

# Nehemiah: Rebuilding the Broken Walls



This will be our eleventh book in the historical section of the Old Testament, and the sixteenth exit as we travel Route 66. We are going to look at Nehemiah 6:15-16 and then try to summarize and talk about the key things in the book of Nehemiah. Of all of the books, this is the hardest book for me because this is perhaps my most favorite book of the Old Testament, so to try to summarize the book in this lesson is just almost impossible. I pray you will read this book often. You should be reading the book of Nehemiah, especially if you are the head of your household, run a business, or if you have any influence of leadership at all, because I believe it is the greatest book ever written on the subject of leadership. One of our members used to tell me often that everything rises and falls on leadership. I am telling you, this is the book on leadership.

## Scripture

***"So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God."***

I pray this book will find a lodging place in the life of all of you who truly desires to lead others, as a dad, a husband, a woman who leads Ladies Bible study; everyone who have been assigned a section of the Kingdom.

This is a book we want to know, and we want to see how this book fits into the big picture of the Bible. We want to see how it ultimately paves the way for us to understand the greatest leader who ever walked on this earth, and it was not Nehemiah, but Jesus Christ. This book gets us ready for when the true King comes. He will not be a dictator or an authoritarian leader; He will be a servant-leader. When we read about this man named Nehemiah and the principles that he illustrated in building this wall, we understand the life of Jesus, the true King who would come to build the true house, the Church.

I have asked you to remember six dates as we come to the end of the historical books. Three of these dates, 606 BC, 597 BC, and 586 BC are dates when the Babylonians took the Southern Kingdom in exile under the reign of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. After seventy years of captivity to the Babylonians, the Persians would overthrow the Babylonians, and in 539 BC, Zerubbabel would lead the first return to the Promised Land. Beginning at Ezra, chapter 1, it is 539 BC. When you get to Ezra 7, it is now 458 BC, and Ezra leads the second group out of Babylon into the land of promise. As we begin Nehemiah, the year is 445 BC. Those are the six years, 606 BC, 597 BC, 586 BC, and then, 539 BC, 458 BC and 445 BC I want you to remember. If you are going to understand God's redemptive plan in Christ, you have to remember those dates.

## **Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem**

Nehemiah is in the palace when some friends who had been to Jerusalem return, they enter into a conversation and he asks how the people in Jerusalem are. He gets this reply that they are "in great trouble and shame" (ESV). Now the King James Version (which most of us cut our teeth on) says that the people were "in great reproach and distress." The reason was because the wall of Jerusalem was still broken down and its gates were burned with fire. They were destroyed in 586 BC, and now it is 445 BC and the wall is still down and the gates are still burned with fire. The news broke Nehemiah's heart. He stopped doing what he was doing. He sat down and began to mourn. He began to weep and began to fast. Then he is on his knees before God, praying, for four months! And in that prayer, he realizes that Jerusalem is in the mess it is in, not just because of

the people living in Jerusalem, but also because of all who call themselves Jews. He said even my house and my father's house participated in the sin that caused the Babylonians to take us into captivity and for part of us to still be there in exile, and for the city walls to still be down and the gates to still be burned.

Then Nehemiah said, "I was the king's cup bearer." Now please, don't imagine what the movies teach us. They portray the responsibility was to taste the wine the king drank, and all eyes were on him so that if he fell dead, the king wouldn't drink. All scholars believe that by the time of Nehemiah, the king's cup bearers was one of the highest cabinet positions in the land. He was a trusted advisor. He was a loyal friend. He influenced the king in the decisions that he made. When he had a problem at home, he never brought it to work. But on this particular day, the king asked Nehemiah what was wrong. Nehemiah could no longer say nothing is wrong. He talked about the city of Jerusalem without mentioning it by name, and the king said, what do you want? Nehemiah asked him if he would give him time to go and build the city walls, and the king granted his request.

Nehemiah gets a caravan together and heads to Jerusalem. He is there for three days. He doesn't tell anyone he has been appointed to be the governor of the land or why he is there. He had heard about the city walls, but he had to check it out for himself. In the night, he inspects the walls and the gates. The next morning, he stands before the people and says, let us rise and build! Then the people say, let us rise and build!

Then, in chapter 3, the children of Israel are standing next to each other as they build. We read the phrase next to, next to, next to, over and over. You probably quit reading after three verses...shame on you. It is probably the most important chapter in the book! It is a picture of 'so and so' standing next to 'so and so', and on and on the next thing you know, fifty-two days pass and the wall is built! When the wall is built, the nations around Israel, suddenly perceive that they didn't do this on their own. Their God must have been helping them, and they are now afraid of Israel.

