuge within the veil', so that we are escaping the judgement of God, and are laying hold of our unique participation in the fellowship of His offering and

in His sufferings. Heb 6:18-20. In that fellowship, we are finding a measure of *revival* because we are *receiving His resurrection life*.

## Seven weeks and sixty-two weeks

In this session, we will continue to consider this season of restoration which was initiated when Ezra returned.

We will particularly focus on the second half of verse twenty-five in the book of Daniel Chapter nine.

'Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem [the restoration preceded the building.] until Messiah the Prince, there shall be *seven weeks* and *sixty-two weeks*; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.' Dan 9:25.

In the second half of that verse we note that *two* specific time periods are nominated. The first is seven weeks, which is forty-nine years; and the second is *sixty-two weeks*, which is four hundred and thirty-four years.

As we have talked about this from the perspective of a broad overview, we have simply added those two time periods together, and said that there are *sixty-nine weeks* from 'the going forth of the command' to 'the coming of the Messiah', which was the baptism of Jesus. That is absolutely true.

But we also need to consider why the Scripture breaks it up between seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.

## The restoration of the street and the rebuilding of the walls

We also want to focus on two significant waypoints that are identified in this verse – 'the restoration of the street', which was accomplished in the time of Ezra' and 'the rebuilding of the walls', which was accomplished in the time of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah returned about thirteen years after Ezra, and they then ministered side by side as contemporaries.

When considering this verse, many commentators are not quite sure what is the significance of 'the street'. So they often focus on the walls. The

account of Nehemiah's rebuilding of the walls is a very well-known account.

As that is where the focus often is, it has led some to mistakenly think that the Seventy Weeks prophecy begins with the return of Nehemiah.

It is important to recognise that the restoration of the street *preceded* the rebuilding of the walls. The restoration of the street was in the days of Ezra, and the rebuilding of the walls was in the days of Nehemiah.

### **Ezra restored the 'street' - the public meeting place for the inhabitants of the city**

We will begin to consider 'the street'. From our last session, we recall that, after Ezra returned to Jerusalem, he issued a proclamation for the head of every household to gather in Jerusalem within three days to address the issue of the mixed culture in their marriages and households.

We will read from the book of Ezra. We read this verse in our previous session, but we will now focus on the word of Ezra, and the response of the people.

Let us consider this now in relation to *the place* where this word was proclaimed.

'All the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in *the open square* [literally, 'street'] *of the house of God*, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain.' Ezr 10:9.

The word that is translated as 'open square' in this verse is exactly the same word that is translated as 'street' in the book of Daniel. Dan 9:25.

So, the 'street' is an 'open square'.

When we think of 'street', we often think of a road; but the 'open square' for the people in this time and in many cities was *the public meeting place*.

Ezra did not restore the main street for the shopfronts; he restored the public meeting place for the inhabitants of the city.

### **The open square - the public meeting place for the Lord's messengers and the heads of households**

The temple itself was rebuilt in the days of Zerubbabel and Joshua. But it was not until the time of Ezra that the open square to the east of the

temple was restored as a public meeting place for the people.

Specifically, the Scripture in the book of Ezra records that it was 'the open square *of the house of God*.' So, it belonged to the temple; it was in the vicinity to the *east of the temple*.

The main reason for this open square was that it was to be the public meeting place between the Lord's messengers and the head of every household.

### **Solomon's portico was the same place where Ezra had proclaimed the word of the Lord**

Interestingly, this is the same general area where Solomon's portico was later built on the eastern side of the temple.

Herod began a massive renovation and an expansion project of the temple precinct, before the birth of Christ. A diagram, or a layout, of Herod's temple, as it would have been in the time of Jesus, indicates that the outer court where the altar was, was called 'the Court of the Priests'.

Immediately to the east of that, there was a small area called 'the Court of the Israelites', where the Jewish men were able to observe the priests making the sacrifices.

Then, further to the east, was 'the Court of Women', where all Jewish people had access, both men and women. Then, further to the east, and all the way around the temple, was 'the Court of the Gentiles'.

The perimeter of the Court of the Gentiles consisted of huge, vast colonnades; they were supported by huge marble pillars, and they were all roofed.

The colonnade on the *eastern side of the temple*, sitting on top of the huge retaining wall that had been built in the days of Solomon himself, was *Solomon's portico*; it was the large colonnade on the eastern side of the temple.

Josephus described the temple precincts in great detail, noting that these columns were over eleven metres tall, and that they were made of white marble. The roof was of panelled cedar. It certainly was a very impressive building.

That was *the same place where Ezra had proclaimed the word of the Lord in his day*.

