

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF  
**NEHEMIAH**

*10 Day Devotional*



**foundations**  
daily devotional

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**DAY 1****READ: Nehemiah 1**

The book of Nehemiah spans 12 years and is the sequel to the book of Ezra, which documented the return of the Babylonian exiles to Jerusalem. Ezra was sent to Jerusalem by Artaxerxes I to ensure that the people were living according to the Law of Moses. Nehemiah comes to the city 13 years after Ezra's arrival. Nehemiah's strong and godly leadership is a focus of the book, which tells an exciting story and shows that following God requires both prayer *and* action.

Nehemiah was the cupbearer to king Artaxerxes I of Persia. The cupbearer was the official in charge of serving the king's wine. Though it sounds amateur, it was a high-ranking position. It was not uncommon for adversaries to attempt to poison the king, thus the cupbearer had to be a man of complete confidence and loyalty, fully trusted by the king.

At the outset of the book, Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, brings news about the returned exiles living in Jerusalem. It seems that the people are in trouble, shamed because the walls of Jerusalem are in shambles. The walls were an important part of a city's stability, offering protection; broken walls left a city weak and vulnerable to enemy invasion. Nehemiah is clearly distraught over this. The ruined walls reveal that the people have broken their commitment to the Lord. Nehemiah knew well God's promise of prosperity for the Jews if they kept to their covenant; these broken walls were proof that the people had abandoned their side of the covenant. So what is Nehemiah's response? He launches immediately into a heartfelt prayer, acknowledging God's character and repenting personally and corporately for the sins of the nation. We see right away that Nehemiah is a man who knows the Lord. He knows God as *God* had presented Himself to His people, and he has learned to take God at His word. He trusts in God's steadfast love, and he expects his prayer to be heard, and to make a difference in the heavenlies.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Is your attitude towards prayer the same as Nehemiah's? Do you pray boldly and earnestly, expecting God to hear, and expecting your prayer to make a difference? If you lack faith and boldness, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you why this is so.
2. Nehemiah knew the Lord. He was able to display all his emotions before God and speak to God openly. As Christians, we can have a personal relationship with God – this is something no other religion can claim. Take some time today to get personal with God. Sit with Him. Pour out your heart to Him like Nehemiah did. Tell Him the things you are struggling with. Tell Him what you love about Him. Invite Him to tell you what He loves about you. Sometimes our devotional times can seem dry or boring, but we must push through this and remember that our God is *real* and *personal*.
3. Nehemiah declared God's character saying, "*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*" (v 5). As you spend this personal time with the Lord, think about His character – the characteristics He claims to have in His Word. Thank Him for these things and declare them out loud as Nehemiah did. Meditate on what it means for your life that God truly is these things!

**DAY 2**

 **READ:** Nehemiah 2:1-8

These verses give us a greater glimpse into Nehemiah’s character. Nehemiah is a relatively unknown biblical character compared to men like Joseph, Joshua and David, etc., but his resolve and commitment to the Lord is as solid as any of these spiritual giants. He is a man of incredible boldness – boldness that comes from a resolute trust in the Lord. For four months, Nehemiah silently bears the weight of his grief. But the time has come for him to make a bold request of the king. The story doesn’t tell us when or how God explicitly put it on Nehemiah’s heart to go to Jerusalem, but this passage is clear that Nehemiah firmly feels that God is calling him on a mission to rebuild the city walls. It is because of this that he can step out in boldness and make a request that could easily be taken as a disloyalty. We see again how prayerful of a man Nehemiah is – while he is conversing with the king he is appealing to God in heaven. And God gives him favour with Artaxerxes! The king readily allows Nehemiah to leave his position and go to Jerusalem. This answer to prayer encourages Nehemiah to make his next request – that of resources for the building project. Again, the king responds in his favour, showing (just as in the book of Ezra) that God can work through anyone – even pagan leaders! – to accomplish His purposes!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask the Lord how He wants to encourage you personally through this portion of Nehemiah’s story.
2. Have you made a resolve to follow the Lord *no matter what*? As Christians, we must come to a point where we draw a line in the sand and choose that there will be no turning back. If not, we will remain immature and be tossed around by every trial and wind of teaching (see Eph 4:14). The path of following Christ is not easy – His path was extremely hard. Are you willing to follow Him *wherever He leads you*? Are you committed to walk in His ways even when those around you are not? Are you willing to stand up for His truth? Think about these questions. Think about the day when you will stand before the Lord – what do you hope He will say to you? Ask Him to help you walk closely to Him for the rest of your days.
3. What is something you feel God has called you to do? Perhaps He has asked you to pour into a certain relationship, to forgive someone, to invite someone into your home, to tithe more, etc. Ask God for boldness to pursue this mission. Ask Him for favour where you need it. Thank Him for His character and trust that He can accomplish His will for you!

