

## 16 - Nehemiah

Nehemiah  
Key Verse:

### INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH

The kingdoms of Israel and Judah had been overrun and the people taken into captivity or scattered by the Assyrians (721 B.C.) and the Babylonians (586 B.C.), respectively. The people of Judah had God's promise that they would return to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon after 70 years (2Ch 36:21-22; Jer 25:8-11), and this time had come. The return of the exiles began under Cyrus, king of Persia, who conquered Babylon. The first group were led back by Zerubbabel (536 B.C.). The temple was restored in 516 B.C. under his leadership. The second group of returnees were led by Ezra (457 B.C.). He was a Bible teacher. Nehemiah led the third group back in 444 B.C. The book of Ezra is also about the returned exiles.

Nehemiah's name means "The Lord comforts." He lived as an exile during the Babylonian captivity and rose to a privileged position in the government as the king's cupbearer. He was broken-hearted when he heard that the broken wall in Jerusalem had never been repaired. So he prayed about it until God showed him what to do.

He returned and built the walls, overcoming great opposition (chapters 1-6). In chapters 7-13, he records how he organized the residents and promoted Bible study and practical reforms according to the teachings of the Bible.

### NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Key Verse: 1:11

#### 1. I sat down and wept (1-4)

Nehemiah was a Jewish exile living in Susa in Babylon. He had a high position in the court of King Artaxerxes; he was the king's cupbearer. Some of the Jewish exiles had returned to Jerusalem and had rebuilt the temple. One day some men--including Nehemiah's brother--came from Judah bringing news of Jerusalem and the people living there. When Nehemiah heard that the city wall of Jerusalem was broken down, leaving her helpless and disgraced, he sat down and wept. He fasted and prayed.

#### 2. Nehemiah's decision (5-11)

Nehemiah decided to risk his job, and even his life, and speak to the king. But first, he prayed. He confessed the sins of his people, and he included himself. The people were living in exile because they had not lived according to God's word. God had kept his promise to scatter his disobedient people; he was keeping his promise to restore repentant people.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see my nation's problems as my own, pray with a repentant heart, and act by faith.

One Word: Give your servant success today

## A MAN OF PRAYER

Nehemiah 2:1-10

Key Verse: 2:4

### 1. Nehemiah's sad face (1-5)

The king did not like burdensome people around him, so Nehemiah was always careful to look cheerful when he served the king. But he prayed and fasted, and made up his mind to speak to the king. Instead of his usual happy face, he went before the king with a sad face. The king immediately noticed and asked him why his heart was sad. Nehemiah was very much afraid. If the king became displeased or angry, Nehemiah might lose his job and/or his head, and the situation in Jerusalem might become worse. But he boldly told the king about his sorrow for Jerusalem. The king responded, "What is it you want?"

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### 2. An emergency prayer (6-10)

Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven; then he answered the king. He requested permission to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and its walls. He also asked for letters of authorization to the officials whose help he would need. God was with him, and the king granted his request.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to begin to do the work you put in my heart to do.

One Word: Pray, then do

## COME, LET US REBUILD THE WALL

Nehemiah 2:11-20

Key Verse: 2:17b

### 1. A lonely task (11-16)

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem. He did not tell anyone what God had put in his heart to do, but went alone to inspect the ruined walls. After assessing the situation and deciding what must be done, he called the officials together. A leader must have God's mission and find God's direction first.

## 2. Let's rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (17-20)

The broken wall was a symbol of broken spirits and despairing hearts. Jerusalem was helpless, vulnerable, and disgraced. The people had no courage to begin rebuilding their city or their lives. He told the officials how God had put it in his heart to come, and how God had answered his prayers and moved the king's heart to help. He planted faith in their hearts. So they began the good work of rebuilding. However, the task would not be easy, for there were enemies who were determined to stop them.

Prayer: Lord, help us to rebuild the spiritual walls of America, brick by brick, through one-to-one Bible study and prayer.

One Word: Let us rebuild the wall

### BUILDERS OF THE WALL

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Key Verse: 3:12,15

#### 1. Repairing the gates (1-16)

Rebuilding the gates was most difficult. The high priest, with other priests, rebuilt and dedicated the Sheep Gate. Others repaired the Jeshana Gate, the Valley Gate, the Dung Gate, the Fountain Gate. People from other parts of Palestine--from Gibeon and Mizpah across the Jordan--came to participate. There were a few problems: the nobles of Tekoa didn't want to work under supervisors. But, on the other hand, in some families, even a father who had no son worked with his daughters. People from all walks of life worked--goldsmiths, perfume-makers, rulers, Levites, governors and merchants.

#### 2. Filling the gaps (17-32)

Some worked only on the part of the wall opposite their own houses; some repaired larger sections. The whole wall had to be repaired. If one part were left open, then the whole wall would be useless. Building the wall meant restoring their dignity and confidence; it meant restoring their nation.

