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Nehemiah: A Study Outline

Old Testament Digest, Volume 2

From the *Old Testament Digest* of William MacDonald

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Nehemiah

A study outline from William MacDonald's *Old Testament Digest, Volume 2* · online: kee-ministry-library.netlify.app/.../outline/nehemiah

Overview of Nehemiah

Nehemiah was the third great leader of the restoration, after Zerubbabel and Ezra. MacDonald shows him, the king's cupbearer, burdened for Jerusalem, sent by Artaxerxes as governor, and leading the people to rebuild the walls in fifty-two days in spite of mockery, threats, internal troubles and plots against his life. Then came revival through the reading of God's Word, a covenant of obedience, the repopulation of the city, the joyful dedication of the walls, and, on a second visit, firm correction of abuses that had crept back. Whereas Ezra deals with the temple and worship, Nehemiah deals with the walls and everyday work, and brings God into the everyday affairs of life. Its last chapter closes Old Testament history.

Key themes

- Prayer and action together: "arrow prayers" in every crisis
- Leadership: vision, planning, motivation, delegation and follow-through
- Every worker's part recorded by God
- Watch and pray, work and fight (Nehemiah 4:9)
- Integrity and self-denial in leadership (Nehemiah 5:14–19)
- "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10)
- Prayer and confession are no substitute for obedience

Christ in Nehemiah. MacDonald does not draw an explicit type of Christ in Nehemiah, but he notes that Artaxerxes' decree fulfilled the word of the Lord to Daniel (Daniel 9:25), the prophecy that counts down to Messiah. He compares the twelve gates of Jerusalem with the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12), and sees the Feast of Trumpets as typifying the regathering of Israel and the Feast of Booths as foreshadowing the day Israel will dwell securely in the land. He also warns that the post-exilic care for outward religion later hardened into the system that opposed the Lord Jesus.

Read Nehemiah in the NET Bible: Nehemiah 1 · MacDonald's full commentary: Nehemiah in the Digest

MacDonald's Outline of Nehemiah

I. Nehemiah's Restoration of Jerusalem (First Visit) (Nehemiah 1–12)
- A. Consternation over Jerusalem's condition (Nehemiah 1)
- B. Authorization for Jerusalem's restoration (Nehemiah 2:1–8)
- C. Reconstruction of Jerusalem's wall (Nehemiah 2:9–6:19)
  1. Private inspection and public opposition (Nehemiah 2:9–20)
  2. Workmen and their work (Nehemiah 3)
  3. External hindrances and special precautions (Nehemiah 4)
  4. Internal problems and social reformation (Nehemiah 5)
  5. Total completion despite persistent hostility (Nehemiah 6)
- D. Organization of Jerusalem's guards (Nehemiah 7:1–4)
- E. Registration of Jerusalem's population (Nehemiah 7:5–73)
- F. Revitalization of Jerusalem's religion (Nehemiah 8–10)
- G. Repopulation of Jerusalem's precincts (Nehemiah 11)
- H. Tabulation of Jerusalem's priests and Levites (Nehemiah 12:1–26)

II. Dedication of Jerusalem's wall (Nehemiah 12:27–47)

III. Nehemiah's Reformation of Jerusalem (Second Visit) (Nehemiah 13)
- A. Expulsion of Tobiah from the temple (Nehemiah 13:1–9)
- B. Restoration of tithes for the Levites (Nehemiah 13:10–14)
- C. Elimination of illegal activity on the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15–22)
- D. Dissolution of interracial marriages (Nehemiah 13:23–31)

1 · Nehemiah's Burden and Prayer

Nehemiah 1

MacDonald introduces Nehemiah, the king's cupbearer, mourning over Jerusalem and pouring out a prayer of confession and request.

I. Nehemiah, son of Hachaliah, the king's cupbearer — Nehemiah 1:1

II. News of Jerusalem's broken walls — Nehemiah 1:2–3

III. Weeping, fasting and prayer — Nehemiah 1:4

IV. His prayer — Nehemiah 1:5–11
- A. Confession of the people's sin as his own
- B. Remember Your word to scatter and to regather
- C. Grant me mercy before this man

LESSONS

- Nehemiah identified with his brethren's hardships though he had not shared them.
- He shows effective leadership: vision, analysis, motivation, delegation and supervision.