**DAY 3**

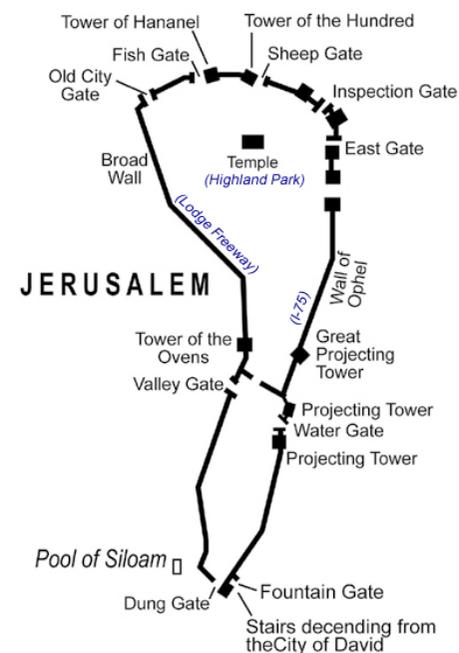
 **READ:** Nehemiah 2:9 – 3:32

On his journey, Nehemiah stops to show the king’s letters of support to the governors of the land, Sanballat (likely the governor of Samaria) and Tobiah (an official). These men are not happy with Nehemiah’s mission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Perhaps they see this third wave of exiles and their plans to rebuild their city walls as a threat to their own security. But nothing can stop Nehemiah and he continues on to Jerusalem.

Before telling anyone of his plans, Nehemiah settles in for a few days and then sets out under the cover of darkness to inspect the city walls and gates. He finds Hanani’s words true – the walls are broken and the gates burned. He knows that the destruction is a direct result of the people’s disobedience to Yahweh, and he is planning on more than just a

building project – he is under the command of the Lord to bring the people back into right relationship with their God through the rebuilding of these walls and the rendering of their hearts. Finally he is ready to announce his purpose for coming to Jerusalem: he urges the Jews to rise up and rebuild the walls of their city, and they respond with enthusiastic commitment. And just as Zerubbabel and Joshua said to their adversaries in Ezra 4, Nehemiah proclaims that this is a project for God’s chosen people alone, and that the God of heaven will be with them.

Chapter 3 describes how the work was divvied up and who repaired what. It seems that crews were divided mainly by family and situated close to their homes. The map gives an idea of the walls of Jerusalem that Nehemiah rebuilt. Due to extensive damage of the old wall and the instability of the community, the city was not as large as it was before the exile, but the people worked with unity and commitment all the same.



 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Nehemiah is a true leader, neither impulsive nor indecisive. He takes time to think and observe before rallying the people. No doubt, he was praying and listening to God every step of the way. Do you take time to think before you speak? Do you pray before you act? Do you think about what a project requires before launching into it? These things are all important if we are to be people of integrity. If we don’t think before we speak, pray before we act or plan before we jump, we risk hurting people, going back on our word and starting things we don’t finish.
  - a. Ask God to show you where you are lacking integrity. Have you gone back on your commitment? Have you hurt someone with your words? Tell God you are sorry and ask for His forgiveness. What active step must you take today to walk out your day with integrity?
  - b. Are you modeling integrity to your children/family members? Do they see you as a person of integrity? Ask the Lord to work in your life so that you will become someone who is known as a person of integrity.
2. The people responded positively to Nehemiah’s call to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This kind of unity is so important for us as the church – the body of Christ. We need everyone – young and old – to take up their materials and build the church.
  - a. If you are not serving in the church, what is stopping you? The church needs you and the particular gifts God has given you – and you have gifts, even if you think you don’t! Ask God how He wants to use you in the church to build up the body.
  - b. If you are serving in the church, ask God to give you a word, thought or picture about how you are building up the body through your service. Thank Him for the opportunity to serve. Think about a way that you can bless and encourage those you serve with and for.

