
PROJECT NEHEMIAH



Project Nehemiah: Being an Intercessor in a Fallen World

PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH

"O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses . . ."

Nehemiah 1:5-7

PROJECT NEHEMIAH OVERVIEW

Warsaw is a metropolitan area of more than 2.7 million people. Warsaw itself is the capital city of Poland and the capital of a free democratic republic, moving each and every day toward complete integration into the European Union. According to some people, Poland is the "Tiger of Europe," and is leading the way for other Central and Eastern Europe countries out of the shadows of communism into the bright future of capitalism. Warsaw is a growing metropolis and is thriving adding more cars, more apartments, more office buildings, more business and more people to its environs.

Despite this progress, there are underlying spiritual issues that are overlooked in light of these stunning economic and material developments. One of the spiritual realities that Warsaw and Poland face is the devastating impact of WW II. Poland lost more than eighteen percent of its population to the war including, three million Poles and roughly three and a half million Jews, who died by the hand of the Nazis. Over the period of the War, Poles lost ten percent of their population while Jews lost ninety percent of their nation to the war.

The Polish nation recovered and has been reintegrated into Europe; however, it has not been the same for Jews in Poland. For all intents and purposes, Jewish culture was lost, destroyed and nearly eliminated from Poland completely, leaving behind only dim shadows of the past in the memories of people.

Despite this tragic loss, a remnant remains.

There is a small number of Jews remaining in Poland today – according to estimates between 10,000 to 20,000 Jews live in Poland; nonetheless and possibly even more significantly, there are silent witnesses that testify to the influence of the once vibrant Jewish culture lying scattered in 1,200 Jewish Cemeteries throughout Poland. These cemeteries are a visible reminder of the presence of God's People in Poland – among Gentiles.

"As the last of the Holocaust survivors pass away, and with them the memory of the heights of Polish Jewry, the nation's menorahs seem to be flickering back to life."

The rebirth of Judaism in Poland is significant, as it reflects God's desire to heal and renew the land and its people. This idea of rebirth, a "flickering back to life" becomes the underlying basis

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of Project Nehemiah. Through Project Nehemiah, Team Warsaw is seeking God's spiritual restoration of what was lost by dealing with the wounds of war through prayer, prayer walking, cleaning and restoring Jewish cemeteries in and around Warsaw.

By so doing Team Warsaw seeks to become intercessors as Nehemiah did and pursue God's forgiveness, healing and reconciliation between the Jews and Gentiles, allowing the gospel to be proclaimed in such a way that it finds "good soil" and produces a harvest.

Please pray as we embark upon this journey of healing and restoration. We want to be good stewards of the land that God has given us. We want to see it being productive and bearing the fruit of repentance. As the steward in Luke 13, we are digging around the roots and seeking to fertilize the soil around the fig tree through prayer and ministry, while proclaiming Christ through our testimony of ministry of meeting a need. We seek God's glory among his people. We seek God's glory in Warsaw and Poland. Only through Christ Jesus will this be possible.

RATIONALE FOR PROJECT NEHEMIAH

Just as Nehemiah prayed, we seek in a similar manner to intercede on behalf of the Israelites judged in our land, among our people – the Poles. The devastating impact of World War II was the spilling of blood of millions of people upon the soil of Poland. Accordingly, many call Poland "the graveyard of Europe." As a direct result, the land in many ways is "cursed" and has become "unproductive."

A noted theologian concludes, *"Whenever people sin on the land, the land suffers the consequences and reflects the judgements God sends on His people"*¹

Oftentimes we do not see the reality of sin and its spiritual impact. After Cain killed his brother Abel, God said to Cain, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you," Genesis 4:10-12.

Numbers 35:33-34

"Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it. Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I, the LORD, dwell among the Israelites."

Deuteronomy 21:1-9

¹If a man is found slain, lying in a field in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, ²your elders and judges shall go out and measure the distance from the body to the neighboring towns. ³Then the elders of the town nearest the body shall take a heifer that has never been worked and has never worn a yoke

¹ Alistair Petrie, *Releasing Heaven on Earth*, Chosen Books, 2000.

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⁴ and lead her down to a valley that has not been plowed or planted and where there is a flowing stream. There in the valley they are to break the heifer's neck. ⁵ The priests, the sons of Levi, shall step forward, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister and to pronounce blessings in the name of the LORD and to decide all cases of dispute and assault. ⁶ Then all the elders of the town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley, ⁷ and they shall declare: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. ⁸ Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O LORD, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent man." And the bloodshed will be atoned for. ⁹ So you will purge from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood, since you have done what is right in the eyes of the LORD.

II Samuel 21:1-6

¹ During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."

