

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR NERSES BALABANIAN

## Two Walls' Protection

by Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian  
Pasadena, CA

Nehemiah 8:1-10; James 1:22-24

The historical book of Nehemiah recounts the lives of God's people following their return from the Babylonian exile. Through its factual accounts, the book offers insights into how the people adapted to a new life in their ancestral land after enduring decades of captivity. It also sheds light on their spiritual revival after a period of disconnect from God and His laws.

In 444 B.C., pursuant to a decree from the Babylonian king, the people of God commenced their journey back to their homeland, only to find it in ruins and in need of extensive restoration efforts. Various aspects such as housing, urban planning, social welfare, defense, and most crucially, spiritual revival, were required.

Nehemiah played a pivotal role in this process. Initially, he focused on reinforcing the physical defenses of the people by rebuilding the gates and walls of Jerusalem, recognizing their significance in a hostile geographical context. Nehemiah 7:1-3 describes the efforts made to secure physical fortifications including walls, fortresses, guards, and gatekeepers (referred to as "Shomer" in Hebrew). Subsequently, funds were raised to bolster the treasury, as depicted in Nehemiah 7:7-72. Visionary leaders prioritized the two essential components of national security: physical fortification and financial stability.

Chapter 8 of the book reveals a significant spiritual event wherein the Law of God is presented and read to the gathered multitude near the temple courtyard. This spiritual aspect served as a vital counterpart to the physical defenses, gates, and financial resources. It acted as a spiritual firewall safeguarding against the attacks of spiritual adversaries, notably the devil and his agents.

The description of the ceremony in Nehemiah 8:1-10 offers intriguing insights into this pivotal moment in the spiritual rejuvenation of God's people.

*"Now all the people came together as one man" (Neh. 8:1, NIV).* The metaphorical imagery of being "one man" underscores the unity required in worshiping God. Despite their diverse backgrounds, mindsets, and life experiences, the assembled multitude presented a unified front, embodying the unity desired by God among His followers who acknowledge Him as their Lord and are eager to receive His teachings.

The crowd requested Ezra the scribe to bring forth the Book of the Law of God, which the Lord had given to the Israelites (Neh. 8:2). Presumably, this was either the same book or a copy recovered from the temple during its restoration under Ezra's leadership.

The people's enthusiasm for hearing from the "Book of the Law" indicates their recognition of its significance. During their exile, they must have learned from their ancestors how the law given by Moses had provided them with a spiritual identity, established moral guidelines, instructed them in God's will, and promised blessings for obedience, as outlined in Deut. 30:15-16.

Furthermore, the congregation's attentive posture is highlighted by the six-hour duration they spent standing to hear the Scriptures. This dedication of time is notable, indicating a deep hunger for the content and an expectation of something life-changing. While people often allocate time for various activities like listening to lectures, watching movies, or attending concerts, spending six hours standing to listen to the Book of the Law of God signifies a profound desire for spiritual nourishment and transformation.

Another intriguing aspect is the construction of a special platform, or pulpit, for Ezra's purposeful reading of the Scriptures (Neh. 8:4). Similar platforms are still present in European churches, symbolizing the inherent authority of the Word of God, which should be proclaimed from above.

When the people responded with "Amen, Amen!" and lifted their hands, bowed their heads, and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground, it signified their

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## 2024 PACC EVENTS

|                            |               |
|----------------------------|---------------|
| Mother's Day.....          | May 12        |
| Memorial Day               |               |
| Picnic .....               | May 26        |
| Graduation Elevation.....  | June 2        |
| Congregational Meeting.... | June 9        |
| Summer Student             |               |
| Mission Trip .....         | June 11-26    |
| Father's Day .....         | June 16       |
| Vacation                   |               |
| Bible School.....          | July 28-Aug 1 |
| Rally (Renewal)            |               |
| Sunday.....                | Sept.8        |
| Harvest Banquet.....       | Oct.12        |
| Thanksgiving .....         | Nov. 24       |
| Congregational             |               |
| Budget Meeting.....        | Dec. 1        |
| Christmas Worship          |               |
| Celebration.....           | Dec. 22       |
| Christmas Eve Service..... | Dec. 24       |

