

11/17/24

Nehemiah 1-2

The book of Nehemiah is incredible, and it is all about “servant leadership”, there is no other type of leadership in the Bible.

* Jesus told his disciples, “And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.” Lk. 22:25-27

We have noted in our introduction that Nehemiah is one of the three books that are known as post captivity and historical, the other two being Ezra and Esther.

1. Nehemiah is believed to be the author of the book, though some ascribe part to Ezra. Neh. 1:1
2. The name Nehemiah means comfort or consolation of Yahweh.
3. The book of Nehemiah focuses on two things by its simple division.
 - a. The city of Jerusalem under reconstruction of the wall. Neh. 1-6
 - b. The people of Jerusalem under re-instruction of the law. Neh. 7-13

4. Thirteen years have passed since Ezra returned in the 7th year of Artaxerxes and it is now the 20th year of his reigns. Ezra 7:7; Neh. 1:1

5. Four men seem to stand out in this post-captivity period, Zerubbabel the political leader, Jeshua the priest, Ezra the scribe and Nehemiah the layman who was the cupbearer to king Artaxerxes.

1:1-2:8 The commission of Nehemiah to go to the city of Jerusalem.

1:1-11 The prayer of Nehemiah for His people.

1:1-3 The inquiry about the remnant.

- 1) The author is identified, “The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.” vs. 1a
 - a) The name Nehemiah means comfort or consolation of Yahweh.
 - b) The name Hechaliah means “wait on Yahweh” and we know nothing about Nehemiah’s family besides this, but appears at the sealing of the covenant with Yahweh to keep the Law. Neh. 10:1
- 2) The date is given, “It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year,” vs. 1b-c

* The date is Nov.-Dec. 446 B.C.
- 3) The location is stated, “as I was in Shushan or Susa the mayor city of Elam, the citadel.” vs. 1d

- a) The citadel was the winter fortified palace for Persian kings, the area of southwestern Iran. Esth. 1:2: 3:15: Dan. 8:2
- b) About 100 miles from the Persian Gulf.
- 4) The occasion is declared, “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.” vs. 2
 - a) Hanani is the shortened form of Hananiah “Yahweh is gracious”, one of his Jewish brothers that came from Judah.
 - b) Hanani is also declared to be the real brother of Nehemiah attested by the Elephantine papyrus that a Hanani was head of Jewish affairs in Jerusalem. Neh. 7:2
 - c) The information regarded the Jewish remnant back in Judea and Jerusalem.
- 5) The conversation about the people and city of Jerusalem. vs. 3
 - a) The state of the remnant that returned, “And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach.” vs. 3a-b
 - 1)) The survivors were in great distress “ra’ ah” adversity and harm having no protection with the walls broken down for security

- 2)) The survivors were under great reproach “cherpah” scorn or taunt by the enemy.
- b) The state of the city, is described “The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.” vs. 3c-d
 - 1)) These walls are what was left from the final siege of Nebuchadnezzar at 586 B.C.
 - 2)) The wall were the unfinished work of Zerubbabel and Ezra, “broken down” and the “gates burned with fire.”

1:4-11 The response and prayer of Nehemiah.

1:4 The response of Nehemiah was that of being overwhelmed.

- 1) The immediate response was one of brokenness, “So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days.” vs. 4a-d
 - a) So taken back, he sat in dismay.
 - b) He sat to express his deep emotional disturbance by weeping “bakah” means in grief bitterly and caused him to mourn or lament.
 - c) The duration is stated, “for many days.”
- 2) The second response was to turn to God fervently, “I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” vs. 4c-d

- a) Nehemiah was so affected, as he denied himself food and drink over the horrible condition of his people, the Jews, many days to hear from God.
- b) Nehemiah was fasting and praying before the God of heaven, not man.
 - 1)) The practice of fasting developed during the captivity like for the fall of Jerusalem, death of Gedaliah, Daniel, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah fasted during this Post-captivity period.
 - 2)) The phrase “the God of heaven” appears four times in Nehemiah. Neh. 1:4, 5; 2:4, 20
 - 3)) The reason is because the Shekinah glory of God had left the Temple of Solomon. Ezk. 11:2-24
 - 4)) The phrase focuses on Who God is and also found in Ezra and Daniel. Dan. 1:5

1:5-9 The particulars of the prayer of Nehemiah in view of the past covenant.

- 1) The person being addressed. vs. 5-7
 - a) The all powerful creator, “And I said: “I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God.” vs. 5a-d
 - 1)) The covenant God “Yahweh”, who sits in the heaven above all.
 - 2)) The One who is great and awesome “yare” to be feared.

