

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 25TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

INTRODUCTION

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one work, written by the same author around 446 B.C., which was eventually split into two books much later.

- Nehemiah is considered one of the history books of the Bible and continues telling of Israel's return to Jerusalem after being exiled to Babylon.

The Babylonian exile refers to a time in Israel's history when some Jews were taken from Jerusalem by the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, and led to Babylon.

- The Babylonians attacked Jerusalem for over a year. They killed many people and took thousands captive, leaving the Temple and Jerusalem in ruins (2 Kings 24-25).

God used Babylon as an agent of judgement against the Jewish people for their sins of idolatry and rebellion against Him. **God is in control**, and **there is never a moment He is not in control**, even when it seems that evil is allowed to prevail.

- We can trust that **He is working all things out for the good of those that love Him**.

The exile, destruction of the temple, the return to Jerusalem after 70 years, and eventual rebuilding of the temple was **all prophesied in the OT**.

- When all these events spoken of by prophets come true, we should have confidence that God is who He says He is, and **all His promises are true!**

Ezra and Nehemiah chronicle the events that took place over 50 years after the exile, when these exiles return home to Jerusalem and attempt to rebuild their lives.

- In these books, we are introduced to three different Jewish men who were allowed to return to Jerusalem to lead in the rebuilding of the city.

In Ezra 1-6, Zerubbabel and a group of exiles are allowed by the now Persian King, Cyrus, to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, fulfilling Jeremiah 25.

- They rebuild the altar for sacrifices and eventually the temple, but unlike Lev. 9 and 1 Kings 8, God's presence was not experienced like they expected.

60 yrs. later, Ezra (7-10) was allowed by Artaxerxes, King of Persia, to return to Jerusalem with another wave of exiles to teach the Torah (first 5 books of the Bible) and build community.

- His attempt to bring about social and spiritual revival failed upon learning that previous exiles had married non-exiles.

Then we come to Nehemiah, who is an Israelite official in the Persian Government.

- Upon learning of the condition of Jerusalem, Nehemiah prays to God and receives permission from Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem with another wave of exiles to rebuild the walls around the city.

TROUBLE (NEHEMIAH 1:1-3)

LIVING THE "GOOD LIFE"

Nehemiah was living in the fortress city of Susa during the winter (Chislev is Nov-Dec).

- Nehemiah is someone important in the Persian Empire by the fact that he is living in the fortified palace of the king of Persia. Though he was in Persia, his heart and mind were in Jerusalem. If Jerusalem was important to God, it was important to him!

It was in Susa where one of Nehemiah's brothers came with men from Judah with news of great trouble.

- Judah was the most important and powerful tribe of Israel, where great kings like David and Solomon and the Messiah would come out of. In this moment, only bad news would come out of Judah.

"GREAT TROUBLE AND DISGRACE"

Hanani reports to Nehemiah that "Jerusalem's walls have been broken down and its gates burned down."

- The condition of the people in Jerusalem were intimately connected to the state of the walls and gates, because in the ancient world a city without walls would be open and vulnerable to its enemies.

An unwall city would be considered a backwoods town with **nothing of value in it** because it could easily be stolen. The people would have been in constant distress and disgrace **just trying to survive**.

- Jerusalem was valuable because **God placed value on it** and the people were **meant for more than just surviving!**

A CALL FOR HELP (NEHEMIAH 1:4-11)

"I SAT DOWN AND WEPT"

When Nehemiah heard the news, he spiritually and physically shared in the burden his brothers and sisters were experiencing, most likely sitting down because the strength had left his legs.

- He didn't just feel bad for them. Yes, he wept and mourned for them, but he began to fast and pray for a number of days.

Nehemiah knew that he couldn't depend on his own strength and his own understanding, so he wisely spent time in prayer and fasting, seeking God's will. He knew that something needed to be done about the situation, but God first needed to do something in Nehemiah.

- **A great work for God can only be done once a great work has been done within us!**

MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

He knows there is no way he can accomplish what God has laid on him alone, so he must lead others to get the task completed.

- Do we try to accomplish everything on our own or are we leading leaders to complete what God has called us to? **We all lead in some capacity** because **we all have a sphere of influence**.

Leaders must prepare for difficult work and be realistic about cost and difficulty.

- Leaders must have vision.
- Prayer is essential to leadership.
- We should always pray to God in preparation for any task, but all the more when the vision given is so big that only God can achieve it.

NEHEMIAH PRAYER IN HUMILITY

He recognizes exactly who God is. "God of the Heavens...great and awe-inspiring...who keeps his promises with those who love Him."

- **Humility starts by the realization God is God and we are not!**
- In humility, we see our **complete dependence** on God and will be **moved to confess sins openly**.

"I CONFESS THE SINS WE HAVE COMMITTED"

Nehemiah uses the pronoun "we" and not "they," not excluding himself for the sins of a generation he didn't even know.

- He simply confesses sin without excuse or exclusion, because he too had "not kept all the commands, statutes, and ordinances" perfectly. **All have sinned and come short of the glory of God** (Rom 3:23).

"REMEMBER YOUR PROMISES"

Nehemiah is not insinuating that God has forgotten but is only showing God that he is aware of the promises made to Moses and is asking God to make good on it (Lev 26, Dt 30).

- First, we must know what the promises of God are. Then, we can plead the promises of God showing that we as children have heard what the Father has spoken.

"GRANT ME COMPASSION"

He was about to ask a Persian ruler, who was famous for not revoking laws (Daniel), to ask Artaxerxes to reverse a previous proclamation stopping all construction in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:23).

- As the king's cupbearer, he not only chose wines for the king, he also tasted them to ensure they were not poisoned.

FOCUS ON THINGS ABOVE

- If we "set our minds on what is above, not on earthly things," then we will find ourselves in alignment with God's heart.
- **Do we care about the things that God cares about?**
- **Does our heartbreak for the things that break God's heart?**
- **What do we set our minds on?**

IT STARTS WITH US

- **Are we focusing on the brokenness and sin around us without first addressing the brokenness and sin within us?**
- **Do we exclude ourselves from the role we played in the penalty for sin? Do we look at others and proudly claim "at least I'm not them (Luke 18:9-14)," or are we the sorrowful tax collector?**