

The Book of Nehemiah Introduction/ Overview

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before me."
Isaiah 49:15-16

The walls of God's people were continuously before Him. Nehemiah probably was familiar with these words of Isaiah, and felt them burn deep within his heart as he received the report that the walls of Jerusalem and the city itself were destroyed, and the people completely demoralized. Nehemiah was the one that God would use to fulfill His promises to Israel, just as He wants to use us today to affect the world around us. These lessons are designed to help us learn from Nehemiah's example, as well as how to build our own walk with the Lord, work together as a body of believers, and live in a way that pleases Him. Nehemiah was no different than we are; he was just a common man, an employee faithfully carrying out his job. Yet he was the one that God chose to use, because in Nehemiah He found a heart that was completely His. We too can impact our world as we learn from his example.

A Look At The Times

Jewish history begins with Abraham at approximately 2000 B.C. But it was not until one thousand years later that Israel took on world significance as a nation under Saul, David, and Solomon. In the successive reigns of these three kings, Israel's flag flew proudly over the nation. Israel was finally recognized as a major military power under King David's forty-year term of office.

David advanced the cause of Israel to remarkable proportions. Upon his death, David turned his throne over to his son Solomon. And if you know your Bible, you know that by the last part of his life Solomon had compromised so obviously with the world that God judged him. *So the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son."* (1 Kings 11:11)

When Solomon died, there was a split in the nation's military ranks. Israel became a divided kingdom: ten tribes migrated to the north and settled in Samaria; the

other two went south and settled in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. The northern tribes during this period of division and civil war are called Israel and the southern group, Judah.

Just as the lowest point in American history was when we took up arms against each other in our Civil War, so it was with the north-south split in Jewish history. They reached their darkest hour nationally, not when they were attacked from without but when they were attacked from within, and the walls of their spiritual heritage began to crumble. During this time of division, literally all hell broke loose. Chaotic conditions prevailed.

God judged Israel when the Assyrians invaded in 722 B.C. Those ten tribes were finished; the Northern Kingdom ceased to exist. But some of the people from the north fled to the south to escape Assyrian control.

The land of Judah remained a Jewish nation for more than three hundred years. However, in 586 B.C. Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem (and all Judah) and took the people captive. This began what is called "The Babylonian Captivity." The biblical account in 2 Chronicles 36:18, 19 records the end of Judah's history and the beginning of the Babylonian Captivity.

They burned the house of God, the temple, and they broke down the protective wall around the city. All the fortified buildings were destroyed with fire as were the valuable articles in the temple.

If you have ever seen a movie on World War II, perhaps you saw Berlin or Tokyo at the end of the war. After the Babylonian takeover, Jerusalem was in somewhat the same shape. It was totally leveled! The magnificent place where God's glory was once displayed was destroyed. The wall lay in ruins and wild dogs fed upon any edible remains. The armies of Babylon marched back home with all the treasures of Judah.

Psalm 137 was written during this dismal time. The psalmist cried out, "*How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?*" (vs.4) Babylon had come and taken away the Israeli captivities. Their song was ended. 2 Chronicles 36:20 adds a final word: *And those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia.*

That's important. Those Jews who lived through this siege of Jerusalem were bound together, chained like slaves, and sent to Babylon, a trek of more than eight

hundred miles. And under Nebuchadnezzar and his wicked son, the Jews lived as they had centuries before in Egypt, as slaves to a foreign power.

But God didn't forget them. He had a purpose and a plan. Notice how verse 20 concludes: "*until the rule of the kingdom of Persia.*" Here's what happened. There was a king named Cyrus who ruled Persia and another king, Darius, who ruled the neighboring Medes. The two nations were allies, but since the Persian force was the larger of the two, the two countries were often called simply, "*the kingdom of Persia.*" The Medes and the Persians invaded Babylon and overthrew it, forcing the Babylonian empire to surrender. What happened then? Second Chronicles 36:22 tells us; "*Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia -- in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah -- the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia*" Was Cyrus a believer? No. On the surface he may have sounded like one, but he was not. He was, however, concerned for the welfare of the Jews. God is not limited to working with His people only. He works in the lives and minds of unbelievers whenever He chooses. He moves the hearts of kings from one plan to another. And this is what He did with Cyrus. God's ultimate plan was to get the Jews back into their land.

Cyrus sent a proclamation in writing throughout his kingdom, which said: *Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!"* He was saying, "Let God's people go back -- back to that city that was destroyed seventy years ago." This period of history has been called by some Bible historians "The Second Exodus." And so the Jews went back to Jerusalem under the leadership of three men.

"Company A" left first with Zerubbabel as their commanding officer. About eight years later, another group, "Company B," left Babylon with Ezra as commander-in-chief. By now, Cyrus had died and Media-Persia was led by Artaxerxes. Then, thirteen years later, Nehemiah led "Company C" back to the destroyed city.

The theme of Nehemiah is summed up in Nehemiah 4:17 "*Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other hand held a weapon.*" Building and guarding both were of equal priorities, just as they must be in our lives to see victory over sin and maximize our ability to serve the LORD. Thus the theme of these lessons will be how to build our lives to guard what God has entrusted to us, and to live godly lives, being pleasing to Him. The emphasis is not only on study

of the passage and getting a clearer understanding of the principles it sets before us, but also on how to practically apply these principles in our lives today.

Our prayer is that these lessons will be a blessing to you, and that they will stimulate you to further growth as you build, guard, and live for the Lord. His Word is our foundation. All others will fade away! Invest your life in those things that will count for eternity, not in those things that will pass away.

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Lesson 1
Prayer and Building Burden

Whenever God wants to get a work done, He lays hold of willing people. The walls of Jerusalem had been ruined; a small remnant had returned; and there was much work that needed to be done. In 536 B.C., Zerubbabel and Joshua had taken about 50,000 Jews back and had (by 516) rebuilt the temple. In 457 B.C. there had been a small revival under Ezra, but now it was 445 B.C., and God was looking for someone to go to the ruined city and restore safety and order. Nehemiah was to be that person.

Read Nehemiah 1:1-3 and answer the following questions:

1. What facts do you learn about the circumstances of the book of Nehemiah from verses 1-2?

2. What two particular circumstances concerned Nehemiah the most?

3. What was the condition of the people who still occupied the land? What condition was Jerusalem in?

Read Nehemiah 1:4-5 and answer the following questions:

4. Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven. "God" is the Hebrew name "Elohim." What can we learn about "Elohim" from the following passages? Deuteronomy 6:4, 7:9, Isaiah 45:18

5. Verse 5 speaks in part of fearing God in prayer (Also note verse 11). What does the concept of "fearing God" mean to you?

6. How should fearing God affect our lives? (Exodus 1:17, 21; 20:20)

Read Nehemiah 1:6-9 and answer the following questions:

7. Verse 6-7, 8-9 illustrates important elements of prayer. What are they?

8. Compare the contents of Nehemiah's prayer with the passages below. What do they mean for you today? Leviticus 26:33-42, Deuteronomy 30:1-6, II Chronicles 7:14, Hosea 6:1-3, 10:12

9. How does the example of Abraham standing by faith in God's promises encourage you? (Romans 4:16-22)

Read Nehemiah 1:10-11 and answer the following questions:

10. Verses 10-11 complete Nehemiah's illustration of prayer. How would you summarize this principle of prayer?

11. We all need to lay the burdens we feel down at the Lord's feet, requesting Him to work in the situation at hand. How does Philippians 4:4-9 encourage you to do the same?

12. Nehemiah prayed that it would be God's strong power that accomplished the work. What do the following passages tell us about His power to work through us?

Isaiah 41:10:

Acts 1:8:

Philippians 4:13:

Practical Applications

1. Think about your own "sphere of influence". What qualities did you learn about in the life of Nehemiah that are lacking, or need more growth in your own life?

2. Satan is attacking the walls of our lives, home, family, and church today, trying to cause us to be victims of his influence rather than being victorious and making an impact on our world.

a. What "weaponry" is Satan effective in using to try to tear down these walls in your life?

b. What are some practical things you can do daily to build up the wall of your life, your family, etc.?

