

# Nehemiah: Not Just another Building Project

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## Introduction

Nehemiah is the longest book I have ever taught through in Sunday school. It took four weeks to get for Jonah's 1,296 words and it will take us all of seven weeks to get through Nehemiah's 10,116 words.

## Order

Ray C. Stedman: Ezra and Nehemiah are **one** book in the Hebrew Bible, for they are part of the same story. In fact, the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther all come out of the same general period of Israel's history. Esther actually happened prior to Ezra and Nehemiah. [Esther's husband], King Ahasuerus of Persia, is the Artaxerxes of the opening chapters of Nehemiah. This heathen king gave the command for Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to build up the walls of the city.

## Titles vs. Names

Ray C. Stedman: Neither Artaxerxes nor Ahasuerus are the names of this king. That is what is so confusing. These are really titles. Artaxerxes means "the great king" and Ahasuerus means "the venerable father." These were not the king's given names. It may or may not be helpful to know that this Artaxerxes and Ahasuerus are also Darius the Mede of the book of Daniel. And then, to add to the confusion, Artaxerxes in the book of Nehemiah is not the same Artaxerxes as in the book of Ezra. Now do I have you thoroughly confused?

## Overview

Ray C. Stedman: Nehemiah is the story of the **rebuilding** of the walls of Jerusalem, which took place in the fifth century before Christ. . . . This ancient city is still surrounded by thick walls, but they are not the same walls that Nehemiah built. Those walls have disappeared; and the walls that are there now are of a much later date.

Ray C. Stedman: But Nehemiah did more than rebuild a wall, as we will learn. This book is also the story of the restoring of a people from ruin and despair to a new walk with God.

Stuart Lightsey: The Israelites turned away from God. This was probably not one big decision. Their disobedience probably was a series of little decisions. They did not keep up their spiritual walls, much in the same way as they did not keep up the walls around the city.

Ray C. Stedman: The most widespread secular illusion of our day is that we do not need God to do what we want to do. We think we can function quite adequately without him. . . . The book of Nehemiah is designed to teach us that only with God's help can we actually change ourselves and recover from the damage and ruin of the past.

*Explore the Book* by J. Sidlow Baxter: There is no winning without working and warring. There is no opportunity without opposition. There is no 'open door' set before us without there being many 'adversaries' to obstruct our entering it. Whenever the saints say, 'Let us arise and build,' the enemy says, 'Let us arise and oppose.'" (pp. 230-231)

**Schedule**Week 1 = **Concern**, Chapter 1

Weeks 5-6 = Consecration, Chapters 7-12

Week 2 = **Construction**, Chapters 2-3

Week 7 = Cleansing, Chapter 13

Weeks 3-4 = Conflict, Chapters 4-6

**Who, What, Where, When**

**Who:** Nehemiah. **Wikipedia:** Traditionally, the author of this book is believed to be Nehemiah himself. There are portions of the book written in the first person (**Nehemiah 1-7; 12:27-47; 13**), but there are also portions of it in which Nehemiah is spoken of in the third person (**Nehemiah 8-10**).

**Chris Arnold:** Nehemiah is also thought by many to have been a eunuch. . . . But, if he was a eunuch, that would also lend credence to the thought that Nehemiah was trusted. (No way is he going to go wandering through the King's personal . . . anything.) Eunuchs were a fixture in politics in those days. So it is not too far of a logical leap to assume that as the king's cupbearer, supposedly steeped in politics, and with the king's ear . . . that Nehemiah was living pretty comfortably and was catered to in his own right.

**What:** David Guzik: Some one thousand years after the time of Moses; some four hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the nation of Israel and the Jewish people were in a desperate state. Their nations had been destroyed—first, the northern Jewish nation of Israel, then the southern Jewish nation of Judah. The city of Jerusalem had been completely conquered by the Babylonians, and the once-glorious temple of Solomon had been destroyed. When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, they deported almost everyone from the city and the region—for some seventy years, Jerusalem was a ghost town, with the potential to end up like many ancient cities—completely forgotten except to history.

When the Jews were deported to Babylon, they began to make homes for themselves there—they settled down, and many still followed the God of their Fathers, but they did it from Babylon, with no desire to return to the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Some of these faithful Jews were raised up to places of prominence in the governments they were deported to. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego became leaders in Babylon. But after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, they were given the opportunity to return to their homeland, the Promised Land. Out of the some two or three million Jews deported from the land, only 50,000 decided to return to the Promised Land. That's only something like 2%!

But they did return, and in the days of Ezra, they rebuilt the temple and laid a spiritual foundation for Israel once again. But fifteen years after the book of Ezra ended . . . some 150 years after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, the walls of the city of Jerusalem were still in rubble. It wasn't that people before hadn't tried to rebuild the walls. In **Ezra 4:6-23**, we see that some 75 years before, they had tried to rebuild the walls, but were stopped by their enemies. No one thought this obstacle could be overcome, so the walls lay in ruin and the people stayed in trouble.

**Where:** Shushan and Jerusalem

**When:** +/- 450 BC (Herodotus, Hippocrates, Plato, and Socrates were all on the scene at this time)

### Resources

Some study resources that might help you along the way: [PreceptAustin.org](http://PreceptAustin.org), [StudyLight.org](http://StudyLight.org), [Easy English](http://EasyEnglish.com)

### Visual Aide: Lego blocks (from JoshHunt.com)

Think about this Lego block as your calling in life—each of us ‘fits in’ somewhere in God’s design and it’s up to us to make ourselves available for His choosing.

## Nehemiah 1 (NKJV)

**1 The words of Nehemiah** [Jehovah comforts] **the son of Hachaliah** [whom Jehovah enlightens].

**It came to pass in the month of Chislev** [the ninth month ~ Nov/Dec], **in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan** [lily—the book of [Esther](#) occurs in Shushan ([Esther 1:1-2](#))] **the citadel** [palace], **2 that Hanani** [gracious] **one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them** [Warren Wiersbe: **Some people prefer not to know what’s going on, because information might bring obligation**] **concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity** [the remnant], **and concerning Jerusalem.**

Josh Hunt: Nehemiah . . . was comfortable in this position. We read in Esther where the king there did not let any troubling word come to him. Godly people, at times, [look](#) for trouble. They look for problems that God can use them to solve. They don’t burry their heads in the sand. They expose themselves to the pain that is in the world.

**3 And they said to me, “The survivors** [the remnant] **who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach** [taunted]. **The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned** [burned and left desolate] **with fire.”** [Albert Barnes: **The Assyrian sculptures show that it was the usual practice to burn the gates.**]

**4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down** [the same Hebrew word for what the king of Nineveh did in his repentance] **and wept** [to weep bitterly—the Hebrew is pronounced, baw-KAW], **and mourned for many days;** [Terry Bolden: **His grief at the hearing of the walls and gates being broken and burned doesn’t translate in our culture. This would be the equivalent of us being [homeless](#). Many in their day didn’t have their own home, but as long as they had walls and a gate . . . those were very basic needs.**]

Warren Wiersbe: When God puts a burden on your heart, don’t try to escape it.

Easy English: The wall would have large gates. During the day, these gates were open. Traders and travelers could enter the city. And they could go to the market. But by night, the guards closed the gates. Then, nobody could enter. And the city would be safe. Because the wall was so strong, people would use it for other purposes too. For example, people might build their houses against it. In some cities, these houses actually became part of the city wall. So, the wall became a row of houses. This also would have prevented anything of value being put in the temple—if they had put anything of value in the temple, it would just have been stolen because of the lack of protection.

**Stuart Lightsey:** The wall is like the fish in Jonah. It is a big part of the story, but not the whole story. The wall is a symptom of the disease of disobedience/sin. It is a very large and obvious symptom, but it is only a symptom. The issue that has to get treated is the disobedience/**sin** of the people.

**I was fasting** [abstained from food] **and praying** [interceded: prayed on behalf of someone else] **before** [the face of] **the God of heaven.** [Ray C. Stedman: There is nothing superficial about this.]

**Ray C. Stedman:** You will never build the walls of your life until you have first become greatly concerned about the ruins.

**Amy Prater:** There are so many things, eternal things, going on around me worth mourning, and fasting, and praying over, yet I don't. Why am I so out of tune that I don't have the same response Nehemiah does?

**Josh Hunt:** What kinds of situations move you as the situation in Jerusalem moved Nehemiah?

We learn in the next chapter that Nehemiah actually prayed for four months. **Adam Clarke:** Many good works have been ruined by making haste.

**5 And I said: "I pray, LORD** [Yahweh] **God of heaven** [David Guzik: Prayer is essential to leadership; if you have a vision big enough that it can only be done by God, you obviously must pray. If you don't need to desperately pray to accomplish your vision, your goal isn't big enough.], **O great and awesome** [fearful, awe-inspiring] **God, You who keep** [guard] **Your covenant and mercy** [chesed] **with those who love You and observe Your commandments** [Notice Nehemiah's humble approach. David Guzik: Humility begins by simply understanding there is a God enthroned in the heavens, and I am not Him!], **6 please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear** [grant, agree to] **the prayer of Your servant which I pray** [intercede] **before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins** [the root of Old Testament word for sin is based in the concept of 'missing the way' or 'making a wrong turn'—think, *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan] **of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You.** [Amy Prater: What's that? Nehemiah's confessing for himself and his people? Yet, I seem to want to separate from society so I don't have to take credit for those other crazy Americans.] **Both my father's house and I have sinned.** **7 We have acted very corruptly** [the Hebrew verb is repeated here for emphasis in two different tenses] **against You, and have not kept** [guarded—the same thing Nehemiah said God guarded in **Nehemiah 1:5**] **the commandments** [things **ordered** to be done], **the statutes** [**limits** or boundaries], **nor the ordinances** [judicial **decisions**] **which You commanded Your servant Moses.** **8 Remember, I pray** [Is it OK to ask God to remember? Yes! **Psalm 119:49**], **the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations;** **9 but if you return** [turn back] **to Me, and keep** [guard] **My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out** [thrown out, banished] **to the farthest part** [end] **of the heavens, yet I will gather** [gather together] **them from there, and bring them** [lead them in, carry them in, bring it to pass] **to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling** [settling down place] **for My name** [name, reputation, fame, glory].'<sup>1</sup> [See **Leviticus 26:33-46**, **Deuteronomy 4:25-27**, and **Deuteronomy 28:64** for the scripture Nehemiah was referencing. **Adam Clarke:** Though in an enemy's country, and far from the ordinances of God, Nehemiah did not forget the law: he read his Bible well, and quotes correctly.] **10 Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed** [ransomed] **by Your great power, and by Your strong hand.** [Justin Harness: How awesome if our leadership from Obama down were to call out to God in such a way?] **11 O Lord** [Adonai], **I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants**

[perhaps there were others praying with Nehemiah?] **who desire** [delight, take pleasure in] **to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper** [succeed] **this day** [David Guzik: This is a prayer of a man of action, not a sideline critic. Nehemiah does not pray “God, make it all better” or, “God, get someone moving on this problem”; instead, his prayer is “God, use me to make it better.” Are you comfortable asking God for **success?**], **I pray, and grant him mercy** [compassion] **in the sight** [face] **of this man.”**  
 [Nehemiah had to pray for success because according to Warren Wiersbe: Nehemiah couldn't simply quit his job and move to Jerusalem. He was an appointee of the king, and he needed the king's permission for everything he did.] **Does this prayer differ from the average prayer you hear? If so, how?**

**For I was the king's cupbearer** [literally, 'one who gave him to **drink**']. [Note that Nehemiah doesn't lead off with his lofty position—he waits. **Matthew Henry: We may hence learn** [from the order of this chapter] **to be humble and modest, and slow to speak of our own advancements.**]

**Jonathan Prater: God can use us or put us in jobs/relationships/networks to get His work accomplished (just like Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah).**

Nehemiah didn't know about **Ephesians 3:20**, but he knew that God used people to accomplish His purpose. **Ephesians 3:20: Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us** (notice the 'in us' at the end)

**Amy Prater: I'm finding out that the Paul syndrome is true. The closer we get to God, the more we see how bad we are and how strong the battle is within us. In my foolishness I say, “God, I desire you alone. I fear you with all I have. I'm yours. Do anything you want with me.” In my honesty, I say, “God, I desire to fear you. I want to want to be yours. I want to want to do anything you want. Help.”**

Let's look at your Lego block again. Do you know what your calling is? If you don't, try the prayer that Nehemiah prays for God to use him—that just might get you started.

