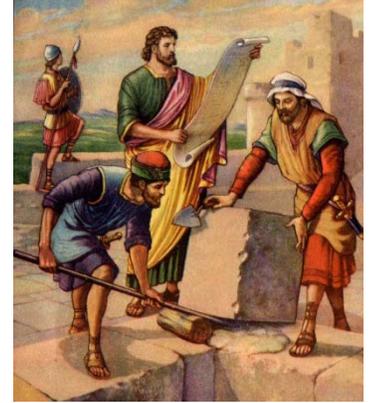


16 – Nehemiah: Rebuilding the City Walls

- “First person” narrative gives the impression that **Nehemiah was the writer**. If Ezra was the writer, he was using Nehemiah’s account. This book, as was true in the Book of Ezra, has copies of letters, decrees, registers, and other documents. The same man probably wrote both books. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are one in the Hebrew canon. Nehemiah was a layman; Ezra was a priest.
- In Ezra the emphasis is on rebuilding of the temple (religious aspect); Nehemiah **it is on the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem** (political, civil).
- **Chronologically** this is the **last of the historical books**. As far as the Jews are concerned, the Old Testament goes no further with their history. Ezra picks up the story about 70 years (time of their captivity) after 2 Chronicles, as a remnant returns to the land of Israel. The return under Ezra took place about 75 years after the return of Zerubbabel. Nehemiah returned about 15 years after Ezra.
- The “seventy weeks” of Daniel begin with the Book of Nehemiah (not with Ezra) **“Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times.”** (Daniel 9:25) Nehemiah tells us **“in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king.”** This is an important date in prophecy.
- Three men played important roles in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. **Zerubbabel**, the prince, **Ezra**, the priest, and finally **Nehemiah**, the layman.
- **Remember.... Watch and pray, or work and pray**, are the words of this great leader.
- The first seven chapters of this book deal with the *rebuilding* of the walls. The rest of the book deals with *revival* and *reform*. The first chapter begins with Nehemiah’s prayer.
- Nehemiah is **probably the best example of great leadership** in all of the Word, except for Jesus Himself. Daniel and Joseph and others are shining testaments to men of God, but Nehemiah’s leadership in post-exile Jerusalem is more detailed with clear examples of what constitutes a great leader. Nehemiah was first and foremost a man who loved and wholeheartedly loved God. That’s where any leadership begins.



Highlights

1	Nehemiah hears of desperate conditions in Jerusalem, prays for remnant, wants to go there to help.
2	Requests permission from king of Persia, returns to Jerusalem, reviews ruins of city (by night, so much debris he could not ride his horse through it) and encourages people to build walls. “Let’s do this job. God is with us.” People agreed, “Let us rise up and build.” Enemies not happy.
3	City walls are rebuilt, gate by gate sections, by teams of families living near each section, walls are being built all at once. We are given the names of all 10 gates. Begins with the Sheep Gate, ends with the Sheep Gate, list of gates and people building. Must be a reason for this! (see below)
4	City wall is built about halfway up, enemies tried laughter, ridicule, mocking, planned surprise attacks, but Nehemiah prayed every time and foiled their plans. “Remember the Lord” was their rallying cry. Jews went back to work each time, carried a brick in one hand a sword in the other.
5	During rebuilding Nehemiah opposed in many forms, now opposition from within. Jews busy building walls, could not carry on business, had to buy food, had to mortgage property to pay unfair taxes to their own countrymen (extortion). Nehemiah found out, got mad, openly rebuked nobles and rulers for this, asked wealthy Jews to restore what was collected, not to collect any more. They agreed, but he doesn’t trust them - wise man. Made them put oath in writing, pronounced a curse on them. “shook out his lap.” - He shook out his long robe in front of the crowd and said, “This is the way God will shake you out, and I will shake you out, if you don’t make your promises good.” Nehemiah indicates he has conducted his business with great integrity never taking advantage, asked God to remember him for this. God did! His whole story has been read by billions.

