

Nehemiah: Rebuilding Ruins

By David Feddes

The Book of Nehemiah speaks of rebuilding ruins—how a great leader raised up by God helped the people of Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of their devastated city. Before we look at the book of Nehemiah and some of the major themes in it that still apply to us today, I want to look first with you at a timeline leading up to the book of Nehemiah. I'm going to start about 300 years earlier, because for these 300 years, God's people are facing a constant barrage of difficulties.

Timeline

722 BC Northern kingdom conquered by Assyria; ten tribes exiled or mingled with others

605 BC Daniel and others taken to Babylon

586 BC Babylon destroys Jerusalem and temple

539 BC Belshazzar's feast; Persia takes Babylon

538 BC Persian King Cyrus calls Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple

536 BC Work begins on building a new temple

530-520 BC Temple work halted by opposition

520-516 BC Temple rebuilding completed

478 BC Esther made queen of Persian Empire

474 BC Haman's plot fails and he is hanged

458 BC Priest Ezra arrives in Jerusalem

445 BC Governor Nehemiah arrives in August; walls completed in October

In 722 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrian Empire. The ten tribes were exiled, taken elsewhere, or mingled in with some of the people of Judah. These are sometimes called the ten lost tribes. It was a huge, devastating blow for such a large chunk of the nation of Israel, now a divided kingdom, to be taken away.

In 605 BC, Daniel and others were taken to Babylon after an invasion of Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar.

In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's generals came back and Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, burned its temple, and carried off all kinds of things. So in 722, there's this devastating deportation of the

ten tribes; in 586, the destruction of Jerusalem and the wipeout of Judah and the taking away of the people of Judah into exile.

In 539, there was Belshazzar's feast, where the handwriting appeared on the wall—"you have been weighed in balance and found wanting" (Daniel 5:27). That night, the Persian Empire invaded the city of Babylon. The Babylonian Empire was overthrown, and Persia took over.

In 538, the Persian King Cyrus decreed that the Jews should return to Jerusalem and begin to rebuild the temple. This was a key moment. There had been a devastating time for the Jewish people when their temple, the holy place of God, had been destroyed. So this opportunity to return and rebuild was tremendous. Work began on building a new temple in 536 BC.

But then that work was halted for ten years, from 530 to 520 BC, by opposition. There was a decade of delay before they could resume the building of the temple.

From 520 to 516 BC (always remember you're counting down on these numbers before the time of Christ), the rebuilding of the temple was completed.

In 478, Esther was made queen of the Persian Empire.

In 474 Haman, the evil assistant to the king, plotted to wipe out the Jewish nation. But his plot failed, and Haman was hanged.

Now we come closer to the period we're talking about. The priest Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in 458 BC. That's recounted in the book of Ezra. He began to teach God's law and lead more and more returning exiles to the city and build up its population more and more.

In 445, Governor Nehemiah arrived in August to lead the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They built like crazy for a couple of months. The initial version of the walls, at least, was completed in October.

Now let's set this timeline and the events of Nehemiah in more of their spiritual context, and of what the people of God were going through.

Would the Jews survive as God's covenant nation?

- Many in Jerusalem had previously been living as exiles in other lands.
- Regional rivals wanted Jerusalem to remain weak and Jews to stay scattered.
- Spiritual challenges: discouragement and apathy, intermarriage with non-believers, political and economic worries

A basic question haunted this era. Would the Jews survive as God's covenant nation? God had made promises to Abraham that through his offspring all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God had made promises to David that someone from his line would reign forever. God had the temple built under Solomon, and yet the temple had been destroyed. The descendants of Abraham had been scattered. David's line was no longer sitting on a throne of any kind.

Now many in Jerusalem, in this particular time of Nehemiah, had previously been living as exiles in other lands. For them to come back to their own land after so long away was hard. Some of them had no memory of that land. They had grown up in other lands, and now they were coming back again.

When they got back, there were regional rivals who wanted Jerusalem to stay weak and who wanted the Jews to stay scattered, because in some cases those rivals had taken over Jewish land, or they had benefited from the weakness of Jerusalem and had been able to build up their own power centers.