RELATED READING

- *Notes on Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (H. A. Ironside) — Ironside on Nehemiah 1–6

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Articles by W. Ross Rainey* (W. Ross Rainey)
- *Archaeology and the Bible* (Gordon Franz)
- *Articles by James Naismith* (James Naismith)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 1 →

2 · Sent to Rebuild

Nehemiah 2

MacDonald shows the king granting Nehemiah's request, his secret night inspection, and his call to the leaders to rise and build.

I. The sad countenance and the king's question — Nehemiah 2:1–3

II. An arrow prayer, then the request — Nehemiah 2:4–8

A. Fulfilling the word to Daniel (Daniel 9:25)

III. The journey and the enemies' grief — Nehemiah 2:9–10

IV. The night inspection of the walls — Nehemiah 2:11–16

V. "Let us rise up and build" — Nehemiah 2:17–18

VI. Scorn answered by faith — Nehemiah 2:19–20

CROSS REFERENCES

Esther 4:2 Daniel 9:25 Jeremiah 29:10

LESSONS

- Prayerful dependence on the Lord is never in vain.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon, "The Building of the Wall and the Gates"

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Confirming Accuracy* (Jean Gibson)
- *Proverbs* (H. A. Ironside)
- *Articles by Steve Hulshizer* (Steve Hulshizer)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 2 →

3 · The Builders of the Wall

Nehemiah 3

MacDonald walks counterclockwise around the gates and notes that God keeps a careful record of all who serve Him.

I. The priests begin at the Sheep Gate — Nehemiah 3:1–2

II. The gates in order — Nehemiah 3:3–32

A. Fish, Old, Valley, Dung, Fountain, Water, Horse, East and Miphkad

III. The nobles of Tekoa shirk — Nehemiah 3:5

IV. Some repair a second portion (Nehemiah 3:4, Nehemiah 3:21; Nehemiah 3:5, Nehemiah 3:27)

V. Twelve gates in all, like the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12)

CROSS REFERENCES

Revelation 21:12 1 Corinthians 3:13

LESSONS

- God knows who is not really involved and who is doing double duty.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon, "The Building of the Wall and the Gates"

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Current Issues* (Dan Snaddon)
- *Collected Messages of Dan Snaddon* (Dan Snaddon)
- *Notes on the Minor Prophets* (H. A. Ironside)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 3 →

4 · Building and Watching

Nehemiah 4

MacDonald shows the builders meeting mockery with prayer and threats with weapons, half working and half on guard.

I. Sanballat and Tobiah mock — Nehemiah 4:1–3

II. Prayer, and the wall to half its height — Nehemiah 4:4–6

A. Imprecatory prayer not for this age of grace (Romans 12:19–21)

III. Conspiracy and discouragement — Nehemiah 4:7–12

IV. "Remember the Lord … and fight" — Nehemiah 4:13–14

V. Half work, half stand guard; the trumpet ready — Nehemiah 4:15–23

CROSS REFERENCES

Romans 12:19–21

LESSONS

- The strategy was to pray, watch and work.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Nehemiah 4

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Articles by John Boyd* (John Boyd)
- *Watch and Pray (1989–1993)* (Kevin L. Engle)
- *The Continual Burnt Offering* (H. A. Ironside)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 4 →

5 · Oppression of the Poor

Nehemiah 5

MacDonald describes Nehemiah's rebuke of the wealthy for usury and his own self-denying example as governor.

I. The poor sell their children — Nehemiah 5:1–5

II. Nehemiah's anger and rebuke — Nehemiah 5:6–11

A. Usury forbidden (Exodus 22:25)

III. The promise sealed by oath — Nehemiah 5:12–13

IV. Nehemiah's twelve years as governor — Nehemiah 5:14–19

A. He did not take the governor's bread, because of the fear of God

CROSS REFERENCES

Exodus 22:25

LESSONS

- If God kept track of his sacrifices, that was enough for Nehemiah.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Nehemiah 5–6

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Through the Scriptures: Sunday School Lesson Outlines* (Alfred P. Gibbs)
- *The Seven Churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 1–3)* (Gordon Franz)
- *Papers on Christian Living* (William Kelly)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 5 →

6 · The Wall Finished

Nehemiah 6

MacDonald shows Nehemiah refusing every scheme against him and the wall finished in fifty-two days.

