

YAM Session

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Kingdom Building: Learning from Nehemiah!

Nehemiah

(from Wikipedia)

Nehemiah or **Nechemya** (נְחֵמְיָהוּ "Comforted of/is the LORD (YHWH)", [Standard Hebrew Nəḥemya](#), [Tiberian Hebrew Nəḥemyāh](#)) was a person in the [Bible](#), believed to be the primary author of the [Book of Nehemiah](#). He was the son of [Hachaliah](#) (Neh. 1:1), and probably of the [Tribe of Judah](#). His family must have lived in [Jerusalem](#) (Neh. 2:3).

He lived in the time when [Judah](#) was a province of the [Persian Empire](#) (see also [History of ancient Israel and Judah](#)). In his youth he was appointed to the important office of royal cup-bearer at the palace of [Shushan](#). The king, [Artaxerxes I](#) (Artaxerxes Longimanus), seems to have been on terms of friendly familiarity with his attendant.

Through his brother [Hanani](#), and perhaps from other sources (Neh. 1:2; 2:3), he heard of the mournful and desolate condition of Jerusalem, and was filled with sadness of heart. For many days he fasted and mourned and prayed for the place of his fathers' sepulchres. At length the king observed his sadness of countenance and asked the reason of it. Nehemiah explained it all to the king, and obtained his permission to go up to Jerusalem and there to act as *tirshatha*, or governor of [Judea](#).

He went up in the spring of [446 BC](#) (eleven years after [Ezra](#)), with a strong escort supplied by the king, and with letters to all the [pashas](#) of the provinces through which he had to pass, as also [Asaph](#), keeper of the royal forests, directing him to assist Nehemiah.

On his arrival he began to survey the city secretly at night, and formed a plan for its restoration; a plan which he carried out with great skill and energy, so that the whole was completed in about six months.

He remained in Judea for thirteen years as governor, carrying out many reforms, despite the opposition that he encountered (Neh. 13:11). He built up the state on the old lines, "supplementing and completing the work of Ezra," and making all arrangements for the safety and good government

of the city. At the close of this important period of his public life, he returned to Persia to the service of his royal master at Shushan or [Ecbatana](#). Very soon after this the old corrupt state of things returned.

[Malachi](#) now appeared among the people with words of stern reproof and solemn warning; and Nehemiah again returned from Persia (after an absence of some two years), and was grieved to see the widespread moral degeneracy that had taken place during his absence. He set himself with vigour to rectify the flagrant abuses that had sprung up, and restored the orderly administration of public worship and the outward observance of the Law of [Moses](#).

Of his subsequent history we know nothing. Probably he remained at his post as governor till his death (about [413 BC](#)) in a good old age. The place of his death and burial is, however, unknown.

Nehemiah was the last of the governors sent from the Persian court. Judea after this was annexed to the [satrapy of Coele-Syria](#), and was governed by the [high priest](#) under the jurisdiction of the governor of Syria, and the internal government of the country became more and more a hierarchy.

It is important to note that the mission of Nehemiah is a theological creation, spun for that purpose. The historical reality indicates that his actions were the result of the Persian's desire for increased security in the Levant and enhancement of Imperial control.

The reality of the 5th century BCE was that the Egyptian revolt continued with an increasing Greek military presence. The security concerns of the Persian Empire required some strategic reforms, namely the refortification of Jerusalem and proper categorisation of people living within the Levant. Hence the rebuilding of the walls and the ban on inter-marriage.

A proper reading of the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah requires an understanding of the political and economic realities of the time.

Nehemiah 1: Vision & Calling

Nehemiah 1:3-4 “They told me that those who had survived and were back in the homeland were in great difficulty and that the foreigners who lived nearby looked down on them. They also told me that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down and that the gates have not been restored since the time they were burnt. When I heard all this, I sat down and wept.”

Nehemiah 2: Sharing the Vision - To Rebuild the Walls of Jerusalem

Nehemiah 2:18 says, "They replied at once, 'Good! Let's rebuild the wall!' So they began the good work."

Reflection: What are the broken walls in your life? Family? Church? Friends?

- Think of all the broken people..
- Degeneration of morals in your generation
- Loss of faith in God
- Life without God

We need to rebuild the spiritual walls of our church, our lives, our society!

Nehemiah 3: Implementation

Having A Plan.

Not only the church's leadership, but all of us need to know what we are doing, and why, and how it fits in with the overall goals of our church and of God's Kingdom.

