



## Still Standing

### Week 8: The Example of Nehemiah

#### ***And having prepared everything...take your stand.*** **(Ephesians 6:13b)**

• **Week 1:** Standing Defined – Installing a parameter (Paul in Acts 19-20). LIVING FOR THE WILL OF GOD. Measuring its success by Results = Miracles, Attacks, Salvations, Baptisms, DISCIPLESHIP happening because we are standing not because we organized an event to create some hoopla.

- **Week 2:** The Nature of Standing: WHO STANDS

As **God** Stands (who bequeathed it to Jesus)

The **Enemy's** Stand (that is allowed because of our gift of free will)

**Our** Right to Stand (the gift from our Heavenly Father when we were conceived = Freewill)

[Dominion will be covered later]

The Nature of Standing in: **RULERSHIP** (What gives us the right to)

- God rules because He was, He is, He is to come.
- Enemy rules because we were created with free will.
- We rule in two ways: 1. From the gift of Free Will created in us during our creation AND

[2. we were given DOMINION in Gen 1:28...not included in week 2. Waiting for discussion on Authority as modeled in Parable **Luke 19:11-27** (Parable of the ten minas (reap what you did not sow, ten minas))]

The Nature of Standing in: **CHARACTER** (Defining WHO we are)

The Nature of Standing in: **MANIFESTATIONS** (The behavior of, the results, the growth, the signs of)

**Week 3:** The Fruit of Where One Stands

**Week 4:** The Power in Confession

**Week 5:** Preparation in the Spirit

*XxXxXxand*

10/27 Prayer II – or – Hezekiah? **Dominion?**

11/03 Nehemiah

11/10 Armor of God

11/17 Fruit of the Spirit ? Worship?

- **Dominion**
- **Worship**
- Prayer/Intercession (Pray Continually. Richard Foster's definitions of.)
- Nehemiah
- Forgiveness

(Child Likeness – add to ??)?

Metric/Rubric = **Fruit of the Spirit** Col 1:9-12

Armor of God as Prayer

**Devotions? = Understanding the Word**

11/24 – FAMILY SERVICE

12/01 – A PERSONAL ADVENT

12/08 – THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

12/15 – ALL CHURCH CHRISTMAS WORSHIP

(KIDS, YOUTH&ADULT WORSHIP TEAMS WILL BE LEADING A NIGHT OF CHRISTMAS WORSHIP)

12/22 – OFF

12/29 – OFF

01/05 – **Ephesians: Living in His Amazing Grace**

This we know: 2 Tim. 3:16-17

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

*Praying Always* (Eph. 6:18): Prayer opens the channels between us and God. In the midst of battle, we as believers must keep in constant communication with our Leader for directions and encouragement. Our prayers for one another are important and effectual

This we know: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

*3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,*

## **Week 8: The Example of Nehemiah**

*And having prepared everything...take your stand .*

### **Ephesians 6:10-18**

*<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, **and having done all, to stand firm.** <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup> **praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.** To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

### **Meeting Nehemiah:**

To understand Nehemiah's actions and reactions, we need to see the history he learned of and inherited.

Background:

**Hezekiah** – Great King, reigned for 29 years.

More space is devoted to Hezekiah in Holy Scripture than to almost any king since the time of Solomon.<sup>1</sup>

**Manasseh** – Hezekiah's son = wickedest King in Judah's history – 55 years!

Worse than those who lived in the land before the LORD gave it to the Israelites:

- Brought Baal & Asherah worship back and added...astrology (worshi of the stars)
- He built altars in the temple for star worship
- Carved (sexual) image of Asherah and put in the temple
- Sought and used witchcraft
- Consulted spiritus and mediums
- History states it was Manasseh who had the prophet Isaiah sawn in half (Hebrews 11:37).

LORD said He would punish the people as He had Samaria.

Empty Jerusalem.

His people would be led away into captivity because they had provoked/hurt/disobeyed the Lord so grievously.

- Manasseh – taken in captivity to Babylon (King of Assyria)
- HE REPENTED in prison and returned to the LORD.

**After this he was permitted to return to Jerusalem and resume his reign**—a fitting proof of the grace, love, and mercy of the Lord. He tried to undo the damage he had done, but it was too late. The people, including his son, followed his earlier example (2 Chron. 33:14–23).<sup>2</sup>

But it was too late for the People of Judah:

<sup>1</sup> MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 412). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 416). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Mannaseh's son, Amon, become King for two years.

**Amon:** Followed the evil of his father. Lasted **two years** before his own servants conspired and killed him. The assassins were executed and made his son JOSIAH king.

**Josiah:** (age of 8) son of Amon was king of Judah for 31 years (641–609 B.C) 2 Chron. 34–35

- He cleanses and repairs the temple. (18<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, when he was 26)
- The Book of the Law hidden away in the temple and discovered by the high priest, Hilkiah.
- At this point, Josiah realized WHO THEY WERE and how far the nation had fallen away.
- Realizing the nation of Judah was in trouble as Israel had already been punished. Inquired of the Lord through Huldah (Jeremiah's Aunt) and she confirmed but it would not happen during Josiah's life.
- Josiah called the people to the temple and (Read the Book of the Covenant) and rededicated them and the temple back to the Lord.
- Reinstated the Passover.
- Zephaniah and Jeremiah begin their prophetic ministry.

**2 Chron 23:4–9** Then follows a list of the many reforms which Josiah undertook. He cleansed **the temple of all the articles** used in idolatry, **burned them**, and took the **ashes to Bethel** (to defile the shrine there). He deposed and probably killed **the idolatrous priests**. He took **the wooden image** (Asherah) out of the temple, **burned it**, and scattered the **ashes on the graves of the common people**. **He tore down the ritual booths** of the male cult prostitutes (sodomites) in the temple area, **where the women wove hangings** for the Asherah image. He **defiled the high places**. This means that he desecrated them in such a way that they would not be used again. **He brought all the priests** out of **the cities of Judah**, where they had offered to Jehovah on **the high places**. God had designated Jerusalem as the place where these offerings should be made. Josiah barred these **priests** from further service in the temple, but gave them a share of the **unleavened bread**.

- Last righteous King of Judah.

As to the thoroughness of his reforms, he was the greatest of the kings of Judah. Hezekiah held the same honor as far as trust in God was concerned (18:5, 6). Yet in spite of Josiah's good reign, **the LORD did not** change His plan to punish **Judah** by sending the people into captivity and by destroying Jerusalem.

**Jehoahaz** – Josiah's son (23:31–33). THREE MONTHS a king.

- He disregarded his father's reforms and allowed the people to return to idolatry.
- Egypt captured the country, put Judah under tribute.
- Brought Jehoahaz to Egypt where he died.

**Jehoiakim** (Eliakim) – Josiah's other son (23:34–24:7) Eleven years king.

- Pharaoh Necho made him king.
- Babylon defeated Egypt (605BC) and now controlled Judah.
- Had Urijah the prophet killed (Jer. 26:23)
- Burned the Word of God which Jeremiah had written concerning Judah and Israel (Jer. 36:23).
- He tried to arrest Jeremiah and also Baruch, his scribe, but the Lord hid them (Jer. 36:26).
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Year of reign:
- Nebuchadnezzar ... besieged Jerusalem (Round #1)
- Took some of the inhabitants (including Daniel) to Babylon
- Took items from the Temple
- Bound Jehoiakim in chains to bring him to Babylon.

The Chronicler says that Nebuchadnezzar "bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon" (2 Chron. 36:6); but before the plan was fulfilled something of urgent importance happened that caused Nebuchadnezzar to change his mind. He received word that his father Nabopolassar had died in Babylon on August 15. Realizing that the throne was now in jeopardy, he forced Jehoiakim to promise loyalty as a vassal, then took the short route across the Arabian desert to Babylon.

God sent invasion armies from four nations against **Judah** because of Manasseh's **sins**.

MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 416–421). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**Jehoiachin** (24:8–16) (Son of Jehoiakim) King for 3 Months (598–597 B.C.; cf. 25:27–30; 2 Chron. 36:9, 10).

- Wicked King
- Nebuchadnezzar ... besieged Jerusalem (Round 2)
- Carried away a second group of captives.
- Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in this deportation.
- The royal family was taken
- 7000 soldiers
- Trained craftsmen [10,000 captives]
- The poorest people of the land were left.
- Jehoiachin had been in captivity for 37 Years when Evil-Merodach, the king of Babylon, freed him from prison, set him above the other captive kings, gave him a position of honor in the court, and provided liberally for him (2 Chron 25:27–30).

The prophet Ezekiel began his ministry at this period.

**Zedekiah** (renamed from Mattaniah) (Jehoiachin's uncle. ONE OF JOSIAH'S SON (#3) Reigned for 11 years)

Zedekiah (Yahweh is Righteous): 2 Kings 24:17-25 and 2 Chronicles 36:10-13 and Jeremiah 52.

- Nebuchadnezzar's puppet
- He then decided to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar and sought Egypt's help
- Neb – besieged the city for 18 months = Severe Famine
- Sought Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord – Not only is Neb against Judah but so is Yahweh!
- Jeremiah – God says to surrender the city. If he did, he and his family would survive.
- False prophet Hananiah – falsely prophesied King would break the back of Neb
- Captured the city
- Killed Zedekiah's son before his eyes and then blinded him.
- Ezekiel also taken to Babylon.
- THE FALL OF JERUSALEM<sup>3</sup>
  
- Babylon's destroyed Jerusalem in 586b.c. in result to Zedekiah's attempt to rebel.
- The temple (400 years it stood) demolished.
- Gates, destroyed.
- Walls, turned to rubble.
- Only the poor were left to live in destitution.

## **Nehemiah**

His example of 'prepare everything':

[Ezra came to Jerusalem around 458 BC, to be followed by Nehemiah about thirteen years later.]

<sup>3</sup> Heyink, B. (2016). *Zedekiah, King of Judah*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

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- He served King Artaxerxes
- Contemporaries of Esther and Daniel
- Trusted Drink Bearer (Wine steward, taste tester, poison control)
- Prophet nor Priest nor King – but a dedicated layman

Honored the Doctrine of God

Passion for Scripture

LIVED Prayer

**He LEAD (leadership)**

- Reminded his sphere of influence of who the Lord is.
- Was public and verbal about His faith.
- Lived His faith outloud.
- Served the Lord in public and private.

**My God is:**

God is universally sovereign.

He is totally reliable

Utterly Holy

God is compassionately merciful.

God is uniquely powerful.

God is infinitely gracious.

Intimately near.

Completely Just.

**Scripture does:**

Inspires \* Teaches \* Develops

**Prayer:**

As Worship

As a tool for discernment

As a tool for encouragement

A processing tool

When perspective is needed

Intercedes

Teaching others

Comfort

Grieving and processing grief

To sharpen his commitment

**How Nehemiah Used Prayer in “Preparing” and “Standing”**

**Nehemiah 1**

**Report from Jerusalem**

*1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.*

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Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, <sup>2</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

**Nehemiah's Prayer**

<sup>4</sup> As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And I said, “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup> Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, <sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ <sup>10</sup> They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

Now I was cupbearer to the king.

1:4-11	After receiving bad news about the state of Jerusalem's walls	Recognized God's holiness. Asked for a hearing. Confessed sin. Asked for specific help in approaching the king.	Included God in Nehemiah's plans and concerns. Prepared Nehemiah's heart and gave God room to work.	How often do you pour out your heart to God? How often do you give him a specific request to answer?
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**What would we entitle this type of prayer?**

**Nehemiah 2:1-8**

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. <sup>2</sup> And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. <sup>3</sup> I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” <sup>4</sup> Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.” <sup>6</sup> And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. <sup>7</sup> And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, <sup>8</sup> and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

2:4	During his conversation with the king.	“Here's where you can help God!”	Put the expected results in god's hands.	Giving God credit for what happens before it happens keeps us from taking more credit than we should.
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**What would we entitle this type of prayer?**

**Nehemiah 4:1-6**

*Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. <sup>2</sup> And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” <sup>3</sup> Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!” <sup>4</sup> Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. <sup>5</sup> Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.*

*<sup>6</sup> So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.*

4:4,5	After being taunted and ridiculed by Tobiah and Sanballat.	“They’re mocking you, God. You decide what to do with them.”	Expressed anger to God, but Nehemiah did not take matters into his own hands.	We are prone to do exactly the opposite—take matters into our hands and not tell God how we feel.
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**What would we entitle this type of prayer?**

**Nehemiah 4:7-9**

*But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. <sup>8</sup> And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. <sup>9</sup> And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.*

4:9	After threats of attack by enemies	“We are in your hands, God. We will keep our weapons handy in case you want us to use them.”	Showed trust in God even while taking necessary precautions.	Trusting God does not mean we do nothing. Action does not mean we do not trust.
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**What would we entitle this type of prayer?**

**Nehemiah 6:8-9**

*Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), <sup>2</sup> Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm. <sup>3</sup> And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” <sup>4</sup> And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. <sup>5</sup> In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. <sup>6</sup> In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem<sup>[a]</sup> also says it,*

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that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. <sup>7</sup> And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, 'There is a king in Judah.' And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together."

