

The Ashes Before Us

I. Introduction to Ezra - Nehemiah

A. A Book of History

1. The Jewish people in exile - 539BC
 - a. Northern Kingdom (Israel) taken by Assyrians in 722BC
 - b. Southern Kingdom (Judah) taken by Babylonians in 587BC
 - c. Babylonian Kingdom taken by the Persians in 539BC
2. The return of the exiles to Jerusalem - *Cyrus*
3. The rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple - *Artaxerxes*

B. A Book of Hope

1. The first exiles return to Palestine - *Ezra 1-6*
2. Ezra returns to bring the Torah to the community - *Ezra 7-10*
3. Nehemiah returns to rebuild the city and the Temple - *Nehemiah 1-13*

II. The Life of Nehemiah

A. The Everyday Life of Nehemiah

1. He is a Jewish exile living in Susa - *Nehemiah 1:1*
2. He serves as a courtier in King Artaxerxes' Court - *Nehemiah 2:1*
3. His brother Hanani brings news of Jerusalem - *Nehemiah 1:2-4*
4. His family has traditional ties to Jerusalem - *Nehemiah 2:3*

B. The Everyday Faith of Nehemiah

1. He wept over the ashes of Jerusalem - *Nehemiah 1:4*
2. He mourned and fasted for several days - *Nehemiah 1:4*
3. He cried out to God in prayer for favor - *Nehemiah 1:5-11*
4. He presented his plan to King Artaxerxes - *Nehemiah 2:4-5*
5. He asks for protection and supplies for the journey - *Nehemiah 2:7-9*

III. Charting the Course of Our Life

A. The Ashes Before Us - *II Corinthians 12:7-10*

1. We need to develop our theology of weakness - our need for God
2. We need to express our brokenness and vulnerability - our need for help
3. We need to accept our limitations - our need for boundaries
4. We need to embrace our loss and grieve - our need for honesty
5. We need to face our difficulties and hardships - our need for reality

B. The Choice to Rebuild - *Nehemiah 2:1-5*

1. Recognize the ashes before us - **submission**
2. Turn toward God and let Him be in charge - **repentance**
3. Trust in God with everything in our life - **faith**
4. Ask God for His help - **prayer**
5. Resolve to do the will of God - **service**

The Journey Before Us

I. Leading Change

A. Nehemiah Inspects the City of Jerusalem - *Nehemiah 2:11-16*

1. Receives permission and provisions from the King of Persia
2. Arrives in Jerusalem - stays quiet for three days
3. Inspects the city's walls at night in secrecy
4. Tours the western and southern parts of the wall
5. Tries to tour the eastside but cannot get through - probably collapsed debris
6. Retraces his steps and goes back inside the city
7. Tells the officials what he had been doing

B. Nehemiah Shares His Vision - *Nehemiah 2:17-18*

1. Explains the situation: "Jerusalem lies in ruins"
2. Details the need: a new wall and new gates
3. Calls for help: let's rebuild the wall
4. Connects the moment: disgraced because of neglect and pride
5. Affirms the faith: God will provide

II. Invitation to a Journey

A. Vision - *Proverbs 29:18*

1. We must receive a vision/revelation from God - **openness**
2. We must consider/reflect/contemplate that vision - **ownership**
3. We must prepare to engage the vision - **opportunity**
4. We must realize that the vision will create friction - **opposition**

B. Process - *II Corinthians 3:17-18*

1. Leaving behind the old life - saying "goodbye"
2. Preparing the move into the new life - saying "hello"
3. Reflecting the grace of God in transformation - saying "glory"
4. Moving in the Spirit of God for service - saying "Amen"

C. Stages

1. Awakening - Nehemiah receives the word - *Nehemiah 1:3-4*
2. Purgation - Nehemiah tells his story - *Nehemiah 2:3*
3. Illumination - Nehemiah tours the city - *Nehemiah 2:12*
4. Union - Nehemiah shares his journey - *Nehemiah 2:18*

D. Practical Steps

1. Begin with worship - learn to lean into God - *John 4:24*
2. Commit to obedience - live under the love of God - *John 14:23*
3. Enter into prayer - listen to the voice of God - *John 15:26*
4. Walk in the light - love the things of God - *I John 1:5-7*

"Spiritual life is the life of God's Spirit within us, both as individuals and as a community. Therefore the point of spiritual formation is to discern where something is happening."