We need to put people with the necessary gifts into the ministry where their gifts fit. Leaders need to know exactly what their goals are, and to whom they are accountable.

And the myriad of tasks involved in doing the work of the church need to be aimed toward some common, clearly stated goals or we'll get lost in the details of whose making coffee or fixing the leaky toilet.

Establishing the Committed: We have different roles!

Cement mixer, brick layer, transporter, encourager, food provider... etc!

Reflection: What is Your Role?

“The people had a mind to work... (and) the gaps began to be filled.” Nehemiah 4:6-7

Everyone got to work seems, So, what we have here is a huge, amazingly diverse group of people organized to work together for a common purpose. It's a picture of the church.

And so we've got a big job to do. Our vision will stretch our resources to the limits. We're just asking one thing. No matter who you are, no matter what your unique gifts or limitations may be, we all work together toward one goal, building up the body of Christ.

Nehemiah 4 -6: Handling opposition

Nehemiah encountered three types of criticism. The first type of criticism he received is the most subtle. In fact, it's what you would call unspoken criticism. The first type of criticism that Nehemiah received was **APATHY**. Nehemiah 3:5 says, "Next were the people from Tekoa, though their leaders refused to help." The people had started to rebuild the wall. Everybody pitched in, with one exception. There was a small town, about 5 miles away from Bethlehem. The leaders of that town refused to work. When you begin to share your vision, you will find that some people will respond with apathy. They'll think that they're too good to join the vision. Expect some people to be apathetic toward the vision. Don't expect everyone to be as excited as you are.

The second type of opposition that Nehemiah received was **ANGER**. Nehemiah 4:1 says, "Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuilding the wall. He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews." Has anybody here ever been the brunt of somebody's angry attack? It's very likely that if you begin to live a life of vision, somebody will get angry with you. They'll give you a piece of their mind that they really couldn't afford to lose. I've sat in meetings and been amazed at the anger that can be unleashed by somebody who doesn't buy into the vision. Some people are going to get very angry. Expect it. Don't be surprised when people get angry.

The third type of criticism that Nehemiah received was **RIDICULE**. Nehemiah 4:1-3 says:

He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews, saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers, "What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they are doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a day if they offer enough sacrifices? Look at those charred stones they are pulling out of the rubbish and using again!"

Tobiah the Ammonite, who was standing beside him, remarked, "That stone wall would collapse if even a fox walked along the top of it!"

These two pulled every stop. They questioned the character of the builders; they questioned their ability; they questioned their commitment. On top of all that, they questioned the feasibility of the project in the first place. They called the entire workforce incompetent. If critics feel it will help, they will question your character. They will call you names. They will call you nuts. Don't be surprised if you're ridiculed when you begin to pursue a God-given vision.

Reflection:

Have you encountered these obstacles in your quest for God?

Are YOU sometimes your own critic/enemy/voice of doubt?

Overcoming!

Sometimes, people will stop at nothing to shut down what God what God has called somebody will do. Their attacks can threaten the vision - even a God-given vision.

Do you see what Nehemiah was up against? He was under threat by rulers from the east (the Ammonites), the west (the Ashodites), and the south (the Arabs). He was under attack from all sides. Jerusalem would never stand a chance against their combined armies. There would be no wall.

To make it worse, the people started to express some doubt. Nehemiah 4:12 says, "The Jews who lived near the enemy came and told us again and again, 'They will come from all directions and attack us!' The people said, 'They're coming at us from all sides!' There was opposition. **Rebuilding the wall was also looking harder than they thought.** There was more rubbish than they had planned for. They were tired. The thrill of the project had worn off. The people were ready to walk off the job.

Nehemiah 4:10 "The people of Judah had a song they sang: We grow weak carrying burdens; there's so much rubble to take away. How can we build the wall today?"

Reflection: What do you do when your vision is under attack from all sides?

V. 4:14 "I saw that the people were worried, so I said to them and to their leaders and officials, 'Don't be afraid of our enemies. Remember how great and terrifying the Lord is, and fight for your fellow countrymen, your children, your wives, and your homes.'"

They got back to work and kept their weapons at hand -

Nehemiah took three steps that we can take when our vision is criticized. These are steps that you can and should take when your God-given vision comes under attack:

1. PRAY

Read with me Nehemiah 4:4-5:

Then I prayed, "Hear us, O our God, for we are being mocked. May their scoffing fall back on their own heads, and may they themselves become captives in a foreign land! Do not ignore their guilt. Do not blot out their sins, for they have provoked you to anger here in the presence of the builders."

