

## AUGUST 12

### Nehemiah 3:15-5:13

Nehemiah 3:15-32

One major miracle here is how the people worked together. Who cares about moving mountains? This kind of unity makes it apparent that God is at work. This chapter is a summary of how the work was organized and where different groups worked. The next chapter will tell of the challenges the people faced as they worked.

The description of this chapter flows counter-clockwise. Nehemiah began at the sheep gate and ended at the sheep gate. If you look at the map of Jerusalem at the end of this document, you can follow this. The "City of David" was below the valley gate and the water gate. During David's early years that was all that was walled. The land above this city was lived in, but it wasn't part of the city. Solomon built the northern part of Jerusalem and walled it in when he built the temple.

Nehemiah 4

This chapter has to do with the threat from outside. Notice how engaged Nehemiah was in praying and encouraging the people. You have the sense that he was working right among them.

Vs. 1-3 This wasn't just jeering. They had some military power. It was a good thing that Nehemiah showed up with loyal Persian soldiers.

Vs. 4-5 Nehemiah appealed to the Lord for help. The opposition was also opposition to God and God would take care of it. Nehemiah could have gotten mired in political fighting, and maybe even won, but that wasn't his mission.

V. 6 The entire project took about eight weeks, so maybe this was four weeks into the building. These problems occurred when the people were well into the work and weary. Now it was about to get worse.

Vs. 7-14 This was the main threat. Ultimately, the way Nehemiah addressed the problem was through prayer.

Vs. 10-12 Word was spreading outside of Jerusalem into Judah that the people were weary. So the enemies thought this was a good time to attack, but the people in Judah got wind of this and warned Nehemiah & Co. 10 times.

V. 12 reads better in the RSV or NKJV. *When the Jews who lived by them came they said to us ten times, "From all the places where they live they will come up against us."*

Vs. 13-14 Nehemiah didn't just pray. His hope was in God to save them, and he encouraged the people by making some strategic show of force and by speaking to the people to encourage them.

Vs. 15-18 This made the work go slower, but it showed the opposition that the Jews knew of their plans to attack. Verse 18 shows that Nehemiah was right there with the people.

Vs. 19-20 This was their alarm system and warning plan.

Vs. 21-23 This summary shows that Nehemiah was right there leading and sweating with the people. They even slept in their clothes. That reminds me of going to camp when I was a kid.

I'm impressed by Nehemiah's journal of this. He was very close to the people, encouraging them, working with them, constant in prayer, working long days, sacrificing with the people. He is a great example of a disciple, who makes disciples in the harvest.

Nehemiah 5:1-13

This chapter has to do with the threat from within. Some of this will spill into tomorrow because Nehemiah continues with a description of his mercy to the people and his work to strengthen Israel.

Vs. 1-5 The situation was that the wealthy and leaders were taking advantage of the people in these hard times and during this building. If the people were working in Jerusalem non-stop for two months, it meant they were neglecting their livelihoods and farms. Instead of the wealthy and leaders opening up their barns and freely giving to these people for the good of Israel and the nation of God, they were shrewdly ruining the people. The people had to borrow money to buy food. When they couldn't pay, they were being forced to sell their children into slavery. Now the people were really losing heart.

Vs. 6-13 Nehemiah was mad. In 13:25 we'll see that he had a bit of a temper. When you look at v. 10 and then the rest of chapter 5 that we'll read tomorrow, Nehemiah and those immediately under him were sacrificing to help the people and the nation.

Vs. 6-7 I think Nehemiah gave himself some time to cool down.

According to the law, the Jews were not allowed to exact interest from one another. Worse than this was the disregard of these people for the health and unity of the nation.

The miracle is in vs. 12 and 13. The leaders obeyed and Nehemiah made them commit to a covenant. Nehemiah also added some drama to this event.

Ezra showed in 1 & 2 Chronicles that a godly leader led the people both in organizing and in worship, both socially and spiritually. Nehemiah was that godly leader and an example of a passionate disciple.