By the way, Nehemiah had some oppositions from without and he had some problems from within that he had to deal with, and he dealt with them. There would be a man having a trowel in this hand and a sword in the other hand. How would you like to have to lay blocks that way? Half of the workers are having to guard you while you work. You cannot even go home to sleep; you have to stay on the job, and in fifty-two days, it is built. Those people stood next to each other and finished that wall.

## **The Wall is Complete**

When that wall was complete, they came together in the Water Gate as one man, and they asked Ezra to bring the book. Now remember, Ezra came thirteen years earlier. Ezra has been working feverishly to restore the Law of Moses to the people, but after finishing the wall under the leadership of Nehemiah, they hunger for God's Word. So we know the book they are asking him for is the book of the Law. He started in the morning, reading, and as he started, they stood up.

If you have ever wondered why Hardin Baptist Church stands when we read God's Word, it is because of Nehemiah. It is because of the children of Israel. There was such a hunger in their life for God's Word after building the wall that when the Law was read, they stood, and they were attentive. Catch this! He started in the morning, and at midday, he was still reading! Wow!! Have you ever been that hungry for God's Word? I am not talking about paying attention when you read it. I am talking about paying attention when somebody else is reading it.

Ezra had men with him who stood on each side, and at a certain point, they moseyed through the congregation explaining what Ezra had been reading. People who are old enough to be attentive are getting their questions answered, and now everybody there understands the Law. The next morning, the heads of the family came together with Ezra and his helpers, and the Bible says they studied the Word. They did this for days. Now let me tell you what happens when you start reading the Word. The Word starts reading you. As a result, during their readings they spend a quarter of the morning confessing and worshipping, and the other quarter of the morning studying. They suddenly realize that as a people, they had

not kept the Feast of Booths since the day of Joshua, so they decide to keep the Feast.

## **A Covenant with God**

Then there is this whole chapter where they talk about their covenant relationship with God and how they suddenly realize that they are in the shape they are in because of their personal sin. So they decide to write a covenant and again enter into a covenant with God. Nehemiah sets apart the leaders, he sets apart the priests, and they sign and seal the covenant. They basically summarized the covenant under three things. Israel began to realize they had failed God these areas.

1. **They married foreigners** - I know that sounds horrible today, but you have got to understand its implications.
2. **They worked on Saturday** - They didn't treat Saturday differently than any other day of the week.
3. **They neglected the House of God**

The book ends with Nehemiah bringing three reforms to the nation of Israel. The areas he reformed, in reverse order, were their view of the House of God. Do you know what they had done? Because Tobiah, the enemy, had intermarried into one of the Israelite families and because he had influence, they had built him an apartment in the Temple. So Nehemiah kicked him out, threw all of his furniture out, and he purified the Temple.

Then he told the guards who were guarding the wall that when the Sabbath begins to shut the gate and shoot any man who is going to buy or sell that tries to enter. And then the last thing he reformed was marriage to foreigners. He said don't you dare let your daughter marry one of their sons, or let one of your sons marry their daughters. He got so mad when he saw some of the people who had intermarried with the pagans that the Bible says he attacked them, whipped them, and pulled their hair out! Now, it was one thing when Ezra got upset and tore his own hair out, pulled the hair out of his own beard, and tore his own clothes, but can you see Nehemiah so upset with the children of Israel that he actually attacked somebody? It broke his heart that there were Israelites married to pagans

and their children spoke the pagan language, not the Hebrew language. Then Nehemiah ends by saying remember me, oh my God.

## **Nehemiah's Leadership: Principles of a Leader**

Now let me give you some principles. Now remember, we are in the eleventh, out of twelve, historical book. When the historical books opened, we are looking for a king. Because without a king reigning over God's people, they do what is right in their own eyes. But what is right in their eyes is evil in God's eyes. But pretty soon, we are not just looking king; we are looking for a king who is going to build God's House. Now on this side of the cross, we understand the king we are looking for is Jesus Christ, and the House He is going to build is the Church of Jesus Christ. So we are not looking for a king like David or Solomon who is going to build a physical temple in Jerusalem. God doesn't want His house to reside in Jerusalem; He wants His house to reside on every corner of the planet. We are waiting for the Messiah who is going to build the true House of God.

