



BRIDGES FOR PEACE
YOUR ISRAEL CONNECTION®



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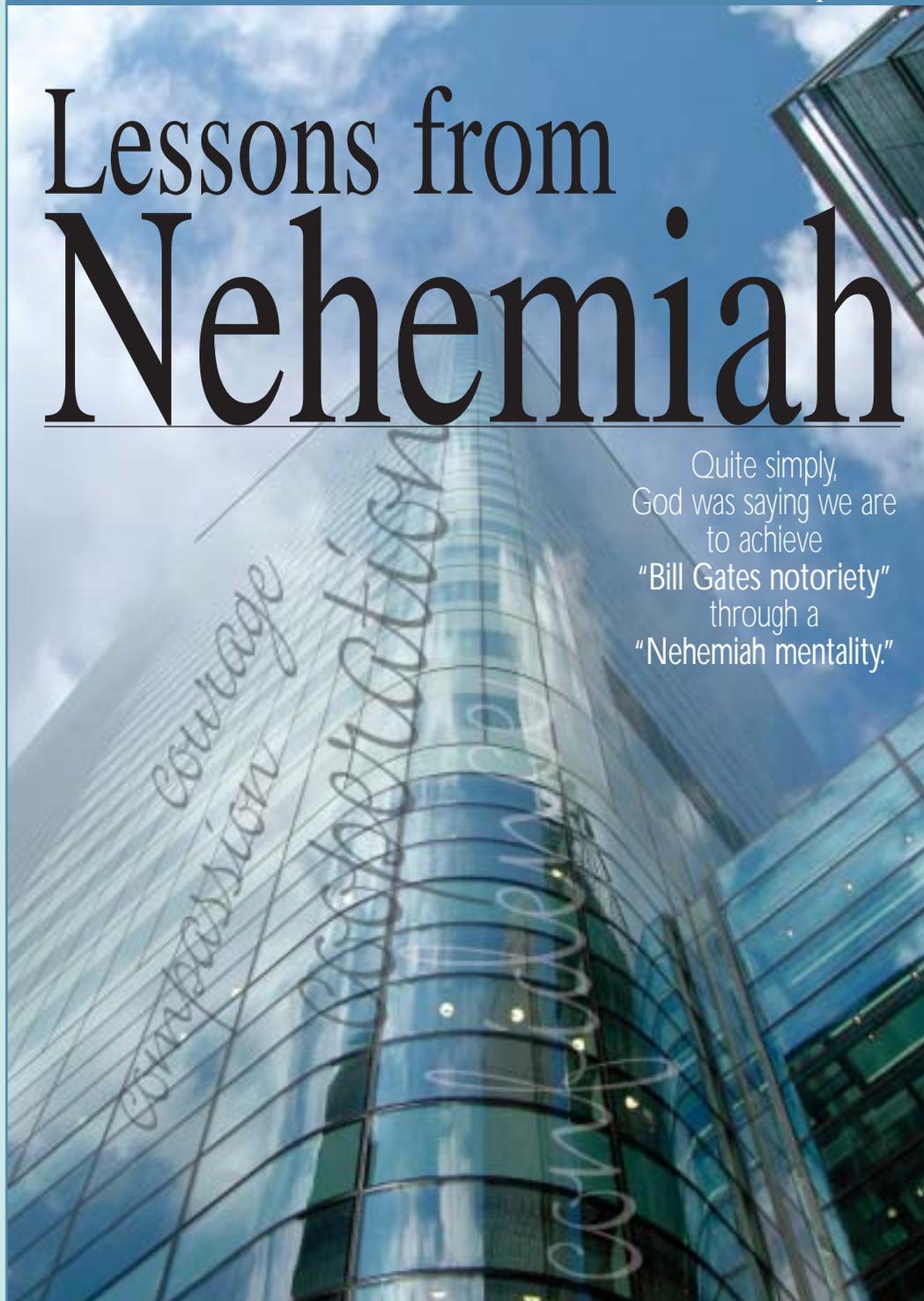
Bridges for Peace

