

Beyond the Rubble

By Mary Kane

“And clean up all this junk in your room!”

“Junk? What junk? I don’t see any junk in my room...it just looks comfortable to me.”

How many times have you been through the conversation above with one of your children or with your own parents? When my two sons were teens they were perfectly at home in their messy rooms. They didn’t even believe that their digs were dirty. Erik and Scott would ignore the clutter and navigate around various piles of dirty clothes, clean clothes and athletic equipment through their “rising up and their lying down.” I didn’t know how they could stand it. They were used to the clutter; comfortable with it. As a matter of fact, they didn’t even see the clutter anymore; it seemed normal to them. My sons’ messy rooms are a perfect illustration of a stage in my walk with the Lord. Due to my wrong thinking and subsequent poor choices of my teenage years, as a young adult I had a lot of rubble in my life. I had lived with this rubble for years. I had learned to navigate around it, dig through it, and grew used to it. As a matter of fact, my rubble even seemed to be normal to me. I didn’t realize how much the rubble in my life was costing me until God began to open my eyes.

Even though it was very painful to deal with my rubble, God provided the grace and strength I needed to heal my heart and make me whole. He showed me that there is life beyond the rubble. Just as He healed me, He’s waiting to heal you too.

Before we begin our study today, please take a moment and ask God to forgive you for any sin that you need to confess to Him and open the eyes of your heart to the truth of His Holy Word. We need God’s insight and wisdom to see how these sections of Old Testament Scripture apply to our modern day lives.

Now, in order to get an idea for what was happening in Israel during the days of Nehemiah, please read the following verses and write a summary sentence for each section.

Nehemiah 1:1-11:

Nehemiah 2:2-10:

Nehemiah 4: 7-10

Read between the lines of Nehemiah chapter 1 and record below what had caused the walls to be broken down and the rubble to be scattered about in Jerusalem.

The people of Jerusalem had been attacked by an enemy and many of them had been carried off into captivity. During Old Testament times if the nation of Israel was under attack it was usually because of one reason.

Please read Nehemiah 1:6-8 and write the reason for the attack on Jerusalem and the destruction of the walls and gates.

When the people of God did not heed His warnings and continued in their sin, God would send an enemy upon them in order to turn their hearts back to Him.

In retrospect, what would God do as they returned to Him (verse 1:9)?

No matter how far they had wandered nor how deep their sin, God would gather them back to His Presence. Think upon this wonderful blessing; God

is always waiting for us to return. Don't be deceived however, our wandering and our sin will cost us more physically, emotionally and spiritually than we ever thought possible. Guilt and shame render a heavy price. Thankfully, Jesus nailed those things to the cross and covered them with His blood.

According to Nehemiah 2:17, what follows returning?

Rebuilding. The builders, however, had a problem—something was interfering with the rebuilding process.

What was hindering the work of the rebuilders (Neh. 4:10)?

There was rubbish in the way. The Hebrew word for *rubbish* is *aphar* which means ashes, dust, and debris. Let's consider each of these items for a moment.

Ashes: ashes are remnants of something that used to be, something that has been destroyed by fire. Perhaps you have the ashes of a failed relationship, ashes from a job that was eliminated, or ashes from a dream that suddenly ended. Ashes are of no value and will not help us move forward in our walk with the Lord. We cannot build our lives upon ashes, but Jesus has promised to give us beauty for our ashes if we will give them to Him.

Dust: In Old Testament times, dust was associated with mourning and death. People covered themselves with ashes and dust when they were grieving. Also, dust covers things that have not been used in a long time. Dust covers talents, gifts or skills that have lain dormant do to fear, misplaced priorities, or sin. It's time to clear away the dust and let God resurrect our ambitions and dreams.

Debris: wreckage, fragments, rubble, trash. No one is attracted to debris. The clutter in our lives can keep us from reaching out to others. We shy away from sharing our lives because we don't want others to see our mess. God promises to make us white as snow. Let's invite Jesus into our mess and ask Him to clean it up.

Please go back and read Nehemiah 4:10 again.

Not only did the rubbish hinder the building, but it also caused the builders to "lose strength." The NKJV states that "the strength of the burdens bearers is *failing*." From the Hebrew *failing* transliterates as *kashal* which means "to totter, to stagger, to stumble. The workers were literally tripping over the ruins and rubbish of the past. The "past" needed to be dealt with so the people could live in the present and plan for the future.

Like the remnant in Jerusalem, we also need to deal with the dust and ashes of the past. Carrying around the rubbish of the old life takes a lot of energy and it will prevent us from carrying on the work of the kingdom.

Cleaning up the rubble from the past is hard work. Why expend the energy? Why should we toil and labor to clean up the destruction in our lives?

- ***So we can rebuild walls of protection.*** Not only will rubble cause us to waste precious energy and resources it will also prevent us from rebuilding appropriate boundaries that will protect us from attacks of the enemy. As Proverbs 25:28 states, "Whoever has no rule over His own spirit is like a city broken down without walls." A city without walls is "easy pickins" for an invading army.

Have you been suffering from attacks of the enemy due to broken down walls?

What walls need rebuilding in your life?

What new boundaries do you need to establish?

- ***So we can help others rebuild.*** Once we have cleaned up our own rubble, we will be able to help a brother or sister go through the same

process. I am always encouraged by someone who has struggled and overcome the same issues that I struggle with.

Who needs your help to overcome a struggle?

How can you help them?

- ***So we can help God build His kingdom.*** Ephesians 4:7-12 states that God has given us all gifts "...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry..." Therefore we must clean up our rubble so we can join God in building His kingdom.

At this point in time, is your life more about stumbling through rubble or building the kingdom of God?

It is not God's will for us to reel and lurch through life. He calls us to run and never tire; to rise up and soar on wings like eagles. If you are currently staggering through life, stumbling over the rubble, don't despair—there is a way out.

- 1. Repent:** "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin" (Ezekiel 18:30). Sin *may* be causing the rubble to pile up in your life. Ask God to search your heart and reveal anything that is offensive to Him. If there is ask for God's forgiveness and *turn* from that sin. Accept God's grace that is abundantly available whenever we need it.

Perhaps you've already repented of any known sin but still struggle in the rubble, if so please go on to step two...

- 2. Renew:** "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Behind every pile of dust and rubble is a lie from the enemy. We need to replace the lies we have believed with the truth of God's Word. When we allow the truth of God's Word to penetrate our hearts and minds it will change our thought patterns, our beliefs and our actions.
- 3. Refocus:** "...let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us and run with endurance the race which is before us *looking unto Jesus*, the author and finisher of our faith..."(Hebrews 12:1-2). Our next step in rubble removal is to get our eyes off of the world, ourselves and the enemy and to focus on Christ. By pursuing Christ we will avoid many pitfalls and temptations.
- 4. Reroute:** "When you walk your steps will not be hindered, and when you run you will not stumble" (Proverbs 4:12). Once the rubble is cleared, we will be free to follow Jesus. We will no longer be stuck at ground zero, staring at the devastation and destruction caused by our own sin.

What step do you need to take next in order to remove the rubble from your life?

Remember to cover every step in prayer.

In closing let's look at one final verse. Please read Isaiah 40:3-4.

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert, a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth."

Rubble will get in the way of our worship, of our daily life, our family time, our ministry, our friendships, and our relationship with God. With God's help,

we can clear away the rubble and begin rebuilding our lives so we can lead others to Christ.

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