## Bible Study Opportunities

### OFFERED WEEKLY

#### Sunday

Sunday School for Children  
(Nursery available)  
.....9:15-10:15am

#### Wednesday

Ladies Morning .....10-11am  
UthGrup, High School ....6-7pm  
College ..... 7:30-8:30pm

#### Thursday

Young Adult.....7-8pm

#### Friday

TGIF Bible Study with Breakfast  
for Men.....7-8am  
Journey to Resilience..... 10am  
UthGrup, Middle School 6-7pm

### OFFERED MONTHLY

**May 1:** Tabitha Circle..... 10:30am

**May 15:** Dorcas Guild Circle  
(Overflow Room) .....12:45pm

**May 18:** Home Builders  
(Overflow Room) ..... 6pm

Pray for our youth on  
their summer mission  
trip to Armenia  
(June 11-26)

Pray for our Annual  
Congregational Meeting  
Sunday, June 2

## Two Walls' Protection

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affirmation of the truth and authenticity of the Word being declared. By saying "Amen," they submitted themselves to the authority of the Scriptures and committed to obeying its decrees for life.

Following the reading, Levites, as the priestly order among the people, continued to read and explain the Scripture to the congregation, highlighting the importance of present-day elders of the churches as lay teachers who need to assist ordained leaders in interpreting the Bible's message, especially if they lead small life-groups in the churches.

Lastly, the people were instructed to rejoice, partake in choice food and sweet drinks, and share with those in need, recognizing that the joy of the Lord is their strength (Neh. 8:10).

Reflecting on our own reception of Scripture, James 1:22-25 exhorts believers to be doers of the Word, not just hearers. Scripture serves to bring self-awareness and prompts action for blessing.

### Pray for the Armenian Evangelical Church of Gyumri PACC's Sister Church in Armenia

On March 30, Badveli Nerses, Sevan and Pilgrim Church members and members from the Evangelical Church in Gyumri, Armenia met via Zoom. This was the first tele-meeting since Rev. Aram Babajanyan's visit to Fresno.

Badveli Aram shared a devotion based on 2 Corinthians 15:13-23. He stated that Easter is a time to rejoice in the Resurrection of Christ, with all the churches in the world.

He asked, "Why is the Resurrection so important? Why would we rejoice with other churches?" Badveli Aram stated that the importance of the resurrection is not about the resurrection itself, but about the resurrection of Christ, because in the resurrection of Christ, we see God's hand. By raising Jesus from the dead, He confirms that Jesus is His son, and His ministry is authentic. God ensures us that He sent Christ, and the resurrection was His will.

He also stated that God shows us something else through the resurrection of Christ. Jesus is called the second Adam. Because the first Adam did not do the will of God, but the second Adam

The Word of God serves as the voice of truth, much like a mirror reflects our outer appearance. It informs us about who we are and the state of our spiritual lives, offering suggestions for transformation while leaving the decision to us. Like a mirror, it continually updates its image to reflect our current spiritual condition.

In conclusion, as we navigate through life, we often strive to fortify the first type of walls—building careers, financial security, social circles, and plans for the future. Similarly, as Armenians, we've pursued the same for our country, achieving independence in 1991. However, without the construction of the second wall—spiritual security grounded in the wisdom of the Word—the first wall remains vulnerable and ultimately meaningless. History reminds us that even the Great Wall of China was breached numerous times due to compromised guards. Therefore, it's imperative to safeguard ourselves, our families, our churches, and our communities with this Spiritual Wall that comes for the Word of God, that Jesus Christ has ultimately personified it through His incarnation and glorification. Amen.

did. God says that the second Adam is living. He is victorious over death. God opens the way so all can have resurrection. It is important for the church – that if Christ is living by the will of God, and has the spirit of the second Adam, there is no death. Through the resurrection of Christ, the church will not die – for which we are grateful.