3. Starting now, begin to implement the prayer lessons we have been learning. As you commit yourself to prayer, following Nehemiah's example, ask yourself:

- Am I really concerned about this need?
- Am I willing to forsake my own personal time and interests to spend time in prayer?
- Am I going to persist in prayer for this?

"What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use--men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but men. He does not anoint plans, but men--men of prayer."

--E.M. Bounds, Power Through Prayer, p. 8

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Lesson 2 / Chapter 2

Beginnings

(Nehemiah prepares for the work)

Four months passed during which Nehemiah waited for God's time to approach the king, "*whoever believes will not act hastily.*" Indeed, faith and patience go together. But Nehemiah had a plan in his mind, given to him by the Lord, and he knew just what to do when the right hour arrived, just as our Lord Jesus Christ.

No one was to appear before the king with sadness or bad news, but the burden on Nehemiah's heart revealed itself on his face. He was a man of sorrows, and the king noticed it. Were it not for the providence of God, this sadness might have caused Nehemiah's death. Before taking his burden to Artaxerxes, Nehemiah quickly went to the throne of Grace in prayer, then he told the king all his heart. He knew God would open the way. So thoroughly had Nehemiah worked out his plan that he was able to give the king a time schedule and a list of materials he would need to do the task.

It took three months for Nehemiah to arrive at the city, and he arrived as a governor, not a servant. A man of patience, Nehemiah waited three days before taking any steps. The enemies were watching, and Nehemiah had to be wise and cautious. Later he would discover that some of the nobles of Judah were allied with Tobiah, the enemy of the Jews. By night, he investigated the situation, keeping his counsel to himself. He was awake when others were sleeping and concerned while others were at ease. He saw more about the situation at night than others could see in the light.

Nehemiah did not believe in a one man ministry, he challenged the leaders of the remnant to work with him (not for him) in repairing the walls. The motive? "*That we may no longer be a reproach.*" He was concerned with the glory of God as well as the good of the nation. Nehemiah showed them the need, outlined the task, and assured them of God's blessing. Immediately, the opposition was aroused (as it always is), but Nehemiah knew that God's hand was upon him and his work.

Read Nehemiah 2:1-3 and answer the following questions:

1. Four months of praying and seeking God may have been taking its toll on Nehemiah. What was his countenance before the king?
2. To be anything but joyful in the king's presence would often result in the death penalty. Nehemiah's fearfulness was understandable. Despite his feelings, he was confident. What assurances did he (and we) have? See Proverbs 21:1, Ecclesiastes 3:11
3. Artaxerxes labeled Nehemiah's problem as “sorrow of the heart.” What do the following verses tell us about man's heart? Jeremiah 17:9-10, Matthew 5:28. What is expected of our hearts as believers? Proverbs 3:5, 4:23, Matthew 22:37-40

Read Nehemiah 2:4-8 and answer the following questions:

4. Nehemiah was probably quite relieved by the king's concerned response. Yet before answering, what did Nehemiah do?
5. The “secret of success” in any endeavor is our bathing it in prayer. What can you learn from the examples of these prayer warriors? David: Psalm 5:3; 119:147, Anna: Luke 2:36-38, Cornelius: Acts 10:1-2
6. What else can we learn about God's hand at work in the circumstances of our lives from these verses? II Chronicles 30:12, Psalm 37:23-26, John 10:28-29

Read Nehemiah 2:9-16 and answer the following questions:

7. Given Nehemiah's burden, we'd expect him to get right to work. What did he do instead upon arrival?

8. What did he do on the third day? Why do you think he did it so secretly?

9. Why do you think he decided to concentrate on rebuilding Jerusalem rather than other areas first?

Read Nehemiah 2:17-20 and answer the following questions.

10. Nehemiah now shares his burden and vision with the people. How did he describe the conditions he discovered?

11. The condition of the walls and the people were closely connected. The Hebrew word for “distress” refers to a moral deficiency. Despite their condition, how did the people receive the challenge?

12. What kind of things did Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem do and say in trying to discourage the work?

13. What courageous response did Nehemiah give to those trying to discredit their work?

Practical Application

1. In many ways, Nehemiah serves as a great example for us as employees. Did you notice anything in his character that would make you a better employee, or more likely to be hired for a position?

2. One of Nehemiah's greatest strengths was that he carefully balanced human factors and planning with dependency on divine influence. Would you see yourself as one who takes efforts into your own hands without spending as much time in prayer as you should, or the other extreme of wanting to seek God's will and pray, but not stepping out in faith and plan ahead? How can you better begin to balance out your life?

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Lesson 3 - Nehemiah 3/Ezra 1

Being Used Of God

The work was organized and directed with the spiritual leaders taking the lead and the people cooperating. Each one had a specified area of responsibility. No one can do everything, but every person can do something. Of course, you will never have 100% cooperation; in verse 5, we find some of the nobles refusing to get involved. There were 42 groups of workers.

What a variety of workers; priests, rulers, women, craftsmen, and even Jews from other cities. Note that some were willing to do extra work. Some did their work at home, and this is where Christian service ought to begin. Some workers were the only ones from their families, and some workers were more zealous than others were. Compare vs. 11 with Ezra 10:31 and you will see that even some former backsliders joined the work.

There is a definite spiritual lesson in each of these gates. The **Sheep Gate** (vs.1) reminds us of the sacrifices of Christ on the cross. This was the first gate repaired, for without the sacrifice, there is no salvation. Note that the Sheep Gate had no locks or bars, for the door of salvation is always open to the sinner. The **Fish Gate** (vs.3) reminds us of soul winning, being “Fishers of men”. The **Old Gate** (vs. 6) speaks of the old paths and the old truths of the Word of God. The **Valley Gate** (vs.13) reminds us of humility before the Lord. The **Dung Gate** (vs.13) apparently is the gate through which the waste and refuse of the city were taken. Imagine how difficult it would be to repair a gate in such a place. Certainly this speaks to us of the cleansing of our lives. The **Fountain Gate** (vs.15) illustrates the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is interesting to note the order of these gates. First there is humility (the Valley Gate), then cleansing (the Dung Gate), and then the filling of the Spirit (the Fountain Gate). The **Water Gate** (vs. 26) speaks of the Word of God, which cleanses the believer. Note that this is the seventh gate mentioned, and seven is the biblical number of perfection, “the Perfect Word of God.” Note that this gate needed no repair! The **Horse Gate** (vs. 28) introduces the idea of warfare. There are battles in the Christian life, and we must be ready to fight. The **East Gate** (vs. 29) makes us think of Christ’s Second Coming. The **Gate Miphkad** (vs.31) speaks of God’s judgement. The Hebrew word Miphkad means “appointment, account, census,” it carries the idea of troops showing up for review. God is going to call all souls up for one judgement day.

As you review these gates and their order, you can see the suggestion of the full picture of the Christian life; from the Sheep Gate (salvation) to the final judgement. Praise God the Christian shall never face judgement because of his sins.

Read Nehemiah 3:1-4 and answer the following questions:

1. Where did the rebuilding of the wall begin (verse 1)?

2. Before we undertake any work for our Lord, we too must begin with consecrating (dedicate ourselves to Him). What do these passages urge us to do?

Luke 9:23-25

Romans 12:1-2

I John 1:9

3. From this beginning point of sacrifice and consecration, the people now built and made repairs (Hebrew for "strengthening their hands" for the work, a battle term!). No other foundation will be successful for us in building and battling. How do these passages confirm this?

