

Building the Temple

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The name of my sermon today is:

Building the Temple

I want you to imagine, if you can, a temple in your mind that is greater and even more beautiful than Solomon's temple when it was brand new. This temple is bright white, adorned with pure gold and at the heart of this temple is where God dwells. This temple—it's you and me—and it's where God desires to dwell. Yet, like any building, our temple is a work in progress. It requires constant attention, careful maintenance and occasionally, major restoration. It's a work in progress.

Thankfully, the Master Architect—Jesus Christ—is at work within us, using the blueprint of His Word to shape us into a glorious dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. In this sermon, we will be looking at stories in the Old Testament about the physical temples and tabernacle, and the intricate design of the tabernacle. The struggles that were faced in building the second temple and the laws surrounding these holy structures. We will find profound truths, practical application for building our own spiritual temples under the New Covenant.

I have this sermon broken down into four sections. We're going to begin with section 1 and it's appropriate because it is the spring Holy Days—a time of Passover. But even after Passover, the Israelites left Egypt and traveled for seven weeks to the mountain of Yehovah. Moses was called up to the top of the mountain and he was given instructions directly. I want to summarize some of how Exodus lays this out.

In Exodus 25, Yehovah begins by instructing Moses about the materials needed for the tabernacle and provides detailed plans for the Ark of the Covenant—the table for the bread of presence and the golden lamp stand.

In Exodus 26 includes instructions for the actual structure for the tabernacle. Including the curtains, the frames, and the veil that separates the holy of holies.

In Exodus 27, instruction continues with details on the altar of burnt offering and the courtyard around the tabernacle. It also includes commands about the oil for the lamp stand.

Exodus 28 is dedicated to the garments to be worn by the priests, particularly the High Priest, including the ephod, the breastplate and other sacred parts of his uniform, so to speak.

Exodus 29 describes the ordination of the priest and the sacrificial rituals that were to be performed to consecrate the priest and the altar.

Exodus 30, Yehovah gives Moses the designs for the altar of incense, the sences tax, the bronze basin for washing and the anointing oil and incense.

Exodus 31 concludes with God appointing Bezalel and Oholiab as the chief artisans for the construction of the tabernacle and everything associated with it. This chapter also includes a reaffirmation of the Sabbath.

The tabernacle was designed by Yehovah in intricate detail and the plan was given to Moses. Every detail has symbolism and these details are recorded for us because of their application to us. Let's go to Exodus 25:8.

Exodus 25:8 *And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. 9) According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it. (NKJV)*

Every detail held significance. The gold, acacia wood, the finely woven linen, each color and every pattern had symbolic meaning. Think of the Ark of the Covenant, overlaid with pure gold, serving as a sacred chest for the tablets of the Ten Commandments and the heart of the Holy of Holies. This was a constant reminder of God's covenant with His people. Or consider the lamp stand—an amazing piece of art work hammered from a single piece of gold, holding seven perpetually burning oil lights, symbolizing light and guidance.

These details tell us something crucial about our own spiritual temples. God has a design for us and how He wants to dwell in us. Our lives, shaped by the teaching and principles of the Bible become the structure that makes His presence possible. The pure gold of the Ark reminds us to build our lives with the integrity and the purity and the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The lamps encourage us to seek Jehovah's guidance. Wisdom, so that our lives become a beacon in the world.

Let's go to Matthew 5; you probably all have this scripture memorized by heart.

Matthew 5:14 *You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15) Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (NKJV)*

However, brethren, the story of the tabernacle also contains a sobering warning. Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, got caught up in a moment of zeal and failed to follow God's precise instructions. We'll take a closer look at this story beginning with just a short prelude. Leviticus 8 describes the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests, Aaron

being the High Priest. These were very, very specific instructions. Everything was being carefully orchestrated. Leviticus 9 describes the consecration of the new altar. Again, this was planned, orchestrated, and directed in meticulous detail. Let's read from Leviticus.

Leviticus 9:22 *Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings. 23) And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, 24) and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. (NKJV)*

Leviticus 10:1 *Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. 2) So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.'" ' So Aaron held his peace. (NKJV)*

This is a pretty sobering warning for us. If God is dwelling in us through His Spirit, how careful are we to be in making sure we're glorifying God with our thoughts and actions and following the pattern that we've been given? This example reminds us that honoring God requires obedience to His patterns and not substituting rituals of our own or preferences in our worship.

In section 2 of the sermon, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied extensively about the destruction of the nation in great detail. Let's go to Jeremiah and begin reading in chapter 25. This is an important prophecy because you have to understand how and why the temple that Solomon built was destroyed to understand about rebuilding the second temple.