6	Enemies, Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, others hear wall is completed, but gates are not set up. Nehemiah a man of prayer, discernment. Enemy tried to sweet talk him but he turned them away and kept working. Now they spread lies that Nehemiah is attempting to rebel against Persia and set up a separate state. Again, enemy plots failed. False prophet lies to Nehemiah and says people are trying to kill him and he should run and take sanctuary in temple. No deal. He is hit with every kind of opposition but never backs down, never stops praying, never falls for the lies of the enemy, and never stops believing in God's power. The wall is finally finished in 52 days, but still danger. Jewish noble mixed up in marriage with enemy, spy. Letters sent to scare Nehemiah.
7	Inside city there still much work to be done, like clearing out debris, rebuilding homes. Nehemiah set doors at gates, appointed men to protect city, also appointed singers and Levites to serve in temple. Each entrance was to be watched during the day. At night, each one was to watch at least his own household. Remainder is genealogical record, same found in Ezra 2, a listing of faithful remnant that first returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. <i>(God remembers!)</i>
8	On Feast of Trumpets a great Bible reading, results in huge revival. Ezra called to bring Law of Moses. Israelites really wanted to hear. When Ezra opened God's Word, everyone stood up, stayed standing. People gathered by water gate inside walls of Jerusalem. Teachers stationed throughout crowd. Ezra would read a portion of the Law and then he would stop while these men stationed would ask his group, "Did you understand what was read?" Man assigned to his group would explain that portion of the Law to them. This process was repeated. People were convicted of sin, great emotional outburst, tears of repentance. People told not to mourn but to celebrate, that it was day for rejoicing. <i>"This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved."</i> (9b-11) Initial study of God's Law caused many leaders to come to Ezra following day for more instruction, then celebration of Feast of Tabernacles (discovered in the Law, not celebrated since time of Joshua!). The people are obeying the Law and rejoicing.
9	Daniel 9, Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9, are all great prayers about revival and repentance followed reading of the Word of God. Most of this chapter is an amazing prayer (by Levites), but more than that it is one of the best Old Testament history lessons anywhere. <i>(Read it!!!)</i>
10	Begins with list of leaders who signed covenant Israelites make with God. Resolved to obey God's Word. Nehemiah, 22 priests listed first. 44 chiefs of people are listed. Terms of covenant spelled out and specifically include 3 things: vow not to intermarry, promise not to do business on Sabbath, or any other holy days, they will bring their firstfruits to temple. (will not neglect the house of God.)
11	Contains another list which continues into ch 12. Time to build up city and begin living again. People cast lots. 1 of every 10 persons would stay in Jerusalem, to inhabit and build up city. Other 9 would move to other cities and spread out over land. God knew each one; and He records their names because they had willing hearts.
12	List continues from ch 11. Dedication of walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah brought Levites from all over because Jerusalem was city where temple was, appointed "two large thanksgiving choirs" for this occasion, walls were done and people were right with God. <i>"Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off."</i> (v 43) Great procession, celebration.
13	People separated out "mixed multitude" in their midst. Nehemiah has returned to Shushan, asked for another leave of absence so that he could go to Jerusalem, makes shocking discovery. People were not keeping covenant. God had strictly forbidden intermarriage with heathen, yet high priest is aligned with enemy Tobiah by marriage, turned over temple storage room to Tobiah. Nehemiah tossed out Tobiah and his stuff, restored temple storerooms, also made provisions for Levites who weren't being supported properly with temple offerings. People also not keeping Sabbath, and intermarrying again. Nehemiah used some extreme measures to restore things when he returned to Jerusalem, but warranted. In short time, people forgot covenant with God. Sin cycle being repeated. Very sad end to powerful book of a powerful leader committed to God and his people. But leaders following Nehemiah didn't have his humility, fierce resolve. Nehemiah asks three times, <i>"Remember me, O my God, for good."</i> (v. 14, 22, 31) The Word of God is permanent. God indeed remembers him for good.

The most important lesson in this book is that of a praying and believing man who wanted to be used by God. There are many lessons here, and this book is worth a careful reading, and close study of how God uses those who rely on Him, and also equips them for this service. It is also a study of the human condition, and how mankind always falls away. *(see the lesson on the city gates as well)*

Nehemiah 3: A Lesson in the City Gates

Chapter 3 records the rebuilding effort, but in an interesting way. We are given a tour of the city via the 10 city gates. These gates can tell the story of God's plan.