### **Solomon's portico was the context for the apostles' public ministry**

This is significant for us because, after the temple buildings had become redundant following the offering of Christ and the inauguration and the anointing of the true temple in the heavenly places, the Lord gave Solomon's portico to the apostles as *the context for their public ministry*. Act 3-5. I encourage you to read that narrative.

It began when the apostles Peter and John healed the lame man when they were on their way into the temple at the hour of prayer. They healed that man, and he then entered the temple with them. He leapt, walking and praising the Lord, and then he clung to Peter and John.

'Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.' Act 3:11.

This clearly initiated a huge gathering of people in the same way that all the people gathered in the open square in the days of Ezra.

Peter began to preach the word of the cross to this gathering. This was his second great sermon after the day of Pentecost itself. Scripture recorded that, immediately, many people believed. So the church grew from three thousand to five thousand men as a direct consequence of this sermon by Peter. Act 4:4.

But, at the same time, Peter and John were arrested by the priests, the Sadducees and the captain of the temple. Then they proclaimed to the Jewish Council that Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone of the true temple in the heavenly places. Act 4:11.

They also proclaimed that there is salvation in no other name. 'Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.' Act 4:12.

They proclaimed that fellowship in the name of Christ and fellowship in His offering is the only doorway for salvation.

In response to this, the Council commanded them not to preach any more in the name of Jesus. However, Peter and John said, in effect, 'Well, you can decide whether it's right to listen to you or to listen to God.' And they said, 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.' Act 4:18-20.

### **They were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch**

The church kept growing after this, and people began to gather from the surrounding cities as well.

'And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were *all with one accord* in Solomon's Porch.' Act 5:12.

### **The word preached by the apostles was the foundation of the *agape* fellowship**

The high priest then had all the apostles arrested, and he put them in the common prison. The Scripture recorded that, at night, the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said to them, 'Go, stand in the temple and speak to all the people all the words of this life.' Act 5:17-20.

This is an amazing event. By direct fiat, or command, or decree, of the Lord, through His angel, the temple buildings were given to the apostles to be their 'cathedral', or the context for their public ministry.

The next day when the officers went to get the apostles, they found the prison shut securely. They found the guards still standing outside the doors. But once they opened the doors, no-one was inside. Act 5:21-23.

As the priests and the whole Jewish Sanhedrin were considering what the outcome of this matter would be, someone came and said, in effect, 'You know those men who you locked up and put in prison? They are back in the temple and they are preaching and teaching again.' Act 5:24-25.

So, the high priest then sent and brought them, 'very gingerly' this time, back before the Council. But Peter and the other apostles said to them again, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.' Act 5:26-29.

Then there was an intervention by Gamaliel, who was a Pharisee; and he was also the mentor of Saul at that time. He said to them, in effect, 'Look, there have been all kinds of leaders who have risen over the time, and people have followed them; then it's all come to nothing. If this is the same situation for these followers of Jesus, if it is just a work of man, then it will all come to nothing. But if this is the work of God, then there is nothing you can do to

stop it. And we need to be careful that we are not fighting against God.' Act 5:34-39.

From a very political perspective, Gamaliel intervened. So, the apostles were beaten and then let go. Act 5:40.

From that point on, they really had 'free reign' in the temple precincts to proclaim the word of the cross as the word of life for all the people.

The key point is this: *the word of the cross* as the word of life, *proclaimed by the apostles* in Solomon's porch, was *the foundation of the agape fellowship* from house to house in the early church.

### **The principle of the open square**

In the same way, *the word of faith* proclaimed by Ezra in the open square that belonged to the temple was *the foundation of the restoration* of the households of the city of Jerusalem in his day.

We see, then, the importance of the principle of the open square that was restored in the days of Ezra, concerning the public proclamation of the word to the head of every household.

It was the return of Ezra, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes in approximately 457 BC, that led to the restoration of the 'street', or the 'open square', of Jerusalem.

### **The prayer of Nehemiah**

Let us turn our attention to 'the walls'. It was the return of Nehemiah in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes in approximately 444 BC, thirteen years later, that led to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

The account of Nehemiah began when he heard that, despite the rebuilding of the temple and despite the restoration that had begun in the days of Ezra, in terms of the culture of the people, the walls of the city itself still lay in ruins and all of the gates had been burned by fire. Neh 1:3.

After hearing this, he began to pray. He wept and mourned for days. Neh 1:4. We notice that he prayed with the same repentance and faith as Daniel and Ezra had prayed. There is a very clear thread here.