Jeremiah 25:1 *The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), 2) which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: 3) "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, this is the twenty-third year in which the word of the LORD has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened. 4) And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. 5) They said, Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers forever and ever.*

- 6) *Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you.'*
- 7) *Yet you have not listened to Me," says the LORD, "that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.*
- 8) *"Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words,*
- 9) *behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, 'says the LORD, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations.*
- 10) *Moreover, I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.*
- 11) *And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.*
- 12) *Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, 'says the LORD; and I will make it a perpetual desolation. (NKJV)*

As we know, during the reign of Zedekiah—Jerusalem's last king—Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar. The temple that was constructed by Solomon with all of the materials that had been collected by David and a whole lot more was all destroyed along with the city and the walls. The city lay in rubble, uninhabited for seventy years.

Then after the seventy years expired, King Cyrus of Persia was inspired to have the temple in Jerusalem rebuilt. Let's look at Ezra 1:1.

- Ezra 1:1** *Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,*
- 2) *Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. (NKJV)*

Then in verse 5.

- 5) *Then the heads of the fathers 'houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.*
- 6) *And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered.*

7) King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; (NKJV)

Now the Israelites had the freedom and a mission. Freedom to go to Jerusalem and a mission to rebuild the temple. King Cyrus even returned valuable articles that had been taken from the temple. This was a pretty exciting time for the people returning to Jerusalem; they were excited. However, accomplishing their mission wasn't a smooth, easy process. They were challenged with many obstacles. Local adversaries disgruntled by their return, tried to undermine the project through a series of maneuvers and deceit. They sent letters with false accusations to halt construction. They hired counselors to lobby against them throughout the Persian Empire. These attacks chipped away at the morale of the builders. Let's look at Ezra 4:4.

Ezra 4:4 *Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building,
5) and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.
6) In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. (NKJV)*

So the temple project ground to a standstill for years. It lay unfinished, surrounded by the rubble of the desolation of Jerusalem.

Continuing in Verse 24)...

24) Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia. (NKJV)

This paints a vivid picture of the challenges we face in our own spiritual journey. We start out with excitement and determination, yet spiritual adversaries attack our resolve. This opposition may come in the form of external attacks, persecution, temptation, or internal struggles. Struggles with our own carnal nature. These challenges may leave us feeling vulnerable, demoralized and our spiritual growth stalled like a half-finished building project. Without strong defenses, we become susceptible to further damage. Through the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, God stirred the hearts of the people. Haggai confronted their complacency. Look at Haggai 1:1.

Haggai 1:1 *In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying,
2) Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built." ' ' '
3) Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying,*

4) *Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?"*

5) *Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!"*

6) *"You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.*

7) *Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! (NKJV)*

This challenge reignited their zeal and God provided encouragement through certain promises. Let's turn to Haggai 2:6.

Haggai 2:6 *For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land;*

7) *and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory, says the LORD of hosts.*

8) *The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine 'says the LORD of hosts.*

9) *The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former, 'says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace, 'says the LORD of hosts.'" (NKJV)*

Zechariah prophesied by what means the temple would be built, to be completed. Zechariah 4:6.

Zechariah 4:6 *So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, ' says the LORD of hosts. '(NKJV)*

Inspired by these prophecies, the people lead by Zerubbabel and the priest Jeshua resumed construction. You can read that in Ezra 5:1.

Ezra 5:1 *Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.*

2) *So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them. (NKJV)*

Now construction began again. Slowly, but surely, the temple was completed. The amazing truth for us today is that under the New Covenant, God doesn't dwell in buildings of stone. He dwells within His people. We are God's temple. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 3:16.

1 Corinthians 3:16 *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

17) *If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. (NKJV)*

How active are we in this building process? Look at John 15:5.

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (NKJV)*

Without Christ we can't do anything—we have no power over ourselves or over sin. Let's go to Philippians 4:10.

Philippians 4:10 *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 11) Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12) I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (NKJV)*

The key is understanding that our spiritual growth is a partnership with Christ, Who is our Passover, Who is our High Priest. He is the Master Builder, the one who is guiding us and empowering us. We still play an important role as well. We must actively engage in the project by using the tools we are given. Not unfamiliar tools—prayer, Bible study, meditation, fellowship, obedience, repentance. If we become passive or complacent then our spiritual temple suffers. Let's look at Philippians 2:12.