**DAY 4**
 **READ:** Nehemiah 4

Nehemiah 4 describes the intense opposition that the builders faced as they began their work on the walls. Sanballat and his accomplices begin with mockery, trying to discourage the builders. When that doesn't work, they come together to plot how they will thwart the building plans. They plan to catch the builders unaware and kill them. But Nehemiah and the workers do not lose heart. We see that they have a firm trust in the Lord; they know that He has commissioned them to do what they are doing, and because of this, they forge on ahead. We are shown another of Nehemiah's bold prayers in verses 4-5 when he prays for God's judgment on his enemies. Yahweh is the God of all who serve Him; Nehemiah knew this. He embraced Yahweh as *his* God, and this allowed Him to pray boldly, knowing that His God would fight for Him in the same way that He fought for the Israelite forefathers.

We see Nehemiah make prudent decisions as the leader of the builders, placing guards where necessary and dividing the workers into groups of builders and defenders, urging them to trust the Lord and fight for their families. We're given an incredible picture of determination in the final verses: tireless labourers with bricks in one hand and weapons in the other.

This chapter provides us with many principles for when we are faced with opposition. First, when we are doing what God has called us to, we can expect opposition from our enemies and from well-meaning people around us; we ourselves may even be tempted to give up (v 2, 8, 12). Given this, we **MUST pray** in the face of opposition, just as Nehemiah did; this will strengthen and encourage us, helping us to see things through God's eyes and rely on His abilities (v 4-5, 9). Third, we must be on guard and continue on; be aware of opposition and keep going in what we've been called to (v 6, 9, 15). Fourth, we must be prepared to fight while we work; obedience is not necessarily easy, and things don't always get easier after we've won the first battle – we must be prepared to battle the enemy as we continue God's work (v 16-23). Finally, we must trust that God is sovereign, that He is with us and will fight for us (v 14, 20). It is not always easy to follow the Lord, but He will always provide us with what we need to carry out what He has called us to.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

- Where are you feeling opposition, either individually in your life, or corporately in the church? Go through the five principles discussed above, and for each one listen in prayer about how it applies to your situation.
- Nehemiah 4:14 says *And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."* Nehemiah spurred the workers on by reminding them of their families.
  - We need to fight for unity in our families. Do you fight for your marriage when things get tough? Do you fight for your children when parenting is difficult? Listen in prayer for any strategies God has for how He wants you to fight for your family.

**DAY 5**
 **READ:** Nehemiah 5

Nehemiah is one of those books that show us the reality of life and of sinful people interacting in the world. It reminds us that not everything is smooth sailing for those who choose to walk in obedience to the Lord. The reward is promised in the next life, but this life will have trouble. Nehemiah is wholeheartedly obeying the Lord, and the people have exuberantly joined in with the building project, but there are still some big issues in the community. Nehemiah 5 reveals one such issue.

It seems there is a famine in the land, and some of the people are being terribly extorted by their kinsmen. Many of the people are struggling to make ends meet due to famine and also to the number of men working on the walls – there is a shortage of food and people have had to mortgage their properties and sell their children as temporary slaves while they get back on their feet. To make matters worse, it is their own kinsmen who are causing this ruin. Wealthier Jewish landowners are oppressing the poorer Jews, exacting interest on those in poverty, which was forbidden in Mosaic Law (see Dt 23:19-10). Nehemiah confronts these wealthy families, demanding them to relent and give back what they have taken unlawfully. Verse 9 reveals the problem behind the problem: the people lack a fear of the Lord. In their greed and pride they have exalted themselves above God, and it is time for this to stop.

