

## LESSON 7

April 18, 2021

### Unit II: Prophets of Restoration

#### Initiating Renewal

**Devotional Reading:** Daniel 9:4-6, 15-19

**Background Scriptures:** Nehemiah 2:11-20; 13:1-22

**Print Passage:** Nehemiah 2:11-20

**Key Verse**—Said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. (Nehemiah 2:17, KJV)

I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” (Nehemiah 2:17, NIV)

#### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Examine why Nehemiah decided to restore the walls of Jerusalem and reform/revive the Sabbath law.
- Appreciate Nehemiah’s feelings and behavior in restoring the wall and reforming Jewish worship.
- Identify ways to restore worn parts of the faith community and revive traditions that honor God.

#### KEY TERMS

**Gates (verse 13)**—Hebrew:shaar (shah’-ar): gate; gateways.

**Rebuild (verse 17)**—Hebrew:banah (baw-naw’): to build again; “build up” (KJV).

#### INTRODUCTION

God repeatedly warned the nation of Israel that they would be enslaved again if they failed to keep their covenant with Him. They refused to heed His warnings and, true to His promise, God used the Assyrians and Babylonians to chastise them. God’s promise of judgment was accompanied by the promise of future restoration after seventy years of captivity. Over a period of approximately ninety years, there were three returns to Jerusalem—beginning with Zerubbabel (538 BC) and followed by Ezra (458 BC) and Nehemiah (445 BC). Although complete political autonomy was never achieved, God used these men to help restore the moral and spiritual condition of the people and to secure the people’s safety from the hostile inhabitants of Canaan. Ezra, an astute scribe and student of the Law, is credited with leading efforts to restore the spiritual condition of the people. Nehemiah, as the civil leader, successfully administered the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem to strengthen national security.

#### THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah appear in most Hebrew texts as one book. Ezra is widely considered to be the author of the text. As a priest and scribe, Ezra would have had access to the royal archives of Persia, as suggested by the multiple citations of administrative documents in both

books. The accounts in the book of Nehemiah begin in the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes, Esther's stepson. It chronologically traces Nehemiah's two terms as governor of Jerusalem. The book is a first-person account of Nehemiah's memoirs and highlights his unquestioning obedience to God. Nehemiah's commitment to prayer was foundational to his success in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem despite external opposition and setbacks. The first seven chapters of the book are devoted to events surrounding the actual rebuilding of the walls; the remaining chapters are a record of his efforts to restore the spiritual lives of the people. Nehemiah's dependence on prayer and his godly life and extraordinary leadership make him a worthy example for believers in every generation.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT**

### **"Reviewing the Situation"**

(Nehemiah 2:11-16)

#### **KJV**

11 So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

12 And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.

13 And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the *gates* thereof were consumed with fire.

14 Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.

15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.

16 And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.

#### **NIV**

11 I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days

12 I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

13 By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its *gates*, which had been destroyed by fire.

14 Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through;

15 so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate.

16 The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

Nehemiah received word from his brother about the deplorable condition of the wall around Jerusalem and the potential dangers the people faced because of it. Without the protection of the wall, the city's inhabitants were open to attack by their enemies, and the newly rebuilt Temple was

at risk of being destroyed. Nehemiah's response to the dilemma was a compassionate intercessory prayer that was answered by God (see 1:1-11). He prayerfully requested help from King Artaxerxes and received royal authorization to go to Jerusalem and administrate the rebuilding of the wall around the city (see 2:1-10). Upon his arrival, Nehemiah spent three days "reviewing the situation" (verse 11), discerning which course of action to take before telling anyone his purpose for being in Jerusalem (verse 12). His secrecy was primarily because of Tobiah, an avowed enemy of the Jews who had access by marriage to some of Nehemiah's prospective laborers. Nehemiah examined the terrain and surveyed from west to south to east—focusing on the city's southern section—and then returned to the city (verses 13-15). He wisely kept his counsel to himself, preventing any of Tobiah's inside friends from getting information to pass on to their enemies (verse 16). Effective leaders plan before they act or propose actions to those they lead. Nehemiah is an exemplary model of this strategy. By night, Nehemiah observed what could not be seen during the day. He was able to discover critical needs, discern the challenges, determine approaches to accomplish needed tasks, and devise a plan of action.

### **What Do You Think?**

Why is planning such a key component of success?

### **Challenging the People**

(Nehemiah 2:17-18)

#### **KJV**

17 Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us *build up* the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

18 Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

#### **NIV**

17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us *rebuild* the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."