We may tend to want to take the critics on. Fight first and pray later. But that's not what Nehemiah did. Nehemiah's first response to opposition was prayer. When the critics take you on, take the critics to God. Make prayer your first defense.

We've already seen how crucial prayer is to the entire vision process. Prayer **fuels the vision and ignites the vision.** It also preserves the vision when the vision is under attack. Criticism will drive you somewhere. It may drive you to despair. It may drive you to frustration. But you will benefit if you let criticism drive you to prayer.

Read Nehemiah's prayer again. "May their scoffing fall back on their own heads...may they themselves become captives...Do not ignore their guilt...Do not blot out their sins." Nehemiah was hot here. He was letting off steam. This prayer is so strong, so mean, that some people have struggled with this prayer. What's the lesson that we can learn? When you're criticized, be honest with God when you pray. You'd be amazed by some of the honest prayers in the Bible. Don't dress up your feelings. Admit that you're tired. Admit that you're frustrated. Tell God exactly how you feel.

It's almost like you can say, "Criticize me all you want. Talk to me any way that you please. But just wait to see how I talk to God about you!" You can be honest with God. You can pray that God would do justice against those who criticize you. You can pray that God would change your heart toward those who are getting you down.

It's important to remember that when your vision is on the verge of being snuffed out by the criticism of others, your heavenly Father is interested. It concerns him. Your Father is more than willing to become involved in the conflict. You can tell him all about it. You can be honest with him about how you're feeling.

Talking to God is often a better approach than talking to the critics.

Proverbs 26:4 says, "When arguing with fools, don't answer their foolish arguments, or you will become as foolish as they are." There are times that arguing with your critics is the worst thing that you could do. When you're criticized, don't take it out on other people. Talk it out with God.

Prayer puts criticism in its proper perspective. Prayer enables you to evaluate the criticism from God's perspective. When you pray, you begin to recapture the perspective of Paul's words in Galatians 1:10: "Obviously, I'm not trying to be a people pleaser! No, I am trying to please God. If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant." You've can't be a people-pleaser if you want to please God. You've got to make your choice.

Three truths you need to remember:

YOU CANNOT PLEASE EVERYONE. Don't even try. No matter what you do, you'll never please everyone. It's impossible.

YOU CANNOT PLEASE ANYONE ALL THE TIME. Even if you please someone most of the time, you will not please that person all of the time. Don't live for someone's approval - even if that person approves of you most of the time.

YOU CAN PLEASE GOD. God is much easier to please than people. Choose your audience. Remember who your final and most important audience is going to be. Play to an audience of one.

1 Corinthians 4:3-4 says, "It matters very little what you or anyone else thinks. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. My conscience is clear, but that isn't what matters. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide." Let prayer clarify your vision. Tell God how you feel. Submit your vision to God once again. Ask him to take action. Pray.

The second step that Nehemiah took:

2. KEEP WORKING

Right after Nehemiah's prayer, we read, "At last the wall was completed to half its original height around the entire city, for the people had worked very hard" (Nehemiah 4:6). One of the dangers of criticism is that it can immobilize you. When you get down, you tend to slow down. That's just human nature. When we're criticized, and we begin to get down, it's easy to slide into despair and to give up on the vision. What's the alternative? Keep working. Once you've prayed, get on with the work, despite the criticism. Don't let criticism stop you.

Think what would have happened if Nehemiah would have quit the work until everybody was on board. The work would never have been completed. If you wait until everybody agrees with the vision that God has given, the vision will never take place. Don't get me wrong. We're only wise when we listen to the advice of others. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans go wrong for lack of advice; many counselors bring success." As part of the vision process, it's only smart to go to others that we consider wise to get their feedback. We had better listen to those who are wise and godly. But that's different from waiting for everyone to appreciate what we're doing. Keep working on the vision, even when others don't understand.

