

## ***When God Says “Build”***

The Passion to Rebuild & the Vision to Carry it Out

### ***Building God’s Way Series (Nehemiah) – Part 1***

Ne 1:1–2:20

Feb 6-7, 2021

#### **Introduction**

- **What’s your plan** for spiritually becoming all that God designed you to be?
- **We cannot live in reaction**, we must live on purpose. That means intentionality. That means strategy. That means focus. That means doing the work...you see...
- **If we’re going to build God’s way we need to...Decide that it’s Worth the Effort**

#### **No Great WORK Resulted From APATHY**

- **If we desire a renewed, vibrant, godly life**, we have to really want it and to strategize to get it.
  - **The book of Nehemiah tells the story** of one man who saw something wrong and did everything in his power to fix it. The Holy City of Jerusalem, the pride of the Jewish people, was in shambles. We are going to do a 7 part series studying his story and finding out why it matters so much for our lives today.
- **Biblical Interpretation Reminder** – One intended meaning by the author and multiple applications. We will be talking about both throughout this series, but let’s keep it clear. We are wanting to remain faithful to the text to understand first, what was really going on and why the Holy Spirit had the author record it, but then we can apply the principles to our lives.
- **The Basics of Understanding Nehemiah** – in 2007, the Year of Community, I taught the book of Nehemiah. Was anyone here for that? It was only 14 years ago. 😊
  - **Who wrote it?** – Nehemiah: Ezra and Nehemiah were once considered 1 book – The Christian Forefather Origen called it 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Ezra.
  - **When?** – Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries and lived c. 440 BC (approx. 440 years before Christ)
  - **Why?** – Chronicle of the rebuilding of the Holy City after exile.
  - **Background Info for Context**
    - **Monarchy (1100BC-900BC) – Saul to Solomon; national split** (10 north – Samaria, aka “Israel”; 2 south – Jerusalem, aka “Judah”) (1 Ki 11:11)
      - **Israel (north)** went down with **Assyrian Invasion** in 722 BC
      - **Judah (south)** went down with **Babylonian Invasion** in 586 BC (under Nebuchadnezzar)
    - **Jerusalem siege = city was torn down and destroyed; all Jews taken to Babylon (800 miles) or killed.** (2 Chron 26:18,19). **Back to scenario in Egypt.**
      - **Babylon empire invaded and overthrown by Medes** (Darius) and **Persians** (Cyrus – 559-530 BC) alliance.
      - **70 yrs after destruction of Jerusalem - Cyrus acknowledges God and lets the Jews go back** and rebuild Jerusalem.

- **They went back in three groups:**
- **A.) Zerubbabel's Team** – settling in the ruins, but back home.
  - **then 80 yrs later...**
- **B.) Ezra's Team** – focus on rebuilding the 'house of God', the temple. Arrived in Artaxerxes 7<sup>th</sup> year.
  - **then 13 yrs later**
- **C.) Nehemiah's Team** – focus on rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (by this time Cyrus is dead and succeeded by Artaxerxes whom Nehemiah worked for). – Arrived in Artaxerxes' 20<sup>th</sup> year.
- **Why This All Happened** – God warned them far ahead of time, recorded in Deuteronomy 28, that if Israel obeyed Him and followed the Covenant, they would be blessed. If not, they would be cursed and exiled out of their land (see verse 63 in particular) in a vicious fashion. To the Bible-reading ancient Jew this puzzle was not that mysterious. But that was part of the problem, the Word of God had been in such disuse and rebellion so extreme that the majority wouldn't listen to the prophets and therefore never saw it coming. Here we are 93 years after King Cyrus shockingly let the Jews go back home and it's still in ruins.