#### MARCH 30 PRAYER REQUESTS:

- Thankful to God for giving Badveli Aram the opportunity to visit the U.S.
- During this difficult time in Armenia whatever we do, we remain faithful servants and grow in commitment.
- During the Easter celebrations, we remember the meaning of why we are celebrating; and for those who do not celebrate Easter, that we pray for them to know Jesus and His sacrifice for us.
- PACC Youth Mission Trip to Gyumri, that it will be a blessing for EC of Gyumri and PACC.
- For Armenia's government to use wisdom, with good hearts, to address the many issues before them. — Roseann Emerzian Saliba



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### BIRTH

**Anna Victoria Rettig** – March 28, 2024

Parents: Michael and Rocio Rettig

Grandparents: John and Cindy Rettig

**Emilia Virginia Rettig & Ellis Ravicchio Rettig** – April 3, 2024

Parents: Andrew and Shelby Rettig

Grandparents: John and Cindy Rettig

### DEDICATION

**Stephan Petrosyan** – February 5, 2023

Father: David; Mother: Angi

**Nikos Yahnian** – October 8, 2023

Father: Jordan; Mother: Nina

Grandmother: Zepur Geuvjehizian

### WITH SYMPATHY

**Lucille Louise Lynch** – April 21, 2024

Phyllis Branche's aunt

*Well done, good and faithful servant.*

*You have been faithful over a little;*

*I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*

*(Matthew 25:21)*

## MODERATOR'S REPORT

The April Council meeting included items related to the Annual Congregational Meeting scheduled for June 9. Nominating Committee representative Jerry Janigian presented recommended names for the slate of candidates, which the Council unanimously endorsed. The Council was thankful for the thoughtful work of the Nominating Committee in filling the open positions on the Committees and Boards for the upcoming term. We also received a written report from Kathleen Melikian regarding the Kufta fundraiser for the Youth Mission Trip to Armenia. This was a grassroots effort by 28 volunteers. Over 100 dozen Kufta were prepared and sold, raising approximately \$5,000 for the mission trip. I can confirm through taste testing that the Kufta was incredibly delicious! A special thank you to Kathleen Melikian and Joyce Kierejczyk for leading this endeavor and to all the volunteers for their time and donations to this culinary fundraising success!

– Moderator Cristel Tufenkjian



## JOIN US FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL!

We preceded the month of April by celebrating the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. Many children and families attended the service and participated in the annual Easter Egg Hunt. During our lessons in April, we began studying the book of Acts as we continue our journey through the New Testament. On April 12, our Sunday School families, teachers, and assistants had the opportunity to visit the ministry we're supporting, Rapha Ranch. Everyone who attended got to meet Ariel, the director, and the horses. The children got to learn more about the ministry and the horses, fill out worksheets, and do a craft. They also got to ride two of the horses named Jireh and Dakota. We are still accepting donations if you feel led to give. This summer, we will be having Vacation Bible School July 28 through August 1 so be sure to save those dates in your calendar. The theme for VBS this year is Breaker Rock Beach where Romans 12:2 will be highlighted. We hope to see everyone there.

– Julia Eriztian



**BREAKER ROCK BEACH**

GOD'S ROCK-SOLID TRUTH IN A WORLD OF SHIFTING SANDS  
ROMANS 12:2

[pilgrimvbs.com](http://pilgrimvbs.com)

**Save the Dates!**  
**Jul 28<sup>th</sup> – Aug 1<sup>st</sup>**  
5:30 – 8:00pm



# Christian Women of First Street Luncheon

Overcast skies and rain in the forecast did not stop more than 120 women and two supportive gentlemen from churches up and down First Street from gathering in the Pilgrim Social Hall for Dorcas Guild's annual Christian Women of First Street luncheon. This much anticipated event is an opportunity for women from different church families to meet other women of faith and share a simple yet delicious meal. At least seven churches were represented this year – surely more, as many guests' church affiliations are not known.