<sup>8</sup> Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind." <sup>9</sup> For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

<sup>10</sup> Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night." <sup>11</sup> But I said, "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live?<sup>[e]</sup> I will not go in." <sup>12</sup> And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. <sup>13</sup> For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. <sup>14</sup> Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

#### The Wall Is Finished

<sup>15</sup> So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. <sup>16</sup> And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. <sup>17</sup> Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. <sup>18</sup> For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife. <sup>19</sup> Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.

6:9	Responding to threats	"Oh, Lord God, please strengthen me!"	Showed Nehemiah's reliance on god for emotional and mental stability.	How often do you ask God for help when under pressure?
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#### What would we entitle this type of prayer?

#### Nehemiah 13:29-31

On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, <sup>2</sup> for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. <sup>3</sup> As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

<sup>4</sup> Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah,<sup>5</sup> prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. <sup>6</sup> While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king <sup>7</sup> and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. <sup>8</sup> And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. <sup>9</sup> Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

<sup>10</sup> I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. <sup>11</sup> So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. <sup>12</sup> Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. <sup>13</sup> And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the

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Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers. <sup>14</sup> **Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.**

<sup>15</sup> In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. <sup>16</sup> Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! <sup>17</sup> Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? <sup>18</sup> Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster<sup>[a]</sup> on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

<sup>19</sup> As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day. <sup>20</sup> Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. <sup>21</sup> But I warned them and said to them, "Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath. <sup>22</sup> **Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.**

<sup>23</sup> In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. <sup>24</sup> And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. <sup>25</sup> And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. <sup>26</sup> Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. <sup>27</sup> Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?"

<sup>28</sup> And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me.

<sup>29</sup> Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

<sup>30</sup> Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; <sup>31</sup> and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

13:29	Reflecting on the actions of his enemies	Asked God to deal with the enemies and their evil plans.	Took away the compulsion to get revenge, and entrusted justice to God.	When did you last settle a desire for revenge by turning the matter over to God?
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**What would we entitle this type of prayer?**

**Nehemiah 5:19** [He stops the oppression of the poor]

<sup>19</sup> Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

**13:14, 22, 31**

<sup>14</sup> Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

*22 Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.*

*31 and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.*

5:19;13:14,22,31	Reflecting on his own efforts to serve God.	“Remember me, God.”	Kept clear in Nehemiah’s mind his own motives for action.	How many of your actions today will be done with the purpose of pleasing God?
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**What would we entitle this type of prayer?**

This is what makes a leader (see above lists!)

- How do I respond to “dramatic” change?
- What is my selfish meter like? Do I know when my actions/reactions are bound by this?
- How do I react when the human rights of others is ignored?
- Materialism looks like.....

Materialistic lifestyles are the congenial soil of secularism and relativism. People who deny God’s existence and thereby dismiss his laws have little regard for objective moral standards. Ethical principles become subservient to situational needs. Contemporary Western society is becoming increasingly secularist. One cannot imagine secularism as a serious threat to a religious community in mid-fifth-century Judah. But it did make serious inroads into the life of the Israelite people; they maintained religious ceremonial but without spiritual commitment. Nehemiah had to deal with such insidious dangers. When he returned to Jerusalem after his stay in Persia, he discovered that his Judean contemporaries had adopted an overtly secularist lifestyle, both by what a temple official did and by what the people refused to do. BST

- Dishonoring of God’s Word – how do I react?

Being IN the world but not OF the world.

**1 John 4:4-6**

*4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

<b>SPIRITUAL WARFARE: STRATEGIES</b>	
<b>The Strategies of Nehemiah</b>	<b>The Ploys of His Enemies</b>
He took up the work of God (Neh. 2:6–9).	They ridiculed him (Neh. 2:19).
He prayed, acknowledging God’s sovereignty and noting the illegitimacy of his enemies (Neh. 2:20).	They mocked him (Neh. 4:1, 2).

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He prayed, asking God to take note of his reproach and to refuse to forgive his enemies (Neh. 4:4, 5).	They conspired to attack and create confusion (Neh. 4:7, 8).
He prayed and set a watch (Neh. 4:9), taking necessary precautions (Neh. 4:13), reminding people to fight for their families (Neh. 4:14).	They used oppression from within, the fruit of their own unrighteousness (Neh. 5:1–5).
He led the people to confess, repent, and make restitution (Neh. 5:1–19).	They plotted to harm the leader (Neh. 6:1, 2).
He showed singlemindedness (Neh. 6:3).	They created a distraction (Neh. 6:4) and circulated slander to create fear (Neh. 6:5–7).
He refuted their slander (Neh. 6:8) and prayed for strength (Neh. 6:9).	They developed an insider plot to discredit the leader (Neh. 6:10).
He modeled righteousness (Neh. 6:11), received God’s discernment (Neh. 6:12), and prayed, asking God to remember them (Neh. 6:14).	They used covert connections as Tobiah sent letters to frighten Nehemiah and desensitize the people (Neh. 6:19).
He suggested precautions for protecting the gates (Neh. 7:3).	They established insider alliances; Eliahshib gave room to Tobiah (Neh. 13:4, 5).
He expelled the household goods of the enemy (Neh. 13:8).	They continued acts of unrighteousness (Neh. 13:10, 15, 16).
He contended with unrighteousness (Neh. 13:11, 17, 25, 28).	They used compromise, especially in intermarriage (Neh. 13:23–25).
Spiritual warfare begins when the enemy (Satan) perceives that someone is trying to seek God’s purposes or to protect the well-being of God’s people. Nehemiah drew the attention of his enemies, Sanballat and Tobiah, who were “deeply disturbed” when he began the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They employed a variety of strategies to divert Nehemiah from his task. These strategies of the enemy have been used through the generations, even until now. Nehemiah’s counterstrategies helped him to persevere and to finish his task.	
See also Eph. 6:10–19; notes on Adversity (Acts 5); Perseverance (Rev. 14); Spiritual Warfare (Eph. 6); Temptation (Heb. 2).	

**NOTES:**

**1. Background**

When **Babylon’s soldiers marched out of Jerusalem in 586 BC**, they left a desolate city behind them. Its magnificent temple, built by Solomon four hundred years earlier, was reduced to heaps of fallen masonry and charred timber. The city’s gates and all its important buildings were enveloped in flames, and its strong walls demolished to ensure that the impoverished citizens could not organize another revolt such as the one recently attempted by the hapless Zedekiah. Only the poorest of Jerusalem’s people were left behind, the rest led off as captives to distant Babylon.

As the despondent exiles tramped the thousand miles of desert highway their steps were heavy; a burning city was behind them and an unknown future lay ahead. Worst of all were the tormenting thoughts that their present desolation, frequently threatened by the sensitive and courageous Jeremiah, was nothing other than the chastising hand of God. The punishment inflicted by Nebuchadnezzar was dwarfed by the intensity of their guilt and despair. **If God was against them, who could be for them?**

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Yet, all was not lost. The time would come when Isaiah's prophetic word would come gloriously true; their iniquity pardoned, they would emerge from exile as people refined by suffering. Across the centuries, Israel had been led by great people. Although costly, Abraham obeyed God and a new race was born, a people destined to make their unique mark on world history. Overcoming adversity, Joseph saved not only his own people but other nations as well. Moses, another imperilled by hardship, led the Israelites to freedom. Other great leaders had followed in their steps. Joshua conquered a hostile country. Gideon raised an unlikely army. David established a city. Solomon built a temple.

But to the despondent exiles such echoes of the past seemed but taunting memories of a remote story. Their blinded king, shackled and humiliated, was alongside them as they trudged the long road to an alien land. Yet, though they could scarcely have believed it, better days were ahead. God prepares new leaders for fresh challenges. In distant Babylon they were not alone; men and women were equipped for crucial service. Ezekiel's ministry confronted the exiles with higher standards and unflinching resources. In a pagan environment, the stories of Daniel and his companions recalled enduring values. The God who was chastising them would raise up an unknown Persian prince to be their deliverer. The Israelite people would return to their war-torn land and begin again—and with resourceful leaders to inspire them. Challenged by new prophets, God's people would think again about noble things. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi brought persuasive truths to the returned people. In God's strength, Zerubbabel organized the rebuilding of a temple. Ezra proclaimed the centrality of God's Word, and Nehemiah made possible the rebuilding of those broken walls. In every generation God equips trusted servants for effective leadership.

## 2. Date

Nehemiah provides his narrative with a firm mid-fifth-century BC date. There is little reason to doubt his historical and contextual data, **that he worked in the Persian king's winter palace at Susa (southwestern Iran), already famous from the exploits of Daniel and Esther.** He served in the court of Artaxerxes, who reigned over the vast Persian empire from 464 to 423, and the dramatic events related in Nehemiah's story began around 445 BC. Although there has been some difference of opinion among Old Testament scholars regarding the date of Ezra's coming to Jerusalem (some asserting the priority of Nehemiah), the precise date of Nehemiah's work has not been seriously questioned. In this exposition we shall follow **the dating provided in the biblical material that Ezra came to Jerusalem around 458 BC, to be followed by Nehemiah about thirteen years later.** A fuller discussion of these chronological issues can be found in the major commentaries: see especially Kidner (pp. 146–158), Clines (pp. 14–24) and Williamson (1985, pp. xxxix–xliv); but see also Williamson (1987) and J. S. Wright's fine monograph (1947).

## 3. Sources

The narrative is impressive for numerous reasons, not least because of its historical value and literary character. From a historical perspective, Nehemiah's memoirs provide us with 'one of the most trustworthy sources of Jewish history in the Persian period', whilst, as literature, both Ezra and Nehemiah preserve an unusual mixture of personal reminiscences and historical archives. Autobiographical memoirs are hardly common in the Old Testament. It contains huge sections of national history, and monumental stories of particular distinct events were used to direct, control, secure and correct God's people, but it is comparatively rare to read personal recollections such as those contained in sections of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. They make the reading all the more compelling because of the high sense of drama, involvement and immediacy they bring to their treatment of history. Nehemiah's reference to 'this wall' conveys the strong impression that the narrative was written in Jerusalem, though with time to reflect on the events he is describing (6:1b; 7:1).

In addition to these vivid autobiographical passages, Nehemiah's book preserves considerable archival material, occasionally paralleled in Ezra or Chronicles, and probably indebted to temple sources. This material takes the form of lists and genealogical data concerning the returned exiles, priests and people, their role in the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, settlement in the city and surrounding countryside, and participation in an impressive dedication ceremony. Williamson (1987) notes that each of the lists reveals 'a particular interest in the temple and its personnel'.

It has been suggested that originally the first-person narrative may have formed the substance of Nehemiah's report to the Persian king, later presented afresh for a wider audience and with a different purpose, either by the writer, a colleague or successor. The supplementary lists may have been added to provide a rich sense of continuity, an important theme in the book. At one time, it was widely held that editorial work on the narratives of both Ezra and Nehemiah was in the hands of 'the Chronicler', a view supported by the repetition of 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 in Ezra 1:1–3, but more recently this view has

been challenged. Japhet and others have suggested that, for a variety of reasons, Chronicles and Ezra—Nehemiah ought to be viewed as separate works with common interests but different emphases.

