

The Story
Chapter 21
Rebuilding the Walls

Ezra & Nehemiah

- According to Hebrew tradition
 - the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book
 - The two books together have historical continuity
 - The purpose was the survival of the remnant community that God restored from the Babylonian exile
 - The promise made to King David that his royal descendants and nation would never end was at stake

Nehemiah

- Covers the twelve year period that he served as governor in Judah, from 445 B.C. to 431 B.C.
- It was in 445 B.C. that Nehemiah received the news that the Jerusalem walls were in such dreadful shape
- He arrived in Jerusalem in 444 and got right to work
- His was the third group to return to the Land
- Zerubbabel led the first group in 536 B.C.
- Ezra led the second group back from captivity in 457 B.C. and finally Nehemiah's return was in 444 B.C.

Nehemiah

- Cupbearer to the king of Persia
- Governor of Jerusalem
- Organized the rebuilding of the wall
- Name means 'the Lord comforts'

Ezra

- Prophet
- Priest
- Teacher of the Law
- Great Grand Son of Hilkiah
 - Directed King Josiah's reformation
- Returned to Jerusalem (3rd) to teach Word
- Name means 'help'

Quick & Condensed Summary

- Hebrew people were homesick after 70 years of foreign captivity
- 80 years since King Cyrus first allowed exiles to return to Jerusalem
- Zerubbabel was among the first to go. 50,000 joined him in 537 B.C.
- Many remained beyond the borders of God's promise
- Ezra had earned the favor of Persia's King Artaxerxes during his time in Babylon
 - The king authorized Ezra to take a second contingent of Israelites back home
 - Ezra was a faithful scribe and teacher, and he was given permission not only to teach God's law but also a mandate to appoint judges and a bottomless expense account to finance his journey
- Nehemiah remained in the palace of Susa as the cupbearer of the Persian king
 - He was dismayed to hear that the walls of Jerusalem remained in disrepair - security
 - The king gave Nehemiah a leave-of-absence to lead 42,000 exiles back to Jerusalem
 - His first order of business was to assess the condition of the walls and the people

Quick & Condensed Summary

- Nehemiah quickly rallied the city leaders to rebuild
- Sanballat and Tobiah were none too pleased
 - As leaders of nearby nations, they were threatened by the prospect of Jerusalem's comeback
 - They retaliated with intimidation and made repeated attempts to out-manuever Nehemiah and his rebuilding project, but Nehemiah was undeterred
- He encouraged his leaders and armed his people
 - Some worked while others stood guard
 - Some carried supplies with one hand and a weapon in the other, but the threats continued
- He refused to entertain empty lies
- Wall was rebuilt in record time—only 52 days

Summary Continues

- Nehemiah rebuilt the walls
- Ezra set out to rebuild God's people
 - He began by teaching them the Scriptures for the next 13 years
 - The people gathered to hear Ezra read
 - Other priests joined in to teach as well
 - At last, they got it!
 - Or Did They?

OLD HABITS DIE HARD

- The people's fervor soon dwindled
- The priests and the people became apathetic
- The priests had begun to dishonor God with sacrifices that were less than the best
- God commissioned a new prophet to speak His words of divine warning
- Malachi

Malachi

- Last Old Testament Prophet
- Name means 'Messenger'
- Message = A warning and A promise
- As a sign of things to come
 - Malachi finally told of the return of the prophet Elijah

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- Leave –
 - Move – get going
 - You cannot lead from a position of inertia
 - Nehemiah was one of the most trusted employees
 - Influential position
 - Comfortable lifestyle
 - Every reason to stay where he was
 - God called him – gave opportunity
 - He answered and received blessing of king

A good leader has to leave his comfort zone, take a risk and get involved for a cause bigger than himself

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- Evaluation
 - He believed he was sent by God
 - BUT he still evaluated situation carefully
 - Waited 4 months before starting building
 - Spent first 3 days in Jerusalem
 - Inspecting – reviewing – assessing – Praying

A good leader gets a realistic evaluation of the situation before acting

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- Action – turn his vision into a reality
 - He challenged the local leaders to recognize the need to act. "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire"
 - He presented his well-researched vision and plan to the people. "Come, let us rebuild together the walls of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace"
 - He motivated the leaders by identifying himself with them. He used "we" and "us." Finally, he understood that it was God working through him that would give the Jews the ability to do what had to be done. His personal testimony encouraged them to trust the Lord's plan rather than their own weaknesses.
 - Almost immediately they began the work. This leader did not waste precious time tying up people & resources in endless committee meetings.
 - When rumors of an impending attack circulated, Nehemiah took action. He staged armed guards around the workers to who stood ready to defend their families and their city. He took action, and like him, good leaders do not stall because of "paralysis by analysis."

