

# The Remnant

**Psalm 128:1** *A Song of Ascents.*

Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!

<sup>2</sup> You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.

<sup>3</sup> Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.

<sup>4</sup> Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.

<sup>5</sup> The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life!

<sup>6</sup> May you see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel!"

**Psalm 129:1** *A Song of Ascents.*

"Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth"-- let Israel now say--

<sup>2</sup> "Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me.

**Neh 11:1** "Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem the holy city, while nine out of ten remained in the other towns.

<sup>2</sup> And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem."

**Neh 7:26** The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188.

<sup>27</sup> The men of Anathoth, 128.

<sup>28</sup> The men of Beth-azmaveth, 42.

<sup>29</sup> The men of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, 743.

<sup>30</sup> The men of Ramah and Geba, 621.

<sup>31</sup> The men of Michmas, 122.

<sup>32</sup> The men of Bethel and Ai, 123.

<sup>33</sup> The men of the other Nebo, 52. (2019)

**Neh 13:4** Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah,

<sup>5</sup> prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had

<sup>3</sup> The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows."

<sup>4</sup> The LORD is righteous; he has cut the cords of the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward!

<sup>6</sup> Let them be like the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up,

<sup>7</sup> with which the reaper does not fill his hand nor the binder of sheaves his arms,

<sup>8</sup> nor do those who pass by say, "The blessing of the LORD be upon you! We bless you in the name of the LORD!"

previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

<sup>6</sup> While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king

<sup>7</sup> and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

<sup>8</sup> And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber.

<sup>9</sup> Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

<sup>10</sup> I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field.

<sup>11</sup> So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them

together and set them in their stations.

<sup>12</sup> Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses.

<sup>13</sup> And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers.

<sup>14</sup> Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

**PSALM 128-129; NEHEMIAH 11:1-2; 7:26-33; 13:4-14**

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## Counting by Tens

THE ARK OF NOAH came to rest on the **tenth** month (**Gen 8:5**). It contained inside it a holy remnant of men, women, and animals that would repopulate the earth after the catastrophe. Just outside the ancient city of Jerusalem, immediately after a great battle had been won and a

covenant meal had bonded them together, Abram gave Melchizedek a **tenth** of all he had (**Gen 14:20**). When God was about to deliver Egypt from the hand of Pharaoh, he told them to take a lamb on the **tenth** day of that month (**Ex 12:3**). After the deliverance, in the wilderness of testing, he gave them strict commands only to take up an **omer**, that is a tenth of an ephah, of the food (**Ex 16:16-36**). This was to test their obedience and holiness. God told them when they entered the land that their **tithe**, or tenth, of seed or fruit was the LORD's and was therefore holy (**Lev 27:30**). In the days of Isaiah, it was predicted that a terrible captivity would come, and only a **tenth** of the people would remain (**Isa 6:13**).

In fact, this word for tenth is of the same root as a word for remnant, and it says they would be “the holy seed” of the LORD. One Bible dictionary defines the “**remnant**” as, “**What is left of a community after it undergoes a catastrophe.**”<sup>1</sup> You heard that in what I spoke about above. It then adds, “**Because the catastrophe is understood to be an act of divine judgment, the survival of a viable remnant**

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<sup>1</sup> **Lester V. Meyer**, “Remnant,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 669.

is, correspondingly, an act of divine mercy ... the catastrophe purges the community of its impurities, and the remnant is called to exemplary life as the people of Yahweh ... Thus, the appointment and rescue of the remnant, making possible the continuation of the life of the community, may be viewed as themselves constituting the saving activity of Yahweh.”<sup>2</sup> Purging of impurities to live obedient lives is akin to being considered “holy” by God. We saw this above as well.

## **The Tenth to Jerusalem: Ps 128 and Neh 11:1-2**

Today we enter into what is probably not accidentally **the ninth and tenth** of the Psalms of Ascent. As we have now grown accustomed, these songs correspond to some very particular situations in the life of Nehemiah, which were then used to help Israel remember God’s mercy and celebrate his sovereign compassion during festival times. The first story begins, “**Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring**

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 670.

one out of ten to live in Jerusalem the holy city, while nine out of ten remained in the other towns” (Neh 11:1). Tenth!

