

Series Introduction #1

Nehemiah 1: 1-4

Tonight I would like to begin an expositional study of the book of Nehemiah. It is an Old Testament book filled with great truth, encouragement, and challenges for the modern church. I trust that our time in Nehemiah will prove very beneficial in our walk and service to the Lord.

As we begin our study I would like to point out the focus of Nehemiah. Within this blessed book we discover three primary themes that are prevalent in the heart of Nehemiah.

- 1) He seeks to display the faithfulness and commitment of the exiles who returned to Jerusalem, even in the face of great opposition.**
- 2) He seeks to direct the people of Jerusalem in a path of purity in worship. Nehemiah will lead them in worship of the true and living God.**
- 3) Nehemiah also seeks to encourage the remnant, as well as coming generations, to be faithful to the work and worship of the Lord, even when faced with adversity and overwhelming circumstances.**

Surely we would have to agree that each of the ideals that Nehemiah sought to display and promote are needful and beneficial in our lives today. I am confident that we will learn much regarding our walk with the Lord as we study this portion of His Word.

It would also benefit us to take a moment to consider the backdrop for the writings of Nehemiah. We are all well aware of the Babylonian captivity. The Jews had been removed from Jerusalem and taken captive to Babylon. Daniel was among the captives, and he prophesied in [Dan.5: 1-31](#) that the Babylonians would be defeated by the Medes and Persians, led by King Cyrus. This prophecy was fulfilled and led to an exodus of the Jews in three separate phases.

The first group of Jews left Babylon in 538 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel, whom Cyrus had appointed governor over Judah. Approximately 50,000 Jews left Babylon with Zerubbabel and returned to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel quickly rebuilt the altar, restoring the sacrifices, and began to rebuild the Temple. It wasn't long until the people met fierce opposition that greatly delayed the rebuilding efforts. In 516 BC, 22 years after their return, the Temple was restored and ready for worship. Tragically it wasn't long until the people drifted back into apostasy and away from the Lord.

The second group returned to Jerusalem about 80 years after the exodus of Zerubbabel's group. In 458 BC Ezra led a smaller group of Jews back to Jerusalem. Ezra, the priest, had obtained permission from Artaxerxes, King of Persia, to return in order to seek

spiritual reform and stir the hearts of the people in revival toward the Lord. About 1,800 Jews traveled some 900 miles with Ezra back to Jerusalem.

The third group, of which we will study, returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah in 445 BC, some 12 years after Ezra's departure. Nehemiah was the official cupbearer of the king. He held an official position on the royal court and was respected of Artaxerxes.

As we will discover, Nehemiah was deeply troubled by the news he received from Jerusalem. He was allowed to return in order to oversee the rebuilding of the city wall.

I would also like to offer a few key verses found in the book of Nehemiah. These verses reveal the focus and desire of Nehemiah and present a personal challenge to us.

- Neh. 2:12 – And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.
- Neh. 2:17 – Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.
- Neh. 6:3 – And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?
- Neh. 4:6 – So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

So let's take a few moments tonight and consider some of the details revealed in the opening verses of Nehemiah.

I. The Character of Nehemiah (1) – 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, We find confirmation of Nehemiah's position within the palace. Notice what we find in V.11 – For I was the king's cupbearer. Clearly Nehemiah held a position of prominence. We will likely deal with this further later, but the position of cupbearer was one of extreme importance and value. The cupbearer was charged with the responsibility of ensuring that all the king ate or drank was safe and would bring no harm or illness.

- The cupbearer was one who was trusted literally with one's own life. That may not seem too significant until we are reminded that Nehemiah was a Jew. He was not of the Medes or Persians and yet he was found to be faithful and trustworthy. Clearly this was all within the plan of God. He needed a Jew who desired the restoration of Jerusalem and God placed Nehemiah in a position of favor with the king so that he might return to Jerusalem and bring about the restoration.

- I want to mention a couple of things that are revealed as we think of the character of Nehemiah. First we see:

A. The Sovereignty of God – As I said, God had placed Nehemiah in a position of favor with the king. To those who looked on his situation, it may have appeared that a captive had gotten a lucky break and rose above the bonds of slavery to a position of prominence, but this was no lucky break. A sovereign God had orchestrated the events and circumstances of Nehemiah's life so that he would be in a position to be used of the Lord.

- It may appear at times that our lives are spinning out of control and we will never achieve victory, but we must be reminded of the sovereignty of our God. We are not left here to wander aimlessly through life. Our lives are not dictated by the circumstances of the world; they are led and directed by the will of God. Even when it seems that we are in a situation that is beyond our control and we can see no good possibly resulting from it, we must trust the Lord and know that He is working all things for our good and His glory! God can take a bad situation and work it out for the good of His people and for glory to His marvelous name.