Prayer: Lord, help me to share in rebuilding the spiritual foundations of our nation through one-to-one Bible study.

One Word: Everyone must work to rebuild

### OVERCOMING OPPOSITION AND THREATS

Nehemiah 4:1-23

Key Verse: 4:18

1. Even a fox could break down this wall (1-9)

When God's people began to work hard to rebuild the wall, godless men were angry. They ridiculed and threatened the builders. So Nehemiah prayed, and the people kept on working with all their heart (4-6). When the enemies plotted together to fight and to stir up trouble, Nehemiah prayed again and posted a guard (7-9).

2. Overcoming discouragement (10-23)

The task was big, and the laborers' strength was small, but they kept on building. Even some fellow Jews who overheard enemy plots warned the builders to give up. Nehemiah refused to be discouraged. He challenged the people to overcome fear; he reminded them that God is great. He armed the workers and posted a guard night and day. Neither he nor his men took off their clothes at night, and they kept their weapons in their hands, even when they went for water.

Prayer: Lord, the task is big and our strength is small and there are many enemies. Help us to keep on building.

One Word: Keep on building

FEAR GOD AND DO WHAT IS RIGHT

Nehemiah 5:1-19

Key Verse: 5:9,16

1. What you are doing is not right (1-13)

Nehemiah was angry. In hard times, certain rich people took advantage of the poor and became richer, while the poor people became poorer. Rich men loaned money and charged high interest; they took the land of the poor and even enslaved their children as payment for debts. These things were legal, but not right. Nehemiah called a meeting and warned the rich men to walk in the fear of God and give back the land and usurious interest they had charged. They promised to do so.

2. Nehemiah's hospitality (14-19)

Nehemiah came to Judea with a royal appointment as governor. Legally, he could have demanded a high salary and many special privileges from the people, but he did not. He did not acquire any land for himself. He and his assistants had come to build the wall. He devoted himself to this task. Every day he entertained many guests at his table--at his own expense. He did these things because he feared God.

Prayer: Lord, help me to fear you and do what is right.

One Word: Fear God and do what is right

## KEEP ON DOING GOD'S WORK

Nehemiah 6:1-14

Key Verse: 6:3

### 1. I will not stop building (1-4)

Tobiah, Geshem and Sanballat were worldly men who did not want the weak Jewish returnees to renew their national spirit by rebuilding the wall. They tried to get Nehemiah involved in politics. He told them four times that he was too busy building the wall to meet them.

### 2. "Now, strengthen my hands" (5-9)

His enemies tried to frighten him by spreading false accounts of his activities and accusing him of plotting a rebellion. They even reported this to the government. Nehemiah was not intimidated. He prayed for strength and kept on working.

### 3. I will not misuse God's house (10-14)

They sent a false prophet to warn Nehemiah of a threat on his life and to suggest that he hide out in the temple. They wanted to discredit him for violating the temple. This didn't work, either.

Prayer: Lord, help me to overcome Satan's tactics to plant doubt and fear; help me to keep on doing your work.

One Word: Don't give up God's mission

## THE WALL IS COMPLETED

Nehemiah 6:15-7:73a

Key Verse: 6:16

### 1. With the help of our God (6:15-7:3)

With the help of God, the wall was completed without a gap in 52 days. When the enemies of God and of his people saw the completed wall, they lost their self-confidence. Nehemiah put a man of integrity who feared God in charge of opening and closing the gates. He appointed men to serve God in the temple and in the city. Spiritual order was restored to God's people.

### 2. The registration exposes the enemy (7:4-73a)

It became clear why Tobiah opposed God's work, and why he had not wanted God's people to have unity and spiritual order. He and his family were not Levites; he was not even an Israelite (7:62). He had exercised leadership and had power because of his wealth, but now men with spiritual and Biblical qualifications would be leaders, and he was excluded.

Prayer: Lord, give us courage to appoint as leaders people with spiritual qualifications--not just people with human ability, money or clever minds.

One Word: Have integrity and fear God

## EZRA READS THE LAW

Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18

Key Verse: 8:18

### 1. Bible study and praise (7:73b-8:6)

Ezra read the Bible to the assembled people from daybreak to noon. They listened attentively. When Ezra praised the great God, they all shouted, "Amen," and they bowed and worshiped God. We must study the Bible with such an attitude. Real Bible study should lead us to worship the great God.

### 2. One-to-one Bible teachers (8:7-8)

The people didn't really understand Ezra's public reading of the Bible. So the Levites taught the people one-to-one. When they understood, they were moved to tears.

### 3. The joy of the Lord is your strength (8:9-18)

Nehemiah told them not to weep but to rejoice in God. They had a joyful celebration because they understood God's word. They obeyed the law and kept the feast of booths, and their joy was even greater.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to worship and rejoice in you each time I study the Bible. Raise up many one-to-one Bible teachers.