Now, our last song (Psalm 127) had its Nehemiah parallel in the first few verses of Nehemiah 7. We have just jumped some four chapters ahead to find the parallel with Psalm 128. Why such a gap? First of all, there isn't as much gap as it may seem. The events of Nehemiah 11:1-2 quite probably correspond to a special group listed in the lengthy names index that takes up most of Nehemiah 7.

Most of Nehemiah 7 is taken up with **names**. Lots of names. It tells us of many who came back from the exile to live in their own towns again. In this way, it describes a **remnant** of the nation that was destroyed 70 years earlier. They are a special group, given undeniable graces by God in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. But the list is curious. First, it gives many verses of those who are “**the sons of**” someone (**vv. 8-25**). Then it gives a shorter list of those who are “**the men of,**” and then it lists their towns (**26-33**). Then it returns to a longer list of “**the sons of...**” (**34-42**). The next part of the chapter tells us about various Levites (**43-65**). Then it finishes with some final numbers of people and

other things (66-73). These are clearly not testimonies of Nehemiah's life-story.

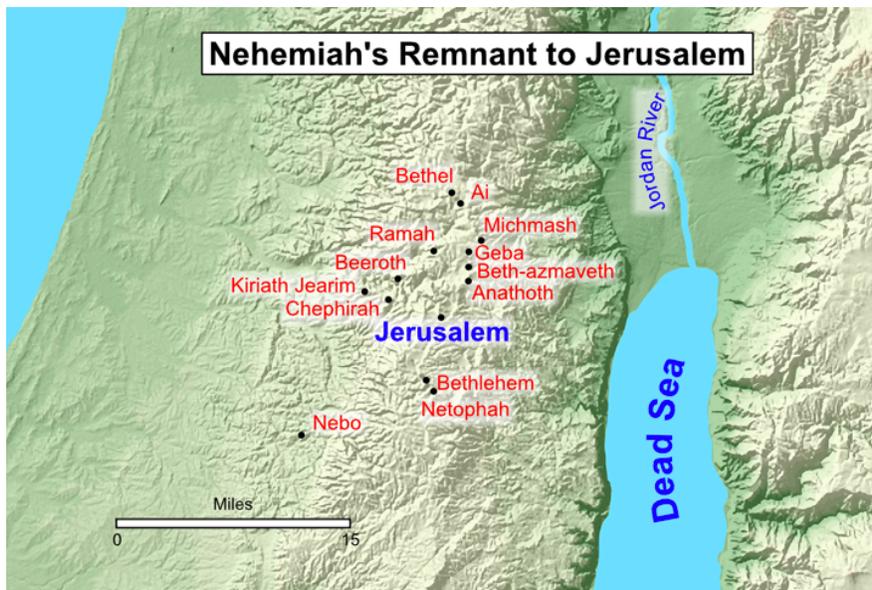
Chapter 8 then focuses mostly on *Ezra* and the holiness of the people, while Chapter 9 tells us about how the people began to confess their sins. Chapter 10 becomes another long list of names combined with stipulations for the people in the covenant they are now entering into. It isn't until you get to **Nehemiah 11:1-2** that we really have another of his own personal stories.

Again, it says, “Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem the holy city, while nine out of ten remained in the other towns. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem” (11:1-2). While Nehemiah is not mentioned by name, it is clear that this took place under his leadership, which is the point of Ch. 7's list of names. That brings us to the special relationship between part of that list and short story told here. It seems that the “men of” such and such a town is a good fit for the “men” who willingly offered to move from

their homes and make a go of it in Jerusalem. So, let's take a look at how the Psalm 128 fits this story.<sup>3</sup>

First, notice that it takes place in Jerusalem. “The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life!” (Ps 128:5). Of course, any Israelite could have sung this happily when they came to the holy city on one of the mandated festivals. But this would be all the more special to those who had given up their land and their homes to move to Jerusalem.

Where did they move from? If this list is indicative, they came from a dozen or so towns in the near vicinity of the City of David. None is more than ten miles away, making for a much easier transition.



