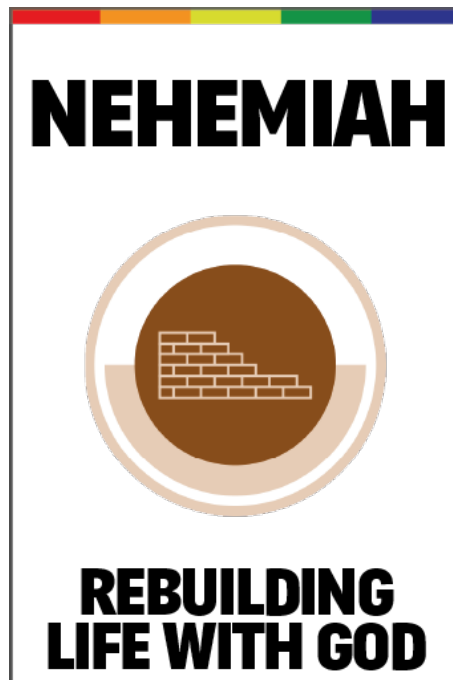





# BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



**NEHEMIAH**



**REBUILDING  
LIFE WITH GOD**

The graphic for the book of Nehemiah is contained within a rectangular frame with a thin black border. At the top of the frame is a horizontal bar with segments of red, orange, yellow, green, and blue. Below this bar, the word "NEHEMIAH" is written in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font. In the center of the frame is a circular graphic consisting of two concentric circles. The inner circle is a dark brown color and contains a white outline of a brick wall. The outer ring is a light tan color. Below the circular graphic, the words "REBUILDING LIFE WITH GOD" are written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, with "REBUILDING" on the top line and "LIFE WITH GOD" on the bottom line.

# Friday 18 December: Nehemiah 1-3

A prophetic sign Liz Nixon writes:

## What did I like about today's reading?

I like Nehemiah! He is a brave man, one prepared to show his heart to the King. Most servants were expected to be invisible, or, deliriously happy to be in the presence of the King. Displaying sadness was a risk, confirmed by Nehemiah's fear when he explains why. He is bold in asking for letters to guarantee his safety, and wood from the king's forest. I imagine he is emboldened by previous kings doing similar with Zerubbabel and Ezra. If you don't ask, you don't get!

Nehemiah is a prayerful man, praying bold prayers of petition, confession, and praise. We see his instinct is to pray before he addresses the king with his request. I would love to be more like this! Something I pray over both my children is that prayer would be as easy and natural as breathing, and we see that this is true for Nehemiah.

He is an organised man with a plan, surveying the building work before assigning a variety of men to complete different sections of the wall. Nehemiah wasn't a priest – he simply served in secular government but used his position to bring back order and stability to Jewish life, as well as a renewed focus on God.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God is at work in the heart of Nehemiah, which Nehemiah acknowledges in chapter 2 and God graciously makes things go well for him with the king, as his requests are granted.

It's interesting that God wants the walls of Jerusalem to be rebuilt – it doesn't seem that important given that the altar and temple have already been completed. But a lack of walls around a city meant one of two things – either a poor place without the blessing of God or a defeated place without the protection of God. Rebuilding the walls is an outward sign: God is reminding His people that He wants to bless them and keep them safe within His place. The rebuilt walls remove the shame and disgrace of exile that has been upon them.

The rebuilding of the walls is no less important than the rebuilding of the temple. Both together represent God's presence with and His protection surrounding His people, which is important for Israel, given they have been exiled away from Him by an enemy superpower. It's a powerful reminder to them that God has brought them back from exile and He will once more be their Defender and Protector.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

I don't often feel the need to pray for protection – we are so blessed to live in the city and country that we do where violence is rare. But I want to experience all of whom God is, so I want to also know Him as my Defender and Protector.

## Who am I going to share this with?

My friends Michelle and Christian.

# Monday 21 December: Nehemiah 4-7

Opposition and fear Liz Nixon writes:

## What did I like about today's reading?

Nehemiah prays and acts - a great model that my husband Greg has always particularly loved about Nehemiah. We are to pray first, to seek God and ask for His help. Then we are called to do! Surely seeking Him first means the doing is more likely to be in line with His heart and His wisdom for that situation?!

Nehemiah reminds them that they are to treat the poor well, and in doing so, set an example to the Gentiles. He understands the bigger story of God – that Israel was chosen to be a light to the Gentiles, to show them the way to the Father. But with wealthier Israelites taking advantage of the poor, the Gentiles reproached them for their attitude. God was at work within the hearts of His people because they responded positively to Nehemiah's rebuke in this injustice and they promised to repay money taken unfairly.

Nehemiah does not take what he is entitled to as Governor of Judah, following a promotion. He could tax the people to provide for himself, but he doesn't. Instead, he shared what he did have (which seemed to be plenty given the daily food amounts described!) with more than 150 people who ate with him every day. God kindly blessed Nehemiah richly, and Nehemiah blessed others with what he'd been given.

Near completion, there is increased opposition, particularly with plots to harm Nehemiah. But Nehemiah refuses to be afraid, understanding that the enemy is trying to frighten them so that the work will stop. It's ironic that when the wall is completed, we see it is the enemy that is afraid, and they lose their self-confidence. They know that God is with Israel, seen in the impossible 52 days taken to rebuild the wall!