Israel

Teaching Letter

Lessons from Nehemiah

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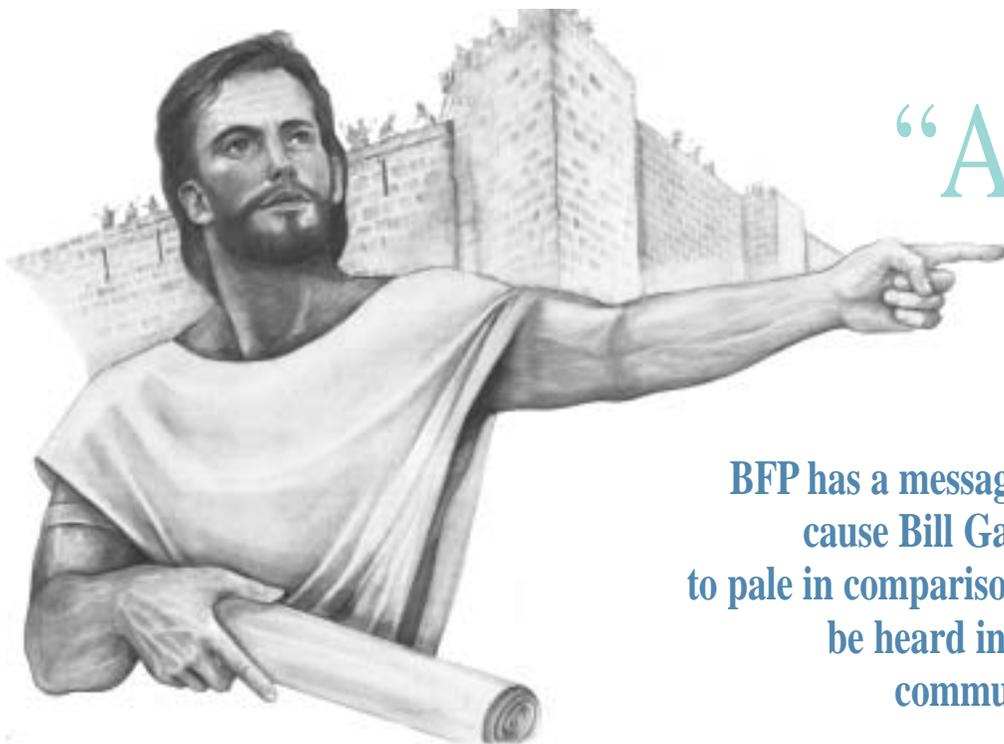
Lessons from Nehemiah



Editor's note: Cheryl Hauer, Deputy National Director for Bridges for Peace (BFP) in the United States, delivered a wonderful study on Nehemiah in relation to BFP as we look to the future. You, our many bridge builders, are a part of this plan, and so I asked Cheryl to write out her notes so that I could share them with you in this month's Israel Teaching Letter.

Over the past few months, I have had the privilege of earnestly seeking the Lord, together with many others around the world, for direction for the ministry of BFP. As I did so, clearly two names came to my mind: Nehemiah...and Bill Gates. Now, Nehemiah was easy. I opened my Bible and read the book. Then I read it again, and again and again. I read it in every translation on my bookshelves and several others on the Internet. I read every commentary, Christian and Jewish, that I could find.

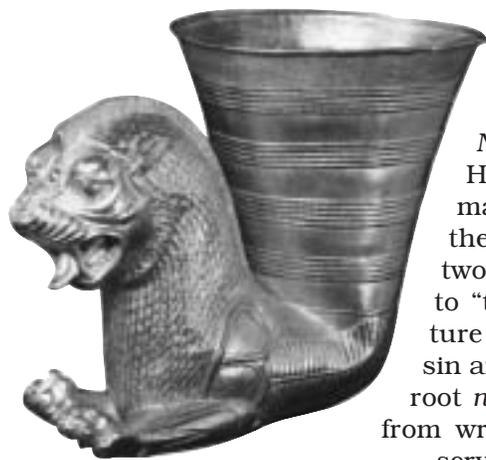
But Bill Gates was another story. There is no book by that name in my Bible, so determining what the Lord was saying was a little more difficult. However, after much prayer, I realized that one word summed it up: notoriety. Virtually any person on any street in the Western world, if asked, could tell you something about Bill Gates, the billionaire founder of Microsoft, and the contributions he has made to the computer industry, which have changed the face of the world. BFP has a message whose impact would cause Bill Gates's accomplishments to pale in comparison, and God wants it to be heard in every church in every community around the globe. Quite simply, God was saying, we are to achieve "Bill Gates notoriety" through a "Nehemiah mentality." We are to "arise and build" (Neh. 2:20). To understand that better, I looked at Nehemiah: first, the man, and then, the book that bears his name.



