

Messages From the Gates of Jerusalem Lesson #1 - Let Us Rise Up & Build

Nehemiah

Book of Restoration; Record of Rebuilding the Walls & Gates of Jerusalem

Also illustrates the restoration and building of the walls & gates in the life of a believer
Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther relate events during the same general period of Israel's history.
These 3 books tell the story of the way out of captivity and back to God.

Timeline of Historical Events leading to Nehemiah

1. The United Kingdom under King Saul, David and Solomon - 1040 BC > 960 BC
2. Divided Kingdom: Northern Kingdom fell to Assyrian captivity about 100 years before the Southern Kingdom (Judah) fell to Babylonian captivity
3. 605 BC > Daniel and 1st group taken captive to Babylon > Temple Vessels
4. 597 BC - Exiled 7,000 men of might and 1,000 craftsman
5. 586 BC - Destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple - exiled remaining Jews except for the poor of the land
6. Captivity = 70 years - Jeremiah prophesied - Daniel 9:2
7. 539 BC > Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonian Empire - He defeated Beltshazzar. Handwriting on the wall - Brilliant plan: reroute water; go in Babylon via the river bed at night; defeated Babylon without a battle - Isaiah prophesied these events and named Cyrus > Isaiah died 150 years before Cyrus was born!
8. Cyrus of Persia allowed captive peoples to return to their homelands and live by their tradition and reestablish the worship of their respective gods. Isaiah prophesied.
9. Jewish people had been exiled to Babylon in 3 groups.
They will return to Jerusalem in 3 groups.
10. Group 1 left in 538 BC under Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple. (Ezra 1-6)
Restore the House of God - God's dwelling place and the Jewish Community.
This group included about 50,000 captives who journey about 900 miles in 4 months.
Faith, courage and sacrifice were required.
Ezra 1:5 *God stirred the hearts of the Jews - desire to return and a desire to work.*
Phil 2:13 *It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*
They took 5,400 temple vessels of silver and gold that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen from the temple at Jerusalem. Temple was completed in 515 BC and dedicated to God.
11. About a 60 year gap and insert the Book of Esther. Esther becomes Queen. Her marriage gave the Jews prestige at Persian court which effected Ezra's return and Nehemiah's position. Preservation of the Jews - Takes place in Shushan or Persia.
Truth: God is never surprised by circumstances or at a loss for prepared servants.
Joseph > Egypt; Ezra & Daniel > Babylon; Nehemiah > Susa; Esther > Shushan
Spurgeon: "There is no attribute of God more comforting to His children than the Doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. He is the Master of the Universe. God is in control."

12. Group 2 left in 458 BC under Ezra; institute many reforms; restore the Law and teaching of God's Word (Ezra 7-10) Ezra set his heart to study the Law of God. He not only read and studied it; he practiced and obeyed it.
Wiersbe: "If our knowledge of the truth doesn't result in obedience, we end up with a big head instead of a burning heart."
 13. Group 3 left in 444 BC under Nehemiah to rebuild the wall and gates around Jerusalem. (Neh. 1-6)

Overview of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther

Ezra 1-6	Esther	Ezra 7-10		Nehemiah
Restoration under Zerubbabel	58 year gap	Reformation under Ezra	13 year gap	Reconstruction under Nehemiah
538-515 B.C.		457 B.C.		444-425 B.C
Temple		People		Walls
Prophets: Haggai & Zechariah		—		Prophet: Malachi
1 st return (about 50,000 or 2%)		2 nd return (about 2,000)		3 rd return

End of the 70 years: God begins to work to fulfill His promise announced by His prophets:

1. To restore His people from Babylon
2. To rebuild the temple at Jerusalem
3. To renew their hope that the Davidic kingdom would be restored

Jerusalem, a symbol of the city of God, is to be God's dwelling place and the center of life for the world. The walls of Jerusalem stood for more than just protection. They stood for the glory of God. Unbelievers of that day looked at the broken down walls and would mock believers. The ruins of the walls became a reproach upon the name of God. Its walls needed to be rebuilt. God raised up Nehemiah for the task. The Jews returned to the devastated ruins of Jerusalem with a hope, placed in their hearts by God, to rebuild the nation. While they were rebuilding the walls, God was rebuilding their hearts so they would obey and worship Him. God will fully restore when you come back to Him.

