

## JOY AND STRENGTH

Chapters 1-6 of Nehemiah describe the trials of trusting and obeying God's will, as the people struggled against all odds to complete God's project. But because of His providence, and their perseverance, they finished rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem in just 52 days. Amazing! Their enemies *"were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of God."* Are you facing some great wall in your life, at home or work or church or community?

As M.Breneman says "today's decisions determine tomorrow's history." Nehemiah lived 1850 years after Moses. He appealed to God's promises, and worked to renew God's remnant people. And 475 years after him, Christ came with a new exodus to ransom His people. So we too are part of God's everlasting covenant love. God provides. So we too can declare, *"let us arise and build"* because it is God's work.

**1- THE JOY OF PEOPLE - living out God's Word.** After years of prayer and preparation, the people rallied to trust and obey. They rebuilt the broken-down walls. But God was rebuilding and restoring His broken-down people. Great challenges had been met by God's grace. Outer opposition was addressed by courage, resolve, planning, and equipping the people with tools and weapons. But the main problem was inward opposition. This was addressed by God's written-down Word. That's how we also wage spiritual warfare. Outward threats must be met with inward truth, strengthening hearts and minds with God's purpose and provision. Because as Nehemiah declares, *"the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

Because God Himself was the main force behind the people accomplishing His task. And the outer opposition was aided by treasonous actors. Officials in Judah were working behind the scenes, trading letters with the enemy Tobiah, an opposing governor who had deep ties and connections to the people of Jerusalem, much like the "deep state" today. Nehemiah had to overcome enemies without and within.

**2- THE JOY OF FAITH - living as God's people.** In chapter 7, Nehemiah the leader takes control. He recruits trustworthy people. He puts his brother Hanani in charge, along with Hananiah, *"for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many."* He controlled access to Jerusalem, and appointed guards because *"the city was wide and large, but the people were few and no houses had been rebuilt."* Small villages were little threat to surrounding governors, but a fortified Jerusalem they had to stop.

Then like Ezra, Nehemiah also makes a public list of the people. God's covenant is with people, whom He loves everlastingly. Nehemiah's list even records the gifts they made for the project. It shows how the common people contributed more to the enterprise than did the leaders. Why is this list important today? Because it is from this covenant community that Messiah would come! Colin Smith observes that Ezra was faced with a challenge of teaching the Bible to a community of people who thought they knew the Lord, but actually knew very little about His Word. Many had spent their lives in a pagan world.

"They knew they were the people of God, but they knew very little about the God whose people they were." Perhaps you know some who know all they want to know about God, since the more they know the more they are called to live out the truth of God's word, and it conflicts with their own pursuits.

**3- THE JOY OF TRUTH - declaring God's Word.** Chapter 8 describes the people renewing covenant with God, as His truth addressed their inward opposition to doing God's will. They gathered on the square, and asked Ezra the scribe *"to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel."* How do you bring God's written Word to bear in your own life? That's how He will speak to your needs. Ezra read from Scripture *"from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand, and the ears of all were attentive to the Book of the Law."* Children today also must be part of church services, and must see adults taking God's Word seriously.

Colin Smith observes, "the people did not ask for a new word from the Lord, they asked for His written Word." God's eternal unchanging truth is applicable and true for all peoples in all places in all times, because it is the complete and all-sufficient Word of God. RC Sproul notes, "the Bible contains all we need to determine what to believe and how to live, so we need no other source of special revelation."

**4- THE JOY OF WORSHIP - depending upon God.** Ezra had been brought by God to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and to teach the God's written Word. *"Ezra opened the law and all the people stood. Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands, and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. And they read from the book, the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading."*

Notice it says *"all the people"* spoke and raised their hands and bowed their heads. Do you follow the pattern of worship presented in the Bible? Is your worship participatory, when you gather with God's people? Many people today speak only during the greeting time, but never express words to God, not in singing or prayer or the reading of God's Word. He only asks for a joyful noise! Try it! God commands His people to verbally address Him and to stand and bow and to raise their hands to heaven. The people in Ezra's and Nehemiah's day were convicted by the truth of God's Word, and their lack of obedience to His Word in their lives. What is the antidote to disobedience? Trust God and His word, and obey! □