



# Nehemiah

*July 2020*

## **Day 1—The History of Nehemiah**

*By Amanda Turnbull*

## **Day 2—Chapters 1-3**

*By Melissa Weber*

## **Day 3—Chapters 4-7**

*By Amanda Turnbull*

## **Day 4—Chapters 8-10**

*By Melissa Weber*

## **Day 5—Chapters 11-13**

*By Amanda Turnbull*

## *The History of Nehemiah*

Before we head into the book of Nehemiah, we wanted to catch you up just in case you aren't fluent in Old Testament history. Since Biblical history is kind of my jam, here we are!

What can be somewhat confusing is the fact that the Old Testament isn't written chronologically, but rather it is put together in sections (The Pentateuch {or the Law}, Historical, Poetry, Major Prophets and Minor Prophets) So even though Nehemiah is the 16th book in Bible order, but it is actually 33rd in chronological order and falls under the Historical section.

For sake of time, I'm going to skip ahead to the age of the kings. Through Abraham, God created a nation of people called Israel. They were slaves in Egypt, God sent Moses to free them, they sinned against God and were sent to wander in the desert for 40 years as an ancient form of time out.

While in the desert, they increased in numbers so great that they had to break apart into family groups (or tribes) as they traveled. There were 12 tribes.

They finally were able to enter the land that God intended for them (not without some battles) and began to establish land borders for each of the tribes.

The people still would forget about God and would turn to sin. God would send prophets and judges to help them out, but the people cried for a king. God had someone in mind, but the people got impatient, so Saul became the first king of Israel. In the meantime, David (God's choice) grew into a man and soldier and, upon Saul's death, became the second king of Israel.

God promised that he would change the world through David's lineage. Known as the Davidic Covenant, God promised David "a kingdom that will have no end" (2 Sam. 7:16) We will get to why this is important in a moment.

David's son Solomon succeeded him on the throne when he died. This is where we will really dig in...you can find a lot of this information in the books of 1 and 2 Kings, as well as 1 and 2 Chronicles.

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam took the throne. However, there were groups that were not huge fans of Solomon (that's a whole other story, but basically there was labor laws, taxes, disagreement over where the capital should be and the fact that people had to flee to Egypt because Solomon tried to kill them) They went to Rehoboam and basically said, "Your dad was a huge jerk. If you change your ways, we will follow you."

Rehoboam took some immature advise and answered back with the equivalent of, "You think my dad was a jerk? Well, you ain't seen nothing yet!"

In true political fashion, this division fractured the nation sometime around 930 BC. The 10 tribes to the north kept the name Israel and established their own kingdom. They appointed their own kings, all but forgot about God and kind of did their own thing until they were conquered by Assyria around 722 BC.

The tribes of Judah and Benjamin became the nation of Judah with Rehoboam as their king and Jerusalem (with the temple) as their capital.

Because of the Davidic Covenant, the Bible follows the nation of Judah. David's descendants lead Judah...the New Testament traces Jesus' lineage back to David...Jesus is the King of the World...a Kingdom that never ends... therefore, Jesus fulfills the Davidic Covenant!

Knowing all of this, you would think that Judah would be a place where God was honored 24/7. Not so much. They would have a few good kings that would lead them towards God, but then a bad one would come along and it would all go to pot. God would send prophets to come along side the kings in an attempt to guide them, but that never really worked out well.

Finally, God couldn't allow sin to run so rampant amongst His people that it could ruin the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, so in 597 BC, the nation of Judah fell to the Babylonians. Some people (mostly the poor) were allowed to stay, but anyone who could be of use to the new mother nation was hauled off in chains to Babylon. The city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 586 BC.

Fun fact: this is where we see the coining of the word "Jewish." People were from Judah, so the Babylonians called them Jews.

Fast forward to somewhere around 540 BC and to the Book of Ezra and we find that Babylon is overtaken by the Persians. The Persians are much more understanding of Judah and allow many of the exiles to return to Jerusalem around 538 BC in an effort to rebuild the temple. It took quite a while (mostly because the people still hadn't learned their lesson and were not staying focused on God), but finally in 515 BC, the temple is completed.

However, because the city and the protective walls of Jerusalem were destroyed as well, there was a lot of attacks from outsiders.