Chapter 5 gives us more insight into what Nehemiah was like as a leader. He was a man of diligence, generosity and righteousness. He goes into detail about such things in verses 14-19. As governor of the land, Nehemiah was due to receive taxes from the people for his own benefit, but he did not enforce this. However, he still allowed many men at his table – a cost that came at his own expense. Neither did he lord his position over others; rather he worked hard alongside his servants. He was a man of self-sacrifice and in verse 15 he tells the reader why: because he feared the Lord. Nehemiah understood that, as God's servant, he was accountable to God for all that was entrusted to him – even the perks of his job. And again, we read a bold prayer in the final verse: *"Remember me for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people."* Nehemiah has no trouble asking God for reward because He *knows God*, he knows that God actually likes to reward His people for their obedience.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

- Do you live as though all you have – *all* you have – belongs to the Lord? Even your free time? Even your house? Even your income tax refund? Colossians 3:5 says, *"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."* It's not often that we lump greed in with those kinds of things, and yet God does, and calls it idolatry – having other gods before Him.
  - Ask God to point out any greed or envy that is in your heart. Confess this as idolatry and ask Him to root it out of your heart.
  - Can you identify a category that is a weakness for greed in your life (clothing, food, house, vehicles, tools, etc.)? Ask God to change your heart, to take away your need for these things. Ask Him for a strategy you can use to battle against greed in this area.
- Nehemiah mentions the fear of the Lord twice in this chapter. A lack of it is the reason why the nobles have succumbed to their greed, and a presence of it is the reason why Nehemiah is so generous. We need the fear of the Lord if we are to follow God

rightly. We need to be grounded in the truth of who God is – a God of steadfast love and mercy *and* of holiness and righteousness. This understanding helps us to feel the weight of sin and recognize the need for repentance which results in a deep love for our God who graciously forgives.

- a. Where might the fear of the Lord be lacking in your life? Ask for a greater understanding of this concept. Ask for a deeper reverence for God and His holiness. Ask for an acute awareness of sin and love for righteousness in your life.
- b. Now also pray for increased fear of the Lord in the Canadian church. She will not turn back to the Lord in repentance without it. Pray that our country would recognize her need for God. Pray that the church would rise up as the pure bride of Christ, that she would have a desire for holiness. Ask for a revelation of God's love and holiness to be poured out on the church.

## DAY 6

 **READ:** Nehemiah 6:1 – 7:4

Chapter six reveals that Nehemiah is also a man of incredible discernment. Where others might derail by giving into temptation or walking into a trap, Nehemiah keeps His eyes on the Lord and persists in what he was called to. The story continues in chapter 6 with more plotting by Sanballat, Tobiah and a new adversary, Gesham. This time they try to get to Nehemiah by cover of peace, claiming they want nothing more than a meeting with him. After four attempts and no response from Nehemiah, their true colours are revealed and they get hostile, sending him a letter of false accusation. Nehemiah is not the least worried by their allegations and comes back quickly with a response and a prayer – *“But now, O God, strengthen my hands.”* We see him depending on God as a true leader should. His strength is not his own; it is the power of God in Him. Nehemiah surely was not without fear or weakness, but he submitted these things to the power of God in his life and he was able to lead the people through challenging times.

Sanballat and Tobiah make a sixth attempt to bring down Nehemiah and his building project, and this one is the sneakiest. They hire a prophet to urge Nehemiah to take refuge from them in the temple. Nehemiah recognizes this for the ploy that it is: he knows that to hide out in the temple when God had clearly instructed him to build would be a display of doubt and unbelief, and would tarnish the name of Yahweh, and so he refuses and keeps working. Yet again, we overhear Nehemiah's bold prayer asking the Lord to judge his enemies.