Exodus 33:13-16

Psalms 127:1-2

Read Nehemiah 3:5 and answer the following questions:

4. Verse 5 brings an interesting insight into some stubborn people. What does it describe as happening?

5. These "nobles" (at least in title) didn't bother themselves to get involved with the work. It was a step of humility to be involved in this work, for the Hebrew word means menial labor, having the flavor of bondage or military service, and the leaders of this group would not have any part in it. Who is a leader, or noble, in the eyes of Jesus? (Matt.18:2-4) What condition does God expect of us to successfully serve Him? (Phil. 2:3-4)

6. The end of verse 5 states that this was the "work of their Lord." Other versions may translate this as "masters", giving a more earthly meaning. However, the burden of this humbling work was the Lord's. He wanted to work through these people to achieve great things, yet they gave up that chance to be used because of pride. What are some things we can learn from these passages letting Him bear these burdens and work through us? How can we put our faith into action rather than refuse the chance to be used by Him? (See Matt. 11:28-30, 1 Cor. 15:58, Phil. 2:12-13)

Read Nehemiah 3:6-32 and answer the following questions:

This section of Nehemiah demonstrates great unity and cooperation by such a diverse group of people. It is a great testimony of the power of God to work and Nehemiah's using his gifts to coordinate this effort.

7. What were some of the various types of people we find working side-by-side? (Note the following verses: 1, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 17, 22, 32)

8. As believers, our work should stand out to our employers. What should characterize it? (See Matt. 5:16, Col. 3:22-24)

9. This was all done in a unified effort to complete the work at hand. We too have been assigned a work of building the body of Christ. To do so, we must make every effort to work and walk in unity with each other. How do these following passages challenge us to strive for this? (Eph. 4:15-16, Phil. 1:27-28)

Read Ezra 1:1-6, and answer the following questions:

We are taking a side trip to the earlier events recorded in Ezra to help us understand how God can use us and intervene in our situations.

10. In 539 B.C., the word of the Lord was fulfilled through Cyrus' declaration, recorded in verse 1-4. What was this declaration?

11. What promises were being fulfilled by this? (See Isa. 44:28-45:2; Jer. 29:10-13)

12. Read Ezra 1:5-6 again. Not only was God able to work through influencing a king, but also through the common people. How were the people that would do the rebuilding motivated (verse 5)? How were those unskilled in rebuilding still able to help see God's work accomplished (verse 6)?

13. God wants to use all of us to touch the world around us. He has given us spiritual gifts, talents and skills to do so. We may not feel capable or competent, but as the above verses demonstrate, He is the one that gives us that ability. Note these three ways we can be involved in God's work here on earth. **Praying** (Matthew 9:37-38), **Giving** (II Corinthians 9:5-8), **Direct Involvement** (Matthew 28:18-20)

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Lesson 4 / Chapter 4

Build and Guard

Whenever the people of God start doing the work of God, there will be opposition. A worker of weak faith and purpose will quit, but a person of resolution and confidence will overcome the opposition and finish the job. Nehemiah was such a person. Notice in this chapter the opposition that he faced (from both within and without the city) and the victories that he won.

God's people always have enemies. In this case, they were Sanballat, a government official in Samaria; Tobiah, the Ammonite; and Geshem, an Arabian. These three wicked men were outside the nation of Israel; in fact, the Ammonites were definite enemies of the Jews. Their first weapon was ridicule; they mocked the "feeble Jews" openly before the leaders of Samaria. Satan is a mocker. Ridicule is a device used by ignorant people who are filled with jealousy. They mocked the people ("*feeble Jews*"), the plan ("*will they finish in a day?*"), and the materials ("*stones and rubbish*"). How did Nehemiah answer them? He prayed to his God! His concern was only for the glory of God and the testimony of the nation, so do not read personal revenge into his prayer. Note that the people still worked as they prayed, for prayer is no substitute for work. Satan would have loved to see Nehemiah leave the wall and get involved in a dispute with Sanballat, but Nehemiah did not fall into Satan's trap. Never allow ridicule to stop your ministry; "*take it to the Lord in prayer*" and keep on working. He kept on **Building, Watching, and Praying.**

What Satan cannot accomplish by deceit he attempts to do by force. What a confederation of people we have in vs. 7! And all of them conspired against the Jews. It is amazing how the devil seems to have no manpower shortage. How did Nehemiah face this new attack? He prayed and set a watch. Note that Nehemiah did not depend on prayer alone; he also set a watch.

The battle moves now from outside the city to inside. Satan followed this same tactic in Acts 5-6 when he used Ananias and Sapphira and the complaining widows inside the fellowship of the church.

Fear and faith can never abide in the same heart. In vs. 11, we have a rumor the enemy started that their armies would suddenly invade Jerusalem. The Jews living outside the city heard this report and carried it to Nehemiah ten times. How persistent Satan's workers can be. Finally, Nehemiah set the guard on the walls and encouraged the people not to fear. Note that the work stopped from vs.13 to 15 exactly what the enemy wanted. Nehemiah saw the folly of this plan, so he put the workers back on the job, a weapon in one hand and a tool in the other. These Jews

are wonderful examples of what a Christian worker ought to be: they had **a mind to work** (4:6), **a heart to pray** (4:9), **an eye to watch** (4:9), and **an ear to hear** (4:20).

Read Nehemiah 4:1-6 and answer the following questions:

In the last chapter, Nehemiah gave us an overview of how the work was organized and accomplished. He now returns to describing the work, and the opposition that began to arise during the building process.

1. What was Sanballat's emotional state when he learned about the accomplishment made on the wall (verse 1)? How did Tobiah's "joke" (verse 3) simply encourage him all the more?

2. Sanballat's "anger" literally could have been translated from the Hebrew as "his nose became hot." It was an emotional term describing the heat of anger just after it has been ignited, or irritation after something being stirred up to a heated condition. What are some wrong ways of handling angry emotions when they are stirred up in us? (See Prov. 14:17, 29:11). What are some better ways to handle these emotions?

3. They didn't give up, but kept building with their hearts being all the more committed to the work. To have a mind for the work that God would have us to do, we must have the mind of Christ. How does Philippians 2:5-8 describe this?

Read Nehemiah 4:7-12 and answer the following questions:

4. When the opposition's plan didn't work, and they saw the wall being built up and its gaps repaired (Hebrew for healing or health being restored to soundness), how did they respond (verse 7-8)? What type of discouragement were they now trying to use?

5. The half-way point of any project is most dangerous. Many people give up at this point, just prior to when they would see God really work a change despite the difficult circumstances they were in. How did Judah begin to crumble under these circumstances (verse 10)?

6. We are often sidelined by circumstances when we lose sight of the eternal perspective, or the vision that God has given us. These people felt incapable of completing the work because of the amount of rubble and broken stones to be removed, and the Hebrew implies that they were being "*led away*" from the work. How can we regain the eternal focus when under attack of the enemy? (See John 15:18-21, Col. 3:1-10, 2 Cor. 1:3-6).

Read Nehemiah 4:13-14 and answer the following questions:

7. How did Nehemiah organize the people in view of these threats (verse 13)? What important strategy did he use?

8. Nehemiah then challenged the people. What three-fold challenge did he give them in verse 14?

9. The Hebrew word for "remember" means to impress and pierce into the memory, declare, and bring to mind. Without this proper focus on the Lord, they would have faced defeat and abandonment of the work. In the following passages, what are some things you can "pierce into the memory" of your heart to better stand when the enemy attacks? (2 Chron. 20:5-12, Ps. 119:9-11, Isa. 26:3-4)

Read Nehemiah 4:15-23 and answer the following questions.

10. What was the result of the people's response to the enemy's attack in verse 15?

11. What further instructions and provisions did Nehemiah make for the people in case of attack? (See verses 18-20)

12. They worked all day, six days a week, even until it was too dark to see to work anymore, and kept a guard alert at all times. What a picture this is of our Christian service: Serving with our whole hearts until that day we go to be with Him, all the while being on guard against the enemy (Satan). What else can we learn about this from the following passages? (John 9:4, Rom. 13:11-14, I Peter 5:8-9)

Practical Applications

1. How are you handling the threats and discouragements the enemy brings your way? Based on the lessons we've learned this week, what new tactics can you now apply to these times of trial and distraction?

2. Are there any areas of your thought life that need to be made more like Christ? How can you focus your thoughts more along the lines He would have you think?