<sup>3</sup> For the discussion of the relationship of this list and Neh 11:1-2 with Psalm 128 see [Goulder](#), *The Psalms of the Return Book V: Psalms 107-150*, 68-73.

Next, notice how the song talks about **family**. “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table ... May you see your children’s children!” (Ps 128:3, 6). It is probably good to remember here that Psalm 127 ended on this same note. When the LORD builds the house, those who labor do not labor in vain. The house at the end of the song referred quite literally to a man’s household, such that God will give him children who will help build the future generation. But this in turn was related to Jerusalem at the beginning of the song. And so here we have the continuation of that, which is especially interesting in light of Nehemiah.

There are around 2,019 men listed here that would account for **a remnant within a remnant if you will**. A double remnant, doubly blessed. They will take their children and wives and move into the newly walled city, to plant, to build, and to guard it from those who seek to tear it down. To someone newly returned from such devastation which saw their people massacred, their land marauded, and their temple and city mangled, it is hard to imagine something more exciting or important to a Jew than this.

This accounts for why they had to draw lots, not because no one wanted the duty, but because everyone did! But you can't very well leave the whole country empty, so only a few were allowed this privilege. Nevertheless, this **1/10 is an important idea theologically** that we will look at later.

For their sacrifice, a great and **special blessing** is pronounced upon them. That as they protect the city, God will protect them with long life. That as they build up the city, God will build up their families. That as they expand the food supply of the city, God will bless their labor and their bellies, “**You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you**” (2).

But all of this is **predicated upon something very important**: *Fearing the LORD*. This was the lesson of the exile. Each man and women must fear God by “**walking in his ways**” (1). *This* is the person who will be blessed (4). This is not just a generic old blessing to anyone who happens to be in the city gates. It is for God's chosen people, *those whom he has called to himself* and to serve the City in such special ways.

## Bringing in the Tithes: Ps 129 and Neh 13:4-14

This idea takes us straight into Psalm 129. You may not see why at the beginning though. This 10<sup>th</sup> Psalm of Ascents has ten implied in its lyrics as the people of Judah brought “the tithe” (a tenth) of grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses (Ps 129:12). It begins in typical ascent stair-step song-of-ascent fashion: “Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth’—let Israel now say—‘Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me’” (Ps 129:1-2). We’ve seen this pattern recently. Psalm 124 began, “If it had not been the LORD who was on our side’-- let Israel now say—‘If it had not been the LORD who was on our side when people rose up against us...’” (Ps 124:1-2).

So, what are they doing (“they” being those afflicted Israel)? “The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows” (3). The image is striking. The evil men are like farmers who took the sharp end of the plow called the share and used it to furrow deep trenches in the backs of God’s people! It makes being whipped with a cat of nine tails look like a tickling feather. But it is only a metaphor.

To see a more specific application, we need to turn to Nehemiah's 10<sup>th</sup> testimony.

This one begins in **Nehemiah 13:4**. Again, this is quite far from the previous testimony. This is because the majority of Ch. 11 is taken up with listing the chiefs of the province (**11:3-24**) and then the villagers outside Jerusalem (**25-36**). **Ch. 12:1-26** then gives a long list of priests and Levites that were appointed to the temple, an explanation of the dedication of the wall and temple service (**27-44**). It is only when we come to Ch. 13 that Nehemiah's testimonies resume. The first three verses describe the reading of the law. Then we finally come to the testimony which begins, as usual, with "Now..."

"Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests" (**Neh 13:4-5**). It is right here at the beginning that you must

understand that the blessing of the previous song is not given to everyone who lives in Jerusalem!

Tobiah has been the enemy of Nehemiah throughout the book. Tobiah is not a Jew. He is an **Ammonite** (one of the descendants of Lot). But here we have Tobiah being given a permanent five-star hotel room inside the newly rebuilt temple! Does that sound suspicious to you? It should. This was absolutely forbidden in the Law of Moses. The priest should have known about this, and probably did. But he didn't care, because as we saw last time, Tobiah had weaseled his way into the pockets of the Jewish leaders through unlawful marriages (**Neh 6:18**). This priest was one of those leaders, thus making what he has done here doubly wicked.