—From *In My Own Words* by Henri Nouwen p.4

The Life Before Us

I. Starting to Rebuild

A. Dedicating the Work of God - *Nehemiah 3:1-5*

1. The High Priest leads the way in rebuilding the Sheep Gate
2. Other priests joined the building process - listed first
3. Other people joined the building process - variety of workers
4. The work was dedicated to God - section by section

B. Working Together - *Nehemiah 3:6-32*

1. Each specific section was assigned to large family groups
2. 38 different leaders are listed - 8 different vocations
3. 7 different villages help with the construction
4. One district leader had his daughters help rebuild

II. The Life Before Us

A. Dedicated to God - Responsible Grace - *Romans 12:1*

1. Committing to the source of grace: faith
2. Committing to the means of grace: worship, prayer, study, fellowship, communion
3. Committing to the giver of grace: Father God
4. Committing to the power of grace: presence of the Holy Spirit
5. Committing to the Lord of grace: Jesus Christ
 - a. Confession of our failures to live holy lives
 - b. Affirmation of God's faithfulness and generosity
 - c. Resolution to live in the presence of God

B. Dedicated to Community - Livable Grace - *Acts 4:32-35*

1. Prayer-Saturated Congregations - listening to the Holy Spirit
2. Worshipping Congregations - celebrating the grace of God
3. Discipling Congregations - nurturing believers towards Christlikeness
4. Evangelizing Congregations - inviting lost people to trust Christ
5. Reproducing Congregations - developing the next generation of leaders
6. Culture-Engaging Congregations - empowering the disenfranchised
7. World-Mission Congregations - working in cross-cultural situations
8. Purpose-Driven Congregations - organizing for essentials only

C. Dedicated to Mission - Transformational Grace - *1 Timothy 1:14-16*

1. Imitating - modeling and direction for pre-Christians
2. Identifying - unconditional love and protection for new Christians
3. Exhorting - formation and freedom for young Christians
4. Participating - maturity and ministry for adult Christians

D. Dedicated to Life - Abundant Grace - *John 10:10*

1. Preventing Grace - God's love towards us before our conversion
2. Saving Grace - God's love for us at our conversion
3. Sanctifying Grace - God's love for us for our perfection
4. Glorifying Grace - God's love for us for our passing

The Enemy Before Us

I. Opposition

A. A War of Words - *Nehemiah 4:1-3*

1. Sanballat, governor of Syria, became angry at the restoration
2. Sanballat ridicules the Jews and tries to demoralize them
3. Sanballat tries to intimidate the builders
 - a. "feeble Jews" - attacks their integrity
 - b. "will they" questions - attacks their intentions
4. Tobiah the Ammonite remarks at their apparently poor workmanship

B. A Prayer of Lament - *Nehemiah 4:4-5*

1. Nehemiah asks God to intervene on the builders behalf
2. Nehemiah prays that God would bring justice to their enemies
3. Nehemiah affirms the call of God upon the Jews

C. More Enemies, More Prayer - *Nehemiah 4:7-9*

1. More angry enemies - Sanballat, Tobiah, Arabs, Ammonites and the men of Ashdod
2. More attacks - they plotted to fight against Jerusalem
3. More prayer - another communal lament - *Psalms 83*
4. More vigilance - posted a 24 hour guard
 - a. Stationed soldiers at the lowest points - *v.13*
 - b. Assured the people of God's protection - *v.14*
 - c. Divided the workforce - builders and warriors - *v.16*
 - d. Equipped every worker with a weapon - brick and sword
 - e. Listened for the sound of the trumpet - ready for battle - *v.20*
 - f. Continued to watch, work and pray - *vv.21-23*

III. Victory

A. Spiritual Armor - *Ephesians 6:10-18*

1. Truth - the truth shall set us free
2. Righteousness - we are made right through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross
3. Peace - wherever we go, we walk with the living God
4. Faith - we live by faith and receive God's grace by faith
5. Salvation - we are justified by the blood of Jesus Christ - atonement

B. Spiritual Weapons - *Ephesians 6:10-18/I Corinthians 13*

1. Word of God - God reveals Himself through His Word
2. Prayer - God answers the prayers of righteous person
3. Love - God places His love into our lives
4. Holy - God sets us apart for His purposes

C. Spiritual Readiness - *I Peter 5:8-10*

1. Be self-controlled - watch your thoughts, words and actions
2. Be alert - work with a brick **and** sword
3. Know your enemy - prowls around like a roaring lion - toothless
4. Know your enemy's tactics - devours people through their thinking
5. Resist and stand firm - faith alive in Jesus Christ
6. Encourage others - suffering is universal
7. Remember the grace of God - restores and strengthens

The People Before Us

I. Living Together

A. Social Tensions - *Nehemiah 5:1-5*

1. Food Supply - a famine had limited the crops
2. Debt - people were mortgaging their fields, vineyards and homes
3. Taxes - people were borrowing money to pay taxes
4. Slavery - people were selling their daughters into slavery

B. Process - *Nehemiah 5:6-8*

1. Nehemiah becomes angry at the injustice upon the people
2. Nehemiah confronts the nobles and government officials
3. Nehemiah calls a meeting to deal with the situation

C. Justice and Mercy - *Acts 6:1-7*

1. Every community of faith will have issues with justice and mercy - **listen**
2. Every community of faith must examine its purpose and mission - **look**
3. Every community of faith must deal with its social tensions - **learn**

II. Worshipping Together

A. Church Divisions - *I Corinthians 3:1-4*

1. Worldly - infants in the matters of faith and grace
2. Jealousy - lusting at the gifts/resources of others
3. Quarreling - arguing with their brothers and sisters
4. Carnal - being dominated by the things of the flesh

