

# Building God's Wall

Reclaiming Your Spiritual High Ground

Nevin Bass

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## Introduction

 ONE OF THE HARDEST things about failure is picking up the pieces. Chaos doesn't heal itself, and neither do damaged lives. If someone does not pick the pieces up, they lie where they have fallen. Rebuilding after failure requires courage, vision, and a large helping of holy enablement!

Perhaps the failure is not your own. Maybe what you are dealing with is failure in someone else's life. Perhaps you are trying to help others cope with and recover from a devastating set of circumstances. Perhaps you are ministering to another who is trying to pick up the pieces and reestablish a godly lifestyle after years of futility and sin. You are searching for answers that will help another avoid the cycle of failure in their future.

The Word of God is still good news, and God has an answer for you. The good news is that judgment from God is quite often an invitation for repentance and restoration. Restoration is the goal; repentance is the process. Judgment is the goad the Lord uses to motivate us.

The extent of this judgment depends first on the sovereignty of God and second on several details regarding man's sin. Several things go into God's calculated attempt to help us break the cycle of futility. For example, He must consider the extent sin has corrupted us, our community, and our testimony. In addition, God considers the degree of judgment necessary to bring a halt to the degradations caused by our wickedness. Even the amount of judgment necessary to give us an opportunity to have a fresh start is evaluated. These things and probably many others go into God's effort to encourage man to turn from his sin.

On to the good news: The good news is that if we are still alive and able to see the error of our ways, there is yet opportunity to snatch victory from the very jaws of depression and defeat! There is still an opportunity to experience God's marvelous restoration. But restoration requires change on man's part. If you view the devastation before you with a desire for renewal and a willingness to change, you are ready to begin the journey.

Someone may say, "You are just being optimistic." Perhaps that is true. Then again, perhaps optimism is just an expression of faith in the God of reconciliation. That's right, the Lord God, Creator of the universe, is a God of reconciliation. There is not a wasteful tendency in His entire being, except when it comes to the way He lavishes His love on all, including those who have been the object of His calculated judgment. And so while there is certainly a limit to God's patience and forbearance, where that limit is and upon what it is based are known only to Him. If men knew where the edge of eternal perdition was, it is a fact that they would happily creep right up to the edge and home-stead there!

But let us deal in certainties. This is certain: As long as there are breath and life, there is yet an opportunity for reconciliation to God. God's goal in bringing judgment is to effect reconciliation and restoration. Reconciliation with God and restoration to our former situation after His judgment require rebuilding and reconsecration. The Lord Jesus instructed a church that had left her first love to "repent and do the first works" (Rev. 2:5). Certainly, after a season of judgment that has "cleared the deck," so to speak, it would be the height of presump-

Restoration requires  
repentance, rebuilding,  
and reconsecration.

tion to try to step right back into the same situation in God that we left months or even years ago. No! There must first be repentance—thorough and complete repentance. And then there must be a rebuilding process that repairs the breaches that were torn by

our own sin as well as God's judgment upon our sin. And finally there must also be a time of reconsecration; a time when we recommit our

hearts to the application of God's principles and precepts in our everyday lives.

This is the pattern of reconciliation found in the book of Nehemiah. It is important to note that this reconciliation was not of the initial variety, that being as a sinner coming to God for the first time. The theme of Nehemiah is not that of a wayward sinner coming home to God. It is the story of a wayward saint returning to God's good graces after experiencing the devastation of His judgment. The deeper truths of Nehemiah will not be applicable to those experiencing God's redemption for the first time. That is not the story line of the book. Nehemiah is about a nation that had a rich history and a wealth of experience in God's grace. This same nation failed God in a big way and on many occasions. As a result of the people's sin, they felt God's chastening countless times. But finally their rebellion grew to the point and was observed by so many others that God was reluctantly forced to respond with severe judgment. The book of Nehemiah is about the gallant efforts of this nation to rebuild after God's judgment. It is also the story of God's willingness and faithfulness to honor their efforts.

Can I say to you that much of the practical message of Nehemiah is lost today because of a longstanding theological debate? That's right, a fundamental theological squabble has prevented many of the simple yet profound truths of Nehemiah from seeing the light of modern application. Simply put, there is a view of Scripture that makes a distinction between *status* and *standing* in God. Standing is defined as being saved or being yet in unbelief. Status is defined as where you are in the spiritual spectrum—hot, lukewarm, or frozen solid. As the stated view goes, one can be saved as to their standing and yet be all the way cold as to their status. This view holds that it is possible to be “saved” and still live in such a sinful way as to face God's judgment as a result.

