

God's Builder - Nehemiah

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 February 2009

[0 : 00] Nehemiah Nehemiah Just going to have a little bit of a hop, skip and a jump through the book of Nehemiah.

It's a massive book, what's in here. And we're really scratching the surface, but, Nehemiah, what's it all about? It's a building project. It's a man's name. A work of restoration that this man did.

It's the last history book of the Bible before the coming of Christ. It shows God's people actively working, engaged, restoring God's work in their city.

And it shows us some principles too, about building, about principles for building a church you could say too. And the man Nehemiah had an important job. He was a cut bearer of the king.

He supervised the king's safety. He was his top security advisor if you like. He had to ensure the king's safety as he tested the cup before the king drank.

[1 : 02] And he would become a wall builder and the governor of Jerusalem. So we're going to look through the book from verse 4 of chapter 1. We see chapter 1 verse 4, the concern that Nehemiah starts with.

The book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem had been burnt down and destroyed. Now verse 4 there of Nehemiah 1. And it came to pass, Nehemiah says, Nehemiah says, Nehemiah says, Before the God of Heaven.

Nehemiah had concern. He was activated by the concern of the city and of the people. He prayed with weeping, with fasting. Prayer activated Nehemiah. Nehemiah. His heart was broken, his spirit was stirred.

And in verse 6 of Nehemiah 1, he prays more fervently and persistently. It says, day and night he prayed. He prays in humility and in repentance. And he sat down and wept, it says. Then he stood up and worked.

He fasted and he prayed and then he took action. And Nehemiah, what an example to you and to me as God's people. Nehemiah was an example for making repairs about what's broken down in our lives. Nehemiah shows the true service, the true devotion to God's word, to praise, to worship, to prayer.

[2 : 28] And Nehemiah, the book, it shows God at work. God at work helping his people overcome the difficult circumstances. So Nehemiah, he saw the conditions of the city.

He saw the conditions of the city. Brothers and sisters, take a look at the conditions of our city. The conditions of our nation. The conditions of our planet. We need to take concern.

Prayerful concern. The city is in ruins. Elizabeth is in ruins. The walls of the city are broken down.

There was no military defense against the enemy for the city of Jerusalem.

It says the gates of the city were burnt with fire. And what do gates speak of? Gates in the Bible speak of the place of business.

The marketplaces. The market was entered through the gates as the traders entered. It was the nation's economy. The gates were important to the business. The gates were spoke of the government, of justice, of law and order.

[3 : 28] The councillors, the governors sat in the gates of the city. They talked about the law and order and the decisions of the city. And that the place was a place of counsel and guidance where the gates of the city were.

So the gates were important and the gates were in a state. And Nehemiah saw not only the conditions of the city but the condition of the people. They were in great trouble and disgrace.

They were embarrassed and ashamed. The broken down walls pictured not only the city broken down but the state of God's people as they drifted from their relationship with God.

And what could Nehemiah do? Nehemiah cared enough to pray. He cared enough to intercede for God's people. To take their shame upon himself as he's burdened for the people.

And the book begins and ends with prayer. Prayer is mentioned throughout. There's 12 instances of prayer in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was committed to this mission to committed to the city. [4 : 30] Committed to God's rebuilding of the city even though it meant for him giving up the palace, the comfort, the luxury. Willing to take the risk.

Willing to lay everything on the line and get involved. And the question for you tonight, believer, are you a builder? Like Nehemiah. Can you take that concern and be a builder of God's work? And it starts with concern. Secondly, we see confrontation. Confrontation is in this book. It wasn't all plain sailing for Nehemiah as he confronts some things.

He confronts firstly his own sin. In verse 6, he repents. He asks for forgiveness. He pleads for forgiveness for himself and for the nation in verse 7.

He seeks God's forgiveness. He confronts his own sin. And then he faces throughout the book a number of obstructions and difficulties. For example, he faces rubbish and rubble in chapter 2 verse 14 of Nehemiah.

[5 : 33] It talks about the rubbish was piled so high that you couldn't get through. It says there was no place to pass in chapter 2 verse 14. The rubbish was so piled high.

