

NEHEMIAH (Teacher's Edition)

Part One: The Reconstruction of the Wall (1:1--7:73)

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AUTHOR-

As written originally in the Hebrew language, Nehemiah was connected to the books of First and Second Chronicles and Ezra. The material in these books formed **one unbroken** book, written probably by the priest Ezra (See notes on Ezra). Most scholars, however, believe **Nehemiah** contributed some of the material that appears in the book that bears his name. This is the only logical explanation for chapters 1-7 and 11-13, which seem to be written by Nehemiah as a **first-person report**. Ezra could have picked up these passages from Nehemiah's **personal diary** in compiling this book.

WHEN THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN-

The story begins in the book of Ezra and ends in Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah centers on the events surrounding the **third return** from the Exile, around **444 B.C.** (see Ezra for more details).

Nehemiah served **twice** as governor of Judah, his first governorship spanning **12 years** (5:14) and ending when he returned to Babylon (**13:6**) in the **32nd year** of Artaxerxes. He quickly returned to Jerusalem, however, and began his second governorship. Since we know that Artaxerxes' reign ended with his death in 424 B.C., and this important event is **not mentioned** in this book, and since the book's contents dictate that it must have been written after Nehemiah's return from Babylon, most believe that the book must have been written in its completed form before the king's death in **424 B.C.**

The historical period covered by the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is about 110 years. The period of rebuilding the temple under Zerubbabel, inspired by the preaching of Zechariah and Haggai, was **21 years**. Sixty years later Ezra brought revival and proper teaching on **temple worship**. After 13 years Nehemiah came to work **on the walls**. The prophet Malachi prophesied during this time, and with Nehemiah worked to eradicate the evil of the **worship of many Gods** and the evil of compromise with the peoples who had been forcibly resettled in the land by the Assyrians approximately 200 years earlier. Their success was **so great** that during the time between OT and NT the people of God **did not return** to idolatry.

ABOUT THE BOOK-

The book gets its present title from the main character whose name means "**Yahweh comforts**". Our first glimpse of Nehemiah is in his role as **cupbearer** to the king, Artaxerxes. This was a position of great trust, both as **advisor** to the king and in keeping the king from **being poisoned**. Nehemiah lived in great luxury, but his heart was Jerusalem and on his people.

Nehemiah is so much like the book of James in the NT: it challenges us to show our faith **through our works**. It expresses the practical, everyday side of our faith and demonstrates, in Nehemiah's example, a **self-sacrificing spirit** whose only interest is summed up in this prayer: "Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love..."

The first section of the book, a full **7 chapters**, deals with **the wall**. In the wall-building period the committed believers under Nehemiah's

dynamic leadership, overcame **laziness** (4:6), **mockery** (2:20), **conspiracy** (4:9), and threats of physical attack (4:17).

The second section of the book (chs. 8-10) deals with those **inside the walls**. The covenant was renewed, and the enemies inside the walls were exposed and dealt with **very firmly**. To lead His people God chose a man whose heart was right and had a **very clear perspective on the issues**, placed him in the right place at the right time, equipped him with **His Spirit** and sent him forth to do His works. In this great books' last section (chs. 11-13) Nehemiah the layman works with Ezra the priest to bring the people back to obedience to the Word. Nehemiah used the **influence of his position** to lead spiritually, acting boldly and wisely by thinking through things **in advance**.

We see in this leadership Nehemiah exhibits that **compassion** is often the springboard to God's will and that **cooperation with others** is required to carry it out. We also see that **confidence** in the will of God comes from **fervent prayer** and the exposition of the Word (like this Bible study!) I must add that as we look at Nehemiah, true courage will show itself in the form of a **sanctified tenacity** in refusing to compromise on the conviction that one is doing God's will.

Finally, we must also consider an interesting debate among scholars regarding this book. The debate is regarding who returned to Jerusalem first, Ezra or Nehemiah (the Bible is pretty clear it was Ezra some 13 years before Nehemiah). The debate arises because of the account of the religious revival under Ezra which is inserted as chapters 8-10 of Nehemiah. There may be a good reason why this revival is included in the book. It was used to emphasize the truth that rebuilding the **Law of God** in the **hearts** of the people was just as important as rebuilding a wall of stone around the city. This was a spiritual, life-sustaining wall that no enemy could batter down.

A BASIC ASSESSMENT OF NEHEMIAH-

There are so many great lessons in this book! I want us to look at two overarching themes that speak to **restoration** and **leadership**. Salvation provides for the **complete renewal** of humans, not merely just saving and forgiving. What God begins in us through the work of salvation in Christ, He carries on through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in us. When we look at Nehemiah's leadership in the

major overhauling of Jerusalem, we see a picture of God's working **full-life restoration** and **wholeness** in us!

When we speak of wholeness, we speak of the **complete recovery** of a person from a) the **regeneration** of the spirit (Titus 3:5), to b) the **renewal of the mind** (Rom. 12:1-2), to c) the mending of **emotions** (Luke 4:18), to d) the restoring of **physical health** (Matt. 14:35-36). In the same way that the rebuilding of the walls was a demanding project, many aspects of the recovery of the people we minister to can take time. Whereas salvation and justification secure a believer's position in Christ at once, there is a **progressive process** in the renewing and healing of body, soul, and spirit. We also see the vital role that leadership plays in this progressive process. Here are things we learn from Nehemiah's leadership.

He was:

1) Self-sacrificing (5:14-18)	6) Bold to confront hateful resistance (2:19-20)
2) Compassionate (1:1-4)	7) Strategically wise in encouragement (4:10-23)
3) A faith-filled, prayerful and discerning intercessor (1:5-11)	8) Undeterred by distractions (6:1-4)
4) A careful and practical planner (2:4-16)	9) Word-centered and positive (8:1-12)
5) Quick to identify with those he lead (2:17)	10) Sensitive to discern and correct confusion (13:4-31).