3. How can you more effectively use the spiritual weapons and armor that God has given us? Are there any particular pieces of armor that you have been neglecting? How can you begin to better see victory over sin by their use?

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Lesson 5 – Chapter 5

Internal Strife

When the enemy fails in his attacks from the outside, he then begins to attack from within; and one of his favorite weapons is selfishness. If he can get us thinking only about ourselves and what we want, then he will win the victory before we realize that he is even at work.

Selfishness means putting myself at the center of everything and insisting on getting what I want when I want it. It means exploiting others so I can be happy and taking advantage of them just so I can have my own way. It is not only wanting my own way but expecting everybody else to want my way too.

This is a sad chapter, for in it we see the Jews selfishly preying upon one another. No building is recorded in this chapter. There were great economic burdens upon the Jews, not only because of the famine, but also because of the taxes and tributes. The Jews were being robbed by their own people. How did Nehemiah act in this crisis? First, he was angry because his people were so spiritually backslidden as to rob one another. He saw it not as an economic problem, but as a spiritual problem. He consulted with his own heart and certainly prayed to God for wisdom. Then he rebuked the people, reminding them of God's goodness to their nation. "We have been set free by the Lord," he argued; "will you now put one another in bondage again?" He appealed to the Old Testament Law as he commanded them to restore their ill-gotten profits. How the enemy enjoyed seeing the Jews rob one another! Note that Nehemiah also appealed to his own good example as a leader. The people vowed to obey the Word and they did!

This chapter reveals to us the depths of sin in the human heart and how each of us must learn to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Read Nehemiah 5:1-5 And Answer The Following Questions:

1. What internal problem began to now affect the work?

2. What was wrong with what the Jews were doing to one another according to the following verses? (Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:35-40, Proverbs 28:27).

3. The Jews had let their physical needs become more important than remembering that God was in control of the task at hand, thus they took foolish steps in dealing with their problems. In fact, they summed up their problem as needing to "eat and live." While this is obviously true, where does true "life" come from? (See Deuteronomy 8:3, Job 23:12, Psalm 119:50, 93)

Read Nehemiah 5:6-9 And Answer The Following Questions:

4. How did Nehemiah respond to this crisis? How does verse 7 demonstrate that his was a different type of emotion than Sanballat's in the last lesson?

5. Like Nehemiah, we'll all face anger from time to time, but we make the choice of what we'll do when it is activated. What can you learn from the following passages about controlled, yet constructive anger? (John 2:13-17, Ephesians 4:25-32).

6. What steps did Nehemiah take in dealing with this problem?

Read Nehemiah 5:10-13 And Answer The Following Questions:

7. What action did Nehemiah propose to meet the people's needs?

8. What further step did Nehemiah have these people take to ensure they would do so?

9. The preventive measures summed up in verse 9 should be taken to heart by all believers. It is so easy to get our eyes off of the eternal perspective and God's promises and onto temporary, earthly concerns. How can the following passages help you to: Walk in truth: (Psalm 26:3, 86:11, 2 John 1:4, 3 John 1:3-4). Walk in the fear of God: (Deuteronomy 10:12-13, Joshua 24:14-15).

Read Nehemiah 5:14-19 And Answer The Following Questions:

10. Obviously, this passage was added later by Nehemiah as an example of how his term as governor was a living example of righteous dealing with such needs. What did he refuse to do (verse 14-15)?

11. The body of Christ cannot function as it should when there are divisions caused by believers ignoring the needs of those who are hurting. In fact, I Corinthians 12:26 states that if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. How should we be following Nehemiah's example of ministering to the hurting, poor and needy? (See Proverbs 14:31, Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 6:1-2, I John 3:17-18).

12. Some may say that it is selfish to pray in such a manner, yet how did these other people pray for remembrance (blessing) before God? (Jabez: I Chronicles 4:10, David: Psalm 25:7, Jeremiah 15:15, Thief on the cross: Luke 23:42-43).

Christian Finances

While the problem addressed in Nehemiah 5 is that of believers taking advantage of each other and causing division, we cannot ignore the issues of personal responsibility and how the Lord would use the finances He entrusts to us. Today's economy and lack of good stewardship has caused many believers to stumble in this area, to the point that we are often "selling" our families into the slavery of increasing debt. They are putting themselves in a place to be used by others rather than to successfully accomplish the work that God has set before them. There are several principles of financial stewardship we must put into practice.

God Cares More About Your Financial Needs Than You Do

What do the following passages teach you about this important truth?

a. Luke 12:22-28

b. Romans 8:32

c. Philippians 4:19

God Holds Us Accountable

God expects us to be good stewards of all that He has given to us. Finances are His gift to us to wisely use and provide for our needs and those of our families. What do the following passages say about this? What is our role as a good steward?

a. Psalm 50:10

b. Matthew 25:14-30

c. I Corinthians 10:26

The Book of Nehemiah
Lesson 6 - Chapter 6
No Compromise

Under Nehemiah's gifted leadership, the people completed the rebuilding of the walls. Now all that remained to do was the restoration of the gates and the strengthening of the community within the walls. Since Sanballat and his friends had failed miserably in their attempts to stop the people from working, they decided to concentrate their attacks on Nehemiah. If they could eliminate him, or even discredit him, they could mobilize their allies living in Jerusalem and take over the city.

The average person doesn't realize the tremendous pressures and testing's that people experience day after day in places of leadership. Leaders are often blamed for things they didn't do and criticized for things they tried to do. They are misquoted and misunderstood and rarely given the opportunity to set the record straight. If they act quickly, they are reckless; if they bide their time, they are cowardly or unconcerned. Referring to the pressures of leadership, President Harry Truman wrote in Mr. Citizen, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen!"

People in places of spiritual leadership not only have the pressures that all leaders face, but they must also battle an infernal enemy who is a master deceiver and a murderer. Satan comes either as a serpent who deceives or a lion who devours, and Christian leaders must be alert and spiritually equipped to oppose him. God's people should pray earnestly, not only for those in civil authority, but also for those in places of spiritual authority. If Satan can defeat a Christian leader, he can cripple a whole ministry and discredit the cause of Christ.

The enemy's main purpose was to generate fear in the heart of Nehemiah and his workers, knowing that fear destroys faith and paralyzes life. Adolph Hitler wrote, "Mental confusion, contradiction of feeling, indecisiveness, panic; these are our weapons." Both Jesus and Paul had to face the issue of fear, and both overcame it by faith.

Nehemiah didn't listen to the enemy's lies. He and the people completed the wall and hung the gates in only fifty-two days, much to the surprise of their adversaries.

Read Nehemiah 6:1-4 and answer the following questions:

1. What tactics did Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem use to try to interrupt the work this time? How frequently did they try this?

2. Sanballat and his group asked Nehemiah to "meet" with them, which in Hebrew implied not just a meeting, but more of a joining together. Their thought (Hebrew for planning out, carefully weaving together a plot) was to do harm to Nehemiah, either through just interrupting the work or causing bodily harm. Either way, it was a call for Nehemiah to compromise the work God had called him to do. How did he handle their "temptation" to compromise?

3. God has also called us to complete a "great work" for Him, and to be diligent in what He calls us to do. What are some things you can learn from the following Scriptures about our works and diligence in them?

a. Proverbs 22:29

b. Matthew 5:16

c. I Thessalonians 1:3

d. I Peter 2:12

e. II Peter 3:14

Read Nehemiah 6:5-9 and answer the following questions:

4. What kind of things were rumored about Nehemiah and his intentions?

5. How did Nehemiah respond to these slanderous reports?

6. What more can you learn about this from Jesus' teaching on the subject (Matthew 5:10-12)?

7. How else can you be strong in the Lord in the face of such attacks (Isaiah 50:7-10)?

Read Nehemiah 6:10-14 and answer the following questions:

8. What was the next method used against Nehemiah and the work at hand? Who was involved in this?

9. What was the real intent of this "prophecy?" What would have resulted if Nehemiah had given into it.

10. Fear can be a positive, life-preserving response to things in our environment, or as pointed out here, it can be a sinful response that may lead to our downfall, or foolish actions that would discredit our testimony. How can we be victorious over the fears Satan wants to use against us? What are some things you can learn from the following scriptures?