And with all this came spiritual challenges for God's people. There was discouragement at the circumstances even though they had been allowed to return to their land. There was spiritual apathy, where some of them were building their own houses and trying to make a little income again, but they had no thoughts of rebuilding God's house, no thoughts of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They were apathetic toward their God and toward the building up of God's people. Some of them were intermarrying with non-believers from other nations, and the very preservation of God's people as a distinct nation was threatened by this intermarriage with worshipers of other gods. Meanwhile, such hard political and economic challenges caused worries about their difficult situation.

In that era, when the question was, would they survive as a nation and as God's people, we read in God's Word of how God is faithful, and how he moved his people through some of their key leaders to do great things, resulting in the rebirth of his nation.

Rebirth of a nation

- **Repopulating the land:** exiles returned and reproduced and claimed ancestral lands
- **Restoring worship:** rebuilding the temple (led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua, urged on by Haggai and Zechariah)
- **Reviving commitment:** teaching God's law so people know and live the Word (Ezra)
- **Rebuilding ruins:** making God's city strong and renewing national morale (Nehemiah)

One thing that occurred was **repopulating the land**. This began after the decree of Cyrus. Later, led by Ezra, many exiles returned to Judah and Jerusalem. They reproduced, had children, and reclaimed ancestral lands. Jewish people began to repopulate the land that God had given them centuries earlier.

Restoring worship was a key development. The temple was rebuilt. This rebuilding of the temple was led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and by two prophets with books in the Old Testament, Haggai and Zechariah. They encouraged people not to just think about their own houses, but urged them to rebuild a house for God—a place to worship and to restore the worship of the nation.

Reviving commitment was very important. There was renewed devotion to God's Word and to relearning God's Word. Ezra and those associated with him were teaching God's law, so that the people would know and live the Word.

Finally, **rebuilding ruins** meant that Jerusalem would no longer be in shambles. The city would no longer be defenseless but would again have walls, making the city of God strong again. As that city stood strong again and its walls stood in their grandeur again, it would renew national morale. God used Nehemiah to do that.

God in his grace sent prophets and leaders and teachers to help in the rebirth of his chosen nation. In the history of God's salvation and redemption, he was carrying on his promise to Abraham. In the words of Jesus, "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). God kept the Jews going, he kept his nation going, leading up to the salvation that he would provide in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So with that setting of the timeline and the situation in salvation history and God's work in the rebirth of the nation, let's take a closer look at Nehemiah himself and at the book of Nehemiah and some of the key hallmarks in it that still teach us today.

Nehemiah: Rebuilding Ruins

1. Recognizing the need
2. A heart to do something
3. Combine prayer with action
4. Ready to battle and to build
5. Servant leaders, willing workers
6. Repent of sin; rejoice in the Lord

One thing about Nehemiah, and about any great leader, is recognizing a serious need. Then he must have a heart to do something about that need. In wanting to do something about it, he is praying to God, seeking help and guidance from God, and acting upon what God shows him. Nehemiah combines prayer with action. God's people and God's leaders need to be ready to battle against opposition and against those who try to stop the Lord's work, but they must also keep building. We find in Nehemiah the importance of having servant leaders, leaders who are willing to sacrifice, who are willing to work right along with everybody else, and we see the importance of the people they lead, working willingly, working hard to carry out a great work together. We also see the need to repent of sin in spiritual renewal, and then rejoice in the Lord and in his salvation and all that he's done.

1. Recognizing the need

First of all, recognizing the need. Nehemiah is living in the city of Susa, which is where the emperor or king of the Persians is living. Nehemiah is his assistant, the cupbearer to the king, who tastes his food and tests his wine to make sure it hasn't been poisoned. Obviously, you have to be a pretty trusted person to be the king's food and drink taster. But Nehemiah is living far, far away from the land of Judah.

Hanani comes and brings a report. Nehemiah writes, "Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, 'The remnant there in the province

who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.” (Nehemiah 1:2-3).