### **1 Corinthians 7:25-40**

Vs. 25-28 The distressful context of these verses helps you understand what Paul is saying. The main idea is to live with your treasure in heaven, not on earth, and to live with your full devotion on Christ and not on anything else.

V. 25 People who were engaged is the special group that is being addressed here. That is clear from the context, although the ESV says *betrothed*; it is interesting that the actual word Paul and the Spirit used was the word for "virgin." It was assumed that there would be no sex before marriage.

Vs. 29-31 Here, Paul changed the tone to address everyone in the church. Notice that for Paul, the *appointed time* was drawing close, and in v. 31, the *form of this world is passing away*. He was not referring to the coming of Christ, but to the judgment on that generation of Jews. The Roman Empire was caving in; Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, and Christians were about to be tested.

Vs. 32-35 Again, keep this in context. Paul is addressing all of the unmarried, including the engaged, saying that if they are anxious in caring for one another as married couples, they might have a hard time taking risks and following Christ during that time of distress.

Vs. 36-38 This again is addressed to the engaged and fits perfectly to the context. If the passions were strong, they should marry. I often quote v. 36 and leave out "let them marry." Then I wait for a second and look at all the wide-open eyes and then correct myself. The group is usually relieved to see that marriage, not sex, is the solution to passion. So actually, this is saying that the proper context for sexuality is marriage, right?

Vs. 39-40 In Richard Wurmbrand's book, Tortured for Christ, he tells of a Christian woman who was targeted by the Romanian police. They waited for her wedding day, crashed the wedding just as they were pronounced man and wife and arrested her. This is sort of what Paul had in

mind here. Waiting until the storm of persecution passed over was what he and the Spirit were advising.

As disciples in the harvest, all of us are asked to lay some things aside for the good of the kingdom and for the harvest. In the crisis Paul was referring to, it would have been better to wait and see what would happen. Most of us will never face such life and death situations, but the Spirit still nudges us to do without, for the sake of what is happening now. One of the first principles Jesus taught about following Him was denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily and following Him.

### **Psalm 32**

It is hard to say when this psalm was written, but it is supposed David penned this after he was confronted by Nathan for his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba.

Vs. 1-2 I wonder how Paul felt when he read this psalm after what he had been doing to Christians and then knew that he had been wrong. Paul quotes these two verses in Romans chapter 4, showing that God forgives sin by grace, not by works. I'll bet these verses helped Paul.

Vs. 3-4 This suggests that David went a long time without confessing. Actually, David "hid" his sin for over a year and only confessed when confronted.

V. 5 If this is the situation after David was confronted by Nathan, this acknowledgement was less noble than this verse implies. On the other hand, we have seen other kings who sinned, like Solomon and Asa and never acknowledged their sin regardless who confronted them.

Vs. 6-7 These are very interesting verses. The time to repent and call on God is when the heart is soft. God can always be found, but in the flood we often do not have the presence of mind. When God touches us, we need to respond.

Vs. 8-9 David is sharing his experience and advice. When it comes to repentance and humbling ourselves before God, we shouldn't be donkeys about it.

Vs. 10-11 David's hallmark was his understanding of the *steadfast love* of the Lord. The reason David could rejoice and why the *wicked* remain in their *sorrows* is simple - humility and repentance. David fell and faced great consequences, yet he still repented and humbled himself. The Lord restored him and David lived to rejoice in the Lord. We all fall, but we need to take the advice of David and the Spirit to return to the Lord, acknowledge our sin and begin honoring Him in our lives.

### **Proverbs 21:5-7**

It seems that vs. 6 and 7 are examples of trying to get what you want with haste. The two favorite modes, it seems, are *lying* and *violence*.

More and more I see that following Christ in the harvest is bearing fruit with patience and diligence. Following God means being observant of what He is doing, and following at His pace, which is seldom a quick one. This is what makes for a fruitful walk with Christ in the harvest, and I think it is what is meant by abiding in Christ.