Why didn't Nehemiah stop it earlier? Because **he was out of the country!**<sup>4</sup> “While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem, and I then

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<sup>4</sup> There is a timing difficulty here. Some have argued that this episode takes place around 430 B.C. with Nehemiah leaving Jerusalem around 434, thus being gone for four years (see Hamilton, p. 218). But others have pointed out that this episode could have taken place back in 445 B.C. (see Goulder, 74-75). Either way, however, the point is the same.

discovered that evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God” (6-7).

But when he gets back to Jerusalem, he sees what’s going on. What was his response? “I was very angry” (8). Why? Because as Psalm 129 puts it, “those who hate Zion” (Ps 129:5) are trampling its courts and its people all over again. As someone explains it, “Eliashib, one to whom was entrusted the care of God's house, had desecrated the place, sequestering its rooms to an evil-minded foreigner to whom he was related by an impure marriage. Tobiah was bent on his own advancement, and was one of the three main enemies of the present Governor.”<sup>5</sup> No wonder Nehemiah was angry.

But there is more. Later he says, “I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field” (10). So not only are they desecrating the temple, they are utterly mocking it by failing to take care of the Levites, whom the law commanded they take care of, since they were not to have an inheritance with the others.

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<sup>5</sup> Goulder, 78.

Its rather incredible. This temple's concrete is still solidifying in its own foundations, it is so new. You can still smell the wet pain. It was the great joy of all the people to see it rebuilt. And they all helped in that endeavor. Further, Ezra was still around. Yet this kind of corruption has already been introduced. It's almost like all they wanted was the building. That's all the religion they need. God isn't real anyway, I mean look at what he let happen to them these last seventy years. You can hear the excuses. We have the same in our day. Don't kid yourself. There is nothing new under the sun.

The effect of this is that this amazing temple has been virtually abandoned by the priests, while the unclean enemies of God have taken up residence in its best quarters. And there's virtually nothing that any righteous person can do about; that's what happens the corrupt governments get their measly paws in religious affairs. Not that the religious priests weren't part of that, of course. They completely were! Just as it was for centuries, the corrupt leaders have all the power; and the only light which is able to guide a people is being snuffed out. Truly, it is difficult to think of how these people could have started off on a worse foot, for

when people forsake true religion and their moral duties to God and neighbor, all is lost.

It is into this that Psalm 129 is used to explain the feelings, in a different way that Nehemiah's testimony does. "Greatly they have afflicted me from my youth" (1, 2). This kind of language could easily remind an Israelite of their slavery in Egypt when they were but a young nation. In these days, it would also remind them of the captivity they just came out of in Babylon. When Ezra and Nehemiah were young, they were still in the captivity. Now, it is as if it is starting all over again, with the same kind of rebellion against Yahweh that brought the captivity to pass in the first place right here at the heart of it all in the pristine new temple that was supposed to be the house of God himself on earth.

So other than get angry, what does Nehemiah do? "I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense" (8-9). This is called righteous indignation, holy wrath. Few men have ever had it, or at least had the nerve to use it.

Regarding the Levites it says, “I confronted the officials and said, ‘Why is the house of God forsaken?’ And I gathered them together and set them in their stations” (11). Nehemiah was a bold, bold man. I guess you would have to be to be a king’s cupbearer! But he also had political authority over them! And he used it for the good of Israel.

But it isn’t enough just to return Levites and guards. They have to be provided for, taken care of. So it adds, “Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses” (12). A tenth. Clearly, the word was sent out and that the leadership of this temple would not tolerate disobedience to God’s word. And everyone came. The priests would be taken care of. The temple and its worship would be able to move forward.

But still more is needed. Without the governor’s sharp administrative abilities, chaos would still ensue. So “I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers” (13). He had to drain the swamp in order to get the house of God in working order. Without

it, there would be no possible obedience and moving forward in a godly way. Once that was done, he had to put reliable, godly, trustworthy men in charge. There would be no more corruption.

