

## Intro to Nehemiah (Part I) Having God's Heart

**The book of Nehemiah is a report about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem after the exile of Judah. The principles contained in this book about how Nehemiah led the people in the building up of the walls and also of the people themselves offer incredible insights into God's Way of Getting Things Done.**

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF NEHEMIAH

The most famous King of Israel, King David, lived roughly around 1000 B.C. David's son, Solomon, ruled for about 40 years after him. After Solomon's death the Kingdom of Israel split into two parts, the Northern Kingdom (which retained the name Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (which took the name of the largest tribe, Judah).

Because of Israel's horrible leaders (19 out of 19 kings were bad) and the idolatry of the nation, in 722 B.C. God allowed the Assyrians to take over Israel and scatter the inhabitants all over the Assyrian empire.

In Judah (where 8 out of the 20 kings did *some* good) God was patient for awhile. But in 586 B.C. the Babylonians overtook Judah. Their foreign policy was to take the best of the best (such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) in to captivity where they could use their skills.

They were in captivity for 70 years. Then when the next world power, the Persians, took over, the rulers let some of the Jewish people return to their land.

There were three major groups who returned to their land. The first major return was led by Zerubbabel who helped the people begin to salvage and rebuild the temple. The next major return was led by Ezra who mainly rebuilt the "people" through spiritual nourishment and teaching. The final major return came under Nehemiah in 444 B.C.

### OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah and Ezra are one book in the Hebrew Bible. They are a follow-up to the books of Chronicles. I & II Chronicles review Israel's history from David to the exile while focusing on the temple and on the worship and spiritual life of the kings, priests, and the people. Ezra and Nehemiah keep this same focus.

**Neh. 1-7 & 13** read like extracts from Nehemiah's diary.

**Neh. 8-12** read like official records that Nehemiah wrote into his narrative later as he prepared his memoirs for public viewing. Without 8-12, chapter 13 would lose much of its point.

**Written:** Perhaps around 425 B.C.

**Audience:** Probably Israelites living in Jerusalem who have returned after being exiled.

### MAJOR EVENTS

- 1-6** Rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls
- 8-10** Renewing of Jerusalem's worship
- 11-12** Repopulation of Jerusalem
- 13** Recommitment to Jerusalem's renewal

### MEET NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah's account begins in the 20th year of the reign of Artaxerxes. Seventy years had passed since the temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem. They had a temple, but the people were not accustomed to worshipping there and their spiritual life waned quite a bit.

In addition, since the walls of the city had been torn down, there was no central and cohesive city life. They were back in their land, but there was very little identity and peace.

Those who were still in Persia, as some stayed there to continue to live and work, had basically outlived their status as prisoners and thought of themselves as immigrants. Since it had been 70 years, many of the children growing up didn't even speak their own language well so they were losing their identity in Persia as well.

### World Events

**551 BC** – Confucius born

**521 BC** – Buddha in India preaches his first sermon

**470 BC** – Socrates born

**448 BC** – Pericles rebuilds Greek Parthenon after it

was destroyed by the Persians in 480 BC

**445 BC** – 30 year truce between Athens and Sparta begins

**440 BC** – Greek philosopher Heracleitus is the first man to declare that dreams are not journeys into the supernatural but retreats into a personal world

Nehemiah found himself in the position of cupbearer. This was a trusted and prestigious position. His role was to taste the king's food. This position was usually given to a trusted foreigner since the king would not trust someone who would be capable and might desire to be a part of a plan to take the crown. Since many kings were assassinated by poisoning, they would have someone like Nehemiah taste the food first.

The cupbearer would many times become one of the king's most trusted confidants and would even become an advisor. Even though the role was like Russian Roulette daily, other than that pressure, Nehemiah had it made. He would have the finest clothes and the tastiest food and the best chariot. He would enjoy a life of comfort and ease. This is the setting where Nehemiah chapter 1 breaks in.

### Nehemiah 1:1-4 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup>The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, <sup>2</sup>that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

<sup>4</sup>So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Hundreds of miles away Nehemiah's Jewish brothers and sisters were discouraged and disgraced. The walls were in ruins. Enemies would make regular raids into the unfortified city. The news broke Nehemiah's heart.

These were his people, but more importantly they were God's people. And God's name was being disgraced as well. Nehemiah's work and body were in Persia, but his heart was in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was comfortable where he lived. He had his challenges of course. But essentially, if he didn't rock the boat, he was pretty well set. However, it was a passionate concern for God's people and God's agenda that superseded his own personal comfort and prosperity.

---

*It was a passionate concern for God's people and God's agenda that superseded his own personal comfort and prosperity.*

---

When Nehemiah heard about the condition of the walls and his people, he "**wept and mourned for many days.**" And not only that, he fasted and prayed because of his concern for God and His people.

---

*Nehemiah did not let his own comfort interfere with true compassion and concern for the welfare of others.*

---

This same mindset would be demonstrated by Jesus several hundred years later. Paul said that Jesus did not let His own comfort in Heaven interfere with Him following God's heart to be an obedient sacrifice for the world.

### Philippians 2:5-8 (NKJV)

<sup>5</sup>Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup>but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

### APPLICATION

- Do you really care for the people around you each day? What is the evidence? Do you overlook the "little people" --as if there actually are people you would consider below yourself?
- Are you so wrapped up in the details of your life that other people are interruptions rather than opportunities to serve Christ? What needs to change?
- Do you wake up in the morning with a thought and a prayer similar to this: "I want my heart to be God's heart...and it will be evidenced by how I treat everyone around me and how I spend my time and how I view each situation in which I find myself."

---

**SENATE STUDY**-Tue, 7:30am: Sen. Hancock's office  
**HOUSE STUDY**-Wed, Lunch: Austin Club  
**CAPITOL COMMUNITY STUDY**-Thu, Noon: Sam Houston Bldg  
Rm 210