“Arise and
build”

(Neh. 2:20).

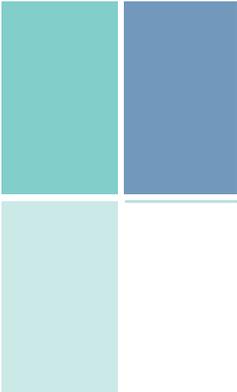
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Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king, a position of influence and honor.

Nehemiah the Man

Most concordances tell us that the name *Nehemiah* means “the consolation of God.” Like other Hebrew words, it is based on a root that can have many definitions. The word *t’shuvah*, for instance, is the Hebrew word for repentance, but it actually has two meanings. It means both to “turn away from” and to “turn toward,” giving us a profoundly accurate picture of what repentance is all about: turning away from sin and toward God. The name *Nehemiah* comes from the root *naham*, which means to comfort, console, pity, avenge, and turn away from wrath. Perhaps there is a deeper layer of meaning here, as Nehemiah served as God’s vessel to bring consolation and comfort to His people, as He turned away from wrath, brought them out of captivity, and avenged them by defeating their enemies and reestablishing Jerusalem as God’s holy city.



The name *Nehemiah* comes from the root *naham*, which means to comfort.

compassion

Nehemiah wept and fasted for many days when he realized that the Lord God of Israel’s reputation was being defamed by the broken-down walls of His own city.

courage

Expressing seeming dissatisfaction with his position at court could well have cost Nehemiah his life.

confidence

Nehemiah’s unshakable belief in the goodness and trustworthiness of God not only caused him to direct his own heart and thoughts immediately to the Lord, but also inspired those around him to do the same, imparting hope and empowering godly living.

cooperation

Nehemiah was a man who understood the necessity of cooperation in order to achieve God’s purposes. He was a team builder extraordinaire!

Four Characteristics of Nehemiah

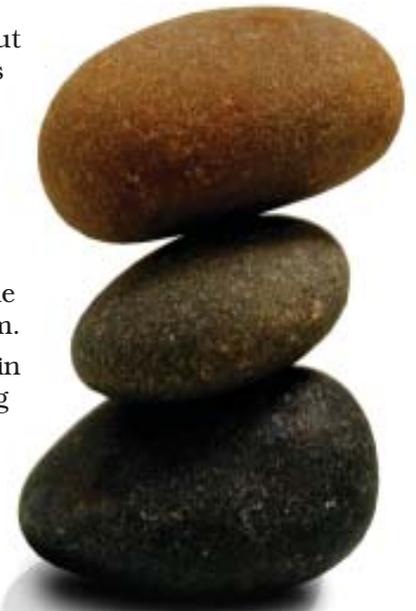
Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king, a position of influence and honor. He lived in the palace, and his life was one of physical ease. Yet he was a man who maintained a passion for the truth of God and *Torah* (God’s Word), and therefore embodied four characteristics that I believe made him God’s man for the hour.

Nehemiah’s *compassion* is revealed in Nehemiah 1:2–4. When visitors from Judah arrived in Shushan, his first question concerned his brethren and their situation in Jerusalem. He was told that they were in great distress and reproach, and Nehemiah’s heart was broken. But he was consumed by weeping and mourning only when he heard that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates had been burned with fire. In his day, the condition of a city’s walls was not only indicative of a city’s vulnerability, but also of the strength of its gods. If a wall was large and fortified, it meant that the gods of that city were powerful and well able to protect the people from attack. But a city whose walls were in disrepair had a god who was weak and ineffectual, unable to repel an attacking enemy. Nehemiah wept and fasted for many days when he realized that the Lord God of Israel’s reputation was being defamed by the broken-down walls of His own city.