One further struggle is mentioned in the final three verses – some of the people in Judah are supporters of Tobiah, and thus they were likely against Nehemiah. Even from his own people he receives pushback, yet he continues to put all his trust in the Lord. The chapter closes with the report that the walls have been finished, and in only 52 days! This is seen by all – including the surrounding nations – as the work of the God of the Jews. So despite all the sacrifice and struggle, God is glorified. Nehemiah immediately sets up gatekeepers, singers and Levites to guard the walls of the city. It seems like an interesting job for worship officials, but it shows again that the key focus is the establishment of proper Yahweh worship – these were God's people in God's city in the land God had promised them; they needed to protect it.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Nehemiah showed incredible discernment where many people would have fallen prey to the enemy. He was so certain of God's will for him in this matter, that even

a prophet's "word from the Lord" could not sway him. From what you have seen in Nehemiah thus far, what about his character enabled him to forge on ahead so boldly, so often?

2. This chapter shows us what God can do despite hardship. He wants to use all things – even our struggles – for His glory. Those watching the Jews rebuild the walls knew that they were experiencing heavy opposition. This opposition was no doubt a great burden to the builders and to Nehemiah, and yet, *because* of the opposition, those watching knew that God was behind the project. Ask God how He wants to be glorified in your weakness and hardship today. Will you let Him be glorified?
3. In what area do you feel the enemy is often attacking you (ex. offense, addiction, gossip, lust, etc.)? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment, to give you an alert mind so that you will recognize the enemy and his plans. Pray what Nehemiah prayed, "But now, O God, strengthen my hands!" Ask for God's strength to resist the enemy and forge ahead. Read 1 Peter 5:8-11 and take heart!

## DAY 7

 **READ:** Nehemiah 7:5 – 8:18

Chapter 7 continues with Nehemiah finding a list of all the returned exiles from Zerubbabel's time, almost identical to the list in Ezra chapter 2. Genealogies were important so that one could prove he was actually a descendant of Abraham and part of God's people.

In chapter 8, we meet Ezra, who had come from Persia to Jerusalem a number of years earlier. Two great leaders – Ezra and Nehemiah – lead the people in covenant renewal. The scene described in this chapter is really incredible – a reverent time as the people respond to the Law of Moses. The phrase "as one man" in verse 1 depicts the unity of the people as they come together in the safety of the restored City of David. The scene is movie-like: The people gathered together – man, woman and child – sitting and waiting in anticipation; Ezra appears and steps up onto a wooden platform above the crowd; he opens the book of the Law, and as he does so, the people rise; Ezra blesses the Lord and the people respond in heartfelt worship; Ezra begins to read and continues from morning to midday while the people listen with attentive ears, hungry for the word of the Lord; all the while, a group of knowledgeable men move throughout the crowd helping the people to understand what they are hearing – this part was extremely important: worship was central to the covenant relationship between the people and Yahweh, and worship came primarily through *obedience* to God's law. A biblical principle is highlighted here – as followers of the Lord, being a hearer of the Word is not enough, we must be *doers* of the Word.

Upon hearing the law, many of the people begin to weep. Obviously, as they understood the law, their eyes were opened to their own shortcomings. Yet Nehemiah and Ezra urge them to rejoice on this day; their sorrow over sin was right, but the purpose of this day was renewed covenant – getting back up again! – and it was to be a time of rejoicing. This shows us something about God – He takes joy in our returning to Him; He rejoices when we want to follow Him, even though we are weak and imperfect. He is a merciful and happy God!