18 I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

Nehemiah opted to challenge the people to rebuild the walls only after he was satisfied that he had a workable plan (verse 17). He presented his concerns and plans to the general population as well as to the priests, nobles, and officials. Nehemiah initially challenged the people to recognize and acknowledge the necessity of the wall and the trouble and disgrace they were experiencing as a result of its disrepair. Second, he challenged them to come together and rebuild the wall. Note that Nehemiah focused on communal disgrace rather than the lack of security as the basis for rebuilding the wall. Jerusalem should have been recognized as the city of the King of glory instead of a city of ruins. It is difficult to help others address their condition until they acknowledge their situation and affirm the need to do something about it. Nehemiah appealed to the people by pointing out the need to improve their spiritual condition and restore God's honor. Effective leadership is not afraid

to challenge God's people to give priority to their spiritual health and relationship with God. After challenging the people, Nehemiah gave his personal testimony about how God had given him favor before King Artaxerxes (verse 18a). The people needed to know that God's guidance and favor had prompted Nehemiah's relocation to Jerusalem. Nehemiah kept the people's focus on "the good hand of God" as the source of the task's successful completion. The people responded positively, accepting the challenge of the task before them (verse 18b). Nehemiah's four-step approach gaining public consensus for the rebuilding project demonstrated his capable leadership skills: (1) he fully assessed the size of the problem before addressing the people with his intentions; (2) he identified himself as one of the people, saying, "Let us rise up and build"; (3) he presented an attainable goal that was both reasonable and practical; (4) he motivated and encouraged the people by assuring them that God was with them.

### **What Do You Think?**

Which of Nehemiah's leadership strategies have you seen other leaders implement with success?

### **Denouncing Opposition**

(Nehemiah 2:19-20)

#### **KJV**

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?

20 Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

#### **NIV**

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?"

20 I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."

Many people say that bad news travels fast. But good news also travels fast, especially when it unravels the schemes of one's enemies. When Nehemiah revealed his intentions regarding the wall, the people responded with positive enthusiasm. But when his adversaries—Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem—heard the news, they stepped up their efforts to hinder and undermine the project (verse 19). They mocked and ridiculed Nehemiah's idea, suggesting that the project was an act of rebellion against King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah continued to demonstrate tactful and strategic leadership in his response to these enemies. Instead of ignoring them or debating, Nehemiah simply informed the three men that God was in charge of the project, and that they had no influence or say in the matter (verse 20).

Sadly, people are often eager to ridicule and oppose those who are engaged in positive ministry. While we cannot control people's criticism and opposition to our work, we can always manage the situation by controlling our response to them. When you are confident that your work is within the

will of God, there is no need to be overwhelmed by other people's resistance or ridicule. When you submit your efforts to God, you can trust Him to handle the outcome.

### **What Do You Think?**

Why is it sometimes difficult to resist the temptation to respond negatively to ridicule and opposition?

### **A CLOSING THOUGHT**

Total dependence on God is an essential key to effective leadership and discipleship. Our dependence on God does not negate the necessity of earnest prayer and purposeful research and planning in preparation for important tasks. Our following these steps allows God to accomplish His purposes through whatever we do in His name.

### **YOUR LIFE**

What ministry task has God assigned to you? If God has revealed a task to you, follow the example of Nehemiah by seeking His will and His direction first. Seek His guidance in establishing your goals through prayerful planning and reliance on God's "gracious hand" as the source of success.

### **YOUR WORLD!**

The work of the Lord on earth has operated in the midst of worldly opposition since ancient times. Today's leaders should emphasize the importance of relying on God's wisdom and strength, and on knowing God's will and doing it. Nehemiah focused his mind and the people's attention on the gracious hand of God throughout the rebuilding of the Jerusalem wall.

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Dear God, help us keep our eyes on You and to discern Your will as we labor to live and work for You. Help us rebuild walls of love, peace, and spiritual renewal for Your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **CONCLUSION**

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Overcoming loss and brokenness is both difficult and challenging. Next week's lesson focuses on how the prophet Jeremiah dealt with the pain and grief he experienced because of the destruction of Jerusalem.

## **HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**(April 19-25, 2021)**

### **Jeremiah Pleads for Restoration**

MONDAY, April 19: "Praise for God's Wonderful Works" (Psalm 111)

TUESDAY, April 20: "God's Blessings Intended for All" (Zechariah 8:18-23)

WEDNESDAY, April 21: "The Lord, Our Sovereign" (Psalm 102:12-22)

THURSDAY, April 22: "Plea for Mercy for Jerusalem" (Psalm 79)

FRIDAY, April 23: "Mourn the Destruction of Zion" (Jeremiah 9:17-22)

SATURDAY, April 24: “God’s Mercy and Love Never Ends” (Lamentations 3:22-33)

SUNDAY, April 25: “Remember and Restore Us” (Lamentations 5:1-22)