This eats at Nehemiah. This troubles and deeply bothers him, even though he's far away. Perhaps he himself had never seen Jerusalem. He was still one of God's people whose heart was with Jerusalem, with the city of God.

2. A heart to do something

Once Nehemiah had that sense of a great need, he didn't just lament and feel bad. He started to develop a heart to do something about it. His sadness was evident in his face. By the way, it was forbidden to act sad or be downcast in the presence of the king. You could get yourself killed for that. But Nehemiah couldn't conceal it any longer. The king noticed Nehemiah was down and said, “This can be nothing but sadness of heart. What's the matter?” (Nehemiah 2:2)

Nehemiah pleads with him: “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it” (Nehemiah 2:5). Nehemiah has this heart to do something, and he asks the king for permission to leave the service of the king in that area and travel far away to rebuild the ancient city.

This is a map from the ESV Study Bible, which gives you a quick picture of the Persian Empire at that time.



The empire extends even to places that aren't on this map. You can see Susa towards the right side of the map and the path Nehemiah followed in his long journey. This wasn't by car or airplane—this was on foot and on horse. It was a long trip from Susa all the way to Jerusalem.

Once he got there, he acted intelligently. The first thing he did was to scout out the dream. He didn't tell everybody else about his dream to rebuild the city: "I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 2:12).

If you're a leader, don't go off half-cocked. Sometimes you have a heart to do something, but you have to check it out more thoroughly, maybe with just a few people. Make sure you know the situation before you start advertising, before you start saying, "Here's the vision God has given me." First, scout out the dream God has given you.

Then comes a time to share the dream. Nehemiah gathers others and says: "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace... I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me" (Nehemiah 2:17–18). After scouting the dream, he shares the dream.

As leaders, that's how to do it. First, make sure that it's really from God, that you've got an action plan, and that you know how to pursue it. Then comes that moment when you share it and try to get others involved.

3. Combine prayer with action

Nehemiah combined prayer with action. This runs through the whole book of Nehemiah, from its very beginning to the very end. Right after he finds out the broken condition of Jerusalem and the discouraged feelings of its people, he says: "For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (Nehemiah 1:4). He goes to God in prayer. He doesn't know what else to do at that point.

Before he says anything about what God should do to help him, he first acknowledges that Jerusalem's problems had come upon it because of its sin and God's judgment. He prays a prayer of humility and repentance, and he wants to renew his own walk with God.

Then he tells God his petition: "Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man" (Nehemiah 1:11).

Four months later, after keeping on with his prayers to God, Nehemiah gets his opportunity when the king notices he is sad. When the king asks about it, Nehemiah says: "Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king" (Nehemiah 2:4–5).

What a wonderful model that is for all believers and all leaders. There comes a moment when we must speak to someone whom we need to succeed. But before we speak to others, we speak to God and ask that God will favor what we're about to say and that God will work in their heart.

Later, when Nehemiah is in Jerusalem, he tells people, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding" (Nehemiah 2:20). They're about to take action, but they're going to take that action with a consciousness that God is hearing their prayers and answering them.

This is all in line with Psalm 127, “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1). You could inscribe that verse over the book of Nehemiah—unless the Lord builds, its builders labor in vain. That's why the whole book of Nehemiah is so full of prayer.

There's a motto, "Pray like all depends on God. Act like all depends on you." That was Nehemiah's approach. He combined prayer and action.

When they're facing opposition, Nehemiah says: “We prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat” (Nehemiah 4:9). I love that sentence. That sentence is worth a whole sermon. “We prayed to our God and we posted a guard.” You don't neglect prayer in order to immediately take action. But when you are praying, you don't neglect the action either. You do both—you pray to God and then you post that guard.

Nehemiah told the people, “Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes” (Nehemiah 4:14). Focus on God. Remember how great he is, how awesome he is. But don't just sit around with awesome thoughts of God. Remember him, and then fight. Pray like it depends on God, then fight like it depends on you.

