

# Broken and Restored

## *An Exposition of Nehemiah*

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### **Introduction**

As we prepare to study Nehemiah it is important to answer this question: "Why was the temple and system of worship in Jerusalem such a big deal?" Ezra and Nehemiah certainly thought so. They devoted themselves for years to rebuilding the physical plant that serves as the shadow for the real temple of God: His Church. That is why we will begin our study of Nehemiah by looking back to Exodus.

Have you ever known someone who lived in a "fixer-upper?" I'm not talking about a house that needs a little bit of paint or has worn out carpet in a few of the bedrooms. I'm talking about the kind of house where the only running water is through the roof in a rain. I'm talking about the kind of place with air-conditioning from broken windows and a view of the junkyard.

What do you think God's place looks like? If you were charged with contacting a realtor for God to find a place for Him to live, what would the spec sheet look like? I know, you want to give the Sunday School answer. You want to talk about streets of gold or you envision Solomon's temple in all its glory. You might even be able to describe the finished tabernacle, whose plans we find in the text we are about to study.

But we need to focus on what God starts with. Creation began with nothing. The universe was unformed and unfilled. The tabernacle began with a wilderness. The Church that is the temple of the Holy Spirit began with people dead in their sins.

We tend to think that the holiness of God simply means that he is completely pure. He is that, but this is not the kind of God who's afraid to enter the parts of his creation that have fallen. That is why the angels can still cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of his glory." He chooses to put his glory in neighborhoods you may not want to visit. God specializes in turning tenements into temples.

If you're reading through the book of Exodus, you will see that there are two scenes before us as we make the transition from Chapter 24 to chapter 25. You sit in your chair with your Bible open looking at a couple million people standing at the foot of Mount Sinai and you see their leader entering into a cloud at the top of the same mountain. Chapter 24 pictures the people waiting at the foot of Mount Sinai, while Moses ascends into a place that appears dangerous. To the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the Lord is like a consuming fire on the mountain top where Moses went in. Chapter 25 records for us what Moses heard while he was there.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, blue, purple and scarlet *material*, fine linen, goat *hair*, rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breast piece. Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct *it*. (Exodus 25:1-9)

Where does God live, anyway? Consider some Scripture on the subject.

Creation is God's tent. Psalm 19 describes how the heavens declare the glory of God. It speaks of God placing in the heavens "a tent for the Sun."

The tabernacle in the wilderness was also his dwelling place. It was evidently patterned after God's creation. Psalm 78:69 says, "He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which He has founded forever."

The incarnation of Christ shed new light on the place God lives. The first chapter of the Gospel of John describes Jesus coming and pitching his tent among us. John 1:14 says "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." The New Testament shows that people, and groups of people (the Church) are the dwelling place of God.

God's ultimate dwelling place will be with men (Revelation 21:3).

### **The Lord Spoke to Moses**

Chapter 25 starts with the first of seven times in the balance of the book of Exodus that record the words, "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying..." This is evidence that Moses, who wrote the book of Exodus, wanted no credit for the commands found in the law.

### **The Hearts of Men Were Moved**

This text is all about God and his plans, not about men, but it is noteworthy that God used men to accomplish his plans once again. The material and articles and craftsmanship for the tabernacle were not simply to come from the people of Israel. They were to come from people of Israel whose hearts were moved. God is even glorified by destroying his enemies, but he has chosen to be glorified by his people when they give from willing hearts.

### **The Tabernacle Was Built**

Take note that the New American Standard Bible records that God ordered Israel to "construct a sanctuary for Me." The word "sanctuary" (*mikdosh*) comes from a word meaning "holy" or "set apart." The reason the tabernacle had to be "set apart" is because the One who dwelt there is "set apart." You could say that holy means "entirely other." The uniqueness of this tabernacle shows that its design was not of human origin.

### **The Lord Moved in**

Exodus chapter 40 records the picture of the glory of the Lord moving into the finished tabernacle. We are not there yet, but we do need to see that this tabernacle was designed to be lived in. Even an elementary knowledge of the Creator of the universe tells us that he cannot be contained in a tent or a temple, let alone the visible universe. Everything is in his presence. He has, however, chosen to put his glory in places we would not expect. God dwells in real places. Those places are places of his design. Those places are places where he lives and rules.

All through the Scripture you see the presence of God as a call to worship. When you find out where he lives you want to go there and meet with him. Moses did that.

**Here are three evidences from this text that the place God lives is a place to worship:**

1. Because it is the place where he stoops. Does this even need explanation? The God who made everything out of nothing condescends to his creation. More than that, he condescends to a creation that is in rebellion against him. Praise him for stooping.
2. Because it is the place where he rescues. The tabernacle was designed to be a bloody place. This is because the only rescue that will satisfy God is a bloody rescue. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Praise him for the rescue.
3. Because it is the place where he stays. The mistake a lot of Christians make is assuming the redemption story is all about their rescue from eternal judgment. That is why so many Christians get bored when they hear messages about the blood and messages about the tabernacle and messages about delighting in the God who saves. It is also the reason why so many Christians wallow in sins of the flesh, wondering why they cannot escape. Christian friend, your Savior bought the house when it was useless. He moved in. He does not stop the remodeling until it is a place worthy for him to live in. Praise him for the change he brings.

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