Now Nehemiah comes in as a governor to help the children of Israel to rebuild the broken down wall, because to a city the wall was its security, its salvation, and its strength. But in Nehemiah, we see something we haven't seen yet, and that is a true leader. Nehemiah is going to prepare our heart to see who the true King of Israel is. He is not a dictator, He is not an authoritarian ruler; He is a servant ruler. As a matter of fact, when you study Nehemiah, you are going to remember when that woman came to Jesus and said. She said, I have got two sons, would You like one to sit on the right and one to sit on the left? Jesus asked them, could you drink the cup that I have drank? He said, I just want you to know if you sit on My right and My left, We are not going to measure how great you are by how many servants you have, but by how many people you serve. If you want to be on My right hand on My left hand, just remember that I did not come to be served, but I came to serve and to give My life as a ransom for many.

- **Compassion Toward Others**

I believe that Nehemiah is in the Scripture to teach us about true servant-leadership that will ultimately be found in the Person of Jesus Christ. The

first principle I want to give you is that as a leader, Nehemiah did not let where he was insulate himself from where others were. He lived in the palace. But when he heard the news of what was happening on the streets of Jerusalem, it broke his heart and it moved him to tears. It moved him to mourning. It moved him to fasting. It ultimately moved him to praying.

When is the last time, as a dad, as a business man, as an influencer of people that you really understood where others were? Don't we have this problem of the luxury and the life we live, insulating us from where other people really live? Did you ever notice that we have this tendency to blame them for the mess they are in, instead of realizing that the mess people are in is because of the mess the Church is in? That it is not their fault, only; that is all our fault.

Nehemiah didn't just blame their sin. He said my father sinned and I sinned. A leader cannot just show up in a distressful situation and get his picture taken. He is not about the photo; he is about the people. This is not about us; it is about them. We learn that from Jesus. The second Person of the triune Godhead in the presence of God the Father did not let that keep Him from understanding where you and I are. He didn't sit down and weep. He emptied himself and became a man. In the form of a man, in the likeness of a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross, cursed of God! That is a true leader.

- **Prayerful about the Situation**

The second principle I see in Nehemiah is that as a leader, he knelt before God before he stood before others. Let me say this to leaders; let it be private before it becomes public. Don't rush too quickly to do what you think God has put in your heart to do, because it may not be God who put it in your heart. It may just be you who put it in your heart. So many times today, we announce something publicly and then begin to pray about it. Not Nehemiah, he is going to pray, ultimately, for four months. Now this doesn't mean that he didn't eat for four months. It just means that he prayed and he prayed and he prayed and prayed. You see, he knelt before God before he ever stood before the king or the people.

If you have noticed, Jesus slipped away many times. Now, if He had to slip away, what should you and I be doing? It is possible that one of the reasons the church today doesn't stand before the King, or the world, very well is because we are not kneeling very well before God.

In Nehemiah's prayer, he came to understand the situation and the problem. The problem was they were in a covenant relationship with God and they had blown it, and by 'they,' he was talking about himself too. But he remembered God's promise. He remembered God's Word. We need to let God's Word govern the way we pray. Nehemiah remembered God said that if you do 'this' you will get scattered, but if you return, 'here' is what I will do. So instead of thinking about the scattered, he started thinking about the return. That is what prayer does. It doesn't cause you just to see the negative; it causes you to see the positive. It doesn't just cause you to see the problem; it causes you to see the hope for the future. So the next thing you know, he standing before the king, the king grants permission, and then he goes to Jerusalem.

- **Firsthand Knowledge of the Issues**

Now I want you to remember this. When we study Nehemiah, as a leader his actions of wanting to rebuild the broken down wall of Jerusalem was based on firsthand information, not second hand. That is the third principle of a good leader. Did you catch that? He did not get a plan based on what his friends had told him. That started the concern. But he arrived in Jerusalem, and for three days, he made it a private inspection of the wall and then decided what needed to be done. So many times, leaders base decisions on what they do not know instead of what they do know. If you are going to lead, you have to see it for yourself.

Didn't Jesus do that pretty well? He could have just showed up on the cross. He could have, but He did not. He experienced what you experience before He laid his life down on the cross. He was in a body just like yours, just like mine. For thirty-three years, He tempted like us, yet without sin. I have said this often, but I think there are some of us who think the life of Jesus was rigged because he was the Son of God and He could not sin. You are looking at it wrong if you have that view. Yes, He was the Son of



God, but He was the Son of Man. He was just like you and me, and when He was tempted, He was really tempted, except He did not sin. Because He did not sin, I personally believe He went to a level of temptation that you and I have never been to. The moment you gave into temptation, it let up. It was over! Have you ever thought about how hard it would have been if you had gone a little farther, a little farther, and a little farther? There is never a time you can come before Him and believe that He does not understand. He understands! He lived this life with firsthand information, and then He went to a cross, and on that cross, laid His life down for you and for me. He is right now sitting at the right hand of God; He fully understands, and He is our help.