I guess you could picture in today's news of the Victorian bushfires and of these places where it's just rubble and it's just burns and ruined.

And as we've heard of stories where it's hard to get through in certain places with the wreckage on the roads and so on. This is the kind of spectacle that confronted Nehemiah.

There was no place to pass because the rubble was piled so high. What about in your life? Is the rubble, is the rubbish to get rid of? Something that's piling up so high in your life that God can't move through your life that God stopped working in your heart.

What is it? What is that one piece of rubble that is obstructing you moving forward with God that God wants you to be rid of? What is that one area of your life that you want to see changed?

[6 : 37] Perhaps it's just seeking God for that one thing that's obstructing your walk with Christ tonight. Chapter 2 verse 19 Nehemiah was surrounded by enemies.

He had to confront enemies. In chapter 2 verse 19 it talks about some of Nehemiah's enemies. It talks about Sambalat. He was the governor of Samaria. It was a system of government and a religion that was not censored in Jerusalem.

It was anti-God. And Tobiah the Ammonite. Now Tobiah, it's interesting. Tobiah's name means God is good. Kind of a bit of an anomaly, isn't it?

That his name was called God is good. But Tobiah the Ammonite, he was a compromiser. He was a wolf in sheep's clothing. He was kind of a tear amongst the weeds.

That Nehemiah had to deal with Tobiah. And Nehemiah's biggest problem in rebuilding this city, this wall, was not the enemies on the outside so much, but the compromises on the inside.

[7 : 44] These enemies taunted Nehemiah. And it says of them that they heard it, they laughed us to scorn, they despised us, and they said, what is this thing that you do? Will you rebel against the king?

They accused Nehemiah of being a rebel, of being out of order. But what did Nehemiah do when he was mocked? In chapter 2, verse 20, he committed in faith, despite being mocked.

His faith was strong. He answered, the God of heaven, he will prosper us. Therefore we, his servants, will arise and fill. But ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was strong. He straight down the line. And someone has said, strength is gain by overcoming adversity, not by giving in to it. Nehemiah stood up to the compromises that were naysayers, that were gainsayers, that were against the work.

What did he do? He didn't quit. And he didn't stop praying. Confrontation was a mark of his life. And if we're going to succeed in God, and do what God has for us, it's going to mean confrontation.

[8 : 52] We must be willing to overcome opposition. Maybe it's opposition from within our own ranks, from within our family, our circle of friends and acquaintances. We're going to confront those things that are against God.

And pray that God will give you his grace to be an overcomer. In chapter 4, confrontation came again as the enemies of Nehemiah came to mock the work.

And they mock God's people and their fame. In chapter 6, the opposition says, in effect, in 6 verse 2, if we can't beat them, let's join them.

And there's a sneaky attack. They say, come let us meet together. They try to meet with Nehemiah to try to infiltrate, to try to really destroy God's work.

It's like it's been said in political parties. There's a term that's used of white-hanting, where they, because they know they can't overcome by attacking, they actually join the group that they want to destroy.

[9 : 53] And their white-hands, they eat it from the inside until it crumbles. And I suppose this is what these people wanted to do. Come let us meet together. Come and let's have some discussion.

Let's have a peace summit. Let's see how we can get together. But really, they only wanted Nehemiah's destruction. It was really a distraction, a time-waster, and Nehemiah dealt with them accordingly.

And so often, we can have those things that confront us that will try to distract and deter us and bog us down. They might be harmless things, but they might be things that hinder your walk with God, they hinder your serving Him, they hinder your serving people, they hinder your winning souls, discipling people, and training children, doing the things that matter for the kingdom of God's sake. And friends, be alert to that. Now learn confrontation. So we see concern in Nehemiah. He prayed. He saw the stake. We see confrontation and opposition came.

Thirdly, we see construction. The Nehemiah of the Bible was a constructor. He was a builder. We see in 2 verse 17, the construction phase begins.

[11 : 04] As Nehemiah goes to the city, he gets permission to leave his day job to go and build the walls and to get those people working together. And he says to them, 2 verse 17, Then said I unto them, You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire.

Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Jerusalem lies in ruins. Nehemiah quells the people of God to be construction workers.

He says, Come, let us arise, let us build, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and we'll be no longer in disgrace. Nehemiah did not promise a prize to the one who laid the most bricks.

He didn't have a competition where he could buy a brick. He just said, Come, let us rebuild the wall. Come, roll your sleeves up, put on the elbow grease and let's get into the work of God.

Now, it's rebuilt the wall, it's broken down, it's a disgrace, it's a reproach. He didn't motivate the people by offering them a free trip to Disney World because they really put a hard work in.

[12 : 20] No, it was a team effort where there was a common vision, a common goal, a common task. It's like Churchill. He motivated the people with his own willingness to sacrifice.

I have nothing to offer, said Churchill, but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. And when there's a war on, which there is, it's no time for competitions and playing games, playing church.

It's about, come, let us rise and build the wall. And verse 18, and they said, let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

The question tonight for you, for me, is what are you building? What are you building with your life? Is it something that will last? Nehemiah and his workers went through great tests.

They succeeded through great difficulties. Some people did not work. Not everybody played fair. Not everybody pulled their fair share of the work.

[13 : 21] It says in chapter 3, verse 5, and next unto them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord. They didn't put their necks into it.

They didn't put their oomph into it. Their heart into it. For these ones, there was a spirit of pride, a feeling of self-importance. Maybe, because they were more noble, that they thought it was beneath them to get down in the dirt and get the mortar and get their hands grubby.

This was the only group that failed. What was their problem? Pride. It was pride. Pride can hinder you from serving God.

They were unwilling to work. They did not want to get their hands dirty or their clothes soiled. What a shame. Let that not be true of you, that you're too proud to serve God.

That you're too proud. Learn humility. Grace. God gives grace to the humble. Chapter 3, we see that by and large, thankfully, the people of God, they were all in together.

[14 : 30] There were 41 teams in chapter 3. 41 teams, 41 units of people that had assignments to work on the wall. It says the phrase, and next to them, and next to them.

There were different units, different groups of people. It's mentioned 25 times in this chapter. In Nehemiah 3, verse 5, for example. The Holy Spirit joins us in a horizontal level with other

Christians.

We're all about the same work. We all have different gifts and callings and roles to play, but we all have an important place to fill a gap on building that wall.

If one group hadn't done their share, the wall wouldn't have been completed. God places us in work alongside each other, in teams, in groups, in unity, together.

And there were rulers and priests, there were professional craftsmen, there were people from outside the city, and the women too. Everyone was doing something. The hard, rough work of rebuilding the walls.

[15:34] And every willing hearted worker has a place of service in the building of God's work. There's a place for everyone and a job for everyone to do. Some did extra work. It says in chapter 3, verses 5, 27, for example, some did more.

I know that's true in church too. Some do more than their fair share. Thank God for workers. Let's learn from their example that Tekawites did not only their first assignment, but another as well.

Verse 11 also tells us that some some who did extra work. These were the extra mile folks. Isn't it great to have Christians who go the extra mile?

As the Lord praises us to do, he urges us to go the extra mile. And one worked with great earnestness in chapter 3, verse 20, a chap called Baruch.

Baruch, the son of Zabai, burns and glowed doing the will of God, the work of God. He worked with great earnestness. That's chapter 3, verse 20. Chapter 4, verse 6, it says, So built me the wall, and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof, for the people had a mind to work.

[16:50] I think that's a problem in church than today, that people don't have a mind to work. I think we're living in the TV culture too long, that it's just sit and press the button, that's about the hardest thing we'd have to do.

You know, just sit and be entertained, be amused, be a fan, be, you know, be cared for. But God wants you to be working. He wants you to be activated, to be energized, to be part part of his kingdom's service, to be having a mind to work.

They work together and we need each other. We need fellowship. That's the good thing that they join together, even in small groups, as I say, in these 41 teams, alongside one another, groups of families, of clusters of people, working together.

