

## INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH

Did you hear about the man with the panicked look on his face? The group of people he was with had moved on and left him behind. As he rushed to catch up, he was overheard saying, "There they go. I must hurry. *I am their leader.*"

We live in a day when good leaders are in short demand. We lack inspiring and trustworthy leaders. This is especially true in the church. We need godly leaders.

The US Infantry has a symbol. It's a soldier with a rifle in one hand, and with his other hand he's waving onward - encouraging the men behind him to join him in the battle. "Follow me boys!" is his famous cry. The pic-

ture is a vivid model of the leadership we need in the Church - leaders who teach by example. None of this, "*do as I say, not as I do*" - we need leaders who live what they teach...

And nowhere in Scripture is this type of leadership better modeled than in the life of Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah is a manual for spiritual leadership.

Nehemiah led the third wave of Jewish patriots from their exile in Babylon back to Judah. Remember from last week... *Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple, Ezra rebuilt the people, and it was Nehemiah that rebuilt the walls* of the city of Jerusalem...

## THE HONOR OF A GOD-GIVEN BURDEN

Nehemiah tells us in verse 1 that it was in Shushan where he met the Jerusalem delegation. Shushan was a resort city - the winter residence of the Persian ruler. Nehemiah had it made - he occupied a prominent position, lived in a palace, ate the king's food (even drank from his cup.) His was a life of leisure and luxury.

Yet Nehemiah sat down and wept... "for many days". God burdened his heart. Nehemiah had been footloose and fancy-free, until God allowed his servant to help shoulder a concern. In Matthew 11:30 Jesus tells us, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Yes, His yoke is lightweight, and it fits just right - and Jesus bears the bulk of the load - but his servants are strapped to a yoke, or purpose.

One of the greatest honors to come upon a person is to receive a God-given burden - to get harnessed to a specific purpose. When God calls on you to help shoulder a burden, He's counting on you to be ready and trustworthy. He's enrolling you into His service. He's choosing to use you for Jesus' sake!

Nehemiah receives a burden. A burden is *a little of the load*. When God gives you *a little of the load* to carry you're allowed into His heart. With a burden comes the privilege to feel God's concern, and sense God's passion. For me, life would be meaningless, hollow, and shallow without some kind of a burden from God.

## Devotion Box - How to Keep a Burden Alive

Often God puts a specific burden on our heart, but somehow it diminishes rather than increases in momentum. Over time, we can lose the burden all together. How do you stay passionate about the burden, and keep it alive? Notice the four things Nehemiah did with his burden...

First, *He bathed his burden in prayer.* (His prayer is in verses 5-11.) Before we act, we first need to pray. In a work of God, *waiting* always comes before *working*.

Second, *He kept his burden before a big and gracious God.* (Notice how he addresses God in verse 5, "LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You...") God doesn't give you a burden to bury you, but tackle it on your own, and it will. That's why we need to see the answer to the burden in

God's greatness and graciousness.

Third, *He understood his burden through the framework of Scripture.* (In verse 8 Nehemiah says, "Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses...") It's so vital to get a biblical perspective on the problem at hand.

Fourth, *He's willing to act on his concern.* (In verse 11 Nehemiah asks God to bless him as he approaches the Persian king with a plan to return to Jerusalem.)

Guys, if God lays a burden on your heart don't run, or try to avoid it - do what Nehemiah did - *bathe it in prayer, keep it before the Lord, understand it through Scripture, and take some action.* The Puritan pastor, Phillips Brooks, sums up Nehemiah's approach, "I do not pray for a lighter load, but for a stronger back."

# Bible Scan - Nehemiah 1-13

## NEHEMIAH AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

In chapter 2 when Nehemiah rides into Jerusalem he comes with *letters and lumber*. This is fascinating when you look at the story typologically. The name "*Nehemiah*" means "*Comforter of Jehovah*". Who does Jesus call the Comforter? The Holy Spirit.

