

Lesson #41

PREPARATION FOR LESSON: Read the book of Nehemiah. Feel free to skip over long lists of names

BACKGROUND

Author and Date: Nehemiah is a contemporary of Ezra and Malachi.

He is confidant/protector for Artaxerxes in Susa in 446 BC; is governor of Jerusalem 445-433, 428 BC.

While governor, he writes in his journals about what he did and what was happening during that time.

Ezra, as editor, takes parts of his writings to form the book we know as Nehemiah c. 400 BC.

Theme: Rebuilding to reflect God's glory.

Purpose: To continue Jewish history after the exile.

To show how God used Nehemiah to change the command of a Persian king.

To give us examples of practical godliness.

Scripture Background: Ezra 4:11-23

OUTLINE Rebuilding Jerusalem's walls 1-6
Rebuilding people's lives 7-13

HISTORICAL SETTING during the Persian empire in the 400's BC

The Jews have been back in their land for over 90 years. The temple was finished 71 years ago. Ezra has been their spiritual leader for the last 12 years. The Temple, small towns in the outlying areas and their family farms have been rebuilt. But the wall around Jerusalem is still broken down and the houses within the capital are still in ruins. In 446 BC, the Jews start to repair and rebuild the wall. But the Samaritans write a letter to king Artaxerxes and he commands, *the Jews must stop building their wall*. When the enemies deliver the king's message, they burn the gates the Jews had just put in and knock down the repaired sections. Ezra 4:11-23

6-12 months go by. Nehemiah works for king Artaxerxes in the palace of Susa. He is the king's cup bearer, meaning the king's protector and confidant. In November 445 BC, Nehemiah's brother and other Jews come from Jerusalem to give him the latest news. They describe the burned gates and broken walls. Nehemiah is shocked. He assumed the wall had been rebuilt and the houses in the city repaired. In all cultures, the capital city was built to reflect the glory of their gods. Everyone knew Jerusalem was called *the city of God, the God of Israel*. But with the condition of the city and wall, it certainly does not reflect God's glory nor His power to protect it. Jerusalem is a disgrace to God's name and reputation.

The king had given the stop work order while living in Persepolis. Nehemiah did not know about it because he only worked in Susa and the king had just recently returned to that palace. But since it is the king he respects and works for, he is grieved. The book of Nehemiah tells how God used him to change the king's command; how the Jerusalem wall was rebuilt and how the spiritual lives of the people were rebuilt.

EXPLANATIONS**Origin of book**

400 BC Ezra goes thru Jewish historical records, combining the accounts of the 1st return, his return and the building of the wall. He puts it into one book.

400 AD Jerome translates the book from Greek to Latin and divides it into 2 books, calling them 1 and 2 Esdras.

1500 AD and after Other languages keep the 2 books but change their names to Ezra and Nehemiah. The Jews eventually divide their single book into 2 and also rename them Ezra and Nehemiah.

Formation of book

Chapters 1-11	Nehemiah is governor of Jerusalem for 12 years, from 445 to 433 BC.
Time gap	Nehemiah goes back to Susa and works in the palace for c. 5 years.
Chapters 12 and 13	Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem as governor, from 428 to 425 BC.

Opposition to rebuilding/repairing the wall (2 miles around, 9-15 feet thick, 10-15 feet high)

The **enemy** against the people: ridicule, scorn, physical attack

The **Jews** themselves: discouragement, fear

The **enemy** against Nehemiah: stall thru discussion, false accusation, wrong spiritual advice



EXPLANATIONS *continued*

Use of phrase: *Remember me with favor...for all I have done*

It means, *Because I did this in obedience to You, Lord, I ask for Your blessing.*

Agreement of Obedience The Jews agree to:

not marry people who worship pagan gods.

keep the Sabbath laws.

bring the first of crops and money to the Levites.

This provides food and income for their spiritual leaders and the poor

Qualities of Nehemiah

A man of **prayer**

Humble - admits he also has disobeyed 1:6; arrives in Jerusalem without fanfare 2:11;

knows he could get discouraged, even as spiritual leader 6:9.

Patient - willing to wait until the king brings up the subject 1:1 cf. 2:1.

Makes good use of his time - while waiting for God, he prepares his request 2:4-8 shows his attention to detail

Practical - seen in the basics he asks for 2:4-8; rests before making major decisions 2:11

prays, but also deals with each problem in a practical way

Planner, organizer and leader - gets everyone to work on the wall together chapters 3, 4, 6

Thinks before he speaks - when dealing with Jews who were treating others unjustly 5:8-9

Discernment - saw thru the enemy's requests to meet with him 6:2-4

Spiritual insight - recognized the prophet's message was not from God 6:11-13

APPLICATION: Practical Godliness

Involving others...

Who need to make **changes**, but we cannot or should not say anything...

Pray and wait for them to bring up the subject.

Use the waiting time to plan what to say and how to say it.

When the opportunity comes, pray for the ability to speak effectively.

Unless they bring it up again, we should say it only once and let the Holy Spirit take over.

Who have **wrong actions** (includes addictions and abuse) that affects our lives, we should pray and think it thru.

Do we have the authority or right to take action?

What specifically are we going to say or do?

Are we willing to set boundaries, use interventions or take legal action if necessary?

If we are not willing, we should not say or do anything. We will only become part of the problem by enabling them to continue. It also means we need to get help for ourselves so we will have courage to take godly, practical action.

Who are **discouraged** - we encourage them to trust the Lord.

We also do things to help them or suggest others who can provide answers.

Who give us **advice** - listen, pray and compare it with God's rules and boundaries in Scripture.

If there is a contradiction, we obey what God has said.

Involving ourselves

In times of **danger**, we pray and protect our lives and property. We use the laws God gives us for our protection.

If falsely **accused**, we ask God to defend us and then we document the situation with our denial in print.

When facing a major **decision**, take time to rest the mind and body; pray; quietly collect the facts and weigh them.

Once we know what to do, we move ahead step by step in a logical, orderly way.

God wants us to be intensely spiritual, perfectly natural and thoroughly practical.

This is practical godliness!