Later Nehemiah writes, “We were aware of their plot ... God had frustrated it. (Nehemiah 4:15). The actions of Nehemiah and his people had worked, and the plot had failed. But Nehemiah doesn't brag, “We were really smart and we figured it out and we took care of it.” He says, “GOD had frustrated their plot” (Nehemiah 4:15).

Later came more opposition. “They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.’ But I prayed, ‘Now strengthen my hands’” (Nehemiah 6:9). He prays that prayer, his hands gain strength, and his hands go right back to work.

Nehemiah has constant conversation with God. “Hear us, O God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads” (Nehemiah 4:4). Sometimes you have to pray against your enemies and pray in the midst of your discouragement.

Again and again, Nehemiah prays a very short prayer: “Remember me” (Nehemiah 5:19; 13:14, 22, 31). "Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love. (Nehemiah 13:22)

Not only does Nehemiah often say, "Remember me." He also prays, "Remember the evildoers” (Nehemiah 6:14, 13:29) He doesn't give particular advice to God on what he should do with those evildoers. He just says, “God, please pay attention to those evildoers and do what you know needs to be done with them.”

As you read Nehemiah, you find the story starts in prayer, is filled with prayer, and what's the last word of Nehemiah in that book? “Remember me with favor, O my God” (Nehemiah 13:31). It ends in prayer.

And those prayers throughout the book are answered. Here's just one quote: "When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work" (Nehemiah 4:15). God answers prayer. God drives back the enemy. God inspires and empowers the people. God answers prayer. That's why you keep praying. And that's why you keep working. If you're to be a leader among God's people, you must be a man of prayer or a woman of prayer. You must encourage the people to pray. But you must also be a person of action, a person who is blown along by the wind and the power of the Holy Spirit and then works in the might and the power of God.

4. Ready to battle and to build

Nehemiah and the people under his command were ready to battle and to build. They weren't just warriors. They weren't just builders. They were both. "Half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows, and armor. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other. And each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked" (Nehemiah 4:16-18). They had "guards by night and workmen by day" (Nehemiah 4:22).

That is a tremendous model for God's people still today. When you do the Lord's work, you'd better have a sword in one hand, because Satan and his enemies and those who work for him are going to be coming after you. But don't just hold a sword. Hold your tools for building, your materials for strengthening and building up the walls.

Christians are an army of battlers. The New Testament makes that very clear: "Fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3). "Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). "Contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 1:3). Christians need to be an army of battlers, to have a fighting spirit when it comes to dealing with the enemies of God.

But Christians can't just be battlers. If Nehemiah and his people had only been battlers, Jerusalem would not have a wall. Nothing would have gotten built. They would have just stood there all the time, ready to fight with somebody. That's not what they did. They were ready to battle, but they also kept on building.

Christians are a crew of builders: "Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). "Encourage one another daily" (Hebrews 3:13). "Try to excel in gifts that build up the church" (1 Corinthians 14:12). The apostle Paul speaks of "the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down" (2 Corinthians 13:10).

The stronger the building gets, the better it is able to resist attacks. Building aids battling. The stronger the walls get, the harder it is for enemies to succeed against you. If you build well, if you're building each other up, this actually strengthens and aids your battling. You can fight much more effectively if you've got powerful ramparts and big walls, things you've built up that make you strong. If you're only fighting all the time, you'll be exhausted. You've got to be a builder, an encourager.

Those of us who are leaders need to keep that balance between being ready to defend against attack and to fight when we need to, but not to become full-time fighters or arguers or quarrelers. We must be those who build up, encourage, and strengthen the people of God.

5. Servant leaders, willing workers

Another thing we learn from Nehemiah is the importance of having leaders who are willing to serve and get their fingernails dirty, to get in there and work and sacrifice themselves. At the same time, it's vital to have workers who are willing to follow those leaders and to cooperate and work together.

Nehemiah offers a lot of comments about different people who worked on the wall. Here are just a few. “The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors” (Nehemiah 3:5). Their nobles thought they were too important and too good to do manual labor to build up the walls of the city. Fortunately, most of the people didn’t feel that way, and most of the men of Tekoa did their part on the wall and pulled it off without the nobles.