Nehemiah is a type of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus wants to rebuild the walls of our life. On the cross He's financed the operation, and He sends the Holy Spirit to direct the work. The Spirit's objective in our lives is to fill in the gaps, and repair the damage caused by sin.

And like Nehemiah, the Holy Spirit comes with two tools: *letters* (God's Word), and *lumber* (God's blessings). Through the truth of God, and the love of God, we can rebuild. This book provides us a picture of the Spirit's ministry in our lives.

When Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem he takes a low-profile. Before he reveals his purposes, he surveys the task. He sees for himself what he's up against. Likewise, the Holy Spirit searches the thoughts and intents of the heart. He exposes the areas in our lives in need of repair and refurbishment.

Chapter 3 reveals that Nehemiah was not only a *motivator*, but an *organizer*. Nehemiah knew the answer to the riddle, "How do you eat an elephant?" The answer: "One bite at a time."

That was his plan for the colossal undertaking of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He divided the wall into small sections, then assigned each section to a different family. The wall was built one bite at a time.

Again, Nehemiah is a type of the Holy Spirit – and a ministry of the Holy Spirit is to help us find our place in the body of Christ. He bestows upon us callings, ministries, and gifts. He assigns us a place on the wall where we can help build the kingdom. The Holy Spirit makes sure we're *on the wall*, not *off the wall*!

Nehemiah tells us in 4:6, "So we built the wall, and the entire

wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work." Nehemiah played a pivotal role in the rebuilding, but the people still needed a mind to work.

There's a sign in a San Francisco distribution center which reads, "If you don't believe in the resurrection of the dead you ought to be here five minutes before quitting time." You'll get nowhere in your spiritual life if you never work at it.

The Holy Spirit will help you rebuild the walls in your life, but you too need a *mind to work*. If you don't do your part, the walls will remain in ruins. You've got to apply God's Word, pray, fellowship, worship. You gotta get with the program!

In 4:7, when Sanballat and his cronies start seeing the gaps closing in they become "very angry", and begin planning a surprise attack to sabotage the work.

In verses 10-11, Judah tells us what made this threat so dangerous. He said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall." And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease." They were working around so much debris, it made an ambush easier.

This is also the problem in the reconstruction of our lives – so much debris and rubbish remain from the past. The Bible has a name for this debris – it's called the "*flesh*". It includes evil thoughts, embarrassing memories, wrong attitudes, bad habits, twisted perspectives – and they all get in the way of God's rebuilding.

The Holy Spirit works in our lives to establish new thoughts, healthy attitudes, good habits, biblical perspectives – but the flesh is always there. Like Nehemiah, we're also rebuilding in the midst of the rubbish – and it's the flesh that makes it easier for the enemy to infiltrate, sabotage, and try to destroy the work.

### Devotion Box - Are You On the Wall or Off the Wall?

Just as it took each family mentioned in chapter 3 to accomplish the work, likewise it takes each of us to accomplish what God wants to do through our church.

We all have a part. If the wall is 95% complete, but there's one small crack – then wild animals, or foreign invaders can still get in and wreak havoc. Guys, without you... there's a gap in the wall that endangers the rest of us.

Perhaps you've read the report, "*Who does the work in America?*"...

"Of the 200 million Americans, 84 million are over the age of 60, leaving 116 million people to do the work.

But of those 116 million, 75 million Americans are under the age of 20, leaving 41 million to do the work.

Of those 41 million, 22 million are unemployed, leaving 19 million people to do the work.

Of those 19 million people, 4 million are in the armed forces, leaving 15 million to do the work.

Of the remaining 15 million, 14,800,000 people are employed by the government, leaving just 200,000 folks to do the work.

Of those 200,000 Americans, 188,000 are in insane asylums, leaving 12,000 people to do the work.

Of the remaining 12,000, 11,998 have committed crimes and are in penitentiaries, leaving just 2 of us to do the work.

*And quite frankly, I'm tired of doing everything!*

Guys, if we're to fulfill our mission on the earth, and build the kingdom of God each one of us has work to do. What are you doing to fill in the gaps in the wall? Don't be off the wall, be on the wall. Find your spot on the wall, and begin to do the work!