#### 4. Author

Nehemiah must surely be regarded as one of the most inventive and resilient personalities in the rich tapestry of Old Testament biography. **He was called to serve God at a time when the Israelite people were emerging from their traumatic years in exile, a stunned and uncertain people.** Under Babylonian then Persian domination they lived as a subject people, without their Davidic king and his embodiment of national security and spiritual ideals. The exiles had been without land and temple and the great days of vigorous prophetism mainly belonged to earlier centuries. Now that many were back in Judah, it was important for them to have a sense of continuity with the people of God in earlier days. Nehemiah is not a king, but his work reminds the people of great regal enterprises. He is not a prophet, but speaks and acts in a manner reminiscent of the best of them. He does not belong to the priesthood, but supports the priests with enthusiasm and manifests priestly characteristics in everyday life. He is a visible reminder that the great days of Israel's life and witness are not locked away in a distant past.

**This dedicated layman** was involved in national projects normally associated with kings, such as major building enterprises, repopulation projects and spiritual reformation. He appears as Hezekiah and Josiah redivivus (reborn), summoning the people to renewed dedication focused on great festivals, urging them to hear and obey the message of God's Word.

He is not a prophet in the usual sense of the term, but his recollection of how he was called to service in Jerusalem begins with a literary formula ('The words of Nehemiah'), also found in prophetic literature, and there are times when he functions as a prophet, boldly declaring what God had said to him and how the people are to bring a like obedience to a divine call (2:12, 17–18). In outspoken confrontation with oppressively materialistic Judeans, he addresses social questions with the same directness and determination as the great eighth-century prophets, and confirms the seriousness of his intentions by a symbolic act (5:13), also typical of earlier prophetic ministry. Like some great Old Testament prophetic figures, he too was harassed by the deceitful message of false prophets (6:10–14).

Neither is Nehemiah a priest, but he encouraged the ministry of the priests, participated with them and their Levitical colleagues in public occasions of spiritual renewal (5:12; 8:2, 9; 12:27–47) and promoted the ideals of a holy, exemplary priesthood (7:65; 12:1–26; 13:4–9, 28, 30–31). Moreover, in penitential prayer and the recollection of God's former mercies and promises, he performed priestly functions as he interceded for his people (1:4–11) and took a leading part in occasions for national witness and worship (8:9–12; 9:38–10:1; 12:38).

**Nehemiah is a visible reminder to the Israelite people of the unchanging mercy of God.** Life has changed for them, and some of their treasured institutions were no more, but the Lord was with them, raising up new people to refine and invigorate the vulnerable community. A trusted wine steward in a pagan palace becomes God's instrument for Israel's renewal.

#### 5. Themes

Although a gifted raconteur, Nehemiah has a greater purpose in writing than merely to recount an impressive story. He is recording educative history and uses the narrative to convey great doctrinal, moral and spiritual ideas. The book is both an artless personal testimony and a dynamic theological confession. It skillfully unites the subjective experience of a man deeply conscious of God's leading in his life (2:4, 8, 18; 6:10–14; 13:3–31) with the great objective truths which God has revealed not simply to one gifted leader but to all his believing people (1:5–11; 4:14; 8:1–12; 9:1–37). The book adds to the story of Israel's distinctive message and witness as it interprets four great themes: Nehemiah's doctrine of God, his passion for Scripture, his experience of prayer and his example in leadership.

##### *a. Nehemiah's doctrine of God*

Throughout his memoirs Nehemiah emphasizes both objective truth and subjective experience, a balance not always maintained throughout Christian history. We live in a period when the subjective awareness of God's immanence is more prominent than the objective reality of his transcendence. David F. Wells maintains that 'the church's identity vanishes when transcendence melts into immanence' and 'where theocentric faith [*i.e.* faith centred on God as an objective reality] becomes anthropocentric faith [*i.e.* faith centred on therapeutic interest in the self]'. Nehemiah's teaching about God as holy and true

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is a healthy antidote to highly subjective aspects of Christian experience which, under the subtle and unrecognized influences of modernity, emphasize more about how the believer feels than upon what God has declared, more about novel and mercurial experience than the unshakeable foundation of revealed truth.

**Nehemiah's contemporaries needed to be reminded of the reality of God's uniqueness.** In the post-exilic period there was an understandable sense of wistfulness. Judah had lost her political freedom (an issue not ignored in this book, 9:36–37) and could no longer pledge her allegiance to her own king. Although recently rebuilt, the temple lacked the impressiveness of Solomon's magnificent construction. Things were certainly not the same, but Nehemiah emphasizes the continuity of the great realities still at the heart of Israel's faith. Most of all, God was on their side. He had not changed, and throughout the narrative the author warms to his primary theme of the greatness of God (9:32), a message for dispirited people in every generation.

**God is universally sovereign.** The 'God of heaven' (1:5; 2:4, 20) was a divine title in Persian religion but Nehemiah uses it as dramatic apologetic: the Lord Yahweh, he alone (9:6) is God of heaven, not Ahura-Mazda, the non-existent 'god' of his Persian contemporaries. Nehemiah hears of Jerusalem's distress whilst living in distant Susa but God is in control of the entire world and is shaping the destiny of his people wherever they are, guiding an unknown cupbearer into his sovereign purposes. Moreover, in his sovereignty he can not only clear the way for those who honour him, but also frustrate the designs of those who oppose him (4:15). He alone can turn a cruel curse into an immeasurable blessing (13:2).

**He is totally reliable,** the God 'who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands' (1:5; 9:32). He is true to his promises (9:8). The events leading up to the threatened exile were a stark illustration of Israel's disloyalty. They had not honoured their covenant obligations but, as Isaiah's message assured them, they were disciplined though not abandoned. His 'unfailing love' would not be shaken nor would his 'covenant of peace be removed'.

**God is utterly holy.** The first word of those who are burdened with grief (1:3–4) is to acknowledge that their greatest need is not immediate relief from present trouble but eternal forgiveness. Nehemiah confesses that he is a sinner whose personal life is set in the wider context of human rebellion, past and present (1:6–7; 9:2). Once forgiven, God's people do not shape their moral standards by contemporary, variable ethical norms. They live not to win human approval but according to the pattern of God's holiness. They must be holy because he is holy. Nehemiah was determined to do everything in life 'out of reverence for God' (5:15) and others treasured the same ambition (7:2).

**God is compassionately merciful.** When he entered into a covenant with them, God knew that his people would fail him and warned them of the serious consequences of their inevitable transgressions. They would be 'exiled ... at the farthest horizon' but, if they returned to him in penitence, he would bring them back to the land he had given them as a token of his mercy (1:8–9). Time without number they grieved him, but he pardoned their offences and restored them (9:16–19, 26–31). He is, literally, 'a God of forgivenesses' (9:17).

**God is uniquely powerful.** He encounters no difficulties in accomplishing his purposes for them. The God who created the universe (9:6), who enabled childless Abraham to become the 'father of a multitude' (9:7) and 'redeemed' (1:10) his oppressed people from Egyptian slavery by his 'great strength' and 'mighty hand' (Exodus language) could certainly bring the exiles home. Moreover, his deliverances are not restricted to the outstanding events of their history but are markedly evident in everyday life when his people are threatened by powers too strong for them. On days when they felt totally overwhelmed by their enemies, their God would 'fight' for them (4:20). Finding their true joy in their spiritual resources (8:12, 17), their physical strength would be perpetually renewed (8:10).

**God is infinitely gracious.** Nehemiah's project was given royal approval, not because he was in the right place at the right time, but because 'the gracious hand' of his God (2:8, 18) was upon him. He does not deal with individuals or communities as they deserve but desires and designs things for their highest good.

**He is intimately near.** The transcendent 'God of heaven' is not detached and distant; he draws close to his dependent people and keeps on putting (2:12, present tense) the right and best things into their hearts. When they are in danger, he makes them sensitive to his promptings (6:12), and when they are uncertain of the way ahead, he reveals his will to them (7:5).

**God is completely just.** Like many of God's servants across the centuries, Nehemiah was plagued by bitter opposition. He and his contemporaries had to know that a day would come when life's wrongs would be put right, when evil people will be brought before the bar of God's judgment. His enemies had not merely insulted Nehemiah; they had despised God (4:4–5; 6:12). But their righteous God was aware of Israel's sins as well as those of their enemies. If they ignored his command to love their neighbours and robbed the poor (5:1–13), they too would experience his severe judgment (9:33). Ezekiel told his contemporaries that the people of Sodom came under divine condemnation not only on account of their sexual obscenities but because they had ignored the cry of the distressed poor. What Sodom suffered would be Jerusalem's fate if they persisted in such unloving conduct to their destitute neighbours. God did not have rules for one people which he overlooked in the case of others.

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Nehemiah's life was totally devoted to such a God. He found 'delight' (1:11) in seeking God's face (1:4), revering God's name (1:11), pursuing God's will (1:11; 2:4–5), acknowledging God's goodness (2:8, 18), serving God's people (2:12, 17), trusting God's power (2:20), confessing God's holiness (4:14; 5:9, 15), sharing God's Word (8:9), showing God's love (8:10), remembering God's generosity (8:13–18), recalling God's faithfulness (9:5–37), obeying God's commands (10:29) and encouraging God's servants (10:37–39; 13:10–13).

### *b. Nehemiah's passion for Scripture*

One of the most fascinating aspects of the post-exilic literature is the manner in which these later biblical writers reflect on what God has said and done in earlier days. They treasure his unique revelation in Scripture and the story it unfolds of his saving work in the life of the nation, and seek to interpret its message afresh to their contemporaries. **At the heart of Nehemiah's narrative is the story of a unique Bible Reading in the centre of Jerusalem. It was not a temple gathering, thereby restricting attendance either to religious officials or to those privileged few who might gain entry to a restricted area. It was held in the city's main square and everybody, young and old, men and women alike, were eager to attend.** Although Ezra leads this occasion, it is Nehemiah who joins with Ezra in encouraging the people's response to Scripture (8:9–11). Nehemiah was inspired, taught and fashioned by God's Word.

**Nehemiah was inspired by Scripture.** The story of how God had called, equipped and used men and women over the centuries never ceased to encourage him. The personalities of the Old Testament story ennobled and challenged him. Abraham believed God's promise (9:7–8, 23), Moses shared God's Word (1:7–8; 8:1, 14; 9:14; 10:29; 13:1), Aaron entered God's service (10:38; 12:47), David (12:24, 36–37, 45–46) and Asaph (12:46) encouraged God's praise and, more recently, Zerubbabel (7:7; 12:1, 47) built God's temple. But Nehemiah has also taken to heart the warning stories of Scripture—Solomon forgot God's holiness (13:26) and ignored God's warning, with disastrous consequences.

**Nehemiah was taught by Scripture.** It was not only the characters of Scripture which attracted him. From his youth onwards, the uplifting language of God's Word, its enriching truths, clear warnings and dependable promises took possession of his receptive mind. Some of the great books of the Old Testament became special to him. In the Pentateuch, the stories and sayings of Genesis (9:7–8), Exodus (1:10; 9:9–18), Leviticus (8:13–15), Numbers (9:20; 13:3) and Deuteronomy (1:8–9; 9:21–23, 29) are never far from his mind, nor the narratives of Joshua (9:23–25), Judges (9:26–28), 1 Kings (13:26) and 2 Kings (9:6). There are echoes of prophetic teaching by Isaiah (6:9), Jeremiah (13:18), Ezekiel (13:17–18) and Daniel (1:4–7), as well as reminiscences of some great psalms (9:13).

**Nehemiah was fashioned by Scripture.** Obedience to Scripture was life's highest priority. From his youngest days, Nehemiah will have become increasingly aware of its authority, persuasiveness, power and relevance. McConville points out that every group needs 'emblems of its identity'. Prior to the exile, the Israelite people had gloried in the emblems of land, temple, throne, book and day. Removed from the land, bereft of temple and robbed of king, they turned with greater commitment to the book God had given them, to his revealed Word embodied particularly in the Mosaic law. Obedience to that law in terms of observing the Sabbath became a confirming 'sign' of their uniqueness, but Sabbath-allegiance was derivative; the Word was paramount. Nehemiah came to love that law, and his commitment to Scripture is evident from his prayers, service, testimony and conduct. He was encouraged by its promises (1:5, 9; 4:20; 9:7–8, 17), challenged by its warnings (1:7–8; 5:9; 9:30, 37; 13:17–18, 26–27) and enriched by its ideals.

