**NEHEMIAH**

**Rebuilding**

**What you need to REMEMBER:**

The Bible describes how God is working through human history to restore His creation to its original, pristine condition. He first made His intention known to Eve by promising that one of her descendants would destroy the source of evil. He later promised Abraham that this descendant would be born to the nation that would be formed from his family lineage.

The overarching story of much of the Older Testament is the description of how God formed the nation of Israel from Abraham’s heirs and provided them with a strong religious and cultural identity, as well as, a robust legal and governmental system. It also recounts how much trouble God went through to give them a national homeland in order to create the place for the Promised Child of Redemption to be born, live and die.

The counterpoint to the whole story is the rebellious nature of the Chosen People. In spite of the miraculous ways in which God had accomplished the work of establishing the nation and providing them with prosperity and purpose, they habitually turned away from Him.

Their waywardness inevitably resulted in harsh consequences. The epitome of this happened after the nation experienced its golden era under Kings Saul, David and Solomon. The nation became divided into Northern and Southern Kingdoms. And because of their blatant sin, God allowed the Assyrian Empire to conquer Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C. With their subsequent removal from the land, the 10 northern tribes ended up in the dustbin of history. Then in 606 B.C., the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin were conquered and removed by the Babylonians.

Over time, the Persian Empire came into power with a different policy toward the people they dominated. Unlike the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Persians allowed conquered peoples to remain in their ancestral homelands. This policy released the Southern Kingdom of Judah from their Babylonian captivity, allowing them to begin to return to the land in 536 B.C.

The work of restoring their civilization was long and arduous. In the Book of Ezra we witnessed how the work started with the spiritual renewal of the people and the rebuilding of the Temple as the centerpiece of the nation’s worship.

**What you need to KNOW:**

The story continues in the Book of Nehemiah. Ezra was a priest who began his ministry of spiritually restoring the people about 80 years after the return of the first group of Jews. Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem 13 years into Ezra’s ministry. Nehemiah was a governmental leader who was empowered by the king of Persia to refortify the city by rebuilding its Wall.

However, the enemies of the Jews went to great effort to stymie the project. But Nehemiah was a skilled leader who navigated and overcame many threats and obstacles; finishing the project in just 52 days – an astonishingly short period of time! In fact, Nehemiah noted that the fast work neutralized their enemies, he said, ***“When our enemies heard about (how quickly the work was completed), all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God” (6:16).***

As you read Nehemiah be on the lookout for lessons in effective leadership. In this, particularly noteworthy is the way Nehemiah prayerfully accepted responsibility and the need to engage in effective action, always tempered with a spirit of cooperation and compassion.

Also, spend some time in Chapters 7-8 to notice the similarities of ancient worship services with those of the modern church.

And, don’t miss how the final chapters of the book in which the people rededicated themselves to obey the Lord and how that commitment was followed by admonitions to financially support the work of the Temple, obey the Sabbath and refrain from marrying those of other faiths.

**GET GOING!**

**Continue your personal Walk Through the Bible by reading, or listening to, Nehemiah.**