“Shallum repaired the next section with the help of his daughters” (Nehemiah 3:12). So here's a guy whose daughters are working harder than some of the guys who consider themselves big shots. Isn't that still the story today? Some think they're really important and hot stuff but aren't willing to do the grunt work for the church. Meanwhile, the lowly daughters and people who aren't thought highly of are really carrying on the Lord's work and are willing workers. Nehemiah was not one of those nobles who thought he was too good to work, and he was the highest ranking noble of them all.

“I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, ‘The work is extensive and spread out, and we're widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us’” (Nehemiah 4:19-20). They're not just willing to fight; they are coordinated. They're working together. Their leader is ready to sound the trumpet when they need to pull together.

Nehemiah showed by his own example, as well as by his words, that other leaders should be servant leaders: “I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised” (Nehemiah 5:12). He's holding them accountable. They're leaders, and they'd better take action. A Christian leader still today has to be someone who holds others accountable and urges them on—and is himself willing to do the work too.

Nehemiah compares himself to some of the earlier governors: “But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people... Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God, I did not act like that. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall” (Nehemiah 5:15-16).

The people had other leaders, yet the walls still remained in ruins and the people remained downcast. That's what lousy leadership can do to you. You are so desperately needy when there's nobody ready to stand up and be different. When the people in charge care only about

their own luxury and ease, they are what Jesus later called hirelings (John 10:12-13). There are some in the church who are hirelings, who are in it for the money or for their own status. They are not in it to build up God's city. They are not in it to encourage and mobilize God's people.

God wants servant leaders and willing workers.

6. Repent of sin; rejoice in the Lord

Both repentance and rejoicing are present in the book of Nehemiah. Sometimes God's people can swing too far one way or the other. One extreme is always to be smiling 24 hours a day and saying, "It's so fun to be a Christian, and I'm so happy, and all is well, and I think positive, and isn't it all just great?" The other extreme is to be constantly moaning, "Woe is me. I'm a sinner. God punishes sin. The world is bad. It's falling apart." In the book of Nehemiah, you get a healthy dose of both repenting over what has gone wrong, but also rejoicing in the grace of God and in what God does.

"All the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law... The Levites read from the Book of the Law, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read" (Nehemiah 8:3, 8). It's a wonderful thing that God's law is being read and that people are understanding it, but it also has a powerful impact in driving people to repent, because they realize how far short they fall of keeping God's law. "All the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law" (Nehemiah 8:9).

Nehemiah didn't want them to get stuck in weeping. He said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). There's a time to repent and grieve about sin, but then there is a time to hear the word of grace from God and to enjoy his goodness. They received his joy as their strength.

And as they rejoiced in what God was accomplishing, there came a time when the work was done, when the people were really committed, and it was time to dedicate the wall and to celebrate God's goodness to them. "At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving" (Nehemiah 12:27). They get the choirs together: "I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks" (Nehemiah 12:31). "On that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away" (Nehemiah 12:43).

Nehemiah started out with a city in ruins, charred rubble, and no walls around it. Now there are walls around the city of God again. A psalm says, "Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation" (Psalm 48:12-13). Zion is this beautiful city. It's once again starting to take that kind of shape. You can imagine the joy of the people.

As we read that joy in Nehemiah, we reflect again on what the New Testament tells us. We have a city whose builder and architect is God (Hebrews 11:10). And Jesus is preparing a place for us

(John 14:2–3). We are here in this world to be building the city of God for him. We too should rejoice whenever ruins and rubble begin to be rebuilt, when something good emerges from the ashes, and when we have the delight of being someone whom God uses to bring it about.

As you read Nehemiah, there are many wonderful themes and things to learn from. Remember the history of salvation, that God is keeping his promise to Abraham, keeping the promises to David, carrying on and moving toward the coming of the Messiah, and the establishing of God's kingship among all the peoples of the earth. As you read that, you can also apply many particular principles.