### *c. Nehemiah's experience of prayer*

Nehemiah uses the narrative to convey to his readers the importance of prayer. Great prayer-passages are found throughout the entire book. It begins with prayer in Persia (1:4) and closes with prayer in Jerusalem (13:31). The story reminds us of the great dimensions of prayer: adoration (8:6; 9:3, 5), thanksgiving (12:24, 27, 31, 40, 46), confession (1:4–7; 9:33–34), petition (1:11; 2:4) and intercession (1:6). There are prayers of anguish (4:4–5; 6:14; 13:29) and prayers of joy (12:43), prayers for protection (4:9), and prayers of dependence (6:9) and commitment (13:14, 22, 31). It is a story of compassionate (1:4), persistent (1:4), personal (1:6) and corporate (1:7) prayer. Prayer provides Nehemiah with perspective (1:11, 'this man'); it widens his horizons (2:4, 'God of heaven'), sharpens his vision (2:12) and dwarfs his anxieties (4:8–9). Here is a believer who hurries to the place of prayer to share his present griefs (1:4), confess his past failures (1:6–7) and discover his future work (1:11).

### *d. Nehemiah's example in leadership*

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Nehemiah's memoirs preserve his indelible character. The fact that such a wide variety of gifts, expertise and achievement are crowded into the narrow compass of one life is ample evidence of Nehemiah's qualities as one of Israel's most outstanding leaders. His leadership qualities are as necessary and relevant today as in the fifth century BC.

Nehemiah was a leader with *infinite compassion*. On hearing of his people's needs he 'sat down and wept ... mourned and fasted and prayed' (1:4). Love matters most in leadership. The loveless leader achieves little of significance. Jerusalem's plight was a thousand miles from Susa's palace but, because he loved them, the anguish of his people reduced everything else in his life to items of lesser importance.

Nehemiah was a leader *under greater authority*. Bewildered as to the right and best course of action in crisis, he sought God for direction (1:5–11). Leaders must be led. In his daily work he was used to receiving the orders of a Persian king, but his greatest priority was to stand as a submissive servant in the audience chamber of God. He recognized that it was more important patiently to discern God's will than to rush to the help of God's people.

Nehemiah was a leader of *transparent integrity*. Coming before God's throne, he speedily recognized his iniquities and longed to confess them. He did not merely acknowledge the nation's sins; he lingered in God's presence to identify his own (1:6). He was not someone who acknowledged himself worse than others in the place of prayer but acted as better than others when he left it. He was not only honest before God but also toward others. When Judah's deprived people complained of injustice, he did not act as a man totally detached and free from blame. However innocently, he had participated in money-lending (5:10) along with others and did nothing to conceal his personal involvement in an issue which must be put right.

Nehemiah was a leader with *a vision for something great*. Believers with vision have 'a deep dissatisfaction with what *is* and a clear grasp of what *could be*'. God planted within this leader's heart (2:12) a strategy which could transform Jerusalem's destiny, relieving its people of ignominy (1:3), insecurity and poverty. Nehemiah became indignant about the city's appalling degradation and could not be at peace until an alternative prospect began to form in his mind.

Nehemiah was a leader *aware of his own vulnerability*. Leaders are not perfect; they all have some point of weakness at which they are on the threshold of possible danger. Sensitive, dependent, honest and venturesome, Nehemiah discovered his potential for crippling fear (2:2). Good leaders do not allow themselves to become so enamoured with their assignments that they forget their temptations. Many a good work has been damaged if not ruined because the leaders have been so busy instructing others that they have ignored a primary leadership obligation, 'Keep watch over yourselves'.

Nehemiah was a leader with *the ability to inspire others*. The rebuilding of demolished walls could not be attempted without galvanizing a unified team, so the task must begin with effective recruitment. Jerusalem's citizens were aware of incipient opposition, and identifying with a new leader could prove dangerous. As a good leader, Nehemiah spoke realistically of the problems, convincingly of the answer and confidently of the resources (2:17, 20).

Nehemiah was a leader who recognized *the necessity and advantages of delegation*. He could oversee the project but was totally incapable of executing it himself. He made sure that responsibility for each section of the wall was entrusted to responsible co-workers (3:1–22), and they in turn recruited their partners who, under agreed leadership, 'worked with all their heart' (4:6).

Nehemiah was a leader who *did not balk at adversities*. He knew the necessity of perseverance. Difficulties were bound to arise and, within a very short time, external hostility was matched by internal pessimism (4:1–12).

Nehemiah was a leader with *sensitive adaptability*. Things do not always go as well as we hope. When problems arise, the effective leader regards them not as intimidating deterrents but as creative opportunities. After hearing the complaints of despondent and endangered workers, undaunted Nehemiah emerged with a five-point plan. He mustered local protection squads (4:13), reminded them of their spiritual defences (4:14), divided the team into builders and protectors (4:15–18), organized a plan whereby a mobile brigade of troops could be rapidly despatched to any vulnerable part of the wall (4:19–20) and ensured that everyone in the city was guaranteed twenty-four hour protection (4:21–22).

Nehemiah was a leader *prepared to make personal sacrifices*. He had surrendered his luxurious lifestyle and personal safety on leaving Persia; once in Jerusalem he had to forfeit the comfort of necessary relaxation and undisturbed sleep (4:23). He continued to be harassed by known enemies with insidious schemes to destroy him (6:1–9), treacherous friends who valued money more than loyalty (6:10–13), corrupt religious leaders intent on misusing spiritual gifts (6:14), and community leaders whose allegiance to their governor was neither wholehearted nor sincere (6:17–19). Like the apostle Paul centuries later he was 'hard pressed on every side, but not crushed ... persecuted, but not abandoned'.

Nehemiah was a leader with *the ability to enlist dependable colleagues*. Once the wall was rebuilt, practical arrangements must be made for the oversight of its spiritual, social and military needs (7:1–2). The governor chose partners with moral 'integrity' and spiritual commitment. In the work of community administration he wanted people alongside him who 'feared God' (7:1–2) rather than those who pleased others, colleagues who were utterly 'trustworthy' (13:12) and not corrupted by materialistic ambitions.

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Nehemiah was a leader who *anticipated the next challenge*. Any achievement for the Lord will be promptly tested in one way or another. The governor knew that the newly secured city must be adequately defended and quickly populated (7:3–5; 11:1–24). His reliable colleagues were required to implement arrangements for the protection of the residents: guards must be appointed at the main points of access and detailed instructions given about appropriate times for opening and closing the gates. A sparsely occupied city could easily be attacked. The enemies who wanted to destroy it during the building operation were unlikely to lose interest in it. He quickly made imaginative plans for recruiting new citizens to take up residence in Jerusalem. Good leaders have the ability to think ahead to identify possible areas of difficulty and be alert enough to develop fresh opportunities for expansion and progress.

Nehemiah was a leader blessed with *enviable tenacity*. He overcame many daunting discouragements which might have ruined another man, but God enabled him to endure even when things seemed at their worst. He coped with a precarious employer (2:1–3), hostile neighbours (2:10, 19), insulting opponents (4:1–3), determined adversaries (4:7–8), disheartened colleagues (4:10), terrified partners (4:11–12), loveless officials (5:1–13), persistent enemies (6:1–11), false prophets (6:12–14), disloyal priests (13:4–9, 28), avaricious traders (13:15–22), and disobedient believers (13:23–27). During a period when he went back to Persia, standards rapidly declined and spiritual and ethical principles were gradually abandoned. On his return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to take up the task again with firm resolution to bring a wayward people back into the will of God. Buffeted by trials, committed leaders may be temporarily disillusioned but, following the teaching and example of the perfect leader, they put their ‘hand to the plough’ and refuse to ‘look back’. William Carey suffered innumerable hardships during an outstanding missionary career. In later years he shared his secret with his nephew. Disclaiming every other gift, he said, ‘I can plod. That is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything.’<sup>21</sup> Dedicated leaders never give up.

## 6. Relevance

Although we are separated from Nehemiah by two and a half thousand years, the problems he faced are not peculiar to the world of antiquity. In contemporary society, human problems may appear in a different guise but they were found in ancient communities no less than in ours.

Ours is a constantly changing society. The past few decades have witnessed unprecedented changes: collapsing political structures (the disintegration of the USSR, the termination of apartheid, the repeated incidence of civil wars in Africa), astonishing technological developments, economic pressures (serious unemployment in many countries), and religious tensions (with the greater degree of pluralism in Western society, the rise of Islamic militancy, the increasing attractiveness of eastern religions, and the proliferation of new religions such as ‘New Age’).

Moreover, these changes are not simply dramatic items for media attention; they have inevitable personal repercussions. Individuals and families are seriously affected by them. Social patterns have changed. Work no longer offers the stability and security it often did; compulsory redundancy is a cruel spectre on the employment horizon. In order to maintain their families, many people have to be prepared for dramatic changes at work, sometimes thrusting them into unfamiliar geographical and social contexts. Although some may not have to move from one part of the country to another, they are not likely to escape the challenge of change. Modern technology makes fresh demands, familiar work patterns disappear, different techniques have to be acquired and new opportunities grasped, often at the expense of home and family life.

**Nehemiah had to face the problem of change.** Obedience to God involved him in vocational, geographical, cultural and social change. When the Lord put it into his heart what he must do for Jerusalem (2:12), it meant moving from one part of the ancient world to another. He had to leave his secure home surroundings for an existence more tentative and uncertain. It involved a change of job from dignified palace steward to building-site manager, leaving a safe and affluent milieu in Persia for a less secure one in Judah. Friends had to be left in Susa, probably forsaking wider family ties as well. It meant exchanging the totally familiar for the largely unknown.

Nehemiah coped with the challenge of dramatic change in work, location and lifestyle. First, he depended upon God, so vividly expressed in his earnest prayers (1:5–7). Secondly, he was conscious that others before him had proved the Lord’s generosity in times of geographical, cultural and social change, notably Abraham (9:7–8) and Moses at the exodus (1:10). Thirdly, he faced the future with the deepening assurance that the Lord’s ‘gracious hand’ was also upon him (2:8, 18) and would crown his venture with success (2:20). Nehemiah’s name does not appear in what Richard Sibbes called ‘the little book of martyrs’ in Hebrews 11, but his was certainly a venture of faith. He too ‘was commended as one who pleased God’. He ‘obeyed and went’ and ‘made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country’. In working for God’s people he not only reconstructed Jerusalem’s damaged wall but ‘administered justice, and gained what was promised’.

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Modern society is crippled by **selfish individualism**. The sense of community concern has disappeared from many contexts in contemporary life. The ruthless pursuit of personal satisfaction has left many of our contemporaries with little time for projects which may benefit others. 'Our computers are starting to talk to us while our neighbours are becoming more distant and anonymous.' Voluntary agencies find it impossible to recruit enough people to staff local ventures to help others. Sick, disadvantaged, elderly, immobile, disabled, deprived people in modern communities are denied the practical support they deserve. Nehemiah's memoirs preserve the story of a prosperous individual who put community needs before his own. He left the opulence of palatial surroundings for a dispirited community in a dilapidated city he had never seen, a thousand miles from his home. When he reached Jerusalem, he had to inspire its citizens and people from the surrounding area to forsake their self-interest for a period in order to do something for the broken city, and once the wall was rebuilt he had to persuade others to do a further unselfish thing, come to live in Jerusalem for good. The narrative has compelling things to say about putting God first, about living unselfishly in the contemporary world, and about the joy and satisfaction of serving others. Modern society is becoming increasingly violent. Tragically, aggression and hostility, both personal and corporate, are familiar television scenes all over the world. The elderly are no longer safe and children are especially vulnerable. Minorities are in grave danger in many parts of the world and thousands of twentieth-century Christians have suffered for their faith. Nehemiah's story is also set within a context of social antagonism, verbal onslaughts, persistent ridicule and continuing attempts at physical brutality, not only directed at Nehemiah personally (6:1–14) but also toward all who identified with his work for God (2:19; 4:1–3, 7–12). His memoirs are particularly relevant to those who have to endure persecution in any form because of their love for Christ.

**Human rights** have a deservedly high profile in contemporary international politics. Millions are aware of appalling inequality, deprivation, homelessness and injustice. The success of Nehemiah's building enterprise was seriously imperilled by heartless Judean nobles and officials who were making money by exploiting the poor, causing widespread poverty, hunger, family disruption and slavery (5:1–5). Nehemiah was a man ready to champion the cause of the needy, and the manner in which he handled this crisis is strikingly relevant in the modern world. He opposed evil practice (5:6–13) and demonstrated by his own lifestyle (5:14–19) that the needs of others will never be far from the believer's mind.