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- Discernment - external & internal threats
 - He discerned that what had initially begun as mocking and ridicule had escalated into a unified plot to strike them
 - External threats can create more problems from within
 - While their enemies seemingly gained strength, the workers seemed to lose it.
 - They said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall!"
 - After the walls were finished, Nehemiah discerned the ill intentions of Sanballat's and Tobiah's scheming letters even asking him to meet them "on the plain of Ono," which was a day's travel from Jerusalem, he discerned that they intended to do him personal harm

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- Discernment – Cont'd
 - Finally, Nehemiah's keen discernment alerted him to the false "insider" Jewish prophet Shemaiah who suggested he hide inside the temple to protect himself from death threats
 - Two problems with Shemaiah's so-called prophecy
 - First, God would not ask him to run and hide when to do so would demonstrate a lack of trust in God and would undermine the confidence of the people in his leadership
 - Second, no true prophet would deliberately influence someone to violate God's Law that only allowed priests in the sanctuary (Num. 18:7)
 - If Nehemiah had complied, he would have disobeyed God, desecrated the temple, and discredited himself as God's appointed leader. Nehemiah discerned this prophet-for-hire was a fraud

Good leaders develop discernment

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- Encourager: Nehemiah was an encourager
 - He used his personal testimony to encourage the local leaders to rebuilding the walls
 - "I also told them about the gracious hand of God on me and what the king had said to me,"
 - Only the encouraged are able to "work with all their heart,"
 - "When the strength of the laborers" was giving out, he discerned that the threat of attack had worn them too thin
 - It is easier to be negative under difficult circumstances than to be both realistic and encouraging
 - But Nehemiah's encouragement was rooted in knowing his God. "Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"

Good leaders encourage their team

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- Respect: God, authorities & subordinates
 - Nehemiah never failed to give God full credit and glory in the process of rebuilding the walls
 - When they feared an attack, he reminded them of their God. "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your people, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes,"
 - Nehemiah showed the ultimate respect for God when he defied the false prophet's suggestion that he hide in the temple to protect himself

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- Respect – Cont'd
 - He knew that the mission was from God, he respected the authority of the king by requesting a leave of absence and garnered the king's documented support
 - He presented his plan to rebuild to the local leaders who then enlisted the support of the people
 - Nehemiah respected the needs of his subordinates. When they were weary, he met their need for protection. Moreover, he worked right alongside all the other laborers, perhaps working even longer hours toward the mission. "Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water,"
 - The king endowed him with the authority of a governor but he refused to use the governor's food allowance because he did not want to burden the people with the taxes (Neh. 5:14-18)

Good leaders respect God, government and those they lead

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- **Selfless servant** - put the needs of the people first
 - Nehemiah was outraged by the immoral and unethical, not to mention unlawful, behavior of some of the wealthy Jews
 - there was a food shortage and the people needed grain
 - Some people had to mortgage their fields & homes to purchase food
 - Some people had to borrow money just to pay their taxes and their Jewish brethren were charging high interest rates
 - This act was worsened when some people had to sell their children as slaves to their creditors (Neh. 5:5)
 - Nehemiah was rightfully outraged and rebuked the community nobles and rulers who were oppressing their poor brethren (Neh. 5:6-7)
 - This behavior was absolutely unacceptable by the community leaders because it gave God a bad name. "And I said to them, "You are exacting usury, each from his brother...The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?" (Neh. 5:7b, 9)