Spiritual Application: Rebuilding the gates and walls of my life

Rebuild the strength, power and purpose again.

1. The restoration of God's dwelling place - We are the temple and dwelling place of Almighty God. Be a prepared sanctuary as His dwelling place.

Why is there so much failure in our desires and resolutions to be obedient?

There is no recognition of God as a necessary part of the process! We don't appropriate the fullness of Jesus Christ to be lived in us via the power of the Holy Spirit. We think we can function quite adequately without Him. How many Christians live on that basis?

The book of Nehemiah is designed to teach us that only with God's help can we actually change ourselves and recover from the damage and ruin of the past.

Spiritual truth: Walls of protection were essential to the usefulness of the city (believer).

Step #1: Concern about your ruins

Neh. 1:3-4 *Nehemiah heard about the walls being broken down. He sat down and wept, and mourned for days.* The Jewish remnant had been back in Jerusalem for almost a century. Nehemiah could have joined them but he chose to remain in the palace under Cyrus. God had a work for him there that could not be accomplished elsewhere. God put Nehemiah in Susa just as He had placed Esther there a generation before. It was just another day in the palace when Nehemiah met his brother Hanani who had just returned from a visit to Jerusalem and relayed a message that would drastically change Nehemiah's life.

Wiersbe: "Like large doors, great life-changing events can swing on very small hinges."

It was just another day when Moses went out to care for his sheep, but on that day he heard the Lord's call and became a prophet. It was an ordinary day when David was called home from the field and was anointed the future king of Israel. It was an ordinary day when Peter, Andrew, James and John were mending their fishing nets after a night of failure, but Jesus called them to be fishers of men.

Questions: Am I indifferent to the call of God to be conformed to the image of His Son?

Am I neglecting the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in me?

Have I grieved or quenched the Holy Spirit in my life?

Truth: You must be concerned about your ruins. Have you ever stopped long enough to assess what you could be under God, and compared that with what you are? What possibilities did God give you? How far have you deviated from that potential? Like Nehemiah, you have received word, in some form or other, of the desolation and ruin there. You will never rebuild the walls of your life until you first weep over the ruins.

Step #2: Confession: Nehemiah confesses that the nation has forsaken God, and acknowledges the justice of God's dealing with them.

Step #3: Commitment: Neh. 1:11 *O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and give success to Your servant today, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."*

Truth: We need to ask God to act in our behalf as we commit to build our walls.

He was the cup-bearer to the king. He asked the King for permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. His request was granted and he commits to the task.

Wiersbe: Nehemiah's journey from Susa to Jerusalem would require about 2 months.

The king's cupbearer would have to sacrifice the comfort and security of the palace for the rigors and dangers of life in a ruined city. Luxury would be replaced by ruins, and prestige by ridicule and slander. Instead of sharing the king's bounties, Nehemiah would personally pay

for the upkeep for scores of people who would eat at his table. He would leave behind the ease of the palace and take up the toils of encouraging a beaten people and finishing an almost impossible task.

Step #4: Courage:

Neh. 2:9-10 *The king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, (Whenever you read of Ammonites, Amorites, Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Perizzites, or any of the other "ites," you have a picture of Satan's evil spirits in conspiracy with the flesh. This satanic agency within man inevitably resists the work and the will and the ways of God.)*

Here you have this same enmity; when the enemies of God heard this, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

Sanballat, Nehemiah's chief enemy, held a high position in Samaria.

Tobiah, an Ammonite and avowed enemy of Jews, was related by marriage to one of Nehemiah's co-laborers and related by kin to Eliashib, the priest.

Tobiah gathered "inside information" and passed it on to Sanballat.

Nehemiah soon discovered his biggest problem was not the enemy on the outside but the compromisers on the inside.

Courage is needed! Neh. 2:17-18 Nehemiah arrives and exhorts the Jews to *"come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be a reproach."*

The Jews said: "Let us rise up and build." They SET their minds and hands to this good work.

Step #5: The need for Caution: When Nehemiah comes back to Jerusalem and rides about the city at night he doesn't immediately start putting bricks on top of one another or get all the people excited to build the walls. If he does, he would fall into the trap of his enemies. He arises at night when no one else knows, rides around the walls of the city, and surveys the ruins, taking note of exactly what needs to be done and makes an honest survey of the facts. Then he begins to lay his plans. These principles of reconstruction -- a display of concern, confession and commitment, and courage with caution -- are basic to rebuilding.