Contemporary Western society is **grossly materialistic**. Those Judean nobles were not the last individuals to prize money more than people. Materialistic ambitions and economic interests probably figured more prominently than other factors in the opposition of Nehemiah's enemies. With its newly built walls and stable population, Jerusalem would no longer be a downtrodden community but would develop its own opportunities for trade and commerce. Those who had benefited by its earlier poverty were outraged that the new city might enjoy better days.

But, as we have seen, there were materialists in Judah as well as Samaria and Ammon. Israelites who had plenty were also greedy for more. Materialistic gain was a recurrent temptation to Nehemiah's contemporaries. It caused them not only to abuse the poor (5:1–5) but also encouraged unhelpful (possibly business and domestic) alliances (6:17–19). Their lust for money made them indifferent to God's teaching about love for debtors (10:31) and the regular support of God's servants (13:10–13). It caused them to marginalize the importance of the law's requirements for an essential rest day for humankind and animals (13:15–22). When monetarism gains pride of place on the human agenda, selfishness is likely to follow and sadness will never be far away.

Materialistic lifestyles are the congenial soil of secularism and relativism. People who deny God's existence and thereby dismiss his laws have little regard for objective moral standards. Ethical principles become subservient to situational needs. Contemporary Western society is becoming increasingly secularist. One cannot imagine secularism as a serious threat to a religious community in mid-fifth-century Judah. But it did make serious inroads into the life of the Israelite people; they maintained religious ceremonial but without spiritual commitment. Nehemiah had to deal with such insidious dangers. When he returned to Jerusalem after his stay in Persia, he discovered that his Judean contemporaries had adopted an overtly secularist lifestyle, both by what a temple official did and by what the people refused to do.

**First, what was done: a responsible religious leader disregarded God's law and allowed an Ammonite (13:1–3) opponent of Nehemiah to take up residence in the temple (13:4–5).** When spiritual leaders become indifferent to God's revealed Word, it is hardly surprising if secularist attitudes are adopted more widely by the people. If a temple official could marginalize God's laws about holiness, then the average Judean felt free to ignore his teaching about giving (13:10–11). Nehemiah confronts his contemporaries with the seriousness of both offences. He introduces immediate, public and practical means for diverting the offenders **from a God-ignoring to a God-honouring pattern of life** expressed in holiness (13:6–9) and generosity (13:12–13). His courageous witness challenges contemporary secularist attitudes and is a rebuke to moral and ethical compromise within the church and beyond it.

Western society is becoming more and more pluralistic. Christian ideals are constantly disputed and the distinctive dimensions of biblical faith seriously questioned. It is reliably estimated that within five years there will be more committed Muslims than committed Anglicans in Britain. Contemporary religious education encourages the notion that all the major

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world religions are of equal value and that there is nothing unique about Christian faith. Jesus is widely regarded as one religious leader among many, and the New Testament's uncompromising assertion of his deity is dismissed as intolerant religious prejudice. A contributor to *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* asserts that the 'idea that Christianity, or even the biblical faiths, have a monopoly on religious truth is an outrageous and absurd religious chauvinism', betraying a dogmatism considered abhorrent in others. Alister McGrath asks how such writers can imagine that their pluralistic theologies are alone 'privileged, detached, objective and correct': 'Is this not also an "outrageous and absurd" imperialism?'<sup>25</sup> With his concern that Israel might hand on to others her distinctive message, pluralism was an urgent problem for Nehemiah. It was a matter of urgency to deal with those who had adopted syncretistic patterns of spiritual life as they provided their children with teaching about the religions of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab (13:23–27). Israelite parents no longer talked about God's Word with their children. Nehemiah's passion for biblical truth ensured that Israel's faith was handed on to the next generation. He knew the role of the family as an effective teaching unit and the importance of communicating the message to the next generation.

In contemporary Britain, like many Western countries, vast numbers of our children have little knowledge of the Christian gospel. Eighty-five per cent of them have no links whatever with a church or Christian organization. Nehemiah's determination to reach the homes and families of his people is an example of one man's attempt to rectify spiritual ignorance and encourage the regular communication of God's truth to his contemporaries.

Like ourselves, Nehemiah lived heroically on the frontier between two worlds: human life as God intended it to be and as people have chosen to make it. In everyday conduct he was confronted, as we are, with the constant tension between life's crucial alternatives: God or self, holiness or sin, love or indifference, courage or weakness, generosity or greed. The temptations he faced and the transgressions he exposed are still rife in our more sophisticated but no less sinful society. His compassionate concern, disciplined prayerfulness, spiritual confidence, resourceful service, moral integrity, resilient faith, biblical principles and exemplary lifestyle continue to be relevant in our different but perilously needy world.<sup>4</sup>

<b>SPIRITUAL WARFARE: STRATEGIES</b>	
<b>The Strategies of Nehemiah</b>	<b>The Ploys of His Enemies</b>
He took up the work of God (Neh. 2:6–9).	They ridiculed him (Neh. 2:19).
He prayed, acknowledging God's sovereignty and noting the illegitimacy of his enemies (Neh. 2:20).	They mocked him (Neh. 4:1, 2).
He prayed, asking God to take note of his reproach and to refuse to forgive his enemies (Neh. 4:4, 5).	They conspired to attack and create confusion (Neh. 4:7, 8).
He prayed and set a watch (Neh. 4:9), taking necessary precautions (Neh. 4:13), reminding people to fight for their families (Neh. 4:14).	They used oppression from within, the fruit of their own unrighteousness (Neh. 5:1–5).
He led the people to confess, repent, and make restitution (Neh. 5:1–19).	They plotted to harm the leader (Neh. 6:1, 2).
He showed singlemindedness (Neh. 6:3).	They created a distraction (Neh. 6:4) and circulated slander to create fear (Neh. 6:5–7).
He refuted their slander (Neh. 6:8) and prayed for strength (Neh. 6:9).	They developed an insider plot to discredit the leader (Neh. 6:10).
He modeled righteousness (Neh. 6:11), received God's	They used covert connections as Tobiah sent letters to frighten Nehemiah and desensitize the people (Neh. 6:19).

<sup>4</sup> Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (pp. 13–29). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

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discernment (Neh. 6:12), and prayed, asking God to remember them (Neh. 6:14).	
He suggested precautions for protecting the gates (Neh. 7:3).	They established insider alliances; Eliahshib gave room to Tobiah (Neh. 13:4, 5).
He expelled the household goods of the enemy (Neh. 13:8).	They continued acts of unrighteousness (Neh. 13:10, 15, 16).
He contended with unrighteousness (Neh. 13:11, 17, 25, 28).	They used compromise, especially in intermarriage (Neh. 13:23–25).
Spiritual warfare begins when the enemy (Satan) perceives that someone is trying to seek God’s purposes or to protect the well-being of God’s people. Nehemiah drew the attention of his enemies, Sanballat and Tobiah, who were “deeply disturbed” when he began the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They employed a variety of strategies to divert Nehemiah from his task. These strategies of the enemy have been used through the generations, even until now. Nehemiah’s counterstrategies helped him to persevere and to finish his task.	
<i>See also Eph. 6:10–19; notes on Adversity (Acts 5); Perseverance (Rev. 14); Spiritual Warfare (Eph. 6); Temptation (Heb. 2).</i>	

### How Nehemiah Used Prayer

1:4-11	After receiving bad news about the state of Jerusalem’s walls	Recognized God’s holiness. Asked for a hearing. Confessed sin. Asked for specific help in approaching the king.	Included God in Nehemiah’s plans and concerns. Prepared Nehemiah’s heart and gave God room to work.	How often do you pour out your heart to God? How often do you give him a specific request to answer?
2:4	During his conversation with the king.	“Here’s where you can help God!”	Put the expected results in god’s hands.	Giving God credit for what happens before it happens keeps us from taking more credit than we should.
4:4,5	After being taunted and ridiculed by Tobiah and Sanballat.	“They’re mocking you, God. You decide what to do with them.”	Expressed anger to God, but Nehemiah did not take matters into his own hands.	We are prone to do exactly the opposite—take matters into our hands and not tell God how we feel.
4:9	After threats of attack by enemies	“We are in your hands, God. We will keep our weapons handy in case you want us to use them.”	Showed trust in God even while taking necessary precautions.	Trusting God does not mean we do nothing. Action does not mean we do not trust.
6:9	Responding to threats	“Oh, Lord God, please strengthen me!”	Showed Nehemiah’s reliance on god for emotional and mental stability.	How often do you ask God for help when under pressure?
13:29	Reflecting on the actions of his enemies	Asked God to deal with the enemies and their evil plans.	Took away the compulsion to get revenge, and	When did you last settle a desire for revenge by turning

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			entrusted justice to God.	the matter over to God?
5:19;13:14,22,31	Reflecting on his own efforts to serve God.	"Remember me, God."	Kept clear in Nehemiah's mind his own motives for action.	How many of your actions today will be done with the purpose of pleasing God?

<b>A PORTRAIT OF THE ADVERSARY</b>	
<b>Description of His Character and Work</b>	<b>Scripture References</b>
<b>His Character</b> Cunning Proud Created with superior wisdom Appears to be beautiful Resident of Eden Essentially evil Liar and violent Originally created as one of the heavenly beings Ambitious to be as God Deceptive in appearance Repulsive to those who know him He is not omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent.	Gen. 3:1 Is. 14:13, 16; Ezek. 28:2, 4, 5, 17 Is. 14:13, 16; Ezek. 28:2, 3, 12 Is. 14:12, 13; Ezek. 28:12 Gen. 3:1 (as serpent); Ezek. 28:13 Ezek. 28:15 Gen. 3:4; John 8:44 Ezek. 28:15 Is. 14:13, 14; Ezek. 28:2, 3, 6; Luke 4:6-8; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4 Gen. 3:1; Ezek. 28:14; 2 Cor. 11:14; Acts 5:3 Is. 14:16, 17; Ezek. 28:19 Eph. 6:11; 1 Cor. 10:13; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9
<b>His Work</b> Urges people to renounce God Perverts and distorts Scripture Opposes the work of God Hinders the Gospel Performs miracles to deceive people He lost his position and is under judgment because of his rebellion against God.	Gen. 3:4, 5 Gen. 3:1, 4, 5; Matt. 4:6 John 8:44; 13:2, 27; 2 Cor. 2:11; 1 Thess. 2:18; 1 Tim. 3:7; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Pet. 5:8 Matt. 13:19; 16:23 Rev. 16:14 Is. 14:12, 15; Ezek. 28:7, 8, 10, 16-18; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 19:20, 21; 20:13-15
<i>See Gen. 3:1, 3, 5; Ezek. 28:13, notes; chart, The Names of Satan.</i>	

<b>THE NAMES FOR SATAN</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<i>baddon</i> (Heb. , lit. "destruction")	Rev. 9:11
the accuser of our brethren	Rev. 12:10
the adversary (Gk. <i>antidikos</i> , lit. "opponent")	1 Pet. 5:8
the angel of the bottomless pit	Rev. 9:11
<i>polyon</i> (Gk. , lit. "destroyer")	Rev. 9:11
beelzebub, the ruler of the demons	Matt. 12:24
deceitful	2 Cor. 6:15

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the devil (Gk. <i>diablos</i> , lit. "one who casts through")	John 8:44
the dragon	Rev. 12:7; 20:2
the enemy	Matt. 13:39
the god of this age	2 Cor. 4:4
the king of Tyre	Ezek. 28:11–19
the star	John 8:44
<i>Satan</i> (Heb. , lit. "day star")	Is. 14:12–21)
the murderer	John 8:44
the prince of the power of the air	Eph. 2:2
the roaring lion	1 Pet. 5:8
the ruler of the darkness	Eph. 6:12
the ruler of this world	John 12:31; 14:30
<i>Satan</i> (Heb. , lit. "adversary")	Mark 1:12, 13
the serpent of old	Rev. 20:2
the tempter	1 Thess. 3:5
the wicked one	Matt. 13:19

### How Nehemiah Handled Opposition

As leader of the effort to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah faced resistance of almost every variety.

