

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 24TH - 25TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

SOME BACKGROUND ON NEHEMIAH

The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah were once considered one book.

- It was written around 446 B.C. to Jews that had returned from the Babylonian Exile.
- Nehemiah was a Jewish leader that worked in the court of the Persian King Artaxerxes as a cupbearer.

HOW NEHEMIAH ENDED UP IN BABYLON

Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians (Daniel) had overthrown Jerusalem around 597 B.C. Around 539 B.C. Cyrus and the Persians overthrew the Babylonians and took many of the Jews back to Persia/Babylon.

- During the Babylonian and Persian Empires many Jews were exiled, but some remained in Jerusalem.

OVER TIME SOME JEWS GAINED FAVOR

Ezra and Nehemiah tell us about 3 leaders that gained favor with the Persian kings and were able to go back to Jerusalem and start rebuilding their homeland.

- **Zerubbabel** (Ezra 1-6): rebuilt the temple.
- 60 years later **Ezra** (Ezra 7-10) rebuilt the commitment to the Law and community and **Nehemiah** rebuilt the city walls.

GOOD, BUT NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

What we will learn from Nehemiah is that though it is good to focus on a place to worship, God-honoring laws, and rebuilding a city, **without placing God first, laws, community service, politics, and social reform will always come up short.**

- Nehemiah reminds us that we must focus on God **changing the hearts of people.**

SOME OTHER THEMES IN NEHEMIAH

We see God's **faithfulness** because many prophecies and promises come to fruition.

This is a handbook in:

- Good **leadership**
- **Teamwork** and **servitude**
- **How we respond to opposition**
- How we are to not only **pray**, but **get to work** and do things for the kingdom of God.

BAD NEWS (NEHEMIAH 1:1-3)

HANGING OUT IN THE KING'S WINTER HOME

Nehemiah was spending time in the "fortress city of Susa," where the king would live in winter months (Chislev is in Nov-Dec).

- While there, he received some bad news from some visitors, including a close friend named Hanani from the area of Judah (the southern part of Israel).

THE JEWISH REMNANT

Nehemiah asked Hanani about the small group of Jews that remained in Jerusalem after the Babylonian and Persian exiles.

- The Jewish remnant isn't just from the exiles but is a recurring theme throughout the entire Bible. What we learn is that because of God's promise to Abe (Gen. 12), the Jews will remain until Christ returns.

"IN GREAT TROUBLE AND DISGRACE"

Nehemiah asked about his Jews and their city because he knew of Artaxerxes' aggression towards the Jews (Ezra 4). Nehemiah was in a comfortable position, and what happened to the Jews didn't affect him. So, why did he care?

- He cared because **he loved his people! Even though he didn't know them or live near them, he wanted them to be saved.**

THE WALLS AND GATES OF THE CITY

Walls are a staple of ancient cities for very practical reasons: they keep out invaders and offer a level of security to the people inside the city. The fact that Jerusalem's walls and gates were torn down left them vulnerable.

- This would have implied that the whole city was probably in disarray because the walls were of the utmost importance.

AN EVEN MORE IMPORTANT WALL

What we will learn is that an even more important safety measure had been torn down: the relationship of the Jews with God.

- And this is where the uncomfortable conversation about security, safety, and trust begins. **Of course, we are to be wise, but ultimately what "walls" do we depend on to keep us secure?**

HELP (NEHEMIAH 1:4-11)

"I SAT DOWN AND WEPT"

We see that Nehemiah loved his people so much that he "**wept**" over their brokenness. Not only did he weep, he **prayed** and **fasted** for his people.

- **Does it break our hearts to see the shape our people are in? What is our response to brokenness? Do we pray and fast for lost and hurting people?**

HE PRAYED FOR A "NUMBER OF DAYS"

Not only did Nehemiah pray and fast, but he did it for an extended period of time. This means **we must persist in seeking God's will and His help.**

- Nehemiah sought God's will and favor for 4 months before an opportunity came for him to go and help his people. **Do we have this kind of perseverance for others?**

THE PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH

His prayer is not that long, but it is very well written and thorough. He starts by honoring and acknowledging the greatness of Who God is. V5 says God is "awe-inspiring" and "gracious" to those who keep His commands.

- **Humility and the acknowledgment of God's greatness is pivotal in growing in our relationship with Him.**

In prayer, we approach the unapproachable God. Because we are able to do this we should have hope that He will hear and "be attentive" to our prayers.

- **If we have a relationship with Jesus, if we trust Him, and if we live by His commands, we can be assured that what needs attention will get it.**

THE ADDRESSING OF SIN

In his prayer, Nehemiah repents for his sinful nature and for the sins of his people.

- James 5:16 says that the prayers of righteous people are effective. This means that **we cannot expect God to demonstrate Himself in our lives if we are not committed to Him.** We must address and step away from sin.

"I WILL SCATTER YOU"

Moses clearly prophesied to the Jews that if they were rebellious, God would scatter them.

Nehemiah accepted God's judgment of a 70-year exile because it was righteous.

- The same thing goes for us today. **If we choose to live outside of God's commands, we choose to live in chaos.** Look at our nation today.

"BUT IF YOU WILL RETURN TO ME..."

Nehemiah isn't reminding God about what He said; he is just affirming it. **If we're arrogant, we're on our own, and that yields destruction. But, if we will humble ourselves and live for God, He will "bring [us] to a place" where we will flourish and be content.**

- This was literal for the Jews and a spiritual metaphor for all of us today.

WE ONLY HAVE ONE THING TO OFFER

Nehemiah offered all he could: his devotion and service to God. Nehemiah offered a prayer and asked for God's provision and success in helping his people rebuild their city.

- **The key is submission and trust. If we can learn to rely on Jesus for our "success," we will have whatever He wants for us, and that is the best life we can live.**

A SYMBIOTIC CIRCLE

- 1 Cor. 12 says, "If one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it." This means that as Christian, the health of the church and the souls of those estranged from God should be very important to us.

- **Does sin disturb us?** Does the current state of humanity bother us? Do we care for all people?

TRUST AND SUBMISSION

- Are we praying and fasting for the broken?
- Are we persistently seeking God's will? What if hearing it takes time?
- What are the "walls" that we depend on to keep us safe? Is God our security, or something that we think we control?

- If we truly trust God, we will live by His commands and principles.

THE HEART

- If our heart is prideful and arrogant, we will be "scattered" both personally and societally.
- But, if we will humble ourselves and seek God, He will not only restore us, He will use us to be a part of the restoration of those around us.

- It boils down to what we're looking for: our temporary pleasure or God's permanent kingdom? **Do we desire a kingdom of comfort or the kingdom of God?**