Nehemiah was also a man of great *courage*. The book of Nehemiah is filled with his acts of courageous leadership and personal bravery. None, however, required as much courage as that recorded in Nehemiah 2:1–8. Ancient kings were men of absolute power, sometimes benevolent and sometimes cruel. In Shushan, there were strict rules of etiquette that governed when and how one appeared before the king, as we read in the book of Esther. If the king did not raise his scepter to indicate permission to enter and speak, a would-be visitor could be subject to prison or death. Expressing seeming dissatisfaction with his position at court could well have cost Nehemiah his life. When the king inquired about Nehemiah’s sadness, he was dreadfully afraid to answer for fear the king might mistake his concern for his brethren as disloyalty and ungratefulness, resulting in his immediate execution.

His response to that fear revealed a man of great *confidence*, not in himself but in the God he served. His simple reaction in verse four gives us the key to Nehemiah's success as a leader, builder, and deliverer: "So I prayed to the God of heaven." Throughout the 13 chapters of the book, prayer is Nehemiah's reaction to success, opposition, confusion, discouragement, and everything else that he encounters. His unshakable belief in the goodness and trustworthiness of God not only caused him to direct his own heart and thoughts immediately to the Lord, but also inspired those around him to do the same, imparting hope and empowering godly living. Nehemiah was able to transmit his own vision and passion to others as he acknowledged God as the source of all success and the only solution to every problem.

Finally, Nehemiah was a man who understood the necessity of *cooperation* in order to achieve God's purposes. He was a team builder extraordinaire! The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was an enormous task, one that was so overwhelming that it had remained undone for some time. Yet Nehemiah's simple plea in Nehemiah 2:17, reminding the Jews that the walls were a reproach and imploring them to "come, and...build," was not only met with enthusiasm, but with such inspiration that the job was done in 52 days! Such was the man God called to bring comfort and leadership to his people, and so must we be if we are to do the same today.



[www.israelimages.com/Hanan Isachar](http://www.israelimages.com/Hanan_Isachar)

The book of Nehemiah has amazing parallels to Israel today. Dispersed Jews are returning to the land of their fathers, rebuilding the nation, and facing enemies aligned against them.



www.nbn.org.il



Nehemiah the Book

The book of Nehemiah is not only a wonderful record of a crucial period in the history of Israel, but it also has amazing parallels to Israel today. It was a time, like today, when the dispersed were returning home to the land of their fathers; like today, the people were rebuilding the nation; and very much like today, it was a time when Israel's enemies were aligned against her, physically attacking, attempting to discourage, and crying out indignantly to the rest of the world that Israel had no right to exist.

[www.israelimages.com/Hashomer Hatzair](http://www.israelimages.com/Hashomer_Hatzair)

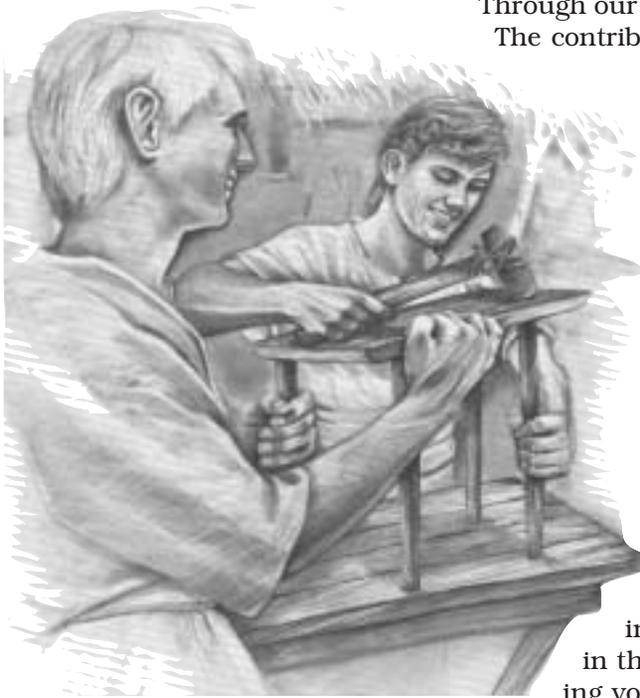


But I believe that the story also has a message for us at BFP.