This is where I will leave you...a rebuilt temple, a fractured nation struggling with obedience and a destroyed wall. All of this to lead up to the Book of Nehemiah!

Over the next month, I look forward to growing along side you as we dive into this story of diligence, teamwork and renewed faith (something I think we can all use a little bit of right now!)

## Chapters 1-3

After reading Nehemiah 1-3 it is very clear to see that God had a purpose and plan for Nehemiah. Just like God has a purpose and plan for you and me. The God of the universe, the Creator of all things has a purpose and a plan for each of us. It seems to me that if the one who created you, created you on purpose for a purpose then that purpose must perfectly be suited for you. So why do we settle for less than what God has for us? God has promised us so many amazing things in his word and yet we settle for less.

Did you come up with some reasons? I did and one of those reasons was Comfort. Sometimes I choose my comfort now in this instant gratification world rather than waiting on God, or worse not seeking God at all for my comfort.

Did you know that the name Nehemiah means Yahweh comforts. It's easy to think that we need comfort when we are sad, when tragedy strikes, or when we have desperate needs. But the truth is we are always in need. We are born needy and our number one need in this life is that we need Jesus.

I think you will enjoy following Nehemiah as he walks out God's call on his life. Sacrificing his comfort to seek God and live out the calling on his life.

Let's Dive in and see how Nehemiah responds to God's call on his life?

First he prayed(Ne.1:1-5), he was burdened by the call on his life. but it's not just that he prayed but what he prayed. The posture that Nehemiah takes before God is one of humility confessing the sins of the people before petitioning God for his blessing.

Second he continued to go about his daily life, he tried to not look sad(Ne 2:1-2), and he continued to pray. Biblical scholars believe that 4 months passed in between Nehemiah finding out about the wall and when he spoke to the king about it. The thing that spoke to me most here was that Nehemiah didn't go around looking for ways to comfort himself from the burden, he didn't go looking for anything or anyone to help him. He simply continued to seek and wait on God.

When God's time came the king approached Nehemiah and asked him about why he was sad. Nehemiah's response was to pray first (Ne 2:4) then respond to the king. Nehemiah's reason for the whole experience " For the good hand of my God was upon me." (Ne. 2:8)

The third thing Nehemiah did was to count the cost. (Ne. 2:11-16) The bible says he told no one. He went instead to survey the wall and the task to which God had called him.

Finally he invited others to join him (Ne. 17-18) He shared what God was doing and asked them to join. Even though some questioned him he continued to tell about what God had promised.

Chapter 3 is all about those who joined and which part of the wall and what gates they worked on. The neat thing here is that each one does their own part. The phrase next to him or next to them is a recurring theme in chapter 3:1-15. God may give one person the inspiration but he calls us all to join in when we see Him move. Just like the people of Jerusalem were called to work on the wall in front of them, we are called to the part we are called to.

I hope you enjoy diving into the first three chapters of the book of Nehemiah. As you read I want to encourage you to define any words or phrases that need further discovery and to compare the ways that God's purpose and plan played out for Nehemiah to your own. There are many stories in the Bible of God working out His purposes through people Nehemiah is one man with one story but there are many things we can learn and discover through it.

## Chapters 4-7

We are in Chapters 4-7 of Nehemiah. Reading through these passages, 3 main themes jump out to me: leadership, facing adversity and perseverance. Today we're going to look at each of these three themes and how we can apply them to our lives today....some 2450 years later!

### LEADERSHIP

Nehemiah was a true servant leader. He didn't demand his way because he was in charge while he merely supervised. He worked along side everyone. He ensured that they were safe, organized and focused. He was calm, but determined; fair but still held people accountable; spoke for God without being clouded by his own selfishness or desires.

Looking at Nehemiah as a leader, we can learn so much!

Do we just bring out own ideas, but do nothing to help implement them?

Do we expect others to "make it happen" for us?

Do we pull our fair share or are we only willing to do the tasks that are fun or interesting to us?

Do we care about the "why" we are doing something above the "how?"

Do we speak truth to others, holding them accountable, while still being calm and caring?

Do we rely on God to show us what needs done, how to do it and who needs included, or are we only operating within our own knowledge and comfort?

