

Nehemiah 1

Seek to give God glory

Introduction

Author: Nehemiah or Ezra

- **Nehemiah?** Personal Pronouns

Nehemiah 1:1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah...

Nehemiah 13:9 [Personal Pronouns] Then **I commanded** them to cleanse the rooms; and **I brought back** into them the articles of the house of God...etc."

- **Ezra the Priest?** Used Nehemiah's memoirs?
- **Rationale:**
 1. Nehemiah 7:5-73 and Ezra 2:1-70 almost identical
 2. Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in Hebrew Scriptures
 3. Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah have similarities of "**priestly**" focus
 - a) Levites
 - b) Temple
 - c) Listings
- Thus, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah may all been authored by **Ezra the Priest**
- **Author:** Most probably Nehemiah or Ezra
 1. **Book of Ezra focus:** Priest. Religious; i.e. Rebuilding ruined Jewish **Temple**
 2. **Book of Nehemiah focus:** Layman. Political focus; rebuilding the **walls**

Ezra is a fine representative of a priest and scribe. Nehemiah is a noble representative of the businessman. [JV McGee] Average guy with important job.

Date Written: 1000 years after Moses/400+ years before Jesus. Approx. **425 B.C.**

- **Nehemiah:**
 1. Last of the OT historical books
 2. Picks up 70 years after 2 Chronicles; i.e. 70 years of captivity are now over
 3. Remnant begins to return from Babylon/Persia to Jerusalem

**Temple is already built/Walls are in Ruin
People there are an Emotional/Spiritual mess**

Background/History:

- **Time Period Covered:** 485-420 B.C.
 1. Northern/Southern Kingdoms Israel destroyed Assyria/Babylon respectively
 2. Jerusalem is a virtual "ghost town" [Guzic]
- **Persian Emperor Artaxerxes I Longimanus in Power**
 1. Agrees to allow Jews to return to Israel to rebuild Jerusalem
- **Nehemiah**

1. Prominent/Dangerous position under Artaxerxes; **Cupbearer to King**
2. Allowed to leave Persia in **20th year** of Artaxerxes; i.e. **444 B.C.**
3. Nehemiah will in Jerusalem for **12 Years**

Purpose of Book: Document the restoration of Jerusalem's wall and God's faithfulness to His people after their exile in Babylon.

- **Jerusalem a very special city...**

Deuteronomy 12:5 "...you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to **put His name for His dwelling place**; and there you shall go..."

- **Jerusalem:**
 1. **Place God** set "His name and God chose to dwell"
 2. **Center** of the Earth/Center of the Universe?
 - Nations to East of Jerusalem read right left toward Jerusalem
 - Nations to the West of Jerusalem read left-right both toward Jerusalem
 3. **Destroyed:**
 - Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar from 589-587 BC
 - Israel unfaithfulness Inc. Not keeping God's Law/Worship of Idols.

NOTE: No more Idols after exile. Hard Lesson learned

Experts uncover evidence of ancient Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians

July 26, 2017 FoxNews.com [Last Wednesday]

Archaeologists excavating the City of David in Israel's Jerusalem Walls National Park have uncovered charred wood, grape seeds, pottery, fish scales and bones and numerous rare artifacts that date back to the city's **demise at the hands of the Babylonians** more than 2,600 years ago. Among the findings, which depict the affluence and character of ancient Jerusalem, capital of the Judean Kingdom, were dozens of jars used to store grain and liquids. Many of them have stamped handles and seals that **depict a rosette**.

"These seals are characteristic of the end of the First Temple Period and were used for the administrative system that developed towards the end of the Judean dynasty," said Ortal Chalaf and Dr. Joe Uziel, excavation directors for the Israel Antiquities Authority. "Classifying objects facilitated controlling, overseeing, collecting, marketing and storing crop yields. **The rosette, in essence, replaced the 'For the King' seal used in the earlier administrative system.**"

The artifacts were found under collapsed layers of stone on the eastern slope of the City of David. One rare find was a small ivory statue of a ...woman with an Egyptian-style haircut or wig. The quality of its carving reflects the skill of the artists who lived there, the directors said. "The excavation's findings show that Jerusalem had extended beyond the line of the city wall **before its destruction**....

- **Tone of the Book of Nehemiah:**
 1. People not excited about project. Complacent. Desperately need leadership

...after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, they were given the opportunity to return to their homeland, the Promised Land. Out of the some two or three million Jews deported from the land, only 50,000 decided to return to the Promised Land. That's only something like 2%! But they did return, and in the days of Ezra, they rebuilt the temple and laid a spiritual foundation for Israel once again. [Guzic]

2. **100+ years** after Jerusalem destroyed...Nehemiah leads rebuilding campaign

3. Encouraging people to trust God's promise to once again dwell in land

- **Book of Nehemiah is 13 Chapters Total:**

1. **First 7 Chapters:** Physical-Rebuilding Walls
2. **Last 6 Chapters:** Spiritual-Revival and Reform. Sent to make changes...