**Ray C. Stedman: Closing Prayer: Thank you, Father, for this wonderfully practical book which sets out a safe guideline to recovery and usefulness. Thank you that when we fall and go astray to any degree, you do not leave us there; you make a way back. We pray that many today will be determined to begin where Nehemiah began: to tell the whole story in your ear and thus begin the process of recovery. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.**

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## Nehemiah 2 (NKJV)

**1 And it came to pass in the month of Nisan** [the first month ~ March/April, four months after **Nehemiah 1**], **in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes** [David Guzik: The date is also important, because it establishes the date given to restore Jerusalem and its walls. **Daniel 9:25** says that exactly 173,880 days from this day—which was March 14, 445 BC—Messiah the prince would be presented to Israel. Sir Robert Anderson, the eminent British astronomer and mathematician, makes a strong case that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy exactly, to the day, entering Jerusalem on April 6, 32 AD.], **when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad** [disagreeable, unpleasant] **in his presence before.** [It was expected of all of the cupbearers (there almost certainly would have been more than one person fulfilling this office) that they constantly display happiness—merely being in the presence of a Persian king was expected to bring great joy. **Martin Luther: Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace.**] **2 Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart."**

**So I became dreadfully afraid** [three consecutive Hebrew words are used to describe this incredible fear], **3 and said to the king, "May the king live forever!** [David Guzik: Nehemiah's reaction was to first say a phrase he must have said many time before: *May the king live forever!* This must have almost been the motto among professional cupbearers; since they tasted the wine and food before the king did, they naturally wished the king a good long life!] **Why should my face not be sad** [a different Hebrew word—this one means to tremble], **when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned** [devoured] **with fire?"**

**4 Then the king said to me, "What do you request** [seek, desire]?"

**So I prayed** [interceded] **to the God of heaven** [quick] prayer]. **5 And I said to the king** [Warren Wiersbe: His reply to the king can be summarized in two requests: "Send me!" (**Nehemiah 2:4-6**), and "Give me!" (**Nehemiah 2:7-10**)], **"If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send** [stretch out] **me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."**

**6 Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him)** [Jamieson, Fausset, Brown: As the Persian monarchs did not admit their wives to be present at their state festivals, this must have been a private occasion. Ray C. Stedman: Whatever position you may take on that {whether or not this was Esther}, there is at least a high likelihood that Esther had some influence upon this queen and, through her, upon king Artaxerxes.], **“How long will your journey be? And when will you return?” So it pleased** [literally, ‘with a happy face’] **the king to send** [stretch out] **me; and I set** [designated] **him a time.** [Most commentators believe that since Nehemiah built the walls in 52 days (we learn this later in **Nehemiah 6:15**) that Nehemiah did the original work and then went back to the king to ask for more time (the entire book takes 12 years and it was improbable that the king would allow him to be gone 12 years).]

**7 Furthermore I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah** [planning for the **political**], **8 and a letter to Asaph** [gatherer] **the keeper** [ward/protector] **of the king’s forest** [park, enclosed garden], **that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy** [planning for the **practical**].” [Josh Hunt: Imagine Nehemiah had answered by saying, “I have no idea. I hadn’t thought about it. I am sure that it will all work out.” What kind of response do you think he might have received?] **And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.**

**Josh Hunt: Has lack of planning ever cost you? Who has a story?**

**David Guzik: As a capable leader, Nehemiah clearly had a plan. Those four months in prayer had not only been spent talking to God, but listening to Him also, and working out a Spirit-led plan for what to do when God opened the door. . . . The Lord our God is a planning God (Psalm 33:11).**

**9 Then I went** [800 miles from Shushan to Jerusalem] **to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. 10 When Sanballat** [strength] **the Horonite** [probably the governor of the Samaritans] **and Tobiah** [Jehovah is good] **the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed** [trembled/quivered] **that a man had come to seek** [to seek in order to find] **the well-being of the children of Israel.**

**Albert Barnes: Compare Ezra 4:4-24; 5:6-17. The revival of Jerusalem as a great and strong city, which was Nehemiah’s aim, was likely to interfere with the prosperity, or at any rate the eminence, of Samaria.**

**Ray C. Stedman: Immediately courage is needed. Whenever a man like Nehemiah says, “I will arise and build,” Satan always says, “Then I will arise and oppose.”**

**11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night** [So he did nothing for three days? Timing is everything.], **I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. 13 And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well** [fountain of the jackal] **and the Refuse Gate** [Adam Clarke: This was the gate on the eastern side of the city, through which the filth of the city was carried into the Valley of Hinnom], **and viewed** [examined] **the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King’s Pool, but there was no room** [standing place] **for the animal under me to pass. 15 So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed** [examined] **the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had**

**done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles** [one born free], **the officials** [governors or their subordinates], **or the others who did the work.**

**David Guzik:** We deceive ourselves if we only look to what is good. Some have no trouble with this; they always like to see what is wrong. They are full of criticism. They believe they have the unique spiritual gift of pointing out what is wrong. But Nehemiah teaches us by example—we must look at the broken down towers, and carefully study what is wrong—but only if we have the heart, the prayer, the vision, the passion to be used of God to **set** it right.

**17 Then I said to them, “You see the distress** [unhappiness—same word used to describe Nehemiah’s face] **that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come** [walk with me] **and let us build** [rebuild] **the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach** [an object of scorn].” **18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words that he had spoken to me.**

**So they said, “Let us rise up and build** [rebuild].” **Then they set** [strengthened, made rigid/firm] **their hands to this good work.**

**Warren Wiersbe:** It takes both the hands of leadership and the hands of partnership to accomplish the work of the Lord.

**David Guzik:** We can just imagine the smile on God's face as He looked down from heaven and saw the people of God working together in one accord, with one heart, with one mind. God will put us into situations where we *must* work together, and learn how to lead, how to follow, how to work together with one heart and mind.

**19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem** [rain] **the Arab heard of it, they laughed** [mocked] **at us and despised us, and said, “What is this thing** [speech] **that you are doing** [making]? **Will you rebel against the king?”**

**David Guzik:** Opposition is always difficult; but when it comes from brothers, it is then mixed with the pain of betrayal as well.

**Ray C. Stedman:** It is the opposition that makes the players dig in and fight through.

**Josh Hunt:** If you were casting a movie, who might you pick for these characters: Sanballat and Tobiah?

**20 So I answered** [turned my speech to] **them, and said to them, “The God of heaven Himself will prosper us** [make us successful]; **therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage** [territory, portion] **or right** [righteousness] **or memorial in Jerusalem.”**

**Matthew Henry:** Nothing is a greater vexation to the enemies of good people, who have misrepresented them to princes as turbulent, and factious, and not fit to live, than to see them stand right in the opinion of their rulers, their innocency cleared and their reproach rolled away, and that they are thought not only fit to live, but fit to be trusted.

## Nehemiah 3 (NKJV)

In **Nehemiah 3**, Nehemiah sets out to **document** for posterity and the official records the names and accomplishments of the people who worked on the wall (Warren Wiersbe).

While it may seem boring to us to go through a list of names and which gates and parts of the wall they repaired, remember the words of **Ray C. Stedman**: **There are many chapters like this in the Scriptures. But that should really encourage us. It means that God has not forgotten our names either. He loves to record the names of obscure people.**

**Ray C. Stedman**: As we compass the walls of Jerusalem, each gate instructs us of the part of our life which needs to be watched, and rebuilt, and repaired.

**Ray C. Stedman**: As we go through this we shall see that each of these gates has a particular meaning which is given to us in the symbol contained in the name of the gate. I know some people have trouble with this kind of an approach. They call it “allegorizing the Scriptures,” or sometimes, “spiritualizing the text.” And they are right, in a sense. There is a danger in working with symbols. It is easy for the imagination to take over and assign arbitrary meanings which have no relation to the text. That has resulted in the past in some very serious abuses of Scripture.

**1 Then Eliashib** [God restores] **the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate** [Ray C. Stedman: This is the gate through which the sheep were brought into the city to be sacrificed at the altar. The Sheep Gate, of course, signifies the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed on the cross for us, and, therefore, it reveals the principle of the cross. That is always the starting place for strength in your life.]; **they consecrated** [set it apart as holy] **it and hung** [set up] **its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, and consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel** [God has favored]. **2 Next to Eliashib** [God restores] **the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur** [mindful] **the son of Imri** [eloquent] **built.**

**3 Also the sons of Hassenaah** [thorny] **built the Fish Gate** [Albert Barnes: The gate through which fish from the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee entered Jerusalem]; **they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. 4 And next to them Meremoth** [elevations] **the son of Urijah** [Jehovah is my light], **the son of Koz** [thorn], **made repairs** [David Guzik: the word for repairs is the Hebrew word *chazaq*, used 35 times in this chapter alone; it has the idea of strengthening, encouraging, making something strong—principles that have application to far more than material gates and walls! **Ephesians 4:12**]. **Next to them Meshullam** [friend] **the son of Berechiah** [Jehovah blesses], **the son of Meshezabel** [God delivers], **made repairs** [made it stronger]. **Next to them Zadok** [righteous] **the son of Baana** [in the affliction] **made repairs. 5 Next to them the Tekoites** [trumpet blast] **made repairs; but their nobles did not put** [lead, carry, bring] **their shoulders to the work of their Lord.**

**6 Moreover Jehoiada** [Jehovah knows] **the son of Paseah** [limper] **and Meshullam** [friend] **the son of Besodeiah** [with the counsel/in the secret of Jehovah] **repaired the Old** [storage] **Gate** [Sometimes the old paths are the best and we must go back and repair them before we can move forward in our walk—note **Jeremiah 6:16**]; **they laid its beams and hung its doors, with its bolts and bars. 7 And next to them Melatiah** [Jehovah delivered] **the Gibeonite** [little hill; hilly], **Jadon** [thankful] **the Merothite** [joyful shouter], **the men of Gibeon** [hill city] **and Mizpah** [watchtower], **repaired the residence of the governor of the region beyond the River. 8 Next to him Uzziel** [my strength is God] **the son of Harhaiah** [fear of Jehovah], **one of the goldsmiths** [refiners], **made repairs. Also next to him Hananiah** [God has favored], **one of the perfumers** [ointment-maker], **made repairs** [David Guzik: These men were not trained for this

kind of work! It would have seemed they had an easy excuse to not do anything, but they jumped in and did the work! The most important ability in the work of the Lord is **availability**; the one with few gifts, with little talent, who has a passion and a drive to see God's work done will accomplish far more than a gifted and talented person who doesn't have their passion and drive to do the Lord's work.]; and they fortified [repaired] Jerusalem as far as the Broad [Wide] Wall. **9** And next to them **Rephaiah** [healed of Jehovah] the son of **Hur** [hole], leader of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. **10** Next to them **Jedaiah** [praised of Jehovah] the son of **Harumaph** [split-nose] made repairs in front of his house. And next to him **Hattush** [assembled] the son of **Hashabniah** [whom Jehovah regards] made repairs.

**11** **Malchijah** [my king is Jehovah] the son of **Harim** [dedicated] and **Hashub** [considerate] the son of **Pahath-Moab** [pit of Moab] repaired another section [**second** measure], as well as the Tower of the Ovens [fire pots]. **12** And next to him was **Shallum** [retribution] the son of **Hallohesh** [whisperer], leader of half the district of Jerusalem; he and his daughters [Nehemiah and Paul both note that there were women who assisted in their ministries—Nehemiah here and Paul in **Philippians 4:3**] made repairs.

**13** **Hanun** [gracious] and the inhabitants of **Zanoah** [cast off] repaired the Valley Gate [Ray C. Stedman: It is the place of humility, isn't it? It is the place of lowliness of mind and humbleness of heart. . . . The world applauds pride. It tries to make every individual feel capable of handling anything that comes. It even applauds arrogance. But God applauds humility.]. They built it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and repaired a thousand cubits [slightly more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile] of the wall as far as the Refuse [dung] Gate.

**14** **Malchijah** [my king is Jehovah] the son of **Rechab** [rider], leader of the district of **Beth Haccerem** [house of the vineyard], repaired the Refuse [dung] Gate [The Refuse Gate was the gate through which the city got rid of its **garbage**. Warren Wiersbe: It was a main exit to the Valley of Hinnom. The word gehenna means, "Valley of Hinnom" and identified the area that Jesus used as a picture of hell (Mark 9:44). Ray C. Stedman: It is necessary to have an elimination gate in our lives as well. **2 Corinthians 7:1**]; he built it and hung its doors with its bolts and bars.

**15** **Shallun** [retribution] the son of **Col-Hozeh** [all-seeing], leader of the district of **Mizpah** [watchtower], repaired the Fountain Gate; he built it, covered [roofed—the **only** gate that this was done to] it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and repaired the wall of the Pool of Shelah [sent] by the King's Garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David. **16** After him **Nehemiah** [Jehovah comforts] the son of **Azbuk** [strong devastation—were it not for these fathers being listed, we could otherwise have been confused into thinking this was the book of **Nehemiah's** namesake], leader of half the district of **Beth Zur** [house of the rock], made repairs as far as the place in front of the tombs of David, to the man-made pool, and as far as the House of the Mighty [Strong].

**17** After him the Levites, under **Rehum** [compassion] the son of **Bani** [built], made repairs. Next to him **Hashabiah** [Jehovah has considered], leader of half the district of **Keilah** [fortress], made repairs for his district [literally, in his 'round']. **18** After him their brethren, under **Bavai** [my goings] the son of **Henadad** [favor of Hadad], leader of the other half of the district of **Keilah** [fortress], made repairs. **19** And next to him **Ezer** [treasure] the son of **Jeshua** [he is saved], the leader of **Mizpah** [watchtower], repaired another section [**second** measure] in front of the Ascent [going up] to the Armory at the buttress [corner post]. **20** After him **Baruch** [blessed] the son of **Zabbai** [pure] carefully [burningly] repaired the other section [**second** measure], from the buttress [corner post] to the door of the house of **Eliashib** the high priest. **21** After him **Meremoth** [elevations] the son of **Urijah** [Jehovah is my light], the son of **Koz** [thorn],

repaired another section [**second** measure], from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib.