Resistance	Nehemiah's Response	Reference
Sanballat and Tobiah angrily ridiculed Nehemiah.	Nehemiah and the people prayed and renewed their commitment to work.	4:1–6
Sanballat, Tobiah, and a coalition of Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites threatened an attack.	Nehemiah and the people prayed and appointed an around-the-clock guard.	4:7–9

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The Israelites became discouraged and fearful. Nehemiah spoke words of reassurance and armed all the workers. 4:10–23

Some of the Jewish officials took advantage of the poor by charging exorbitant interest rates and seizing their property. Nehemiah rebuked these opportunists and ordered them to return the seized assets. 5:1–13

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem tried to distract Nehemiah with offers to meet and talk. Nehemiah refused the offers and kept his focus on the goal of finishing the walls. 6:1–4

Sanballat spread slanderous reports that Nehemiah intended to make himself king. Nehemiah denied the accusation and prayed for strength. 6:5–9

Shemaiah, a subordinate of Tobiah and Sanballat, tried to convince Nehemiah to be a coward and break God's law by hiding in the temple. Nehemiah discerned the trick and prayed for strength and justice. 6:10–14

5

**Leadership Principles from  
Nehemiah, Part 1**

***Leaders Have a Sense of Mission (1:5).***

Almost by definition, leaders have an end to which they are headed. This sense of mission helps to guide their decisions and determine their strategy.

<sup>5</sup> Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1997). *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (Ne 5:1–5). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

Nehemiah's mission grew out of his knowledge of the Law and his awareness that the destruction of Jerusalem had come about through God's judgment of his people's sins (Neh. 1:5–8). At the same time, he knew that God was willing to forgive their sins and restore them to the land (1:9). Therefore Nehemiah determined that he would see to the rebuilding of Jerusalem, in accordance with the Lord's promises, and he began to devise a strategy toward that end (1:10, 11).

Nehemiah did not dream up a sense of mission out of his own agenda or self-interest. He responded to the news of Jerusalem's plight with tears, prayer, fasting, humility, and seeking the Lord's will (1:4). As he prepared to go before the king, he probably did not know exactly what he should say or do, only that he needed to go to Jerusalem. Nor could he have known all that he would encounter once he arrived at the ruined city. Nevertheless, convinced that God wanted the Holy City to be revived, Nehemiah stepped forward as a change agent, and his leadership proved strategic.<sup>6</sup>

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## Leadership Principles from Nehemiah, Part 2

### ***Leaders Leverage Their Power (2:5)***

Management has been defined as the ability to get things done through other people. However, that can happen only if the people involved are in a position to get things done. Thus leaders must use their influence to get people of means participating in their efforts.

Nehemiah followed this principle in his plan to rebuild Jerusalem. He was in a key position of influence as the cupbearer to Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:1). He had the king's ear, and he leveraged his proximity to power for the advantage of his people. He requested and was granted a leave of absence (2:5, 6), letters of reference (2:7), and a government grant for building materials (2:8).

Today, the ability to leverage power is an indispensable requirement of leadership, especially for those who work in community development and urban ministry. There are plenty of resources to help the poor, for example, but it takes wise and disciplined leaders to align themselves with the powerful on behalf of the powerless. Tasks such as grant-writing, resource

<sup>6</sup> Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (pp. 584–585). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

<sup>7</sup> Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1997). *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (Ne 5:1–5). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

development, and asset distribution require careful cultivation of relationships with those in the networks of power.

### **Leaders Conduct Research (2:12)**

A missile without a guidance system is a dangerous thing—all power and no direction. In the same way, leaders who don't know where they are going can wreak havoc. That's why it pays for people in leadership positions to gather the right kind of information, so that they can make wise choices about which path to pursue.

Before he launched his plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah conducted careful research about the task at hand. He quietly walked around the city by night, without fanfare, surveying the extent of the problem and perhaps formulating some tentative strategies (2:11–15). Nehemiah's low profile was especially appropriate given that he was a new member of the community. As a representative of the king, he could have come in with trumpets blaring and declared what his expectations were. Instead, he kept his thoughts to himself and avoided attracting attention until he had formulated a plan.

### **Leaders Build Community (2:17, 18)**

In many Western countries of the twentieth century, the labor force often has been sharply divided between management and labor. One problem of this rigid distinction is that it tends to create a mentality of "us" versus "them." History shows that most of the greatest achievements of humanity have been accomplished by teams and communities of people working together toward common ends.

Nehemiah understood the power of community as he undertook the task of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. After surveying the situation, he gathered the people and gave a speech in which he mobilized the community around the rebuilding project. First he raised their awareness that something should be done, then he instilled confidence in them that something could be done—by them (2:17, 18).

It is interesting to notice that Nehemiah spoke in terms of "we" and "us," even though in his written account he used "they" and "them." Clearly he saw himself as a participant in the dire circumstances, even though he had just arrived from the royal palace. In fact, he bridged the class division between himself and his people by sharing the discussion he had had with the king, thereby showing that the people had a friend in the emperor's court.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (p. 587). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

## ehemiah 1:1

Nehemiah

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#### KEY PEOPLE IN NEHEMIAH

##### **Nehemiah (1:1)**

Strategically positioned in the Persian royal court, this man used his connections to accomplish great things for the Lord.

##### **Artaxerxes I (2:1)**

The powerful king of Persia authorized Nehemiah to strengthen the defenses of Jerusalem using government funds.

##### **Sanballat (4:1)**

This man, who may have been governor of Samaria during or shortly after Nehemiah's time, bitterly opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall—but to no avail.

##### **Tobiah (4:3)**

Another opponent of the the reconstruction, this may have been a Persian appointee or Sanballat's deputy.

##### **Why Start with the Wall? (2:18)**

If you were Nehemiah, where would you have started to rebuild the Holy City? Nehemiah chose to start with the wall.

##### **Christ Cares About Cities (2:20)**

Christ wants His followers to participate in public institutions for the benefit of all. This was the sort of work in which Nehemiah got involved.

##### **"Next To" (3:1–32)**

Americans value independence and celebrate solo performers. Yet most of the great accomplishments in the world are the result of coordinated teamwork in which many dedicated people pull together.

##### **Lingering Resentment Boils Over (4:7)**

Nehemiah offers a case study in how community developers might go about working with people to effect lasting change that actually benefits residents.

##### **The Ten Percent Solution (11:1–2)**

Nehemiah came up with a novel solution for repopulating and revitalizing the

lifeless neighborhoods of Jerusalem.  
Could his strategy be useful for run-down  
neighborhoods today?

## Articles



**Working from Within the System** *Nehemiah's position as the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes I enabled him to use the authority of the Persian government to rebuild the wall at Jerusalem. His contacts and connections with the king's inner circle remained important to him throughout his life. His model of working from within the system is one of several ways to accomplish institutional change for the Lord. See "The Scribe and the Cupbearer" at Introduction to Ezra and Nehemiah.*

## You'll Find It in Nehemiah

### YOU'LL FIND IT IN NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah hears about the desperate **Neh. 1**  
conditions at Jerusalem.

Nehemiah leads the citizens of **Neh. 2-6**  
Jerusalem in rebuilding the walls.

Nehemiah institutes several reforms. **Neh. 13**

The city of Enoch

Was built by Cain as a place of  
protection (see Gen. 4:17).

The Tower of Babel	Was built as a defiant attempt to avoid God's mandate to populate the earth. (Gen. 11:1–9).
Egypt's stores of food	Were established through Joseph's wise planning and management in order to have enough food during seven years of famine (Gen. 41:47–49).
The tabernacle	Was built with the gifts of the people of Israel to provide a center for worship of the Lord (Ex. 35:22–29).
Solomon's temple	Was planned by David, built by Solomon, and paid for through taxes and gifts in order to provide a permanent place for worshipping the Lord at Jerusalem (1 Kin. 5:3–5; 1 Chr. 29:1–9).
The Millo	Was fortified by Solomon, and later by Hezekiah, probably to strengthen the defenses of Jerusalem (see 1 Kin. 9:15).
The port and fleet at Ezion Geber	Were built by Solomon to provide access to the Gulf of Aqaba for purposes of shipping and trade (see 1 Kin. 9:26).
The city of Samaria	Was built by Omri as the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel (see 1 Kin. 16:24).
Jehoash's repairs to the temple	Were paid for by gifts from the people as a symbol of spiritual renewal and

rededication to the covenant (2 Kin. 12:4–16).

Hezekiah's water tunnel

Was built to bring water from the spring of Gihon inside the walls of Jerusalem, an important addition to the city's defenses (see 2 Chr. 32:30).

The second temple

Was commissioned by King Cyrus of Persia (Ezra 1:2–3) and partially paid for out of public funds (1:4; 6:8–10) in order to restore a place of worship at Jerusalem.

Herod's temple

Was begun in 19 B. C. and worked on until A. D. 64, mostly to gain political favor among the Jews (Matt. 24:1).

### Leadership Principles from Nehemiah

#### LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FROM NEHEMIAH

**Scripture presents numerous role models for leadership. Few, however, are as fully developed as the example of Nehemiah. Under authority from King Artaxerxes I, he returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city, beginning with its broken-down wall. Numerous principles of effective leadership stand out in the account, including the following: Leaders Have a Sense of Mission (Neh. 1:5)**

- **Leaders Leverage Their Power (2:5)**
- **Leaders Conduct Research (2:12)**
- **Leaders Build Community (2:17–18)**
- **Leaders Adapt to Adversity (4:8–9)**
- **Leaders Resist Underhanded Politics (6:5–9)**
- **Leaders Serve People (7:1)**
- **Leaders Celebrate Often (8:1)**

**For further discussion, see Neh. 1:5; 2:12; 4:8–9; 6:5–9; 8:1.**

## Chapter 1

### NEHEMIAH

**1:1 Name means:** “God is consolation,” or “the Lord comforts.”

**Not to be confused with:** Two other men named Nehemiah who returned from the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 3:16).

**Home:** Known to have lived at one of two royal palaces at Shushan (Susa), but almost certainly accompanied the king wherever he lived; later Jerusalem.

**Family:** Son of Hacaliah; probably born after the Jews of Judah were taken captive to Babylon (586 A.D.).

**Occupation:** Cupbearer to the Persian king (1:11) Artaxerxes I; oversaw the rebuilding of the wall at Jerusalem (2:11–4:23); twice served as governor of Jerusalem (5:14; 13:6–7).

**Noted for:** Deep piety and prayer; leadership and organizational ability; compassion for his people; impeccable integrity.

**Best known today for:** Returning from Persia to Jerusalem to lead an effort to rebuild the city walls, a project which he completed in 52 days (6:15) despite heavy opposition; also instituted social and political reforms, including the repopulation of Jerusalem, a ban on marriage to pagans, and the elimination of usury.

#### Nehemiah 1:4

#### NEHEMIAH’S PRAYER: A MODEL TO FOLLOW

**1:4–11** Nehemiah’s prayer (Neh. 1:4–11) offers several important lessons for believers today for how to practice the discipline of prayer:

(1) *Nehemiah’s first response was to turn to God in prayer.* Prayer was not something that Nehemiah engaged in after he had exhausted all other alternatives. He did not approach it as a last ditch effort, with the attitude, “What have I got to lose?” Instead, his immediate, instinctive response to the news of trouble back home was to fast and pray (1:4).

(2) *Nehemiah recognized and affirmed God’s sovereignty.* He realized that the Lord had first and primary claim over all nations and people, whether they were Israelites or

Persians. He saw himself and his people as being in the hands of God, dependent on His grace.

(3) *Nehemiah identified with his people.* He used the pronoun “we” in his prayer. Rather than blame others, he accepted corporate responsibility for his people’s sin.

(4) *Nehemiah recognized the whole of God’s promises and commandments.* In praying to God, it is easy to focus on what one wants from God, but ignore what God asks and expects from His people. Nehemiah knew what the Scriptures said about the Lord’s covenant with Israel, and he accepted the responsibilities of the covenant, not just the privileges.

## Nehemiah 1:5

### LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FROM NEHEMIAH, PART 1

#### 1:5

**LEADERS HAVE A SENSE OF MISSION (1:5)** Almost by definition, leaders have some end to which they are headed. This sense of mission helps to guide their decisions and determine their strategy.