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

When God is at work in the hearts of His men and women, anything is possible!

It typically takes 6 – 12 months to build a house and so it should not be possible to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days. Apparently, the walls of Jerusalem would have been more than 4000 metres around, 12 meters high and 2-3 metres thick. But this was God's initiative and He saw it through to completion. And in record time! This was not the work of mere human hands!

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

I love that Nehemiah's heart is to share that which God has given him. I want to hold all that I have more lightly and be more willing to share what I have with others.

## Who am I going to share this with?

I'm going to share this with those on The Gold course, as Nehemiah perfectly demonstrates a "belong" first approach to life, praying first to His heavenly Father who shapes who he is and how he thinks, before then acting in line with His Father's heart.

## Tuesday 22 December: Nehemiah 8-10

Before we behave, we belong! Liz Nixon writes:

### What did I like about today's reading?

Nehemiah prays, recounting the Israelites history: praising God for His steadfast faithfulness, and confessing that His people have been continually unfaithful. We see a repeated cycle of God saving the Israelites, miracles happening, and the people being blessed by God: they grow complacent and forget Him, and act unfaithfully towards Him; God hands them over to their enemies as discipline; they cry out to Him and God once more saves them.

Nehemiah acknowledges that God is always good and faithful, and that they have been unfaithful and turned their hearts away from Him.

Chapter 10 is an agreement of things they promise to do and not do, as a way of showing God their good intentions to live differently. But it was short-lived change because the root of the issue was not dealt with. They thought dealing with the symptoms (their sinful behaviour) could change them but only a changed heart and mind will impact the way they behaved.

"Before we behave, we belong" is a quote from one of the talks in [The Gold course](#), and this sums up the issue with what Israel is trying to do. They are making rules about what they will or won't do. They are behaving in order to belong, to make God "happy".

But God says to those who trust in Jesus that we are His children, and we belong to Him. A growing knowledge of God as our Father, and our increasing experience of being His child will then lead to changes in behaviour. But first we belong!

And this is the great, great news of the Gospel: it's not a behaviour modification programme, but an adoption programme!

### What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

I love that the people don't have to grieve in repentance for their unfaithfulness, but to rejoice in God and celebrate. What a picture of who God is! He is a jubilant, joyful God of celebration. Doesn't celebration sound more fun, and more in keeping with the good news of the Kingdom, than mourning and solemnity?!

It reminds me of the Prodigal Son, and the joy of the Father on his son's return. He doesn't wait until he is clean, fed and dressed appropriately to celebrate, but starts the party immediately! He doesn't tell him off first but embraces him! That's the joy of our Father when we come home to Him, when we recognise our unfaithfulness and praise Him for His faithfulness. God is a Father full of joy and celebration, and we get to celebrate with Him! And for Israel, it was time to celebrate what God had done in bringing them back from exile.

### What am I going to do differently as a result?

It's vital to remind myself that I am a child of God, a daughter of the King: that truth will better impact my behaviour, than trying to force myself into religious lists of "do this and not that"!

### Who am I going to share this with?

People on The Gold course.

# Thursday 24 December: Nehemiah 11-13

Joyful celebrations and a quick return to sin Liz Nixon writes:

## What did I like about today's reading?

Chapters 11 & 12 list the people who moved into Jerusalem and the grand dedication ceremony of the newly built walls, celebrating and worshipping God. It's good to see they took this seriously – it was such a great and joyful celebration that the sound of rejoicing could be heard far away! That's sounds like the kind of party that God would love!

Nehemiah returns to Susa as promised, then back to Jerusalem, but is not impressed with how things have carried on without him. Reminiscent of Moses going up the mountain to come back and find the golden calf, having just promised to faithfully love and serve God, Nehemiah returns to find things not as they should be. The people had just promised to honour the Sabbath in particular, but here they were again violating it!

Nehemiah is very pragmatic in response – he shuts the gates to the city so that the merchants couldn't come in. They would be re-opened only once Sabbath was over – what a brilliant tactic! But again, it only impacts the symptom, the outworking of their sin, not the root cause.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

Like yesterday, we need transformed hearts and minds.

The Israelites hopes are raised at the start of the book with the fulfilment of prophetic promises to return home. But a return to Israel hasn't changed their spiritual state. Being away from their enemy hasn't changed them. The political and social reforms don't address the problem either. The biggest problem facing them is their sinful condition, which impacts the way they think, feel, and behave. This issue is identified in Jeremiah and Ezekiel – the people need to start again; they need a transformation of their hearts and minds if they are to love and obey God. And it's the same for us.

But thank God for Jesus!

Jesus is the solution to our problem! We can be reborn and start over through His death and resurrection. And through the gift of His Spirit, our hearts and minds can be continually renewed and transformed.

It shows me again how much we need a Saviour – we cannot save ourselves through better behaviour. But we can turn to a loving Father, who sent His only Son into the world to save us, to be with us, and who redeems our broken state through His broken body and make us whole. He made us to be fit vessels of His Holy presence – perfectly designed to carry the Spirit of God, who rebuilds me into who I was originally created to be and sends me out into the world to point others to this loving Father.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

Be thankful for the kind of God we have, One with power to change us from the inside out.

## Who am I going to share this with?

My husband Greg.