## Lesson

- **When God's Wounds Break Our Heart**
  - **Nehemiah Cared About God's People and God's Name**
    - *Ne 1:1–4 - "The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, <sup>2</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." <sup>4</sup> As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven."*
    - **Susa = the capital of the known world.** The Center of the Persian Empire, although Persian kings lived and traveled in a circuit-type way, cycling through Babylon, Susa & Ecbatana<sup>1</sup>.
    - **445 BC** – the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Artaxerxes I.
    - **Nehemiah cared** about Jerusalem, God's Name and His People – he asked about them. He initiated. He mourned, wept and fasted. He owned it corporately and personally.
    - **Application: If we're going to build God's way we need to...care about what He cares about.** Do His Wounds hurt your heart? When you consider your personal vision for your life are you considering what He built you to do for the greater kingdom? Are you able to see beyond what's best for you? We are put here for the advancement of God's agenda. Do you know what that is? The best way to know the heart of God is to read His Word.

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<sup>1</sup> Daily Bible Series insight from Barclay.

- **The Beginning of all Solutions (Prayer)**

- **Nehemiah's Knew Answers Were Found in the Lord**

- Ne 1:5–11 - *“And I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup> Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, <sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ <sup>10</sup> They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” Now I was cupbearer to the king.”*

- **Nehemiah's First Step (prayer)** – He prayed. God is the answer.

- **Application: If we're going to build God's way we need to listen to Him. The best ways to do that is to read His Word and pray consistently.** So many of us consult self-help books and the wisdom of our friends or listen to podcasts from leaders we think we can trust. But **what about God?** What about prayer? What about reading God's Word? Do we truly believe that God has nothing to say about our current situations?

- **Nehemiah prayed properly** – I say that with hesitancy because if you are truly pouring your heart out to God honestly, that is praying properly. There's no magic formula. But there are healthy ways to pray and unhealthy ways to pray and Nehemiah was clearly mature and healthy due to the tone of his prayer. Consider all these elements that his prayer contained.

- **Humility** – He knew who God was (Great and Awesome) and in relation, who he was (servant). He was quick to confess sins both of his nation and himself.
- **Reflected on God's Nature** – Descriptions of who God is and what God does flow naturally from his lips. He knows His God well.
- **Personal and Relational** – He humbly calls for God to listen to him. He wouldn't do that unless they had a good relationship.
- **Passion** – he prayed day and night and mixed it with fasting.
- **Called Upon God's Goodness** – Multiple times Nehemiah reminds God that he knows what God said and how God acts and is calling God to be consistent with that nature in his rescue of His people.

- **Timely and Focused** – He prays knowing he has a plan and needs God’s help to pull it off. Later he will check in again quickly with the Lord before he pulls the trigger on his plan. He knew that if God wasn’t in it, it would fail. So, he prayed timely and in a focused way.
- **Application: If we’re going to build God’s way we need to be men and women who pray. Who Will Call Fire Down?** – Leadership devotional from the staff. There are too many things we need to accomplish that are over our head, in fact, some are impossible. If God doesn’t move, they won’t happen. But that is where prayer comes in. Who is willing to pray the fire down from heaven to light the alter you prepared? Who is willing to pray passionately that God might change reality?
- **For Such a Time as This**
  - **Nehemiah Utilized his Position for Kingdom Building**
    - *Ne 2:1-6 - [4 months later] – “In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.”<sup>2</sup> And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid.<sup>3</sup> I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”<sup>4</sup> Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.<sup>5</sup> And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.”<sup>6</sup> And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.”*
    - **4 Mths Later** - Nehemiah’s story – opens in wintertime (Chislew/Kislev = Nov/Dec). About 445-444 BC. Lived in Susa, the capital of the Media-Persian Empire (capital of the known world); Chapter 2 opens in the month of Nisan = March/April – 4 mths “nothing happened”. (Nisan is the first month of the Jewish calendar)
      - **What happened in those 4 months?** – I think that Nehemiah and God had some really long talks. I think that Nehemiah had to get his mind wrapped around it. I think that he needed to get his life in order to be able to carry out a calling like this.
        - **Application: Instant Obedience vs. Long-term Vision** – When do we jump when God says jump and when do we take some time to consider it and plan? It depends on the ask. If God is telling you to do a time-sensitive command, then it’s instant obedience. If He’s asking you do something that requires planning, we slow it down for long-term vision planning.
    - **Cupbearer to the King** – quasi-bodyguard, admin, assistant. Some scholars say that no one was as close to the king as his cupbearer since he trusted his life to

them. They say, cupbearer was second only to the queen with influence in some monarchies.

