

January 2023

What's the Point....of Nehemiah? **Mark Garner**

The book of Nehemiah is best known for Nehemiah coming to Jerusalem and helping the Judeans to rebuild the city walls; yet as in Ezra, this was also a time when God continued to rebuild the ruins in their hearts. Moreover, building the wall also parallels the ways that God asks us to help one another, especially spiritually, and to look out for one another in the body of Jesus.

God Rebuilds The Ruins (Overview Of Nehemiah)

Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem in 444 BC, almost fifteen years after Ezra (Nehemiah 1-2). When he hears that there are still many struggles in Judah, especially that Jerusalem's walls are still in ruins, Nehemiah prays for God to allow him to go to Jerusalem. Nehemiah holds a key position under King Artaxerxes, and the Lord moves the king to show favor to his trusted servant.

Though they at once face opposition, Nehemiah reassures them that God will be with them, and they begin to rebuild the city walls (Nehemiah 3-7). As the rebuilding begins, we can see God's hand at work, helping them to work together, prominent persons and little-known persons, and some whose usual professions range from goldsmiths to perfume-makers.

More opposition soon arises, from threats to mocking and intimidation. As they continue with the wall, God strengthens their hearts and through Nehemiah he teaches them some ways to watch out for one another. God can do this for us too; for we often need someone to caution us about spiritual dangers, or someone to call attention to someone in need, or someone to remind us of God's words.

God also continues rebuilding their hearts. When Nehemiah discovers some of the officials are profiting from the hardships of the less fortunate, he encourages them not to charge any interest; he himself gives up many of the privileges his own position would have given him. Meanwhile, God helps Nehemiah respond calmly to opposition, and soon the walls are completed.

Ezra then teaches God's Word to the assembly (Nehemiah 8-10). They listen for hours, as the Levites also explain God's words as needed. They are distressed to find they've not been following many of God's decrees, so Nehemiah and Ezra reassure them that this is a time to rejoice in knowing God better. They offer a prayer of praise and ask God to guide them.

At the dedication of the wall, they can look at what God has done for them, and they also realize that they will need God to continue giving them mercy and understanding each step (Nehemiah 11-13). We too can always see the things our Heavenly Father has done for us, as well as our ongoing need for his grace and guidance. As God continues to cleanse and guide them, he calls us to keep our hearts and minds open, so he may renew us every day too.

Overall Thoughts

Throughout Nehemiah, we see not only the many ways our Heavenly Father shows his care to the Israelites, but also how he had prepared a path, had foreseen the possible obstacles and snares, and how he was always ready to help them. Likewise, when we walk by faith in Jesus, God is always near and he always knows what we need. Whether we are content and joyful or whether we are confused or discouraged, our Father in heaven can carry us and comfort us each step.

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What's the Point....of Nehemiah? Caleb Dillinger

Here is the story of the shortest man in the Bible. You know....Knee-High-Miah...

Alright, now that the knee slapper joke is over with (oh, another pun...), let's dive into the real reason you should read Nehemiah in the 21st century. This thirteen chapter story speaks to faithful resilience, the power of prayer, and the importance of God's people conforming to holiness.

Nehemiah is first and foremost a historical story. It's not a prophetic book, despite the name echoing many prophetic books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah...). Nehemiah is the name of the Jewish cupbearer to the king of Persia (Artaxerxes). He hears of the broken down wall of Jerusalem and weeps. He approaches the king and asks to return to his homeland to rebuild the wall. He is granted permission and returns. Unfortunately, there is opposition and jeering, but Nehemiah persists and the wall is built.

Though Nehemiah may have returned to Jerusalem to build the wall, he doesn't stop there. He works to end the oppression of the poor and as newly appointed governor of the land he became known for his generosity, not abusing his position of power that had previously been abused. Ezra the scribe (Yes, the same Ezra from the book of Ezra) reads the Law of Moses, and leads the people along with Nehemiah towards holiness, confession, and sanctification.

Once again, there are a plethora of names to read. Why did the Biblical writers care so much about names? For one, it showed the reality of these stories. They are not pontificating about God's work - they are recounting history, how God works in the world through real people. It also promotes accountability. These names are accountable to the deeds associated with them.

So what's the point of this Old Testament piece of history about rebuilding a wall and increasing holiness? I would argue this is one of the more essential books in the Old Testament to read concerning prayer. It shows the personal nature of prayer (see Nehemiah 1), the flexibility of prayer (see Nehemiah 2), and the collective power of prayer (as seen in confession and praise, Nehemiah 9).

Beyond the insights gained from studying the prayers, Nehemiah teaches two other universal truths about our faith. First, our faith is guaranteed to lead to earthly struggles. Living a holy life directly contradicts those intending on living sinful lives. Consequently, anyone committed to living a holy life for God is guaranteed to face opposition and struggle. Additionally, people living a life for God are dedicated to living a life to help other people. Selfish people don't always like that. The rich don't get richer when blessing others becomes a top concern. Godly people seek to serve God and others.

The point of reading Nehemiah is to observe and learn from a man dedicated to serving his God and his people. You won't sit back and relax reading this book. But you will be blessed by investing your time and energy into understanding the journey of Nehemiah.