

## GOD'S CONSTRUCTION PLAN

The people of Jerusalem, under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra and others, saw God do great and mighty things in them and through them, as they trusted and obeyed His written Word. They rebuilt the city, and saw God rebuilding their very lives. They renewed their covenant with Him, and reformed their community, and renounced their sins. We too can pledge to live according to His Word and ways!

**1- RESTORING our congregational worship.** M. Breneman says, "*Nehemiah didn't separate the secular wall-building from the sacred worship, which was all part of the community's dedication to God.*" Building the wall was also an act of obedience, stepping out in faith, an expression of their dependence upon God. And it was lived out by the priests and Levites and people purifying themselves, to rebuild gates and walls and homes. In Nehemiah chapter 12, they dedicated the wall and the work to God.

Two great processions of choirs, singers, cymbals, harps, lyres, etc, went around the city on the 9-foot wide walls. Breneman notes this was not just pageantry, but consecration, reclaiming the stones of the holy city for Israel and for God, because He had kept His promises. God's decree through King Cyrus of Persia had been fulfilled. The prophecy of Jeremiah had begun and the stage was set for its completion.

**2- RESOLVING to continue God's work.** Believers in Christ today are likewise part of God's continuing plan, as His redeemed people, grafted in and growing up as His holy kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9-10). As we worship God together, consider passages such as Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:18, Hebrews 13:15-16 which express self-sacrifice. We love God, and give ourselves and our goods to Him.

Breneman observes "the joy that God gives is genuine, and can best be experienced in fellowship with the community of God's people. We should not be ashamed to be heard when we praise God, on the contrary, we should be ashamed not to be heard." Will you resolve to be like the people of Jerusalem? Verse 43 says "*they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.*"

All they did conformed to Scripture. They were careful to appoint people over storerooms, firstfruits and tithes. "*And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah gave*" all that was needed. We too must be careful that our worship is not to please men, but God. We need to follow the patterns and principles of Scripture rather than customs of culture and wisdom of men. As Breneman says "*to find ways to unite our community and glorify God together, as a help to believers and a testimony to unbelievers.*"

**3- REMEMBERING our connections to God.** Lists in Nehemiah 10-12 respect previous generations, a record of receiving God's covenant blessings. Chapter 13 teaches vigilance. Nehemiah was governor 12 years and went to Persia to report to the king. On his return, he learned those left in charge had allowed much evil to transpire in his absence. The people succumbed to convenient compromises with pagans, abandoning their covenant pledges "*to observe all the Law and not neglect the house of God.*"

The solution? The Scriptures. "*They read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and as soon as they heard the Law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.*" Again, this was not about ethnicity or politics, but about religious truths. Rahab and Ruth are examples that any foreigner was accepted in Israel if they became a true worshiper of the one true God. Nehemiah also observed how intermarriage of Jews with pagan women had resulted in compromising the identity of the children, their thinking and expression - because they had lost access to the Scriptures. What a lesson for us today!

Nehemiah led many "do-overs" which remind us of Jesus Christ cleansing the temple! Scripture said no Ammonite or Moabite should enter the assembly of God. But Tobiah, governor of Ammon and an early adversary of Nehemiah, had actually been given rooms in the courts of the temple, ideal for his counter-influence and intrigue. Nehemiah "*was very angry, and threw out all the household furniture of Tobiah, and gave orders to cleanse the chambers*" and restore the rooms for godly temple purposes.

**4- RENEWING God's construction of our lives.** Nehemiah learned that tithes had not been given to the Levites, so he appointed reliable men as treasurers. D. Kidner notes the people were no longer out to bribe God with gifts, but were robbing God by defaulting on tithes (Malachi 3). "*When the spiritual life of leaders diminishes, because of sin or carelessness, God's provision for His work also decreases.*"

As a scrappy leader, Nehemiah "*refused to let holiness become negotiable, nor allow custom to hallow anything. Laxity on the part of leaders leads to spiritual carelessness in the whole country*" says Kidner. Not only did the people not want to tithe, they wanted to do business on the Sabbath. Nehemiah ordered the doors shut and prevented traders from entering by putting Levites in charge. Breneman says we should follow Jesus' example of not being concerned about how not to desecrate the Sabbath, but rather how to sanctify the Lord's Day. All our time, talents, treasures come from God and are for His purposes!

Nehemiah is known for building the walls, but ends his report with emphasis on reforming and renewing the worship of the covenant community. He says four times, "*remember me, O my God, for good.*" You too can be a person of prayer, pursuing holiness, committing to God all you do for Him (Hebrews 6:10), trusting, obeying His written-down Word as your authority, living out His steadfast faithful love. Philippians 1:6 says "*I am sure of this, that God who began a good work in you will bring it to completion!*" □