

# Rebuilding Walls, Rebuilding Lives

The Story: part 21

Nehemiah and Malachi

March 5, 2017

## **DAY 1: Rebuilding walls (Nehemiah 1-7)**

1. The walls and city of Jerusalem had been demolished in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar. They were almost rebuilt after 464 B.C. Opposition struck again and the walls were destroyed. Nehemiah hears this report in 446 B.C. Nehemiah is the cupbearer for Artaxerxes the Persian king. Listen to his anguish.

*Nehemiah 1:4 When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.*

2. Why do you think Nehemiah wept? What broke Nehemiah's heart?

3. Nehemiah appeals to the king to let him go. "It just so happens" that the Persian king not only allows him to go, but funds the project and sends a letter for protection from enemies!

4. When Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem he rallies the leaders to build the wall.

*Neh. 2:17 "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins... <sup>18</sup> I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me."*

5. As the wall is being rebuilt, opposition arose:

*Nehemiah 2:19 ... they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" <sup>20</sup> I 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."*

6. The opposition from the neighboring people became a severe threat.

*Nehemiah 4:4 "Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. <sup>5</sup> Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders." <sup>6</sup> So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. (9) but we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.*

7. The wall was built in only **fifty-two** days!

*Nehemiah 6:16 When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.*

8. What strikes you most about the rebuilding of the wall?

## **DAY 2: Rebuilding people (Nehemiah 8-13)**

1. After the wall was rebuilt, the people assembled to hear the reading of God's word, something that had not been done for almost 150 years! Ezra read all morning until noon.

2. The people began to weep when they heard God's word. They "got it," God's story!

*Nehemiah 8:8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.*

*Nehemiah 8:10 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."*

3. The people repented and began to build their lives around God again.

4. They then read about the Feast of Tabernacles (or booths) commemorating and remembering the time when their ancestors lived in the wilderness before entering the promised land.

*Nehemiah 8:17 The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.*

5. Why do you think there was such great joy?

6. Near the end of the month the people regathered. They wept and confessed their sins.

*Nehemiah 9:3 They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God.*

*Nehemiah 12:27 At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres.*

7. The dedication of the wall was a joyous ceremony! God's story was moving forward, not just in the city structures, in the people! They saw themselves as part of God's story and now moving it forward!

*Nehemiah 12:43 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.*

8. This day's study is about rebuilding people, families, lives and a nation. What's your biggest take away from today?

### DAY 3: Malachi, part 1

1. The prophet Malachi is the last prophet and book of the Old Testament. His time of ministry is roughly 432-425 B.C., about twelve to twenty years after Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the wall.

2. Once again, the people have started moving away from God. God confronts the people in a way reminiscent of the game show, Jeopardy. Alex Trebek reads the answer, the contestant asks a question, gets it wrong, and Alex tells the right answer. We'll look at a few of these today and tomorrow.

*Malachi 1:6 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, 'How have we despised thy name?'*

*<sup>7</sup> By offering polluted food upon my altar. And you say, 'How have we polluted it?' By thinking that the LORD's table may be despised.*

*<sup>8</sup> When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that no evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that no evil? Present that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.*

3. What action was God confronting in the people?

4. What attitudes was God confronting in the people?

*Malachi 2:13 Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.*

5. It appears to the people that the sacrifices they are bringing to God are not bringing about the life they want. The inquire of God...

*Malachi 2:14 You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.*

*<sup>15</sup> Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.*

*<sup>16</sup> "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.*

6. What sins does God point out?

7. Religiosity, by itself, is no virtue. Religious deeds only make sense when we are seeking to walk with God, even though we fail.

## DAY 4: Malachi, part 2

1. The “Jeopardy” game continues, today.

*Malachi 3:7 Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?'*

2. The people have no clue how they have turned away from God. God answers.

*Malachi 3:8a "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?'*

3. Even as God begins to spell it out, the people still can't see what they're doing.

*Malachi 3:8b "In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup> You are under a curse--the whole nation of you-- because you are robbing me. <sup>10</sup> Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. <sup>11</sup> I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. <sup>12</sup> "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.*

4. What does God equate with the people turning away from Him?

5. What have been the consequences to the people? (v. 11)

6. What blessings have they forfeited as a result? (vv. 10, 12)

*Malachi 3:13 "You have said harsh things against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?'*

*<sup>14</sup> "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?'*

*<sup>15</sup> But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.'"*

7. What the people have said about God is harsh! How would you summarize what the people have thought about God in vv. 14-15?

8. Have you found yourself thinking similar thoughts? Explain.

## **DAY 5: The Messiah is coming!**

1. The book of Malachi ends the Old Testament. But Malachi can see the next steps coming in God's redemptive plan!

*Malachi 4:5 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.*

*<sup>6</sup> He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."*

*Matthew 3:1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea<sup>2</sup> and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*

*<sup>3</sup> This is he who was spoken of through **the prophet Isaiah**: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"*

*Isaiah 40:3 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.*

2. At long last, the Messiah is coming!

3. As we end the Old Testament, you may be wondering why it took so long. There are a few things that strike me.

a. By the time we get to this point, isn't it apparent that all of man's varied attempts to fix himself don't work?

b. By this time, aren't we ready for a God-solution?

c. By this time, we can corroborate hundreds of Messianic prophecies, some written over a thousand years before Malachi to Jesus! The sheer mountain of proof, in just fulfilled prophecy is stunning!

d. We will be able to check the Messiah's lineage all the way back to David, to Abraham, to Noah, and to Adam, just as was foretold all along the way!

e. To corroborate the lineage and prophecies of the Messiah, over a span of two thousand years of history corroborates the message of the Messiah!

4. We dive into the New Testament next week!