**22** And after him the priests, the men of the plain, made repairs. **23** After him Benjamin [son of the right hand] and Hasshub [considerate] made repairs opposite their house. After them Azariah [Jehovah has helped] the son of Maseiah [work of Jehovah], the son of Ananiah [Jehovah clouds], made repairs by his house. **24** After him Binnui [built up] the son of Henadad [favor of Hadad] repaired another section [**second** measure], from the house of Azariah [Jehovah has helped] to the buttress [corner post], even as far as the corner. **25** Palal [judge] the son of Uzai [I shall have my sprinklings] made repairs opposite the buttress [corner post], and on the tower which projects from the king's upper house that was by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiah [Jehovah has ransomed] the son of Parosh [flea] made repairs.

**26** Moreover the Nethinim [helpers assigned to the Levites and priests for service in the sanctuary] who dwelt in Ophel [a hill between the Water Gate and the Horse Gate] made repairs as far as the place in front of the Water Gate toward the east, and on the projecting tower. [Note that the Water Gate needed **no** repair—just as the Bible (often referred to as the Water of the Word)—needs no repair as it never breaks down. As further proof that this is symbolic of the Word of God, Ezra (in **Nehemiah 8**) reads the Scripture from this gate.] **27** After them the Tekoites [trumpet blast] repaired another section [**second** measure], next to the great projecting [sticking out] tower, and as far as the wall of Ophel [hill].

**28** Beyond the Horse Gate [The gate where the horses would enter the city. **Ray C. Stedman: This is the gate that reminds us that we are not on a picnic: We are not on a Caribbean cruise. We are on a battlefield! We are going to be under attack. We are going to be assaulted by surprising events.**] the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. **29** After them Zadok [righteous] the son of Immer [he hath said] made repairs in front of his own house. After him Shemaiah [heard by Jehovah] the son of Shechaniah [dweller in Jehovah], the keeper [guard] of the East Gate [the gate through which many believe Jesus will return], made repairs. **30** After him Hananiah [God has favored] the son of Shelemiah [repaid by Jehovah], and Hanun [gracious], the sixth son [**Matthew Henry: His five elder brethren, it seems, laid not their hand to this work, but he did. . . . those are most honorable that are most useful.**] of Zalaph [wound], repaired another section [**second** measure]. After him Meshullam [friend] the son of Berechiah [Jehovah blesses] made repairs in front of his dwelling [room]. **31** After him Malchijah [my king is Jehovah], one of the goldsmiths [literally, the goldsmith's son], made repairs as far as the house of the Nethinim and of the merchants [traders], in front of the Miphkad [command/inspection] Gate, and as far as the upper room [roof chamber] at the corner. **32** And between the upper room [roof chamber] at the corner, as far as the Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths [smelters] and the merchants [traders] made repairs.

### Closing thoughts:

**Matthew Henry: Here is no mention of any particular share that Nehemiah himself had in this work. A name-sake of his is mentioned, **Nehemiah 3:16**. But did he do nothing? Yes, though he undertook not any particular piece of the wall, yet he did more than any of them, for he had the oversight of them all; half of his servants worked where there was most need, and the other half stood sentinel, as we find afterwards (**Nehemiah 4:16**), while he himself in his own person walked the rounds, directed and encouraged the builders, set his hand to the work where he saw occasion, and kept a watchful eye upon the motions of the enemy, as we shall find in the next chapter. The pilot needs not haul at a rope: it is enough for him to steer.**

**Easy English:** Some people worked on the walls near their own houses. This was a good idea. They did not have far to travel and they could have their meals easily. They could also protect their families.

**David Guzik:** The names of the men who are said to have made repairs in front of his house are interesting:

**Nehemiah 3:10:** Jedaiah = “praised of Jehovah”; our homes must be places where God is honored

**Nehemiah 3:23:** Benjamin = “son of the right hand” (indicating protection); our homes protect our families

**Nehemiah 3:23:** Hasshub = “considerate”; our homes must consider the God-ordained structure

**Nehemiah 3:23:** Azariah = “Jehovah has helped”; our homes must be places where God can help

**Nehemiah 3:29:** Zadok = “righteous”; our homes must be places of righteousness

**Nehemiah 3:30:** Meshullam = “friend”; our homes must be places of friendship with God

**Ray C. Stedman:** The important truth that emerges is that this is God's design for **ministry**. God has placed us all strategically where he wants us to be. Your neighborhood, office, or home is where your ministry should be. That is why God put you there.

**Theodore Roosevelt (from his speech at the Sorbonne, Paris, France):** It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

**Ray C. Stedman: Closing Prayer:** Thank you, our Father, for this great truth. We pray that the Spirit of grace will make these gates real to us. Point out those areas that need to be worked on in our lives that we may enter into the full security and safety that you have for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

# Nehemiah: Not Just another Building Project

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## Introduction

### Overview

**Ray C. Stedman:** Nehemiah is the story of the **rebuilding** of the walls of Jerusalem, which took place in the fifth century before Christ. . . . But Nehemiah did more than rebuild a wall, as we will learn. This book is also the story of the restoring of a people from ruin and despair to a new walk with God.

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## Nehemiah 4

**1 But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious** [scorched] **and very indignant, and mocked** [derided—we could spend all day giving examples of believers who were mocked] **the Jews. 2 And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, “What are these feeble [week] Jews doing? Will they fortify [repair] themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive [quicken] the stones from the heaps of rubbish—stones that are burned?”** [Note the misinformation here: the **gates** were burned, not the walls]

**3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.”**

**Jamieson, Fausset, Brown:** The foxes were mentioned because they were known to infest in great numbers the ruined and desolate places in the mount and city of Zion

Nehemiah begins to pray. **4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised** [held in contempt, see **Psalm 79:12**]; **turn their reproach** [taunts, scorn] **on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity!** **5 Do not cover** [conceal] **their iniquity** [guilt], **and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders.** [Nehemiah ends praying]

### Was it OK for Nehemiah to pray this way?

**Ray C. Stedman:** This is not Nehemiah, the ordinary citizen, the individual, who has been injured by someone's personal attack. This is the Governor of Judea, praying about maintaining order and peace in his land and forwarding the work that God himself had sent him to do. This is a different kind of prayer because it is a prayer of an authority seeking to handle the problem of evil.

**David Guzik:** This prayer seems pretty tough, but prayers in the **Psalms** are even tougher: **Psalm 58:6; 69:25.** Can a child of God pray such a prayer? Yes, because they are giving their violent inclinations over to God, and letting Him deal with it!

**6 So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together [bound] up to half its height [they are halfway through with the wall], for the people had a mind [heart, inclination, resolution, courage] to work.**

**7 Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored [healed] and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very [exceedingly] angry, 8 and all of them conspired [bound] together to come and attack [wage war] Jerusalem and create confusion [disturbances, wandering]. 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch [caused to stand firm, appointed, ordained, established] against them [in their face] day and night.**

**Matthew Henry: If we think to secure ourselves by prayer only, without watchfulness, we are slothful and tempt God; if by watchfulness, without prayer, we are proud and slight God; and, either way, we forfeit his protection.**

**10 Then Judah [praised] said, “The strength of the laborers [burden-bearers] is failing [stumbling], and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.”**

**11 And our adversaries [hard pebble] said, “They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill [murder, out of control] them and cause the work [business] to cease [fail].”**

**12 So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times [Hebrew euphemism for ‘many’, see Genesis 31:7, 41; Numbers 14:22; Job 19:3], “From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us.”**

**13 Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings [literally, bare spots]; and I set the people [caused the people to stand] according to their families [perhaps he puts them with their families so they’ll remember who they’re defending], with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked [inspected], and arose and said to the nobles [those born free], to the leaders [rulers, officials], and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome [literally, fearful; “don’t fear man, fear God”]; John Wesley: You think your enemies are great and terrible. But what are they in comparison of God? Especially in opposition to Him?], and fight [engage in war] for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”**

**15 And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought [broke, frustrated, split] their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. [David Guzik: This is the victory. Defending against the attack was not the victory; the people of God would not be at peace and security until the wall was rebuilt. Getting on with the work is the victory! When we are under spiritual attack, we can often feel that just enduring the storm is the victory. It isn’t! The attack often comes to prevent your progress and work for the Lord. Victory is enduring the attack and continuing the progress and work for the Lord! This is an important point as we move in to Nehemiah 5 (watch how much work gets done on the wall).] 16 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants [boys, youths] worked at construction, while the other half held [displayed] the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor [Albert Barnes: made of thin [layers] of bronze or iron, sewn upon leather or linen, and overlapping one another]; and the leaders [princes] were behind all the house of Judah. 17 Those who built [rebuilt] on the wall, and those who carried [sustained] burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held [displayed] a weapon. 18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded [tied] at his side [hips] as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet [shofar, ram’s horn] was beside me. [Matthew Henry: We watch always against our spiritual enemies, and not expect that our warfare will be accomplished till our work is.]**

**19 Then I said to the nobles** [those born free], **the rulers, and the rest of the people,** “**The work** [business] **is great** [numerous] **and extensive** [broad], **and we are separated** [divided] **far from one another on the wall.** **20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet** [shofar, ram’s horn], **rally** [assemble] **to us there. Our God will fight** [wage war] **for us** [great faith].”

**21 So we labored in the work** [business], **and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared** [came out]. **22 At the same time I also said to the people,** “**Let each man and his servant** [boys, youths] **stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard** [watch] **by night and a working party** [business] **by day.**” **23 So neither I, my brethren, my servants** [boys, youths], **nor the men of the guard** [watch] **who followed me took** [stripped] **off our clothes, except that everyone took** [put] **them off for washing** [literally, **water**; could mean for ritual purification, washing, or urinating].

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Intro: Let's each share your name and one unfinished project you have in your life.

## Nehemiah 5

**Ray C. Stedman:** The Unseen Enemy tries yet another approach. . . . a problem from **within**.

**1 And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives** [women are not usually mentioned like this, but two weeks ago we saw the 'daughters' building (**Nehemiah 3:12**) and now they're crying out—everyone was involved] **against their Jewish brethren. 2 For there were those who said, "We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain** [wheat, grain, corn], **that we may eat and live."**

**3 There were also some who said, "We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain** [wheat, grain, corn] **because of the famine** [hunger]." [They complain about what they brought on themselves: see **Haggai 1:6-11**, **Ezra 10:9**, and **Malachi 3:9-10**. **Matthew Henry: Foolish, sinful men bring God's judgments upon themselves, and then fret and complain of them.**]

**4 There were also those who said, "We have borrowed** [the Hebrew word for borrow means to **join**] **money** [silver] **for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards** [**Who did they borrow from?**]. **5 Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing** [bonding] **our sons and our daughters to be slaves** [**Exodus 21:7**], **and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery** [been subdued]. **It is not in our power** [hand] **to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards."** [**So far in Nehemiah 5, who is working? Nobody**. **David Guzik: It isn't unusual for money problems to create strife and completely disrupt what God wants to do.**]

**6 And I became very** [exceedingly] **angry** [burned—this won't be the last time—wait until **Nehemiah 13!**] **when I heard their outcry and these words. 7 After serious thought** [consideration in my mind/heart; Nehemiah obeyed **Psalm 4:4**], **I rebuked** [strived with, contended with] **the nobles** [those born free] **and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury** [charging **interest**] **from his brother** [a direct violation of **Deuteronomy 23:19-20**—it was OK to loan, not to charge interest]." **So I called** [appointed] **a great** [large] **assembly** [congregation] **against them. 8 And I said to them, "According to our ability** [sufficiency] **we have redeemed** [bought] **our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations** [Nehemiah

had bought back the slaves sold to other nations]. **Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?**" [Did Nehemiah sin? **No**. Was this OK? Yes. See [Ephesians 4:26](#)]

**Then they were silenced** [deaf] **and found nothing to say.** **9** Then I said, "What you are doing [speaking] **is not good. Should you not walk** [live your life] **in the fear of our God because of the reproach** [taunting] **of the nations, our enemies?** **10** I also, **with my brethren and my servants** [boys, youths], **am lending them money** [silver] **and grain** [wheat, grain, corn]. **Please, let us stop** [abandon, let go] **this usury** [charging interest]! **11** **Restore** [pay back, an imperative] **now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves** [olive groves weren't mentioned by the people being oppressed], **and their houses, also a hundredth** [the custom of the day was to require payment each month, so this would amount to **12%** yearly interest] **of the money** [silver] **and the grain** [wheat, grain, corn], **the new** [fresh] **wine and the oil** [fresh oil, shining oil], **that you have charged** [lent] **them."**

**12** **So they said, "We will restore it** [pay it back (making it right)], **and will require** [seek, ask, **desire** (keeping it right)] **nothing from them; we will do as you say."**

**Then I called the priests, and required** [caused] **an oath from them that they would do according to this promise** [speech]. **13** **Then I shook** [literally, showed the emptiness] **out the fold of my garment** [probably a pocket—a common behavior to illustrate a decision being made (some think it was a visible means of swearing)—"I'm emptying my pockets and they have nothing in them for you"; see [Matthew 10:14](#) for Jesus' take on this] **and said, "So may God shake out** [off] **each man from his house, and from his property** [literally, anything gained from working], **who does not perform** [raise up] **this promise** [speech]. **Even thus may he be shaken out** [shown to be empty] **and emptied."**

**And all the assembly** [congregation] **said, "Amen** [so be it]!" **and praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise** [speech].