Titus 1:5 [Paul sends Titus to Crete] that you should set in order the things that are lacking

Here God sends Nehemiah to Jerusalem

- **Chronology of events leading to Rebuilding of Jerusalem:**

1. **First,** Zerubbabel and Joshua the Priest sent by God to motivate the people
 - They bring group of exiles to rebuild Temple as led by **God's Spirit**
 - Impossible in the eyes of the people...

Zechariah 4:6 "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: '**Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,**' Says the Lord of hosts.

- **Begin building...**
- People not impressed with new Temple compared to former
- God rebukes people's poor attitude...

Zechariah 4:9 "The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. 10 For **who has despised the day of small things?**

2. **Next,** 50 years after Zerubbabel returns...
3. **Ezra the priest** leads second group of exiles to **proclaim Law Moses.**

Finally, Nehemiah petitions King of Persia to allow him to build the wall around Jerusalem

I. Nehemiah Prays

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.

- **Nehemiah**
 1. Author?
 2. Nehemiah: Lit. "The Lord Comforts"
 3. Associate of Ezra the Priest [Temple Builder]

1b...It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year

- **Chislev:** November/December of Jewish Calendar
- **Twentieth Year** of Artaxerxes King of Persia [Iran]

NOTE: Dates in Nehemiah are important. Daniel will prophesy Jesus Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem to the very day using historical facts found in Nehemiah. [Next Chapter]

1c...as I was in Shushan the citadel...

- **Nehemiah in the Citadel at Shushan:** Modern Western Iran

1. **Shushan:** 150 miles north of Persian Gulf
2. **Citadel:** Fortified Royal Palace
 - Where Daniel received his vision of Rams and Goats
 - Home of Mordecai and Esther

Citadel in Shushan: Winter home for Royalty. Nehemiah is there

...2 [As I was there...] 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.

- **800-1000 mile trip:** Nehemiah's brother arrives from Judah/Jerusalem
- How are the people Jerusalem who survived...
 1. Some not deported to Babylon?
 2. Few not killed by Nebuchadnezzar?
 3. Scarce Jews who already returned from exile to the land...

3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great **distress and reproach.**

- **Great distress:** Bad, disagreeable, malignant condition with each other
- **Great Reproach:** Despised by others, Can't get it together...

3b...The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

- Reason for great distress/reproach/tension...

**Wall broken down/Gated burned
Vulnerable to attack/Vulnerable to ridicule**

- People looking around at ruin. Task seemed insurmountable
- **Discouragement** made them vulnerable

If Satan was allowed only one weapon...he would keep discouragement

Discouragement is a by-product of unbelief; Satan's agenda for pour lives...

If you are a discouraged and defeated Christian believer, you may have accepted the rationalization that your condition is "normal for all Christians." You may now be content with the position that the progressive, victorious Christian life may be suitable for a few Christians but not for you!

That attitude on the part of Christian believers is neither modesty nor meekness; it is a chronic discouragement, *resulting from unbelief*. It is rather like those who have been sick for so long that they no longer believe they can get well. Jesus is still saying, as He said to the man lying by the gate at the Jerusalem pool, "*Do you want to be made whole?*" Jesus made him whole because of his desire! His need was great, but he had *never lapsed into that state of chronic discouragement*.

Read and claim the promises [of God] until your heart leaps with the joy of His promises. Remember that the living God is everything. Our victory cannot enrich God and our defeat cannot impoverish Him. *Live on the side where the promises of God are bright!* [Tozer]

Isaiah 12:2 Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For [God], the Lord, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.'" 3 Therefore [God says...] with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation.

2 Corinthians 4:6... it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has *shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are **hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—**

- Victory in Christ
- World, Satan, Heart/Flesh beat us down every day...don't count it strange...

Romans 8:36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [That's the promise]

- People looking around at ruins. Task seemed insurmountable
- **Discouragement** set in making them vulnerable to attack
 1. Need a strong leader who trusts the Promises of God
 2. Need a leader that would **lead them** to trust in the Promises of God

Who would Nehemiah choose? Who would he delegate the task to?

4 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.

Nehemiah: Never physically been to Jerusalem but his heart was there

Psalms 137:5 [Written in Babylon] If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill! 6 If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth— If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy.

- Nehemiah in Kings Palace hears of the plight of brethren...
 1. Sits down
 2. Cries
 3. Mourns

Nehemiah fasts and prays before the God of Heaven: Vertical Perspective

- **God of Heaven:** Term only found in Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel
- At this point the Glory of the Lord has departed the Temple

Ezekiel 10:18: Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.

- **Glory returns 500 years later:** Seen by Shepherds at Jesus first coming!

Luke 2:13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward

men!"

- All will see His glory at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ...

Matthew 21:30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

5 And I said: "I pray, **Lord God of heaven...**

God of Heaven: Praise is Great way to start off a prayer
This is Who You are!

Matthew 6:8 Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

**Nehemiah begins by acknowledging who he is talking to...Lord God of Heaven
NT: Our Father who is in Heaven**

- **Next praise to God:** Eyes off self

5b...O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments,

- Nehemiah *begins* by praising God...