- **Nehemiah utilized his position for Kingdom Building** (cupbearer) – like Esther was made aware of by Mordecai, he was put where he was put for such a time as this. He had access to the king. That was different than 99.9% of the whole kingdom of people. That wasn't an accident.
  - **Application: If we're going to build God's way we need to use what God's given us. Where has God put you strategically for such a time as this?**
- **Nehemiah's Character and Work Ethic Laid the Foundation** – Nehemiah was a trusted employee. Why? He had high character and was low drama. Had he been an emotional mess prior, first of all he wouldn't have a job like that, secondly the king would have blown it all off assuming he was just being dramatic. But Nehemiah was solid. He had strong work ethic and was a man to be trusted and listened to. So, when he came with a big ask, it was met with a welcomed posture by the king.
  - **Application: If we're going to build God's way we need to be trustworthy to share the gospel. Are you trustworthy to share the gospel?** – there are many Christians today that cannot share the gospel with someone and expect any real audience, simply because they are not solid in the first place. Before someone wants to hear about your Lord they need two things: 1.) Trust WITH you, 2.) Evidence IN You. They need to consider you someone wise enough, solid enough, trustworthy enough to allow to share an eternal truth. And they certainly won't listen too closely to your words if your life doesn't show ample evidence that it's made you better.
  - **Application: Have you given a strong foundation for the Lord to build upon?** It's okay to say no to this. We are all in process. Some of us are actually brand new to Christianity and we have little to nothing. But whatever we have said yes to God in the past, will mean a more solid foundation, which means a more rapid building process gets started. Sometimes we don't have a lot to work with and most of our initial time is God laying foundation underground, which looks like we aren't going much of anywhere and can be frustrating. (ex. Before you pour the foundation for a home, you want the underground stuff right, but it's rather boring).
- **The Nervousness** – Why was Nehemiah so nervous to ask the king for a leave of absence? Come to think of it, why was Esther and everyone else nervous to ask the king for things? Because we are in the ancient world in a secular monarchy situation. There is no such thing of the empowerment of the individual person or lets all share our opinions. There was 100% hierarchy and the king had absolute power. That type of power in the hands of a human being means that much depended on mood and what was going on at the time. Even good kings were 'relatively good kings'. Kings dealt with tons of people and were constantly told that they were godlike and anything they wanted they go and anything they didn't want would be removed. So, you don't want to upset a king or you would be demoted at best, killed at worst, no matter how close you thought you were

to the man himself. Everyone was vying for power and trying to bend the king's ear.

- **The Essence of the Ask** – Nehemiah knew full well the danger of his request. He was asking to rebuild the capital of a conquered people. That could be seen as treason. It could be seen as the beginning of a rebellion or revolution. Depending on the king's frame of mind it could go well or terribly wrong.
- **Planned Timeframe: 4 mths to 12 years?** – We don't know what timeframe Nehemiah gave to the King, but the king seemed okay with it. We know that it's 800-900 miles away which can take up to 4mths to travel, but we find out later that Nehemiah ends up staying there 12 years. We don't know if he worked remotely and traveled back and forth or not (that would have been tough), but with God's help it worked out.
- **Application: If we're going to build God's way we need a God-Designed, personal Vision.**
  - **How to design a personal vision – It's fleshing out the answer to the question: What do I want to be?**
- **Anointed or Bust**
  - **God Blessed Nehemiah's Efforts**
    - *Ne 2:7-10 - "And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, <sup>8</sup> and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me. <sup>9</sup> Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. <sup>10</sup> But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.*
    - **Susa to Jerusalem** - 800-900 miles on a slow walk could take up to 4 months. With a small team on horseback, it was likely shorter than that.
    - **Thinking Through Protection & Provision** – It may have been tempting for Nehemiah to just stop asking for stuff when it started out well and he wouldn't want to push his luck with the king. But he also knew that getting started was only part of the challenge, safe travel to get there was a whole other problem and so was materials to build walls and gates. He's not a carpenter or a stone mason. He's not an architect or a city planner. He's a cupbearer, but he needed to think through all the parts of the plan. He needed help in multiple areas. So, he asked.
    - **The Different Anointing Makes** – instead of death he got help. Instead of a short time he got 12 years. Instead of just letters of safe passage he got armed bodyguards. And the list goes on. He is about to see more radical success than

any other person who tried to rebuild had seen. What was the difference?  
Anointing.