² The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.) ³ David asked the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? How shall I make amends so that you will bless the LORD's inheritance?"

*⁴ The Gibeonites answered him, "We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death."
"What do you want me to do for you?" David asked.*

⁵ They answered the king, "As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel, ⁶ let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul—the Lord's chosen one."

So the king said, "I will give them to you."

In a real spiritual sense, we are seeking to deal with cursed ground brought about by World War II. We are asking God to forgive the sins of His people, as well as forgive those who committed these atrocities and cleanse and heal the land, so that it – the land of Poland – will bear spiritual fruit and produce a harvest.

By not being Jewish many of us have great difficulty grasping completely in its fullest and most realistic sense the meaning of "Shoah" or what we know as the Holocaust.²

We can never completely understand **why** the Holocaust occurred, but it did and we must deal with the aftermath of such a monumental tragedy, especially as it relates to our work in

² **The Holocaust** (from the Greek *ὁλόκαυστον* (*holókauston*): *holos*, "completely" and *kaustos*, "burnt"), also known as **Ha-Shoah** ([Hebrew](#): [השואה](#)), **Churban** ([Yiddish](#): [חורבן](#)), is the term generally used to describe the killing of approximately six million European [Jews](#) during [World War II](#), as part of a program of deliberate extermination planned and executed by the [National Socialist](#) regime in Germany led by [Adolf Hitler](#) (Niewyk, Donald L. *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust*, Columbia University Press, 2000, p.45).

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Warsaw. Consequently, God has placed the Jewish people and what happened to them in Poland upon our hearts. Out of this burden for the Jews and, as well as, for the Polish people, we are seeking to become ministers of reconciliation between both Jews and Gentiles, but more importantly between God and Man.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God,"* (II Corinthians 5:18-21).

Why undertake such a project? How do we actually deal with these charged issues and become ministers of reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles?

Very simply stated, we should undertake this project because it is a way for us to enter into the Jewish world and speak the gospel through a "good deed" – a "mitzvah."³ By attempting to meet a specific need that is not being met, we are able to share the gospel of Jesus Christ through our actions and deeds, which speak volumes to both Jews and Gentiles.

We have heard this question many times, "Why would you, a Christian, do this for us Jews?" This question presents an opportunity to say simply, *"We honor the Jews as the root of Christianity and we know from Scripture that 'salvation has come from the Jews'"* (Romans 11:11-24 and John 4:22b).

Clearly we can see that this project is a community service project intended as a means to build a bridge into the Jewish Community for the purpose of sharing the Messiah in a practical, loving way by "becoming a Jew" performing a "mitzvah."

"THE CONCEPT OF MITZVAH IS SINGULARLY JEWISH IN THAT IT REFERS NOT TO DEEDS, BUT TO BEHAVIORS THAT ARE EXPLICITLY SET FORTH IN THE TORAH BY ONE GOD. ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MITZVAHS THAT A JEW CAN PERFORM IS HONORING THE DEAD AND CARE OF CEMETERIES - BECAUSE THE DEAD CANNOT GIVE THANKS."

By performing this "mitzvah," we can identify ourselves with the Jewish Community and demonstrate to them something extraordinary. The Apostle Paul said it this way, *"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the*

³ **Mitzvah** (Hebrew: מצווה, IPA: ['mitsvə], "commandment"; plural, *mitzvot*; from צוה, *tzavah*, "command") is a word used in [Judaism](#) to refer to (a) the commandments, [of which there are 613](#), given in the [Torah](#) (the first five books of the [Hebrew Bible](#)) or (b) any [Jewish law](#) at all. The term can also refer to the fulfillment of a *mitzvah* as defined above. The term *mitzvah* has also come to express any act of human kindness, such as the [burial](#) of the body of an unknown person. According to the teachings of Judaism, all moral laws are, or are derived from, divine commandments.

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Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews . . . To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings," (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Paul also stated, "I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them," (Romans 11:13b-14).

We see in Project Nehemiah an opportunity to enter into something unique. We see an open invitation to become ministers of reconciliation in a fallen world. How?

Quoting directly from <http://www.jewishgen.org/cemetery/e-europe/poland.html>, we see that the, "Poland Jewish Cemeteries Restoration Project" (PJCRP) has two major objectives:

1. Restoration/Preservation of hundreds of still devastated Jewish cemeteries in Poland, recognizing the important efforts already underway on specific sites and the need for continued funding for perpetual care of every site.
2. Documentation-photographing and translating every monument; filming documentaries of before, during and after restoration; and, making all of this freely available on the Internet through our the PJCRP web site (under construction), through JewishGen and others.