Nehemiah didn't stop working. In fact, Nehemiah's team worked even harder after they were criticized. It was normal to work until sunset, but Nehemiah 4:21 tells us that they worked until the stars came out. The people not only worked harder, but they formulated a defensive strategy while they carried on the work:

So I placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas. I stationed the people to stand guard by families, armed with swords, spears, and bows. (Nehemiah 4:13)

But from then on, only half my men worked while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. The officers stationed themselves behind the people of Judah who were building the wall. The common laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon. All the builders had a sword belted to their side. The trumpeter stayed with me to sound the alarm. (Nehemiah 4:16-18)

When you're criticized, you may have to revise your plan. The opposition may even slow down your plan. The timing may change, but the vision will remain the same. Don't let criticism immobilize you. Keep on working.

Work towards the vision that God has given you. It may be in your marriage, or your finances, or your job. God may be calling you to make some radical changes. Your vision may cause people to misunderstand your intentions. Share the vision as well as you can, but don't stop when people criticize you. Pray, and then keep working.

One last step that Nehemiah took when criticized:

3. REMEMBER

Not only did Nehemiah keep praying and working, but he remembered. He remembered who it was that brought him to Jerusalem in the first place. He remembered God's intervention with King Artaxerxes. He remembered what could and should be in Jerusalem. Those memories gave him the courage to continue despite the threats and the opposition.

This idea of remembering is funny for us. This is foreign to our culture. But one of the keys to maintaining momentum in our vision is to remember - to remember how God has acted in the past; to remember his faithfulness; to remember all that God has done to get us to this point.

There are times that we'll get so discouraged, the only thing that will keep us going is to remember that it's a God thing. Nehemiah could have remembered a lot of things. He could have remembered when Israel was exiled to Babylon. He could have remembered when the walls were torn down in the first place. He could have remembered all the problems and obstacles that stood in the way of the walls being rebuilt for over a century. But Nehemiah chose to remember something different. Read Nehemiah 4:14 with me: "Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the leaders and the people and said to them, 'Don't be afraid of the enemy! Remember the LORD, who is great and glorious, and fight for your friends, your families, and your homes!'" Nehemiah said, "Remember the LORD."

There are going to be times that you're tempted to dwell on your past failures. There are going to be times that you're tempted to focus on your financial statement, the obstacles, your jitters, your fears. It's easy to slip into focusing on the opposition and the critics. But it's much better to do what Nehemiah did. Focus on the LORD.

If God wants you to do or be something, be assured of one thing: God has the power to make it happen. If it's a God thing, then focus on God. When the critics start, start remembering what God has called you to do. Remember his faithfulness to us.

Anyone who wants to live a life of vision needs to remember. When the critics get you down, start remembering how God has worked in your past. Focus on what only he can do.

There are some people here who are scared to death of stepping out and living a life of vision because of what other people will think. Some of you have tried, but you've been beaten down. It doesn't take long for the criticism of others to deflate us - to completely knock the stuffing out of us. Some of you are thinking of quitting. Some of you already have.

How are you going to handle criticism? What is your personal action plan for handling the criticism that will come your way? Are you going to follow Nehemiah's example? Are you going to express your feelings to God, to refuse to give up on the vision - to keep working, and to remember God's faithfulness to you in the past?

If your vision is a God thing, you dare not quit. Sure, it may seem impossible. God-sized visions often are. Your vision may not even make sense from a human perspective. Don't worry about it. Somebody has written, "When God gives you a vision or points you in a direction, the issue is not your ability or the feasibility of the project. The issue is will you follow through with what you know to do? Will you do what you can do and trust God to do what only he can do?" (Andy Stanley).

One pastor has a card on his desk with these words: "Lord, you got me into this; I'm trusting you to see me through." Whenever you run into the inevitable criticism that comes with a God-given vision,

take time to remember the Lord who is great and glorious. Focus on him. Remember the time that he first birthed this vision in your heart. Reflect on the ways that he's led you and provided for you. Reflect on the promises of Scripture. Remember the Lord who is great and glorious.

Calvin Coolidge once said, "Press on. Nothing can take the place of persistence. Talent will not. Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not. Unrewarded genius is almost a promise. Education will not. The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are the overwhelming power."

Proverbs 29:25 says, "Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but to trust the LORD means safety." There may be somebody here who know what could and should be. But you've let the opinions and attitudes and criticisms of others slow you down. You've let the vision die - in your family, in your finances, in your ministry. You've let others set the pace for your life rather than God.

If that's you, you've been sent here today so that you could hear these words: Don't quit. If God has birthed the vision in your heart, don't let a little opposition stop you. Don't settle for pleasing mortals when you could please God instead. Romans 8:31 says, "If God is for us, who can ever be against us?"

