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Lesson 1

REBUILDING THE WALLS . . . AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE WHOLE STORY

The book of Nehemiah will amaze us with its dramatic story of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. We will enjoy this story even more if we understand its background. Where did these people come from, and who are these families who are struggling to rebuild a broken-down city? These are *God's people*, who show us both *the consequences of disobeying God's law* and *the blessing of receiving God's mercy*.

(Please refer throughout this lesson to the General Timeline and the Detailed Timeline in the back of the book.)

DAY ONE—THESE ARE GOD'S PEOPLE

1. The people rebuilding the walls in Nehemiah are God's people. They have God's word on it. What scriptural

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promises to their ancestors apply to these people as a nation?

a. To Abraham: Genesis 12:1-3 and 13:14-17

b. To Moses: Exodus 19:3-6

c. To David: 2 Samuel 7:16

d. Through the prophet Isaiah: Isaiah 9:6-7

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of human unfaithfulness do you observe? Second, what do you observe about God's dealing with unfaithfulness?

a. 2 Kings 17:5–15

b. 2 Chronicles 36:11–20

The northern kingdom was dissolved forever, but many Jews from the southern kingdom stayed together, grew, and even prospered in exile—figures such as Daniel and Esther (and Ezra and Nehemiah). A number did remain faithful to their God, and God in his mercy preserved them.

DAY THREE—THE BLESSING OF RECEIVING GOD'S MERCY

These people of God show not only the consequences of disobeying God's law, but also *the blessing of receiving God's mercy*. The very first deportations of Jews from Jerusalem to exile in Babylon had begun as early as 605 B.C. Just short of seventy years

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c. 2 Chronicles 36:20–23

2. We marvel now, looking back. The prophet Daniel, who had been among the first exiles taken to Babylonia, marveled as he watched it come to pass. What did he do when he read the prophecies from Jeremiah and understood that the end of the exile was near? In Daniel 9:1–19, what can you observe and learn? (“Darius” of v. 1 is probably a temporary ruler appointed over Babylon at the beginning of Cyrus’s reign—not the later Persian King Darius.)

DAY FOUR—SO WHAT?: PART ONE

So, we have the background story straight. But what does it have to do with us? Are we simply to benefit from taking in all this fascinating history, or can we begin as well to connect personally with this story? The answer to that last question is a resounding *yes*.

First, *this is our story*, if we have become part of God's people. Most of us probably do not share the privilege of being Jewish, or part of Abraham's physical seed. We could not list our names in the genealogies that continue down through the generations. How can we be part of God's chosen people? What is the only way, ever, for anyone to belong to God?

- I. Read Galatians chapter 3. It's a difficult chapter, so we might not understand every part of it—and that is fine. But this chapter answers the question we are asking. The apostle Paul is writing to the Galatians and telling them how to become God's people—and it's not by having Abraham's genes *or* by perfectly obeying the law. So how is it? Write down key phrases from this chapter that point to how we do indeed become God's people, Abraham's true seed.

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2. Using some of these key phrases, write your own brief summary of how we become part of God's people, and how it is that this Old Testament story becomes our story.

3. How does the larger biblical story shed light on God's declaration in Isaiah 1:27?

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DAY FIVE—SO WHAT?: PART TWO

Not only is this our story, but, second, *this is our God*. The God of the Bible is one God, from beginning to end, working in all of human history to redeem a people for himself through his Son Jesus Christ. The God to whom we as believers pray when we wake up in the morning is the God to whom Nehemiah prayed when he wanted to go back to Jerusalem. For this final day, look back through the passages we have read during this week of background study. As you reread, jot down key phrases you find that tell you about God—what he is like and how he deals with his people. Spend some time meditating on and worshiping the Lord God.

Notes for Lesson 1