'Let Your ear be attentive and *Your eyes open* [He, also, prayed that the Lord would meet him and meet the people eye to eye, and heart to heart.], that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the

children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned.' Neh 1:6. He confessed this, not only on behalf of the people, but also very personally, himself.

As he concluded his prayer, he said, 'O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.' Neh 1:11.

### **Nehemiah anointed with the fear of the Lord**

Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Neh 1:11. He was the same king who had issued the command and allowed Ezra to return. Nehemiah was his cupbearer and, after hearing the account of the walls and the gates, he went in before the king, and his face was sad. Neh 2:1.

The king, evidently being a perceptive man, said to him, 'Why is your face so sad? You are not sick. So, it must be sorrow of heart.' Neh 2:2.

Interestingly, Nehemiah then testified that he became 'dreadfully afraid'. This was not simply that he became dreadfully afraid of the king. An anointing of the Spirit of the Lord came upon Nehemiah - the anointing of *the fear of the Lord*. Neh 2:2.

This fear of the Lord overcame his fear of the king, so that he was able to boldly say, 'Why shouldn't I be sad, because the walls of my city and its gates are in disrepair.' Neh 2:3.

He received amazing favour here. The king said to him, 'What do you request?' Neh 2:4.

The king allowed Nehemiah to go back. Once Nehemiah returned, he inspected the walls by night on his horse, and then he encouraged all the people to rebuild them. We know that he encountered great opposition. Neh 2:10-19.

### **Nehemiah's godly fear led to submission and obedience; sanctification**

This is a key point. The recurring theme throughout the book of Nehemiah is that he did not succumb to the fear of man, because *he was a God-fearer*. A number of verses state this very clearly.

So Nehemiah met the eyes of the Lord in the same way as Daniel and Ezra had. Nehemiah's fear of

God motivated his obedience to God and his unyielding commitment to his own sanctification. Nehemiah did encounter much personal opposition, deceit and slander.

He had an unyielding commitment to his own sanctification, and also to the sanctification of the people, in the face of much warfare and opposition.

Concerning the rebuilding of the walls, this verse is a summary statement: 'I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses".' Neh 4:14.

My Bible contains a footnote that is connected to this verse regarding the word 'awesome.' Where Nehemiah said, 'Remember the Lord, great and awesome,' the Hebrew word translated as 'awesome' is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning 'to fear'.

In this context, the word does not mean 'frightening'; rather, it suggests the quality that inspires reverence, or godly fear.

I will read the note as it appears in my Bible. 'In some Bible passages, 'fearing' and 'godly living' are so closely related that they are almost synonymous.' And then it gives some examples of various verses. 'Thus, while ordinary fear paralyses a person, *godly fear leads to submission and obedience.* The person who properly fears God avoids evil and walks in God's way.' And then they quote from the book of Psalms, 'Blessed is everyone who *fears the Lord, who walks in His ways.*' Psa 128:1.

We know that that 'way' is *the way of the cross*, where we are crucified with Christ. And, because we are crucified with Christ, we are crucified to the world, and the world is also crucified to us.

The rebuilding of the walls was significant for Nehemiah and the people because it represented their commitment to be a sanctified, believing, God-fearing community; and also their sanctification from the world.

### **An obedient God-fearer has the weapons of righteousness – for work and for warfare**

Nehemiah recognised the importance of this work. He recognised the warfare, and so he instructed half of the people to hold weapons, to hold spears, while the other half of the people were building.

Even the builders carried their load in one hand, and carried a sword in the other hand.

This is an important point for the head of every household. In obedience to the word of Christ that is proclaimed to us by His messengers in His right hand, we are to give ourselves completely to carrying our load and to *working as part of a sanctified Christian community, according to the name that we have received from the Lord.*

At the same time, while walking in obedience to the word that has come to us, we are also fully aware of the *warfare that surrounds us in the world.*

So we are *watchful*; we are *prayerful*; and we *hold a 'sword'* which is the sword of the Spirit, or the word of God. Of course, this word is in our heart and in our mouth; it is *the word of our testimony.*

We give ourselves to the work while, at the same time, we are cognisant of the warfare. In that sense, there is a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other.

The apostle Paul described this as 'the weapons of righteousness', or 'the weapons that belong to a person who is an obedient God-fearer'. These are the weapons for the right hand and for the left.

### **The work of restoration was accomplished by God's grace**

Coming back to the days of Nehemiah, remarkably, the wall was completed within fifty-two days. All commentators agree that this was an amazing building program run by Nehemiah.

We do know that he did not build it 'from scratch'. He *repaired* the walls. Nonetheless, it was certainly *the evidence of the grace of God* upon them that they were able to complete this work in fifty-two days.