We need fellowship. We need our fellow believers. Chapter 4, Nehemiah faced discouragement. Friends, discouragement. Maybe that's affecting you. I know it's past me at times and others close to me, but it's easy to be discouraged.

Discouragement is one of the greatest weapons of the enemy. He wants to discourage you and it's a destructive thing. Negativity, criticism, sarcasm, ridicule.

[18:06] We must overcome that with prayer and with perseverance. When obstacles and difficult circumstances come and press in on us, we need to pray through, not call it quits.

Another thing that faced Nehemiah was weariness and hardship, jealousies and conspiracies. The builders were criticised too. Their character was criticised in chapter 2, verse 19.

You're a load of rebels, they were called. Their abilities were criticised in chapter 4, verse 2. You're feeble. You're weak. Their project was criticised.

Their wall, they criticised the wall. They said, a fox is going to knock that down. Yeah. Just had a good laugh at them. Their worship was criticised. Their hard work was criticised.

Do you intend to finish that? The ability of the group to build was criticised. But Nehemiah, what did he do? He didn't argue, he didn't get into all of that, he didn't get distracted by that negative talk.

[19:10] Verse 4, he brought it to the Lord in prayer. That's Nehemiah 4, verse 4. And the Lord worked, the people worked with all their hearts as Nehemiah brought it to the Lord in prayer.

Friends, the enemy's strategy is still like that. The enemy wants to drain our morale. The enemy's propaganda is still to wage war against the people of God so that they feel disheartened.

It's like Nehemiah 4, verse 10. And Judah said, the strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed and there is much rubbish so we are not able to build the wall.

What did they say? We're weak, we don't have enough strength, you know, we're tired, it's hard yakit, it's too much rubble, you know, it's a hopeless task, we're not able, we can't do it.

But they laboured on, they pressed on, the Jews, they'd been hard at work every day for over 20 days. This was full on. They worked from morning to night, they were exhausted and when the wall was built halfway, discouragement sets in and some want to quit.

[20 : 18] We're prone to quit when we get tired, when fatigue sets in. We must learn to rest, I must learn to rest, we must all learn to rest. Fatigue gets you when you focus on the glass half empty rather than the glass half full.

When you see all the things that need to be done, you see the great mission field and we're just stretching the surface. You know, there's millions of opportunities to share Christ with so great a harvest field and there's not enough workers like it was in the Bible days and you see the needs and you know that we're never going to really get the job done.

They did not see that the wall was half filled but they saw that there was much rubble. They felt unable to go on and sometimes the rubble that frustrates us too.

When we see that all the bad things going on, there's a lot of rubble in Elizabeth, amen? We see that, you know, the drug addiction, the domestic violence, the torn apart families, the chaos, the destruction, that the enemy is doing damage to people's lives and we see that what can we do as Christians?

We can just shine our little light, let our little light shine that's about all we can do and hope and pray that some of that rubble that hinders people from living a Christian life can be removed.

[21 : 46] Nehemiah stationed the people's defences in verse 13 of chapter 4 and he kept on encouraging their faith. He says, don't be afraid of them. Be not you afraid of them.

Remember the Lord which is great and terrible and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses. Nehemiah says, now's the time to actually fight.

We talked along that line this morning. Now's the time to fight. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Life is a war. In Nehemiah 4 verse 21, Nehemiah assigns half of the servants to be ready for war and half of them involved in the work.

It's interesting, it's hard to name the newsletter The Sword and the Trowel. And it's based on this text here where some laboured with the mortar and the trowel and some had the spear in their hand as they were and they were ready to defend.

And the Christian life too is a balance between working and warring. Some had a trumpet, some had a sword, some were mixing water and some were looking out for the enemy.

[23 : 05] In chapter 5 we see the complaints of the workers. We learn when we serve God we see people complain. The people are suffering hunger verse 2 chapter 5 debt verse 3 and struggling to pay taxes.

It's a hard time for them. And friends, there's lots of people, lots of things we can find to complain about in our lives and lifestyles in our community that we live.

Problems are a part of life. It's like me and I just learnt to battle on despite all of that and encourage the people to do that too. Because really we know for sure that you're either having a problem now, you just have one or you're heading for one.