## BUILD AND BATTLE

In light of the threats from Nehemiah's enemies, he sets guards and arms the workers. The Christian life requires a two-fold mentality: *building and battling*.

In 4:16 half the workers stood guard while the other half worked. And notice where Nehemiah sets the guards... verse 13... "behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings..." Here are Satan's favorite targets – the foundation and the openings – *what we believe* and *what we receive*.

Guard the openings - your eyes, and ears. Don't let evil influences into your life through the music you listen to, or the programs or movies you watch. And guard your heart. Don't buy into this world's belief system – it's headed to hell.

Guys, we need to *build* and *battle*!

So what if you build wonderful walls, but aren't prepared when the enemy attacks. You need to battle as well as build.

On the other hand, you can adopt a combat mentality, that allows no time to build. I know people who love to fight, and that's the emphasis in their Christian life. They're always on an anti-something campaign, and never build personal peace, and joy, and holiness. It's not an either/or proposition. We need both.

Verse 17 makes the point beautifully: "Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon." They had a sword in one hand, and a shovel in the other. This is the example every Christian needs to follow.

## TIME TABLE

**536 BC Medes and Persians conquer Babylon**

**536 BC First Return**  
*Zerubbabel rebuilds temple*

**486-473 BC Story of Esther**

**458 BC Second Return**  
*Ezra rebuilds people*

**445 BC Third Return**  
*Nehemiah rebuilds walls*

## NEHEMIAH AND LEADERSHIP

Nehemiah approaches the leaders of the city in 2:17, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."

Nehemiah was not a "barge in and take charge" guy. He took 3 days to understand the people, and identify with their predicament. He uses the plural pronoun – "us" or "we". He took pains to communicate to the Jews that he understood, that he was one of them, and that he would work with them.

There is a tremendous difference between a boss and a leader. "The boss drives men; the leader coaches them. The boss depends on authority; the leader on good will. The boss inspires fear; the leader inspires enthusiasm. The boss says 'I'; the leader 'we'. The boss fixes the blame for the breakdown; the leader fixes the breakdown. The boss says 'go'; the leader says 'let's go!'"

Nehemiah was a leader – not a boss.

In 2:18 Nehemiah tells us, "I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work."

It was said of the chairman of Ford Motor Company, Henry Ford: "He could get anything out of men because he just talked and would tell them stories. He'd never say, 'I want this done!' He'd say, 'I wonder if we can do it.' (And they did.)"

When Nehemiah shared the work God had done in his life to get him to Judah, it inspired the Jews to begin the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. God had set His plan in motion, and the Jews realized they needed to do their part.

A good leader establishes vision and inspires people. What Tom Landry, long time coach of the Dallas Cowboys, said of coaches, also applies to leaders: "The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don't want to do, in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be." Nehemiah had this ability...

Nehemiah's strategy for ministry was simple... *pray and work*. Nehemiah stays focused on his work. The only time he stops work is to pray.

In his book "Eating Problems for Breakfast", Tim Hansel lists the 10 steps to success... "1) Pray, 2) Work, 3) Pray, 4) Work, 5) Pray, 6) Work, 7) Pray, 8) Work, 9) Pray, 10) Work." You get the point. We need a mind to pray, and a mind to work.

Under Nehemiah's leadership the work was progressing rapidly. But as the work picks up, so does the opposition. But notice in chapter 4, Nehemiah refuses to become distracted by the taunts and criticisms. Part of Nehemiah's brilliance was his ability to stay on task. *His priorities became his protection*. Rather than get caught up in addressing the cynics, Nehemiah stays focused.

In 5:7 Nehemiah tells us, "After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles..." He thought before he acted. *Always use your noodle before you order the pasta!*

Notice also in chapter 5 Nehemiah practiced what he preached.