Psalm 91:1-6

Psalm 118:4-6

Proverbs 3:21-26

Isaiah 12:2

Read Nehemiah 6:15-19 and answer the following questions:

11. The wall was completed on the 25th of Elul (September). What was the amazing length of time it took to complete it?

12. When the enemies and nations surrounding Jerusalem saw this, what was their response? What did they have to recognize as a result of this fact?

13. Although defeated at the cross, Satan still searches for ways to distract and attack us. How does I Peter 1:13-16, 5:8-10 teach us to deal with these attacks more effectively?

Practical Application

Nehemiah knew what it was like to be criticized, as well as how to criticize others in a godly fashion, and sets an example for us in this chapter on how we can deal with criticism. One of the biggest problems Christians have is both facing and giving constructive criticism in a scriptural, godly manner. Criticism can be healthy, whether positive (identifying a person's strengths and accomplishments) or negative (evaluating weakness and mistakes).

It can easily become destructive or taken to extremes. We must be careful in how we deal with or use criticism. Satan would like nothing better than seeing the body of Christ and our effectiveness for service torn apart by poor use of our speech and criticism of others. There are several principles we can learn from Nehemiah in dealing with those criticizing us:

- a. Wisdom and waiting in our response to discern what the real motive is, and not counterattacking those criticizing us, which would only be destructive.
- b. Face it with boldness, denying false accusations in a straightforward but gentle way.
- c. Don't allow fear or other negative emotions to take control, leading us to respond prematurely.
- d. Pray!! Bathe the situation and the person in prayer, committing it over to the Lord for Him to reveal what the best steps of action are in response to criticism you receive.

The Book of Nehemiah
Lesson 7 - Nehemiah 7 / Ezra 3:1-13
Prerequisites for Successful Building Part 1: Faithfulness

The walls were completed, the gates were restored, and the enemy was ashamed; but Nehemiah's work was not finished by any means. Now he had to practice the truth Paul emphasized in Ephesians 6:13, "*And having done all, to stand.*" Nehemiah had been steadfast in building the walls and in resisting the enemy, and now he had to be steadfast in consolidating and conserving the gains. "Look to yourselves," warned the Apostle John, "*that we do not loose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward*" (2 John 8).

A city is much more than walls, gates, and houses; a city is people. In the first half of this book, the people existed for the walls; but now the walls must exist for the people. It was time to organize the community so that the citizens could enjoy the quality of life God wanted them to have. God had great things in store for Jerusalem, for one day His Son would walk the city streets, teach in the temple, and die outside the city walls.

Nehemiah described in the first six chapters recording the building of the wall. But the task wasn't finished with the external building effort. Chapters 7-13 describe how God was now going to build His people into what He intended them to be. This is a very close parallel to us as well, for although we have been saved by receiving Christ as our Lord and Savior, the work isn't done. He wants to continue to mold and shape us into what He would have us to be. One of God's requirements for successful building is faithful obedience to Him.

Read Nehemiah 7:1-3 and answer the following questions:

1. Once the wall was built and the gates were hung, what was Nehemiah's next task?

2. Faithfulness is the quality we want to focus in on. The fear of God is also crucial, but we have covered this in other lessons. The Hebrew word for "faithfulness" means firmness, stability, truth, surety, and continuance. How do the passages below demonstrate God's faithfulness?

Deuteronomy 7:9

Psalm 36:5

I Corinthians 1:9

Hebrews 10:23

3. God's primary desire for us is our faithful obedience to Him. Record below what you learn about this truth from these passages:

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Hosea 6:6

Micah 6:6-8

Matthew 22:35-40

Read Nehemiah 7:4-73 and answer the following questions:

As we have learned previously about Nehemiah, he was constantly seeking and dependent upon God's leading in every move he made. It probably would have been tempting to Nehemiah just to sit back at this point and rest on this accomplishment. But if he had, the people would have missed out on the great blessings that followed his seemingly unimportant act of obedience in gathering the people together for record keeping purposes, as we'll learn about in the rest of Nehemiah.

4. What was the condition of Jerusalem now that the walls were rebuilt (verse 4)?

5. What was Nehemiah led to do? What did he find to help him in this task (verse 5)?

6. How can you seek God's guidance for your daily courses of action? See: Psalm 25:1-5, 27:11-14, 143:10

7. How does God promise divine guidance to those that follow and obey Him?
See: Psalm 23, 73:23-26, Isaiah 42:16, 43:18-19, John 16:13-14

Verses 6-73 is almost an identical recounting of the listing of those who returned as accounted in Ezra 2:1-70, with a few minor changes and additional information. The people were gathered together for the work that God would do next, with the combined efforts of Nehemiah and Ezra leading the way to a national revival. A similar set of circumstances is found in Ezra 3 that didn't quite lead to national revival, but demonstrates what happens when a people turn to God whole heartedly, and walk in faithful obedience to Him.

Read Ezra 3:1-7 and answer the following questions.

8. What especially characterized this gathering together of the people at this time?

9. There were several things that the people did to take steps once again of faithful obedience to the Lord. What were they?

Ezra 1:3

Ezra 1:4

Ezra 1:5

Ezra 1:6

Ezra 1:7

10. It is interesting that the priest leading the way to renewed obedience was named Jeshua, or Joshua, which is the Hebrew form of the name Jesus. How did our High Priest, Jesus, make it possible for us to return to renewed obedience and faithfulness (Hebrews 9:12-15)?

Read Ezra 3:8-13 and answer the following questions:

11. What significant thing did the priests, Levites, and the sons of Asaph do during the building process (verse 10)?

12. Praises for God's mercy and goodness abound in the scriptures, as they should in our lives. What can you learn from the following passages on these things?

Psalms 34:8

Psalms 103:17-18

Psalms 108:4

Lamentations 3:22-23

Regardless of the reason, the people raised such a great shout that it was heard "*afar off*," or as one translation puts it, "*heard for miles*." The Hebrew word for the sound of the shout, ruwa, means "*to split the ears with sound, like blowing a trumpet*." This was an ear shattering blast of rejoicing over what the Lord was doing, like someone blasting a trumpet in your ears!

13. How do the following passages demonstrate what a great privilege worship is, and what our attitude should be?

Psalms 84:1-4

Psalms 122:1

14. What prerequisites are there for obedient worship?

John 4:23-24

Ephesians 5:18-20

Matthew 5:23-24

15. What are three ways we can worship the Lord?

Proverbs 15:8

Jeremiah 33:3

Matthew 6:9

One of the simplest ways that we can praise the Lord is to simply take time out to thank Him for all that He's done for us. The Hebrew word for thanks means to speak out, to confess, acknowledge and declare as a fact, thank and bless. How often we fail to take the time to give Him a simple "thank you" when we pray, yet we quickly will give Him our list of requests with minimal worship in prayer. But He answered and said to them, "*I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out*." Luke 19:40

The Book of Nehemiah

Lesson 8 - Nehemiah 8

Prerequisites for Successful Building Part 2: Revival

The People and the Book

French author Victor Hugo said over a century ago, “England has two books, the Bible and Shakespeare. England made Shakespeare but the Bible made England.” Supporting that view, historians tell us that at one time England was indeed a country of one book, and that book was the Bible.

When they arrived in America, the Pilgrim Fathers brought with them that same reverence for the Word of God. “The Bible came with them,” said American statesman Daniel Webster, “and it is not to be doubted that to the free and universal reading of the Bible is to be ascribed in that age that men were indebted for right views of civil liberties.” President Woodrow Wilson said, “America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture.”

