

Editorial: Proclaim the Whole Counsel of God

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Second Timothy 3:16 is one of the most foundational texts regarding an evangelical view of Scripture. In it, the apostle Paul reminds us that all Scripture is nothing less than God's own breathed-out Word, graciously given to us in order to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, and thus able thoroughly to equip the man of God, and by extension the people of God, for every good work. Interestingly, however, what we often forget is that the Scripture to which Paul is referring in this text is the OT. No doubt it is legitimate to appeal to this text to argue for the inspiration of both the OT and NT. At the time Paul penned this letter, the NT canon was in the process of being written. But with that said, we must not lose sight of the fact that Paul viewed the OT as fully authoritative, sufficient to lead us to Christ Jesus, and the church neglects it to her peril.

Even though most of us would agree with what has been said, it is a sad fact that too many of our churches neglect the OT. Unfortunately, many among us have only a cursory knowledge of it. For the most part, we have been taught various stories and moral lessons from the OT, which serve to instruct us how and how not to live our Christian lives. But what we often lack is an understanding of how these OT stories first fit into the larger story of God's redemptive plan and purposes centered in Jesus Christ and, secondly, how they apply to us today. It is important to remember that Scripture does not come to

us all at once. Rather, God has graciously chosen to reveal himself progressively to us over time, along a redemptive-historical storyline, ultimately centered in Jesus Christ (cf. Heb 1:1-2), and our reading and application of Scripture must take this into consideration. Otherwise we will misread and misapply Scripture. Thus, in reading any text, including the OT, we not only exegete it in terms of its syntax, context, historical setting, and genre, but we must also understand that text in light of its place in God's unfolding plan, and, finally, where it is in light of the coming of Christ, that is, the entire canonical context. It is only when we do so that we learn to read Scripture according to its divine intention. But it is *this* point that is often neglected in our reading of Scripture and particularly the OT. That is why for many of us, the OT only serves as a book of illustrations and examples that has little to do with present-day Christian faith and practice.

In this Bible study edition of *SBJT*, we want to take a small step forward in remedying this problem by thinking through the book of Nehemiah—in terms of its context, message, and place in the canon of Scripture—as it, along with the entire OT, makes us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:15). While for many of us, Nehemiah has only served to illustrate lessons of leadership or give us incentive for our new building programs, our authors demonstrate that God has given us this book for more

reasons than this.

T. J. Betts begins our discussion of Nehemiah by first setting the historical background to the book—recounting the historical circumstances surrounding the fall of the northern kingdom, Israel, and then the fall and restoration of the southern kingdom, Judah. Obviously knowing the context of the book is the first step in grasping its message. Tiberius Rata continues our discussion by outlining a theological overview of the book, focusing predominantly on what Nehemiah has to teach us about God, God’s people, and our enemies.

The next two articles by Peter Gentry and Stephen Dempster, respectively, help us in at least two ways. First, they help us grasp the message of the book by describing the historical and literary context of Nehemiah. But, secondly and more importantly, they wonderfully set the book within its larger canonical context so that we learn afresh how Nehemiah should be read and applied to us today, as those living in light of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, they help us see that Nehemiah is more than a mere story about a great man who saw himself as a leader and repairer of a broken wall many years ago. Instead, they rightly argue that to understand the book correctly, we must view Nehemiah as one who saw himself within the context of a divine plan for the world; indeed, one who saw himself as playing a small part in rebuilding the city of God. Yet this would eventually lead to a greater one to come—one who would not merely build a city, but one who would build a new community, a heavenly Jerusalem in fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham of old, in his glorious redemptive work of which we are now the beneficiaries.

Nehemiah, then, when understood in light of the storyline of the entire Bible, has important relevance for us today as we live in light of the one to whom Nehemiah pointed, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, Russell Fuller and Mark Dever round out our discussion of Nehemiah. Russell Fuller focuses on lessons we may learn from Ezra as a priest, scribe, and teacher, and Mark Dever gives us a sermon that beautifully illustrates how one may preach an entire book in one message with the goal of helping the people of God to grasp the “big picture” instead of the fragmentary pieces.

In all of these articles, it is my prayer that we will not only better understand the book of Nehemiah, an important book of the OT, but also that we will learn rightly how to divide the Word of truth, to proclaim the whole counsel of God, and to discover afresh how all of Scripture, whether OT or NT, leads us to our great and glorious Redeemer.