As another summary statement, Nehemiah said, 'When all our enemies heard about it [that the work was finished; the wall was complete], and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognised that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God [or, *by His grace*]. Neh 6:16.

We note that this was a season of *restoration by grace.*

### **The grace of resurrection life for our work comes from the finished offering of Christ**

As Ezra said, *grace came from the finished offering of Christ.* That grace firstly enabled the people to turn,

to look upon Him whom they had pierced, and to find grace for recovery and restoration in their marriages and in their households.

This grace continued to flow concerning the practical work that the Lord asked them to do. Nehemiah said that 'they recognised that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God'. This was the grace of resurrection life for the work, coming from the finished offering of Christ.

The people *received grace* for the work, and overcame the opposition *because of their submission and obedience to God*. The apostle James summarised this principle: 'Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.' Jas 4:7.

### **The fear of the Lord**

We will now consider a couple of points from the book of Nehemiah.

After the walls were completed, Nehemiah continued the work of restoration, alongside Ezra. 'Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square [this is still the 'street'] that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel.' Neh 8:1.

Ezra then read from this book, and he was supported by thirteen other men on the platform. Nehemiah recorded that Ezra read, with explanation, from sunrise all the way to midday – for at least six hours.

We know that he did not simply read the ten commandments. Also, it is very unlikely that he read all of the first five books of the Bible. He read the book of Deuteronomy, which is the prophetic book of the New Covenant.

Moses received this book, this instruction, from the Lord immediately before the children of Israel went into the promised land. Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord into a book. He then committed that book into the care of the priests and the Levites, instructing them to put it into the most holy place with the ark of the covenant.

They were instructed to read that book every seventh year, during the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. This is what Ezra did; he read the book of Deuteronomy as the prophetic book of the New Covenant.

The Lord clearly explained to Moses that the reason for this was to promote, and to teach the people, *the fear of the Lord*.

'Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates [Ezra and Nehemiah gathered all the people together.], that *they may hear* and that *they may learn to fear the Lord your God* and *carefully observe all the words of this law*, and that their children, who have not known it, may [also] hear and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.' Deu 31:12-13.

### **Agape fellowship was the fruit of the proclamation and understanding of the word**

Interestingly, Ezra was supported by thirteen other men on the platform. He was also supported by thirteen others, and by all the Levites who were scattered among the congregation. These men translated what Ezra said. So, we see a very important work of translators here as well. They also explained and interpreted, and gave the sense of the word that was proclaimed to the people, so that *understanding came to every person*.

Our key point is that the immediate *fruit* of the *proclamation of the word* in this manner, and the *understanding* that it brought to all the people was a wonderful *agape fellowship*.

They responded to the word, because 'they understood the words that were declared to them'. Neh 8:12.

As well, 'All the people went their way *to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly*.' Nehemiah made it very clear to the people that it was a time of *rejoicing*.

### **Celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles**

The people then celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days. Scripture suggests that this was the first time since the days when Joshua led the people into the promised land that this happened. The entire seven days were a continued fellowship in the word.

Many commentators are perplexed that the people did not appear to celebrate the Day of Atonement. This is not a surprise to us, because Ezra had already proclaimed to the people, concerning the fulfilment of the Day of Atonement, that they had 'a Peg in the holy place'.

We know that there was no ark of the covenant in the holy place at this time. Ezra had already proclaimed the true fulfilment of the Day of Atonement as the finished offering of Christ, when he declared to the people that they had a Peg in the holy place.

The Feast of Tabernacles, when the people dwelt in booths, was a celebration of the miraculous provision and protection of the Lord for the nation of Israel.

Of course, this refers to the younger generation who were to inherit the land while they were still on the journey from Egypt to the promised land.

We know that the journey of the nation of Israel in the wilderness, before they possessed the promised land, foreshadows the entire church age.

Paul called Israel in the wilderness, 'the church in the wilderness'. It foreshadows the entire church age, when the Lord brings the church out of the world and into the wilderness of the peoples, to enter into judgement with us, face to face, and eye to eye. Eze 20:35.

This is the period before the time when the Father takes His seat, and the time arrives for the saints to possess the kingdom. Dan 7:9,18,22,27.

We know that the Day of Atonement has been fulfilled. And we are *celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles now as we eat and drink the agape meal*, which is our participation in the finished work of Christ, *while* we are still on the journey.

In a similar way, the people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, in faith for the New Covenant.

In our next session, we will consider the significance of the two time periods – the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks – and then look at how Christ 'confirmed the covenant with many for one week'.