Whether the Bible is “making” any nation today may be debated, but one thing is sure: The Scriptures helped to “make” the nation of Israel. They are a “people of the Book” as no other nation has been, and the church today would do well to follow ancient Israel’s example. When God’s people get away from loving, reading, and obeying the Word of God, they lose the blessing of God. If we want to be like fruitful trees, we must delight in God’s Word (Ps.1:2-3).

This explains why Nehemiah called for a “Bible conference” and invited Ezra the scribe to be the teacher. The walls were now finished and the gates were hung. The material needs of the city had been met; now it was time to focus on the spiritual needs of the people in the city.

It is important to note that Ezra and Nehemiah put the Word of God first in the life of the city. What happened in Jerusalem from that point on was a by-product of the people’s response to the Scriptures. “The primary task of the church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God,” said Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to cleanse and revive the hearts of the people of God.

If God is to work in and through His people, then they must respond positively to His Word; and this chapter describes three basic responses: **understanding the Word** (8:1-8), **rejoicing in the Word** (vs. 9-12), and **obeying the Word** (vs. 13-18).

Read Nehemiah 8:1-4 and answer the following questions:

1. What characterized the attitude of the people as they gathered together?
2. Ezra had been faithfully working among the people since his arrival in Jerusalem in 458 B.C., some 14 years prior to Nehemiah's arrival. There had been some bright moments in his ministry, but now God was going to fulfill His real purposes for Ezra in the land. What had Ezra's ministry goal been, according to Ezra 7:10?
3. In God's perfect timing, the joint efforts of Nehemiah's practical leadership in physical restoration, as well as the spiritual efforts of Ezra, were now going to result in revival and new direction for the Jewish people. The body of Christ also needs all of its "parts" functioning fully to achieve the type of work He wants done. How does I Corinthians 12:12-18 speak more on this?

Read Nehemiah 8:5-8 and answer the following questions:

4. The people stood up as Ezra now opened the book, and remained attentive and on their feet for about five hours! What was Ezra's reaction (verse 6)?
5. Being aware of God's greatness, as Ezra was, is essential in both understanding His Word and in bringing revival in our lives. How do the following passages describe God's greatness?

Deuteronomy 3:24

Psalm 95:3-7

Psalm 145:3-5

6. The term "amen" means "so be it", or an acknowledgement. The people's worship was an acknowledgement of the greatness of God and the power of His Word.

A. How does II Corinthians 1:20 describe the promises of God?

B. What interesting title is used of Jesus in Revelation 3:14?

7. Not only did the people bow themselves and shout "amen," they lifted their hands to the Lord, symbolic of their surrender and worship of Him. What else does the Bible say about lifting our hands to the Lord in worship?

Psalm 63:1-4

Psalm 134:1-2

Read Nehemiah 8:9-12 and answer the following questions.

8. How did the people respond to the reading of the Law?

9. Nehemiah told the people not to mourn or weep, which could also be translated as not worrying, grieving oneself, or going through mental and physical anguish because of their sin. Rather, how did he and the Levites redirect the people to properly channel their emotions (verses 10-11)?

10. The people greatly rejoiced and celebrated because they understood the Word of God. Indeed, the joy of the Lord is our strength and stronghold. Personal holiness often seems to be associated with justice and righteousness, humility and contrition, but joy in the Lord is just as importantly linked with it. What are some ways we can experience and understand the joy of the Lord, thereby making it our strength?

Psalm 16:11

Isaiah 35:10, 61:10

Jeremiah 15:16

I Peter 4:12-13

Read Nehemiah 8:13-18 and answer the following questions.

11. What did the people discover that was especially important about that month?

12. How did they go about obeying God's Word concerning this feast (verses 15-16)?

13. How long had it been since this feast was fully celebrated as the Law commanded (verse 17)?

Seeing Revival in Our Lives

Times of revival and renewal have come by God's grace during the history of Israel and in the church era. We hear of these great revivals in the past, and wonder if God will do the same sort of work in our time. We see the virtual decay of our society around us, and pray that God will bring a change in our world. Yet revival isn't something that happens to the unsaved. It is a phenomenon that occurs to God's people, drastically changing their lives. As a result, individual believers are used to reach out to those around them, having a social impact. How we desperately need revival in our land today!

The Book of Nehemiah
Lesson 9 - Nehemiah 9
Prerequisites for Successful Building Part 3: Repentance
AMAZING GRACE

Jehovah God is the main subject of this chapter. Who He is, what He does for His people, and what His people must do for Him. This prayer reviews the history of Israel and reveals both the majesty of God and the depravity of man. Israel responded to God's "great kindness" (Neh. 9:17), "great mercy" (vs. 31), and "great goodness" (vs. 25, 35) with "great provocations" (vs. 18, 26) that resulted in "great distress" (vs. 37).

It is interesting that three of Israel's great "national prayers" are recorded in Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9, and Daniel 9. Behind these prayers is the promise of 2 Chronicles 7:14 *"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, than I will hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

Dr. Arthur T. Pierson said, "**History is His story**"; and this chapter bears that out. "That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons that history has to teach," wrote Aldous Huxley. The church today can learn much from the experiences of Israel, if we are willing to humble ourselves and receive the truth.

As you read this prayer, notice that it reveals the greatness of God (Neh. 9:1-6), the goodness of God (vs. 7-30), and the grace of God (vs. 31-38).

Read Nehemiah 9:1-4 and answer the following questions.

1. Up to this point, Nehemiah had referred to those involved in the work "the people." How does he refer to them here in verse 1?

2. What pattern did they follow in humbling themselves before God?

3. What does "confession" of sin mean to you? What does I John 1:9 add to your understanding of it?

A real change has taken place in the people's lives. They now address the Lord as "their God"; they spend a fourth of their day hearing the Word and then appropriately respond to the Word for another fourth of the day; and the rest of the chapter and the actions they will take in Chapters 10-13 demonstrate that revival has taken place. But there wouldn't be this revival without the repentance recorded here.

4. In the last chapter, how were the people instructed when they began to weep over their sins (Nehemiah 8:10-12)?

5. Now the time was appropriate for them to weep. How does Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 help you to understand God's timing and our responses to it?

Read Nehemiah 9:5-15 and answer the following questions.

This prayer of the Levites and leaders makes for fascinating and convicting study. Verses 5-15 record their praises to God for all He had done for them.

6. What did they exhort the people to do in verse 5?

7. The word "bless" means to "bend the knee," kneel down and praise. Yet they are told to stand up while bowing down! How does this reflect the importance of our attitude in prayer and praise rather than specific posture or ritual?

Read Nehemiah 9:16-31 and answer the following questions.

8. How did the Israelites respond to God's goodness toward them (vs. 16-17)?

9. Their conquest and settling of the land is covered in verses 22-24. What were some of the things that God did for them during this time period?

10. Verses 26-31 discuss the period of Judges through the events leading up to their Babylon captivity. How did the people respond to God's goodness in giving them the Promised Land? (vs. 26) What was God's course of action toward them? How did the people continue to respond? (vs. 27-30)

Read Nehemiah 9:32-38 and answer the following questions.

11. After confession of the multiple sins of their fathers, the Israelites may have been hesitant to ask anything of the Lord. Yet how did they now approach Him (verse 32)?

12. Much like the people of that time, we as Christians today have nothing in ourselves to make us acceptable to God. We must come to Him because of what He has accomplished for us, despite our repeated failures and sins. What are some reasons that we can confidently approach Him? (See Rom. 5:6-8, 8:1-4, Heb. 4:14-16).

13. What did they realize that was true despite the grace that God extended toward them even then (verses 36-37)?

Repentance

Repentance is essential in the Christian life. Yet many Christians seem unclear as to what it is, or how to go about it. We'll never see revival, as Nehemiah and his people did, unless we turn from our wicked ways (II Chronicles 7:14). As we confess and forsake our sin, then we will find mercy (Proverbs 28:13).

The Old Testament wordings for "repentance" are linked to the idea of being comforted; it is connected to a change of heart or disposition, mind, purpose, and conduct. It means to return or to turn again to something, almost like doing an about face. The New Testament word for repent is "metanoia," literally meaning "later knowledge," but signifying a change of mind, opinion, feelings, will, or thought, because of the remorse and regret resulting from dissatisfaction with the mind set as a result of our sin.