Nehemiah’s mission grew out of his knowledge of the Law and his awareness that the destruction of Jerusalem had come about through God’s judgment of his people’s sins (Neh. 1:5–8). At the same time, he knew that God was willing to forgive their sins and restore them to the land (1:9). Therefore Nehemiah determined that he would see to the rebuilding of Jerusalem, in accordance with the Lord’s promises, and he began to devise a strategy toward that end (1:10–11).

It is important to note that Nehemiah did not dream up a sense of mission out of his own agenda or self-interest. He responded to the news of Jerusalem’s plight with tears, prayer, fasting, humility, and seeking the Lord’s will (1:4). As he prepared to go before the king, he probably did not know exactly what he should say or do, only that he needed to go to Jerusalem. Nor could he have known all that he would encounter once he arrived at the ruined city.

Nevertheless, convinced that God wanted the Holy City to be revived, Nehemiah stepped forward as a change agent, and his leadership proved strategic.

If you are in a leadership position, have you identified the overarching mission to which you are committed? Is it a worthwhile endeavor? Is it something that you believe God wants you to accomplish?

## Nehemiah 1:11

**God often places His people in strategic positions in order to accomplish His purposes. To bring about the reconstruction of the wall at Jerusalem, God used Nehemiah, a man who was perhaps closest to and most trusted by Persian king Artaxerxes I.**

As the king's cupbearer (Neh. 1:11), Nehemiah held one of the most important assignments a courtier could have in the ancient world. Cupbearers tasted a ruler's food in order to test its safety and ensure against poisoning, whether intentional or accidental. In the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian courts, which were notorious for political intrigue and assassination, the job of cupbearer carried enormous responsibility.

Usually foreigners, cupbearers often became trusted confidants of the rulers they served. Given the nature of their position, they tended to enjoy unusual political privilege and prestige. It was in a ruler's self-interest to keep his tasters happy, so their requests were listened to carefully and their wishes frequently granted.

This situation worked to Nehemiah's advantage. Unburdening himself to the king concerning the situation at Jerusalem, he requested and received a leave of absence and letters of authority to go and rebuild the city (2:3-8). Later, when his adversaries at Jerusalem threatened to falsely accuse him of rebellion (6:5-9), Nehemiah must have been comforted by the fact of his close association with Artaxerxes and the trust that his years of service had earned.

Where has God placed you in order to accomplish His purposes? What position and responsibility do you hold that might be useful to bring about good? Like Nehemiah, are you in prayer about what God is doing in the world? And are you prayerfully considering ways to leverage your influence to bring about His will?

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*Centuries earlier, a cupbearer (translated butler) played a role in winning the release of Joseph from prison. The result was the rescue of Abraham's descendants from severe famine and the beginning of their sojourn in Egypt. Read Gen. 40-41.*

*To find out more about the job of cupbearer and other positions in the royal courts of the ancient world see the Jobs and Occupations Index in the back matter.*

## Chapter 1



### A Strategically Placed Person of Faith

**2:9** *Nehemiah serves as a model of faith in that he leveraged his position to accomplish God's purposes. He used the resources available to him to overcome hostile opposition, such as the governors in his homeland (Neh. 2:9).*

*To find out about other people in the Bible after whom we can pattern our own lives, see "Models of Faith" at Dan. 2:48–49.*

## 2:11

### Nehemiah 2:11

#### JERUSALEM AT THE TIME OF NEHEMIAH

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The city of Jerusalem to which Nehemiah returned (Neh. 2:11) was still mostly in disrepair 70 years after its fall to the Babylonians. Nehemiah carried out extensive reconstruction, as did Zerubbabel and Ezra. Nevertheless, the city remained considerably smaller than it had been in its days of glory.

### Nehemiah 2:12

## 2:12 LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FROM NEHEMIAH, PART 2

### Leaders Leverage Their Power (2:5)

*Management has been defined as the ability to get things done through other people. However, that can happen only if the people involved are in a position to get things done. Thus leaders must use their influence to get people of means participating in their efforts.*

Nehemiah followed this principle in his plan to rebuild Jerusalem. He was in a key position of influence as the cupbearer to Artaxerxes (see "Nehemiah the Cupbearer" at Neh. 1:11). He had the king's ear, and he leveraged his proximity to power for the advantage of his people. He requested and was

granted a leave of absence (Neh. 2:5–6), letters of reference (2:7), and a government grant for building materials (2:8).

Today, the ability to leverage power is an indispensable requirement of leadership, especially for those who work in community development and urban ministry. There are plenty of resources to help the poor, but it takes wise and disciplined leaders to align themselves with the powerful on behalf of the powerless. Tasks such as grant-writing, resource development, and asset distribution require careful cultivation of relationships with those in the networks of power.

If you are in a position of leadership, what is your relationship to the powerful? Do you know how to befriend those to whom God has given authority and influence, so that you can enlist them appropriately in your efforts for good? Or do you resist or resent them, thereby alienating yourself and those you lead from vital resources that could help you accomplish your goals?

### **Leaders Conduct Research (2:12)**

A missile without a guidance system is a dangerous thing: all power and no direction. In the same way, leaders who don't know where they are going can wreak havoc. That's why it pays for people in leadership positions to gather the right kind of information, so that they can make wise choices about which path to pursue.

Before he launched his plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah conducted careful research about the task at hand. He quietly walked around the city by night, without fanfare, surveying the extent of the problem and perhaps formulating some tentative strategies (2:11–15).

Nehemiah's low profile was especially appropriate given that he was a new member of the community. As a representative of the king, he could have come in with trumpets blaring and declared what his expectations were. Instead, he kept his thoughts to himself and avoided attracting attention until he had formulated a plan.

If you are in a position of leadership, do you take pains to gather the kind of information you need to make decisions? Are your decisions informed and based on reality? Or do you assume that the power of your position alone is all that is required to bring about the results you seek?

### **Leaders Build Community (2:17–18)**

In many Western countries of the twentieth century, the labor force often has been sharply divided between management and labor. One problem of this rigid distinction is that it tends to create a mentality of "us" versus "them." History shows that most of the greatest achievements of humanity

have been accomplished by teams and communities of people working together toward common ends.

Nehemiah understood the power of community as he undertook the task of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. After surveying the situation, he gathered the people and gave a speech in which he mobilized the community around the rebuilding project. First he raised their awareness that something *should* be done, then he instilled confidence in them that something *could* be done—by them (2:17–18).

It is interesting to notice that Nehemiah spoke in terms of “we” and “us,” even though in his written account he used “they” and “them.” Clearly he saw himself as a participant in the dire circumstances, even though he had just arrived from the royal palace. In fact, he bridged the class division between himself and his people by sharing the discussion he had had with the king, thereby showing that the people had a friend in the emperor's court.

If you are in a leadership position, have you learned how to break down walls that divide, and instead build community? Like Nehemiah, do you know how to overcome communication barriers? Do you address individuals and families by name, involve people right where they live, respect their limitations, and take a personal interest in their circumstances?

## Nehemiah 2:18

### 2:18 WHY START WITH THE WALL?

**The city of Jerusalem to which Nehemiah returned was in gross disrepair. Its temple had been restored by Ezra, but little else was functioning effectively. The wall was broken down, the gates were burned, the roads were cluttered with debris, and most of the homes and buildings stood vacant. It must have been a depressing place to visit, let alone live.**

If you were Nehemiah, where would you have started to rebuild the Holy City? After a private nighttime site inspection (Neh. 2:11–15), Nehemiah chose to start with the rebuilding of the wall. Why?

The text does not give us the details of Nehemiah's reasoning, but several points seem clear:

(1) *The project was achievable.* Restoring the city's many systems of commerce and public life required complex, long-term processes. By contrast, the wall could be rebuilt in a mere 52 days (6:15). Thus Nehemiah provided a means of success to a people who had experienced nothing but defeat for decades.

(2) *The task was something in which everyone could participate.* The physical labor of rebuilding the wall did not require highly technical or intellectual skills. A few carpenters and masons were needed, but most of the work required nothing more complicated than lifting stones and clearing a path. Thus everyone could get involved. As a result, the task brought together the entire community.

(3) *Rebuilding the walls had both practical and symbolic value of restoring security to the city.* For too long, Jerusalem had been wide open to the domination of strongmen such as Sanballat, Tobiah, and their cronies (4:1, 7; 6:1). By closing up the walls, Nehemiah was improving the safety of the citizens. He also was serving notice that the Israelites were back, putting thugs and thieves out of business.

Nehemiah's wisdom serves as a model for those involved in community development today. Often the place to begin revitalization of a neighborhood is with simple tasks that are doable and achieve tangible yet significant results.

## Nehemiah 2:20

### CHRIST CARES ABOUT CITIES

**2:20** The account of Nehemiah rebuilding the city of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:20) may seem like a footnote of history, but it illustrates a fundamental principle that has implications for every Christian living today: *Christ cares about cities.*

A key passage for understanding this concept is Paul's New Testament letter to the Colossians. There we learn that Christ is the Lord of *all* of life, whether public or private. He not only transforms us personally, but uses us in the global arena to transform societies and systems as well (see "Two Portraits of Jesus, Two Sides of Life" at Col. 1:15–18, and "Two Portraits of Jesus, Two Sides of Life" at Col. 2:6).

Therefore, Christ wants His followers to participate in public institutions for the benefit of all. As believers, we can use the systems of the city—education, health care, transportation, housing, community development—as instruments for good. By doing so,

we can help create healthy cities that promote healthy neighborhoods that encourage healthy families and lead to healthy individuals—and vice versa (see the diagram “Faith Impacts the World” in the front matter).

This was the sort of work in which Nehemiah was ultimately involved. He was concerned about far more than a wall. He wanted to see his people restored and revitalized. He wanted his nation to return to the covenant with God outlined in the Law. The rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem was the first step in that process.

Are you committed to the city in the way that Christ is? How might you use your resources—job, money, relationships, influence—to accomplish tangible benefits for people in your community?

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*Scripture has a great deal to say about how and why God’s people should be actively involved in the revitalization of cities. See the articles listed under the “Urban Life” and “Government” headings in the Themes to Study index in the back matter.*

### Chapter 3



### A Region-Wide Project

**3:17–18** *Nehemiah recruited workers from far outside the city of Jerusalem—for example, from as far away as Keilah, 18 miles southwest of the city (Neh. 3:17–18). This shows that the reconstruction of the wall was a region-wide project, involving workers from throughout Judah. To find out more about Keilah, see 1 Sam. 23:1.*

#### Nehemiah 4:1

**4:1 Name means:** “May Sin (the moon-god) give him life.”

**Home:** Probably Beth Horon, 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem (see 2 Chr. 8:5), as he was called “the Horonite” (Neh. 2:10).

**Family:** May have descended either from a family of Israelites left behind when Assyria captured the northern kingdom (722 A.D.), or from the racially mixed Samaritans that resulted from Assyria’s resettlement of the area (2 Kin. 17:24); had two sons, Delaiah and Shelemaiah, according to extrabiblical sources, and a daughter who married a

Jewish priest, causing Nehemiah to remove the man from office (Neh. 13:28; compare Lev. 21:14).

**Occupation:** Probably governor of Samaria during or shortly after Nehemiah's time, according to extrabiblical sources; may have been in line to become governor of Judah if Nehemiah had not been given the position (Neh. 5:14; 13:6–7).

**Best known today for:** His strident opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall, employing tactics such as ridicule, mockery, rumors, lies, and letters to the king.

## Nehemiah 4:7

### 4:7 LINGERING RESENTMENT BOILS OVER

*Nehemiah faced growing opposition as progress on the wall of Jerusalem moved forward (Neh. 4:7). Who were these opponents and why were they so upset?*

- *Sanballat* (4:1, 7; 6:1) is called "the Horonite" (2:10), probably indicating that he came from Beth Horon, 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem (see 2 Chr. 8:5). He was probably descended either from a family of Israelites that had been left behind when the northern kingdom was captured by Assyria (722 A.D.), or from the racially mixed Samaritans that resulted from Assyria's resettlement of the area (2 Kin. 17:24). Extrabiblical sources suggest that Sanballat became the governor of Samaria during or shortly after Nehemiah's time.
- *Tobiah* the Ammonite (4:3, 7; 6:1) is referred to as an "official" (literally, "servant," 2:10), which may mean that he was a Persian appointee or possibly Sanballat's deputy. Because his name means "the Lord is good" and he called his son Jehohanan ("the Lord is merciful," 6:18), he was possibly at least partially Jewish. The reference to Ammon might have designated his area of control more than his background. Apparently he was joined by other Ammonites in opposing the reconstruction.
- *Geshem* the Arab (6:1) is known mostly from extrabiblical records. They suggest that he was the king of Kedar, a nation of nomads in northern Arabia. He and his people (4:7) served the Persians by controlling the

caravan routes between Palestine and Egypt, so his accusations against Nehemiah (6:6) were liable to win at least a hearing.