This year's speaker was **Joan Minasian**, a leadership development professional in the Central Valley's non-profit sector. Joan's passion for prayer shone brightly throughout her testimony. During her journey through breast cancer, she was



gifted with a prayer shawl—every knitted stitch is a prayer for the recipient. She has since made prayer shawls for others. Each one offers the recipient a tangible comfort, an infusion of prayer from someone who cares about them, and encouragement in their own prayer life. Joan encouraged anyone in attendance in need of prayer to write it down and drop it in her basket so she can pray for us!

Even as the cold drizzle began, we closed the luncheon with our hand in hand prayer circle. Rather than our traditional courtyard circle under a spring sky, we formed our circle in the social hall for silent prayer. We had been informed at the last minute that the pastor from the Serbian Church who always rings his church bells for us was ill that day and so we would have no bells. As with the weather, we were disappointed but not deterred. Amazingly just as we finished our prayer time – bells could be heard ringing in the distance! Amen.  
– Kathleen Melikian




## Pilgrim Youth On A Six Flags' Adventure

I would absolutely love to start this off by saying thank you to my Badveli Nerses and Badveli Kevin for giving us the opportunity to go to Six Flags. It was April 1 and Badveli Kevin drove the nine of us in a rented van. I was so excited for this trip because I've always wanted to go to Six Flags, but I never could. This was a unique experience for me because I love scary rides and I've never rode anything as scary and fun rides as I did at Six Flags. One of the rides there is called "Tatsu" and we waited almost three hours in the line but it was worth it. Going to Six Flags with some church friends and Badveli Kevin was definitely a great and funny group to go with and for that I thank God.

I really love my church, my Pastors, and the community there. I'm very grateful that our Pastors gave us this amazing, unique, and fun experience. I'm glad God never gave up on me and made me who I am today. For I am so happy to now always be involved with the church and have a chance to help them. I pray that our church always has an event/trip where we can help them, they can help us, or even have fun like this Six Flags trip. Amen.