The assembly reads Yahweh's commandment to celebrate the feast of booths (see Lev 23:33-44). This was a festival to commemorate how the Israelites lived in temporary dwellings in the wilderness while they waited entrance into the Promised Land. The people celebrate it joyfully, as it had not been celebrated since the time of Joshua!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Solomon wrote that there is a time for everything. There is a time for grieving over our sinfulness, but there is also a time to humbly return to the Lord with joy, knowing that He is faithful and forgiving. Committing ourselves to God should not be a chore! It should be a time of gladness for us, because He is surely glad when we do so.
  - a. Check your heart: what is your attitude towards obedience? Is it one of happy holiness or crabby compliance?
  - b. Ask God to show you His heart towards your obedience. Ask Him for the joy to obey Him. Read Hebrews 12:1-3. Jesus had joyful obedience. Ask God to give you the endurance to walk in Christ's footsteps.
2. Take a few moments to imagine the scene described in Nehemiah 8:1-8. What would it be like to be part of the assembly? Why do you think the people were hungry to hear the Law? With the Bible at our fingertips, we sometimes lose a taste for it, but it is vital for our survival! It often happens that when we stop *acting* on what we read – stop being *doers* of the Word – our Bible reading and relationship with the Lord seem stale. Are you a doer of the Word? Do you listen to the Holy Spirit throughout the day? Do you submit your will to His? Do you leave your devotional times with an active mission for your day? Ask God to reveal how He wants you to *act* on what you've read today.
3. Take some time to renew your commitments to the Lord. Identify some of the commitments you have made (ex. to follow Him all the days of your life; to remain faithful to your spouse; to serve in a particular area; etc.) and tell Him that you are devoted to obeying Him in this thing. Take notice if there are commitments you are struggling to walk out and ask Him why you feel such a burden. Pray for the strength to give yourself fully to God in each of these areas.

**DAY 8****READ:** Nehemiah 9 & 10

Nehemiah 9 describes a day of humble confession. The people spend a quarter of the day reading the law – receiving conviction – and another quarter in confession *and worship*. Confession and worship should go hand-in-hand, though we often separate them. We feel that they must be separate – that we must leave space after our confession until we are “worthy enough” to participate in worship. But that is pride speaking. Worship is the most appropriate thing to do after we have repented of our sin – in it we acknowledge and show gratitude to the only One who can forgive us and remove the guilt of our sin!

The remainder of the chapter documents a heartfelt prayer of repentance as the people acknowledge their sin before the Lord. They remember, in detail, the faithfulness of Yahweh and the unfaithfulness of their forefathers. We see how God's covenant began with one man, whom God chose because he took a step of faith and walked in obedience. We remember the affliction Abraham's descendants experienced in Egypt and the mighty deliverance of the Lord. All of Israel's major events are recalled and their national rebellion is highlighted. We see the blessings of God's word, presence, and Spirit given to the people and ultimately rejected by them. And verse 36 describes them as they are on this day: “Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves.” God's people have gone full circle – He gave them the land and now they are slaves in the very land that they hold a right to. It is not coincidence; it is the sovereignty of God whose words of blessing and punishment

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

are always fulfilled. Yet there is so much hope in this passage as the people cling to God's promise to take them back when they turn to Him. What a patient God we serve!

And so the people make a covenant with the Lord, showing that they wholeheartedly agree to the terms of the covenant. There is a specific emphasis in chapter 10 on the people's duty to care for the temple. The temple was the Lord's house, and its neglect reflected the people's neglect for Yahweh Himself. The assembly agrees to give the proper tithes and vow explicitly that they will not neglect the house of God. These are not just nice words – the people are re-entering into a covenant with Yahweh; they will now be held to what they have promised.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Study the prayer in chapter 9 and, in your journal:
  - a. Write down all that is declared about God's character and nature, both what is spoken outright and that which is implied.
  - b. Write down all the ways that God showed mercy and faithfulness to His people in the past.
2. Take time to think back on your own life:
  - a. Write down specific aspects of God's character and nature that you have experienced.
  - b. Write down specific ways that God has shown you mercy and faithfulness throughout your journey.
  - c. Praise and thank Him for your testimony!
3. God still calls His people to tithe and take care of His house. The church is the *body* of Christ. This applies both to the universal church (all Christians worldwide) and local churches (congregations). How we treat and care about the body speaks to how we care about God. Many people are afraid to submit their finances to God – that is one area where many of us compartmentalize as “mine” not God's. But God is the Giver of all we have and He asks us to use what He has given us for His kingdom. Ask God to speak to you about your giving. Is he pleased? Is there something He wants you to change? Trust Him that He is your sovereign Provider.