Restoring the Jewish cemeteries of Poland to

- Recover and restore what is left of Jewish heritage in Poland
- Honor the dead and
- Care for cemeteries as a mitzvah (good deed)
- Remember the hundreds of thousands of Jews murdered and buried in mass graves in cemeteries and nearby forests
- Obtain valuable genealogical and historical information
- Enable Jews and non-Jews, traveling through Poland, to learn of their heritage and the Holocaust

Earlier this same website listed the following reasons; however they have modified these statements above:

- To recover and restore what is left our heritage in Poland;
- To remember the hundreds of thousands of murdered Jews, buried in mass graves in most of the cemeteries and in nearby forests;

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- Honoring the dead and care of cemeteries is the highest level of Mitzvot⁴ that a Jew can perform ... because the dead cannot give thanks. ("Mitzvot" -- Hebrew plural for good deeds; "Mitzvah" -- Hebrew singular for good deed)
- We have little time left before the destruction of these sites is complete;
- For valuable genealogical and historical information;
- For Jewish and non-Jewish tour groups, traveling through Poland, especially Jewish youth, eager to learn about their heritage and the Holocaust;
- **For reconciliation between Poles and Jews** (emphasis added).

Team Warsaw is focusing primarily on this last statement: "for reconciliation between Poles and Jews." What an opportunity – an open invitation to become "ministers of reconciliation" and enter into to what God is doing. We seek reconciliation not only between Jews and Gentiles, but importantly we are seeking reconciliation between God and man.

SCRIPTURAL ORIGIN OF PROJECT NEHEMIAH: WEEDS, DEEDS AND SEEDS

Project Nehemiah has grown out of nearly four years of dealing with underlying spiritual issues inherently present among the peoples and cultures in Poland. These spiritual issues are barriers found in the soil – rocks, stones and thistles that impede the gospel from bearing fruit, as God intended.

Team Warsaw feels that understanding how sin and its residual influence, impacts our proclamation of the gospel or the actual sowing of the gospel in the soil of people's lives is vitally important if we wish to see a harvest.

Based on Scripture, we expect to see God's Word to produce fruit.

⁴ Interwoven with the tenets of Torah, Service to God, and Deeds of Loving-kindness is the commandment to live a holy life, with elements of holiness expressed in the concept of *mitzvot* (singular—*mitzvah*). The concept of mitzvot is singularly Jewish in that it refers not (as often thought) to deeds, but to behaviors that are explicitly set forth in the Torah by One God. Observing Sabbath, for example, is one central mitzvah. Centering around Shabbat are additional mitzvot — lighting Friday night candles to mark the start of Shabbat, baking the special Shabbat bread called Challah, refraining from work-related activities, reciting special prayers, and numerous other mitzvot that developed from the inception of Judaism and throughout its history. In traditional Judaism, many mitzvot are considered time-bound, that is related to the division of the week and within the week to the division of the day itself. These mitzvot (such as morning and evening prayers) are obligations for the men, but not for the women who are excused. In the Torah, men's and women's obligations are defined as separate domains and have resulted in separation of the sexes in the synagogue, as well as in other settings among traditional Jews. Today, however, the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist branches of Judaism have taken different positions regarding separateness of the sexes. In Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist synagogues today, women and men are usually included in all the rituals related to the *mitzvot* of prayer, study, and service to God. In addition, these branches of Judaism also ordain women as rabbis.

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As a team of missionaries, we have worked hard to sow God's Word, broadly in the soil – the people of Warsaw. We have seen some responsiveness by several who have trusted Christ as their Savior; however we have not seen the response that Jesus indicated we would see as it relates to “other seed” that “fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times” (Mark 4:8). In this parable, Jesus explained that the soils represent different types of responses of people to the gospel. We are looking for “others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown” (Mark 4:20).

What happens when we do find these “others” and we do not see this type of harvest among people? In other words, when we do not see fruit in response to the gospel, what should we do?

Firstly, we must deal with underlying issues lying in the soil and deal them as an intercessor (Luke 13:8-9), so that the seed of the gospel can find “*good soil*” (Mark 4:8) and bear fruit. In this parable in Luke, we see the gardener – a servant who cares for a garden he does not own.

In this parable, we see a definition of true stewardship. Stewardship is not about money. Stewardship is caring for something that we do not own and which has been entrusted to us by someone else.

God loves this world and everyone in it more than we do. He demonstrated his love for this world by giving to it his Son to die for it. We are not the owners of this world but we have been entrusted the care of it by God. We are involved in what God is doing in this world when we proclaim the gospel. When we proclaim the gospel, we are only servants through whom others come to believe. We cannot control the outcome or results – only God can; however, we are God's “fellow-laborers” and accordingly we should work with him in his “harvest field” (I Corinthians 3:5-8).