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- **Selfless Servant Cont'd**
 - In stark contrast to the other community leaders, Nehemiah gave up his right to enjoy the governor's benefits
 - For twelve years he did not use the governor's food allowance because of the tax burden it put upon the people (Neh. 5:14)
 - Former governors had not only taxed the people, but had also taken their food allowance of bread and wine from them
 - The former governors' servants had oppressed the people to demand the payments (Neh. 5:14-15)
 - Nehemiah still provided for 150 Jews and officials, as well as foreign dignitaries, on a regular basis, but he did it out of his own pocket because he was a selfless servant to the people he governed (Neh. 5:17-18)
 - He demonstrated the heart of God for the welfare of His people

Good leaders show compassion for those they lead by setting an example of selfless servant hood

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- **Hard Working** – Hard work inspires others
 - When faced with opposition, Nehemiah and the builders worked from early morning till nighttime
 - "So we continued the work with half of them holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out," [Nehemiah 4: 21]
 - Those living outside of Jerusalem did not return to their homes at night, but some stood guard each night to protect their city and the people
 - Nehemiah set the example for the whole community. He stayed on the job and was on guard at all times (Neh. 4:23)
 - He also made sure his own servants were doing the work of rebuilding rather than serving him personally (Neh. 5:16)
 - He did not permit himself to be distracted
 - He stayed focused on his mission & devoted himself to the work

Good leaders set the example of hard work

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- **Integrity** – Trustworthy & confronted injustices
 - Cupbearer in Persian court - second only to the king
 - The chief treasurer and the keeper of the king's signet ring
 - This gave him great authority and influence
 - Nehemiah was careful not to personally profit from his leadership position
 - He did not exercise the privilege of the food allowance, but used his own resources (Neh. 5:14, 18)
 - Nehemiah was not afraid to confront wrong doing
 - He confronted the leaders who were charging interest and oppressing their fellow Jews (Neh. 5:7-11)
 - He reprimanded those who had not handled the money for the temple correctly (Neh. 13:10-13)
 - He reprimanded those who profaned the Sabbath (Neh. 13:17) and who married foreigners violating the Law (Neh. 13:23-28)

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- **Integrity** – Cont'd
 - With integrity comes a clear conscience
 - Those who lack integrity lead a double life that gets them into trouble
 - A man of integrity has nothing to hide because he only serves one Master

Good leaders show personal integrity and refuse to tolerate the injustices of others

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- **Prayer:** Undergird everything with prayer
 - According to Robert D. Bell's, "The Theology of Nehemiah," in *Biblical Viewpoint* (Nov. 1986),
 - of the 406 verses in the book, prayers fill 46 verses (11%)
 - He prayed at every crucial time and depended upon God's help
 - He prayed as a first response rather than a last resort
 - He often sent up quick & sandwiched them within the stories
 - A man of prayer humbly acknowledges his own insufficiency and trusts God to accomplish more than he ever could in his own strength
 - Prayer was a way of life for Nehemiah
 - "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." (Neh. 1:4)

Prayer is a way of life for a godly leader

Psalms 51: 7 - 12

⁷ "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."

Ezekiel 36: 24-27

²⁴ "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

The End is Nigh

The end of the Old Testament

Just ONE More Messenger

MALACHI

Malachi – 3 THING NEED CHANGING

- **Worship**
 - The Lord says, "Do not light useless fires on my altar."
In other words, stop wasting my time
- **Marriage**
 - The husband/wife relationship is the analogy that God has used all along with Israel
 - If you are unfaithful or disrespectful of your wife, you are making a mockery of what I've called for in MY relationship with YOU - If you diss your wife, you diss me
 - *In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat her with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard."* 1 Peter 3:7
 - Man up, and repair your marriage
- **Giving**
 - Bring your whole tithe, not just the table scraps, the loose change under the seat cushion of the couch

Malachi

ELIJAH WILL RETURN

God had restored His people and protected His faithful remnant

He had protected Judah's royal line in keeping with his promise to David

He spoke His final words of warning and promise through Malachi...

**And Then
God
Was SILENT**

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**Upper Story
God Has a Plan
and
MANKIND CANNOT STOP IT**

**Lower Story
NOT GIVING YOUR BEST TO GOD**