I'd like to close today by praying for you. Some of you have been stung by criticism. You may be on the verge of quitting on the vision. You may have already quit. You may be afraid to take the next step because you're afraid of how others may criticize you. You don't want to make yourself a target.

There is nothing the devil would rather do than to stall you and stop you. But that doesn't have to happen.

There's nothing more tragic than a God-given vision that's died at the hands of critics. Refuse to quit. Live up to the purpose that God has put in your heart.

Prayer:

Father, some of us have been deeply hurt by the criticism of others. Perhaps we've never told you. We didn't know that we were allowed. Today we want to be honest with you about how it feels. We want to express our pain and disappointment to you.

Father, we will never give up on what could and should be from your perspective in our life. Whatever the vision that you've given, if it's for your glory, we will refuse to stop working, no matter what the critics say. Whether it's our marriage, our finances, our ministry, a really big change you're calling us to make, we will pursue that vision even when others don't understand.

Father, thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you that you never let us down. Thank you that you loved us so much that you gave your Son for us. If you gave your Son for us, we know that you, who gave us Christ, will also give us everything else - all that we need.

Thank you that anyone can receive this new life in Jesus Christ, not because of what they have done - but because of your love and mercy. All they have to do is say, "Lord, I need that forgiveness. Thank you that Jesus died for me. Today I make him CEO of my life. I want to live for you. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Are you a kingdom builder?

- The Key to Kingdom Building is found in 3 steps:

○ YOU:

Nehemiah 1:3-4 "They told me that those who had survived and were back in the homeland were in great difficulty and that the foreigners who lived nearby looked down on them. They also told me that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down and that the gates have not been restored since the time they were burnt. When I heard all this, I sat down and wept."

- Knowing your identity in Christ
- Developing a relationship with God
- Saying No to Sin and Yes to God
- Overcoming the old self and putting on the New Man
- Learning and understanding the ways of God
- Being faithful and obedient to God's will
- Having a heart for God
- Seeking first the kingdom of God!

○ VISION:

- Visioning of God's purpose for you
- Seeing things in the eternal – not in the present (big picture!)
- Aligning your dreams and desires with that Vision
- Knowing your strengths and weaknesses and having faith that God will use you over it all
- Embracing the changes and challenges we will face when you take up that vision for your life
- Surrendering our wills and ways to God – Yielding

○ KINGDOM BUILDING

"The people had a mind to work... (and) the gaps began to be filled."
Nehemiah 4:6-7

- Doing the work of God – service
- Preparation, planning, goal-setting
- Outreach – going out of your comfort zones
- Evangelism – Telling people about the Good News
- Ministry – going out to serve, pray, heal, teach
- Going out beyond our shores. Promoting God's cause
- Equipping, mentoring, journeying with others

Leading to

- Revival (Mind, Body & Spirit)
- Greater prayer & Love for God
- Confession of sins
- Transformation of the mind
- People giving Glory to God
- ETC!!!

Nehemiah 6:15

After fifty-two days of work the entire wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul. When our enemies in the surrounding nations heard this, they realised that they had lost face, since everyone knew that the work had been done with God's help.

Nehemiah 8:6 "Ezra said, 'Praise the Lord, the great God!' All the people raised their arms in the air and answered, 'Amen!'"

KINGDOM BUILDING!

Reflection worksheet

What are the 'ruins' around me?

My life...?

Family...?

Church...?

Society...?

What needs to be rebuilt?

What is my work plan?

Name 3 strengths/characteristics that you have or developed:
(eg. Willing to listen, good in counselling, heart for God)

Name 3 weaknesses:
(eg. Lack of love, doubt, cynicism..)

Name some possible barriers or limiting situations you face: (eg. Sin, tiredness, low morale?) (These are your 'enemies')

Name 3 outcomes that could happened if you used those 3 strengths (eg. Someone will be touched, someone can praise God, I will develop a stronger relationship with God...)

(→ This is your service area!)

Do you believe God's Grace can overcome these weaknesses? Describe how He might turn one of your weaknesses around (picture a possible scenario)

GRACE for the Godly Race! It is in our sin that we see the greatest grace! It is in the greatest darkness that we can recognise light -- JESUS!

(This is your Witness / Testimony / Your own story of conversion!)

→ Learn from Nehemiah! Persevere, Pray, Stand against the arrows that come against you!

→ Declare, "Let Me build up the Wall" and begin the Good Work!

