

# Finishing Well

Lesson #33

Prerequisites For Rebuilding

Sept. 8, 2021

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

It 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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
  - 539 BC > Cyrus of Persia defeated Belshazzar & the Babylonian Empire.  
Handwriting on the wall; defeated Babylon without a battle - Isaiah prophesied these events and named Cyrus > Isaiah died 150 years before Cyrus was born!

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.

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

They will return to Jerusalem in 3 groups.

1. 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.
  - Nehemiah is not born yet!

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.

Temple was completed in 515 BC and dedicated to God.

About a 60 year gap after Ezra 6. 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 in Persia.

Truth: God is never surprised by circumstances or at a loss for prepared servants.

Joseph > Egypt; Ezra & Daniel > Babylon; Nehemiah > Susa; Esther > Susa

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."

2. Group 2 left in 458 BC under Ezra. [Ezra 7-10; 80 years since group 1]

Ezra instituted many reforms; restored the Law and teaching of God's Word. Ezra set his heart to study the Law of God. He not only read and studied it; he practiced and obeyed it. [7:10]

Wiersbe: "If our knowledge of the truth doesn't result in obedience, we end up with a big head instead of a burning heart."

### Walls Symbolize: Strength & Protection

- Ancient Cities - Only real means of protection and defense - Many were more like a fortress. The perimeter consisted of a massive stone wall with gates to permit or prevent the entry of people and animals. In times of war, enemy forces often concentrated their attacks on these openings which were usually the weakest part of the city wall.
- The gates were usually constructed in such a way that they were flanked by, or part of, one or more defensive guard towers.
- A city's walls keep her enemies from advancing. The walls protect the people inside from harm. They offer protection and a clear border that all can see.
- But when those walls are breached—when stone is torn from stone so that mere rubble remains—the city and its people are left vulnerable to every wind that blows and every vandal that prowls.

The Jewish remnant who left with Zerubbabel had been back in Jerusalem for almost a century. Nehemiah, a Jew, had been serving as the king's cupbearer in the Persian palace.

God had a work for him there that could not have been accomplished elsewhere.

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.
- David was called home from the field and was anointed the future king of Israel.
- Peter, Andrew, James and John were mending their fishing nets after a night of failure, but Jesus called them to be fishers of men.

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.

Neh. 1:3-4 They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire." He sat down and wept and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven. [Jerusalem lies as a defenseless and dishonored city.]

Jerusalem's walls stood for more than just power, protection and beauty.

They stood for the glory of God.

The walls and gates of Jerusalem are heaps of charred ruins.

- Unbelievers of that day looked at the broken-down walls and mocked the believers.
- The ruins of the walls became a reproach upon the name of God.

Spiritual truth: Walls of protection were essential to the usefulness of the city [believer].

Consider: The hardest part of any challenge is getting started.

A 5-step process drives Nehemiah's action.

1. Concern
2. Confession
3. Commitment
4. Courage
5. Caution

Step #1: Concern About Your Ruins: Make An Honest Evaluation Of Your Ruins

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?

John G. Whittier: "For all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: what might have been."

Truth: You will never rebuild the walls of your life until you first weep over the ruins.

Consider: No one after falling into a carnal, apathetic state would return to Christ unless God stirred his heart.

Ezra 1:5 God stirred the hearts of the Jews - desire to return and a desire to work.

Question: Is God stirring your heart to rebuild His temple?

I Thess. 4:3 For this is the will of God: your sanctification

God calls each of us to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. He desires that each of His children run the race of faith well and remain strong to the end. Your continual choice!

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. 1:11-12 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. For I was the king's cupbearer.

- The person God uses has a burden for His people, a vision for His purpose, and a commitment to His purpose.

II Chron. 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect [devoted, complete] toward Him.

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

Neh. 2:1-3 The king asked Nehemiah: Why are you sad? ...and replied to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should I not be sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

One hundred fifty years prior, the prophet Jeremiah uttered these words:

Jer. 15:5 For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you?

Or who will turn aside to ask how you are doing?

- Nehemiah was the man God had chosen to do those very things.
- Faced with insurmountable task > Laid in ruins for ~164 years

Nehemiah, the cup-bearer to the king, asked him for permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city.

Started The Process With The Goal In Mind.

- Upon receiving the king's permission, he committed to the task.

Neh. 2:7-8 Nehemiah needed the authority of the king.

- He asked to be appointed governor of Judah and the authority to build the city walls.
- He needed letters of introduction that would guarantee safe travel and hospitality between Susa and Jerusalem.
- He requested letters of authority that would provide the materials needed for the construction of buildings and walls.

Don Campbell [Nehemiah: Man in Charge]: Nehemiah lived in the palace at Susa with the king. Excavations have shown that it was built with cedar, gold, silver, and ivory. The walls were decorated with artistically colored glazed bricks and relief designs of winged bulls. Nehemiah would have eaten the best food, worn the best clothes, and lived in very comfortable quarters. He had a civil service job with incredible benefits. Yet he was willing to move out of his own comfort zone to be the agent of rebuilding in Jerusalem.