The testimony ends, as it usually does, with a prayer, “Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service” (14). It is easy to imagine Nehemiah singing the rest of Psalm 129 as he prays this. “...they have not prevailed against me” (Ps 129:1). Thank you, Lord! “May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward! Let them be like the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up, with which the reaper does not fill his hand nor the binder of sheaves his arms, nor do those who pass by say, ‘The blessing of the LORD be upon you!’” (5-8). You see? Not all who are in physical Jerusalem are or will be blessed of God. Many, in fact, will be consumed by him as they wither and fade away into nothing.

But let Israel say, “We bless you in the Name of the LORD!” (8). The “Name” here is again the Second Person. The Targum in Psalm 128 mentions him as the Word. “May

the *Memra* of the LORD bless you from Zion; and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life” (128:5).

It is **Christ-centered**. *He* delivered.

## **A New Temple Cleansing and a New Remnant**

We’ve now seen how Nehemiah applies these songs for the children of Israel as they come for that great Feast of Tabernacles around the year 445 B.C. He tells them these stories from his own life and their very recent history, and they sing together songs of ascent as they look upon that edifice raised from the rubble of Solomon’s first temple, and their eyes and hearts are raised up to heaven to praise the God who would give such graces and returning them to their land, **rebuilding** their center of worship, **protecting** their city with walls, **ridding** it of unclean filthy scum that were using political power to destroy all hopes of obedience and atonement, **filling** it with men ready to protect it, women willing to plant and harvest and nurture, children who would soon stand by their mothers and fathers, food gathered in from throughout all the country, and a people who were thankful just to be back home in the land God had given to their fathers.

Such is the theological meaning of the tenth. The remnant of the people returning from captivity. The tenth of those people moving into the Great City. The tithe of the land filling the empty storehouses of the temple. The tenth song of ascent celebrating God's loving-care in the midst of perpetual hatred of him and his people.

So what about today? There is so much to say! Let us start by sifting this great work of Nehemiah through the sieve of Christ. When such acts are strained and refined in this way, the purity of the old that was always mingled with sin finds its perfect expression and purpose The New.

Nehemiah does something in this story that is a type of something greater to come. **Hamilton** writes, “**Nehemiah here foreshadowed One who would come to the temple and find that, rather than the worship of God being upheld there, it had been turned into a place for traders ... On that occasion the man who was righteously indignant about what was happening in the temple made a whip. He started overturning tables and dumping out bags of money and driving people out of that place.**”<sup>6</sup> This has a very long history of interpretation. The **Venerable Bede** (672-735

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<sup>6</sup> **Hamilton**, 219.

A.D.) writes, “Clearly, we ought to compare this zeal of Nehemiah with that of the Lord Savior, when finding vendors and buyers in the temple, he made a whip from cords and drove them all outside.”<sup>7</sup> This is the best, most Christian way of interpreting Nehemiah’s actions.

They are talking, of course, about Jesus in John 2. It was the time of the Passover, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, as all Jews were to do by law (**John 2:13**). When he went into the temple, he found people selling oxen and sheep and pigeons. There were money-changers sitting there (**14**). So he made **a whip of cords** and drove them all out of the temple, along with the sheep and oxen. He poured the coins of the money-changers out and **overturned their tables** (**15**). Then he scolded them, “**Take these things away, do not make my Father’s house a house of trade**” (**16**). Like Nehemiah, get this furniture and your evil enterprise out of here!

Why did Jesus do these things? It tells us. The disciples remembered that it was written of Messiah, “**Zeal for your house will consume me**” (**17**). At this point, the Jews were

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<sup>7</sup> **Bede**, On Nehemiah 13:8-9. Marco Conti and Gianluca Pilara, *1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 372.

not gnashing their teeth at him. In fact, they may have believed he could be the Messiah. So they asked him for a sign to prove his authority (18). Jesus threw them for a loop. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (19). They thought he was talking about the place he had just so violently emptied. But he wasn’t. He was talking about his own body.