Philippians 2:12 *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13) for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (NKJV)*

We have to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling while remembering that it is God who works in us, to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Moving on to section 3, the enemies of the second temple project used various tactics, accusations, threats, and even political maneuvers to hinder God's work. That's pretty similar to spiritual adversaries who seek to sabotage our growth. Both from the outside and from the inside. External tactics may be obvious. Those trying to lead us astray. Proverbs 1:10.

Proverbs 1:10 *My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. (NKJV)*

Then it runs on to tell the story of joining a crowd of people and sharing a purse with evil intention. Although we may not be tempted to become bandits and robbers, there are still people who want us to join them and whatever they are doing—that doesn't match what God wants us to do.

There are various kinds of persecutions to our faith. Let's look at Matthew 5:10-12.

Matthew 5:10 *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness 'sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11) *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*

12) *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NKJV)*

What we believe—our doctrines—are not popular. If we rub the truth in somebody's face, it's offensive because it doesn't match what they believe and they don't want to hear it; they don't like us very much. In addition to spiritual enemies and persecution, there's this world's constant pressure to conform. Let's look at Romans 12. We have to not be seduced by this world's patterns.

Romans 12:2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (NKJV)*

All of these and more combine to create pressure and discouragement and attempt to demoralize us. However, the most dangerous debris often lies within us. The deceitfulness of sin can harden our hearts. Let's look at Hebrews 3:12 and look at the warning.

Hebrews 3:12 *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;*

13) *but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (NKJV)*

Compromise and sin can create a barrier between us and God. We can see that in Isaiah 59. This can interfere with the flow of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Isaiah 59:1 *Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear.*

2) *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear. (NKJV)*

Other spiritual enemies to watch out for are unresolved hurts that fester, transforming into bitterness; poisons our joy and erodes our trust in God. Our critical or judgmental spirit towards others blinds us to our own faults. Let's look at Matthew 7; Christ is speaking.

Matthew 7:3 *And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?*

- 4) *Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?*
- 5) *Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*
- 6) *Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. (NKJV)*

These internal obstacles hinder our building project. The book of Nehemiah primarily focuses on the restoration of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile and the reestablishment of the religious social order. I could not figure out a way to read certain scriptures throughout the book that would give a good overview. So, I'm just going to read a brief summary. It's important for what we're going to read after this.

Nehemiah served as the cup bearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia or Ahasuerus and learns that the walls of Jerusalem are in ruins and its gates have been burned. He requests the king's permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city's defenses. He was given authority and resources, he travels to Jerusalem and begins the task of rebuilding the walls, despite opposition from surrounding enemies.

Jameson, Faucet, and Brown places this in the same time period as Esther—just for context. Throughout the building process, Nehemiah and the Jews face significant resistance from neighboring groups who fear the implications of a fortified Jerusalem. Nehemiah organized the work while safeguarding the workers against planned attacks to stop the project. Nehemiah also addressed various social issues including economic hardships faced by the poorer Jews. He confronts the wealthy Jews about their exploitation of the poor, leading to reforms that included the cancellation of debts and the return of land to their owners. With the physical structure secured, Nehemiah turns his attention to restoring religious practices. Ezra the scribe plays a significant role. They read the book of the law and the people renew their covenant with Yehovah and that included commitments to obey the law, terminate marriages with idolatrous foreign wives, and support of the temple. Even with all the enemies and adversities they faced, the walls were completed in only 52 days. That's pretty amazing. The city walls then were dedicated with great celebration and the people were organized according to their genealogy.

Nehemiah, before he began the project, he started just by looking at all the rubble. Before he even announced his arrival there, he went and looked at all the rubble and the walls broken down. Before he could start the project, they had to clean up all of that. We constantly have to embark on our own clean up—a “spiritual clean up” project. Sometimes our good intentions fail. We fall back into unhealthy behaviors. The story of Nehemiah is that after he had rebuilt the walls and made major reforms and had the big party and everybody was excited, he went back to Persia. Later he comes back to Jerusalem to find a hot mess—a big hot mess with most of the reforms abandoned. We're going to read most of this part in Nehemiah 13:7. Nehemiah is pretty disappointed. He was proud when he left of all the work they had done. When he gets back, he's appalled.

Nehemiah 13:7 and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God.

8) And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room.

9) Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

10) I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field.

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

12) Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse.

13) And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren.

14) 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 its services!

15) In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions.

16) Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

17) Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?"

18) Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath." (NKJV)

Continuing in verse 22)...

22) And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!

23) In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.

24) And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.

25) So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, "You shall not give your

daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves.

26) Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, pagan women caused even him to sin.

27) Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?"

28) And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore, I drove him from me.

29) Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

30) Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service,

31) and to bringing the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times.

Remember me, O my God, for good! (NKJV)

I can't tell you how many times, having attended 50-plus Feasts of Tabernacles, how many times I went and was so moved by the messages. So excited, so much zeal, and committed to making some serious changes. I'm going to do more study and it was like New Year's resolutions from the Feast of Tabernacles. I'm going to reform my life. But then a few months later, the zeal goes away and the patterns that I had repented of would return back into my life. I know that all of us have experienced a time where we were so inspired to make big changes and then 6 months later, we kind of lost the zeal. Accepting responsibility and being accountable for everything we do, say, and think, is a vital step in aligning ourselves with truth. Let's look at 1 John 1:8.

1 John 1:8 *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

We have to be honest with ourselves, cultivating a spirit of humility. Trying to see ourselves as God sees us. Using His word as both a mirror and a model to see ourselves clearly. This is the protection we can have from the toxins of pride and shame. It keeps us dependent on Him. In Zechariah 4, we had the symbolism of the olive tree. We're not going to have time to read this, but Zechariah's vision pictures how our spiritual life is sustained. The lampstand shines brightly, only when it's continually supplied with oil from the two olive trees. The trees symbolize the lifegiving flow of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, our efforts are meaningless. (NKJV)

We previously read in Matthew 5, *Let your light so shine before men that they see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.* Staying intimately connected with God is ensuring the oil never runs dry. It means intentionally prioritizing prayer and Bible study where we pour out our hearts to Yehovah and we listen to His voice. Studying God's

word is how we receive wisdom and guidance, aligning our thoughts and actions with His will. The parable of the 10 virgins drives this point home, showing that our spiritual lives are dependent on the daily use of God's Spirit in our lives. This parable shows clearly that many of us who think we are okay, because we are in the right group, we believe the right things. We may be caught by surprise when the oil runs dry and the light goes out. I have a friend of mine that taught his children to memorize Psalm 119. If you look at how many verses there are, that is a huge feat and they could recite it word for word. Let's start in verse 104 of Psalm 119.

Psalm 119:104 *Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.*

105) Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

106) I have sworn and confirmed That I will keep Your righteous judgments.
(NKJV)

In addition, fellowship, encouragement, and obedience, provide spiritual nourishment. Neglecting all of these connections will dim our light, sap our strength, and hinder the building project. Nehemia's rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls shows there are a lot of lessons there. Offering us insight for building our inner defenses. A city without walls is a recipe for disaster. A spiritual life without strong defenses leaves us wide open to the enemy's attacks, schemes and temptations. Consider these three points on how we can build up our defenses against the enemy.

1. Discipline.

Consistent habits of prayer and Bible study form a protective barrier just like the physical walls of the city. This is about prioritizing the source of our strength. Let's look at Psalms 1:1.

Psalms 1:1 *Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;*

2) But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law, he meditates day and night. (NKJV)

When we neglect God's Word, we become spiritually malnourished and susceptible to compromise. Let's go back to Jeremiah 15, we're going to read just one verse.

Jeremiah 15:16 *Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.* (NKJV)

2. Discernment.

The enemy is cunning. We read in Genesis 3 that the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field that Yehovah had created.

Genesis 3:1 *Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (NKJV)*

What questions is Satan putting in our minds to create doubt? Discernment is like having a watchman on the wall who can spot threats early on. We learn to recognize the tactics—subtle twisting of God's truth, appealing to our lust and manipulating our emotions. The Bible equips us for spiritual warfare if we put on the whole armor of God every day. Let's go to Ephesians 6:10. It seems like this scripture has been read an awful lot recently, but I'll tell you, it is something that I read every morning because it's so important to be prepared for the day.

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

11) *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

12) *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

13) *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

14) *Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*

15) *and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;*

16) *above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*

17) *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; (NKJV)*

Something my dad always told me is (he blamed the Marine Corp for teaching it to him)

"Proper preparation prevents poor performance."

3. Accountability.

We are accountable to God for our thoughts and actions. Look at Romans 14:12-13.