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.

Isa. 49:15-16 Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.

<sup>16</sup> Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me. Jesus Christ left His comfort zone to become the rebuilders of our broken walls.

- He came to be our personal rebuilder.
- He made an honest evaluation and identified with our need.
- He, like Nehemiah, came and wept over us and over the city of Jerusalem.
- Jesus took personal responsibility. He took our sin into His own body and died our death so we could live His life. He took our sin so we could take His righteousness.
- Jesus Christ laid aside His glory in heaven, encased Himself in human flesh and walked among us. He is still constantly calling on men and women to leave their comfort zones and follow after Him.

#### Step #4: Courage:

Neh. 2:9-10 Then I came to the governors beyond the river and gave them the king's letters. The king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

When 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.

Consider: A force is at work in every human heart that immediately rises up to oppose everything God attempts to do.

When Nehemiah arrived in Judah, opposition greeted him. Opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem had been going on for >90 years by those who settled in the area when the Jews were taken captive.

- When I make a commitment to the Lord, be prepared for the enemy's unrelenting attack.
- Knowing God is behind your task is the best incentive to move ahead in the face of opposition.

Question: Why were Sanballat and Tobiah, government officials of Samaria, grieved exceedingly about the arrival of Nehemiah and his small band of exiles?

- When Zerubbabel first returned with his group [Ezra 1-6], his refusal to accept help from the Samaritans had caused bad relations.
- Nehemiah, the king's personal adviser and cupbearer, arrived with the king's permission to build and fortify the city.
- A rebuilt Jerusalem was a threat to the authority of the Samaritan officials who had been in charge of the land since Judah's exile.
- This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> group to return. The increasing number of people in Jerusalem made Sanballat and Tobiah angry. Their control and authority were being threatened.

#### Step #5: The need for Caution

Neh. 2:11-12 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. <sup>12</sup> And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.

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.

Neh. 2:17a Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire:

- Look at the situation: The broken-down walls and rubbish no longer bothered them.

#### Time for Motivation & Action

Neh. 2:17b come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. When God's people are in great distress and reproach and the wall between them and the pagan world is broken down, God is not glorified through His people because His people are not living any differently than the world lives. The wall symbolizes the distinctive difference between God's people and worldly people in the way we think, the values we hold, and the way we relate to God and to one another [I Pet. 2:9-12].

- Motivated them: Look forward - grasp the vision and the goal

Prov. 29:18a Where there is no vision, the people perish

Neh. 2:18a Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me...

- Look Up: God is with you. He will lead and guide you to accomplish the task.

Question: Why invest this time & energy to build some broken down walls?

Ps. 48:1-2 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.

Ps. 87:2 The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

What was Nehemiah's primary motive?

Neh. 2:17b that we be no more a reproach - This is for the glory of God!

Neh. 2:18b The Jews said: "Let us rise up and build." They SET their minds and hands to this good work.

Whenever a man like Nehemiah says, "I will arise and build," Satan says, "Then I will arise and oppose." Satan will use every weapon in his arsenal against you and your commitment.

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?"

The Jebusite spirit was at work seeking to keep Jerusalem downtrodden. 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.

Nehemiah 2:20 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."

#### Hand Me Another Brick by Charles R. Swindoll

Quite frankly, I think the walls of our lives often lie in ruins through neglect. The leader who brings us to rebuild the walls is the Holy Spirit. It is He who continues the work of reconstruction inside us. He tries His best to bring to our attention the condition of our walls, but sometimes we don't hear what He is saying. We are not hard of hearing; we simply don't listen.

Some of you are living within the walls of your life surrounded by ruin, and it all began very slowly. First there was a loose piece of stone or mortar. Then there was a crack that appeared in the wall. And then it broke into pieces, and there was a hole. Because of further neglect, the weeds of carnality began to grow through the wall. By and by, the enemy gained free access to your life.

You may be known as a solid Christian man or woman. But you know in your heart that although you are a Christian in the same sense that Jerusalem belonged to the Jews, the wall around your spiritual life that protects and defends you is in shambles. Such things as selfishness, lack of discipline, procrastination, immorality, not making time for God, compromise, and rebellion have come and sowed their ugly seeds. And they have begun to bear poisonous fruit in your life.

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.

Spiritual Application: It is a picture of the strength, power, and purpose that God wants to rebuild in us as a barrier to sin, discouragement, failure, and destruction.

➤ The restoration of God's dwelling place - Be a prepared sanctuary

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

Wiersbe: 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? God's purpose in my life is only accomplished through His power as I yield and submit to His working in me.

- Look forward - grasp the vision and the goal
- Look Up: God is with you. He will lead and guide you to accomplish the task.

Phil 2:13 [Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight. [Amplified]