[www.israelimages.com/Nitsan Shorer](http://www.israelimages.com/Nitsan_Shorer)

Nehemiah's team built a physical wall with real brick and mortar. We are building a wall of relationship, one that has been in ruins for nearly 2,000 years.



Through our projects in the land, we too are helping to rebuild the nation. The contributions and efforts of Christians worldwide have helped BFP to be recognized by Israeli and Jewish leaders for the work we are doing to aid in the restoration of the land.

With an extended hand of unconditional friendship, we are bringing comfort and consolation. Nehemiah's team built a physical wall with real brick and mortar. We are building a wall of relationship, one that has been in ruins for nearly 2,000 years and has said to the world that God was ineffectual and unable to protect His people. By bringing Jews and Christians together in relationships of respect, care, and love, God's power is again being demonstrated.

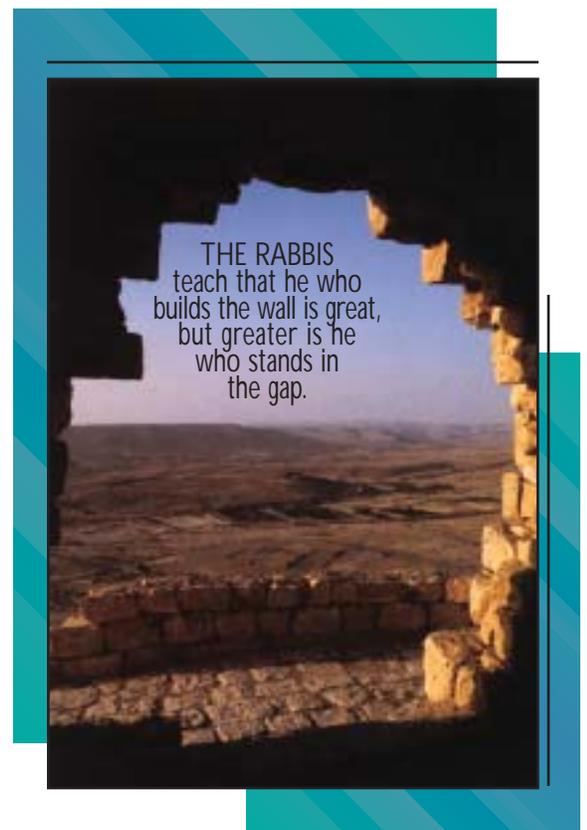
By standing in the gap, we are defending the land and enabling the workers. Christians most often associate this phrase with prayer, and certainly we are called to pray for the nation and the people of Israel. The rabbis teach that he who builds the wall is great, but greater is he who stands in the gap. In the ancient world, "standing in the gap" referred to placing yourself physically in any hole in the wall through which the enemy might enter, willingly risking your own life for the honor of God's name.

As we bring the message of biblically mandated Christian support for Israel and the Jewish people to the Church at large, we are helping to build God's Church into the mighty army He wants it to be in these last days.

Chapters one and two in Nehemiah, as we have previously discussed, clearly give us a picture of the kind of man that Nehemiah was. Chapter three gives us further insight as it lists, seemingly endlessly, "who did what" as the building project progressed. It is an account, in fact, of Nehemiah's genius.

We are told that the priests, who were the leaders of the day, began first. We are told that each individual or household was commissioned to work on their own portion of the wall, that in which their own residences were located. Many large cities had what is known as casemate walls, which had rooms or houses built into the thickness of the wall. We are told that everyone did his part, even the daughters. Nehemiah didn't put together construction crews with specialized purposes to build the wall in its entirety. He asked each man and his family to build that part of the wall that was right in his own backyard!

