

Nehemiah – Building the Future, Part 1

Nehemiah 1:1-4 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.

The book of Nehemiah is not just about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem – it is about building a city that could be a home for God’s people and a witness for God’s Name to every other city! As we proceed through the book keep in mind that we are reading Nehemiah’s 2500-year-old journal.

606 BC – First wave of captives taken to Babylon
(20 years pass)

586 BC – City of Jerusalem destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar
(50 years pass)

536 BC – Jews allowed to return to Jerusalem by King Cyrus
(20 years pass)

516 BC – Temple finally completed after many delays
(70 years pass)

446 BC – Nehemiah’s journal begins

Nehemiah is not a paid religious professional! He is a secular person with great influence, a great place to live, and a great career – he is the King’s cupbearer. He did not return with the Jews who straggled back to their homeland 90 years before. He has made a successful life for himself in the beautiful city of Shushan (capital of Persia). He has a life that anyone would envy. He has it made; he is comfortable. But a report from the devastated city of Jerusalem (capital of Israel) totally messes him up!

Jerusalem looks like New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina! The city is destroyed and the people are scattered and demoralized.

One conversation with some of his brethren from Judah about the state of his beloved Jerusalem, and Nehemiah can never be the same. Others can still be indifferent, but he can no longer sit idly by while God’s city is not faring as well as his secular job! He is heartbroken, and he goes into a prolonged time of fasting and praying (4 months) – and then he acts!

One little historical detail should be mentioned at this point – the news that so devastated Nehemiah is news that is 140 years old!

That would be like me telling you that President Abraham Lincoln had been shot (1865), or that the American Civil War had ended, or that the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery had been added to the US Constitution. It would be like me telling you that Canada had become a nation (1867) or that Alaska had been purchased by the US from Russia.

Those are all astounding pieces of news, but isn’t it a little much and a little late to react in such a dramatic fashion? Shouldn’t Nehemiah have “emotionally moved on” by now? Nehemiah, everyone has known this information for a century and a half! It’s all we’ve ever known. We’re accustomed to the “brokenness” in Jerusalem. This is “normal” to us.
Why are you getting so worked up?!

Nehemiah is like David was – for forty years, a carnal and corrupted King Saul never concerned himself with the presence of God, but no sooner had David been crowned king than he traded his scepter for a sword and started shouting, “Where is the ark of God?! Let’s get it back!!”

Nehemiah didn’t get new INFORMATION, he got a new BURDEN.

Nehemiah said, “Everything is going great in my secular job and at home, but that’s not enough if God’s work isn’t going even better!” His burden affected him so much that the king noticed and asked him about it – and Nehemiah didn’t cover it up! “Yes, God’s work is more important to me than my secular work!” “Yes, God’s kingdom comes before your kingdom!” “Yes, I need to give some major time and energy to the Lord!”

Do you understand Nehemiah’s tears?

Where are the Christians any more who are concerned more about the house of God than their own house? More about the work of God than their own work? More about the kingdom of God than their own kingdom? More about the future of the church than their own financial future? Does God have any Christians like that anymore?

It used to be that people got saved and told their employers, their sports teams, and any company that happened to drop in, “I don’t do Sundays, I don’t do Wednesday nights, I don’t do prayer meetings, and I don’t do special service nights.” I’m going to church because God is the most important thing in my life! Things sure have changed, haven’t they? Now people get a job and tell their church, “I don’t do Sundays, I don’t do Wednesday nights, I don’t do prayer meetings, and I don’t do special service nights.” These same people are able to arrange vacations, day trips, getaways, and time off for anything they want to do. These same people often spend the equivalent of a forty-hour work week sitting in front of their television or their computer ... but they have no time! What does that say to God and to the world about our priorities?

Nehemiah said, “I was a cupbearer to the king of Persia, but I want to be a wall builder for the King of Heaven!” I’ve enjoyed tasting the wine hundreds of times in the atmosphere of the royal court, but I’m disturbed that the walls of God’s city are in disarray and no one seems to care.

TAKE THIS GOBLET AND GIVE ME A HAMMER!

We’ll see as we move through Nehemiah’s journal that in only 52 days, 42 different working parties restored a 50 foot high wall with a circumference of 4 miles at a rate of 504 feet per day – all the while fighting against severe opposition. How did they accomplish in only 52 days what no one had been able to do in 140 years?!

THEY PRAYED, YES ... BUT THEY ALSO ACTED!

Prayer is not getting man’s will done in heaven but getting God’s will done on earth. However, for God’s will to be done on earth, He needs people to be available for Him to use. If God is going to answer prayer, He must start by working in the one doing the praying! He works in us and through us to help us see our prayers answered.

Ephesians 3:20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh **in us**,

We don’t need new INFORMATION, we just need a new BURDEN!

Genesis 30:1 And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, **Give me children, or else I die.**

Where are you, Rachel? Have you just accepted the circumstances and resigned yourself to a lifetime with an empty womb? Or are you begging God for babies? Give me children, or else I die! When is the last time you prayed, “God, whatever you have to do to me”? When is the last time you said, “I haven’t won a soul in a long time, and I hate it”? When is the last time you said, “I should be more involved in the church than I am, and I can’t stand it”? Where are you, Rachel?

Nehemiah cared enough to ask, to weep, to pray, and to volunteer!

TAKE THIS GOBLET AND GIVE ME A HAMMER!

HERE AM I, SEND ME!

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