Out of this understanding of stewardship flows the idea of being an intercessor, a reconciler. We stand in the gap between God and the lost people of a city, a nation or a people group and their judgment. From this position we see that the gardener in Luke 13 had a simple plan to deal with coming judgment due to the lack of fruitfulness of the “fig tree.” Jesus outlines three steps of the gardener and his plan for intercession: **ministry** – digging around the roots; **prayer** – fertilizing the tree and lastly **time**, as time is necessary in order to allow the “fig tree” to produce fruit.

Secondly, we see the heart of God and about what he cares in Micah 6:8, and how Jesus encapsulates the same understanding in Matthew 23:23 as neglecting the “more important matters of the law” – justice, mercy, and faithfulness. In light of these attributes, we came to understand that God was leading us to deal with the “weeds”⁵ of injustice. By desiring to set right what was wrong we expressed **justice** in how it relates to the **injustice** of what happened to the Jews in Poland (and Europe) during the Holocaust.

⁵ The concept of “Weeds, Deeds, and Seeds” is attributed gratefully to Dr. Thom Wolf, who developed and shared with me this principle based on Micah 6:8.

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How? How did we go about this? God led us to demonstrate **mercy** by performing “deeds” – a “mitzvah” as it relates to caring for the dead. Why?

“ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MITZVAHS THAT A JEW CAN PERFORM IS HONORING THE DEAD AND CARE OF CEMETERIES - BECAUSE THE DEAD CANNOT GIVE THANKS.”

By working to restore a virtually forgotten Jewish Cemetery in Otwock, Poland through literally removing “weeds” in the form of overgrowth, shrubs and small trees, along with trash and other debris from these Jewish Cemeteries, we demonstrated God’s love, **his** mercy. We showed concern and cared about something that belongs to God – **his** people and what has happened to them. By so doing, we began to deal with the injustice of World War II. This is important because the descendants of those buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Otwock were “cut off,” decimated and exterminated during the war, they cannot “care for the dead.”

By being merciful, we showed that we cared for what was important to the Jewish people. By expressing God’s mercy – his concern to make right what was wrong, we showed the character and heart of God. Recall that God “saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (Titus 3:5).

Because of walking humbly with God, our **faithfulness** has expressed God’s mercy. Accordingly, our ministry of reconciliation has ultimately led to opportunities to sow “seeds” – Divine Truth and proclaim the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. We now see in retrospect what God was leading us to do and by becoming involved in what he wanted to do in Poland as it relates to proclaiming the gospel first to Jews and then to the Greeks.

What has developed?

We are beginning to see fruit – responsiveness or fruitfulness to the gospel. This past summer (2007) we have had the opportunity to openly share the gospel with Jews from Poland and Israel, as well as, sharing the gospel in a Polish orphanage, a drug rehabilitation center and with several people at a local ice cream and coffee shop. Many people are aware of who we are as Christians in the community due to our work in the Jewish Cemetery in Otwock.

We were able to share with the Jews who we are as Baptist Christians and along the way we were able to point them to their Messiah, Jesus Christ. We have entered into a dialogue and not a debate with the Jewish community concerning God and his revelation to us by way of the Law, the Prophets, the Children of Israel and ultimately through His Son, Jesus Christ.

We have shared the gospel with Poles and as a direct result we have seen God move in response to our working in the soil by the fact that we have seen eighteen people trust Christ as their Savior over the past two summers with four being baptized one year ago into church plant that has recently constituted. God has blessed our work as we have blessed the Jews.

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STRATEGIC PURPOSE OF PROJECT NEHEMIAH

Our goal here is to become reconcilers and bring reconciliation to Poles and Jews so that healing may come and the gospel proclaimed freely and be able to bear good fruit from good soil.

Practically speaking, one outcome of Project Nehemiah is the preservation of Polish Jewish heritage and culture. The Jewish Cemetery in Poland is unique, as it is a testimony to a nearly thousand year history of the Jewish people. Poland was the home to the largest Jewish population prior to World War II having a population of more than 3 million people. Sadly, there are less than 20,000 Jews living in Poland today. Consequently, the Jewish Community is working to preserve this heritage by photographing and cataloguing headstones, translating and creating an inventory of vital historical family records, making them available to Jews worldwide.

Secondly, the Jewish Community wishes to reclaim these cemeteries because “the land” is sanctified and considered “holy” to them for eternity until the day of the resurrection.

