

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Nehemiah: Pattern For Solutions In Spiritually Hard Times

J. Encouraging God's People Unto The Safety Of Holiness

(Nehemiah 6:15-7:5a)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Your former two pastors and myself, each of us a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, for over 50 years have taught Scripture from this pulpit using the classic dispensational point-of-view. Dispensationalism is the theological belief that God has revealed increasing degrees of truth to His people through consecutive historical eras or dispensations. Dispensationalism has promoted the premillennial, pretribulational doctrines that Christ will take the true Church to heaven before the start of the seven-year Great Tribulation Period followed by Christ's Second Coming to earth to set up His literal thousand-year Kingdom over Israel.

I myself have long been convinced that dispensationalism is true, for "(d)ispensationalism is a result of consistent application of the basic hermeneutical principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation. No other system of theology can claim this." (Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 1970, p. 96)

Yet, regardless of this Church's long exposure to this theological system, dispensationalism is increasingly opposed even in evangelical circles. Once it was called "'a danger'" or "'unscriptural,'" the dispensational Schofield Bible being called "the most dangerous heresy . . . within Christian circles" (Ibid., p. 11), but Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith's 2001 book, Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America, has more recently upped the criticism, claiming that the "premillennial worldview" is the cause for "a limited response to racial issues" by evangelicals. (Brannon S. Howse, Marxianity, 2018, p. 190) [Actually, premillennialism opposes Marxist social justice, and Emerson and Smith adhere to social justice ideology, making this racism charge biased and errant!] In addition, an early dispensationalist named John Nelson Darby, often "pictured as the pope of the Plymouth Brethren . . . excommunicated at will those who disagreed with him," and dispensationalists are often unjustly made to look bad by way of guilt by association with Darby! (Ibid., Ryrie, p. 12) [Actually, many dispensationalist pastors like myself neither pontificate as popes of the Plymouth Brethren nor do we excommunicate people at will!]

As a pastor, I am very concerned about pressures we face to cease holding to dispensationalism, and here is why: If we abandon dispensationalism, the only theological system that interprets Scripture in a consistently literal way, at some point we will interpret Scripture non-literally in violation of Jesus' Mark 12:18-27 example, and we will end up being subject to our own human imagination in handling God's Word. If our own human imagination is the basis of handling God's Word, due to our sin natures, error will creep into our theology, leading to errant living.

Need: So, we ask, "In view of the growing criticisms about dispensationalism, how can we discern if it is valid?!"

- I. Nehemiah faced the trial of his foe Tobiah's dangerous deception of fellow Hebrews, Nehemiah 6:15-7:4:**
 - A. Though the wall had been built in 52 days, causing Nehemiah's foes to be dismayed at God's help for the Hebrews to achieve such a feat, Nehemiah was still concerned over his Gentile enemy Tobiah's dangerously deceptive influence over many Hebrews through Tobiah's marital ties with them, Nehemiah 6:15-7:4:
 1. Tobiah's marital ties with some Hebrews had led Judah's nobles to send friendly letters to him, and many Hebrews had spoken well of Tobiah to Nehemiah to make him friendly toward Tobiah, Neh. 6:17, 19a.
 2. However, in contrast to Tobiah's actions toward other Hebrews, Tobiah had long been sending threatening letters to Nehemiah to try to hinder his leadership of the Hebrews in order to stop his leading them to reconstruct the Jerusalem city wall, Nehemiah 6:19b.
 - B. Tobiah's friendly posturing toward other Hebrews that contrasted so sharply with his threats to Nehemiah left Nehemiah with an ongoing concern over Jerusalem's safety even after the wall was finished, Nehemiah 7:1-4:
 1. Even after the Jerusalem wall was completed, Nehemiah set up the wall's gate doors and protectively had them opened for a limited time each day and closed and barred before nightfall, delegating this activity only to a trusted relative and to the ruler of the palace that guarded the temple site, Nehemiah 7:1-3.
 2. Nehemiah also noted that the city area was large, that only a few people lived in it and that its houses had not yet been built, so he was concerned about the city's ongoing vulnerability to attack, Nehemiah 7:4.
- II. God thus led Nehemiah to a solution to end Tobiah's dangerous influence through heeding Scripture:**
 - A. The Lord moved Nehemiah to register the Hebrew people according to their genealogies, Nehemiah 7:5a NIV.
 - B. This move spurred the people to desire to have their Old Testament Scriptures read to them that they might renew their commitment to support their heritage that was taught and recorded in those Scriptures, Neh. 8:1.