Life is full of problems and don't let it get you down because we know that our Lord is with us. And if you're doing work for God expect problems, expect battle, expect warfare.

Don't think that if you have problems I must not be doing something right. You could be about doing something right, that's why you're having a hard time. So notice what kind of things Nehemiah had to encounter.

[24 : 13] There was infighting. The Jews fight against the Jews, the brother against the brother, and this happens in churches too. The church in Corinth had believers taking one another to court, and the church in Philippi also had internal strife.

It talks about them fighting and devouring one another. They don't sound too healthy, kind of church unity there at that time. There's sometimes infighting, and sometimes there's financial need.

Verse 3, the supplies were running out, the practical needs. They had mortgaged all they had so they could borrow money to buy food. That's verse 3 there. Must be chapter 4 or 5.

And there was famine came along too. Some things we have no control over. It's like the current world environment, we've got no control over that. But we know that our God still is able, and because he is with us, we are able.

And Nehemiah, he just points the people back to the word of God, to faith, to obedience, to the fear of God, and he urges the people to live right. Nehemiah 6, 6 and 7.

[25 : 16] Nehemiah 6, verse 16, and it came to pass when all our enemies heard thereof, they heard of what was going on, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes, for they perceived this work was wrought of our God.

They could see that God was doing something here. Here they were repairing the walls, it took 52 days, 52 days of huge effort.

When the project was completed, everyone knew that the work had been completed with the help of God. And even some of Nehemiah's enemies realised that God was in this project.

Now I'd like to think that God is in this church. God is in the decision making, the thinking, the forward thinking, the actions, the activities, the programs, the projects, that God is in this.

Otherwise it's pointless. God must be in it. Otherwise it's going nowhere. And friends we need to seek his face like Nehemiah did. In chapter 8 we see what happened when the people were obedient, when the work of God was evident.

[26 : 22] Chapter 8 we see revival. Revival happened. Spiritual awakening hit this city of Jerusalem. One of seven main revivals in the Old Testament happened here in chapter 8 of Nehemiah.

The spiritual awakening will come as a result of God's word, as a result of God's hand on Nehemiah and on God's people. As we see the word of God upheld as they opened and heeded and obeyed the word of God.

The word of God brought revival in Nehemiah chapter 8. And the people call out for God's word.

They cried out and it was rattle out. Verse 3, from daybreak till noon.

And all the people listened attentively. God's word is honored by those who listened. And verse 5, the people all stood up. God's word inspires worship. Verse 6, and they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

They responded as the word of God was delivered and they heard it and heeded it. They obeyed it. There was faith. There was joy in obedience to God's will.

[27 : 30] What is revival? Charles Finney said this. Revival is nothing more or less than a new beginning of obedience to the word of God. It's obedience to the word of God.

That is revival. When the word of God is obeyed and taken into lies, into action. So we've seen, started with concern.

Nehemiah saw the mess that the city was in. Look at the mess our nation and our city is in. Brother and sister, look at Elizabeth, Solesby, Smithfield, Dameron Park.

It's in a mess. The city is broken. The walls are broken down. The gates are burned. We need concern. We need concern, brother and sister today.

We need to realise the great danger that our city is in. We need to have a confrontation against the powers that are working and doing damage. To have a confrontation.

[28 : 25] We need to have a construction. A construction project. Not of bricks and water per se, but a construction of the people of God. A construction and edifying of one another.

About building up of our faith together in Christ. And lastly we see in Nehemiah's book from chapter 11 there was a consecration. There was a consecration from verses 11, chapters 11 to 12.

The people rededicated themselves to God. The people committed their lives according to the word of God. The people said we must give ourselves to God.

In chapter 12 there's a dedication of the wall. The dedicated people now want to dedicate their word. In verse 27 of chapter 12 there's a dedication of the wall and they wanted to, I'll read it, and the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought the Levites out of all their places to bring them to Jerusalem to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, with psalteries and with harps.