I really marvel at Nehemiah. The book is just such an excellent case study in courageous, resourceful leadership. Against overwhelming odds, he encouraged the people to "rise up and build" (2:18). Their rapid completion of the wall has been an inspiration to countless Christians across the centuries that have faced the challenge of completing some major task to the glory of God.

Nehemiah also teaches that **prayer** is an important part of the faith of every follower of God. At several crucial points in his book, he prayed for God's direction (1:5-11; 2; 4:1-14; 6:9-14). If this courageous leader needed to claim **God's strength** and **guidance** through prayer, how much more fervently should we pray for God's will to be done through us as we face the important decisions of life? Nehemiah is an excellent object lesson on the power of prayer for all believers.

Finally, we must make note of the fact that Nehemiah proved himself to be, above all else, a servant: of God and His people. We see this in the following chart:

A servant...	Because God...
<i>Prays</i> for his people (1:4)	<i>Preserves</i> His covenant (1:5)
<i>Plans</i> for his people (2:6-8)	<i>Places</i> ideas in his mind (2:12)
<i>Perserveres</i> against enemies for his people (4:9, 23)	<i>Perverts</i> the enemies plans (4:15, 20)
<i>Pleas</i> for unity among his people (5: 10, 11)	<i>Is pleased</i> with unity (5:9, 13)
<i>Perceives</i> falsehood and remains faithful (6: 2, 8, 12)	<i>Proclaims</i> His name among the nation (6:16)

A POSSIBLE KEY WORD-

While Ezra deals with the religious restoration of Judah, Nehemiah is primarily concerned with Judah's political and geographical restoration. Because of this, and the fact that the **first 7 chapters** deal with the **rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls**, my key word is: **WALLS**.

KEY VERSE(S) AND CHAPTER(S)-

OK, I did my best last study and had one verse. But for me there had to be two this week related to what we discussed about the first two sections of the book. The book deals with the walls and those inside them- both manifested God's working on the outside and inside of people. Hence, my key verses were: **Nehemiah 6:15-16 & 8:8**. As to the key chapter, I believe **Nehemiah 9** fills the bill because it speaks to what we have seen as a key theme in the OT so far. It speaks to the **covenant** and the reality that **if disobeyed**, it leads to **judgment**, if obeyed to **blessing**. In this chapter the people reaffirm **their loyalty to it**.

JESUS REVEALED IN THE BOOK-

- ❖ The role of king speaks to Jesus who is King of kings
- ❖ The entire process of rebuilding the destruction wrought by judgment due to sin speaks to the very work of Jesus
- ❖ Both the Law, as well as the Temple speak of Jesus
- ❖ The Sabbath typifies Jesus who is our Sabbath rest
- ❖ Nehemiah is himself a type of Jesus, in character and role

THE HOLY SPIRIT REVEALED IN THE BOOK-

- ❖ Nehemiah's name, meaning "Yahweh comforts", speaks of the role of The Comforter
- ❖ The expression "hand of God" (as in Ezra) refers to the Holy Spirit
- ❖ The work carried on through the strength the Holy Spirit gives
- ❖ The frustrating of the enemies plans was through the Spirit (4:15)
- ❖ The gift of discerning between spirits is a gift of the Holy Spirit (6:11-13)
- ❖ The fear of the Lord is a working of the Spirit in the hearts of the people (6:16)
- ❖ The response of brokenness to the Word was the work of the Holy Spirit (8:9)
- ❖ The Holy Spirit is directly mentioned in 9:20

SOME TRUTHS AND APPLICATIONS-

Neh. 1:11

Wisdom knows that the Lord is the source of any spiritual advancement. Understand and believe that success and favor with people comes from the Lord- so make prayer and obedience your goal!

Neh. 2:12-16

Wisdom involves searching out a matter before making any decisions. Don't blab! Find out the mind of God on an issue first and then, after much prayer, communicate it to others.

Neh. 2:10,19; 6:12

Wisdom tells you that no spiritual progress will go unopposed, so we must act with discernment. Wise people discern the true origin of attacks- and find out many originate from our adversary. Don't be surprised at hostility you face. Be aware that any favor shown to God's people will anger the devil and manifest itself through people. Be discerning and reject negative confessions and prophecies spoken over you from malignant sources.

Neh. 3:5

Leaders must insure the welfare of the church. They must lead the way so that everyone carries a fair share of the work and no one puts their own interest above those of others. Don't put yourself "above" doing anything! Note and reprove those who, due their position or privilege, will not serve. Remember: leaders are servants, providing examples of obedience and diligence in leading the way.

Neh. 5:1-13

Leaders, indeed all of us, need to reprove those who ignore the welfare of others, pursuing instead personal gain. We need to champion the cause of the poor and needy!

Neh. 8:10

Joy is a powerful source of spiritual strength! We should encourage that joy on "partying" around the Word! Invite people to your home and teach the Word, pray and eat and drink!

Neh. 13:4-9 & Neh. 13:23-27

Remember this: true holiness is active and not static or passive. We must actively remove the ways of the world from our lives. Be willing to root out worldly ways where they have become established in the life of the church. Reject carnal compromises. Also, refuse evil alliances and unequal yoking! Don not marry or encourage someone in a relationship with an unbeliever.

Neh. 13:10-13

This our pet peeve! We must first be generous toward God's work, and make sure His servants are well cared for! Bless the ministers you know that are needy- like missionaries (and remember your youth and children's ministers!) Avoid any tendency to neglect the work of God in favor of personal concerns or selfish ambitions. And remember this verse:

Proverbs 22:16- He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and he who gives gifts to the rich- both come to poverty.