I believe if you truly look at Nehemiah as a leader, we will see that even through he wasn't perfect, he lead the way God wanted him to.

### FACING ADVERSITY

It should come at no surprise that the people surrounding Jerusalem were not happy at the progress that was being made. Just as the stories of what God did for the Israelites were passed down from generation to generation of His people, the people God helped them conquer passed down stories as well. What begins as mocking in the beginning of chapter 4, turns to all out fear by the end of chapter 6. These people knew what they were up against and wanted to stop the wall from being built so God's people couldn't grow strong and potentially rise up against them.

Nehemiah dealt with lies and manipulation. He recognized it as an attack of spiritual warfare and it only lead to fuel his fire to work more diligently.

When people tell lies about you and use manipulation to make you look bad, it hurts. It can even make us angry or bitter. However, if you look at it for what it is (the enemy) and focus on why you are doing what you're doing in the first place (it should be because God told you to...if it is for any other reason, you have to ask yourself if it's really worth it) then it should fuel your fire to work even more diligently for the Lord!

However, outsiders weren't the only opposition that Nehemiah faced. He faced opposition from within his own people when they started looking focus of the "why" and got tired.

I think we can look at this from 2 standpoints...Nehemiah and the people of Judah.

If you are leading something and you have a passionate personality, it can be really easy to forget that not everyone has the same drive and determination as you do. That doesn't necessarily mean that they aren't as committed as you; they just might need a little more encouragement.

Now, if you are serving and you are experiencing frustration and burn out, you must ask yourself...WHY? Is it just that you have lost sight of the "why" God called you to this or was it just something that seemed fun for a moment and you aren't really called to it at all. Maybe you're frustrated with the leader. It is important to remember that God tends to give the leaders a more passionate drive because they must lead the way by example. Maybe you're allowing the enemy to distract you with doubt and fear. Whatever it is, let it go and focus on God, because He should be the reason you're serving in the first place.

## PERSEVERANCE

After facing adversity, you would think it would be really easy for Nehemiah to get discouraged. He's being attacked by the enemy and they're flinging lies and fear tactics at him constantly. It would be really easy to throw in the towel and go back to his cushy job in the palace in Babylon. He's dealing with infighting and grumbling from his own people. He could very easily have, in an effort not to offend and to appease, slowed the workload. But God called him...he had a clear vision of what God wanted, why He wanted it and how to make that happen. He dug in, persevered and encouraged others to do the same.

In the type of society we live in today, it is really easy to throw in the towel. We are constantly getting messages thrown at us to do what seems right for you. We get distracted easily, give up easily and get our feelings hurt easily. Perseverance isn't really a commonality any more. Frustration and distraction is a part of the human condition...perseverance is part of being a disciple.

When we face times of frustration and burn out, we must ask ourselves, "Why was I doing this in the first place?" Was it because God asked you to do it? Then persevere!

The beauty of the Word is that it is alive and active. What God shows to one person through a passage may be completely different to another with the same passage! We serve a God who knows us personally and loves us intimately and knows us better than we know ourselves! Read His Word, dive into it, let it settle within the marrow of your soul and let Him speak to you through it. You may read these same chapters and get something completely different - THAT'S AWESOME! Share it! God is speaking to you through His Word and that in and of itself is something to be thankful for and something to be shared!

## *Chapters 8-10*

Today we are diving into chapters 8-10 of Nehemiah. I pray that God in His infinite wisdom will illuminate His great love for you and bless you wherever you are at today.

In Nehemiah Ch 8 - Ch 10 there is a lot going on the wall has been finished, the Israelites have returned to Jerusalem, Ezra reads the Torah, the people are inspired to observe the festival of the tabernacles (or Booths) which they have not observed since the time of Joshua the son of Nun (8:17). Then after the feast the Israelites adopt an attitude of repentance, re-commit to following God, and write a new covenant.

Here are some questions to consider while reading through these chapters:

What do you see?

Are there other stories in the Bible like this? How are they the same? How are they different?

Are there stories in your life like this? How are they the same? How are they different?

I see the story of a people group. This people group is one that we have followed many times throughout the story of the Bible. We've witnessed their recurring story of being scattered, gathered, lost, and redeemed. We've seen their faithlessness and God's faithfulness through it all.