- **Application: Are You Anointed by the Holy Spirit?** – we need more than just what we can achieve by hard work. **If we're going to build God's way we need God's Anointing.**
- **The Bad Guys of the Story**
  - **1.) Sanballat the Samaritan** – Governor of Samaria. Samaria, during this time was a large territory above Judah/Southern Israel (still in Israel's area – and in fact used to be Northern Israel's Capital city! It was in strategic locations, so it was always involved in conflicts). Once Jewish but then not after the exile<sup>2</sup>, its people group later became known as the Samaritans, who never got along with the Jews even in Jesus' day since they were considered half-breeds (half Jewish and half non-Jewish/foreigners).
  - **2.) Tobiah the Ammonite** – Persian official with Ammonite heritage and super close (family) ties to the nobles of the Jews. Ammonites were related to the Jews in a creepy way<sup>3</sup>, and they didn't get along<sup>4</sup> due to the Ammonite people refusing to help the Jews in the wilderness wandering after being freed from Egypt and they hired a prophet to put curses on Israel (Balaam – Num 22:5-6). The Ammonites were located to the West of Israel just across the Jordan River. The Moabites were below them on the map.
  - **Anti-Semitism** – Doesn't it strike you odd that people keep wanting to wipe out the Jewish people? Haman in Esther's story. These guys here. Hitler in the 1940's. It's not just about the land (which was most of the wipe out in 722 BC and 586 BC), it's about the actual people group. Why? Why is there so much worldwide hatred, through so many generations, toward the Jewish people? It's still alive today and not just by Israel's enemies like Iran. It's right here in America still. Why?
- **Planning for the Win**
  - **Nehemiah did the inspection thoroughly**
    - *Ne 2:11-16 – “So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. <sup>12</sup> Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. <sup>13</sup> I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. <sup>14</sup> Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. <sup>15</sup> Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. <sup>16</sup> And the officials did not know where I had gone or*

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<sup>2</sup> When Israel was kicked out of their land by Assyria in 722BC, other nations and people groups backfilled the land and intermarried with the remaining Jews there (similar to the Palestinian/Jewish conflict today).

<sup>3</sup> see Lot's daughters story in Genesis 19:30-38

<sup>4</sup> Judges 3:12 – Ammonites fought Israel on more than one occasion. This is an example. Dt 23:3 records that God rejected the Ammonites and Moabites for their treatment of Israel and they were never allowed to be priests or enter the Temple.

*what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.*"

- **3 Day Reconnaissance** – Nehemiah did a 3 day trip to Jerusalem to examine everything he could about the project.
  - **Why so sneaky?** – It's one thing to do the reconnaissance at night and hidden to avoid all the enemies looking to shut you down, but Nehemiah even hid the plan from his fellow Jews who were seemingly on his team. Why? Because he didn't yet know what he was leading and likely wanted to talk it out with God before talking it out with people who would have their own opinions, biases, hesitations and fears.
    - **Application: If we're going to build God's way we need to be men and women of action and determination more than we are talkers and manipulators. Don't Talk About What You'll Become as Much as Show What You'll Become.**
  - **Why so thorough?** - I believe it's because he wanted to see the actual size and scope of the job and figure out what really needed to happen BEFORE he started hyping people on board. You can't lead as well if you don't know what you are leading them into.
    - **Application: If we're going to build God's way we need to think through the process of what we are becoming. A Half-formed Life is more Confusing Than Inspirational.**
  - **A Heart for His Nation** – Nehemiah was doing just fine. The fact that he didn't even know the state of Jerusalem demonstrates that he wasn't tied to it very much. He most likely made bank and had a cushy job with all kinds of perks and authority. So, he didn't need to take this on. So, why did he? Because what was happening wasn't good and he knew that he had a calling and a position to do something about it. That made it a mandate.
    - **Application: Passion to rebuild when you're in a rut** – Whenever I'm unmotivated or in a rut, I think of Isaac Newton's First Law of Motion: "An object at rest tends to stay at rest and an object in motion tends to stay in motion with the same speed and direction unless acted upon by another force." We need to answer the WHY, or we won't get up off the proverbial couch. Why do we want to align with God's will? Why do we want to be a part of His greater plan? Why do we want to be all that God designed us to be? Until we answer those in a way that our hearts and minds can receive, we will stay at rest.
      - **Application: How do we strategically respond in our care for America? (do we care?<sup>5</sup>)**
- **Contagious Courage**
  - **Nehemiah had great hope and faith in the Lord & got others on board**

