

NEHEMIAH—A MAN WHO REFUSED TO GIVE UP!

Presented by

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The Bible is filled with fascinating true stories that teach us all kinds of valuable lessons. Some of the stories teach us the importance of obeying God. Some of them teach us vital moral principles like never lying and always telling the truth. Some of the stories inform us about the mistakes of people in the past so that we can avoid making those same mistakes. And some stories impress upon us critical spiritual teachings—like what we need to do to be saved from sin so that we can live in heaven with God and Jesus forever. But personally, I think that one of the most intriguing stories in the Bible revolves around a fundamental lesson that God wants every one of His children to learn—**the importance of never giving up!**

The story is found in the book of Nehemiah in the Old Testament. Nehemiah was a servant to the king of Persia. In fact, he was a cupbearer—which means that his job was to taste whatever was placed before the king to drink in order to keep him from being poisoned. The second chapter of Nehemiah tells us that on one occasion Nehemiah was very sad. When the king asked Nehemiah why he was unhappy, Nehemiah said, “Great king, why should my face **not** be sad, when Jerusalem, the city of my fathers’ tombs, lies in waste?” (Nehemiah 2:3). It hurt Nehemiah badly to think that the great city of Jerusalem had fallen into such a state of terrible disrepair. In the past, Jerusalem had been the center of Jewish life. King David had reigned from there (which is why Jerusalem is referred to as “the city of David”). And it was in Jerusalem that Solomon, David’s son, had built the beautiful temple of God. To Jews, Jerusalem was a holy place. It broke Nehemiah’s heart to think that Jerusalem was now in such a tattered, rundown condition. And Nehemiah apparently wanted to do something about it.

After Nehemiah answered the king’s question, the king said to him, “What, then, do you request?” Suddenly, Nehemiah had a very important decision to make. Should he tell the king how he felt? Or should he simply ignore Jerusalem’s pitiful plight and mind his own business? It is interesting to see how Nehemiah handled this situation. Nehemiah 2:4 tells us that before Nehemiah answered the king, he “prayed to the God of heaven.” What a valuable lesson there is in **that** simple statement! Nehemiah understood something that we, today, also need to understand. **There is great power in prayer!** In the New Testament, James wrote, “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). Nehemiah understood that. So, he prayed to God to ask for help to do the right thing.

After he prayed, he then said, “King, if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, so that I may rebuild it” (Nehemiah 2:5). Wow! What a request **that** was! Here was a humble slave who was merely a cupbearer to a king—yet he was bold enough to ask the king to allow him to return to Jerusalem to repair the city and its walls. So how did the king respond to this unusual request from one of his slaves?

Nehemiah 2:8-9 tells us the rest of the story. The king not only granted Nehemiah's request, but also granted Nehemiah permission to cut down trees from his forests to provide wood that he could take with him to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. Why did the king do this for a mere slave? Nehemiah 2:8 tells us: "And the king granted these things to me **according to the good hand of my God upon me.**" In other words, **God was behind all of this.** He had answered Nehemiah's prayer—and was acting through the king to help Nehemiah accomplish good things for the city of Jerusalem.

From this story, we can learn two important lessons. First, we can learn that we, too, should be people who, like Nehemiah, are willing to go to God in prayer to ask for His help. Jesus taught this important principle in the Sermon on the Mount when He said:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will his father give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:7-11).

Nehemiah asked God to help Him—and God did! Second, we also can learn from the story of Nehemiah that no matter **who** we are, God can use us to accomplish **great** things. Nehemiah was a slave who was living in captivity in a foreign land under a pagan king. As the world looked at him, he was a "nobody." But to God he was a very important "somebody"—**because he was the man whom God planned to use to rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem!** In Zechariah 4:10, God asked the question: "Who has despised the day of small things?" What was God's point in asking such a question? His point was that He can use the smallest thing, or the person who seems to be completely unimportant, to accomplish His divine will. As Jesus said in Mark 10:27, "With men it is impossible, but not with God, because **with God all things are possible.**" That is the second important lesson we need to learn from the story of Nehemiah.

But there is more to the story. When Nehemiah got to Jerusalem, he found that the people in the city were not all carpenters or bricklayers. Many of them were storekeepers, jewelers, priests, or servants. How could **these people** rebuild the city's walls? And to make things even harder for Nehemiah, three men by the names of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem became Nehemiah's enemies and tried to stop the good work he was doing.

So, Nehemiah decided that half of the people should work on the walls, while the other half protected them with swords, spears, and bows (Nehemiah 4:13). Nehemiah told them, "Our God will fight for us!" (Nehemiah 4:20). Thus, the storekeepers, jewelers, and priests left their normal jobs and began working on the city walls. **In just 52 days, they were finished** (Nehemiah 6:15). How did they accomplish this gigantic task so quickly? Nehemiah 4:6 tells us: "The people had a mind to work." The people made up their minds to obey God and to work together for Him. As a result, in less than two months they had finished a **very big job**—a job that their enemies had tried to stop, and that others felt could never be completed.

Today, we should do exactly what these people did. We should make up our minds to work for God. And we should know that if we do, “our God will fight for us!” If we will make up our minds to work together and to obey God, **what great things we can accomplish!** As God asked Abraham on one occasion, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14). We all know the answer to **that** question, don’t we?