I. "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down" — Nehemiah 6:1–4

II. The open letter of slander — Nehemiah 6:5–9

III. Shemaiah's false warning — Nehemiah 6:10–14

  A. Only priests could enter the temple

IV. The wall finished in fifty-two days — Nehemiah 6:15–16

V. The nobles' letters with Tobiah — Nehemiah 6:17–19

LESSONS

- Nehemiah habitually turned to God in times of crisis with "arrow prayers."

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Nehemiah 5–6

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Proverbs* (H. A. Ironside)
- *I Will Build My Church* (James Gunn)
- *Daniel in the Critics' Den* (Sir Robert Anderson)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 6 →

7 · Guarding and Registering the City

Nehemiah 7

MacDonald describes the guard set over Jerusalem and the register of those who first returned with Zerubbabel.

I. Hanani and Hananiah given charge — Nehemiah 7:1–2

  A. "A faithful man, and feared God above many"

II. Rules for the gates and watches — Nehemiah 7:3

III. A large city with few people — Nehemiah 7:4

IV. The genealogy of the first returners — Nehemiah 7:5–65

  A. Almost the same as — Ezra 2

V. The totals and gifts — Nehemiah 7:66–73

CROSS REFERENCES

Ezra 2

LESSONS

- Faith built the walls where they used to be, even for a city still too empty.

RELATED READING

- *Notes on Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (H. A. Ironside) — Ironside on Nehemiah 7–13

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Life of Christ* (Gordon Franz)
- *Articles by Gordon Franz* (Gordon Franz)
- *An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke* (William Kelly)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 7 →

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8 · Ezra Reads the Law

Nehemiah 8

MacDonald calls this chapter a revival through the public reading of Scripture, ending in the joyful Feast of Booths.

I. The people gather at the Water Gate — Nehemiah 8:1
  A. The Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:24–25)

II. Ezra reads from morning to midday — Nehemiah 8:2–6

III. The Levites give the sense — Nehemiah 8:7–8

IV. "The joy of the Lord is your strength" — Nehemiah 8:9–12

V. Study for the leaders; the Feast of Booths found — Nehemiah 8:13–15

VI. Booths built; joy greater than since Joshua — Nehemiah 8:16–18

CROSS REFERENCES

Leviticus 23:24–25 Ezra 3:4

LESSONS

- The feasts were to be kept with joy: love in sharing, joy before the Lord, peace in the heart.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Nehemiah 8–9

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Through the Scriptures: Sunday School Lesson Outlines* (Alfred P. Gibbs)
- *Proverbs* (H. A. Ironside)
- *Bible Gems: Gospel Light* (Milton Haack)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 8 →

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9 · The Great Prayer of Confession

Nehemiah 9

MacDonald outlines the Levites' long prayer reviewing Israel's history and God's faithfulness, leading to a sealed covenant.

I. Fasting, separation and confession — Nehemiah 9:1–3

II. The prayer — Nehemiah 9:5–37
  A. Creation and Abraham — Nehemiah 9:6–8
  B. Exodus, Sinai and the wilderness — Nehemiah 9:9–21
  C. Conquest, judges, warnings and captivity — Nehemiah 9:22–31
  D. An appeal for mercy — Nehemiah 9:32–37

III. "We make a sure covenant" — Nehemiah 9:38

LESSONS

- Biblical praying sees events from God's point of view.
- Prayer and confession, important as they are, are no substitutes for obedience.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Nehemiah 8–9

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Through the Scriptures: Sunday School Lesson Outlines* (Alfred P. Gibbs)
- *Dr. Ironside's Bible* (H. A. Ironside)
- *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Volume 4 (Ecclesiastical 2)* (John Nelson Darby)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 9 →

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10 · The Covenant Sealed

Nehemiah 10

MacDonald lists those who sealed the covenant and its terms, centered on the care of God's house.