**14** **Moreover, from the time that I was appointed** [commissioned] **to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions** [food]. **15** **But the former governors who were before me laid burdens** [were heavy] **on the people, and took** [snatched] **from them bread** [food] **and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants** [boys, youths] **bore rule** [domineered, lorded] **over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.** **16** **Indeed, I also continued** [strengthened in] **the work** [business] **on this wall, and we did not buy any land** [even though Nehemiah and his men had money and the people did not]. **All my servants** [boys, youths] **were gathered** [collected, assembled] **there for the work** [business].

**17** **And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us** [see [Isaiah 32:8](#), [Romans 12:13](#)]. **18** **Now that which was prepared** [done] **daily was one ox and six choice** [specially selected] **sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand** [seek, ask, desire] **the governor's provisions** [food], **because the bondage** [labor, service] **was heavy on this people.** [David Guzik: Nehemiah not only did not **take** when he could have; he **gave** when he didn't have to.]

**19** **Remember me, my God, for good** [pleasantness, agreeableness], **according to all that I have done for this people.** [David Guzik: His public words and private actions were saying the same thing!]

Are you able to pray this prayer over your life? Over this week? Over this morning?

## Nehemiah 6

**1** Now it happened when Sanballat [strength], Tobiah [Jehovah is good], Geshem [rain] the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* there were no breaks [gaps] left in it (though at that time I had not hung [stood up] the doors in the gates), **2** that Sanballat and Geshem sent [stretched out] to me, saying, “Come [Walk out], let us meet [assemble] together [unified] among the villages in the plain of Ono [vigorous; Ono was 25-30 miles away—an obvious **trap** and a three day delay in the work (1.5 days there, 1.5 days back; remember too that Jesus was asked to come down from His work on the cross).” But they thought [devised, calculated] to do me harm [evil].

**3** So I sent [stretched out] messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great [enormous] work [business], so that I cannot come down [**sink** (to your level)—see **Ecclesiastes 9:10**]. Why should the work [business] cease [rest, desist] while I leave [abandon, relax] it and go down [sink] to you?”

**4** But they sent [stretched out] me this message [speech] four times, and I answered [returned] them in the same manner [speech].

**5** Then Sanballat sent [stretched out] his servant [boys, youth] to me as before [speech], the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand [Jamieson, Fausset, Brown: In Eastern Asia, the Persians make up their letters in the form of a roll about six inches long, and a bit of paper is fastened round it with gum, and sealed with an impression of ink. . . . Letters were, and are still, sent to persons of distinction in a bag or purse, and even to equals they are enclosed—the tie being made with a colored ribbon. But to inferiors, or persons who are to be treated contemptuously, the letters were sent open—that is, not enclosed in a bag. Nehemiah would have recognized this as a disrespectful action.]. **6** In it was written:

It is reported [heard] among the nations, and Geshem [rain] says, *that you and the Jews plan* [devise] to rebel [revolt]; therefore, according to these rumors [speech], you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. **7** And you have also appointed [caused to stand firm] prophets [spokesmen, speakers] to proclaim [cry out] concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, “There is a king in Judah!” Now these matters [speech] will be reported to the king. So come [walk out], therefore, and let us consult [deliberate, counsel] together [in union, in a united way]. [The Bible Exposition Commentary: Gossip is news you have to hurry and tell somebody else before you find out it isn't true!]

**8** Then I sent [stretched out] to him, saying, “No such things [speech] as you say are being done, but you invent [devise—only used negatively in the Bible] them in your own heart.”

**9** For they all were trying to make us afraid [terrified], saying, “Their hands will be weakened [sunk] in the work, and it will not be done.”

Now therefore, O God, strengthen [firm up] my hands. [Another short prayer by Nehemiah. **Josh Hunt: The best answer to opposition is to **keep** working]**

**10** Afterward I came [entered in] to the house of Shemaiah [heard by Jehovah] the son of Delaiah [Jehovah has drawn], the son of Mehetabel [favored of God], who was a secret informer [restrained, shut up]; and he said, “Let us meet together [by appointment—this is not traveling together, this is meeting there] in the house of God, within [in the middle of] the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill [murder, destroy] you; indeed, at night they will come to kill [murder, destroy] you.”

**11 And I said, "Should such a man as I flee [run away]? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!"** [Nehemiah knew that **Numbers 18:7** did not allow for this.

**Ray C. Stedman: There was an altar of asylum in the temple courtyard to which people who were under threat could flee and be safe, but this man is proposing they actually go into the temple and shut the doors.] 12 Then I perceived [recognized, discerned] that God had not sent [stretched out] him at all [2 Corinthians 11:13-15 warns us that one of Satan's devices is to appear to be good and to have those that follow him appear to be good to deceive God's children. See also **Matthew 7:15**], but that he pronounced [spoke, promised] this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him [Now there is a full-fledged **conspiracy**]. 13 For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin [miss the path, go the wrong way], so that they might have cause for an evil [bad] report [reputation, name], that they might reproach [defy, taunt] me. [Ray C. Stedman: Do not take everyone's advice just because they are friendly to you. It may be totally wrong advice. Nothing substitutes for knowledge of the Word of God. See **Proverbs 11:9**]**

**14 My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works [deeds, not the word for business], and the prophetess [spokeswoman] Noadiah [meeting with Jehovah] and the rest [remainder] of the prophets [spokesmen—how many were there?] who would have made me afraid [terrified].**

**Ray C. Stedman: Life is a **battle** from beginning to end.**

**15 So the wall was finished [complete, at peace—shalam] on the twenty-fifth day of Elul [the sixth month ~ August/September], in fifty-two days.** [This had been a problem for over 100 years and the work was done in less than two months] **16 And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around [totally surrounding] us saw [inspecting] these things, that they were very [exceedingly] disheartened [cast down—literally, lying down] in their own eyes; for they perceived [recognized, discerned] that this work [business] was done by our God.** [The result of faithfulness is a **glorified** God.]

**17 Also in those days the nobles [those born free] of Judah sent [walked] many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came to them** [I think this sentence makes more sense without the 'the letters of' being added—the implication is that Tobiah had to shore up his base by making the rounds himself and not writing letters to his supporters]. **18 For many in Judah were pledged [sworn, those who had taken an oath—again, we see how large this conspiracy is] to him [literally, an **owner**], because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah [dweller with Jehovah] the son of Arah [traveler], and his son Jehohanan [Jehovah is graced] had married the daughter of Meshullam [friend] the son of Berechiah [Jehovah blesses]. [Matthew Henry: A sinful love leads to a sinful league.] **19 Also they reported his good deeds [pleasantness] before me [in my face], and reported my words [speech] to him. Tobiah sent [stretched out] letters to frighten [terrify] me.****

**Ray C. Stedman: There are two major lessons that loom forth from these chapters: First, when we face enmity, we should do so with careful preparation, perseverance, and above all, prayer. But, when we face discord and internal strife, let us do so with justice, with honest confrontation, and by setting a good example ourselves. As we do this, God will enable us to solve the problems that face us and move toward rebuilding the ruined areas of our lives.**

**Ray C. Stedman: Closing Prayer: Our Father, strengthen us to act like Nehemiah of old and stand against the pressures of our day. Help us to be men and women who **visibly** live according to what we profess. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen**

# Nehemiah: Not Just another Building Project

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## Introduction

### Overview

Ray C. Stedman: Nehemiah is the story of the **rebuilding** of the walls of Jerusalem, which took place in the fifth century before Christ. . . . But Nehemiah did more than rebuild a wall, as we will learn. This book is also the story of the restoring of a people from ruin and despair to a new walk with God.

### Schedule

Week 1 = Concern, Chapter 1

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## Nehemiah 7

**1 Then it was, when the wall was built** [rebuilt] **and I had hung** [stood up] **the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed** [David Guzik: The singers and the Levites were there to lead the people in worship; the walls were not rebuilt so the people of Jerusalem could look at nice walls. They were rebuilt so they could worship God with greater glory and freedom than ever before!], **2 that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani** [gracious; perhaps the man that told Nehemiah about the sad state of the Jews in Jerusalem in **Nehemiah 1:2?**], **and Hananiah** [God has favored] **the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful** [firm] **man and feared God more than many.** [David Guzik: Nehemiah wasn't in this for **political** glory. He had done a work, and now he could let it go.]

**3 And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot** [Albert Barnes: The ordinary practice in the East is to open town gates at sunrise. Perhaps Nehemiah did this for defensive reasons or for the purpose of reading the Scripture during the morning.], **and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar** [take hold of] **the doors; and appoint** [cause to stand] **guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."**

**4 Now the city was large and spacious** [broad], **but the people in it were few** [little], **and the houses were not rebuilt.** **5 Then my God put it into my heart** [Adam Clarke: With this good man every good thing was of **God**. If he purposed any good, it was because God put it into his heart; if he did any good, it was because the good hand of his God was upon him; if he expected any good, it was because he earnestly prayed God to remember him for good. Thus, in all his ways he acknowledged God, and God directed all his steps.] **to gather the nobles** [those born free], **the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy** [enrolled]. **And I found a register** [book] **of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return, and found written in it:**

**6 These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away** [exile, captive], **and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah** [praised], **everyone to his city.**

**David Guzik:** These are people who had a pioneer spirit; they were willing to endure hardship and discomfort, because they had a call from God that was more important than their own comfort. Life was easier in Babylon, but it was better in Jerusalem!

**David Guzik:** This list flows beautifully after the completion of the work, because it reminds us that the work was really all about these **people**

**Jamieson, Fausset, Brown:** This account is not the same as the one in **Ezra 2:1-61** because of the different circumstances in which the two registers were taken; that of Ezra having been made up at Babylon, while that of Nehemiah was drawn out in Judea, after the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt.

Note: We'll skip **Nehemiah 7:7-60, 62-63**

**7 Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.**

**The number of the men of the people of Israel: 8 the sons of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two;**

**9 the sons of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two;**

**10 the sons of Arah, six hundred and fifty-two;**

**11 the sons of Pahath-Moab, of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and eighteen;**

**12 the sons of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;**

**13 the sons of Zattu, eight hundred and forty-five;**

**14 the sons of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty;**

**15 the sons of Binnui, six hundred and forty-eight;**

**16 the sons of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-eight;**

**17 the sons of Azgad, two thousand three hundred and twenty-two;**

**18 the sons of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-seven;**

**19 the sons of Bigvai, two thousand and sixty-seven;**

**20 the sons of Adin, six hundred and fifty-five;**

**21 the sons of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight;**

**22 the sons of Hashum, three hundred and twenty-eight;**

**23 the sons of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-four;**

**24 the sons of Hariph, one hundred and twelve;**

- 25 the sons of Gibeon, ninety-five;**
- 26 the men of Bethlehem and Netophah, one hundred and eighty-eight;**
- 27 the men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight;**
- 28 the men of Beth Azmaveth, forty-two;**
- 29 the men of Kirjath Jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three;**
- 30 the men of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one;**
- 31 the men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two;**
- 32 the men of Bethel and Ai, one hundred and twenty-three;**
- 33 the men of the other Nebo, fifty-two;**
- 34 the sons of the other Elam [Adam Clarke: to distinguish him from the Elam mentioned Nehemiah 7:12], one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;**
- 35 the sons of Harim, three hundred and twenty;**
- 36 the sons of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five;**
- 37 the sons of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-one;**
- 38 the sons of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty.**
- 39 The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three;**
- 40 the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two;**
- 41 the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven;**
- 42 the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.**
- 43 The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, of Kadmiel,**  
**and of the sons of Hodevah, seventy-four.**
- 44 The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and forty-eight.**
- 45 The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum,**  
**the sons of Ater,**  
**the sons of Talmon,**  
**the sons of Akkub,**  
**the sons of Hatita,**  
**the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-eight.**

**46 The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha,**

**the sons of Hasupha,**

**the sons of Tabbaoth,**

**47 the sons of Keros,**

**the sons of Sia,**

**the sons of Padon,**

**48 the sons of Lebana,**

**the sons of Hagaba,**

**the sons of Salmai,**

**49 the sons of Hanan,**

**the sons of Giddel,**

**the sons of Gahar,**

**50 the sons of Reaiah,**

**the sons of Rezin,**

**the sons of Nekoda,**

**51 the sons of Gazzam,**

**the sons of Uzza,**

**the sons of Paseah,**

**52 the sons of Besai,**

**the sons of Meunim,**

**the sons of Nephishesim,**

**53 the sons of Bakbuk,**

**the sons of Hakupha,**

**the sons of Harhur,**

**54 the sons of Bazlith,**

**the sons of Mehida,**

**the sons of Harsha,**

**55 the sons of Barkos,**

**the sons of Sisera,**

**the sons of Tamah,**

**56 the sons of Neziah,**

**and the sons of Hatipha.**

**57 The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai,**

**the sons of Sophereth,**

**the sons of Perida,**

**58 the sons of Jaala,**

**the sons of Darkon,**

**the sons of Giddel,**

**59 the sons of Shephatiah,**

**the sons of Hattil,**

**the sons of Pochereth of Zebaim,**

**and the sons of Amon.**

**60 All the Nethinim, and the sons of Solomon's servants, were three hundred and ninety-two.**

**61 And these were the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not identify [prevail in showing] their father's house nor their lineage, whether they were of Israel: 62 the sons of Delaiah,**

**the sons of Tobiah,**

**the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and forty-two;**

**63 and of the priests: the sons of Habaiah,**

**the sons of Koz,**

**the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name.**

**64 These sought [desired, looked for] their listing [registration, writing] among those who were registered by genealogy [enrolled], but it was not found; therefore they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled [desecrated, polluted]. 65 And the governor [some of your translations may say, 'Tirshatha' which is Chaldean for governor] said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things [set apart things] till a priest could consult with the Urim [lights] and Thummim [perfection] [Urim and**

Thummin were stones kept in a pouch on the high-priest's breastplate, used in determining God's decision in certain questions and issues and for selecting a lot].