B. Church Unity - *Ephesians 4:1-7*

1. One Body - united under Christ who is our head and as members of one another
2. One Spirit - preserving unity through peace in Christ
3. One Hope - persevering, encouraging and spurring one another on toward home
4. One Lord-loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving each other
5. One Faith - trusting and believing in God through hearing the word of Christ
6. One Baptism - dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus
7. One God and Father of All - given a birthright to be called children by belief in Christ

C. Church Worship - *Hebrews 10:19-25*

1. We come to God - bowing down before Him
2. We embrace new life - receiving grace upon grace
3. We draw near with sincere hearts - living in forgiveness
4. We have hope - remembering His promises
5. We exhort one another - doing good
6. We meet together - gathering in the Name of Jesus
7. We encourage each other - enduring until the end

D. Church Attraction - *Titus 2:9-10*

1. We have a faith which we live by
2. We are a part of a community of faith
3. We are proud of our community of faith and believe that others could benefit from it

The Night Before Us

I. Intimidation

A. Old Enemies Rise Again - *Nehemiah 6:1-9*

1. A report on the progress of rebuilding the wall
2. A threat from the enemies of the reconstruction
3. A prayer by Nehemiah - "Now strengthen my hands"

B. False Prophets - *Nehemiah 6:10-14*

1. Shemaiah speaks false things to Nehemiah
 - a. "Go to the Temple and hide" - sin to misuse the temple
 - b. "Men are coming by night to kill you" - cowardly to run away
2. Nehemiah rebukes the false prophet and refuses to be intimidated
3. Nehemiah keeps his good name
4. Nehemiah prays against his enemies

II. Darkness and Light

A. Sin Brings Darkness

1. Sin is opposed to life, light and love
2. Sin is a conflict in which the soul is divided, deranged and distracted
3. Sin is a loss - the loss of grace and truth
4. Sin is a separation - no longer connected to love
5. Sin is a breakdown between God and humanity

B. Light Brings Assurance

1. Assurance sweetens life's changes
2. Assurance keeps the heart from desiring the world
3. Assurance assists in communion with God
4. Assurance preserves from backsliding
5. Assurance produces holy boldness
6. Assurance helps to receive God's mercy
7. Assurance gives energy to the service of God
8. Assurance leads to rejoicing in God
9. Assurance prepares a person for life and death

III. A Candle in the Darkness

A. Not about us - **about Jesus Christ** - *Colossians 1:15-19*

1. Jesus Christ is the center of everything we are - object, subject, action
2. Jesus Christ in us shines His light - His death, His resurrection, His return

B. Not about Here - **about the Kingdom of God** - *Mark 1:14-15*

1. The Kingdom of God is moving and advancing
2. The Kingdom of God is growing and emerging
3. The Kingdom of God is changing everything, everywhere

C. Not about Now - **about Eternity** - *Revelation 21:1-5*

1. God is bringing light into our world - new vision
2. God is moving in the midst of His people - new order
3. God is making all things new - new life

CHARTING THE COURSE OF LIFE

Men's Ministries International

The Day Before Us

I. Celebrating the Light - *Nehemiah 8:1-7*

A. Coming Together as God's People

1. Everyone was settled in their own town
2. They asked Ezra to bring out the Book of the Law
3. Ezra read God's word from daybreak to noon
4. Everyone listened attentively to the Book of the Law

B. Experiencing the Presence of God

1. Ezra opened the book - God's recorded Word
2. Everyone was attentive to the reading of the Holy Scriptures
3. Ezra praised the Lord and the people also praised God
4. Everyone bowed down and worshipped the Lord

C. Seven Realities of Experiencing God - Henry T. Blackaby

1. God is always at work around you.
2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal
3. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work
4. God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways
5. God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to crisis of belief that requires faith and action
6. You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing
7. You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and His accomplishes His work through you

II. Patterns of Worship

A. Gathering - People to People

1. People coming together in the name of the Lord for worship.
2. Adults learning about community and fellowship.
3. Adults growing in their corporate faith and covenant relationships.

B. Prayer and Praise - People to God

1. People submitting their hearts, minds, souls and strength to God the Father through corporate acts of worship.
2. Adults expressing their faith through acts of worship.
3. Adults experiencing the unity and bond of the Holy Spirit.

C. Proclamation - God to People

1. People hearing the Word of God for their salvation, deliverance, healing and sanctification.
2. Adults waiting before God as an act of obedience.
3. Adults receiving the grace of God through the Holy Scriptures.
4. Adults believing the promises of God through faith in the Word of God.

D. Thanksgiving - People to the Word

1. People responding to the power, presence and purpose of God in their midst.
2. Adults meditating on the Word of God as the body of Christ.
3. Adults responding to the Word of God through affirmations of faith.
4. Adults gathering around the Word and Table to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

E. Vision - People to the World

1. People seeing the needs of the last, least and lost and responding to those needs with God's mercy.
2. Adults putting into practice the elements of worship.
3. Adults passing on the faith, hope and love to a hurting world.
4. Adults engaging in acts of service, ministry and passion for the sake of the Kingdom.