Now, many have seen this story of Jesus foreshadowed in Nehemiah’s zeal. Hamilton writes, “So what Nehemiah does here is Christlike.” Derek Kidner puts it this way, “Nehemiah stormed in as violently as, one day, his Master would.”<sup>8</sup> Bede is even more to the point, “Nehemiah, in this as in his other undertakings, aptly conveyed a type of true consoler and cleanser.”

But someone else has pointed out something more, and it is directly related to what Jesus *said*. Notice that Jesus empties the temple and then gives them a sign of another temple as proof of his authority. He writes,

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<sup>8</sup> Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979), 129.

This could be a type of ... the real cleansing of the Temple in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In John 2, Jesus says, “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will rebuild it.” John tells us, “He was speaking of the Temple of His body.” In the death of Jesus the true Temple is destroyed. The sin of the people who He has raised up to be the New Covenant Temple were laid on Him, and in His death He has cleansed them from their sins. The beauty of the greater Nehemiah is that He continually cleanses the Temple, as He sanctifies His people through that death and resurrection.<sup>9</sup>

This is in fact what we learn in Hebrews. “He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption ... Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things,

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<sup>9</sup> Nicholas T. Batzig, “The Greater Nehemiah and Temple Cleansing,” *FeedingOnChrist* (Sept 14, 2009), <http://feedingonchrist.com/the-greater-nehemiah-and-temple-cleansing/>.

but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 9:12, 23-24).

Let’s bring this back a little closer to our stories and songs. As for **the second story**, the cleansing of the temple idea is obvious. And what the Nehemiah and Jesus stories do here is point out the necessity for some kind of final cleansing to take place.

Think about it. As we’ve seen the last two sermons, the Jews can hardly hobble back into the Promised Land before they are corrupted with greed and power and money. It doesn’t matter if they were part of building the wall, like Eliashib was (see **Neh 3:1**), nor not. **Sin simply cannot be overcome in this life**. No matter how good God’s graces are towards you here, you are still easily susceptible to corruption because of your flesh. The things you want to do, you do not do; the things you hate, that is what you do! This has always been the way of it, and the way the Bible tells these kinds of stories, sin always happens sooner rather than later. The entire book of Nehemiah screams this out from the top of the gates in every direction.

This is why what Jesus does is so remarkable. This man was so consumed with the house of God, and he did not stop

his work at cleansing a physical temple, like Nehemiah before him. He went **all the way to death** for crimes he did not commit, in order that he could ascend into heaven and make purification that would atone for all of our sins once-for-all, thereby making the Most Holy Place available to us who cannot abide in it because we are Tobiahs.

But what Jesus does here is far more than even making purification once-for-all, as impossible as that is for anyone else but him. This work itself is attached directly to the idea of “**ten**” that we began with this morning. How? Jesus had a very special people in mind when he offered this sacrifice and cleansed this place. You see, while his blood is sufficient to atone for any man and is therefore to be offered to all men without exception, **Jesus actually wanted some people to be in this temple**. Without the effectual calling of the Spirit, all would remain outside like the pay-deprived Levites who would not go into their own temple.

But when this call goes out and a man hears his name, “**Man of Bethlehem,**” “**Man of Netophah,**” “Man of Boulder,” and so on, or to put it another way when God casts his lot for you, then you come in, and like the Israelites

of old, you do so gladly! This is the heart of remnant theology.

This theology is found in the prophets and is picked up again in places like [Romans 9](#), which is directly related (in the text) to God's electing love. Throughout this chapter he has both [groups](#) (Gentiles/Jews) and [individuals](#) (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau in mind. Then he brings up the remnant. "Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved'" ([Rom 9:26](#); [Isa 10:22-23](#)). But according to other prophecies, this actually predicts things in the future. As another prophet says, "If the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" ([Rom 9:26](#); [Hos 1:10](#)).

This remnant in the NT is not just Jews, but also Gentiles, and it is not just people groups, it is special chosen people that God brings to himself out of his vast, unknowable love. "And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed" ([Acts 13:48](#)). This was all of grace, because if God had not done this, no one would believe! But God is reclaiming people from all the nations, according to

the way it was before Babel when we all worshiped the One True God. He is fulfilling his promise to Abraham, making him the father of many nations.