- **Manages Well**

The fourth thing Nehemiah did as a leader was after challenging the people to rise up and build, and they said, let's rise up and build. He then breaks the wall down into manageable sections. He breaks the work down into manageable sections. I love the wisdom of Scripture. I believe chapter 3 is my favorite chapter of Nehemiah. I love that phrase next to, next to, next to, along with the names of the workers. In one of my older Bibles, I have it all underlined. I cannot pronounce all the names, but it was a beautiful picture, 'so and so' stood next to 'so and so', and so on, and he names all the people who worked and ones who wouldn't work. And then toward the end of the chapter, it says that he let 'so and so' build in front of their house, and 'so and so' build in front of their house. It just suddenly hit me; this is a leader! He let people work on the section of the wall where their heart was really going to be into their work. He knew that what most men and women's heart are concerned about is their home!

I want to tell you what I've noticed as a pastor. I didn't use to like this, but now I understand it. We would have some great preschool workers, and I thought wow, those people love preschoolers! Then their children moved to the children's department, and we lost them in the preschool department! They now wanted to work in the children's department, and they helped us to have the best children's department you could have. Then before long, they are wanting to revamp the youth ministry because their children are youth now. Do you get it? They didn't love preschoolers,

they didn't love children, and they didn't love youth. They loved their preschoolers, their children, and their youth. That is why some of you don't work anymore in the church! There is this mentality. Well, I raised my kids...REALLY? You have got to be kidding me! You have all this experience with preschoolers, with children, youth, and college students, and now you...well...that is another sermon in and of itself, amen? Jesus, in His wisdom, gives His Church gifts, and according to what gift you have, that is where your heart will be. If you have been gifted to teach, you want to study and you want to teach. You want people to show up to hear you, but you don't want to invite them to show up because you never think about who is going to be in your class until you start teaching. Praise God for the people who have the gift of mercy and compassion and want people to hear the word of God, because without them the teachers would have no one to teach! Quit giving the teacher of your class credit for growth in his class. It is not him, the teacher; it is those who have a hunger to want people to hear him teach God's Word!

Nehemiah says that 'so and so' stood next to 'so and so,' and 'so and so' stood next to 'so and so,' and they built the wall in fifty-two days! Can I ask who you are standing next to? You know it mentioned a few people who would not work. They were too good to put their hands on the rubbish. Oh, there was a lot of rubbish. They didn't bring in new stones; they worked with what they had. Honestly, right now, if I were to pass around a piece of paper and ask who you are standing next to, what would you say? If I asked you what part of the Kingdom you were working in, what would you say?

- **Focus on the Work**

You might be thinking that because the wall gets built in fifty-two days, everything must have gone great. No, things did not go great. They had oppositions and problems. This leads me to the fifth characteristic in a leader's life, our next principle. Nehemiah does not let opposition from without, and problems from within, hinder him from completing the work of God.

If you are a dad, or husband, or leader of a church, a class, a business, or part of a business, when we face opposition and have problems from within our home, church, or organization, we sometimes focus on ourselves. Poor, poor me; for some reason, we think it is all about us! Your opposition and your problems are not about you. They are about the work. I get so tired of people who are in leadership positions making it all about themselves and being distracted from what they have been elected or chosen to do, and that is to do the work. A true servant-leader never lets it be about himself; it is about the work. It is about finishing what the Father sent you to do.

Jesus Christ was pretty good at that! He would not let it be about Himself, He always kept His focus on glorifying His Father. He didn't let anything prevent Him from doing what He knew He came to do, and that was go to the cross. That is why the writer of Hebrews can say it was for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame, He sat down at the right hand of God.

Can you imagine that day, as you follow the leadership of Jesus Christ, when you ultimately sit down; job finished, Father glorified, sinners evangelized, and saints equipped? Wow! Don't let problems or opposition cause you to get your eye off of what you are supposed to be doing. And that is the work God has put in your heart to do.