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<sup>5</sup> "Nehemiah saw the ruined city as a sign of God's reproach and disgrace for the nation's sins. He saw it as his responsibility to help remove that disgrace..." Hughes & Laney, Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary



- Ne 2:17-20 – *“Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.”<sup>18</sup> And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work.<sup>19</sup> But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?”<sup>20</sup> Then I replied to them, “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.””*
- **Sharing the Vision**
  - **Corporate Work Requires Corporate Buy-In** – Nehemiah was doing something for his community so he needed to do it WITH his community. It’s commonly said that people support what they help build. You can’t just do something for people and ignore what they really want or need.
    - **Application:** in a similar way, **PERSONAL Work Requires Personal Buy-In. If we’re going to build God’s way we need to get our hearts AND minds on board.**
- **Inspiring the Vision** – Nehemiah knew that people need to know not just what they are being called to do but inspired to do it.
  - **A.) The Exciting Plan** – First Nehemiah need to have a plan that was worth doing.
  - **B.) An Exciting God** – Secondly Nehemiah needed people to remember that they weren’t working alone in this project, but that it was God inspired and God involved.
  - **C.) The Exciting Track Record** – Third they needed to be reminded that God had been good and generous and powerful for the people of Israel time and time again. If He did it before He can do it again.
    - **Application: If we’re going to build God’s way we need to remain Hopeful & Encouraged**
- **Stirring Up Opposition** – Next week we will learn how intense the opposition gets and what we need to do to make sure we are able to battle through to victory.
- **Ferocious Faith** – To Nehemiah, victory is a lock. Why? Because it was God’s idea to begin with and nothing is impossible for Him.
  - **Application: I Know You Can Be Victorious in Building Your Life God’s Way for the Same Reason.**

## Conclusion

- **I believe that there is more for us.** I believe that God has designed you with a potential that you can’t currently comprehend. I believe that we have been designed for victory and that the Holy Spirit is waiting for us to unleash His power in our lives.

- **We are going to tell you what to do** - In this series we are going to do something that we don't normally do, tell you what to do. You always have the freedom to talk it out with God and do what you feel led to do or just to take our advice and consider it. But we want to be clear in this series about what we need to do if we are going to utilize what God built in us.
- **"If we're going to build God's way, we want to focus on three practices as a church Family for the next seven weeks:**
  - **1) Daily Bible Reading-** A building is only as strong as its foundation, and we want our foundation to be the Word of God. We've even created a Bible reading plan you to use during this series, and I'll tell you more about that in a moment.
  - **2) A Daily Gratitude Practice-** If we are going to build God's way we need to keep our eyes on what He has given us. This isn't about mere optimism or positive thinking, this is about focusing on God and His goodness.
  - **3) Weekly Church Attendance-** If we're going to build God's way we have to gather with His people. We want to encourage you to make a point to engage with church every weekend during the series.
- **Updates** - I mentioned that we created a Bible reading plan. If you **text BUILD to (xxx) xxx-xxxx** we will text you each morning during this series with that day's readings and a gratitude prompt. We'll also have the readings and prompts available at [www.bridgeway.church/build](http://www.bridgeway.church/build)."
- **You have to want it.** It's going to require focus and effort. We can't just sit back and assume it's going to happen or wait for something to happen. With the Lord's help we are going to make something happen.
  - **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Decide that it's Worth the Effort**
- **Let's begin by standing up and getting prayed for** empowerment and anointing.