Just as they had given careful attention to their work, they also gave careful attention to their worship. And verse 27 and 29 talks about special singers who celebrated with music.

[29 : 42] The dedication to have joy, thanksgiving and worship singers and instrumentalists. They climbed on the wall and they surrounded the city with singing, thanksgiving, rejoicing and musical instruments.

The dedication called for a purification, for a thanksgiving, for a sacrifice. And the people, they marched on the walls, they showed to the surrounding enemies that the walls were rebuilt and strong and celebrated God's victory.

And they claimed the victory for themselves. And later, in Nehemiah chapter 13, God's word says it warts and all.

It says it warts and all, the people became unfaithful to the commence they had made in chapter 10. It did take them longer from chapter 10 to chapter 13. And verse 11, why is the house of God

forsaken?

They've compromised, they've messed up already. It didn't take them long to mess up after the revival there of Nehemiah 12. They compromised with relationships. It talks about that in Nehemiah 13, 4 to 9, 23 to 31.

[30 : 47] They had not separated themselves from the world. And they had intermarried with the heathen. What a shame or reproach again. They compromised with their giving, they'd been unfaithful.

They compromised with respect for the Lord's Day. They'd allowed the city gates to be opened on the Sabbath so Gentiles could enter the city and trade. This is a temptation to the Jewish businessmen to break the Sabbath and open their businesses.

Friends, separation. If we have revival, we still need separation. We need to ensure that separation is part of the package, that total commitment to cleave to God, to be motivated by love for Him.

Separation and total devotion to God no matter what the cost. Friends, just to close, to apply this now to yourselves. Think of this now. Please, if you were, of what areas in your life and mine, what areas are in need of repair.

God wanted Jerusalem, His city, to be a strong city that could defend itself against the enemy and like us now. God wants you, Terry, Ian, Peter, He wants you to be strong Christians, to be strong and steadfast, to be strong against the enemy, to build strong spiritual walls and we need to check our lives and take that kind of stop take, that kind of spiritual check up, if you like.

[32 : 11] Look at where our walls are broken down. You know, we talked earlier of prayer, of reading the Bible. Where is it that our wall might be starting to crumble and needs a bit of repair?

The walls need repair. Maybe it could be in your spiritual life, in your family, in your day-by-day walk with Christ, there's something that needs to be repaired. We know in the Bible it talks about the altar as a repair and rebuild the altar of the Lord that had broken down.

What needs repairing in your life? Be challenged tonight to make today a decision point. Make it a fork in the road. Make today a day when you decide to follow more firmly, more closely.

What rubble needs clearing away in your life? What is blocking you? What is in the way from stopping you from following Jesus wholeheartedly like you must, like he calls you to?

What is it that needs restoring? That you've let lapse and let lapse and you've grown slack and you've grown weak. It's like the story told of how missionaries were in a jungle and the people used to go and they had a gathering time and then the individual Christians used to go off into the bush and have a little private time of prayer and from each house, from each hut in his jungle and the people could tell, those who were backsliding, because the path had become overgrown.

[33 : 47] The path to their place of prayer had become overgrown. Maybe that's true for you tonight. We've been challenged about prayer. Think about your prayer life. I know I need to pray a whole lot more.

And friends, let's be encouraged. Let's have that prayerful concern. Let's confront sin. Confront the enemies of God. Confront the rubbish. Let's have that mind to work, to construct, to face the problems, to give glory to God in the construction that He does for His glory.

And let's have that consecration, that fresh rededication of giving ourselves afresh to God and His service. And can we, I trust, pray. I pray tonight as individuals, as a church, make that commitment tonight to take those steps.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for Nehemiah's testimony. This man of God that we know saw the great need and he did something. Lord, help us too to see the need in our lives, in our families, in our communities, in our neighborhoods.

Lord, around about us, help us to be moved. Help us to be moved, Lord, with compassion. Move to action, Lord, to see and to be a part of the construction effort of the kingdom of God.

[35 : 00] To build the kingdom in this world, in this place, in our community, in our streets, in our connections with people, that we might see people saved as they put their trust in you, we pray for your glory.

In Jesus' name, amen.