

# NEHEMIAH

Making The Bible Come Alive

## The Builder

### Who was this person?

- Nehemiah's story can be found in the Old Testament book of the Bible that bears his name, Nehemiah. We know him to be part of the writing of this book as much of it is written in the first person. It is thought that Ezra may have helped as editor, while also writing the book of Ezra and 1st and 2nd Chronicles. Although Ezra was a priest and Nehemiah was a civil ruler, they worked together in harmony to bring about spiritual and economic change in Jerusalem.
- Nehemiah was a counsellor and a trusted adviser. He was one of the most exemplary leaders in the Old Testament (meaning "the best of his kind"). He was courageous and was willing to sacrifice for the benefit of others.
- Nehemiah was placed by God into a very important position—serving the Persian King Artaxerxes I, the most powerful ruler in the world at that time. The king trusted Nehemiah and had confidence in him. This was at a time when Judah (in Palestine) had been partly repopulated by Jews who had been released from exile in Babylon.
- Nehemiah was the personal cupbearer to the king. It was his responsibility to taste the wine being served to the king to make sure it wasn't poisoned.
- Nehemiah was a man of prayer. He knew the importance of prayer and would often fast as well, meaning that he did without food or drink for periods of time, showing his devotion to God. Nehemiah was a humble man, filled with faith and trust in God to intervene on his behalf. (Nehemiah 1:3-11).
- The name, Nehemiah, means "God comforts".

### What is this person known for?

- Nehemiah had disturbing news that was brought to him about the terrible conditions of the Jews who had been allowed to return to Jerusalem. This caused him his heart to be heavy out of concern for the Jewish people. Nehemiah chapter 1 records this news and Nehemiah's prayer to God after he wept, mourned, prayed and fasted (verses 5-11).





- He was a patient man. He needed to wait for four months before he was able to present his plan to the king. (Nehemiah 2:1) Even as Nehemiah was talking with the king, he was praying silently and asking God for favour. (Nehemiah 1:11, 2:4)
- Around 444 BC Nehemiah journeyed to Jerusalem and encouraged the people that it was time to repopulate the city and rebuild its walls. In just 52 days, the Jews under the leadership and direction of Nehemiah, were successful in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.
- Being an outstanding servant of God—one who willing to work hard, rally a team together and set a high standard that God would be proud of, even though he would have to experience discomfort, pain and personal loss. He was truly a sacrificial leader that God knew He could put in charge of an important and big project ... the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem!

### WHY DO YOU THINK THIS PERSON HAS BEEN INCLUDED IN GOD'S STORY?

- **To teach us the importance of prayer in our lives.** Right in chapter 1, Nehemiah responded to the bad news by first weeping and mourning, but then he prayed and fasted, and went to God in prayer acknowledging the people's wickedness and disobedience. He asked God to hear his prayer and show His favour to the people of Israel. (Matthew 5:10; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2)
- **To show us that when God calls us to a leadership role, He will not abandon us.** He will help us communicate with clear direction, building up the team so that a task can be accomplished through people with willing hearts and a desire to do God's work together in unity. You will see God do great things when you act humbly as a leader, letting God take the lead. You just need to listen closely to His voice and follow His instructions. It is important, as well, that you not seek to gain the credit for the job that is done. All glory should go to God, not to us. God simply empowered Nehemiah with strong conviction, determination and a deep sense of duty to the nation, and most importantly, to God. (Hebrews 13:21; 2 Timothy 3:14-17)
- **To remind us to maintain a Godly character at all times.** To show us that although we may get angry over the way people act or respond, we need to have godly character that sees beyond the problem and looks for a solution.

