

# Nehemiah 1-2 | 4/29/2018

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- Introduction

- General Overview

- The book of Nehemiah follows the actions and accounts of a man by the same name as the title Nehemiah.
    - Nehemiah, like Ezra, was used by God to fulfill His holy will.
    - Ezra major events
      - In Ezra we saw the beginnings of the Israelites return from their 70-year exile.
        - We know that they Israelites caused this exile because of their disobedience, however God also promised to restore them.
      - We had the first return of the Israelites to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel.
        - God used King Cyrus to allow the Israelites to return to Jerusalem so that they could rebuild the city.
      - The major purpose and goal that they accomplished was to rebuild the temple, which they did complete.
        - The people were once again returning to God.
      - Then in Chapter 7 we see where Ezra the Scribe has entered the picture.
        - Ezra was a priest and a scribe of God. He was an expert in the Law and knew God's Word better than anyone.
        - Ezra's divine purpose was to restore God's Word back into the heart of the people.
          - They had strayed away from the Laws of God and they needed to be reminded.
        - God was at work again with the King of Persia who know was Darius and He like Cyrus issued a decree allowing Ezra to take anyone he needed with him to Jerusalem along with numerous items needed for sacrificing in the temple.
        - Ezra will again fill His role as an expert of God's Law in the book of Nehemiah.
      - God will use Nehemiah to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem.
        - So now we have the temple completed and the Israelites have been rebuilding the city, however they have had numerous problems along the way.
          - **Because the city has no walls they were constantly being attacked and they would make progress only to have it removed.**
        - God appointed Nehemiah to lead the way for the Israelites to rebuild the wall.
      - Nehemiah brings religious reform to the Israelites.
        - As Ezra is reestablishing God's Laws in the minds and hearts of the people, Nehemiah is making sure that the people return fully to obeying God's original commands.
          - **This includes worship, tithing, marriage, Sabbath and confession of sins.**
    - Relation between Ezra, Esther and Nehemiah.
      - Reference the chronology handout.
      - Nehemiah picks up right where Ezra left off.
    - Author
      - Nehemiah is widely believed to have been written by Ezra.
      - This is based on both Jewish and Christian tradition as well as scholarly study.

- Ezra was a skilled scribe and he had access to all of the documents that were unobtainable by most like the letters in Ezra.
    - Ezra's writing of the personal account of Nehemiah was likely from his personal journal.
  - Who was Nehemiah?
    - Nehemiah has a true Hebrew name.
      - Unlike Esther or Mordecai Nehemiah has a true Hebrew name.
        - The suffix of "-iah" like Isaiah or Zachariah.
      - It means "Jehovah comforts"
    - **He was neither a prophet nor a priest, but he was a leader.**
    - Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes
      - This was a prominent position as you had direct access to the King.
        - Sounds familiar like Esther, Joseph and Daniel.
      - The primary responsibility of this position was to make sure that the King was never poisoned.
        - Nehemiah would pick out the wine for the King and guard his cup to make sure it was not tampered with.
        - He was also responsible for testing the beverages to make sure they were not poisoned, so he was always putting his life at risk as well.
        - This person of course had to be trustworthy because the cupbearer could also poison the king if he so chose to.
    - Nehemiah served as the governor over Judah.
      - Nehemiah 5:14
    - Nehemiah had great respect for God and knew His hand was upon him.
      - Nehemiah 1:5
        - "I said, Yahweh, the God of heaven, the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant with those who love Him and keep His commands"
      - Nehemiah 2:8b
        - "...The king granted my request, for I was graciously strengthened by my God."
      - Nehemiah 2:18a
        - "I told them how the gracious hand of my God had been on me, and what the king had said to me..."
      - Nehemiah 2:20a
        - "I gave them this reply, "The God of heaven is the One who will grant us success. We, His servants,..."
  - Interesting Observations
    - Nehemiah and Malachi are the last of the OT canonical writings.
      - There is a 400 years of Biblical silence until John the Baptist and Jesus Christ are recorded.
    - Chapters 1-12 happened over the course of 1 year 444 or 445 B.C.
    - Esther is the step-mother of King Artaxerxes
    - Ezra and Nehemiah were one book in the Hebrew Old Testament
    - Nehemiah was called "Second Ezra" in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) and also in the Latin Vulgate.
- Nehemiah hears a report from Jerusalem | Nehemiah 1:1-3
  - **Read Nehemiah 1:1-3**