In the last half of the chapter Nehemiah describes how he refused to draw the typical governor's salary. He was there to serve the people, not for the people to serve him. He refused to use tax money to finance a luxurious lifestyle. Nehemiah and his servants lived modestly, and took only what was needed. This is an excellent example for all those in spiritual leadership.

In chapter 6 Sanballat spreads lies about Nehemiah. Again he wants to distract Nehemiah from the work. Nehemiah recognizes his intention, and prays, "O God, strengthen my hands." In other words, help me stay focused.

I've been told when a pastor leaves a church he does so because of just 8 people. A disgruntled few tell lies and stir up rumors. They hassle the pastor until he quits. Nehemiah refused to be drawn away from what God had called him to do.

Nehemiah takes care of his character, and trusts God with his reputation. It's been said, "So live that when people speak evil of you no one will believe it."

# Bible Scan - Nehemiah 1-13

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study, email Pastor Sandy - [sandyadams@calvarychapel.org](mailto:sandyadams@calvarychapel.org)

Calvary Chapel Announcements - June 18, 2000

**6/19 Mon - 6/23 Fri—Junior High Retreat at St. Simon's Island**

**7/10 Mon—Ladies Night Out Luau**

**7/24 Mon - 7/27 Thurs—Kid's Camp 2000 at FDR State Park**

**7/22 Sat- 7/29 Sat - Senior High Mission Trip at Saltillo, Mexico**

**8/18 Fri- 8/19 Sat—Calvary Chapel Worship Conference**

Next Bible Scan - July 9 - Esther 1-10

## Devotion Box - Growing Slack and Robbing God

"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"  
- Nehemiah 6:3

## Bible Scan Memory Verse

When Nehemiah first left Persia, and came to Judah, he told Artaxerxes he would return... and true to his word he does – for a short time.

While he is gone Nehemiah finds that the people had grown slack and disobedient in several other areas. For example, they had stopped tithing to the Lord, and it had forced the Levites into other jobs.

For a commentary on Nehemiah 13 read the book of Malachi. It was written during Nehemiah's visit to Persia. Remember one of Malachi's central themes, 3:8, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me!... In tithes and offerings."

Pastor E.V. Hill makes the statement, "If God can get it through you, God will give it to you." And here's an important truth. God blesses us so we can be a blessing to others.

Malachi 3:10 is the one place in Scripture where God challenges us to prove Him, "prove Me now in this, says the LORD of hosts, If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." If you give to God, God promises to give to you!

The people had endured hardships, and worked hard to regain a foothold in the land. It would be sad indeed, if they lost the momentum they had gained by withholding their tithes and offerings.

What about you? Have you grown slack in your giving to God?

## Devotion Box - The Joy of the Lord

In 8:10 Nehemiah and Ezra tell the people of Judah, "Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." The joy of the Lord gives us wings to rise above our circumstances. It fortifies us in times of trial and persecution.

*Joy is the secret up the Christian's sleeve.*

All hell might break loose around us, but the Christian still has reason to rejoice. He has heaven in his heart. Hebrews 12 tells us Jesus endured the cross, and despised the shame, for the joy set before Him. Joy was His strength!

The shortest verse in the English Bible is John 10:35, "Jesus wept." But the shortest verse in the Greek Bible is 1 Thessalonians 5:16, "Rejoice evermore." Jesus experienced sorrow for a season so you and I could rejoice forever. CS Lewis once said, "Joy is the serious business of heaven."

Guys, it takes 72 muscles to frown, but only 14 to smile. It takes a lot less effort to smile than it does to frown. God wants us to rejoice – to take joy in Jesus!

## GOING OVERBOARD

In chapter 13 Nehemiah radically opposed three sins: intermingling Jews with pagans, neglecting to pay tithes, and irreverence for the Sabbath.

Nehemiah was so successful in creating a disdain among the people for these three offenses that they went overboard, and became self-righteous and legalistic in their observance. In the days of Jesus these were the primary preoccupations of the Pharisees. They hated gentiles - stringently paid tithes – and constructed a rigid observance of the Sabbath. Ironically, Jesus had to correct them on all three counts.