

A Journey Through Ezra and Nehemiah

Nehemiah 3-6: Wall Rebuilding Despite the Opposition

Take a moment now to ask for God's blessing and help as we study Nehemiah 3-6 together.

The Big Picture:

What's the Big Picture? Nehemiah 3-6 tells us of the process of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. This is possible only through faith in the Lord God who helps and strengthens them. The same Lord God inspires Nehemiah's godly leadership in the face of threats from inside and outside the people.

Once in Jerusalem, Nehemiah leads the work of rebuilding the walls and closing the gaps. He leads the people in trusting God throughout the whole process. It is beautiful to read of the unity of God's people (chapter 3) in spite of external opposition (chapter 4 & 6) and internal strife (chapter 5). Finally the wall is complete! The building has finally been accomplished 'with the help of our God (6:16).'

Read Nehemiah 3 & 4

Working Together Despite Threats from Outside

Chapter 3 is a list! Amongst it there are many gates named: the Sheep Gate; the Fish Gate; Old Gate; Valley Gate; Dung Gate; Fountain Gate; Water Gate; Horse Gate; East Gate and the Muster Gate. There are also many towers mentioned: the Hundred Tower; the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Ovens. There are numerous sections of the walls, areas and districts mentioned also. A group of people works at each. This gives us a little dose of reality. These were real people who worked on real walls, gates and towers. The people work alongside one another – working side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder on a God-given mission

Chapter 4 is rather different. It is full of opposition and threats.

Sanballat, Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites are angry to learn of the rebuilding and repairing of the walls. In v. 7-9 we read that they plotted together in their anger. They had violence in mind and planned to cause disruption and confusion within the city. But the Nehemiah and his building team were undeterred – they are strong in faith and in the assurance of the help of their Father. They remembered the Lord God – a God who is great and awesome (v.14).

Read Nehemiah 5 & 6

Threats from Inside and Pressing Through with God's Help

Chapter four ended on a note of great victory. The people of God were doing the work of God, and they did it despite all obstacles. They worked with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other, and they would not let their enemies stop them. But in this section of chapter five, there

is no mention of working on the wall, indicating that the work had stopped. There was strife among God's people – one group fought against another.

What was the problem? The problem was money. There were a few reasons why this was the case. The people had problems with money because:

- a. they worked hard on the walls and did not spend time on providing for the needs of their household;
- b. there was a famine, which made food more expensive. It was so expensive that some mortgaged their property to provide food;
- c. because the King kept taxing them even though they weren't working as much and even though living in the land was costly;
- d. because the loans they had taken out to live cost interest, and some were in default. Therefore, some had to give their children as servants to their lenders to pay off the debt.

Nehemiah's immediate response is one of anger. He's angry because these money problems were caused, in part, because of the greed of those who wanted to make a profit off of the money troubles of others, something Moses' law clearly said was wrong (Exodus 22:25). Nehemiah was a good leader; he cared and was passionate enough to get angry but he was wise enough to know he had to consider the matter carefully.

After thinking it over Nehemiah makes a wise, godly and courageous response. Something is quite clear in these chapters - Nehemiah was no coward. When people were in the wrong, he confronted them. He told the truth, and from the result (Nehemiah 5:12-13), we can judge that he must have told the truth in love. Those who were in the wrong received the rebuke and did the right thing by admitting they had been wrong.

After these difficulties were dealt with, others arose. Sanballat and Tobiah and to Geshem the Arab and the other enemies learnt that the wall had been rebuilt and that no gaps were left. Sanballat and Geshem tried to arrange a meeting with Nehemiah. However, Nehemiah has the discernment to know and understand that this is a trap.

Their enemies also try to dishearten, frighten and stir up the people with false rumours and slander. In another incident, a false prophet also offers Nehemiah an easy way out of his difficulties. Again, Nehemiah sees through all of these things. He also knows that he cannot allow these circumstances to deter or distract him from the task at hand. He presses on. He seeks the Lord's help and strength.

The walls of Jerusalem were completed on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, after 52 days. The people of God had achieved the purpose given to them by their Father. By the strength, power and help of the Lord God they accomplished their work. The enemies of the people were afraid, disheartened and conscious of their own failings when they heard the news – their self-esteem took a hit! It was evident to these enemies that this thing had been accomplished by the power of God. Tobiah tries to intimidate Nehemiah. However, it seems that Nehemiah left Tobiah up to God.

Servanthood that claims nothing and gives generously

We cannot forget Nehemiah's servant heart, godly leadership and generosity. We see in Nehemiah one who as governor could have 'lorded it over the people' but who instead served them generously – gathering people from the nations at his table (5: 17-18). Nehemiah did not claim the benefits of the allowance technically due to him (5:14-18). We might think of the apostle Paul, who sought no payment for his gospel work (1 Corinthians 9:14-15). For the sake of the Lord Jesus, he made himself 'a servant to all' (1 Corinthians 9:19). This kind of servanthood ultimately reflects a gospel-shaped pattern, shown most fully in Christ Jesus, who, 'though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant' (Phil 2:6-7). Through this heavenly servant, we receive by grace undeserved salvation.

The Unity of God's People

Chapter 3 offers a remarkable picture of God's people working together: the high priest, priests, Levites, and the non-temple workers; goldsmiths and perfumers; servants and officers; people from towns near and far; fathers, sons and daughters; whole towns and families ... one next to the other. This is a scene that reveals every single person's crucial role in God's family and a scene that reflects the story of salvation told in the Church of Jesus Christ. In Christ alone, we believers are one, 'fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God ... being built together into dwelling place for God by the Spirit' (Ephesians 2:19 & 22).

Take time to reflect on the implications of Nehemiah 3-6 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God; what might lead you to repent and to reconsider; and what leads you into a place of deeper trust in His gracious promises and purposes.

Some questions for reflection:

1. Nehemiah 3: The words of Nehemiah 3 emphasise the unity of God's people in the task of rebuilding. How does 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 help us think about the unity of God's people in the present context of the church?
2. Nehemiah 5:1-13: Note the various stages of Nehemiah's response. Which do you find most thought-provoking or convincing and why?
3. Nehemiah 5:14-19: Note the ways Nehemiah offers himself as an example. How is he similar to the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9? Write down some of your reflections on how the fear of the Lord God relates to our treatment of those around us (also see Lev 25:39-43).
4. Nehemiah 6:1-14:
5. Nehemiah 6:15-19: These verses bring this section to a close. What kind of resolution do they bring? What recurring themes are wound into these verses?

Feel free to get in touch to share what you have learned and what you have been reflecting on during our study. You can email Mark at revmarkmcconnell@gmail.com and/or Emma at revemaycarson@gmail.com.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26

Yours in faith and love,

Rev Emma