

# ABIDE

## DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



## REBUILDING THE WALL

### NEHEMIAH

About thirteen years later from the time of Ezra, the third wave of God's people come along with Nehemiah to the city of Jerusalem.

Originally, Nehemiah was an official in the king's court. He served the king Artaxerxes as a cupbearer, and during this time it was a very important position. While in this position, Nehemiah had heard of the sad condition of the city wall and gates and began to grieve so much that he gave himself to continual prayer.

God then finally led him to take on the task of rebuilding the wall and he was given leave by the king to do this very job. So Nehemiah takes a third group of exiles back to Jerusalem and heads up this building project.

God's people had occupied their former homeland for about ninety years and this would continue for many more years to come. As Israel continually became more habitable, more and more Jewish people found themselves making the long journey home.

#### *How to think About Nehemiah*

In outlining this book, much of what you encounter in the beginning is an overlapping narrative about what is happening while the wall is being repaired.

**Repairing the Wall (Chapters 1-6):** The whole of these chapters are dedicated to the actual rebuilding of the wall. It ranges from the conception of the plan all the way to the completion of the plan.

**Defending the Wall (Chapters 4-6):** Enemies of this project were out in full force and actually threatened death on all who were involved in this project (including women and children).

**Completing the Wall (Chapter 6):** It is here where we read that the entire wall was completed in the breath-taking timeframe of 52 days.

**Reviving the People (Chapters 7-13):** This describes the spiritual renewal taking place among God's people and the celebration that took place upon the completion of the wall project. Also in this chapter is a narrative about a spiritual compromise that took place among God's people and how Nehemiah dealt with this problem.

Further, we learn that many of God's own people had to be convinced to actually come back and live inside the city walls once they were completed.

## *What to Look for in Nehemiah*

### **Key People—**

**Nehemiah:** A great leader and the main character of this book. What you are reading is believed to be personal journal recordings of Nehemiah that were copied and transcribed by Ezra the priest.

**Ezra:** The spiritual leader of Israel at the time who played a key role in the revival of God's people by way of his preaching.

**Sanballat:** The ruler of Samaria who attempted to discourage God's people and keep the wall from going up.

**Tobiah:** An Ammonite ruler who mocked and discouraged the rebuilding of the wall. He was able to con his way into having his own room in the temple and for a time, reasserted power over God's people.

### **Key Themes—**

**The Importance of Prayer:** Before Nehemiah did anything, he prayed when he heard about the condition of the city. In fact, if you look closely at the timeline, you'll find that Nehemiah spent a significant amount of time in prayer.

**The Importance of Preparation:** Once Nehemiah was led by God to rebuild the wall, and once he was given permission by the king, he began a meticulous plan to make sure God's work was completed in the way it was intended to be completed. God's work requires a special amount of time and thought before any physical work can be started.

**The Importance of Serving God:** The entire book is about serving God by participating in His work. When reading about this service, you'll notice that once the job was completed, the celebration was massive. It is always a time of rejoicing when service is rendered to God.

**The Importance of Godly Leadership:** This comes to the forefront as we see all of the repairs that needed to be made, the empowering of God's people, and the protection from danger that the people experienced.

It wasn't that God's people did not have leadership during this time, it was that they did not have enough godly leadership during this time. Ezra could only do so much.

What we learn from this is that leadership does not exist in a vacuum. If there is a position that needs to be filled, then there will always be someone there who will try to fill it. If the godly do not step in, the ungodly will. This is what caused such struggle during Nehemiah's arrival. There were enemies who were threatened by godly leadership because they did not want to let go of their influence.

## *What to Gain from Nehemiah*

**When the Going Gets Tough, You Get Tougher—** In the Christian life, if you want to win, then you're going to have to fight.

In chapters 4-6, when God's enemies started to threaten the lives of those who were attempting to build the wall, instead of running and hiding, and instead of trying to compromise, Nehemiah solicited more volunteers to work as soldiers who would protect the progress of the wall and the people who worked there day and night.

This wasn't an easy solution; we can be sure that this caused more strain and stress on both manpower and emotion. This was by far the harder decision to make, but it was the right one.

Whenever sin hits your life and makes you want to give up, by God's grace, you can grit your teeth and keep moving forward.

**It's Easier to Fight Sin Together**— You'll notice that the completion of the project and the protection of the people was only made possible because they banded together as one people under God and refused to let the enemy win.

That is the way it is in the Christian life, and more specifically, in church life. When we are unified and we are all on the same page about completing God's work, then we accomplish more and have far more victory than when we fight alone.

**Don't Flirt with Danger**— This proposition statement comes from a passage in Nehemiah found in chapter 13. In this chapter a priest named Eliashib made an alliance with the enemy. He allied with a man named Tobiah (who is mentioned in the key persons section). In fact, Eliashib prepared a nice, huge room in the temple for this person to stay.

Now, this all happened while Nehemiah was away for a time, and when he came back, this is what he came back to. Not only this, but none of the ministers of God were doing what they were supposed to do, the people were not honoring the Sabbath, and some of God's people were taking pagan wives again.

In every instance, the people were compromising key portions of the law that had ultimately brought devastation in the first place.

We need to understand that every area of compromise in our lives puts us in great danger.

**It's Okay to be Angry with Sin**— As we follow Nehemiah around again in this same passage in chapter 13, you'll find that he took extreme measures in correcting every single thing. With Tobiah, he physically threw him (along with all of his things) out of the temple. With the ministers not doing their job, he gathered them up and forced them to sit where they were supposed to sit and do what they were supposed to do. With those violators of the Sabbath, he shut the doors to the gates and forced all of the businesses to close for the day. When it came to those who were taking foreign wives, he plucked out their hair from some of them and made them re-promise their oath to God.

Now, obviously, we are not to imitate these actions in our day. This was a different time, a different setting, and a different rule of law. For Nehemiah, some of these offenses were literally a matter of life and death.

However, what we can take away from this passage is that it is, in fact, okay to be angry about sin. We can be angry about it in our own lives, in the lives of those we care about (family and church), and we can be so angry that we confront it when it has the potential of affecting us personally.



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