Our work for the Lord begins at home! The text plainly shows us that those who had no background or skill in wall building were just as important to the success of the project as the stonemasons and carpenters. In Nehemiah 3:32, we are told that even the goldsmiths and merchants engaged in the building of the wall. The whole community was part of the project.



"And what about my joy?" he whispered.
"It, too, highness, has left for Jerusalem."



The rabbis teach that each righteous person carries with him a divine spark, and every place that he goes is enlivened by that spark, until he leaves and takes it with him. In Genesis 28:10, for instance, we are told that Jacob "*went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.*" Some rabbis have questioned the redundancy of such a statement, but others have decided that this sentence is not, in fact, redundant. Rather, they say, the Torah says "*out from Beersheba*" to acknowledge that Jacob took the divine spark with him when he left.

Similarly, the Talmud says that there was a king in Persia who gave permission for the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. Many days of preparation ensued, until finally

one afternoon, the entire company of Jews left for Israel. The next morning, when the Persian king arose and went onto his balcony, he was distressed that his city seemed so empty...so silent...even mournful.

"Where are my goldsmiths?" he asked.
"They are gone, your highness," he was told.
"My artisans?" he asked.
"They have departed, my lord," his servant replied.
"What about my singers?"
"They, too, are gone, your majesty."
"And what about my joy?" he whispered.
"It, too, highness, has left for Jerusalem."

Jews of every layer of society had left Persia to help rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and the king felt the loss of "the spark" that was with them. Nehemiah empowered them all, and Persia was the worse for their loss.

Enemies Within and Without

Already in chapter two, we meet the leaders of the opposition at the very moment the people said, "*Let us start rebuilding*" (Neh. 2:18). Then we read: "*But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. 'What is this you are doing?' they asked. 'Are you rebelling against the king?' I [Nehemiah] answered them by saying, 'The God of heaven will give us success. We His servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it'*" (Neh. 2:19–20). Nothing much has changed today, as we see the same ethnic characters mocking the restoration of Israel.

In chapter four, Nehemiah is confronted by these same enemies, who are determined to undermine the work on the wall, either through distraction or discouragement. If they couldn't stop the workers through shouting insults and mocking them, they would rally the enemy troops and attack. But Nehemiah's immovable faith and his ability to encourage the Jewish people to that same level of trust in God proved to be a matchless weapon. Nehemiah's response to every form of attack was the same: prayer and action. A reliance on God for victory, coupled with appropriate action, made the Israelites unconquerable.

Perhaps more difficult to deal with, however, were the problems within. In chapter five, Nehemiah discovers that some of the citizens of Jerusalem were taking advantage of their less fortunate brethren. Children had been sold into slavery; land, vineyards, and houses mortgaged to buy grain; and money borrowed to pay taxes.

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Daughters were given into slavery, and their families were powerless to redeem them. As in Shushan, Nehemiah's heart was broken. Some nobles and rulers had been exacting usury from their brethren, which is expressly forbidden by the *Torah*. To Nehemiah, the heart of this matter was the same as that of the walls of Jerusalem. In verse nine, he says, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?" Should you not obey the *Torah*, should you not love your brethren, should you not rebuild the walls...because God's reputation is at stake?

Despite the best efforts of enemies within and without, the wall was at last completed. What a day of triumph it must have been! And truly, the condition of the wall spoke of the power of God, not just to those outside the household of Israel, but to those inside as well. Ezra the scribe read the Book of the Law to all who could hear and understand, and there was great repentance among the people. There was true revival in the land; the Feast of Tabernacles was again celebrated; the wall was dedicated with magnificent ceremony and irrepressible joy; and the city of Jerusalem was repopulated. The reputation of Nehemiah's great and awesome God had been restored.

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Nehemiah discovered that some of the citizens of Jerusalem were taking advantage of their less fortunate brethren. Children were sold into slavery and their families were powerless to redeem them. Nehemiah's heart was broken.

Called to Be Nehemiah

So, in light of the man and the book, what does it mean for us to have a Nehemiah mentality?

