

Bible Challenge 2018

Week 16b: April 15-21

Outline:

Nehemiah 1-2: News of Jerusalem and Nehemiah's Request to the King

Nehemiah 3-6: The Rebuilding of Jerusalem's Walls & the Opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah

Nehemiah 7: The Returning Exiles Numbered

Nehemiah 8: The Reading of the Law and Worship

Nehemiah 9: Confession of Sin

Nehemiah 10: The Covenant Renewed

Nehemiah 11-12: Numbering the Leaders and Priests

Nehemiah 13: Nehemiah's Further Reforms

The book of Nehemiah is the companion to Ezra and picks up with the rebuilding of the city walls. What I find interesting is that numerous people have used Nehemiah as a model of leadership in business. And while one may be able to draw some legitimate applications from Nehemiah, it is my humble suggestion that none of us would ever want to work for a boss like Nehemiah who regularly was found making harsh criticisms of those who deviated from his plan and even, on one occasion, attacked a man, tearing out some of his hair. Yikes! Yet, Nehemiah was the right man for the job that he had to do — not only dealing with opposition but also dealing with the fear and sloth of the people who worked under him. Let me say, if you want to make Nehemiah as a model of something, instead of business leadership, let us use him as an example of a man of prayer and as a man who cared about the right worship of God's people.

News of Jerusalem and Nehemiah's Request to the King

Nehemiah, like Daniel, Esther, Joseph, and Moses before him, was a Jew of immense influence and responsibility within the household of a pagan king. In this case, Nehemiah was a cup-bearer, a man who ensured that the food which the king ate had not been tampered with or poisoned by the king's enemies. Such positions were only ever given to people of impeccable integrity and trustworthiness.

While in his official capacity, one of his relatives comes and relates to him about the terrible situation in Jerusalem and the condition of the city walls, making the people vulnerable to attack. This distresses Nehemiah greatly and he decides to do something to help his brothers as part of his position. Yet, before he rushes into action, he commits himself to prayer. It should be noted too, that the overall structure and elements of this prayer are anticipatory of the prayer our Lord teaches his Apostles, better known as "The Lord's Prayer."

It ought to be noted, in a world where debates over racial reparations are ever-present, that Nehemiah does begin his prayer by asking for forgiveness for the sins of his fathers and fathers-fathers. Some suggest that this is a foundation for the church seeking forgiveness for the crimes and prejudices of prior generations. Yet, notice, this repentance is before God, not man, and it is a reminder that while it is right to prepare your heart before the Lord by purging the sins and guilt you have inherited, that a man should not be punished in any civil or community sense for the sins of his parents (Deuteronomy 24:16).

The king does give Nehemiah the freedom to go to Jerusalem and oversee the building of the wall so long as Nehemiah promises to return. Again, this is a sign of the trust that Nehemiah had in the king's eyes.

The Rebuilding of Jerusalem's Walls & the Opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah

Like those before him, Nehemiah runs into opposition from the enemies of God's people, in this case from Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite were displeased. The first was a regional governor and the second was the servant of another governor, so both presented Nehemiah with a formidable opposition.

Nehemiah chose to have people build sections of the wall nearest to their homes. This increased the interest and motivation of the people. And, so building ensued with people known for always being armed while they were at work just in case attackers would come.

One thing that I find interesting is that it was Malchijah, the son of Rechab, a district ruler, who was in charge of rebuilding the Dung Gate. Isn't it ironic that a family of such importance would be charged to rebuild such a lowly gate? Is not the first in the Kingdom of God the last? Did not his Son humble himself when he came down to us? Indeed, shall we not do the same?

In the midst of the work on the wall and of the opposition from the regional governors, Nehemiah discovers that the poor of the city are being taken advantage of by the wealthy. You see, the farmers had come into town to help rebuild the city walls, but while in town they could not produce on their property and were having to take liens on their property just to pay for food for their families. This is not only against the Law of God, it is against the Law of Common Decency — even the pagans treat those who assist them better than that.

And Nehemiah did one better than to simply correct the injustice of the moneylenders by denying them the right to charge interest against their kinsmen (Leviticus 25:36-37) but also did not take the Governor's allowance, but paid for his own keep out of his own pocket and welcomed many to his table.

The Returning Exiles Numbered

Like Ezra before him, those exiles that had returned with Nehemiah are numbered, again a reminder of the covenantal role of one listing their name as part of the covenant community.

The Reading of the Law and Worship

With the completion of the wall comes worship and with worship comes the reading and explanation of the Law of God, a reminder of the significant role of preaching through the generations.