- C. When those Scriptures were then read to the people, the Law's directives against marital unions with Gentiles motivated the Hebrews to repent of their mixed marriages and put away their Gentile spouses, Neh. 9:1-2.
- D. The fulfillment of this directive would have ended Tobiah's marital ties and thus ended his influence on Nehemiah's fellow Hebrews, in turn solving the threat to Jerusalem's welfare that so bothered Nehemiah!

Lesson: *To end the dangerous influence Nehemiah's Gentile foe Tobiah had with fellow Hebrews due to Tobiah's marital ties with them, God led Nehemiah to register his countrymen by their genealogies, spurring their interest in Scripture that in turn led them to end their marital ties with Tobiah and thus end his ominous influence on them.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-11. (2) If facing troubling, ungodly influences on fellow believers, may we emphasize appealing Scriptural truths to such believers to spur them unto the holiness that ends the bad influence.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

In applying this sermon to the question of whether dispensationalism is true, I need to appeal to my hearers in a way that motivates them to rise above unfair and false charges made against dispensationalists or dispensationalism. To that end, I know that were I to show **Jesus'** view on dispensationalism, that would influence my hearers to adopt His view since they trust in Him as God Incarnate and Savior! ***We thus present Christ's view on dispensationalism:***

(1) First, we note that a **sure** mark of one who holds to dispensationalism, a "*sine qua non*" of this theology, is that he distinguishes Israel from the Church (Ibid., Ryrie, p. 44): theological expert on the subject, Dr. Charles C. Ryrie, wrote that a "dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct" (Ibid.), and "(a) man who fails to distinguish Israel and the Church will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions . . ." (Ibid., p. 45)

(2) We apply this *sine qua non* of dispensationalism to Jesus' teachings to discern His view on it (as follows):

(a) Just before heading up to Jerusalem for His suffering and death (Matthew 20:17-19), in Matthew 19:27-28 KJV we read: "Then answered Peter and said unto him [Jesus], Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Jesus at that time was expecting a literal Messianic Kingdom for Israel.

(b) Later, at the Last Supper in Jerusalem the night before His death (Luke 22:15-20), Jesus in Luke 22:28-30 KJV told His disciples: "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Once again, Jesus **repeated** His teaching that His disciples would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in a still expected coming literal Kingdom of Israel.

(c) In Acts 1:5-8 KJV after Christ's resurrection and just before His ascension to heaven in Acts 1:9, the disciples asked Him (Acts 1:6b): "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Had Jesus intended to replace Israel with the Church as to the fulfillment the Kingdom promises like Amillennialism teaches, at this point in time with the disciples asked this question, He had opportunity to correct their belief by telling them that the Church was replacing Israel with the Kingdom promises. However, ***instead of correcting His disciples***, Jesus replied in Acts 1:7-8 KJV, "It is not for you to know the **times** or the **seasons**, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ["but rather," translating the Greek particle *alla*, a strong adversative, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 416] ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and In Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." So, even ***after His resurrection, Jesus did not deny a literal future Kingdom for Israel***, but He said that His disciples would not ***then experientially know*** (*ginosko*, Ibid.; T. D. N. T., vol. I, p. 689-714) its *time*, ***BUT RATHER*** (the strong adversative *alla*) that they were to disciple the nations, the **Church's** role! ***Jesus thus taught that the Church era would occur first followed sometime later by Israel's literal Kingdom.***

(d) Since ***Jesus distinguished Israel with its Kingdom promises from the Church***, He did what **only a dispensationalist** does, so **Jesus is a dispensationalist!** We should follow our Lord and hold to dispensationalism!

(3) Accordingly, and just as important, as classic dispensationalists, we should **also** hold to the consistently "literal, normal, or plain interpretation" of Scripture (Ibid., Ryrie, p. 96), what Jesus did in Mark 12:18-27 and what delivers us from inevitable errant man-made theology and its resulting errant living!

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. When facing troubling influences on God's people, may we emphasize Scriptural truths that spur God's people unto holy living that ends the troubling influences that affect them.