Nehemiah: Rebuilding Ruins

1. Recognizing the need
2. A heart to do something
3. Combine prayer with action
4. Ready to battle and to build
5. Servant leaders, willing workers
6. Repent of sin; rejoice in the Lord

Those are great principles. Recognizing a need. Having it on your heart to do something about it. Praying to God and taking action as God leads you and empowers you. Being ready to battle opposition and deal with tough things, but also to keep building people up and building in a positive way, not just being negative. Being a servant leader, or a willing worker, or quite a bit of both. Being ready to repent of all the disgrace and sin that's infected your life and the life of the congregation or the group of people you're associated with. At the same time, bringing the good news of God's grace, taking that news to heart, and rejoicing in the Lord as you see what he's accomplishing, what he's building through you and in his kingdom.

As we think on Nehemiah, we think about what the New Testament says about the Lord's building. Jesus says: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Just as Nehemiah, a leader of God's people, determined to build those walls no matter what the enemy was throwing at him, so Jesus says, "I'm going to build my church, and hell itself and all the demons are not going to prevail against my church." What a tremendous encouragement that is!

The apostle Paul says of Jesus: "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2:21–22).

Nehemiah is a tremendous and inspiring book about God's faithfulness and grace, about dedication to God. It's a tremendous book about living out what God reveals to you and building it in a positive way. Take that book to heart, and you will become a stronger and better leader in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then you too will be able to rejoice at the way that God is building his kingdom through you.

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Rebirth of a nation

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- **Rebuilding ruins:** making God's city strong and renewing national morale (Nehemiah)

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1. Recognizing the need

Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." (Nehemiah 1:2-3)

2. A heart to do something

- "This can be nothing but sadness of heart." (2:2)
- "Send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it." (2:5)

2. A heart to do something

- **Scouting the dream:** I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. (2:12)
- **Sharing the dream:** "Come, let us rebuild." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. (2:17-18)

3. Combine prayer with action

- I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. (1:4)

- Renew relationship with God before saying, “Grant your servant success.” (1:11)
- Four months later: I prayed to the God of heaven and answered the king. (2:4)
- The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding. (2:20)
- Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. (Psalm 127:1)

Pray like all depends on God. Act like all depends on you.

- We prayed to our God and posted a guard. (4:9)
- Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight. (4:14)
- We were aware of their plot ... God had frustrated it. (4:15)
- They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.” But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.” (6:9)

Constant conversation with God

- Hear us, O God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. (4:4)
- Remember me (5:19; 13:14,22, 31) Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love. (13:22)
- Remember evildoers. (6:14, 13:29)
- Story starts, is filled with, and ends in prayer. “Remember me with favor, O my God.” (13:31)

Answered prayer

When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work. (4:15)

4. Ready to battle and to build

- Half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows, and armor... Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. (4:16-18)
- guards by night and workmen by day (4:22)

Christians are an army of battlers

- Fight the good fight of the faith. (1 Tim 6:12)
- Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:3)
- Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (Eph 6:11)
- Contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. (Jude 1:3)

Christians are a crew of builders

- Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thess 5:11)
- Encourage one another daily. (Heb 3:13)
- Try to excel in gifts that build up the church. (1 Cor. 14:12)
- The authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down. (2 Cor. 13:10)

The stronger the building gets, the better it is able to resist attacks. Building aids battling.

5. Servant leaders, willing workers

- The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under the supervisors. (3:5)
- Shallum repaired the next section with the help of his daughters. (3:12)
- I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!” (4:19-20)
- I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. (5:12)
- The earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people... Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. (5:15-16).

6. Repent of sin; rejoice in the Lord

- All the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law...The Levites read from the Book of the Law, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. (8:3,8).
- All the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. (8:9-10).

Dedication and Celebration

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out ... to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving... I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks... And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. (12:27,31,43)

Nehemiah: Rebuilding Ruins

1. Recognizing the need
2. A heart to do something
3. Combine prayer with action
4. Ready to battle and to build
5. Servant leaders, willing workers
6. Repent of sin; rejoice in the Lord

The Lord's building

- Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)
- In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Ephesians 2:20-21)