As a point of view, this belief may be fine for many people. But for those who have plumbed the depths of sin after their first profession of faith, it is more often than not found wanting. For those trying to recover from the type of judgment that has leveled their entire world, an explanation of the differences between status and standing will scarcely be viewed as encouraging. They need to know how they can indeed be

## BUILDING GOD'S WALL

reconciled to God...yet again. They need to know why walls are important and how to rebuild them. They need to understand and practice the ten gates of worship. They need to know what to do inside the walls once they are rebuilt! Applying Nehemiah to the new believer alone is indeed missing the point of the book and depriving those who are struggling in their faith of a valuable source of encouragement. Nehemiah is not a builder's guide; it is a rebuilders' guide.

And so for believers who have failed God in a big way and have seen their world crumble as a result—this book is for you. For those who have lived through the destruction of a failed marriage—this book is for you. For those who have lost the joy of your first love with Jesus and have suffered the loneliness and emptiness of life without His fellowship—this book is for you. For all those who have somehow survived the horror and devastation of God's judgment—this book is for you. And for those who minister to any of these types of rebuilders—this book is also dedicated to you. May God bless and encourage you as you rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar (Ps. 51:17–19).*

*Section One*

Building  
the Wall

**WHAT IS A REBUILDER?** A rebuilder is one who picks up the pieces of that which has collapsed and builds it again. A rebuilder who is good at his craft will rebuild the project with strength to withstand the destructive forces that brought calamity. A rebuilder is a spiritual version of a construction company that specializes in burned-out buildings. A rebuilder is a cross between a demolition crew and a construction crew. Both analogies apply because the old debris must be removed before the work of building back can begin.

The necessity of rebuilding is a constant in the spiritual life. This need is brought about by sin and the desolation caused by depravity. That is the cause of the destruction. What are some of the hindrances to the work? Every rebuilder faces opposition from within and from without. Every rebuilder is also faced with the need for material and laborers. There is also the resistance of inertia, i.e., the natural tendency for things in ruin to remain in ruin. This results from creation's resistance to change and also from human carnality. All these things combine to make the work of rebuilding a much greater challenge than building fresh.

These are some of the forces that are aligned to resist the work of rebuilding. But the rebuilder should take heart because God is a God of restoration, renewal, and regeneration. The rebuilder is doing the work of God and therefore has both God's sympathy and active help.

Every work of renewal begins with a burden. This compassionate response comes when the spirituality activated are confronted with the need evidenced by a spiritually desolate landscape. For the rebuilder, the only valid response to this need is to seek God's face in prayer and to chasten the soul with fasting (Neh. 1:4). Nehemiah, from hundreds of miles away, felt a burden for the situation he had only heard about. Yet the Jews on the ground had grown accustomed to the situation and had even learned to accept it.

*And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire (Neh. 1:3).*

How can God's people learn to live with affliction, reproach, desolation, and rubbish? In a word: apathy!

Who were these Jews in Jerusalem? First, there were those who escaped the captivity—or rather their children of several generations. Next, there were the offspring of three different mass repatriations from Babylonian captivity. The first repatriation happened eighty-five years prior to the events at the beginning of the book of Nehemiah. As for those Jews who escaped captivity and lived through the destruction of Jerusalem, their own souls had been seared far beyond the destruction suffered by the city. By the time the first group arrived from Babylon, the Palestinian Jews had endured seventy years of affliction. Sadly, those who went into bondage had an easier life than those who were left to live in the aftermath of defeat and destruction.

With the decree of Cyrus seventy years after the fall of Jerusalem, fifty thousand Jews returned from the captivity. At first they had a real zeal for God's work of rebuilding. But sixteen years passed after the foundation of the temple was laid while the work stood still. With the ministries and encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, the temple was finally completed. This temple is known as Zerrubabal's temple, because he was the governor of Palestine at the time it was built.

The difficulty encountered by the temple builders serves to illustrate an important spiritual truth. There will always be many types of resistance to any work inspired by God. It is possible that conditions around the workers can distract those who begin the good work of renewal. How often the enemy of renewal succeeds in discouraging God's people by prolonged resistance to change!

Before long the desolation of the rest of the city was accepted. The desolation of the walls and gates seemed less important as months accumulated into years. People became caught up in their own individual struggles, and apathy ruled the day. One of the characteristics of apathy

is that it is the enemy of unity and the sense of community. Anytime one group comes to accept the situation as it is, the pressure is always on the rebuilders to follow suit. So often they do, and the work of God suffers.

