

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
June 23, 2016

Nehemiah 6:1–7:65. The schemes against the Jews and completion of the doors.

1 John 5:1–5. The victory of faith and the 3 essential theological virtues.

Psalms 109:16–31. Prayer for help according to God’s mercy and for His glory.

COMMENTS:

Nehemiah 6:1–7:65. In chapter 6 we have various schemes against the Jewish completion of hanging of the doors, which was the only thing remaining for security. 6:1-4 records the assassination plot against Nehemiah as they attempted to get him to come to the plain of Ono. But prudent Nehemiah recognized their motive. Why would they want him to meet them a day’s journey away from Jerusalem, where he would certainly be outnumbered and vulnerable to foul play? If they wanted a peace conference, they could just meet him in Jerusalem. The second scheme is found in 6:5-9; it consists of slander regarding Nehemiah’s intent to set himself up as king of the Jews, which in turn would be a threat to King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah’s response in 6:8-9 is to deny the rumor and to turn to God in prayer for strength. 6:10-14 notes the third scheme involving treachery designed to destroy the credibility of Nehemiah. Nehemiah discerned two flaws in Shemaiah’s so-called prophecy. First, God would hardly ask Nehemiah to run when the project on the walls was nearing completion. Second, no true prophet would ask someone to violate God’s Law. Only priests were allowed in the sanctuary (Num. 3:10; 18:7). If Nehemiah, not being a priest, entered the temple, he would have desecrated it and brought himself under God’s judgment. He would not disobey God to try to gain safety from his enemies. Nehemiah was convinced that Shemaiah was a false prophet, employed by Tobiah and Sanballat to trick him. If the governor had entered the temple and lived, his people would know he disregarded God’s commands. Once again Nehemiah prayed, this time that God would remember his enemies and judge them for their evil scheming. As noted in a previous lesson, imprecatory prayers for national survival of God’s people is perfectly legitimate. Following these three failed attempts to thwart the completion of the Jewish project, Nehemiah oversees the completion of the project. Notice Nehemiah’s wisdom in seeing the long-term needs of the community. The wall was necessary, but Jerusalem was not safe if it was under populated. Apparently, the people preferred to live in the surrounding villages and not in Jerusalem. Moreover, Nehemiah makes clear that his census was approved by God (7:5), indicating that national census in and of itself as a principle is not an evil (theoretical knowledge)—it all depends on the circumstances (practical knowledge). It certainly was evil in David’s case as per 1 Chron. 21:1 because it was motivated by Satan.

1 John 5:1–5. John continues with his theme of love for God and for fellow believers as core required tenets of Christianity. But are they beyond the capacity of believers? In this section John points to faith as the secret of a victorious, obedient life (5:3-5). He notes in principle that God's commands are not burdensome. Moreover, he points to faith as the principle of victory. Faith enables one to overcome the entire world. He is indicating that faith is the secret to all victory past, present, and future. This is easier to grasp when one understands the metaphysics of faith. Faith is a perfection of the intellect, not the will as commonly believed. It is by faith that the believer is able to see and live in the invisible realities of God: Hebrews 11:1 *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* Faith enables the believer to overcome because only through faith can the believer live in the eternal perspective (Heb. 11:39). Of course, with true faith (living and vibrant cognition of the reality of God) comes love and hope, both of which perfect the will. Faith perfects or completes the intellect with knowledge that otherwise could not be known; and hope and love perfect or complete the will with regard to God and the things of God. The theological virtues of faith, hope, and love differ from other virtues in that they take God as their immediate and direct object. This is why there is no *spiritual* life apart from these three theological virtues, which in effect expand attributes of the believer rather than run through him in conduit fashion, which is why there is no spiritual life apart from corresponding natural or acquired virtues. Moreover, faith, hope, and love are not virtues that the believer can turn on or off by self-will or by some spiritual formula. God gives them directly in response to a believer's true attitude toward Him as such. It is absolutely absurd to think that God will magically give faith (knowledge of the supernatural) to a believer who does not want it, or hope to a believer who does not look forward to being with the Lord, or love to a believer who really does not care much about the Lord for His own sake. For God to do so would absolutely destroy free will and thus the nature of man himself. The chief obstacle in all of our lives that block the grace of God from filling us with an overabundance of faith, hope, and love is our own pertinacious ways. We are all far too willful for our own good.

Psalm 109:16–31. This Davidic psalm that is filled with imprecations ends with David praying to God for divine aid. He approaches God on the basis of God's loyal love (אֱהָבָה) and with a desire that God would be glorified: Psalm 109:27, *That they may know that this is Your hand-- That You, LORD, have done it!* All of our prayers for deliverance should never really be so much about our comfort level—they are to all be oriented to the glory of God first and foremost. Ultimately, we are here for God, not vice versa.

Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Pastor Don