**66** Altogether the whole assembly was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, **67** besides their male and female servants [slaves], of whom *there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred and forty-five men and women singers.* **68** Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, **69** *their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.* [This may sound like a lot, but to repopulate an entire city, it's not that much]

**70** And some of the heads [chiefs] of the fathers' houses gave to the work [business]. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas [a gold coin current in Palestine in the period after the return from Babylon; 128 grains (8.32 grams) of gold], fifty basins [vessels used for carrying/using liquids like wine], and five hundred and thirty priestly garments [tunics—undergarments]. **71** Some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the treasury of the work twenty thousand gold drachmas, and two thousand two hundred silver minas [60 shekels and 1/50 talent]. **72** And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priestly garments.

They had given of their time to build the walls and their talents to do the work and now they give their treasures to fund the **worship**

**73** So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the Nethinim [temple slaves assigned to the Levites and priests for service in the sanctuary], and all Israel dwelt in their cities. When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.

Adam Clarke: It seems that the examination of the registers occupied about a month; for as soon as the walls were finished, which was in the sixth month, (Elul,) Nehemiah 6:15, Nehemiah instituted the examination mentioned in this chapter, Nehemiah 7:5; and by the concluding verse we find that the different families had got into their paternal cities in the seventh month . . . Thus the register determined everything: there was no room for complaint, and none to accuse the governor of partiality.

## Nehemiah 8

Ray C. Stedman: Nehemiah 8 highlights the fact that after reconstruction there is a great need for reinstruction.

**1** Now all the people gathered together [assembled] as one man in the open square [street] that was in front of the Water Gate [Matthew Henry: Sacrifices were to be offered only at the door of the temple, but praying, and praising, and preaching, were, and are, services of religion as acceptably performed in one place as in another]; and they told Ezra [help] the scribe to bring [carry] the Book of the Law [Torah] of Moses [drawn], which the LORD had commanded Israel. [Matthew Henry: God gave him ability and authority, and then the people gave him opportunity and invitation] [Jamieson, Fausset, Brown: The public reading of the Scriptures was required by the law to be made every seventh year—see Deuteronomy 31:10] **2** So Ezra the priest brought the Law before [in the face of] the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. [David Guzik: Who needed to hear the Word of God? Every man, every woman - all who could hear

with understanding. If you can understand God's Word, you need to hear it! **3 Then he read** [called out] **from it in the open square** [street] **that was in front of the Water Gate from morning** [light—indicating the dawn] **until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.** [Matthew Henry: If through carelessness we let much slip in hearing, there is danger that through forgetfulness we shall let all slip after hearing]

**4 So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform** [tower] **of wood which they had made for the purpose** [speech]; **and beside him, at his right hand, stood** [perhaps these are the chief priests?] **Mattithiah** [gift of Jehovah], **Shema** [hear], **Anaiah** [Jehovah has answered], **Urijah** [Jehovah is my light], **Hilkiah** [my portion is Jehovah], **and Maaseiah** [work of Jehovah]; **and at his left hand Pedaiah** [Jehovah has ransomed], **Mishael** [who is what God is?], **Malchijah** [my king is Jehovah], **Hashum** [rich], **Hashbadana** [considerate judge], **Zechariah** [Jehovah remembers], **and Meshullam** [friend]. **5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.** **6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God.**

**Then all the people answered** [shouted], **“Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped** [bowed down to the ground—prostrated themselves before] **the LORD with their faces** [literally, **noses**] **to the ground.**

All of these men in **Nehemiah 8:7** represent teachers that have helped me at some point in my life.

**7 Also Jeshua** [he is saved], **Bani** [built], **Sherebiah** [Jehovah has scorched], **Jamin** [right hand], **Akkub** [insidious (treacherous, trying to trap)], **Shabbethai** [sabbatical], **Hodijah** [my majesty is Jehovah], **Maaseiah** [work of Jehovah], **Kelita** [crippled], **Azariah** [Jehovah has helped], **Jozabad** [Jehovah has endowed (financed)], **Hanan** [he is merciful], **Pelaiah** [Jehovah does wonders], **and the Levites, helped the people to understand** [to cause to understand, give understanding, teach] **the Law; and the people stood in their place.** **8 So they read** [called out] **distinctly** [to separate, to be distinctly declared] **from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave** [set] **the sense** [insight, understanding], **and helped them to understand** [to **cause** to understand, give understanding, teach] **the reading.**

**9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy** [set apart] **to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep.” For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.**

**10 Then he said to them, “Go your way** [live], **eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send** [stretch out] **portions to those for whom nothing is prepared** [fixed]; **for this day is holy** [set apart] **to our Lord. Do not sorrow** [be pained], **for the joy** [gladness] **of the LORD is your strength** [stronghold, protection, safety].”

**11 So the Levites quieted** [caused to be quiet] **all the people, saying, “Be still** [quiet], **for the day is holy** [set apart]; **do not be grieved** [pained].” **12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send** [send off, shoot] **portions and rejoice greatly** [intensely], **because they understood the words** [speech] **that were declared to them.** [Matthew Henry: We ought always to have such a command of every passion as that, however it may break out, it may soon be restrained and called in again when we are convinced that it is either unreasonable or unseasonable. See **Proverbs 16:32**]

**EasyEnglish: When they all studied God's law, they found out about a special holiday.**

There were **three** holidays in the seventh month

1. The Day of Trumpets (first day of the month – Leviticus 23:23-25: a day of rest)
2. The Day of Atonement (tenth day of the month – Leviticus 23:26-32: a day of atonement of sin)
3. The Festival of Booths (fifteenth day of the month – Leviticus 23:33-36: seven days of remembering what it was like in Egypt)

**13 Now on the second day the heads** [chiefs] **of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered** [assembled] **to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand** [consider, to give attention to] **the words of the Law. 14 And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell** [sit, stay] **in booths** [temporary shelters] **during the feast** [festival] **of the seventh month, 15 and that they should announce** [sound out] **and proclaim** [voice] **in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring** [carry in] **olive branches** [leaves], **branches of oil** [fat] **trees, myrtle branches** [leaves], **palm branches** [leaves], **and branches** [leaves] **of leafy** [dense] **trees, to make booths** [temporary shelters], **as it is written."**

**16 Then the people went out and brought** [carried] **them and made themselves booths** [temporary shelters], **each one on the roof of his house** [houses at that time had flat roofs], **or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim** [double ash heap]. **17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua** [he is saved] **the son of Nun** [fish, posterity] **until that day the children of Israel had not done so** [not done like this for nearly 1,000 years]. **And there was very great gladness** [exceedingly abundant joy]. **[David Guzik: The Feast of Tabernacles was all about remembering how God had blessed and provided for Israel in the wilderness during the Exodus; they could see God's blessing and provision for them right then, and it made something old brand new to them]** **18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read** [called out] **from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner** [ordinance].

**Ray C. Stedman: This is the Feast of Tabernacles, a reminder that they were called as a people out of Egypt. Their departure was sudden and precipitous. They were not even to sit down when they ate the Passover meal. They had to eat it standing, with their staffs in their hands, dressed in traveling clothes, ready to leave. They went out at a word of command, and left Egypt in one night. When they got into the desert, one day's journey out, and night fell, where were they to find shelter? Moses had been told by God that they were to collect boughs and limbs of trees, etc., and build booths for shelter. Then God ordained that they were to do this once every year. Even though later they had homes to dwell in, they were to build these booths and live in them for seven days. This was to teach them that they were always pilgrims and strangers on the earth. This world was not their home. . . . That is the truth that will deliver us from the pressures of the times. We must hold things lightly.**

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## Nehemiah 9

**1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.** [Adam Clarke: The feast of trumpets was on the first day of this month; on the fourteenth began the feast of tabernacles, which, lasting seven days, finished on the twenty-second; on the twenty-third they separated themselves from their illegitimate wives and children; and, on the twenty-fourth, they held a solemn day of fasting and confession of sin, and reading the law, which they closed by renewing their covenants.] **2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves** [set themselves apart] **from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities** [perversity, depravity] **of their fathers** [David Guzik: This was especially important in Israel, where there was a tradition of glorifying their **forefathers**]. **3 And they stood up in their place** [literally, in the standing place] **and read** [called out] **from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day** [three hours]; **and for another fourth** [three hours] **they confessed and worshipped** [bowed down to] **the LORD their God.**

**Ray C. Stedman:** The Levites divided themselves into two groups. Some were standing on the stairs leading up to the Water Gate and others were on a platform on the opposite side of the square. These groups were calling back and forth to the people, one group confessing the sins of the people, the other praising God in language that fit the situation at the time.

**Ray C. Stedman:** Nehemiah 9 records the longest prayer in the entire Bible

**Ray C. Stedman:** There is a great story about D. L. Moody who once asked a certain brother to pray at a service in the Chicago Church. The man began to pray and was still droning on after ten minutes had gone by. Finally, Mr. Moody stood up and said, "While our dear brother is finishing his prayer, let's turn to number 342 and sing it together!"

Note: We'll skip **Nehemiah 9:4-32, 34-38**, but this is the outline of this prayer of repentance:

**4 Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God** [the confessors]. **5 And the Levites,**

**Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah** [the praisers],  
**said:**

1. Praise to God
2. God's reply to (a very rebellious) Israel
3. Israel's cyclical relationship with God
4. A call for God to intervene
5. Conclusion: Deciding with a covenant

**Nehemiah 9:33** gives us a great example of confession

**“Stand up and bless the LORD your God**

**Forever and ever!**

**“Blessed be Your glorious name,**

**Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!**

**6 You alone are the LORD;**

**You have made heaven,**

**The heaven of heavens, with all their host,**

**The earth and everything on it,**

**The seas and all that is in them,**

**And You preserve them all.**

**The host of heaven worships You.**

**7 “You are the LORD God,**

**Who chose Abram,**

**And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans,**

**And gave him the name Abraham;**

**8 You found his heart faithful before You,**

**And made a covenant with him**

**To give the land of the Canaanites,**

**The Hittites, the Amorites,**

**The Perizzites, the Jebusites,**

**And the Gergashites—**

**To give *it* to his descendants.**

**You have performed Your words,**

**For You are righteous.**

**9 “You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt,**

**And heard their cry by the Red Sea.**

**10 You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh,**

**Against all his servants,**

**And against all the people of his land.**

**For You knew that they acted proudly against them.**

**So You made a name for Yourself, as *it is* this day.**

**11 And You divided the sea before them,**

**So that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land;**

**And their persecutors You threw into the deep,**

**As a stone into the mighty waters.**

**12 Moreover You led them by day with a cloudy pillar,**

**And by night with a pillar of fire,**

**To give them light on the road**

**Which they should travel.**

**13 “You came down also on Mount Sinai,**

**And spoke with them from heaven,**

**And gave them just ordinances and true laws,**

**Good statutes and commandments.**

**14 You made known to them Your holy Sabbath,**

**And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws,**

**By the hand of Moses Your servant.**

**15 You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger,**

**And brought them water out of the rock for their thirst,**

**And told them to go in to possess the land**

**Which You had sworn to give them.**

**16 “But they and our fathers acted proudly,**

**Hardened their necks,**

**And did not heed Your commandments.**

**17 They refused to obey,**

**And they were not mindful of Your wonders**

**That You did among them.**

**But they hardened their necks,**

**And in their rebellion** [Some of the manuscripts say Egypt instead of rebellion as they are only one character different in the Hebrew language—it would make more sense to have ‘Egypt’ as **Numbers 14:4** says the same thing]

**They appointed a leader**

**To return to their bondage.**

**But You are God,**

**Ready to pardon,**

**Gracious and merciful,**

**Slow to anger,**

**Abundant in kindness,**

**And did not forsake them.**

**18 “Even when they made a molded calf for themselves,**

**And said, ‘This is your god**

**That brought you up out of Egypt,’**

**And worked great provocations,**

**19 Yet in Your manifold mercies**

**You did not forsake them in the wilderness.**

**The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day,**

To lead them on the road;

Nor the pillar of fire by night,

To show them light,

And the way they should go.