Think of where these people come from. We are all survivors of the great **flood**, descended through Noah. This is God's grace through catastrophe. Our ancestors were those making war on the likes of **Melchizedek**, Abraham, and Lot; like **Pharaoh** trying to destroy God's people, like the **Amalekites** waging war against them. Our ancestors—be they Jews like Elishib or Gentiles like Tobiah, and not only our ancestors but we ourselves were doing nothing but polluting and defiling sacred things in our sin when we were called into purity and holiness by the Word of God.

This **sin is, without question, the greatest catastrophe** each of us endures, and when someone is saved from it, then by definition they become part of **a remnant**. And by definition it demonstrates God mercy over our judgment. All because God spared his mercy and judged Christ in our stead. All so that he might cleanse the temple once-for-all, be raised from the dead, and call many to himself, bringing them into the heavenly city when they were outsiders, making them part of the temple when they were defilers,

filling of their storehouses when they were robbers, bringing a holy tenth to his Father thereby proving himself God and Lord of all things.

Beloved, if you do not know this love, then I tell you to look at these stories today, behold the love of God in Christ, turn from your ways outside the city, and come in behind the safe walls built up by Christ, into the holy city, to the temple of God on earth, his body and church, and never look back.

Make your home here. Bring your wife here. Raise your children here. Plant your crops here. Eat your food here. For it is now clean once-for-all. But know that if you do not, then you will be thrown outside like Tobiah, into the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, to the outer darkness, beyond the walls and the protection they provide you from the LORD who watches over the city.

Do not refuse the call to come. But rather be like those few Jews who become fewer when they went into an abandoned city. And know that this call is not one that many on this earth are afforded. So many live in darkness,

but you have come near to the light through the word of God today.

Let me leave you with the words of a Father named Barsanuphius by way of encouragement regarding these things and what you are to do from here if you know Christ as Lord.<sup>10</sup> This is the third use of the law, after God has given us new natures and desires. He writes,

Brother Euthymius, I entreat your love, toil with me in prayer to the kind and loving God. For your love has also asked me to write to you about how we may seek the Shepherd ... “Cleanse your heart from the thoughts of the old self, and I shall grant you your requests. My gifts are received by and granted to those who are pure. For as long as wrath and remembrance of evil and other similar passions of the old self trouble your heart, wisdom will not enter it. If you sincerely desire my gifts, **remove from yourself the vessels of the enemy** [Neh 13:8-9], and mine will come to

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<sup>10</sup> **Barsanuphius and John** (fifth to sixth century). Two anchorite friends who served as spiritual directors to coenobites at a monastery near Gaza. The two communicated with others, including one another, almost exclusively through letters. Little is known of them apart from their correspondence, included among 850 letters of Barsanuphius. Dorotheus of Gaza was one of Barsanuphius’s most important disciples. *Introduction and Biographical Information, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 488.

you quite naturally. Have you not heard: ‘No slave can serve two masters’?<sup>11</sup>

May God bless you, your work, your wife, your children.

May he bless those who fear the Lord.

May peace be upon the church.

May you be blessed because of the Name of the Lord, the great Savior of mankind, the risen and glorified Lord Jesus.

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<sup>11</sup> **Barsanuphius and John**, *Barsanuphius and John: Letters*, ed. Thomas P. Halton, trans. John Chryssavgis, vol. 113, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 89. **Bede** writes something very similar using the very same passage. “You also, whatever infidelity and uncleanness you discover among the faithful, immediately cast it out so that after the hearts of believers (which are the Lord’s storerooms, since they are full of the riches of the virtues), have been purified, the vessels of the Lord may be brought in—that is to say, those same hearts that just before were vessels of error through sin may again become vessels of the Lord through correction, and there let the sacrifice of good works and the incense of pure prayer be found where before there was a den of thieves. But the vessels of Tobiah the Ammonite are also cast out from the temple storeroom, and God’s vessels as well as the sacrifice and the incense are returned to that place by those who, after they have excommunicated or anathematized heretics and false catholics and expelled them from the church, substitute in their place catholic servants of Christ such as may serve him faithful deeds and prayers.”