It's time indeed to break up our fallow ground and let God make us into fruit bearing believers. David prayed that God would search and know his heart, and reveal any ways displeasing to Him (Psalm 139:23-24).

The Book of Nehemiah
Lesson 10 - Nehemiah 10/Ezra 6
Commitment to Obedience
After We Say “Amen”

In a certain church, there was a man who always ended his prayers with, “And, Lord, clean the cobwebs out of my life! Clean the cobwebs out of my life!”

One of the members of the church became weary of hearing this same insincere request week after week, because he saw no change in the man’s life. So, the next time he heard that prayer “Lord, clean the cobwebs out of my life!” he interrupted with, “And while you’re at it, Lord, kill the spider!”

It’s one thing to offer the Lord a passionate prayer of confession, such as we have in chapter 9, and quite something else to live an obedient life after we say “Amen.” But the people in the assembly were serious about their praying and were determined, by God’s grace, to make a new beginning and live to please the Lord.

“The victorious Christian life,” said Alexander Whyte, “is a series of new beginnings.” *The Lord is able to keep us from stumbling* (Jude 24); but if we do stumble, He is able to lift us up and get us going again. “*The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand*” (Ps. 37:23-24). The nation had sinned, but now it was taking new steps of dedication and obedience.

But was their dedication real? There are at least three evidences given in this chapter that these people really meant what they prayed. 1. Submission to the Word of God (10:1-29) 2. Separation as the people of God (10:28-31) 3. Support for the house of God (10:32-39). These same evidences will be seen in our lives if our promises to the Lord are sincere.

Read Nehemiah 9:38-10:29 and answer the following questions.

1. Because of God's amazing grace to Israel despite their faithlessness toward Him, the people were going to recommit their lives to following Him. How did they go about making this promise of renewed obedience (9:38)?

2. In this culture, an oath was a sworn, verbal statement which was affirmed. In some cases, a curse was attached for punishment or penalties for breaking that oath. An example of this is seen in Deuteronomy 27-29 of God's promises for obedience and the people taking curses upon themselves if they failed to keep His Law. What did Jesus teach about the true intention of oaths, as well as their dangers (Matthew 5:33-37)? What does James 5:12 add to this?

3. "To observe" comes from the Hebrew word for keeping a hedge around something, to guard and keep a garden or a flock. "To do" has the meaning of labor, keeping an obligation. What should our commitment to God's Word be, especially when we have the benefit of the entire Word of God?

Read Nehemiah 10:30-39 and answer the following questions.

4. Giving out of one's self is a true mark of God's Word at work in us, whether it is of our finances, time, or ourselves. What will the results of faithful giving be (Malachi 3:10)? Do you think that this applies only to our financial giving? What encouragement do you gain from I Corinthians 15:58 as we give out of ourselves in service to the Lord?

5. The Israelites also promised to stop their practice of intermarriage with other nations, which God had forbidden because of the dangers such a practice would bring. What was the primary reason God prohibited this according to Deut. 7:3-4. How was this displayed in the life of King Solomon? (1 Kings 11:1-6)

6. Why is it wrong for a Christian to marry a non-Christian (II Cor. 6:14-18)?

7. Their final area of commitment was that they would not neglect the house of God. Yet believers today seem to neglect the house of God in many ways. What should be our attitude toward the house of God, or going there for times of fellowship and instruction (Psalm 122:1)?

8. What purpose is accomplished when believers gather together for fellowship (Hebrews 10:24-25)?

Read Ezra 6:1-18 and answer the following questions.

Ezra 6 is also a chapter that records the people's return to obedience in rebuilding the temple, taking steps to "*not neglect the house of God.*"

9. Verses 1-12 are a record of Darius' letter of approval for the building project. It had somehow been misplaced, but when found, ended the opposition to this rebuilding work. What command did Darius give in verse 12? How forceful was this?

10. God's Word, particularly the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, helped them to prosper and see the work through. What does this mean for you in your relationship to God's Word?

11. What are some of the results we will see in our lives as we walk in and keep God's Word?

Joshua 1:8 -

I Chronicles 22:12-13 -

Psalm 1:1-3 -

John 15:1-8 -

Read Ezra 6:19-22 and answer the following questions.

12. The people here were referred to as the "*children of the captivity*," not fully grasping the freedom that was being accomplished for them. Are we to still view ourselves as children of captivity, bound to the past? What does Colossians 3:1-11 tell us about our status in Christ?

Practical Application

1. The people covenanted with God to observe and to do all that was commanded in His Word. What is your relationship to His Word? What are some ways you can make it more of a priority in your life?

2. They also promised to obey Him in their home life. What are some steps you can take to better lead your family in the things of God? If you are single, what changes can you make in your life that would either help prepare you for family life or else be more glorifying to God in your home life?

3. These people gave God their all, their best. Are there any ways you could be better giving out of your time, self, and resources?

"The distinction of a godly leader is that when he does business, he does it with integrity. When he puts in a day's work, he puts in a day's work...in the nuts and bolts of living, God will honor the person who honors Him. Such a decision deserves a place on any leader's priority list." Charles R. Swindoll, Hand Me Another Brick

The Book of Nehemiah

Lesson 11 - Nehemiah 11-12

Dedication (The Job Isn't Done)

Theologians remind us that God made the first garden (Gen. 1-2), but rebellious man built the first city (Gen. 4:16-17), and the two have been in conflict ever since. In the ancient world, cities were places of wealth and power. In modern times, in spite of their magnificence, too often our cities are bankrupt institutions famous for pollution, poverty, and crime. How to finance and manage the great cities is a continual problem to government leaders around the world.

Nehemiah followed the same philosophy. He knew that the nation of Israel could never be strong as long as Jerusalem was weak. But Jerusalem could not be strong unless the people were willing to sacrifice. Nehemiah calls on the people to present three sacrifices to the Lord for the sake of their city, sacrifices that God still calls His people to give for the sake of the church He is building in this world. 1. We must give ourselves to God. (Neh. 11:1, 12:26) 2. We must give our praise to God. (Neh. 12:27-42) 3. We must give our gifts to God. (Neh. 12:44-47)

Nehemiah returns now to the story of the walls, which he had interrupted to tell about the spiritual work under Ezra. The events in Nehemiah are not given in their exact order. It was necessary to get the Jews to live in the city, for both the good of the city and the glory of God. This, of course, demanded faith. The leaders were dwelling in the city, but now they wanted the citizens to join them, so they cast lots and moved one out of ten into the city. Verse 2 indicates that there were also some volunteers. The numbers in vs. 3-19 total 3,044. If this represented 10 percent of the male population, we can see how small the remnant was in the land. Note the mention of singers. The Jews had no song during their years of exile, but now they had the joy of the Lord as their strength.

The actual dedication of the walls is described in 12:27-47. Ezra and Nehemiah divided the people into two great companies, with Ezra leading one and Nehemiah following the other (31, 36, 38). They started probably at the valley gate. Ezra led his company along the eastside of the city, then north to the temple area. Nehemiah and his company went straight north and then east, meeting the other company at the temple area. It was a reminder, perhaps, of when Israel marched around Jericho and won a great victory.

It was also an opportunity to publicly thank the Lord as they witnessed the work accomplished. Verse 43 indicates that the joy of the city was heard miles away. What a day of dedication that was! When dedicated people unite joyfully to dedicate God's work, they will always experience God's blessing.

Read Nehemiah 11:1-18 and answer the following questions.

1. Once the people had committed to obey the Lord, Nehemiah wanted to make sure that Jerusalem was re-populated. In what two ways was this task accomplished (11:1-2)?

2. Nehemiah now begins to list those that re-populated Jerusalem. What groups are spoken about in:

Verses 3-9

Verses 10-14

Verses 15-18

3. Verse 14 mentions "mighty men of valor." What does this mean to you? Are there any men today that you would consider to be a "mighty man of valor?"