Despite these important considerations, our ultimate goal spiritually as missionary apostles is to plant churches as a direct result of what we are doing through Project Nehemiah. By planting churches, we desire to impact the spiritual environment of Warsaw. Collectively we are praying for God to move in the hearts of the people of Warsaw and bring about a spiritual awakening. We desire to bless communities in the Warsaw area through prayer and ministry by interceding and dealing with underlying spiritual issues that inhibit the gospel from flourishing among people in Warsaw – no matter what they may be.

Prayer and ministry encompass the heart of Project Nehemiah.

To this end, Team Warsaw and volunteers from America and Poland have worked in several Jewish Cemeteries over the past three years. We have seen God bless us with a church being planted and people being saved and baptized. We wish to apply what we have learned from God to other cities and communities by restoring cemeteries in the Warsaw area, so that Poland will bear spiritual fruit and produce a harvest of churches.

Over the years we have learned a little bit about being a farmer as it relates to our work. We see that the farmer breaks up the ground, prepares the soil, sows the seed, fertilizes and waters the crop, nurtures the new growth and then gathers the harvest. Although we have not yet seen a harvest of churches in our work, we do see progress.

We continue to plant churches in Warsaw. Since 2002, we have seen four churches planted related to our work. Of these we see that two are growing in their understanding of what it means to be a church and multiplying itself among others. Currently we are working in fourteen church planting situations in various stages in the Warsaw area and beyond. Recently, we have seen one church plant, the Way of Life Baptist Church (Droga Zycia) in Otwock formally constitute as an “official” church in October 2007 and is now functioning as a “mother church” in four of these church planting locations. This church will partner with us, as well in Project Nehemiah.

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AN IMPORTANT NOTE CONCERNING EVANGELISM

In light of what Paul says in I Corinthians 3:5-9, the focus of evangelism must not be placed on men but upon God, *"who makes things grow."* If we and what we do or how we say it becomes the focus of evangelism, then we are no longer a servant and the emphasis is being placed on us and our presentation. Presentation is about us and how we look or what we know.

We must remember that we are not anything, but a servant – a fellow worker, a partner of God. It is only God who makes anything happen and causes the gospel to grow and produce fruit. Our part in this partnership is that of a tool or vessel through whom others come to believe. Our contribution to this partnership is certainly not much; nevertheless, in relationship to Jesus Christ and in the power of His Holy Spirit, God will multiply *"what was sown"* – our efforts and produce the harvest.

God's vision is the harvest. God desires for all people to be saved and know Jesus Christ as their Savior. God's vision is expressed in Revelation 7:9 and 10, where we see standing before the throne of the Lamb – Jesus, a *"great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language."*

Ultimately, the Harvest is the Church – the Redeemed from every people, tribe, nation, and tongue from every generation. The church expresses the glory of God *"in Christ Jesus throughout all generations"* (Ephesians 3:21), no matter where it is and plays the crucial role in God's eternal plan or purpose (Ephesians 3:10 - 11) to redeem the world to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ.

There will be opportunities for building relationships with some Jewish young people; however caution must be exercised when sharing personal testimonies. Testimonies must be simple and direct without "church-language" or "Christian" slang. Sharing your life story is encouraged. A full orientation will be provided upon arrival.

THE JEWISH CEMETERIES OF WARSAW

Warsaw alone has two major Jewish cemeteries: Warsaw Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery, which is the largest and main Jewish Cemetery and Warsaw Brudno Jewish Cemetery, which is no longer in use.

The Okopowa Jewish Cemetery has more than 250,000 graves dating back to the "time of the Napoleonic Duchy of Warsaw (1807-1813). Many important rabbis, writers, actors, industrialists, medical doctors, lawyers, engineers and others are buried here." This is one of the very few Jewish cemeteries in Poland still in use today. "Unlike many other Jewish cemeteries . . . the Germans did not destroy the Okopowa Street cemetery because, as it was in central Warsaw, they did not need to use the tombstones to lay roads in the vicinity."

There are up to fifty Jewish Cemeteries in the Warsaw vicinity. Currently we are working with local Jewish Community leaders, who have responsibility for the restoration of these cemeteries

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that were destroyed during and following World War II and we have been give formal permission to work in three different Jewish Cemeteries: Okopowa Street, Brudno and Pruszków.

Due to trust that has been developed over the past couple of years, the Jewish Community has asked Team Warsaw to take on the renovation of the wall in the Jewish Cemetery in Pruszków. Pruszków is a suburb of Warsaw having a population of 80,000 people.

There is no Evangelical church of any type in Pruszków as far as missionaries currently know. In light of this fact, missionaries have begun laying the foundation for the planting of churches in Pruszków through prayer and through this specific ministry project. Alongside of Project Nehemiah will be multiple outreach efforts, such as sports, Bible Clubs, and English based work in order to share the gospel in “word and deed.”