One of the deceptive qualities of life is that those things that are essential and therefore of the highest import change slowly. This is in marked contrast to the rest of life in general, which swirls around our ears like a howling March wind. Because of the whirlwind of rapid activity around us, we tend to focus on the things that are changing swiftly. We lose sight of the essential while pursuing the important. God spoke through a prophet to describe this phenomenon to a wayward king long ago. The prophet detailed how, as the battle raged around him, he lost sight of his charge, an enemy prisoner. He forsook the essential in order to tend to the important (1 Kings 20:38–40). This is a perfect explanation of how the enemy distracts God’s people with the turmoil and rapid changes of life. Everything except what is essential in life changes rapidly, and we are forced to respond to those changes. Meanwhile, the things of highest importance are those that change slowly. Apathy sets in because our efforts are being applied to things that are constantly changing while areas that require rebuilding resist change and require prolonged effort with little observable result. Apathy is a conditioned response to this dynamic. The result of apathy is that those most affected and in need of rebuilding are the least willing to become involved. Finally, they condition themselves not to notice the need so that they can avoid regret. Apathy is first an attitude, then a way of life, and finally a culture. A culture of failure. For example, consider the culture of poverty and failure among those caught in the cycle of

*Apathy is first an attitude, then a way of life, and finally a culture.*

government assistance/dependence. The people at Jerusalem had likewise conditioned themselves to accept affliction and reproach. At first, their attitude allowed them to accept it. Then their way of life expected it. Finally, their culture became content to continue in it.

Need is expressed in many different ways. An attitude and lifestyle content to live with devastation and reproach are expressions of need. Understand that those caught in this cycle of failure seldom understand how pathetic their situation really is. The fact that they have come to expect nothing more from life speaks volumes about their need.

This was the situation on the ground that Nehemiah had to confront. This is the reality a rebuilders must grapple with. How does one prepare to deal with such apathy on the part of those in such great need? This is one of the deeper truths contained in the book of Nehemiah. A rebuilders ministry is first and foremost to those in need. The physical realities are related to spiritual problems. The walls cannot be rebuilt until the spiritual needs are addressed. The walls will never be defended unless a spiritual renewal comes about. And revival will not continue beyond the immediate need unless there is a sincere and deep change in the majority of the people. The spirit of apathy must be broken. This means that the rebuilders must first become an intercessor.

Before we introduce the rebuilders and hero of our studies, we need to mention that the work of rebuilding is divided into two major tasks: building the walls and cleansing the city. This is the natural division of the book of Nehemiah. Chapters one through six concern the rebuilding of walls. Chapters seven through thirteen concern cleansing the city. Each major task has its own set of challenges and opportunities, and yet each also has many things in common.

The study of rebuilding must begin with the rebuilders himself. What motivates someone to try to restore what others are content to accept in a ruined and tarnished condition? The work of rebuilding begins within the rebuilders himself.

# The Need for an Intercessor

## CHAPTER ONE

*T*HE WORLD NEEDS INTERCESSORS. The world needs someone to bring a fresh vision of God’s love and His design for life. Someone is needed to help others see past the ruin and desolation that surround them and their situation in life—someone to help them catch a glimpse of the power of God’s transformation and to share with them the Lord’s desire to lead them through a time of restoration and renewal. People need someone to teach them the value of good and proper boundaries and to help them establish the same. Within the safety of those boundaries, people will be able to renew their covenant with the Savior and see the fruit of renewal in their everyday lives. The world needs the ministry of an intercessor.

Are you an intercessor? If so, you are desperately needed. The work of renewal almost always begins with the ministry of an intercessor. This is true because most people, who have plumbed the depths and experienced the bitter fruit of rebellion in the most severe form, are so low they can’t even see the bottom. This is why the story line in the book of Nehemiah begins with Nehemiah. The work of rebuilding began when God moved his heart and Nehemiah became an intercessor.

*The work of rebuilding began when God moved his heart and Nehemiah became an intercessor.*

*The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain*

*men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven (Neh. 1:1–4).*

The year was 445 BC. Nehemiah dwelt in Shushan, the capital of the Media-Persian Empire. The glory of the golden kingdom that was Babylon was absorbed into the silver empire of the Medes and Persians. The political capital of the empire was moved from Babylon to Shushan. Nehemiah lived in the palace. He was the king's cupbearer, one of the most prestigious positions in the realm. He had more personal contact with king Artaxerxes than almost anyone else. What few peers Nehemiah had all had the utmost respect for him. He had the king's ear and the king's love. Life was good!

Then came news from the homeland. The capital of Nehemiah's recently repopulated nation was yet in ruins, and the repatriated inhabitants were in affliction and reproach. Instantly things changed for Nehemiah. He went from enjoying life to weeping and mourning. This is one of the first lessons from the book of rebuilding—the work of reconciliation almost always requires an intercessor.

Those in the throes of devastation seldom are able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Indeed, they are so close to and associated with the problem to such a degree that they usually are even unable to assess properly the extent of the damage. And make no mistake about it: The damage is the direct result of God's judgment on their sin. Restoration and renewal will require the prayer and prompting of someone outside the cycle of failure.

If you are in need of reconciliation, learn quickly to recognize and honor the ministry of the intercessor God has placed in your life. He or she brings you a vision from God—a vision born from a burden. Understand that you are too close to the problem even to realize how