- Nehemiah has been given the news of the state of the Jewish people who have returned to Jerusalem.
  - It had been 13 years since the 2<sup>nd</sup> return of Ezra in 458 B.C.
- **They had been successful in rebuilding the temple, however the city was still in shambles and they faced constant opposition.**
  - They would get some things rebuilt and then their neighbors who did not like them would come and tear it back down.
- Jerusalem of course is not back to its former glory (not even close) and Nehemiah is informed that the **primary means of protection for the city does not exist.** This being the walls and the gates.
  - It is difficult to defend a city (especially in those day) without any walls!
- This consistent opposition was recorded in Ezra
  - Ezra 4:6-23 was a later account that was recorded in Ezra but it was not in the same timeline as the beginning of chapter four and five.
- Nehemiah mourns for his people and calls out to God. | Nehemiah 1:4-11
  - **The purpose of Nehemiah's great prayer**
    - **This is a prayer of intercession for Israel.**
    - Nehemiah was praying for his people because of the opposition and problems they are having in trying to return to their former way of life.
    - Nehemiah recognizes the sins of the people and that this may be a cause for their current troubles. He asks for forgiveness for their sins and also his.
    - **Nehemiah knows he needs to go before the king to request permission for him to help the people rebuild the wall. He desires God's guidance and help in this endeavor.**
  - An important prayer for all Christians
    - This prayer of Nehemiah is a beautiful example of what a true prayer from the heart looks like.
    - It is a prayer to model, one that God most certainly responds to when it is genuine.
  - Nehemiah fasted and continuously prayed before God. | Nehemiah 1:4
    - **Read Nehemiah 1:4**
    - Nehemiah was not a priest or a prophet, but we see that he was deeply concerned for the Jewish people.
      - And rightfully so as he was appointed to be the governor and we can see his desire to bring the people in a better relationship with God.
    - **Nehemiah humbly came before God broken and in mourning.**
      - His approach to this prayer was not empty nor indifferent, but his heart was deeply hurt for whom he was praying for.
      - His truly cared for the people and he humbly brought himself before God.
      - **God responds to our humility when we come to Him.**
        - There is a reason why most all prayers recoded in Scripture begin with humility.
        - God will listen to the humble, not the one whom is proud and arrogant.
        - Our humility shows God that we respect, fear and revere Him. That we cannot do it on our own, that we NEED Him.
        - **When we approach Him with genuine humility, He will respond.**
    - He calls out to God in fasting and prayer for a longer period of time.
      - Again fasting and prayer is recorded on numerous occasions throughout the Bible for those in distress (Nehemiah, Jesus) and those making big decisions (Esther)

- This was not a short time of prayer
  - Nehemiah 1:6“...I pray to you day and night...”
  - This tells us that his time of prayer wasn’t limited to this short passage of Scripture but with his fasting and continuous prayer it was quite lengthy.
- **There was a 4-month gap between when Nehemiah heard of their plight and chapter 2 when he speaks with the king.**
  - The Jewish calendar is referenced in chapter 1 and 2
    - Chislev (November-December) and Nisan (March-April)
- He went to God on a consistent basis during this time.
  - He did this because it was important to him, and he desired God’s guidance and his presence.
- Esther also fasted and prayed for her important decision
  - Esther 4:15-16
    - “Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. Don’t eat or drink for three days, day or night. I and my female servants will also fast in the same way. After that, I will go to the king even if its against the law. If I perish, I perish”
- **Do Nehemiah’s actions of humility, brokenness and continuous prayer have any effect upon God? If so why?**
- Nehemiah was aware that God keeps His promises and His commands. | Nehemiah 1:5
  - ***Read Nehemiah 1:5***
  - He knew full well who God is, his character and promises.
    - That if God said He was going to restore the Israelites then He would.
    - **Nehemiah also knew that God would have to intervene to save the people and to keep His promise.**
    - The Israelites could not survive without God.
  - **We might wonder of what importance it is to tell God something about Himself that He is well aware of.**
    - We do this because when we acknowledge before God His character and His truths, this demonstrates our faith in Him.
    - When we say we know God keeps His promises and He loves us, it’s because we truly believe this in our hearts.
    - We are showing our faith in Him and by doing so it also lifts our spirits.
      - **We remind ourselves of God’s love and truth which uplift our spirits even in the darkest of times.**
- Nehemiah makes a confession for the sins of the Israelites and he acknowledges their disobedience. | Nehemiah 1:6-7
  - ***Read Nehemiah 1:6-7***
  - With a humble attitude and heart Nehemiah confesses, he acknowledges the sins of the people and his own.
  - **To acknowledge our sins before God is the first step to righting our relationship with God.**
    - Sin is primarily what puts a wedge between us and God, it is the source of a significant amount of our troubles (either our own or others).
    - We should always confess our sins to Him before we ask for what we want.