B. The Sanctification of Nehemiah – Even though Nehemiah had been born and raised in captivity, among a people who knew not the Lord, he maintained his commitment to the Lord and sought His ways. He was not swayed or influenced by the lives and practices of those around him. Nehemiah determined to serve the Lord and maintain a relationship with Him.

- That serves a sobering challenge to us as well. We live in a world that is growing less tolerant of the Lord and our faith. We are surrounded by those who have no desire for the things of God and would rather that our world exist without Him. In these difficult and trying times we need to determine in our hearts, as Nehemiah did, that we are going to continue to serve the Lord even if everyone else around us chooses not to. [Dan. 1:8, 19 – But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. \[19\] And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.](#)

I. The Character of Nehemiah (1)

II. The Concern of Nehemiah (2) – 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. Keep in mind that Nehemiah is the cupbearer of the king. He is living within the palace. He is loved and cared for of the king. Many would assume that Nehemiah had it made. He wanted for nothing and was secure in his position. It would have been easy to have grown complacent and unconcerned about the needs of the Jews, but Nehemiah was genuinely concerned for their well being. He inquired of how things were progressing in Jerusalem. He didn't allow his position or prosperity cause him to lose concern for the people or diminish his desire for the things of God.

- Things are going well for us at Fellowship. We are blessed beyond measure and the Lord is working mightily among us, but we must not allow our blessings to create an attitude of apathy for those around us. All are not as blessed as we are. Many tonight are struggling just to maintain their faith. There may even be those of our congregation who are not enjoying the blessings that we are. We need to be reminded of the needs of those around us. We need to be stirred from our beds of ease and realize that our world is filled with darkness.

- I pray that God will renew our compassion and concern for the needs of those about us. There are churches who are struggling; homes that are facing division and strife; souls that are lost and undone before God; Christians who are on the verge of giving up and abandoning the work of God. We need to pray for them and seek to do all we can to encourage them!

III. The Conversation with Nehemiah (3) – 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. As Nehemiah talked with his brother, they shared a conversation that completely changed his life. Nehemiah inquired of the state of affairs in Jerusalem and his brother was brutally honest. Things were not good. The people suffered great affliction and reproach. The work was being opposed on every hand and the wall of Jerusalem was in shambles. The pride of God's people had become a reproach.

- You might wonder what significance that has for us today, but I am convinced that it reveals a profound truth. Many today may be aware of the needs of our day, but few are willing to really acknowledge them, much less discuss them openly. We need to face the harsh realities of our day. The church is under great affliction. I hate to admit it, but she is also under great reproach. We have so conformed to the world that they see little, if any, difference. We have lost our power and our witness. The church needs to open her eyes to the truth!

- We are aware of the needs, but are we willing to admit them? Further still, are we willing to do anything about the great needs of our day? Are we willing to take an honest look at where we are spiritually and corporately as a congregation and make an accurate evaluation?
- The needs and issues of our day don't need to be ignored or overlooked. That has been the case for far too long. We need to get them out in the open and begin an honest and beneficial dialogue about where we go from here. Let's be honest about the state of affairs within our church, our community, and our nation as a whole. Let's be honest about the real need for a positive Christian witness among the world. Let's be willing to admit that there is a need and develop a commitment to address that need!

I. The Character of Nehemiah (1)

II. The Concern of Nehemiah (2)

III. The Conversation with Nehemiah (3)

IV. The Commitment of Nehemiah (4) – [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,](#) Nehemiah could no longer dwell in his ivory palace of ease while the people of God suffered. The conversation he had with his brother stirred his heart and brought a compelling desire to serve the Lord and make a difference. He sought the Lord regarding what he should do about the current situation and desperate need of Jerusalem.

- I can assure you that our study in Nehemiah will not be weeks of “pats on the back” or words of praise for our good works. I am confident that if we will be sensitive to the Word of God, we will experience conviction and a desire to move from our seats of complacency and comfort. I genuinely desire us to see the needs of our day as Nehemiah saw the needs of his.
- We need a genuine move of God among us. We need to be broken over the current situation of our churches and society as a whole. We need to seek the Lord with a desire for His direction and power. We need to stand together united, committed to rebuilding the walls of our faith that have been assaulted and compromised for many years. We need to determine to proclaim the truth of God's Word at all costs and in every opportunity.
- Genuine, heartfelt repentance and commitment are desperately needed today. Will we be the generation to rise up, work together, and rebuild after years of neglect and devastation? As I've said before, if not us, who; if not now, when; if not here, where?

I have tried to lay the groundwork for what I am convinced will be a powerful and challenging study in Nehemiah. Are we willing to be honest with the Lord this evening? Has He spoken to our hearts about the state of affairs around us? I know that He has spoken to me. What are we going to do about it? Is there any commitment and desire among us to seek and bring about profitable change? Let's do business with the Lord tonight and submit to His will.