**DAY 9****READ:** Nehemiah 11-12

Chapter 11 address the need to repopulate Jerusalem. Most of the people lived in outer towns and villages; now that the city was secure and the temple in service, the city needed to be filled. It seems, though, that people weren't lining up to get in. Moving meant picking up homes and businesses, it meant stricter obedience to God's Word as the temple was in close proximity, it meant possible opposition from adversaries. Some voluntarily moved, and Nehemiah calls them blessed. As for the rest, lots are cast and 1 in 10 is chosen to relocate. The rest of the chapter gives a list of names. This goes to show that walking out commitment is not always as easy as it seems when the commitment is made. God may call us to something during a worship service or a devotional time – it may be powerful and emotional. But after the call comes the journey. Emotions won't always stay high, and sacrifice will be required. But there is reward for walking the path God brings us on!

Chapter 12 gives a list of names of priests and Levites from the time of Zerubbabel until Nehemiah's time. Again, this is not just a random list of names. The purpose here is to show that the priestly line has continued uninterrupted; it has been sustained during a rather difficult time of rebuilding and opposition.

And then the walls of the city are dedicated with much joy and music! There are two choirs designated to go out, each along with half of the leaders, Ezra with one group and Nehemiah with the other. In dedication, they walk the walls and meet up at the temple for the remaining ceremony. Again, it is a time of jubilation and worship for the whole assembly. There is singing and sacrifice for the whole family – they make such a joyful noise that they are heard from far away!

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What sacrifices have you made to follow Jesus? Thank God for calling you to these sacrifices! You are sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and that will bring reward in heaven!
2. Spend some time thinking about dedication as you have seen it in the book of Nehemiah. The people were so joyful to commit their city and themselves to God. What does this concept mean for us today? What does it mean for you? I.e. Have you dedicated your children to the Lord? Do you take this seriously? Have you dedicated your home to the Lord? Is your marriage dedicated to God? – What should these things mean for us?

## DAY 10

### READ: Nehemiah 13

This final chapter in the book of Nehemiah describes some further issues and reforms that took place during his time. When Nehemiah had asked Artaxerxes permission to go to Jerusalem, the king had released him readily, asking only for Nehemiah to give a return date. We don't know when Nehemiah pledged to return, but chapter 13 tells of at least one time that he went back to Persia. The priest Eliashib takes advantage of Nehemiah's absence and gives Tobiah – Nehemiah's adversary – a room in the temple. This was a room purposed for storing tithes. After the people had just committed themselves to taking care of the Lord's house and tithing diligently, this is quite an act of disrespect. Nehemiah is livid to find the temple desecrated in this way and he ensures that the room is cleansed and put to use for its true purpose.

But that isn't the only problem in the temple. It seems those who had so eagerly promised to tithe had neglected their commitment, and the temple workers were left without any provisions. The priests and Levites had no choice but to return to their homes in the countryside. With skilled leadership, Nehemiah sets things back in order.

A third issue had risen: people – both Jews and foreigners – were selling their wares on the Sabbath, directly breaking God's commandment to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. We see Nehemiah rise up in righteous anger, rebuking the people of Judah and boldly threatening the outsiders.

Fourthly, the people had started to intermarry again. This is quite sad, seeing that not too many years earlier, the people had confessed and ended intermarriage under the leadership of Ezra (see Ezra 9 & 10). This is a disgrace to the name of the Lord! The people's children are seen to not even know the language of Judah, but are well-versed in the language of their pagan parents. And verse 28 reveals that intermarriage has reached

even the priestly families. Nehemiah gets very angry here, even beating some who have violated the law! Intermarriage was an act of adultery against Yahweh and quickly lead the people into idolatry, as proven classically by the once wise King Solomon.

Four times in this chapter we hear Nehemiah pray, asking God to remember his deeds. Nehemiah was a man of prayer, but his prayers were always accompanied by action. He was a man of righteousness, a man zealous for God's ways. He was bold and sure-footed. He did not second-guess what God commanded him, even in the face of opposition and challenges. He knew God; he lived with a sincere fear of the Lord and thus he was willing to spend his life on whatever God called him to do. Let us allow his dedication and faithful service to spur us on as we seek to follow the Lord with joyful hearts.