**20** You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,

And did not withhold Your manna from their mouth,

And gave them water for their thirst.

**21** Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness;

They lacked nothing;

Their clothes did not wear out

And their feet did not swell.

**22** “Moreover You gave them kingdoms and nations,

And divided them into districts.

So they took possession of the land of Sihon,

The land of the king of Heshbon,

And the land of Og king of Bashan.

**23** You also multiplied their children as the stars of heaven,

And brought them into the land

Which You had told their fathers

To go in and possess.

**24** So the people went in

And possessed the land;

You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land,

The Canaanites,

And gave them into their hands,

With their kings

And the people of the land,

**That they might do with them as they wished.**

**25 And they took strong cities and a rich land,**

**And possessed houses full of all goods,**

**Cisterns *already* dug, vineyards, olive groves,**

**And fruit trees in abundance.**

**So they ate and were filled and grew fat,**

**And delighted themselves in Your great goodness.**

**26 “Nevertheless they were disobedient**

**And rebelled against You,**

**Cast Your law behind their backs**

**And killed Your prophets, who testified against them**

**To turn them to Yourself;**

**And they worked great provocations.**

**27 Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies,**

**Who oppressed them;**

**And in the time of their trouble,**

**When they cried to You,**

**You heard from heaven;**

**And according to Your abundant mercies**

**You gave them deliverers who saved them**

**From the hand of their enemies.**

**28 “But after they had rest,**

**They again did evil before You.**

**Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies,**

**So that they had dominion over them;**

**Yet when they returned and cried out to You,**

**You heard from heaven;**

**And many times You delivered them according to Your mercies,**

**29 And testified against them,**

**That You might bring them back to Your law.**

**Yet they acted proudly,**

**And did not heed Your commandments,**

**But sinned against Your judgments,**

**'Which if a man does, he shall live by them.'**

**And they shrugged their shoulders,**

**Stiffened their necks,**

**And would not hear.**

**30 Yet for many years You had patience with them,**

**And testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets.**

**Yet they would not listen;**

**Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.**

**31 Nevertheless in Your great mercy**

**You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them;**

**For You are God, gracious and merciful.**

**Ray C. Stedman: The closing paragraph here, beginning with [Nehemiah 9:32](#), brings their history down to their own time. Here we find a change of pronouns. They have been talking about "they" and "them." Now we read about "we" and "our" as they begin to look at their own generation.**

**32 "Now therefore, our God,**

**The great, the mighty, and awesome God,**

**Who keeps covenant and mercy:**

**Do not let all the trouble seem small before You**

**That has come upon us,**

**Our kings and our princes,**

**Our priests and our prophets,**

**Our fathers and on all Your people,**

**From the days of the kings of Assyria until this day.** [Matthew Henry: It is the only petition in all this prayer]

**33 However You are just in all that has befallen us;** [David Guzik: God is **right**]

**For You have dealt faithfully,**

**But we have done wickedly.** [David Guzik: and we are **wrong**]

**34 Neither our kings nor our princes,**

**Our priests nor our fathers,** [Note that the prophets aren't present in this list of those who have not kept your law as they are present in **Nehemiah 9:32**]

**Have kept Your law,**

**Nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies,**

**With which You testified against them.**

**35 For they have not served You in their kingdom,**

**Or in the many good *things* that You gave them,**

**Or in the large and rich land which You set before them;**

**Nor did they turn from their wicked works.** [Matthew Henry: Fatness and fullness often make men **proud and sensual**]

**36 "Here we are, servants today!**

**And the land that You gave to our fathers,**

**To eat its fruit and its bounty,**

**Here we are, servants in it!**

**37 And it yields much increase to the kings**

**You have set over us,**

**Because of our sins;**

**Also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle**

**At their pleasure;**

**And we are in great distress.**

**38 "And because of all this,**

**We make a sure covenant and write it;**

**Our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it."**

**Easy English: So the people decided to make promises to God. They wrote down their agreement with God and their leaders signed it. Then everybody would know what they had promised to do.**

## Nehemiah 10

**1 Now those who placed their seal on the document were:** [David Guzik: At the end of Nehemiah 9, the people had come to a place of decision, and now, collectively, the nation was going to do something about it by entering into a covenant]**Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah,**

**Nehemiah 10:1b-8** describes the priests who signed

**2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 3 Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, 4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, 5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, 8 Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These were the priests.**

**Nehemiah 10:9-13** describes the Levites who signed

**9 The Levites: Jeshua the son of Azariah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, and Kadmiel.**

**10 Their brethren: Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, 11 Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah, 12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, 13 Hodijah, Bani, and Beninu.**

**Nehemiah 10:14-27** describes the civil leaders who signed

**14 The leaders [heads] of the people: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, 15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, 16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, 17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, 18 Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai, 19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, 20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, 21 Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, 22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, 23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, 24 Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, 25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, 26 Ahijah, Hanan, Anan, 27 Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.**

**28 Now the rest of the people—the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim [temple slaves], and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law [Torah] of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding [discernment]— 29 these joined [strengthened, supported] with their brethren, their nobles [not the normal word for nobles in Nehemiah, this word means great ones], and entered into a curse [swearing] and an oath [curse] to walk [live] in God's Law [Torah], which was given [provided] by [the hand of] Moses the servant [slave] of God, and to observe [keep, guard, protect] and do [accomplish, make] all the commandments of the LORD [Yahweh] our Lord [Adonai], and His ordinances [judgments] and His statutes [limits]: 30 We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons; [David Guzik: This promise was addressed to parents . . . because in that day, parents made the marriage decisions, not the people getting married] [Ray C. Stedman: That may look discriminatory, but there is an excellent reason for that. The peoples among whom Israel was called to live were unusually degenerate. They practiced public lewdness. They worshipped sexual organs. Their immorality had spread diseases among their people. They killed their children by throwing them alive into furnaces of fire in worship to their god, Molech. To protect the Israelites from these dangerous practices God had told them not to intermarry with these peoples.] 31 if the peoples of the land brought [carry in] wares or any grain [grain or corn] to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy [set apart] day; and we would**

**forego** [abandon] **the seventh year's produce and the exacting** [load, burden] **of every debt** [hand]. [See [Exodus 23:10-11](#) and [Leviticus 25:18-22](#)]

**David Guzik:** This was a covenant to only make **money** in ways that were obedient and glorifying to God . . . What a challenge for us today! Many of us are in careers where we have the opportunity to make money in ways that are plain wrong. We need to have the same heart they had here, and covenant before God to only make money in ways that are obedient and glorifying to Him! Many of us - as was true in Nehemiah's day - slip into these practices subtly. We don't wake up in the morning saying we're going to cut corners, cheat others, and defraud the system. We do it because we think we need to - bills need to be paid, the kids need things, and so on. Then we do it because it works. But we don't really need to; if we trust God, He will take care of us. What do we trust more our slick ways of doing business or God in heaven?

**32 Also we made** [stood up, appointed] **ordinances** [commandments] **for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service** [labor, work] **of the house of our God** [**Albert Barnes:** This appears to have been the first occasion on which an annual payment toward the maintenance of the temple service and fabric was established. The half-shekel of the Law ([Exodus 30:13](#)) was paid only at the time of a census (which rarely took place), and was thus not a recurring tax. In later times, the annual payment was raised from the third of a shekel to half a shekel ([Matthew 17:24](#)).]: **33 for the showbread** [literally, 'bread in a row'], **for the regular** [perpetual, continuous] **grain offering** [gift], **for the regular** [perpetual, continuous] **burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the set feasts** [appointed times]; **for the holy** [set apart] **things, for the sin offerings to make atonement** [covering, pacify] **for Israel, and all the work** [business] **of the house of our God.** [**Matthew Henry:** We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well] **34 We cast** [threw, let drop] **lots** [pebbles] **among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering** [there is no wood offering mentioned in Scripture, but this was necessary at this time because the Nethinim were so few and needed help, so a lottery was put in place to assist] **into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn** [consume] **on the altar of the LORD** [Yahweh] **our God as it is written in the Law** [Torah].

**35 And we made ordinances to bring the firstfruits** [first to come up] **of our ground and the firstfruits** [first to come up] **of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the LORD; 36 to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle** [all domestic animals], **as it is written in the Law** [Torah], **and the firstborn of our herds** [cattle] **and our flocks** [sheep and goats], **to the house of our God, to the priests who minister** [serve] **in the house of our God; 37 to bring the firstfruits** [first, best, chief] **of our dough, our offerings** [contributions], **the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil** [fresh oil], **to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring** [give] **the tithes** [tenth part] **of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities** [cities of our labor]. **38 And the priest, the descendant of Aaron** [light bringer], **shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive** [take up] **tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes** [tenth parts, see [Numbers 18:26](#)] **to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse** [treasure house].

**39 For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering** [contribution] **of the grain** [wheat, grain, corn], **of the new wine and the oil** [fresh oil], **to the storerooms where the articles** [vessels, implements, utensils] **of the sanctuary** [holy place] **are, where the priests who minister** [serve] **and the gatekeepers and the singers are; and we will not neglect** [abandon, depart] **the house of our God.**

Ray C. Stedman: Ultimately, these people failed to follow through with their commitment. Subsequent history reveals that all the old habits returned. All the old sins were revived among them. The nation once again lost the blessing of God upon it. Why? We discover the key in **Nehemiah 10:29**. . . . They were depending on their own efforts to obey. . . . There is no expression of any need of help from God or of any provision for failure and return. . . . That is what the New Testament adds. It is right to vow. It is right to write it down for your own benefit and remind yourself frequently of your goal. But we must always add . . . **Philippians 4:13**

## Nehemiah 11

Nehemiah **repopulates** Jerusalem

**1 Now the leaders** [princes, chiefs, rulers, officials] **of the people dwelt** [remained] **at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast** [threw, let drop] **lots** [pebbles] **to bring one out of ten to dwell** [remain] **in Jerusalem, the holy** [set apart] **city, and nine-tenths were to dwell in other cities.** [A draft was a common practice among people of this relative time—Syracuse and Rome were both populated this way] **2 And the people blessed** [praised, saluted] **all the men who willingly offered** [volunteered] **themselves to dwell** [remain] **at Jerusalem.**

**Nehemiah 11:3-9** talks about the leaders

**3 These are the heads** [chiefs] **of the province** [district] **who dwelt** [remained] **in Jerusalem.** [Adam Clarke: A good deal of difference will be found between the enumeration here and that in **1 Chronicles 9:2**, There, those only who came with Zerubbabel appear to be numbered; here, those, and the persons who came with Ezra and Nehemiah, enter into the account.] (But in the cities of Judah everyone dwelt [remained] in his own possession [property] in their cities—Israelites, priests, Levites, Nethinim [temple slaves], and descendants of Solomon's servants [slaves].) **4 Also in Jerusalem dwelt** [remained] **some of the children of Judah and of the children of Benjamin.** [Jamieson, Fausset, Brown: The catalogue in **Chronicles** [**1 Chronicles 9:1-9**] contains those who came with the first detachment of returned exiles, while the list in this passage probably included also those who returned with Ezra and Nehemiah; or it was most probably made out afterwards, when several had died, or some, who had been inserted as going on the journey, remained, and others came in their stead.]

**The children of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, of the children of Perez; 5 and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. 6 All the sons of Perez who dwelt** [remained] **at Jerusalem were four hundred and sixty-eight valiant** [strong, army-like] **men.**

**7 And these are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah; 8 and after him Gabbai and Sallai, nine hundred and twenty-eight. 9 Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer** [commissioner, deputy, officer], **and Judah the son of Senuah was second** [second in charge] **over the city.**

**Nehemiah 11:10-14** talks about the priests (divided up into three groups: those that dealt with the spiritual lives of the people, those that led the people, and those that fought for the people)

**10** Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, and Jachin; **11** Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, was the leader [ruler, captain, prince] of the house of God [probably the high priest]. **12** Their brethren who did the work [business] of the house were eight hundred and twenty-two; and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah, **13** and his brethren, heads of the fathers' houses, were two hundred and forty-two; and Amashai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, **14** and their brethren, mighty [strong, brave] men of valor [strong, army-like], were one hundred and twenty-eight. Their overseer [commissioner, deputy, officer] was Zabdiel the son of one of the great men [literally, 'son of greatness'].

**Nehemiah 11:15-18** talks about the Levites (divided up into two groups: those who cared for the outside ministry and those who were the musicians and singers). In this group of singers was Asaph (credited with writing **Psalm 50**, and **Psalms 73-83**) and Jeduthun (mentioned in **Psalm 39**, **Psalm 62**, and **Psalm 77**)

**15** Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; **16** Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the heads [chiefs] of the Levites, had the oversight of the business [work] outside [external] of the house of God; **17** Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the leader [chief] who began the thanksgiving [confessions, praise, thanksgivings] with prayer; Bakbukiah, the second [second in charge] among his brethren; and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. **18** All the Levites in the holy [set apart] city were two hundred and eighty-four.