Missionaries are working with local contacts, who are not believers; nevertheless, they are open to us and the gospel. They are assisting missionaries in developing this project and prayerfully will come to trust Christ as their Savior and become the basis of a new church in Pruszków.

WORK ASSOCIATED WITH PROJECT NEHEMIAH

In general the primary tasks of Project Nehemiah will include: prayer walking; cutting and removing shrubs, branches and small trees; removing trash and debris, and lifting and turning over fallen headstones.

We are looking at the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery, the Pruszkow Jewish Cemetery, along with prayer walking, and seeking to engage new people in these areas. Steven Reece, Joe Vaughn and Susan Carson will be teaming with volunteers from the United States along with Polish partners in this project. We will be working in Pruszków and Brudno this year where we are attempting to plant churches.

In Pruszków we are working with a former student of Joe Vaughn with whom we are sharing Christ and attempting to begin a small group around them in the future. Please pray for this student and his girlfriend, as well.

There are two basic types: cleaning the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery and rebuilding a wall of a Jewish Cemetery in Pruszkow.

Specifically related to the work associated with the Jewish Cemetery in Pruszków (pronounced Prush-koow) will require the removal and rebuilding a section of the wall that encompasses the cemetery. We will need for this work experienced bricklayers, who know how to build a wall.

We will also need willing “hands,” who can dismantle the wall, clean and sort brick. The reason that we are approaching this particular aspect of the work in this way is due to the fact that rebuilding the wall will need to be done in phases by multiple teams.

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PLEASE NOTE: The actual rebuilding of the wall (after everything is cleaned) may take up to two weeks (10 working days). Please see the following pictures for more information.

You will need to bring gardening gloves, mosquito repellent, sun screen, a hat, good shoes or boots and a flexible attitude, as this work will not go exactly as we expect. We will also do in the evenings if possible several coffeehouses in the community.

PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION



PRUSZKÓW CEMETERY PHOTO 1

The above photograph shows the length and condition of wall along the north wall. The bricks are stacked in the closest section and would have to be cleaned, stacked and used in rebuilding. The wall is broken in two sections and probably is 30 to 40 feet in length.

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PRUSZKÓW CEMETERY PHOTO 2

The above photograph shows the first and second sections and approximate scale.



PRUSZKÓW CEMETERY PHOTO 3

The above photograph shows the second section of the wall that needs repairing.

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PRUSZKÓW CEMETERY PHOTO 4

The above photograph shows the condition of the cemetery toward the rear of the cemetery. Some cleaning of debris will be necessary.

What we would like to do with at least two possibly three teams is to remove and clean brick, and then sort the brick and stack it for re-use. Then we would like for one or possibly two teams to rebuild the wall. One team could do this work; however the project would need to be longer than a week because rebuilding the wall will require more than a week to complete.

In order to rebuild the wall, we will need experienced bricklayers who know how to build a brick wall. Skilled labor will be required and some Polish expertise will also need to be brought in for the work.

Rebuilding the wall would be a specialized project which would follow removing the wall, cleaning, sorting and stacking brick.

A new foundation would need to be laid for the wall as well.

Any one church could do the entire project: remove, clean, sort and stack the bricks, as well as, rebuild the wall; however all of this work would require more than a week. For this reason we are asking for multiple teams to participate in this aspect of Project Nehemiah.

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There are six phases for the renovation of the wall in the Pruszków Jewish Cemetery:

1. Remove old brick
2. Clean the brick
3. Sort, organize and stack bricks
4. Clean and remove debris from the Pruszków Jewish Cemetery
5. Build foundation for the wall
6. Rebuild the wall, which will require two teams:

The reason that we are approaching this project in this way is due to the fact that the rebuilding of the wall is complicated and will need to be done in phases by more than one team. The rebuilding (after everything is cleaned) may take up to two weeks (10 actual working days) or longer.

ONGOING DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO PROJECT NEHEMIAH

The summer of 2005 was the first time that we actually worked in the Jewish Cemetery in Otwock, Poland. North Lanier Baptist Church of Cumming, Georgia was the first group to work in the cemetery and has returned in 2007 to finish what it began. In the summers of 2006 and 2007 multiple churches participated including:

1. Brentwood Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee
2. First Baptist Church, Hampton, Georgia
3. The Fellowship at Luella, Georgia
4. First Baptist Church, Liberty, Texas
5. First Baptist Church, Pecos, Texas
6. Second Baptist Church Warner Robins, Georgia
7. First Baptist Church Plant City, Florida
8. North Lanier Baptist Church, Cumming, Georgia
9. Parkway Baptist Church, St. Louis, Missouri
10. Bethlehem Baptist Church, Clarkesville, Georgia

Here is feedback and comments that we have received regarding Project Nehemiah:

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1. Carol Jackson, Brentwood, Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee writes:

Steven,

... Your report encourages me and lets me know how to continue to pray for your work there. I hope you won't mind if I share this news with the 2 who diligently join with me to pray for all of you there - Kevin and Cheryl. (Cheryl is the lady who partners with me doing the presentations about the Nehemiah project. Kevin was the young man who spent so much time with Peter and Monica when we were there. Kevin has a huge heart for you all and the relationships he made there. He is hoping to go back next year.) They will be so glad to have current information about what's going on there with the continuing work of reconciliation and restoration.