- *The Ashdodites* (4:7) were inhabitants of Ashdod, which had been one of five principal cities of the Philistines (see 1 Sam. 5:1). However, the Ashdodites mentioned by Nehemiah may not have been full-blooded Philistines, as the Assyrians had destroyed the city in 711 A.D. Later it was controlled by the Babylonians and eventually the Persians, who repopulated it.

What all of these people had in common was that they had remained in Palestine during the period of Judah's exile. That helps to explain why they were so angry (4:1, 7). For decades they had lived in the political, cultural, and spiritual wasteland that the Babylonians created in Judah. The best and brightest of the Jews had either been killed during the capture of Jerusalem, or else deported to Babylon. That left only the poorest and least capable people behind (2 Kin. 24:14–16; 25:11–12).

Thus it was natural that over the years, strongmen such as Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem would come to dominate the region. The Persians used these bureaucrats to maintain order, but did little to help redevelop the territory. In effect, Jerusalem and its surrounding districts were not unlike many blighted inner cities today, where one often finds that slumlords and petty politicians maintain control over the poor by keeping them weak and powerless.

Suddenly Nehemiah entered the situation. Unexpected and uninvited, he represented change being imposed from the outside. His bold plan to rebuild the wall offered long-term benefits, but it also threatened the immediate interests of the local bosses. In fact, it even made many of the people uncomfortable, for over the years they, too, had started to exploit each other (Neh. 5:1–5).

People who live in ghettos and other “throwaway” communities often feel seething resentment against those who have left them behind, those who oppress them, and those who are supposed to protect them but don't. When an outsider comes in with sweeping plans and promises, that resentment can boil over into outright hostility and even violence. Nehemiah offers a case study in how community developers might go about working with people—adversaries as well as advocates—to effect lasting change that actually benefits residents.

### LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FROM NEHEMIAH, PART 3

#### 4:8-9

**LEADERS ADAPT TO ADVERSITY (4:8-9)** Many people run from adversity; wise leaders cheerfully expect it! Wherever change and progress are underway, competing interests inevitably rise to challenge them. At that point, leaders must decide whether they will accept the challenge and meet it, or turn tail and let their opponents set the agenda.

Nehemiah's adversaries were a group of Jews from racially mixed backgrounds and Gentiles who had a vested interest in seeing that Jerusalem remained unprotected (Neh. 4:7). During the seventy years of Judah's exile, they had established dominance over those left behind. Therefore, Nehemiah's plan to rebuild the walls and revitalize the city threatened to end their monopoly on control.

Nehemiah responded to their opposition with resolute faith and prayer and measured resistance. Rather than escalate a touchy situation, he defended against attack and kept on working. Thus he adapted to adversity rather than run from it or overreact to it. God eventually rewarded Nehemiah's perseverance with the completion of the wall (6:15).

If you are in a position of leadership, how do you respond to opposition and adversity? Do you bend but not break, strengthened by your faith and confident that God will see you through? Do you respond to the opposition in appropriate ways, taking practical steps to ensure that the task goes forward, even as others try to shut it down?

#### Nehemiah 6:5

#### 6:5-9 LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FROM NEHEMIAH, PART 4

#### Leaders Resist Underhanded Politics (6:5-9)

*Having failed to intimidate Nehemiah into stopping the work of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall, Sanballat and his cronies tried smear tactics to shut the project down (Neh. 6:5-7). Frustrated opponents often resort to that approach when other methods have proven useless.*

The Bible does not explain why Nehemiah so easily dismissed their accusations (6:8) and apparently took no steps to prevent their letters from reaching the king. However, it seems plausible that he was relying on his years of trustworthy service as the king's cupbearer. He might have known that he had the full trust of King Artaxerxes, who would quickly see through the deception of anyone who accused Nehemiah of sedition. He also knew

the process by which letters such as those Sanballat had written would be read and evaluated.

In short, Nehemiah had a clear conscience and an impeccable reputation. Therefore, no amount of “mud” could cause him to lose heart. He knew that none of it would stick.

It is worth noticing that Nehemiah did not resort to slinging mud himself. He probably could have come up with plenty of counter-accusations against his adversaries. But rather than waste time on a verbal exchange that would have distracted him from the wall, he prayed and ignored the politics swirling outside the city.

If you are in a position of leadership, are you resistant to the dirty tricks of your opponents? Do you maintain your integrity, so that there can be no ground for accusation against you? Do you resist the temptation to “fight fire with fire” by resorting to political games and dirty tricks yourself?

### **Leaders Serve People (7:1)**

Some people regard leadership primarily as the art of getting results. Great leaders, they say, are those who get the job done. It matters very little how they operate, as long as they achieve their goals. But when we examine the great leaders of Scripture, we find that they not only accomplished much, but served people in the process.

Nehemiah illustrates the point rather well. His project of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem was never an end in itself. The ultimate objective was to revitalize the people of Israel and return them to their covenant with God.

To that end, after the wall was completed, Nehemiah turned the city’s management over to local government leaders (7:1–2). He did not create dependency on his own skills, nor did he use the project to gain wealth or fame for himself (5:18). Instead, right from the start, Nehemiah began the process of turning over management of Jerusalem to others.

Nehemiah also helped the people trace their roots by reviewing the census taken twenty-five years earlier in Ezra’s time (7:5; see “New Reasons for Taking a Census” at Ezra 2:68). That set the stage for repopulating the city (Neh. 11:1–2) and continuing the initiative of urban revitalization.

If you are in a position of leadership, what is your posture toward the people you lead? Are you concerned about the task alone, or do you see people as the ultimate beneficiaries? If so, in what ways might you serve those who work with you, over you, or for you, so that they gain from the process even as they carry out the work?

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*The style of leadership that Nehemiah demonstrated was much like that which Jesus not only advocated, but practiced. See “A Model of Servant-Leadership” at Matt. 20:25–28, and “A Model of Servant-Leadership” at John 13:2–17.*

## Chapter 6



### An Important List

**7:6** *Nehemiah’s list of returnees from the captivity (Neh. 7:6–72) duplicates Ezra’s roll of the families who came back to Judah (Ezra 2:1–70). Bible readers today may be tempted to skip over these lists as tedious, but they are highly important. They named the principal families that returned, and were probably used to establish ownership of lands.*

*For us today, these lists provide occasional insights into who went back to rebuild Judah and what society was like after the exile. For example, we learn that a group called the Nethinim were represented (Neh. 7:60). These people’s ancestors were foreigners who served as temple servants beginning in the time of Solomon (see 1 Chr. 9:2). Their presence here is a testimony to the fact that God reached out to other nations and peoples through the Israelites, and faithfully preserved them through the ordeal of the exile.*

*To learn more about the significance of genealogies in the Bible, see “The Purpose of Genealogies” at Gen. 5:1.*

## Nehemiah 8:1

### LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FROM NEHEMIAH, PART 5

#### 8:1

**LEADERS CELEBRATE OFTEN (8:1)** Effective leaders appreciate the value of celebrating the great things that God has done in and through their organization. When the task is completed, when results have been achieved, when people have been served, then it is appropriate to take time to celebrate.

That is what Nehemiah did when the people completed the rebuilding of the wall (Neh. 8:1, 10). First he had Ezra read from the Law—the motivation for Nehemiah’s mission in the first place. The words kindled a godly sorrow (9:1–3), but also genuine joy (8:10–12). Thus with heartfelt praise, choice food, and even an “amen” chorus (8:6), the community rejoiced in the Lord for the work it had accomplished.

One interesting sidelight to the celebration was Nehemiah’s instruction to “send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared” (8:10). In other words, bring the poor to the party! Share the wealth. No one should be deprived of joy just because he cannot afford even a small feast.

If you are in a leadership position, do you know how to celebrate your group's milestones? In the end, celebration can be a way of worshiping the Lord, because He is the source of all good gifts. We can praise him for giving us a task and the means to accomplish it.

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*Christians have every reason to celebrate life, as James hints at when he urges believers to sing songs of praise when they are happy. You'll find a number of suggestions for ways to do that in "Let's Celebrate!" at James 5:13.*

## Nehemiah 11:1

### THE TEN PERCENT SOLUTION

**11:1-2** How do you revitalize dead or dying urban neighborhoods that have many abandoned homes and buildings, few if any businesses, and an infrastructure that lies in ruins? Nehemiah came up with a novel solution for that problem in Jerusalem: let the outlying suburbs donate one-tenth of their people to move into the city (Neh. 11:1-2). In effect, the districts surrounding Jerusalem tithed people for the purpose of community redevelopment.

Could a similar "ten percent solution" be applied to run-down neighborhoods today? It is intriguing to imagine what might happen if ten percent of all the believers in the suburbs surrounding any of today's largest cities relocated into the most blighted sections of their cities; if they put their children in neighborhood schools; if they rebuilt abandoned or neglected houses; if they shopped at neighborhood stores and restaurants; if they established or worked at businesses in the community; if they participated in local political and civic affairs; if they built up churches in the inner city.

Nehemiah's recruitment for the repopulation program involved casting lots to determine who would relocate (11:1; see Josh. 18:8-10). Those who were selected were "blessed" or ordained (Hebrew, *barak*, Neh. 11:2) to the task by their fellow citizens. This suggests a formal commissioning of these families to carry out the redevelopment of Jerusalem.

In a similar way, people who move back into the city today to help revitalize urban life need not come with a spirit of know-it-all condescension or quick-fix triumphalism, but rather with a sense of mission (see "Lingering Resentment Boils Over" at Neh. 4:7). Just as urban blight happens over many years, so urban renewal takes years to accomplish.

But it must start somewhere. Nehemiah began with ten percent of God's people living nearby. Where will God's people today begin?

## Chapter 11



### Zerubbabel, Nehemiah's Coleader

**12:1** Nehemiah depended heavily on Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:1), as did Ezra before him. Zerubbabel was the crown prince of the Jews and the appointed governor of Judah. To learn how important his influence on the returnees to Judah was, see his personality profile at Hag. 1:12.<sup>9</sup>

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**What** is a hedge of protection? Pray a hedge of protection about yourself and your loved ones.

**Job 1:9-10**

<sup>9</sup> “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. <sup>10</sup> “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land.

**Ps 34:7**

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.

**Psalm 91**

<sup>1</sup> Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

<sup>2</sup> They say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

<sup>3</sup> Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence.

<sup>4</sup> He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

<sup>5</sup> You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

<sup>6</sup> nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

<sup>7</sup> A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

<sup>8</sup> You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

<sup>9</sup> If you say, “The LORD is my refuge,” and you make the Most High your dwelling,

<sup>10</sup> no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.

<sup>11</sup> **For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;**

<sup>12</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. [M]

<sup>13</sup> You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. [M]

<sup>14</sup> “Because they love me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue them; I will protect them, for they acknowledge my name. <sup>15</sup> They will call on me, and I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will deliver them and honor them. <sup>16</sup> With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation.”

**Hosea 2:5-7 (NASB)**

“For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, Who give me my bread and my water, My wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’

<sup>6</sup> “**Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns,**

**And I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths.**

<sup>7</sup> “She will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; And she will seek them, but will not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, For it was better for me than now!’

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**Ephesians 6:10–18**

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done

everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup> **Stand firm** then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of

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<sup>9</sup> [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed., Ne 1:1–11:1). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Still Standing  
Week 8: The Example of Nehemiah

*righteousness in place,<sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.<sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.<sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

*<sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

**Romans 11:19-21**

*Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." **20** That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, **but you stand fast through faith.** So do not become proud, but fear. **21** For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you.*

**Exodus 14:13-14**

***10** And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. **11** Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? **12** Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."*

***13** And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. **Stand still (firm)**, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. **14** The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.*

Still Standing  
Week 7: The Power of Dominion