- We don't need continuous forgiveness for Salvation, but we need to show God that we are deeply sorry for our sin and disobedience that we have committed.
- God will always forgive us of our sins
  - 1 John 1:9
    - "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- **This is a prayer of intercession.**
  - This prayer wasn't just for his sins, but for the sins of the people.
  - Nehemiah recognized all of their sins and he brought them before God asking for forgiveness.
  - The prayer of intercession is powerful and has a purpose. We are called to do this in the Scriptures.
  - 1 Timothy 2:1
    - "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."
- **Is there power today in a prayer of intercession? For what reasons do we commonly pray intercessory prayers?**
- Nehemiah acknowledges God's promises and pleas for their fulfillment. | Nehemiah 1:8-10
  - **Read Nehemiah 1:8-10**
  - God obviously didn't need reminding but Nehemiah is essentially pleading with God for His fulfillment of the previous promises.
    - Deuteronomy 30:1-4
  - Nehemiah also recognizes the previous work God had done when he led them out of Egypt and had redeemed them.
  - With the help of Nehemiah, Ezra and the other prophets the people are returning to God and He is fulfilling His promises by restoring Jerusalem.
- Nehemiah and the Israelites revere/fear God | Nehemiah 1:11
  - **Read Nehemiah 1:11**
  - Nehemiah acknowledges that both he and the Israelite people, revere and fear God.
    - He is calling out to God to let Him know that they fear Him, that they respect Him and that they desire to obey Him.
  - He knew that one's heart had to be in the right place when you pray to God.
    - Your heart and attitude cannot be God give me give me and bless me, but I'm not going to be obedient or respect you in any way.
  - He asked for mercy before the King Artaxerxes whom he was going to see soon to ask for permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall.
- Nehemiah requests to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall | Nehemiah 2:1-10
  - **Read Nehemiah 2:1-8**
  - Nehemiah's sadness for his people was written upon his face | Nehemiah 2:1-3
    - Nehemiah who had never been sad in the presence of the king before apparently had his condition written upon his face.
    - The condition of his people due to the walls of Jerusalem was weighing heavy upon his heart.

- The king realized that Nehemiah was not sick but that it had to be sadness of the heart (depression)
    - The king was of course correct.
  - Nehemiah now had his opportunity to ask the king if he could return but he was fearful.
    - Likely because of his fear of the king and if he displeased him and of course if the king was to say NO.
    - This is similar to Esther when Mordecai had told her that she needed to go to the King to save the Israelites. She was fearful of the king and what he might do.
- Nehemiah asks the king if he can return to Jerusalem | Nehemiah 2:4-8
  - Nehemiah again prays (briefly) before asking the king
    - Again we see that Nehemiah at the last moment even makes a request to God.
  - The King approves of Nehemiah's request
    - The king has heard Nehemiah's request and approves of it.
    - **The king was not a stranger to who the people were of course he had previously granted Ezra with letters and the ability to return to Jerusalem.**
    - However, the request to rebuild the walls was a bit more extensive of a request.
      - **We know that they still had to answer to the king and when you have a city that has its own walls that can seem like an act of defiance.**
      - Which is exactly what the people who were against the Israelites and were against God had been saying to get the king to not allow this to happen.
  - Letters were granted as they were for Ezra
    - Just as the king had done for Ezra he has granted a request to Nehemiah so that he would have the royal authority to use the king's resources to rebuild the wall and the gates.
  - Nehemiah acknowledges that God's providence is at work.
    - Nehemiah has realized that God has in fact answered his prayers and that God's providence is at work in the restoration of the walls.
- Opposition is never far away | Nehemiah 2:9-10
  - ***Read Nehemiah 2:9-10***
  - We can see that opposition to Nehemiah and for all of God's people is never far away.
  - While God's hand is at work to fulfill His promises He never says that we will never have troubles.
  - In fact, when we ready about them rebuilding the walls we will see that they were constantly under opposition and had to fight and build at the same time.
  - **Do you find at times there is opposition even when you are doing the will of God and being obedient? If you are doing God's will, why is it not always easy?**