- 1: Begins at the **Sheep Gate**. (built by High Priest) This is the gate where Jesus entered into Jerusalem. The sheep gate is the gate through which the animals were brought for sacrifice and this is the gate our Lord used. Jesus was the Lamb of God, the sacrifice give for our sins. This gate symbolizes the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. An interesting note. The men of Jericho worked alongside the men of Jerusalem on this portion of the wall. Jericho is the place of the curse, and its men worked right next to the sheep gate. Perhaps there is a story in this as well. Jesus, and His sacrifice on the cross took away the curse on mankind.
- 2: **Fish Gate**. Here fish were brought in from the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. The fish gate was one place you would not have any problem locating, your nose would lead you right to it. Jesus said to the men who followed Him, "... I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). This gate is about fishing for souls with the gospel, and stands for our witness and the spread of the good news of Jesus.
- 3: The **Old Gate**, which has been there from the very beginning. Jeremiah 6:16 tells us the message this gate has for us: "Thus saith the Lord. Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls..." We are living in a day where people are only interested in new things. Morality is changing. People talk about "new morality," but it was old even in the time of Noah. This constant search for something new just leads to frustration, stress and sin. The old gate gives us practical navigation for life – stick with the old things that are true. Stick with God's ways and don't hunger for something else. It is also interesting here that women working. God noted it in His word.
- 4: The **Valley Gate** is the one that led out of the city of Jerusalem down into the valley—it could have been on any side of the city, because you have to go down into a valley to get out of Jerusalem. This is the gate through which many of us are called to walk. This gate reminds us of the valley of the shadow of death. All of us are walking in that valley. Since the fall, the shadow of death hangs over us. David spoke of it in Psalm 23. Only the Light of Jesus dispels that darkness. This gate also has a practical side. It is the gate of humility, the gate of humbleness. God sometimes has to lead us into valleys and through trials and difficulties in order to teach us some lessons. All of us go through this gate on our faith walk.
- 5: Next is the **Dung Gate**, an important gate for the health of the city. Today the dung gate leads to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, but in Nehemiah's day it was located at the southwest angle of Mount Zion. This gate was where the filth was carried out. In 2 Corinthians 7:1 Paul says, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We need to confess our sins to God. Honest confession is the means by which we take out the garbage. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The dung gate symbolizes our need to take our garbage out once in a while, to confess regularly our sins to God.
- 6: The **Fountain Gate** refers to what Jesus meant when He said to the woman at the well, "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14). At the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus stood up and said, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38). In the next verse John explains His statement: "But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified." (John 7:39). The gate of the fountain reminds that every believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and regularly requires a new infilling. When a believer is filled with the Spirit, he is not just a well, but a fountain of living water which will gush out to be a blessing to other people.

- 7: The **Water Gate** was the gate used to bring water into the city. An aqueduct brought some water into the city but not all of it. The remainder was carried in through the water gate. It symbolizes the Word of God. Here is where Ezra put up a pulpit and read from the Word. The place he chose was symbolic; it was no accident. The interesting thing about the water gate is that it was not repaired. Apparently when the other gates and walls were torn down, the water gate remained intact. That was unusual. It did not need any repairs at all. That should tell us something. The Word of God does not need any repairs. It is intact and will stand forever. The water gate is the unending, always standing Word of God that cleanses us.
- 8: **Horse Gate:** In Bible times the horse a warrior's animal. Everyone else rode donkeys. The horse gate speaks of the "soldier service" of the believer today. Jesus will return to earth for the Battle of Armageddon riding a white horse (Revelation 19). The horse gate is a picture of war and warriors and reminds us that we are in the middle of battle, and that one day Jesus will return on a horse proclaiming victory.
- 9: The next gate we come to is the **East Gate (Golden Gate)**, obviously located on the east side of the city. It was the first one that was opened in the morning because it was facing in the direction of the rising sun. All during the night the watchman was on the wall, walking up and down, making his rounds. Early in the morning he would come around to the east gate and watch the horizon for the first sign of daybreak. The east gate in modern Jerusalem is sealed. Some think that it is the gate through which Jesus will come when He returns to earth. He may do that, but Scripture is not clear on that. Scripture indicates that He will enter through the golden gate, which is not in the wall of the city but in the temple. The east gate is where the sun would rise, and where again one day the Son, Jesus Christ, will re-appear.
- 10: **Miphkad Gate:** *Miphkad* means "inspection" or "registry." When a stranger came to Jerusalem, he had to stop at this gate and register. It was also a gate of review. When the army had been out fighting a battle and returned, they passed through this gate. It was here that David reviewed his soldiers returning from battle. Everyone will appear before God for judgment. Some to reward, and some to everlasting separation from God. Believers have the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) "review" which will be about the rewards we receive. Unbelievers have the Great White Throne Judgment of the lost. (Revelation 20:11-15) That is the picture of the gate Miphkad, review and judgment.

We've have been through ten gates, and now we are back at the sheep gate. We have been all of the way around the walls of Jerusalem, and we are right back where we started. It all rests on the atonement, the redemption bought by Jesus' sacrifice.

Note: The city gates of Jerusalem today do not correspond to these original gates, except in a few cases, such as the Dung Gate (wouldn't you know it!) Pictures of this gate today are below.