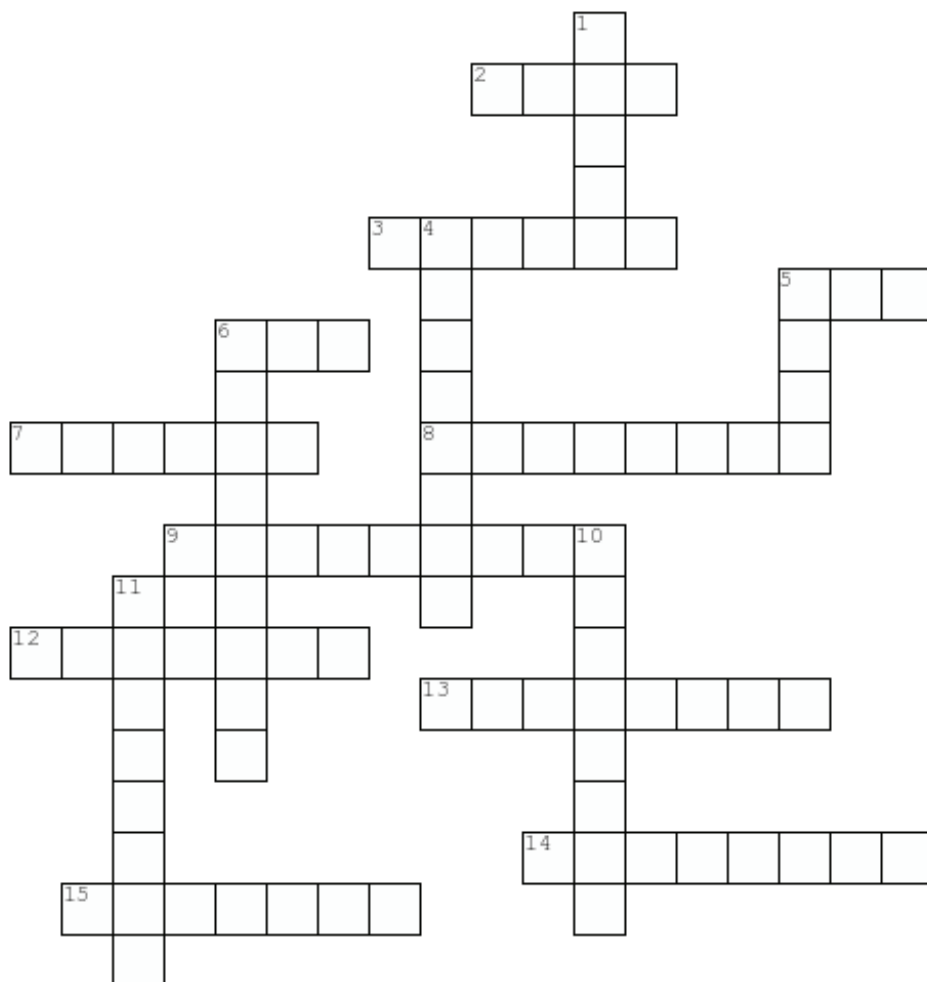
Confession of Sin and a Renewed Covenant

A common theme in the scripture is that of God renewing his covenant with his people and one of the key aspects of that is confession. The structure of the confession is interesting because in the midst of focusing on their own failures, they also addressed the faithfulness of God in the midst of said failures. How often that is lacking in the midst of our own confessions.

Nehemiah's Further Reforms

Nehemiah's account closes with other reforms that he sees made. He ensures that buying and selling are not done on the Sabbath, that the people are teaching Hebrew to their children as the language of worship and prayer, and that the Levites were getting their proper portions. Such is the work of a busy governor or official. It seems there is little rest, just a job to get done.

Week 16b: Nehemiah



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Across

2. Before Nehemiah approaches the king for a leave of absence, he does this.
3. Nehemiah tears out the hair of men for not teaching their children this language.
5. This was preached and explained in the worship of the people.
6. The nations feared the completion of the wall because they understood the Jews had help from their _____.
7. The name of Nehemiah's brother who brings him bad news of progress in Jerusalem.
8. In their sin, the people turned this kind of shoulder toward God.
9. This leader was in charge of rebuilding the dung gate.
12. The workers were commanded to keep these with them due to opposition and threats.
13. This Governor from Horon sets himself to hinder Nehemiah.
14. Nehemiah approaches King Artaxerxes in the month of Nisan, the month when this feast is held.
15. The priests were called on to consult the Urim and the _____.

Down

1. Nehemiah fed 150 men at his own _____.
4. Even this High Priest was in charge of building a portion of the wall.
5. The rich were making the poor put a _____ on their fields to pay for food.
6. Nehemiah puts the names of those who returned with him in the Book of _____.
10. The name of Nehemiah's father.
11. The fulfilling of the _____ was an important part of the renewal of the covenant.