Whenever a man like Nehemiah says, "I will arise and build," Satan always says, "Then I will arise and oppose." Satan makes things difficult when we start turning back to God.

When you commit to the task, you will find that forces arise and resist God's work in your life with every influence that can be used against you.

Persecution & Difficulties come to resist the building of the wall.

1. Contempt -mock what God is doing -"Ridicule is the weapon of those who have no other."
Neh. 2:19-20 *But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"²⁰ So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."*

Joshua 1:7-9 *Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

Process: Know, Reckon, Yield, Give Thanks

The Jebusite spirit was at work seeking to keep Jerusalem down trodden. Sanballat and Tobiah went to great lengths to frustrate the plans of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls and have Jerusalem occupied and useful to God's purposes again.

2. Conspiracy to overthrow the work

Neh. 4:7-8 *Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, ⁸ and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.*

Neh. 4:13-14 *Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. ¹⁴ And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight...*

Neh. 4:15 *And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work.*

Romans 8:31 *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

Neh. 4:18 *Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built.*

God gives a very clear picture of the spiritual battle going on while the physical work is carried out. There was certain physical work to do but each person involved in the building had to be prepared for spiritual warfare.

Why were Sanballat and Tobiah so opposed to the work going ahead?

They were not indifferent. They were hostile to the things of God.

Nehemiah had to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, terribly destroyed with heavy rubbish surrounding it, while fighting those who wanted to stop him.

Under the leadership of Nehemiah, they accomplished in fifty-two days what had not been done in the ninety-four years since the first return under Zerubbabel.

By obedient faith they were able to overcome what appeared to be insurmountable opposition.

We are in a spiritual battle to join with the Holy Spirit to build walls and gates of protection in our lives. The enemy enters the arena with a determination to defeat us.

Attacked by his fiery darts, we can experience frustration and defeat.

How do we build our wall, when the enemy is there to tear it down?

1. Take a stance of defense; commit and submit to the Holy Spirit; Set your mind to the task.

2. Difficulties will be encountered; the enemy will rise up to stop the work.

Neh 4:11 *And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst*

among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.

3. Prayer and watchfulness are vital to the success of the task.

Neh 4:9 *Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. Note: The enemy DID NOT LEAVE after prayer.*

Why should I invest time and energy to build and secure the walls and gates of my life?

Neh. 2:17 *Let us build up the walls and gates of Jerusalem so that we be no more a reproach.*

The Gentiles delighted in mocking and ridiculing the Jews by pointing out the dilapidated condition of Jerusalem.

Ps. 48:2 *Jerusalem was "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth."*

Ps. 87:2 *God loved the "gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob."*

Truth: The purpose of my life and ministry is to glorify God.

Ephesians 1 states that I am to be to the "praise of His glory."

Nuggets of Spiritual Truth from Nehemiah

1. The people finished God's assigned task because they obeyed the same leader (type of Holy Spirit), kept their eyes on the goal and worked together for the glory of God. The enemies outside nor the difficulties inside distracted them from their God-given task. Phil. 3:13 Paul said, "This one thing I do."
2. Word "built" meaning "rebuilt" is used 6 times in Nehemiah 3. George Morrison writes: This restoration needed NO new material. In the debris of the ruined masonry lay ALL the material required. It is not by inventing clever new things that we take away our (or the church's) reproach, but by going back to the old truths of God's Word. They lie like stones in the dust, waiting for someone with a burden to recover and use them."
3. Repair is used 35 times = make strong and firm. Nehemiah wasn't interested in a "quick fix," a white-washed wall that would soon crumble.
4. Locks and bars are mentioned 5 times. Locks refer to the sockets into which the bars were fitted, thus making it difficult for anyone outside the gate to open it. Our work needs to be protected from the enemy.
II John 8 Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.
5. Nehemiah faithfully did his work and prepared God's city, Jerusalem, for the coming of the Messiah.

Am I willing for the Holy Spirit to lead and guide so I can say with Nehemiah:Neh. 2:4 So I prayed 2:11 So I came to Jerusalem 2:18 So we strengthened our hands for this good work 4:6 So we built the wall 4:21 So we labored in the work 6:15 So the wall was finished.

I Cor. 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.