

## The Half Hour That Changes the World

### Nehemiah

### Book 16

#### Basic Questions behind the book:

*What does this book teach us about being persistent and trusting in God's promises?  
If strategic leadership is required in businesses, how much more is Spirit-filled, theologically informed,  
strategic leadership essential for the leading of God's people the Church?*

#### Summary of book:

Nehemiah is the last of the Old Testament historical books. The events in Nehemiah take place 12 years after those in Ezra. The story begins in Babylon, where Nehemiah serves the King as his wine-bearer. He is heavy of heart and is given permission to return to Jerusalem. He works to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The builders find a lot of opposition, but Nehemiah resists the opposition and keeps on going, with single-mindedness, persistence and faith. His persistence is visible through prayer and through action. Nehemiah is a good example of the man of action and the man of prayer combined. For him there is no line between the secular and the spiritual. Once the wall is finished, a census is taken, the law was publicly read by Ezra, the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated, a fast of repentance was held and a covenant to the Law was signed. A lot happens on and below the surface in this little but significant Old Testament book!

#### Vital Statistics:

Purpose: It is a record of the history of the third return to Jerusalem after captivity of the Jewish people. It is a retelling of how the walls were rebuilt and how people's faith was renewed.

Author: As much of the book is written in the first person, it suggests that Nehemiah is the author. Ezra could have been his editor.

Recipients: The Jewish people who have returned from the Babylonian exile.

Dating: It is suggested that it is around 445 - 432 BC.

Setting: It is the third return to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel led the first return to Jerusalem in 538 BC and Ezra led the second return in 458 BC.

#### Other Reflections:

The book shows the fulfilment of the prophecies of Zechariah and Daniel concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. Nehemiah's life is an example of leadership and organisation. He gives up a comfortable and wealthy position to return to the land of his ancestors and to work hard to rebuild it. Nehemiah and Ezra were two very different people, and yet God used them both to lead the nation.

Sometimes in Church Councils and Committee meetings to ask questions about how we do things and how we might do them better is seen by some to be too worldly. We are told that we should pray instead and trust the Lord. I think there is a polarity on the same line here between God's grace and activity on the one hand, and using all our human resources and faculties on the other. Nehemiah demonstrates that it is possible to marry the two extremes. We must use all the resources we have at hand and we must trust the Lord.

*"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realised that this work had been done with the help of our God" (6:15-16)*

*"Remember the instruction you gave to your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'"(1:8-9)*

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