Nehemiah wanted to help the poor. He wanted people to be treated fairly and justly. Read what it says in Nehemiah 5:6-12—you will hear how Nehemiah dealt with his anger, but was very clear and direct in his instructions to the people in order to get the respond that was needed from them:

*When I heard their complaints, I was very angry. I calmed myself down, and then I went to the rich families and the officials. I told them, "You are forcing your own people to pay interest on the money you loan them. You must stop doing that!" Then I called for all the people to meet together and said to them, "Our fellow Jews were sold as slaves to people in other countries. We did our best to buy them back and make them free. And now, you are selling them like slaves again!"*

The rich people and officials kept quiet. They could not find anything to say. So I continued speaking. I said, "What you people are doing is not right! You know that you should fear and respect our God. You should not do the shameful things other people do! My men, my brothers, and I are also lending money and grain to the people. But let's stop forcing them to pay interest on these loans. You must give their fields, vineyards, olive fields, and houses back to them, right now! And you must give back the interest you charged them. You charged them one percent for the money, grain, new wine, and oil that you loaned them." Then the rich people and the officials said, "We will give it back and not demand anything more from them. Nehemiah, we will do as you say."

- To show us that not everybody will support us or encourage us when we are doing God's work. Nehemiah stood strong as he encountered hostility (anger and outrage) from non-Jewish local officials in the areas around the city. Nehemiah 4:1-5 tells us, "Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuild- ing the wall. He flew into a rage, and insulted and mocked us and laughed at us, and so did his friends and the Samaritan army officers. "What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they are doing?" he scoffed. "Do they think they can build the wall in a day if they offer enough sacrifices? And look at those charred stones they are pulling out of the rubbish and using again!" Tobiah, who was standing beside him, remarked, "If even a fox walked along the top of their wall, it would collapse!" Then I prayed, "Hear us, O Lord God, for we are being mocked. May their scoffing fall back upon their own heads, and may they themselves become captives in a foreign land! Do not ignore their sin. Do not blot it out, for they have despised you in despising us who are building your wall."
- When we do great things for God, or are a leader doing God's work, we will come up against opposition. There will be people who may not like what we do or how we are doing it. Sanballat,





the Horonite, had a mocking spirit, one that got angry when he saw something great being done for God. Tobiah was an Ammonite. They were both very disturbed when they found out that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites. (Nehemiah 2:10).

As people who believe in God and want to do His work, it is important that we listen to God's voice, and not be swayed or discouraged by the voices of those who may try to tear apart what it is God wants us to do, in us and through us.

- To show us that God is still in complete control of what happens with nations and that He continues to work out the details according to His will and purpose. And, He will do so until the end of time. The city of Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the temple there, and God's love for the Jewish people are all important parts of how we see end-time prophecy unfolding even in the world today.

### LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

**Pose the following two questions to your children, one at a time. Allow for interaction and discussion, letting them share their thoughts while you guide the conversation.**

- What life lessons can I learn from this Bible character about how I should and should not live?
- Based on what I have learned from this Bible character, how can I live in a way that is pleasing to God.

### MORE IN GOD'S WORD

Just as Nehemiah did good, God wants us to trust Him and also do good. Read Psalm 37:3. It is a simple verse, yet a very clear instruction on how we should live: "Trust in the LORD, and do good. What does it mean to trust God with every part of your life? What does it look like to do good, not just once in a while but every day, all day? List some ways you can trust God. Then list five things you can do in the coming month to "do good". It is more than making your bed or taking the dog for a walk. These are things that God is wanting of you. It's more than your day-to-day chores or responsibilities.

One of the Fruit of the Spirit is patience. (Galatians 5:22) Patience can be something that people struggle with, especially in today's fast-paced world where people want everything right away. They want answers to issues or problems. They want food and clothing. Kids want new toys and technology. Everything needs to be immediate, or so we think. The world is programming us to think this way. Daniel

needed to be patient, even before he acted. He needed to pray, but then He needed to wait—to patiently wait on God for His approval and His perfect timing. We don't see the big picture of the circumstances and situations we find ourselves in, but God does! Read the following Scriptures in God's Word about being patient:

Psalm 37:7; Isaiah 40:31; Lamentations 3:26; Proverbs 20:22

God wants to reward His children who learn to be patient, and can put that patience into practice. We must reassure our anxious hearts and minds that God's timing is always perfect, and His plan is always right.