- **Creates a Hunger for Knowledge**

As a leader, his leadership causes people to hunger after God's Law. Now, I'm reading between the lines here with this sixth principle, but I struggle to understand how building a wall in fifty-two days would ultimately cause a group of people to want to stand in front of the Water Gate as one, and call for Ezra (who has already been there thirteen years) to bring out the Law. And then, build a special little platform for him to stand on and they all stand up when he starts reading it in the morning, and at mid-day, they are still standing with their ears perked up listening to every word of the Word of God, wanting to understand every bit of it. How does building this wall cause them to want to hear the Law? Where did that come from? That came from Nehemiah. The people saw the heart of their leader. Everything

about him evolved around his love for God, his love for God's law, and his hunger to do God's work. Because of this, the people exemplified their leader. They too were hungry to know what he knew. For thirteen years, they have had the privilege of sitting under Ezra, but now they wanted to sit under Ezra. Praise God, Ezra was ready. He had men trained to filter themselves among the congregation, and when someone had a question, they answered it. The next day, when everybody who was head of a family, or anybody who was a leader, wanted to sit, they were ready, and they studied God's Law together.

Let me tell you what happens when you start studying God's Word, and this is our last principle in Nehemiah's life. He calls them to recognize they are in a covenant relationship with God. If you are a leader at home, work, or church, ultimately, your leadership (if it is a godly, biblical, servant-leadership) causes us to recognize that we are in a covenant relationship with God.

At the end of the book of Nehemiah, the children of Israel recognize the reason they went into exile is because they broke their covenant relationship with God. They were in a conditional covenant with Him, but the reason they returned was because God was still faithful in spite of them being unfaithful. He still had a plan for them, which was ultimately to bring forth the Messiah. The Messiah had not brought forth yet, so He was faithful to them, and when they summarize it, they have three problems. They had married foreign women, they were working on Saturday, and they were neglecting the House of God. So they made a covenant with God and they sealed it, and then told God they would not neglect His House anymore. Notice how all of this evolved around the House. Nehemiah is supposed to be about building the wall of Jerusalem, but building the wall ultimately brought them to understand the problem. The problem was they neglected the House of God.

In America, we have to recognize the problem is not in Washington D.C., the problem is in Hardin, Kentucky! The problem is not our government; our problem starts with the Church. We have neglected it. You know who you are. You know if you are just one of those people who attend the House instead of building the House. The King came to build the House.

Once you become a part of the House, you become a builder of the House with Him. You did not become part of the House just to become part of the House! You became part of the House to help enlarge the House. Make the house start here, literally go to the ends of the earth.

The children of Israel failed in their covenant relationship. The sign of the Mosaic Covenant was not circumcision; that was Abrahamic Covenant. The sign of the Mosaic Covenant, the sign you were in a conditional covenant with God, was what you did on Saturday. You were supposed to do on Saturday what God did on Saturday; He rested. He finished His work in six days and rested on the Sabbath. The people who were following Him were supposed to do the same thing. You were supposed to get your work done, and even if it is not done, you stop and rest. When you rest, you show the world you are following the God who created the world. In other words, you do not make every day like every other day. That one day is special. That one day says everything we accomplish is because we follow the One who accomplished what He did in six days.

I probably should not go here, but there is no one day in our lives anymore; it is just like every other day. In fact, most of us are worried what time is church going to end so we can get to all the other stuff we want to do. We could not break out and have a day of Pentecost if we wanted to because that is not what is on our hearts and minds any more.

## **Unequally Yoked**

The holy seed of Ezra was mixed seed with the pagans. Nehemiah got so mad he attacked some people and pulled out their hair! How dare you marry a pagan and let your child know their language and not the language of the children of Israel!

This is why the New Testament emphasizes us not being unequally yoked. I do not mean to be mean here, but the desire of our hearts should be for our children to marry a godly person. If they don't, they are going to get the devil as a father-in-law. Marriage is not for evangelism. Business is not for evangelism. Our closest relationships mirror the relationship we have with God, and that is we are covenant people. It is not a conditional covenant. When you get into the Word of God, you understand you are a

covenant people because of following Jesus. It is not a conditional covenant, but an unconditional covenant.

Do you get this? The Bible says when we become children, and are adopted into the family, that we become an adult son. That means we are treated as full grown children. We get the signet ring, we get the shoes, and we get the robe! God trusts us to make decisions that are best for the family. He doesn't treat you like a child and say if you do 'this,' then I'll do 'this.' And if you don't do 'this,' then I will do 'this.' God says no, 'here' is how I am going to treat you regardless.

Wow, do you understand that? If you really believe this, you will not want to sin more. You will want to sin less when you understand that who you are is not based on what you do, but based on what He does. What He did on the cross gets imputed to us and we can now do what He did; it is called grace! You want to serve Him, you want to be holy, you want to be separate; you want your whole life to point others to Jesus Christ. It is not about your name. It is not about your fame. It is not about your glory. It is about His.