**Great and Awesome God. Promise Keeping God. Mercy displaying God
Hallowed be Your Name...Your Kingdom Come. Your will be done.**

- Acknowledge then Magnifying God; **make God big!**

Job 36:24 "Remember to magnify His work, Of which men have sung.

Psalms 34:3 Oh, magnify the Lord with me, And let us exalt His name together.

Psalms 69:30 I will praise the name of God with a song, And will magnify Him with thanksgiving.

- **Remember your promises:** Your Covenant and Mercy

Nehemiah will base his requests on the fact that...
God stakes his Character on His loyalty to His people

Leviticus 26:44 [After you turn to idols and the land I gave you vomits your out...]Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. 45 **But for their sake I will remember the covenant** of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the Lord."

"Remember Your covenant of Mercy"

- Acknowledge/Magnify/Remind/Then beseech [ask]...

6 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, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants...

Look and Listen Lord as we pray

Give us this day our Daily Bread though we don't deserve it

6b... [We pray] and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. 7 We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

- We Your people [including me] are sinners
- Daniel also prayed for restoration of Jerusalem
- Began with personal confession then national. No mention of Daniel personal sin

Daniel 9:3 [Read] Then I [Daniel] set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with **fasting, sackcloth, and ashes**. 4 And I prayed to the Lord my God, and **made confession**, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, 5 **we have sinned** and **committed iniquity**, we have **done wickedly** and **rebelled**, even by **departing** from Your precepts and Your judgments. 6 **Neither have we heeded** Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. 7 O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us **shame of face**, as it is this day—to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the **unfaithfulness** which they have committed against You. 8 "O Lord, to us belongs **shame of face**, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have **sinned against You**. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. ...**20** Now while I was speaking, praying, and **confessing my sin** and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God, 21 yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering.

- Shame of face?

Jeremiah 6:15/8:12 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, **Nor did they know how to blush**. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; In the time of their punishment They shall be cast down," says the Lord.

- **Common with Nehemiah/Daniel: "We" have sinned against You**

1. Not kept Your commandments [Sabbath/Idolatry]
2. Not kept the Law you gave to Moses

We confess our sins and our need of Your Forgiveness.

And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.

- **We repent**

Repentance makes us see the evil of sin, not merely as a theory, but experimentally—as a burnt child dreads fire... He who looks sinward has his back to God—he who looks Godward has his back to sin... Wherever there is a real forgiveness of sin, there will be real sorrow on account of it. [Spurgeon]

- **Repentance brings refreshing...**

Acts 3:19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that **times of refreshing** may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 21 whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things Next, Remembering God's promises...

- Repentance ushers in Spiritual Refreshing
- Israel's Repentance will bring Jerusalem's Restoration

Nehemiah believed God's Word; i.e. "If you break My commands you will suffer"
Choose to sin...choose to suffer

But...If You repent and keep My commands I will be faithful to restore you

8 Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 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.'

- **We are returning to You Lord:** Keep Your promise to gather us back

10 Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by **Your strong hand.**

- We are Your servants
- They are Your people

...by Your great power and with your strong hand you redeemed us from Egypt

Exodus 6:1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a **strong hand** he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."

Exodus 13:14 So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By **strength of hand** the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.'

Exodus 15:6 "Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces."

The Lord has a Strong Hand on to redeem us from the devil and sin

God does not get the glory unless we believe He will act
We are to live in constant expectation that He will act and in greater ways than we can imagine

- Walls of Jerusalem are broken down...People of Jerusalem are discouraged and need a strong leader

- Nehemiah compelled to go to Jerusalem to rebuild. **He is that Leader**

Something about pushing all the way through a trial and proving God out...

- **Begins with Foundation of Prayer:**
 1. **Who God is:** God of Heaven; Great and Awesome
 2. **Who we are:** Sinners

Psalm 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear. 19 But certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer.

3. **Lastly:** Relying on God's Faithfulness and Goodness...

Jeremiah 29:10 ...thus says the Lord: **After seventy years are completed at Babylon,** I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, **and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.**

- Prayer continues...

11 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...**

- Fear of God is the very beginning of Wisdom

Psalm 147:11 **The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him,** In those who hope in His mercy.

- **Fear:** Be afraid, stand in awe and reverence of God

The fear of God is the death of every other fear... [Spurgeon]

- **Fear of man:** Snare
- **Fear of loss:** Despair
- **Fear of the pagan king of Persia:** Losing your job/head

Something about pushing through and proving God out...

- Listen to the prayer of those who fear You...

11b... and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the **sight of this man."**

Ruler of the Known World

- **I ask for:**
 1. Prosperity [success] from You Lord
 2. Mercy from the king...

11c...For I was the king's cupbearer.

The quality control supervisor of the King's beverages should not look distressed!

- Nehemiah prayed for **4 months**
- Nehemiah completed wall in **52 days**

How important is it to pray and wait on the Lord?

Isaiah 40:31 But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

"Laying the matter to heart, [Nehemiah] did not begin to speak with other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise...but it occurred to him that he would do something himself." [Spurgeon]

- End of prayer...