**Nehemiah 11:19** talks about the gatekeepers (they guarded the doors and basically served as ushers)

**19** Moreover the gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren who kept [guarded, watched] the gates, were one hundred and seventy-two.

**Nehemiah 11:20-24** talks about the miscellaneous **duties** as assigned—the trouble-shooters

**20** And the rest [remainder] of Israel, of the priests and Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, everyone in his inheritance [possession, property]. **21** But the Nethinim [temple slaves] dwelt in Ophel. And Ziha and Gishpa were over the Nethinim [temple slaves].

**22** Also the overseer [commissioner, deputy, officer] of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha, of the sons of Asaph, the singers in charge of the service [business, work] of the house of God. **23** For it was the king's command concerning them that a certain portion [financial support] should be for the singers, a quota [speech] day by day [See **Ezra 6:8-10**]. **24** Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, was the king's deputy in all matters [speech] concerning the people.

**Nehemiah 11:25-35** talks about the various cities and villages around Jerusalem.

**25** And as for the villages [settlements, towns] with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt [remained] in Kirjath Arba and its villages [settlements, towns], Dibon and its villages [daughters], Jekabzeel and its villages [daughters]; **26** in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth Pelet, **27** Hazar Shual, and Beersheba and its villages [daughters]; **28** in Ziklag and Meconah and its villages [daughters]; **29** in En Rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, **30** Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages [settlements, towns] ; in Lachish and its fields; in Azekah and its villages [daughters]. They dwelt [bent down, encamped] from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom.

**31** Also the children of Benjamin from Geba dwell in Michmash, Aija, and Bethel, and their villages [daughters]; **32** in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah; **33** in Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim; **34** in Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat; **35** in Lod, Ono, and the Valley of Craftsmen [literally, silent magicians]. **36** Some of the Judean divisions [technical term for their courses or schedules of service] of Levites were in Benjamin.

## Nehemiah 12

**Nehemiah 12:1-11** talks about priests and Levites in Zerubbabel's day

**1** Now these are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel [from **Babylon** to Jerusalem] the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua [Ray C. Stedman: Zerubbabel [a priest] led the first return from captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem in 538 B.C., almost 100 years earlier than Nehemiah's day. Nehemiah is looking back at these men who led that procession.]: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, **2** Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, **3** Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, **4** Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, **5** Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, **6** Shemaiah, Joarib, Jedaiah, **7** Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, and Jedaiah.

These were the heads [chiefs] of the priests and their brethren in the days of Jeshua.

**8** Moreover the Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah who led the thanksgiving psalms [songs of praise], he and his brethren. **9** Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brethren, stood across from them in their duties [guards, watches].

**10** Jeshua begot Joiakim, Joiakim begot Eliashib, Eliashib begot Joiada, **11** Joiada begot Jonathan, and Jonathan begot Jaddua.

**Nehemiah 12:12-21** talks about priests in Joiakim's day

**12** Now in the days of Joiakim, the priests, the heads of the fathers' houses were: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; **13** of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; **14** of Melichu, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; **15** of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; **16** of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; **17** of Abijah, Zichri; the son of Minjamin; of Moadiah, Piltai; **18** of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; **19** of Joarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; **20** of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; **21** of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; and of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

**Nehemiah 12:22-26** talks about the Levites during Darius' day

**22** During the reign [kingdom] of Darius [lord] the Persian [splendid], a record [roll, register] was also kept of the Levites and priests who had been heads [chiefs] of their fathers' houses in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua [Adam Clarke: This was probably the high priest who went in his pontifical robes, accompanied by his brethren, to meet Alexander the Great, when he was advancing towards Jerusalem, with the purpose to destroy it, after having conquered Tyre and Gaza. Alexander was so struck with the appearance of the priest, that he forbore all hostilities against Jerusalem, prostrated himself before Jaddua, worshipped the Lord at the temple, and granted many privileges to the Jews.]. **23** The sons of Levi, the heads of the fathers' houses until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib, were written [enrolled, recorded, registered] in the book of the chronicles [speech]. [Adam Clarke: This is not the book of Chronicles which we have now, no such list being found in it; but some other book or register, which is lost.]

Ray C. Stedman [on Jaddua in **Nehemiah 12:22**]: The critics say that this dates the book further in history to the time of Alexander the Great, in about 323 BC, which would be 100 years or so after Nehemiah lived. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that when Alexander the Great led his Greek armies down through the Middle East against the land of Egypt he came up to Jerusalem. He was about to attack and sack the city when he was met by a company of priests led by the high priest, whose name was Jaddua. This man opened the book of Daniel and showed to Alexander the 8th chapter, in which it was predicted that a he-goat with a great central horn (who is clearly identified as the leader of the Grecian nation) would come against the Holy Land, and that he would conquer most of the world of that day.

When Alexander the Great saw this prediction of his own life and conquests, he was taken aback and so impressed that he spared Jerusalem and went on down to conquer Egypt and establish the city of Alexandria there. So the critics say, "This mention of Jaddua means you cannot trust the dating of Nehemiah. This is not history. This is mere legend. It is not trustworthy." But, unfortunately for that theory, the scholars have now found that there were a number of priests named Jaddua. This is certainly easy to believe because we find in this very account men passing their name on to their sons, just as fathers do today. There were several priests named Jaddua, and several governors of Samaria named Sanballat, another source of the critics' charge. So this theory is clearly unfounded.

Why is all this information given to us? I think it is clear that it marks the deeds of God as part of the record of history. That is one of the great advantages of Christianity over all the other religions of the world. Most of them are religious philosophies, or simply the musings of men meditating upon various aspects of life. Many of them are a record of visions and dreams of dubious origin. But when you come to the record of the Bible, it is based upon facts. It is not legend. It is not myth. It is not fiction. It is not a record of philosophies or of the inventions of men. It is made up of historic facts. God grounds these great events in the history of the world itself.

**24 And the heads** [chiefs] **of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers across from them, to praise** [boast] **and give thanks, group** [guard/watch] **alternating with group** [guard/watch], **according to the command of David the man of God. 25 Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers keeping the watch** [guarding] **at the storerooms of the gates. 26 These lived in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe** [recorder].

**Nehemiah 12:27-47** talks about the dedication of the wall

**27 Now at the dedication** [consecration] **of the wall of Jerusalem** [Adam Clarke: The ancients consecrated their cities to the gods, and the very walls were considered as sacred. Ovid gives us an account of the ceremonies used in laying the foundations of the walls of the city of Rome, by Romulus. After having consulted together who should give name to the city, and have the direction of the wall by which it was necessary to surround it, they agreed to let the case be decided by the flight of birds. One brother went to the top of the Mons Palatinus, the other to that of Mount Aventine. Romulus saw twelve birds, Remus saw but six; the former, therefore, according to agreement, took the command.] **they sought out** [to seek to find, to demand] **the Levites in all their places** [posts], **to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate** [do the work] **the dedication** [consecration] **with gladness** [pleasure], **both with thanksgivings** [confessions, praise, thanksgivings] **and singing** [lyrical songs], **with cymbals and stringed instruments** [harp, lute, guitar] **and harps** [lyre, harp]. **28 And the sons of the singers gathered**

[assembled] **together from the countryside** [round] **around Jerusalem, from the villages** [settlements, towns] **of the Netophathites** [droppings], **29 from the house of Gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built** [rebuilt] **themselves villages** [settlements, towns] **all around Jerusalem. 30 Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified** [cleansed, purified] **the people, the gates, and the wall.**

**31 So I brought the leaders** [princes, leaders, officials] **of Judah up on the wall, and appointed** [caused to stand] **two large thanksgiving choirs** [confessions, praise, thanksgivings—the word ‘**choir**’ is not present in the Hebrew here or anywhere else in **Nehemiah 12**]. **One went** [proceeded] **to the right hand on the wall toward the Refuse** [Dung] **Gate. 32 After** [following] **them went** [walked] **Hoshaiah and half of the leaders** [princes, leaders, officials] **of Judah, 33 and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, 35 and some of the priests’ sons with trumpets—Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, 36 and his brethren, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical** [lyrical song] **instruments** [vessels, implements, utensils] **of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe** [recorder] **went before them** [in their face—Ezra **led** them]. **37 By the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went up the stairs of the City of David, on the stairway** [incline] **of the wall, beyond the house of David, as far as the Water Gate eastward.**

**38 The other** [second] **thanksgiving choir** [confessions, praise, thanksgivings] **went the opposite** [in front of them] **way, and I was behind** [following—Nehemiah brought up the **rear**] **them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall, 39 and above the Gate of Ephraim, above the Old** [Storage] **Gate, above the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped** [stood] **by the Gate of the Prison** [referred to in **Nehemiah 3** as the command/inspection gate].

**Ray C. Stedman: In the Old Testament this action of walking around an object or a piece of land is a way of claiming a certain thing for God.**

**40 So the two thanksgiving choirs** [confessions, praise, thanksgivings] **stood in the house of God, likewise I and the half of the rulers** [subordinate rulers] **with me; 41 and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Minjamin, Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; 42 also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loudly** [literally, ‘sang to cause people to hear’] **with Jezrahiah the director** [commissioner, deputy, officer].

**43 Also that day they offered** [killed] **great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great** [intense] **joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy** [gladness, pleasure] **of Jerusalem was heard afar off** [from a distance].

**44 And at the same time some** [men] **were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse** [treasures] **for the offerings** [contribution], **the firstfruits** [first, best, chief], **and the tithes** [tenth parts], **to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions specified by the Law** [Torah] **for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced** [had joy, was glad] **over the priests and Levites who ministered** [took a stand]. **45 Both the singers and the gatekeepers kept** [watched, guarded] **the charge** [watch, office] **of their God and the charge** [watch, office] **of the purification** [cleansing], **according to the command of David and Solomon his son** [Jamieson, Fausset, Brown: that is, took care that no unclean person was allowed to enter within the precincts of the sacred building. This was the official duty of the porters (**2 Chronicles 23:19**), with whom, owing to the pressure of circumstances, it was deemed expedient that the singers

**should be associated as assistants.]. 46 For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chiefs** [heads] **of the singers, and songs** [lyrical songs] **of praise and thanksgiving** [confessions, praise, thanksgivings] **to God. 47 In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, a portion** [speech] **for each day. They also consecrated** [set apart] **holy things for the Levites, and the Levites consecrated** [set apart] **them for the children of Aaron.**

# Nehemiah: Not Just another Building Project

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## Introduction

### Overview

Ray C. Stedman: Nehemiah is the story of the **rebuilding** of the walls of Jerusalem, which took place in the fifth century before Christ. . . . But Nehemiah did more than rebuild a wall, as we will learn. This book is also the story of the restoring of a people from ruin and despair to a new walk with God.

### Schedule

Week 1 = Concern, Chapter 1

Weeks 5-6 = **Consecration**, Chapters 7-12

Week 2 = Construction, Chapters 2-3

Week 7 = **Cleansing**, Chapter 13

Weeks 3-4 = Conflict, Chapters 4-6

## Nehemiah 13

**1 On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing [ear] of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite [tribal] or Moabite [of his father; Ammon and Moab were the sons that a drunken Lot had with his daughters after leaving Sodom] should ever come into the assembly [congregation] of God, 2 because they had not met [confronted] the children of Israel with bread [bread, foot, grain] and water, but hired Balaam [not of the people] against them to curse them. However, our God turned [overthrew, transformed] the curse into a blessing [blessing, present, treaty of peace]. 3 So it was, when they had heard the Law [Torah], that they separated [divided, separated] all the mixed multitude [literally, 'woof'; in English it means a weaving and currently is the formal term for hair extensions: weft] from Israel. [Ray C. Stedman: When the Israelites left Egypt they came to the edge of the Promised Land, into the country of the Ammonites and the Moabites. But these people did not offer them the normal desert hospitality of food and water. Instead, they hired the prophet Balaam to curse them. Balaam is forever famous because he was rebuked by his donkey. When he was trying to ride to the hilltop to curse the people, as he was hired to do, the donkey saw an angel of the Lord standing in the pathway. The beast refused to go past the angel although the prophet beat him three different times. Finally, God gave the donkey a voice and he rebuked his master: "Why are you beating me?" Then the Lord opened the prophet's eyes and he, too, saw the angel. It is a humiliating thing to be rebuked by a donkey!]**

Ray C. Stedman: It was actually nine centuries before Nehemiah that Israel was mistreated by the Ammonites and the Moabites. Some of you must be saying, "How long does God stay mad anyhow? Nine hundred years is a very long time." This is why many critics of these Old Testament stories misrepresent the God of Israel as being vindictive and easily angered. They accuse him of overreacting to situations like this, of cursing people for no good reason and then allowing them to remain under that curse century after century. This offends their sense of justice. Perhaps some of you feel the same way. But the attempt of the Ammonites and the Moabites to curse Israel reveals something about their hearts. What we often forget about God is that he is reading the hearts of men and women. He sees what is going on in our inner lives. We cannot conceal our motives and our attitudes from him. Therefore we often misjudge what God is doing because we think he is being

unfair. But he is reacting to something that is much deeper. We will discover that when we check the reasons why he allowed this long-enduring curse.