It means that as leaders in our churches, communities, homes, or whatever our sphere of influence might be, we are to lead like Nehemiah with the same unwavering allegiance to God and trust in His power and mercy; the same dedication to building up the nation and people of Israel; the same refusal to be distracted or discouraged by the

enemy; and the same steadfastness in prayer as the response to every situation in life, good or bad.

It means that we need to be willing to place ourselves in the gaps in the wall in order to protect others from the enemy. Israel is rebuilding today, but there are still many gaps in her walls, literally and figuratively. God wants a Church that is willing to lay itself down to stand in the gap for those He loves no matter what the cost.

It means that we are to bring the message of *naham* (comfort) to the Church. For nearly 2,000 years, the Jewish people have experienced untold persecutions and atrocities as a direct result of Christian anti-Semitism. To this day, many seminaries and pulpits teach that God is finished with the Jews and that the Church has replaced Israel as the apple of God's eye. We are called to teach the Church that it is well past time to turn away from the wrath of anti-Semitism and, like Nehemiah, to bring comfort and consolation to Zion.



The new Jerusalem will also have a great and high wall. There will be no breaches in this wall, no gaps for us to fill, and it will shine with the glory of the Lord.

Finally, we are called to remind the Church and the world what all of this is really about. Nehemiah recognized that God's reputation was at the heart of the conflict of his day. Did He or did He not have the power to keep His Word and protect His people Israel in the land that He had given them? And so it is today. It's not really about the Jews or the Arabs or the Christians or even Israel itself. It is all about Him, His faithfulness and His ability to keep His promises. In Ezekiel 36, God tells His people Israel that He scattered them among the nations because of their sin. However, when they went into the nations, God's name was profaned because it looked as though He could not uphold His promises to Israel in their land, which He gave them in an everlasting covenant (Gen. 15:18–21).

In Ezekiel 36, God confirms, *"I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. And wherever they went among the nations, they profaned My holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the Lord's people, and yet they had to leave His land.' I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone... 'For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be My people, and I will be your God'"* (Ezek. 36:19–22, 36:24–28).

Today, God is doing just that as He is bringing His people Israel from the four corners of the earth (Isa. 11:11–12), restoring the land (Ezek. 36:8–12), and redeeming the heart of His people. Yet the enemies of God, as in the days of Nehemiah, are still

fighting against the restorative plans of God, which will bring about the messianic redemption of the world.

Until the Church recognizes its responsibility to partner with God in loving and supporting Israel and the Jewish people, His name will continue to be profaned among the nations. Christians are called to be ambassadors and messengers to the world of God's redemptive plan, and in our day, this includes proclaiming what He is doing in the Land of Israel to prepare for the soon return of Messiah. There are hundreds of prophecies that were written over 2,000 years ago by the prophets of Israel, and many spoken by Yeshua (Jesus) nearly 2,000 years ago, that are coming to pass today. This is an exciting time in which to live, and most Christians and Jews are missing out on all the excitement. God is alive and well and fulfilling His word daily. We need to get the Church on the same page as God, so that we can participate in prophecy. BFP offers many biblical projects, so that the Church can be a part of the restoration of Zion. We always call upon Christians and the nations to *"pray for the peace of Jerusalem"* (Ps. 122:6), which amounts to praying for the fulfillment of the messianic promise to come.

The book of Revelation tells us that the new Jerusalem will also have a great and high wall, whose foundations will be decorated with precious stones. The wall will have 12 gates, each made of pearl and inscribed with the name of a tribe of Israel. There will be no breaches in this wall, no gaps for us to fill, and it will shine with the glory of the Lord. May we be like Nehemiah, building to His glory, to the sanctification of His Name, to the restoration of His people until that day. Amen.

Thank you, Cheryl, for this insightful study of Nehemiah as you brought the situation in Israel in his day into a parallel with what is happening today. May we all be part of standing in the gap and fulfilling our part of the message and action to bring about the restoration of Israel and of Zion to the glory of the Lord God of Israel.

Many pastors, Bible teachers, and laypeople have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding "yes"! That is why I am sending out this *Israel Teaching Letter*. It is my hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. *"For out of Zion shall go forth the law, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"* (Isa. 2:3).