- b) The God that make a covenant with Isreal, “You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments.” vs. 5e
 - 1)) The covenant took place at Mount Sinai with Moses. Ex. 19; 24
 - 2)) Mercy “hesed”, a covenant word means loving-kindness.
- c) The petition, “please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now.” vs. 6a-b
* Nehemiah pleads as the servant of God that God hear his prayer!
- d) The persistancy in prayer for his people, “day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants.” vs. 6c-d
 - 1)) Nehemiah knew the urgency of the time.
 - 2)) Nehemiah understood the perilous condition of his people.
- e) The need of confessing sins, “and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father’s house and I have sinned.” vs. 6e-f
 - 1)) Sin is an obstacle for God to hear us.
 - 2)) Sin impedes our being heard by God for He is holy. Ps. 66:18; Is. 59:1-2

- 3)) Nehemiah does not say, “they have sinned”, but rather “we have sinned” and “I have sinned”.
- f) The specific sins articulated, “We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.” vs. 7
- 1)) They acted corruptly in view of their oath and vows.
- 2)) They did not keep the Law of Commandments, statutes and ordinances God commanded Moses.
- 2) The particular promise God made to Israel. vs. 8
- a) God promised to send them into captivity for disobedience, “Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations.’” vs. 8
- 1)) Remember is a key word in the book. Neh. 1:8; 4:14; 5:18; 6:14; 13:14
- 2)) The word Holy” is found 83 times and 131 times with its' cognates in the book of Leviticus.
- 3)) “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” Num. 23:19

- 4)) The curses on Mount Ebal and blessings on Mount Gerizim found in the Law. Lev. 26; Deut. 27-28
- b) God promised to regather them from captivity, if they repented and obeyed, “but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.” vs. 9
- 1)) The two captivities were under Assyria 722 B.C and Babylon in 606, 596, the final siege was in 586 B.C.
- 2)) The place they returned was for the dwelling for His name, Jerusalem, Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.
- 3)) God honors His word above His name, He cannot lie. Num. ?
- 1:10-11** The particulars of the prayer of Nehemiah in view of the present effect of the covenant.
- 1) Nehemiah said they were the people of God, “Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand.” vs. 10
* The Ex. 19:4-6; Deut. 4:35; 9:28
- 2) Nehemiah petitioned the intervention of God on his behalf before the king, “O Lord, I

pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” vs. 11a-f

- a) His privilege to partners in ministry, “servant and servants who desire to fear your name.”
- b) He says, “this day” there is no procrastination.
- c) He pleads for mercy in the sight of this man, King Artaxerxes, who reigned from 465-425 B.C.

3) Nehemiah was an official in the court of the king, “For I was the king’s cupbearer.” vs. 11g

- a) He probably was a young man, handsome and from a prominent family trained in the court etiquette as Daniel, a good companion and listener to the king having influence as one closest to the king to decide who would see the king.
- b) He as the cup bearer tasted all the food and drink brought for the king to insure no one was trying to poison him.
- c) He was a faithful servant and at times a confidant to the king.

2:1-8 The commission granted to Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem.

1) The date given is very important, “And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes.” vs. 1a-b

- a) The date on the Jewish calendar comes out to our March 14, 445 B.C. four months have passed. Neh. 1:1
- b) Daniel prophesied the 70 Weeks of Daniel says about the first 69 Weeks and multiple of sevens to be 483 years, “Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times.” “And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.” Dan. 9:25-26
- c) It is based on the Jewish calendar of 360 day year not the Gregorian calendar of 365 days, being 483 years or 173,880 days.
- d) Taking the date of Artaxerxes of March 14, 445 B.C. and projecting it forwards, it lands on April the 6 32 A.D when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a the colt of a

donkery in the Triumphal entrance to Jerusalem, fulfilling the First Coming of the Messiah. Zech. 9:9; Ps. 118:25-26

- 2) The occasion is also given, “when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.” vs. 1c-e
 - a) The occasion is not stated, but to not please the king in any way was capital punishment, like Esther. Est. 4:1
 - b) Nehemiah tasted the wine to ensure it was not poisoned and gave it to Artaxerxes.
 - c) Nehemiah had always had been a joyous person before the king all the time.
- 3) The king was compassionate towards Nehemiah, “Therefore the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart. So I became dreadfully afraid.” vs. 2
- 4) The response of Nehemiah was to take this as God’s answered prayer of having the favor of the king, “and said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?” vs. 3
 - a) He expressed his desire for the king to live forever, as a personal blessing.
 - b) Nehemiah then steps out in faith believing this was the answer to his prayer about the king and relates the

devastating condition of the place of his father's tomb's, Jerusalem, lying in waste and the gates burned with fire.

- 5) The confirmation to Nehemiah came, “Then the king said to me, “What do you request?” vs. 4a-b
 - * Nehemiah found favor from Artaxerxes. Neh. 1:11
- 6) The constant dependence of Nehemiah on God is expressed as in the midst of the king asking what he requested, as they are in conversation we read, “So I prayed to the God of heaven.” vs. 4c
 - * Man of prayer. Neh. 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14
- 7) The petition of Nehemiah is made to the king, “And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.” vs. 5
 - a) This was a request for a leave of absence from his royal duties.
 - b) This would not be a short time.
- 8) The king asked Nehemiah for the length of time and his return to the court of the king, “Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), “How long will your journey be? And when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.” vs. 6

- a) Nehemiah had the favor of the king and queen and the request to send Nehemiah pleased the king and he set a time for his return.
 - c) The journey took four month, from the first day of the first month to the first day of the fifth month. Ezra 7:8-9
 - d) Nehemiah was gone 13 years from the 20th year of Artexerxes, March 14, 445 B.C to the 32th year of Artexerxes. Neh. 1:1; 2:1; 5:14; 13:6
- 9) The second petition of Nehemiah to King Artexerxes was for the necessary provisions to fulfill his commission. vs. 7-8
- a) First for written royal permission to cross and enter the province of officials serving under the satrap west of the Euphrates and protection, “Furthermore I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah” vs. 7
 - b) Second for the particular provisions, “and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy.” vs. 8a-d
- * Probably near Jerusalem not Persia!