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Are you passionate for God's ways? Are you zealous for righteousness? Ask God to give you the boldness of Nehemiah – the boldness that enables you to do what is right and stand for what is right even when those around you are sinking into the culture. In listening prayer, ask God how He wants you to stand for Him today.
2. Take the qualities you have come to admire in Nehemiah and pray these things for yourself. Ask God to make you a person of great faith. How will you walk differently today because of what you have learned?
3. What do you want God to remember you for? Ask Him. Be one who prays boldly for favour, just as Nehemiah did!

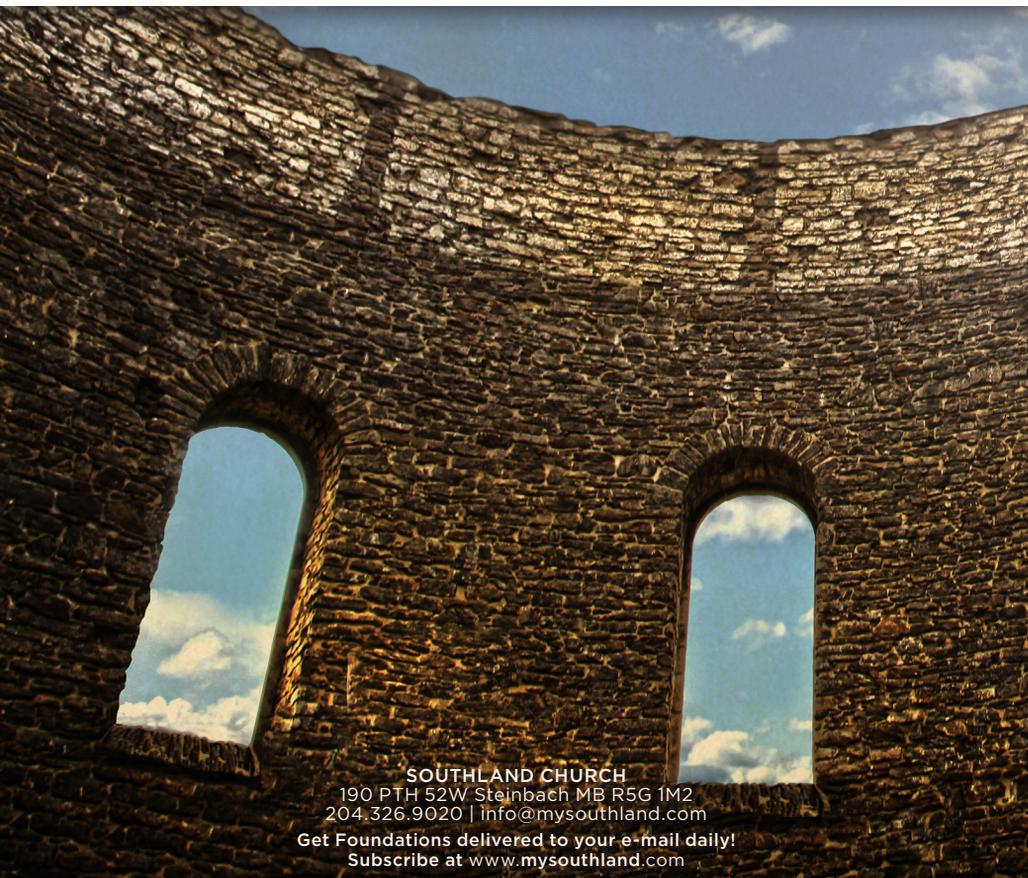


## The Book of Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah focuses on the bold and godly leadership of the title character. A true servant of the Lord, Nehemiah is a man of prayer and action, leading the Jewish exiles through challenging times in the fragile land of Judah. His leadership – his approach to challenges and his stand for righteousness – holds incredible insight for Christians today.

### **Nehemiah 1:11** (ESV)

*“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...”*



**SOUTHLAND CHURCH**

190 PTH 52W Steinbach MB R5G 1M2  
204.326.9020 | [info@mysouthland.com](mailto:info@mysouthland.com)

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