And the pictures are wonderful! I consider it a great joy, privilege and honor to pray for you guys, as well as the Jewish and Polish connections the Lord is allowing you. To Him be the glory! Don't hesitate to send me lists of specific ways we can continue to pray for you all and the work there.

For the King and the Kingdom!

Carol

2. Here is an update from Ron DeMoss, the mission's pastor at North Lanier following their work in the Jewish cemetery in Otwock in 2005:

"I believe that this mission trip truly has 'planted seeds' far beyond what we can comprehend or could have ever expected. The article in the Atlanta Jewish Times has resulted in the church getting phone calls from around the country... apparently our trip was posted on a Jewish web site somewhere. I have received a call from a man in California who does Jewish Genealogy and two years ago he was in Otwock and walked around the same cemetery. Steven (Reece) and him are in discussions now."

"I received another call from someone just wanting to express her appreciation to our Team for doing what we did. I talked to a lady yesterday, Pola, who lived in Poland but now lives in Atlanta. She survived the Holocaust by hiding under a bed for three years. She lives near Emory University and has written a book about her experiences. She has invited me to come for a visit and is going to give me some books. The stories are starting to flow together but I believe she lived in Otwock."

"I received this letter yesterday and will quote you the letter in its entirety."

Dear Pastor Matteson,

We just read the article in the Jewish Times about the wonderful trip the teens of your church made to the Polish town of Otwock.

We are so impressed by the kindness and good fellowship the children showed by the work they did in picking up and repairing the headstones in the Jewish Cemetery.

Please thank Ms. Becky Perrin and Pastor Ron DeMoss for their efforts on the trip.

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Sincerely yours,

Howard and Julie Stahlman

"They also sent a very generous gift to the church in honor of the mission trip."

I also received a VM from a lady here in Atlanta who wants to donate money for future mission trips. I hope to get a call back later today or this week. Thanks for all your hard work and faith. I know I made promises about the opportunities we would have and how this could be a life changing trip for many of us who went with believing God could do great things . . . Indeed He did and now He is giving the Increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-9)."

Increasingly, over the past two years, we are hearing testimonies such as these. And as a result of our ministry to the Jews, we have been drawn deeper into the Jewish Community.

We are truly amazed at what God is doing in us and through us in Otwock. In the summer of 2006 we will begin work in two neighboring communities seeking to establish two new congregations in these communities. We believe that this is possible only through prayer and only through seeking through prayer to deal with the devastating losses that occurred in Poland related to World War II and following.



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Below are a few pictures from the Otwock Jewish Cemetery, which were made in October 2006 following our work in the cemetery. There was a group of Israeli and Polish high school students that came and worked together symbolically cleaning up the cemetery. This was an awesome moment to see Jewish and Gentile young people working together to do something in the physical world that deeply touches the spiritual world of separation between Jews and Gentiles as well as God and man. Jesus Christ has destroyed the barrier of separation between Jews and Gentiles and between God and man. In Christ there is no difference; however not everyone is in Christ.

So with this in mind we are becoming and have become Ministers of Reconciliation, as though God is making his appeal through us to the world that is not yet reconciled. Ultimately, this is our goal: we seek to see Jew and Gentile as well as God and man reconciled in Christ Jesus. This is why we labor in the cemetery.



The above photo shows a new, restored headstone in an area that we cleaned in the summer of 2006. The headstone is done in the Jewish style that was originally present in the cemetery on many headstones. It shows that we have brought hope back in the sense that someone cares for the “holiness” of this place much in the same way that Nehemiah cared for the city of Jerusalem and its Holy Temple.

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This photo to the left is a broken headstone showing a fractured Star of David. This is highly symbolic of the brokenness that exists between Jews and Gentiles. This brokenness can only be reconciled through Jesus Christ.



In the photo above, Jewish and Polish high school students work on cleaning a headstone.

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In this last photo above, Jewish and Polish high school students sit and talk while cleaning the Jewish Cemetery in Otwock in October 2006.