Read Nehemiah 11:19-36 and answer the following questions.

4. Nehemiah continues to list the various people that re-populated Jerusalem. Who does he mention in these passages?

Verses 19-21

Verses 22-24

5. The people began to resettle in the areas that were given to them by inheritance from the Lord. One of Israel's greatest problems was that they never really fully entered into all that God wanted to give them. The same is sadly true for the church today. What are some ways that the following passages exhort us to "possess our possessions," enjoying our spiritual inheritance in the Lord?

Psalms 119:111-112

Acts 20:32, 26:18

Galatians 3:29-4:7

Ephesians 1:3-14

Colossians 1:12-14

Read Nehemiah 12:1-30 and answer the following questions.

The wall was rebuilt; the temple again ready for service; the people had vowed obedience. Yet Nehemiah didn't let these achievements rest at that point. He wanted to make sure that the walls and the lives of the people were truly dedicated over to the Lord. First, Nehemiah completes his historical documentation.

6. Which groups of people are discussed in the passages below?

Verses 1-7

Verses 8-9

Verses 10-11

Verses 12-26

7. The dedication ceremony was now to begin. The Hebrew word for dedication is "chanukkah," meaning a dedication, inauguration. As a result of the Maccabean revolt in 168 B.C., worship was re-established in the temple, for Antiochus Epiphanes had desecrated the temple and worship had ceased. Their dedication ceremony is celebrated by Jews around the world in December as Hanukkah, a time of great rejoicing. This dedication was also to be a time of rejoicing. With what kind of attitude and equipment were the Levites to lead this dedication (27)?

8. Who else was going to be involved in the dedication (28-29)?

9. How do these following passages encourage us as believers to seek purification, and to better be able to dedicate our own lives to the Lord?

Isaiah 1:16-18

II Corinthians 7:1

II Timothy 2:21-22

I John 3:1-3

Read Nehemiah 12:31-47 and answer the following questions.

10. What did Nehemiah appoint as part of the dedication celebration (31, 38)?

11. What was the purpose of these two choirs?

12. The sound of their joy was loud enough for all to hear. How will our service also lead to joy in the Lord?

Psalm 40:8, 126:5-6

Isaiah 61:10

Jeremiah 15:16

13. What other actions were the people moved to do out of this joy (44-47)?

Being A Mighty Man of Valor

Earlier we read about some men that were labeled "mighty men of valor." Except for their names being recorded here, history remembers little of them. God chose a place of honor for them in the Scriptures because they were willing to serve Him regardless of what they would gain in this life, whether or not they were seen and known by men. Hebrews chapter 11 has been called the "hall of faith" listing many believers that were both well known and some never recorded in Scripture, that faithfully followed God based on what they knew. At the end of the chapter, the author states we as Christians have an even greater revelation, a greater responsibility to dedicate ourselves to the Lord and follow Him by faith.

The Book of Nehemiah
Lesson 12 - Nehemiah 13
Sanctification
(The Job Continues)

From Nehemiah 13:6 and 7:2 we learn that Nehemiah returned to Babylon for a time, leaving the governing of the city in the hands of his brother. When he returned, he discovered that the people had fallen back into their old ways. Years before, Ezra had faced this problem. Sin has a way of repeating itself. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he found that the Jewish men had repeated this sin. In fact, even the priests had sinned in this way. It was necessary for this courageous leader to face sin honestly and judge it.

He started at the house of God, where he discovered that the high priest was allied with the Jew's enemy, Tobiah. It is a sad thing when the servants of God compromise with the enemies of God. The priest even gave Tobiah a chamber in the temple and provisions from the temple store, provisions that really belonged to the priests and Levites. Nehemiah lost no time in throwing out Tobiah and his goods, and having the temple chamber sanctified for its proper use.

Another sin was the failure of the people to support their spiritual servants, the priests and Levites. Nehemiah reproached the people and set up a dependable system for the priests to follow. Note in verse 14, how he asks for God's help in all his ministry.

Sabbath disobedience was another problem. The workers were employed on the Sabbath, and the merchants were selling on the Sabbath. While we do not believe that the Lord's Day today is the same as the Jewish Sabbath, we do feel that God's people ought to set apart the Lord's Day and use it to glorify Him. Nehemiah reproved the Jews for dishonoring the Sabbath, and he closed the gates of the city against the Sabbath salesmen.

Note that even the Levites were guilty of desecrating the Sabbath (vs. 22). Read Mal. 1-2 and you will see that the priesthood had fallen into shameful sins. Unless the leaders of God's people set the example, the people will not easily obey God. It may have been the failure of the people to support the temple that forced the Levites into working on the Sabbath to keep themselves alive.

The book closes with three prayers. Nehemiah has done his work, but only God can bless it and keep it going. Nehemiah would one day die, and the people would forget him. But God would never forget him!

Read Nehemiah 13:1-9 and answer the following questions.

As we learn in this section, Nehemiah had returned for an unspecified length of time to Artaxerxes, as he had promised. He had been in the Jerusalem area for approximately 12 years, so it was time to return and give an account to the king of all that he had done as governor. Yet what a shock he received when he came back to Jerusalem! The people had turned their backs on almost every commitment they had vowed to the Lord.

1. What was the first thing Nehemiah made sure the people did upon his return?
2. What steps of sanctification (setting something or someone apart for God's purpose) did Nehemiah take in view of this "evil act" [the Hebrew for "evil" is a very strong word, meaning bad, malignant]? (verses 8-9)
3. Both the "mixed multitude" and Tobiah are symbolic of the fleshly nature. It takes strong action on our parts as well to sanctify, or set apart, our lives for God's purposes. How can we better do so according to these passages? Psalm 119:114-115, John 15:3-5, Ephesians 5:1-11.

Read Nehemiah 13:10-14 and answer the following questions.

4. What next problem faced Nehemiah (verse 10)?
5. How did the people repent of their lack of attending to the house of God (verse 12)?
6. What was the content of Nehemiah's prayer (verse 14)? Do you feel this was a selfish prayer? What was he really asking for?

Read Nehemiah 13:15-22 and answer the following questions.

7. How did the people continue to turn away from the dedication they had previously made?

8. How had God warned His people through Jeremiah prior to the Babylonian captivity about this? See II Chronicles 36:14-21, Jeremiah 17:21-27

9. What were the merchants from Tyre and other places doing? How did Nehemiah respond to this (verses 20-21)?

10. What further steps did Nehemiah lead the people to do to keep the commitment they had made?

Read Nehemiah 13:23-31 and answer the following questions.

11. In what crucial area had the people also compromised with their commitment to God (verse 23)?

12. What was happening in these families (verse 24)? What was the spiritual implication for this?

13. What further steps did Nehemiah take to deal with the heart of Israel's problems and lack of sanctification (verses 28-31)?

Spotlight: The Way of Balaam

Balaam, who is mentioned in Nehemiah 12, serves as an excellent example of what happens when a "believer" fails to sanctify himself and his gifts over to the Lord. His story is recorded in Numbers 22-24.

Balaam was kind of a "prophet for hire," using what God had given to him for his own selfish gain. When Balak, king of Moab, tried to hire him to curse Israel, God warned Balaam not to go. However, he went anyway, which led to the Angel of the Lord rising in opposition to him. Eventually, God allowed him to go and speak only what He commanded. Instead of cursing, every word Balaam spoke was a blessing for Israel! However, in the end, Balaam gave in to more financial gain, and suggested that the Moabites try to get their young women to entice the Israelite men into sexual acts and also worship of their false gods, thus bringing God's wrath upon themselves.

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world--this age, fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs. But be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind--by its new ideals and its new attitude--so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you]. (Amplified Bible)

Stop always trying to adjust your life to the world's ways. You must get a new attitude to life; your whole mental outlook must be radically altered, so that you will be able to decide what God's will is, and to know what is good and pleasing to him, and perfect. (Barclay's Translation)