**Ezra 9** explains what was happening because of this intermarriage

**Ray C. Stedman:** Many people feel that he overreacted. Today we do not get upset by the presence of evil and think it strange that a man should act like Nehemiah did. We have lost to a great degree our ability to express outrage and public indignation over things that are wrong.

**Temple reform** (prayer) (note: there is a 12 year gap between **Nehemiah 13:3** and **Nehemiah 13:4**)

**4 Now before** [in the face of] **this, Eliashib** [God restores] **the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with** [near, had a personal relationship with] **Tobiah** [Jehovah is good]. **5 And he had prepared** [fashioned] **for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings** [sacrifices, grain offerings, meat offerings], **the frankincense** [white resin burned as fragrant incense], **the articles** [vessels, implements, utensils], **the tithes** [tenths] **of grain** [wheat, grain, corn], **the new** [fresh] **wine and** [new] **oil, which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings** [contributions] **for the priests. 6 But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon** [confusion, mixture] **I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave** [asked for a leave of absence] **from the king, 7 and I came to Jerusalem and discovered** [discerned] **the evil that Eliashib had done** [prepared, fashioned] **for Tobiah, in preparing** [fashioning] **a room for him in the courts of the house of God. [David Guzik: Verses six and seven indicate Nehemiah had left Jerusalem, and went back to his duties in the Persian court, and was gone from Jerusalem]** **8 And it grieved** [trembled, quivered] **me bitterly** [exceedingly]; **therefore I threw** [hurled, cast out] **all the household goods** [vessels, implements, utensils] **of Tobiah out** [into the street] **of the room. [Ray C. Stedman: There is a time for strong stands against evil which others have indifferently accepted.] 9 Then I commanded** [spoke to] **them to cleanse** [clean, purify] **the rooms; and I brought** [caused to bring] **back into them the articles** [vessels, implements, utensils] **of the house of God, with the grain offering** [sacrifices, grain offerings, meat offerings] **and the frankincense** [white resin burned as fragrant incense]. [Implying that Tobiah's articles replaced God's?]

**Ray C. Stedman:** This story pictures the way these false forces can invade our lives and take up rooms in the very temple of our spirit, polluting and destroying us in the process.

**Ray C. Stedman:** This neglect of the Temple is a result of the practice of intermarrying with Ammonites and Moabites. When Tobiah moved into the temple and they had to throw out the grain and oil and incense that the Levites needed, it meant that the Levites had no supplies to work with. Since they could not perform their ministry, they could not even be adequately supported, so they went to work in the fields to earn a living. . . . As a result, the services of the temple were sorely neglected.

**Financial reform** (tithing)

**10 I also realized** [discerned] **that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work** [business] **had gone back** [run quickly away] **to his field** [land]. [For more on this, see **Malachi 3**] **11 So I contended** [strove] **with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken** [left]?" **[Adam Clarke: Nehemiah used their own words (from Nehemiah 10:39) here by way of reproof]** **And I gathered them together and set them** [caused them to stand, appointed] **in their place. 12 Then all Judah brought** [caused to be brought in] **the tithe** [tenth] **of the grain** [wheat, grain, corn] **and the new** [fresh] **wine and the** [fresh] **oil to the storehouse. 13 And I appointed as**

**treasurers** [storer-up] **over the storehouse Shelemiah** [repaid by Jehovah] **the priest and Zadok** [righteous] **the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah** [Jehovah has ransomed]; **and next to them** [at their side] **was Hanan** [he is merciful] **the son of Zaccur** [mindful], **the son of Mattaniah** [gift of Jehovah]; **for they were considered** [calculated to be, considered to be, computed to be] **faithful** [established, firm], **and their task was to distribute** [divide up, apportion, share] **to their brethren.** [Nehemiah 13:13 describes the audit function that Nehemiah initiated—he was setting up structures that would insure compliance]

**14 Remember** [Recall] **me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe** [blot] **out my good deeds** [chesed, goodness, kindness, faithfulness] **that I have done** [accomplished, fashioned] **for the house of my God, and for its services** [watch, guard]!

**Ray C. Stedman:** Let us remember that when we read this prayer of Nehemiah in Verse 14. (He repeats it twice more in this chapter). Some people think it sounds self-serving, that he is concerned that God is going to forget him and not reward him adequately. But that is the wrong way to read this prayer. What he is doing is recognizing his own frailty and his own tendency to self-deception. He is saying, in effect, "Lord, I have done all this but you may see it differently than I. You may see something in me that would cause you to blot this all out of your book. If you feel that way, show it to me." That is what he is asking.

**Ray C. Stedman:** It is really the same prayer that David prayed at the end of Psalm 139. Everybody loves Psalm 139. It is a great psalm about how we are fearfully and wonderfully made; how well God knows us; our down-sitting and our uprising; that if we take the wings of the morning and travel to the uttermost parts of the earth, still God is there; how he watches over us; how he guards us and keeps us and knows our thoughts, etc. Then it ends with this wonderful prayer [in Psalm 139:23-24]. That is a wonderfully honest prayer. It is saying, "Lord, I do not know myself very well. I deceive myself easily. I think I am doing fine, but you may see a lot of things that are terribly wrong with what I am doing. So Lord, search me and know me and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me to the point where I can see that, too." That is what he is asking.

**Priority reform** (devotions—had they been in the Word, they would have known this)

**15 In those days I saw** [inspected] **people in Judah treading** [marching] **wine presses** [vats] **on the Sabbath, and bringing** [carrying] **in sheaves** [heaps, piles], **and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens** [loads], **which they brought** [caused to be brought] **into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned** [protested against, bore witness against] **them about the day on which they were selling provisions** [food supplies]. **16 Men of Tyre** [to distress] **dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods** [merchandise], **and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.** [Matthew Henry: He would not punish it till he had laid open the evil of it.]

**17 Then I contended** [strove] **with the nobles** [those born free] **of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing** [speech] **is this that you do** [fashion, accomplish], **by which you profane** [treat as common, make plain] **the Sabbath day? 18 Did not your fathers do** [fashion, accomplish] **thus, and did not our God bring** [carry in] **all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added** [increased, repeated] **wrath** [anger, heat] **on Israel by profaning** [treating as common, making plain] **the Sabbath."**

**19 So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be** [grew] **dark before** [in the face of] **the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut** [closed], **and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted** [caused to stand] **some of my servants** [boys, youths] **at the gates, so that no burdens** [loads] **would be brought in** [enter in] **on the Sabbath day. 20 Now the merchants**

[traders] **and sellers of all kinds of wares** [sales] **lodged** [spent the night] **outside Jerusalem once or twice.**

**21 Then I warned** [protested against, bore witness against] **them, and said to them, “Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so** [repeat] **again, I will lay** [stretch out] **hands on you!” From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath. 22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse** [purify] **themselves, and that they should go and guard** [protect, watch] **the gates, to sanctify** [set apart] **the Sabbath day.**

**David Guzik: The New Testament makes it clear we are not under the law of the Sabbath in the same sense Israel was under the Old Covenant (Colossians 2:16-17); but we are certainly under the same obligation to make honoring God more important than making money or spending money**

**Ray C. Stedman: The Sabbath, to put it in modern terms, is God's stress management program!**

**Ray C. Stedman: The first thing God emphasized in giving the Sabbath, of course, was that human bodies need rest. You cannot keep working day after day without exacting a tremendous toll on your body. Our bodies, even as believers, are not redeemed. They grow weary.**

**Ray C. Stedman: You have to ask yourself, why did God rest? God is not a man. He does not get weary. The answer is, he rested because he was through! He did what he intended to do. He accomplished his objective. What he is teaching by that is that man, too, must recognize a limit to his work. There is a time to say you are through. There is a need to let go, to stop, to allow the body, mind, and spirit to recognize its limitations, and be content with them.**

**Ray C. Stedman: The second reason the Sabbath was given is often ignored. It is found in Deuteronomy 5:15. God said to Israel, "Remember you were slaves in Egypt. The Lord brought you out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commands you to observe the Sabbath day."**

**Ray C. Stedman: That is a different reason from that of creation. They were to rest in order to reflect on God's ability to work beyond the labors they had already completed. Israel did not deliver itself from Egypt. It could not. When they came to the Red Sea they panicked. They did not know how they were going to get through the waters. The Egyptian army was coming on like forty acres of horseradish behind them, and the Israelites were afraid. But God opened the waters before them. They were delivered with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, they were to think of that when they observed the Sabbath day, the day of rest.**

**Ray C. Stedman: So there are two aspects of the Sabbath -- creation and redemption. There are two forms of rest. There is a *rest of cessation*; a ceasing from our own works.**

**Ray C. Stedman: But then there is the rest of rejoicing in the mighty delivering power of God. That deliverance is a process. It goes on beyond the rest of salvation to the rest of accomplishment. It is learning how to keep calm and poised, to not become overwrought by anxiety or pressure but to keep steady because you are looking to God to work in what you are doing. That is a rest of faith in the mighty hand of God.**

**Remember** [Recall] **me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare** [have compassion, pity] **me according to the greatness** [abundance] **of Your mercy** [chesed, goodness, kindness, faithfulness]!

**Relationship** reform (fellowship)

**23 In those days I also saw** [observed] **Jews who had married women of Ashdod** [I will spoil], **Ammon** [tribal], **and Moab** [of his father]. **24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak** [recognize, understand] **the language of Judah** [which was Hebrew], **but spoke according to the language** [tongue] **of one or the other people.** [Adam Clarke: There were children in the same family by Jewish and Philistine mothers. As the Jewish mother would always speak to her children in Hebrew or Chaldee, so they learnt to speak these languages; and as the Ashdod mother would always speak to her children in the Ashdod language, so they learnt that tongue. Thus there were, in the same family, children who could not understand each other; half, or one part, speaking one language, and the other part another. Children of different wives did not ordinarily mingle together; and the wives had separate apartments. This is a better explanation than that which intimates that the same child spoke a jargon, half Ashdod and half Hebrew.]

**25 So I contended** [strove] **with them and cursed** [literally, 'I pronounced them cursed'; to make little of them, to make them despicable] **them, struck** [hit; Deuteronomy 25:2 did allow men found guilty to be beaten like this] **some of them and pulled out their hair** [literally, polished their heads; From Nehemiah's reaction, it's logical to assume that this sin made him the most angry. John Wesley: Baldness was a disgrace, and token of slavery and sorrow], **and made them swear** [oath] **by God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take** [carry] **their daughters for your sons or yourselves** [quoting Deuteronomy 7:3]. **26 Did not Solomon** [peace] **king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made** [appointed, assigned] **him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan** [foreign, alien (from the root word meaning calamity, disaster, misfortune)] **women caused even him to sin** [the root of Old Testament word for sin is based in the concept of 'missing the way' or making a wrong turn]. **27 Should we then hear of your doing** [fashioning, making] **all this great evil, transgressing** [acting unfaithfully] **against our God by marrying** [marrying by causing a place to live to be created for them] **pagan** [foreign, alien (from the root word meaning calamity, disaster, misfortune)] **women?"** [For more on this, see Malachi 2]

**28 And one of the sons of Joiada** [Jehovah knows], **the son of Eliashib** [God restores] **the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat** [strength] **the Horonite** [a direct violation of Leviticus 21:14-15]; **therefore I drove him** [caused him to flee] **from me.**

**29 Remember** [Recall] **them, O my God, because they have defiled** [the root word means desecrated or polluted and is used in Nehemiah 7:64] **the priesthood and the covenant** [legal alliance by cutting] **of the priesthood and the Levites.**

**30 Thus I cleansed** [purified] **them of everything pagan** [foreign, alien (but from a different root than the word in Nehemiah 13:26)]. **I also assigned** [appointed, ordained] **duties** [guards, watches] **to the priests and the Levites, each** [every man] **to his service** [work, business], **31 and to bringing the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed** [fixed] **times** [Why mention this here? Because without the wood, the temple doesn't function properly. It is critical.].

**Remember** [Recall] **me, O my God, for good** [pleasantness, agreeableness, benefit]

Matthew Henry: The best services done to the public have sometimes been forgotten by those for whom they were done (Ecclesiastes 9:15); therefore Nehemiah refers it to God to recompense him, takes him for his paymaster, and then doubts not but he shall be well paid.

**David Guzik:** Nehemiah must be painfully aware of his own failure; in **Nehemiah 10**, the people made a solemn covenant to God that they would not do three things: have ungodly romantic relationships (**Nehemiah 10:30**), buy and sell on the Sabbath (**Nehemiah 10:31**), and support the work of God with money as He commanded (**Nehemiah 10:32-39**)

**David Guzik:** The law . . . is . . . powerless to stop **sin**. Only the grace of God, alive and flowing in our lives, can give us the power to truly overcome sin.

**David Guzik:** If we could be saved by our own promises, by our own commitment to Jesus, then His death would have been noble, but unnecessary. We aren't saved by some vow we make, or some leaf we turn over, but by trusting in who Jesus is, and what He has done to save us.

**So, what was Nehemiah about?** It's about you and me. It's about the walls in our lives that need to be built up. It's about the fellowship that we have with each other and how each one of us plays a role in that.**Ray C. Stedman:** This is the way Christians change the world. This is the way we affect the times in which we live. We are not here to be a tightly knit, quiet community, operating for our own benefit. We are here to change the world!