I. Those who sealed — Nehemiah 10:1–27

II. The pledge to keep the law — Nehemiah 10:28–29

III. No mixed marriages — Nehemiah 10:30

IV. The Sabbath and the seventh year — Nehemiah 10:31

V. The temple tax, wood, firstfruits and tithes — Nehemiah 10:32–39

A. "We will not forsake the house of our God"

LESSONS

- Care for externals, though right, later grew into the pharisaism that opposed Christ.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Nehemiah 10–11

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Confirming Accuracy* (Jean Gibson)
- *Life of Christ* (Gordon Franz)
- *Articles by J. G. Bellett* (J. G. Bellett)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 10 →

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11 · Repopulating Jerusalem

Nehemiah 11

MacDonald describes the lot cast to bring one in ten into the holy city and the families who lived there.

I. One in ten chosen by lot; volunteers blessed — Nehemiah 11:1–2

II. Those of Judah and Benjamin — Nehemiah 11:3–9

III. Priests, Levites and gatekeepers — Nehemiah 11:10–19

IV. Temple servants and overseers — Nehemiah 11:20–24

V. The villages of Judah and Benjamin — Nehemiah 11:25–36

LESSONS

- Those who willingly offered themselves to live in Jerusalem were blessed by the people.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Nehemiah 10–11

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *The Acts of the Apostles* (William Kelly)
- *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Volume 4 (Ecclesiastical 2)* (John Nelson Darby)
- *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Volume 4: Romans to Philippians* (John Nelson Darby)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 11 →

12 · The Dedication of the Wall

Nehemiah 12

MacDonald lists the priests and Levites and describes the two great choirs that circled the wall to its dedication.

I. Priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel — Nehemiah 12:1–9

II. The high priests to Jaddua — Nehemiah 12:10–11

III. Priests and Levites in later days — Nehemiah 12:12–26

IV. Purification of people, gates and wall — Nehemiah 12:27–30

V. Two choirs around the wall — Nehemiah 12:31–42

VI. Great sacrifices and joy heard afar — Nehemiah 12:43

VII. Provision for the priests and Levites — Nehemiah 12:44–47

LESSONS

- Joyful giving followed joyful worship.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Nehemiah 12–13

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *The Four Hundred Silent Years* (H. A. Ironside)
- *From the Editor's Notebook: The Minor Prophets* (W. Ross Rainey)
- *The Kings of Judah and Israel* (Christopher Knapp)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 12 →

13 · Nehemiah's Reforms

Nehemiah 13

MacDonald shows Nehemiah returning to find Tobiah in the temple and correcting neglect of the Levites, Sabbath-breaking and mixed marriages.

I. The law read; the mixed multitude separated — Nehemiah 13:1–3

II. Tobiah thrown out of the temple chamber — Nehemiah 13:4–9

III. The Levites' portions restored — Nehemiah 13:10–14

IV. The Sabbath kept holy — Nehemiah 13:15–22

V. Mixed marriages rebuked — Nehemiah 13:23–31

  A. A grandson of the high priest driven away

VI. "Remember me, O my God, for good"

CROSS REFERENCES

Ezra 10 Psalm 69:9

LESSONS

- Zeal for the things of God consumed Nehemiah; he was no respecter of persons.

- This chapter closes Old Testament history; the four hundred silent years follow.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Nehemiah 12–13

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Papers on Christian Living* (William Kelly)
- *The Four Hundred Silent Years* (H. A. Ironside)
- *Disciple's Manual Study Guide* (Peter Lueling)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 13 →

Further reading on Nehemiah

In the Faithful Men Library

- *The Book of Nehemiah* (Dan Snaddon)
- *Lecture on the Book of Nehemiah* (William Kelly)
- *Notes on Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (H. A. Ironside)
- *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Volume 2: Ezra to Malachi* (John Nelson Darby)
- *Articles by Leslie S. Rainey* (Leslie S. Rainey)

On plymouthbrethren.org

- "Lecture on the Book of Nehemiah" (William Kelly, plymouthbrethren.org)
- "Nehemiah" (John Nelson Darby, plymouthbrethren.org)

Every library book that cites Nehemiah: Scripture index — Nehemiah

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