



BIBLE STORIES EVERYONE OUGHT TO KNOW

**Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ ^ Adult Bible Studies ^ Winter-Spring 2010
March 21, 2010
Nehemiah**

Getting Started

It is 444 BC and Nehemiah, a descendant of exiled Jews, lives in Persia serving King Artaxerxes as cupbearer. His position gives him a prominent place in a powerful and prosperous empire. He lives a comfortable life. Why does he exchange this life to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its walls? Why agree to govern Judea? The answer lies in God's call through Nehemiah's brother, who travels 1000 miles to share news that brings Nehemiah to tears and prayer.

The Story

It has been almost 100 years since the first remnant returned from exile. Though the restoration efforts of Ezra and others were noble, the restoration remains unfinished. Jerusalem still lacks walls to protect people from invaders. Nehemiah knows that sin among his people is why Jerusalem is not yet rebuilt and he prays for forgiveness. He is saddened that the city remains vulnerable and has not been rebuilt.

Seeing Nehemiah's sadness, the king asks how he can help. Nehemiah asks the king for authority, resources, and funding to rebuild Jerusalem and its walls. The king graciously grants these requests, even writing letters attesting to Nehemiah's royal authority to undertake the work. Nehemiah leaves the good life in Persia to accomplish God's mission.

After Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, he first surveys the walls and assesses the damage. He tells the Jewish leaders that the project has God's blessing and persuades them to begin work immediately, using the argument that without walls, their troubles will continue. Walls are essential for protection and a sense of national identity.

Nehemiah carefully plans the work and assigns the construction of each section of the wall and of each gate to specific Jewish clans. The simultaneous construction of every section of the wall results in the entire circumference of the wall rising at once, not section by section. All can see that the wall is being built from any part of the city.

Neighboring tribes, led by Sanballat, Geshem, and Tobiah mock the effort and accuse Nehemiah of lacking the king's authority. Nehemiah's faith response is simple—God will help us (2:20).

Opposition continues and Nehemiah repeatedly turns to God for help. God responds with help. Nehemiah diverts most of the city resources to the effort and this leads to weariness and worry about protection, but Nehemiah reassures his people that God will fight for them (4:14) and he devises a brilliant plan to staff the effort with alternating teams of builders and guards.

In 52 days, the people complete the work. The Lord God provides His people a wall.

Through prayer, planning, perseverance, and by the power of God, Nehemiah gets things done. He personally works on the wall, opposes excessive interest charges by the rich, accepts no salary for his work as governor, and institutes numerous religious and political reforms. With

the walls complete, Nehemiah and Ezra spur the people to a renewed zeal for God. Ezra reads the law and people respond with a reinstitution of the Festival of Booths. The people also confess sins (Nehemiah 9) and vow to obey the Lord (Nehemiah 10). The final chapters of Nehemiah describe a reoccupied and safer Jerusalem, a people reformed, and a people revived for God. It all started with one man on God's mission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

What the story tells us about God?

Despite the sin of his people, God's love for them is manifest when he calls Nehemiah. God shapes Nehemiah for this specific time. God works through others (like Nehemiah's brother) to call Nehemiah. God moves the people of Jerusalem to hear Nehemiah's message of hope and to follow his plans, responding with days and nights of hard work. Nehemiah is not alone in God's mission. God answers Nehemiah's prayers repeatedly. Nehemiah asks God for help and God provides abundant results. Finally, God uses Nehemiah's talents to accomplish God's mission. Nehemiah had leadership, organizational and planning skills and he humbly allows God to direct these gifts to accomplish God's task. God grants people gifts, calls them at the right time, takes them to the right place, and helps them aid His people.

Now, what about our faith?

God invites us to join Him in His mission on earth. He also equips us with gifts and talents so that we can accept that invitation with vigor and accomplish His mission. What is your talent? How have you allowed God to accomplish His mission through you? We all have something to offer toward God's work here on earth.

Monday: Nehemiah 1

1. Though Nehemiah is living a comfortable life, far from his homeland and many years after his forefathers' exile, why would his brother's news bring him to tears?
2. Why does he pray for forgiveness?
3. Is God calling Nehemiah or is this simply a faith response?

Tuesday: Read Nehemiah 2

1. Why did the king grant Nehemiah's request? Could Nehemiah start the work without the king's help?
2. Does God work today through those who surround us to accomplish His work?
3. Why does Nehemiah inspect the walls at night?

Wednesday: Read Nehemiah 3 - 4

1. Why does Nehemiah assign specific parts of the wall and gate work to specific clans?
2. What effect would the division of labor and planning have on the builders, the residents of Jerusalem, and the enemies outside?
3. What promoted opposition from without and what drove discouragement from within?

Thursday: Read Nehemiah 5 - 10

1. Describe Nehemiah's efforts to defend the oppressed poor of Judea?
2. To what extent had the Jews been their own worst enemy in the years after exile?
3. How could a wall-building project lead to repentance and revival?

Friday: Read Nehemiah 11 - 13

1. Describe the dedication of the walls and its impact on the people?
2. Do you know any Christians like Nehemiah today?
3. How can we learn from this great servant and how does God call us, use our talents and skills today?