It is comforting to know that my story, with all of its intricate details, its ups and downs, and even all my crazy wanderings that God is faithful through it all. That He is God alone!

Go and Read Chapter 9:6-33 again.

It starts with: 6 You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

And it ends with: 32 "Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes—the hardship that has come on us, on our kings and leaders, on our priests and prophets, on our ancestors and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. 33 In all that has happened to us, you have remained righteous; you have acted faithfully, while we acted wickedly.

All the stuff in the middle is the circumstantial workings of life. It is my prayer that your heart would be comforted and blessed knowing that in your coming and your going that God is God Alone and that He has and will always remain faithful.

## Chapters 11-13

As we dive into our last three chapters, we see four main takeaways!

### 1) Living a life close to God is desirable!

The biggest downfall of modern day Christianity is the fact that we water down the true Gospel in order to make it more appealing. We focus on the love and forgiveness and the forever life with Christ, but we gloss over the part where Christ says we must be willing to give up everything and make Him the King of our lives. It is easy to think that God wants to forgive me of all my sins, but it is something else to deny myself, take up my cross and actually follow Him!

At the beginning of Chapter 11, we see that people were so excited to live in the city that they would have been overcrowded if they allowed everyone who wanted to live there in! Scripture says they cast sacred lots. There was a little more to it, but for our purposes here today we can compare it to getting your name drawn from a hat.

Why did they want to live in the city? Why not just stay in their surrounding communities? The temple! Remember, this is Old Testament. Now we have the Holy Spirit living in us...we are the temple! But back then, God's presence dwelled within the Holy of Holies in the Temple. People wanted to live as close to God as possible!

Do we desire to live close to the Lord? Do we desire to give everything up to follow Him?

### 2) Legacy matters!

It is really easy to gloss over the list of names in Chapters 11 and 12. You can get to a point where you think, "why does this even matter?"

A few years ago, my Granny and I got really into [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com). We spent more hours than I would care to admit tracking our family clear back to the 1400s! For us, it was exciting to see our first ancestor to come to America. Reading of my 9X Great-Grandmother board a boat (widowed, pregnant and with 5 other kids!) as a single woman to find a better life in the new world gave me a sense of pride in the determination she had. It is easy to see where our legacy of strong women comes from.

That what these chapters were for the Jews! Imagine generations later, people seeing their family names written on a scroll!

No, we don't want people looking to us for their answers or to give us glory. But generations later, are we going to be known for our faith? Will your grandchildren share with their grandchildren about your relationship with Christ and how you helped point them toward Him? Will we be known for helping others find Jesus and follow Jesus?

### 3) Our joy that come from following Jesus should be evident and obvious!

Once the wall was completed, the people dedicated it to the Lord. They had a huge celebration to let everyone know all their hard work was for the Lord! All the glory was His!

People came from all over to participate in the celebration. They took it seriously, purifying themselves first...making sure they were right with God. And in 12:43, we read that their joy could be heard from far away!

Do we take our work for the Lord seriously? Do we examine our hearts and motives and KNOW that we're right with the Lord? Is our joy in serving the Lord so apparent that it can be heard and seen from far away?

When you're in the store, do you ooze the joy of the Lord? COVID took a lot of things away from us, but one thing it heightened is people's attitudes. Even with a covered face, you can "feel" someone's attitude. Even with a mask on your face, can people "feel" your joy for the Lord?

### 4) We have to be careful what we allow into our lives.

Reading chapter 13, it can very easily be taken that foreigners aren't welcome in the kingdom of God. That is NOT what we should take away from this! Remember, this is Old Testament. There entire books in the New Testament that talk about how we should include Gentiles (those not of Jewish descent) in the Kingdom of God.

If you really look at all of the examples that Nehemiah discusses, it boils down to one thing...are you allowing outside things to influence you? If God says something is wrong, it is wrong. If God warns us against something, take heed.

It is really easy to push God aside and make excuses for our choices. Cussing, gossip, drinking to excess, sexual immorality, tearing people down. The Bible is clear about all of these things, but we do them anyway. Chapter 13 can be boiled down to this: CHOOSE CHRIST! Don't let the world distract you and your own desires lure you away.