Please let me know, if there is anything else that you would like to know. We will try to keep you posted on developments in our work as much as we can. One thing that we are trying to do is to keep our Web Diary up to date. Please look here for postings:

<http://www.teamwarsaw.blogspot.com>.

Pray for our work with the Jewish community, as this project continues to lay a foundation for our future working relationship with this community and prepare the soil for whatever God has in mind for this ministry or Mitzvah. More importantly we are laying a foundation for expressing a positive witness for Christ.

REQUESTS OF JEWISH REPRESENTATIVES

Here are the main points to consider from the Jewish Community:

- We must fully explain to each worker the parameters of their role and the importance of their work in the Jewish Cemetery. Orientation upon arrival will be provided in addition to this guide.
- We must strongly emphasize the serious nature of this land, and work respectfully. For example, the removal of shrubs but not digging up the roots.

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- Making absolutely certain about clearing areas, headstones, before making permanent changes. That is patience in following clearly instructions.
- Chemicals (herbicides) would most likely be necessary. Does someone in the group have experience with chemicals? They want to find a local merchant for the chemicals and other materials we would use.
- All men who work in the cemetery must wear a hat of some sort. A baseball cap is fine.
- We need expertise to rebuild the wall in Pruszków. Most other work will require only a willing heart and hands.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGY

Short Term Goals:

1. Prayer – pray for Jewish community leaders in Warsaw
2. Prayer Walk in the Jewish Cemetery and in the surrounding community.
3. Read Scripture aloud related to God’s promises for the Jewish People and those around them.
4. Fast – fast in teams of 3 for project daily, while praying for God’s direction and provision
5. Enlist prayer partners including Messianic Jews
6. Determine what can be done practically in terms of the wishes of the Jewish Community and the Rabbinic Committee responsible for the Jewish Cemeteries. (This has been an ongoing process in which we have increasingly have gained the trust of the Jewish representatives).

Possible Action Plans

1. Recruit Messianic Jews to join us in intercession and possible participation in project
2. Develop Prayer Calendar for Prayer Partners
3. Prayer walk site prior to and during the project
4. Designate prayer team who will pray daily during the clean up project
5. Rotate team members on and off the prayer team
6. Involve Rabbi and ask to pray at the cemetery and perform necessary Jewish ceremonial acts to cleanse and sanctify the area, when appropriate and possible.
7. Clean immediate area of cemetery by removing trash and debris

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8. Photograph individual headstones and immediate area
9. Video cemetery and individual headstones and immediate area?
10. Identify fragments of headstones that possibly go together and photograph and catalogue

NOTES ON THE JEWISH CEMETERY: OTWOCK, POLAND 2006

Jane Mussey, Prayer Coordinator, Team Warsaw

The face of a person is rarely seen on Jewish headstones.

Levites: Washed the hands of the priests. When you see an image of a pitcher with pouring water, it signifies that the man buried here is a descendant of the family of Levi. (Illustration: Levi Strauss!)

Some headstone symbols come from last names, for example:

- Lion
- Deer
- Bear
- Eagle (strength)
- Bird
- Rose

Some symbols tell something about the person's profession, education, or character:

- Mortar & pestle (doctor)
- Crown (symbolizes "a good name") Jews work for this "crown", this good name.
- Bank with hand putting money into it (helped the poor)
- Many books (a wise, learned man)
- Candelabra (a woman: her role was to light the "Shauvot candle" in the home. Candle may not be lighted or may be burned out.)
- Two hands (sign of God's blessing; a Priest is buried here; represents the family of Aaron, the first high priest; usually on the first row of cemetery incase they are called to duty in the cemetery). Note: Aaron's descendants- shoemakers, craftsmen, "cohenu", "cohen", surnames with "Katz" or "Con".

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Below the symbol on the headstones, near the top, there are 2 letters, translated “here lies”. It is on all headstones. Following it is the person’s first name, their father’s name, and the date of death, which was determined by the Jewish estimation of the number of years after the creation of the world (5,000 years). Sometimes a person did not have a last name, so they put the name of their town instead (example: “Warsaw”).

In small towns, some headstones were painted (blue & white, red & white, black & white). Many were knocked over by the Nazis, but after the war, when turned face-up again, were in good condition! The earth had preserved the color.

In the Jewish cemeteries, the men are buried in one section, the women in another.

The oldest Jewish headstone in Poland is from the 1200’s; it is located in Krakow. The greatest Rabbi in Poland is buried in Krakow, dated in the 1570’s.

Until 1850, Poland had no other writing on the headstones except Hebrew. “Yiddish” is a mixture of Hebrew and German. Half of the headstones in the Otwock Jewish cemetery are from the 19th Century.