



Nehemiah

Big Idea:

Rebuilding the wall.

THE STORY SO FAR

In the beginning, God created the earth and a beautiful garden where humans could live in a close relationship with Him. However, Adam and Eve sinned, leading to their expulsion from the garden. Despite this, God made a promise to Adam, providing a way to cover their sin.

Following this, God called a man named Abram to leave his home and follow Him to a new land. Abram obeyed, and his name was changed to Abraham. Throughout the generations, Abraham's descendants received reassurances of a promise to bless the entire earth through them.

During a time of famine, God saved Abraham's descendants by leading them to Egypt, where they flourished. Many years later, the people were delivered from Egypt through mighty demonstrations of God's power. They then wandered in the desert until the next generation was prepared to enter the land that God had promised to this family.

Before they entered the land, God presented the people with a choice: if they followed Him and taught their children to do the same, He would continue to bless them. However, if they turned away from Him and neglected to teach their children, He promised discipline by allowing their enemies to conquer them.

After spending many years in exile, the people began to return. Originally the book of Ezra and Nehemiah were a unified work. The book of Nehemiah takes place during this time of restoration and rebuilding of the city walls.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Read: Nehemiah 1

In those days if a city did not have a strong wall, then there was no security from invaders. If a city became prosperous and had no defenses, then eventually they would be raided.

Questions:

What are your observations about Nehemiah's reaction to the news about Jerusalem?

How would you categorize Nehemiah's reactions?

Read: Nehemiah 2:1-10

Nehemiah goes on to see for himself the state of the wall before letting anyone know what his plan is to help rebuild the city.

Question:

Why do you think Nehemiah waits to tell everyone his plan?

Chapter 3 describes how people and groups start to repair and rebuild sections of the walls and gates. In chapter 4 we see some of the leaders from the surrounding areas are opposing the rebuilding of the walls.

Read: Nehemiah 4:1-18

Question:

Why do you think there is opposition to the rebuilding efforts?

What kinds of different reactions do you see from the people involved?

Chapter 5 Nehemiah sees some of the difficulty of the people and tries to address the internal and economic difficulties the people were

having as they rebuilt the city. The wealthy were charging high interest to their own people on loans. This was clearly against their own laws.

Read: Nehemiah 5:6-13

Question:

What stands out about how Nehemiah responds to this situation?

Read: Nehemiah 6:1-9

The outsiders opposing the work on the walls have been unsuccessful in intimidating the people. Now they switch tactics and try to distract the leaders.

Question:

Again, what stands out about how Nehemiah responds?

The work of refortifying the city is complete and now the leadership wants to reestablish the traditions of the people.

Read: Nehemiah 8:1-3

They learn how God had called the community to live and start by taking some steps of obedience in the rest of chapter 8.

Question:

Was there something your family did when you were growing up that you did not understand or seemed strange, but now are able to look back and see was wise?

Chapter 9 has an incredible accounting of the history of the history of Israel up to this point. It acknowledges the amazing works of God and how the people time after time stubbornly turned their backs on God which caused them hardships.

In chapter 10 the people gather and swear to uphold the laws of God that they have been relearning. To care for the house of God, to give to God first, follow the sabbath, and not to allow foreign influence that will lead them away from

God. Which leads into a list of leaders in chapter 11.

Chapter 12 closes with the dedication of the wall. After the community has put in so much work to see the wall quickly restored, they pray, sing and celebrate what God has done.

The final chapter of the book turns a corner. Nehemiah has to go back to Babylon for his official duties and when he returns, he finds that the house of God has been neglected, the people have not been keeping the sabbath set apart and allowing outside influences to lead them away from the worship of God.

Read: Nehemiah 13:10-14 & 30-31

This is an odd conclusion to the book. Nehemiah has helped to restore the city, overcome problems, and given honor to God during the entire process. With what seems like success Nehemiah sees his people repeating the same mistakes that previous generations made that lead them into slavery.

It would be nice to have a bow on the end of the story. Instead, what we see is someone who is faithful to God, a consistent leader that seeks to honor God in his actions have some success, some setbacks, and ultimately an unclear end to his book. Because in the modern west we are so results orientated we often miss the point in stories like this that do not have a nice bow at the end. God is valuing faithfulness to progress His own story and people. Nehemiah is not a hero because of his accomplishments but because of his faithfulness.