One Word: Praise the great God

## THE ISRAELITES REPENT OF THEIR SINS

Nehemiah 9:1-37

Key Verse: 9:35

### 1. Bible study and obedience (1-5a)

Real Bible study only happens when people decide to obey the word of God. When God's people stood with repentant hearts and listened to the word of God, they could confess their sins, repent, and worship God.

## 2. Pray to the Creator God who rules history (5b-37)

The people stood together and read from the Bible; then they repented of their sins as God's Law convicted them. They praised the Creator God (5b-6). They praised God for keeping his promises (7-8): He delivered them from Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan. He gave them spiritual and physical food in the desert. They praised him for giving them victory over their enemies. They remembered the time of the judges, when God had sent deliverers and shepherds to his rebellious people time after time. Their present distress was because of their own sins. They repented and asked God's mercy.

Prayer: Lord, you are full of mercy and love; forgive our sins and heal our land.

One Word: Remember God and repent

## A BINDING AGREEMENT

Nehemiah 9:38-10:39

(Read 9:38, 10:28-39.)

Key Verse: 10:29

### 1. An important decision (9:38-10:29)

The civil and religious leaders and those recognized as leaders among the people wrote down their new commitment and signed it. They and the people they represented made a decision to make God's word the law of the land. They studied the Bible and made a decision to accept it as God's word to them.

### 2. Practical fruit of their decision (10:30-39)

Real obedience to God's word touches the most sensitive and important parts of a person's life. The first area mentioned is marriage; then business dealings; then offerings. The offerings included material contributions for the support of the temple, the dedication of time, and the dedication of children to God. They promised to put God first in their lives--before family or material possessions.

Prayer: Lord, help me to study your word and live by it; help me to put you first in my heart and life.

One Word: Commit heart and life to God

## BRAVE MEN WHO LIVED IN JERUSALEM

Nehemiah 11:1-12:26

Key Verse: 11:2

### 1. Brave men (11:1-19)

These chapters contain lists of names which can be skimmed hurriedly. Verses 2,6,14,17,20-23; 12:24-26 tell us that many of these men were able men, and that they were responsible for taking care of the city and temple. It was dangerous to live in Jerusalem because the enemies of the Jews constantly harassed them. Also, moving to Jerusalem meant leaving their ancestral property. This move exposed their families to risk. These men wanted to please God, not themselves, so they volunteered to live in and take care of the holy city.

### 2. The rest occupied the villages (11:20-12:26)

Occupying the villages was also important. Each one had to live in the place assigned to him and do his assigned duty. Priests and Levites who led in thanksgiving and prayer stayed in the city.

Prayer: Lord, give me courage to live in a dangerous place and faith to be full of thanksgiving and prayer continually.

One Word: Joyfully live where God puts you

## DEDICATION OF THE WALL

Nehemiah 12:27-47

Key Verse: 12:43

### 1. A time of rejoicing and praising God (27-43)

Nehemiah's purpose in returning to Jerusalem was to rebuild the wall. Now the task was finished, and it was time to thank and to praise God. The Levites gathered in Jerusalem to lead the people in a great public singspiration. They organized an orchestra and a choir. They prepared their hearts by repenting. The priests and Levites purified themselves and the people. On the day of the dedication, everyone sang, danced and praised God with great joy.

### 2. According to the commands of David (44-47)

Thanks to God is expressed in the giving of tithes and offerings as well as in prayers and songs. The whole program of singing and rejoicing was done according to the instructions of the Bible. They remembered King David and his joyful singing before the Lord. There was a sense of participation in God's great redemptive history.



Prayer: Lord, when you give success to our work, help us to praise and thank you and give you all the glory.

One Word: Worship God in God's own way

## REFORMS ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

Nehemiah 13:1-31

Key Verse: 13:1

### 1. Nehemiah cleans up the temple (1-9)

After the wall was dedicated, Nehemiah made a short trip back to Babylon (6). When he returned to Jerusalem, he found a compromising atmosphere that could not please God. He instigated a thorough-going reform according to the Bible. First, he threw Tobiah the Ammonite out of a room he had occupied in the temple. Tobiah was wealthy and had powerful connections, but Nehemiah didn't care about those things. He acted to please God.

### 2. Other reforms (10-31)

Nehemiah discovered that the Levites, God's servants, were not being supported; the Sabbath was not being kept; God's people were marrying unbelieving women and many Jewish children couldn't even speak their native language. Nehemiah rebuked them severely, even beating some men and pulling out their hair. Nehemiah lived and worked before God. He restored spiritual order.

Prayer: Lord, help me to obey your word and not blindly follow cultural customs.

One Word: The real standard of reform