– Eric Petrosyan



| SUNDAY   | MONDAY   | TUESDAY  | WEDNESDAY   | THURSDAY   | FRIDAY  | SATURDAY   |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|--|
|  <b>PACC</b><br><b>CALENDAR OF EVENTS</b><br><b>May 2024</b>                                      |  |  |   |  |   |  |
|  |  |  | <b>10:00 am</b> Women's Bible Study, Room 6<br>9:30am Dorcas Guild-Set up, Social Hall<br><b>6:00 pm</b> High School Bible Study<br><b>7:30 pm</b> College Bible Study  | <b>7:00 pm</b> Young Adult Bible Study   | <b>7:00 am</b> TGIF, Fireside Room<br><b>10:00 am</b> Journey to Resilience, Room 5<br><br><b>6:00 pm</b> Junior High Bible Study | <b>10:30 am</b> Tabitha Circle,  |
| <b>9:15 am</b> Sunday School<br><b>9:15 am</b> Parenting Fellowship<br><b>10:30 am</b> Worship Service /Communion  | <b>6</b>   | <b>7</b>   | <b>7:00 am</b> Men's Forum Executive Board Meeting<br><b>10:00 am</b> Women's Bible Study, Room 6<br><br><b>6:00 pm</b> High School Bible Study<br><b>7:30 pm</b> College Bible Study                                 | <b>7:00 pm</b> Young Adult Bible Study   | <b>7:00 am</b> TGIF, Fireside Room<br><b>12:00-3:30 pm</b> FUSD<br><br><b>6:00 pm</b> Junior High Bible Study                     | <b>11</b>  |
| <b>MOTHER'S DAY</b><br><b>9:15 am</b> Sunday School<br><b>9:15 am</b> Parenting Fellowship<br><b>10:30 am</b> Worship Service, Children's Message<br><b>11:45 am</b> Misston Meeting | <b>8:00-4:00 pm</b> FUSD<br><b>10:00 am</b> Dorcas Guild Executive Meeting.                                | <b>7:00-4:00 pm</b> FUSD   | <b>7:00-4:00 pm</b> FUSD<br><b>10:00 am</b> Women's Bible Study, Room 6<br><b>12:45 pm</b> Dorcas Guild Wednesday Circle, Library<br><br><b>6:00 pm</b> High School Bible Study<br><b>7:30 pm</b> College Bible Study | <b>7:00 pm</b> Young Adult Bible Study   | <b>7:00 am</b> TGIF, Fireside Room<br><b>10:00 am</b> Journey to Resilience, Room 5<br><br><b>6:00 pm</b> Junior High Bible Study | <b>18</b>  |
| <b>9:15 am</b> Sunday School<br><b>9:15 am</b> Parenting Fellowship<br><b>10:30 am</b> Worship Service)<br><b>3:00 pm</b> Piano Recital, Sanctuary                                   | <b>Pilgrim's Progress Articles Due</b><br><b>12:30-5:30 pm</b> FUSD  | <b>6:00 pm</b> Deacons, Fireside<br><b>6:30 pm</b> CE Meeting, Library<br><b>6:30 pm</b> Trustees, Overflow Room | <b>9:00 am-2:00 pm</b> FUSD<br><b>10:00 am</b> Women's Bible Study, Room 6<br><br><b>6:00 pm</b> High School Bible Study<br><b>7:30 pm</b> College Bible Study  | <b>7:00 pm</b> Young Adult Bible Study<br><br><b>12:30-5:30 pm</b> FUSD<br><br><b>7:00 pm</b> Young Adult Bible Study  | <b>7:00 am</b> TGIF, Fireside Room<br><br><b>6:00 pm</b> Junior High Bible Study  | <b>25</b>  |
| <b>Badveli Nurses Is on Vacation</b>   |  |  |   |  |   |  |
|  | <b>26</b><br><b>9:15 am</b> Sunday School<br><b>10:30 am</b> Worship Service<br><b>Memorial Day Picnic</b> | <b>27</b><br><b>MEMORIAL DAY</b><br><b>OFFICE/GFLC CLOSED</b>  | <b>28</b><br><b>8:00-4:00 pm</b> FUSD<br><br><b>6:30 pm</b> Council Meeting, Overflow   | <b>29</b><br><b>8:00-4:00 pm</b> FUSD<br><b>10:00 am</b> Women's Bible Study, Room 6<br><br><b>6:00 pm</b> High School Bible Study<br><b>7:30 pm</b> College Bible Study | <b>30</b><br><b>8:00-4:00 pm</b> FUSD<br><br><b>7:00 pm</b> Young Adult Bible Study   | <b>31</b><br><b>9:00 am-2:00 pm</b> FUSD<br><br><b>6:00 pm</b> Junior High Bible Study |
| <b>Badveli Nurses Is on Vacation</b>   |  |  |   |  |   |  |

**PILGRIM**  
*Armenian*  
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

3673 North First Street  
Fresno, California 93726-6870

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP**

In-person 10:30 am

Online at 10:30 am

On our website: [pilgrimchurch.com](http://pilgrimchurch.com)

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# MEMORIAL DAY PICNIC

PILGRIM ARMENIAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
INVITES YOU TO JOIN US

**SUNDAY \* MAY 26, 2024**

IMMEDIATELY  
FOLLOWING WORSHIP  
WEAR CASUAL CLOTHES

## THE BEST PICNIC... EVER!

LUNCH IS ON US | FOOD SERVED 12:00 to 1:30pm

 Donations Accepted

HOTDOGS, HAMBURGERS WITH CHILI BEANS, POTATO SALAD, CHIPS, CAKE & DRINKS

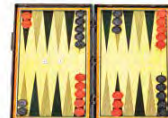
\* FELLOWSHIP \*

\* FUN \*



**BOUNCE HOUSE**

\* BINGO \*



**BACKGAMMON**

Bring your backgammon board and play with friends!

\* MUSIC \*