Romans 14:12 *So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.*

13) *Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. (NKJV)*

Just as guards protect gates, having trusted mentors and brethren ensures that we don't have to face our battles alone. Accountability also allows us to be lovingly challenged, offer support through trials and helps us stay on track. We know the often-quoted Proverb—*As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.*

The Levitical laws teach us about the clean and unclean and keeping the temple pure. The laws surrounding purity may seem overly detailed at first, however they underscore profound truth. God takes the holiness of His dwelling place very, very seriously. We are reminded of the priests who underwent cleansing before performing temple rituals. Israelites, through ailment or unclean encounters, temporarily lost the privilege to worship at the temple. While we are no longer under these specific rituals, the need for spiritual purity and the defilement caused by sin—all of that remains very real. Sin pollutes our spiritual temple. We know during the Days of Unleavened Bread, leavening causes fermentation and that fermentation spreads. Just a little bit leavens the whole lump. This symbolizes the insidious, pervasive nature of sin. Sin spreads.

Our world offers a constant barrage of influences that are directly opposed to God's ways. Harmful entertainment that desensitizes us to immorality. If you flip on a risqué movie from the 1950's and compare it to PG today, it's not risqué. We have toxic social media that fosters envy and discontent. We have to carefully guard against what is entering into our minds and especially what seeps into our hearts, ensuring that our spiritual temple remains uncontaminated. Leviticus 23 meticulously laid out the Sabbath and the Holy Days. Just like the temple furniture needs dusting and polishing, these Holy Days provide times for rest, realignment, and spiritual restoration. Our own busy and challenging lives—these times of restoration are important for us to keep focusing on the meaning of each Holy Day. What it means depicting our path to salvation. Compromising on Sabbath, compromising on prayer and Bible study, leaves us spiritually tired and worn out by the world and susceptible to spiritual malnutrition. Even so, we all stumble. Repentance is the cleansing process for our spiritual temple. God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ is the only remedy for removing the stain of sin. Let's look at 1 John 1:9.

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (NKJV)*

We need that. Like the priest who examined themselves for blemishes before entering the temple, we need regular self-examination and honesty before Yehovah and Jesus Christ. We just must not allow our stubborn pride or shame to leave hidden patches of contamination. Repentance is a doorway to spiritual healing and ensures our temple remains a place where God wants to dwell. Zechariah 7—you don't need to turn there, just a reference—that whole chapter highlights God's disappointment in his people, who outwardly observed religious practices yet neglected compassion and care for the less fortunate. He blasted them. One of the reforms that Nehemiah made. All of us are part of the body of Christ. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 12:12.

1 Corinthians 12:12 *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.
13) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.
14) For in fact the body is not one member but many. (NKJV)*

Drop down to verse 27.

27) Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. (NKJV)

Building our individual temples also means actively fostering the building of a collective temple. Just as the strongest temple will eventually crumble if its stones are not well joined, knittly framed together, so the church becomes weakened through judgment, gossip and division. True strength comes from serving and upholding others with mercy, extending grace and humbly seeking reconciliation amidst conflict. Let's look at Matthew 5:21.

Matthew 5:21 *You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'*

22) But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Raca!' [which means empty-headed] shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool! 'shall be in danger of hell fire.

23) Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24) leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (NKJV)

How we treat other people is not only important, it is the metric by which we are judged. Let's look at Matthew 25:31-46.

Matthew 25:31 *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.*

32) All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

33) And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

34) Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35) for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;

36) I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

37) Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?

38) When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?

39) Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?

40) And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

41) "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

42) *for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;*
43) *I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'*
44) *Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'*
45) *Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'*
46) *And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'* (NKJV)

The journey of constructing our spiritual temples is never done. It is a lifelong pursuit. It is filled with victories but also obstacles and setbacks. Just as God provided meticulous instructions for the tabernacle, He has given us His Word as our blueprint. Yet, challenges along the way are inevitable. As the rebuilding of the second temple so clearly demonstrates, whether external attacks or internal struggles, they seek to wear us down—wear us out. We cannot afford to become discouraged like the builders of the second temple in Jerusalem, leaving our spiritual temple in ruins. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah remind us of the source of true strength. The ever-flowing oil of the Holy Spirit. It is by remaining rooted in Jesus Christ, through prayer, study, practice and fellowship, that we have the power to persevere. Furthermore, we have to build up our inner walls. Cultivating the disciplined discernment and accountability necessary to withstand the spiritual assaults.

The Master Builder is at work in us, yet we play a critical role to continually clear away the debris. The debris of sin and pride. We can't give up, we cannot slow down, we cannot be discouraged. Every challenge is an opportunity to rely more and more on Yehovah and become stronger through His Spirit. Working hand in hand with Jesus Christ, Who is our Passover. He's our High Priest. By actively participating in this building project, we can become beacons of light that inspire others. So let everything that we do, say, and think, reflect the New Covenant Temple that God is building and become a testament to His work that's inside each of us.