- 10) The declaration of Nehemiah was that it was God had been the One to answer his prayer about his petition, “And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.” vs. 8e

2:9-20 The plans of Nehemiah to rebuilt the wall at Jerusalem.

- 2:9-10** The meeting of Nehemiah with the governors and official of the region.
- 1) The protocol of Nehemiah was wisdom, as he went directly to those in authority of the region to inform them he was on royal business from King Artexerxer, “Then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king’s letters.” vs. 9a-b
 - a) This would put them on notice that any attack on Nehemiah would be an attack on king Arrexerxes.
 - b) This would provide safe passage and check the hostility against Nehemiah, but not eliminate it altogether.
 - 2) The royal escort confirmed the commission of Nehemiah at Jerusalem, “Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.” vs. 9c
 - a) Nehemiah did not ask for these royal officers and soldiers of Artexerxes and confirmed the royal authority!

- b) Ezra did not ask for an escort due to the fact he boasted of the protection of God.
- 3) The enemies of the Jews were not pleased at the news about the commission of Nehemiah, “When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.” vs. 10
 - a) Sanballat means “strength”, the Hornite he was the governor of Samaria, according to the Elephantine papyri.
 - b) Tobiah means Yahweh is good, the Ammonite who was an important official of the powerful family in Ammon for centuries and related to the traitor priest Eliashib. Neb. 13:4-7
 - * Ammon and Moab were sons of Lot by his two daughters when they fled Sodom and Gamorah.
 - d) They were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

2:11-16 The arrival of Nehemiah to Jerusalem to survey the ruins and wall.

- 1) Nehemiah took a short rest after his long travel, “So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.” vs. 11
 - * The journey took about four months, Ezra also rest three days. Ezra 8:32

- 2) Nehemiah the man of faith was being directected by God to view the walls of Jerusalem and make a night survey, “Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode.” vs. 12
 - a) He kept what God had put in his heart to do at Jerusalem, he was not trying to impress any man.
 - b) He went out to hear the voice of God about the rebuilding.
- 3) Nehemiah set out on his survey of the condition of the city, “And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire.” vs. 13
 - * Believed to be the spring of Gihon.
- 4) Nehemiah continued his examination of the conditions of the city, “Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King’s Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass.” vs. 14
 - * Believed to be the Pool of Siloam.
- 5) Nehemiah then headed back from his personal observations of the work needed to done, “So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned

back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned.” vs. 15

- 6) Nehemiah waited till God had spoken to him about sharing his call and commission by God, “And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.” vs. 16

2:17-20 The plan of Nehemiah revealed to the leaders of Jerusalem.

- 1) Nehemiah exhort and invited the men to partner with him in to rebuild the ruins of Jerusalem, “Then I said to them, “You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.” vs. 17
* Nebuchadnezzar destroyed them 130 ago.
- 2) Nehemiah revealed the direction and vision God had given and sent him, including the words of king Artaxerxes about his commission to do the work, “And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words that he had spoken to me.” vs. 18a-b
* The phrase “the hand of my God” and “the good hand of my God”, “my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem”, “Then my God put it into my heart to gather the

nobles, the rulers, and the people”, “And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me”, appears several times. Neh. 2:8, 18

- 3) Nehemiah witnessed the patriotism and pledge of the rulers, nobles, priest and officials to partner in the work with him, “So they said, “Let us rise up and build.” Then they set their hands to this good work.” vs. 18
 - a) Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.” Neh. 5:19
 - b) “My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.” Neh. 6:14
 - c) “Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!” Neh. 13:14
 - d) “Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!” Neh. 13:22
 - e) “Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.” Neh. 13:29
 - f) “Remember me, O my God, for good!” Neh. 13:31

4) The evil opposition began from the start. vs. 19

a) Their enemies grew, “But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it.” vs. 19a-c

b) Their enemies ridiculed them, “they laughed at us and despised us.” vs. 19d

c) Their enemies accused them falsely, “and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?” vs. 19e-f

* As in the time of Ezra that halted the work. Ezra 4

5) The courageous respond by Nehemiah to his enemies. vs. 20

a) God was for them, “So I answered them, and said to them, “The God of heaven Himself will prosper us.” vs. 20a-c

b) God’s servants would accomplish the work, “therefore we His servants will arise and build.” vs. 20d

c) Their enemies had no right to the work, “but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem.” vs. 20e