

Nehemiah 01 - Nehemiah Prays for Israel

I. Rebuilding of the wall (Neh 1:1—7:73)

(1) Nehemiah returns from Susa to Jerusalem (Neh 1:1—2:20)

(A) Nehemiah's concern for Jerusalem's vulnerable condition (1:1-11)

(a) Hanani's report to Nehemiah concerning wall less Jerusalem (1:1-3)

(b) Nehemiah reacts to Hanani's report (1:4-11)

(i) Grief (1:4)

(ii) Prayer (1:5-11)

(a) Worship: God is a covenant keeper (1:5)

(b) Confession of sin (1:6-7)

(c) Reminder of God's promises of restoration (1:8-10)

(d) Request for success before Artaxerxes (1:11)

Nehemiah 1

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1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened **in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year**, while I was in **Susa the capitol**,

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, *in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol,*

1 In this document, I, Hacaliah's son Nehemiah, recount what occurred during the twentieth year of Artaxerxes. Background In the month of Chislev, while I was in Shushan at the palace,

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah: This distinguishes him from others of the same name (Ezra 2:2; Neh 3:16), though nothing further is known of his father, nor do we know his tribe.

- "...in the month Chislev, *in the twentieth year*" - December, 445 BC, the 20th year of Artaxerxes (2:1)

- "...Susa the capitol" - in 478 BC, Esther became Xerxes' queen in this palace (Esther 2:8-18); and in 550 BC, Daniel was carried there in a vision (Cf. Dan 8:2)

- While serving at the Persian winter palace, Nehemiah one day received a report from several men who had come from Judah. One of them was his own brother, Hanani; later

Nehemiah appointed him to a high position in Jerusalem (7:2).

2 that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them about the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

2 that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped *and* had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

2 Hanani, one of my brothers, arrived with some men from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had escaped, about those who had survived the Babylonian captivity, and about Jerusalem.

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.

3 And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and disgrace, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire."

3 They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

3 They told me, "The survivors of the captivity there in the province are living in great distress and shame. Furthermore, the Jerusalem wall remains broken down and its gates have been burned by fire."

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.

- The report instantly depressed Nehemiah. It pertained to his people and their land. The Jews in Judah (a province of Persia) were greatly troubled and disgraced, and Jerusalem's wall was broken down and its gates had been burned (six gates were later repaired, 3:1,3,6,13-15).

— This left the city defenseless against enemy attacks. The people had been rebuilding the walls (Ezra 4:12) but were stopped by Artaxerxes who was pressured by some Samaritans and Rehum, the commanding officer, who may have been a Persian responsible to Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:17-23).

Because of Nehemiah's position in the King's court, he must have been aware of Rehum's initial letter and Artaxerxes' subsequent response. However, he had probably not received word as to the results of the letter, though no doubt he feared for his brothers in

Jerusalem. It is with this prior knowledge that he received the disappointing report from Jerusalem with a sense of deep regret and despair.

- (b) Nehemiah reacts to Hanani's report (1:4-11)
 - (i) Grief (1:4)

4 Now when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

4 When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

4 When I heard this, I sat down and cried, mourning for a number of days while I fasted and prayed in the presence of the God of Heaven.

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,

- His praying was continual ("day and night," v6). Fasting, though not a requirement of the Law except on the annual Day of Atonement, often evidenced one's distraught condition (Cf. 2 Sam 12:16; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 8:23).

- (ii) Prayer (1:5-11)
 - (a) Worship: God is a covenant keeper (1:5)

5 I said, "Please, **LORD God of heaven**, the **great and awesome** God, who keeps the covenant and faithfulness for those who love Him and keep His commandments:

5 I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,

5 I said, "Please, LORD, God of Heaven, the great and fearsome God who keeps the covenant, showing6 gracious love to those who love you and keep your commands,

5 And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:

- Nehemiah faced a situation he knew he could not solve by himself. But he also knew that with God all things are possible (Cf. Jer 32:17).

— He began his prayer by acknowledging that fact: O LORD, God of heaven (Cf. v4), the great and awesome God (Cf. 4:14; 9:32)

- "...LORD" - *Yahweh*, speaks of His covenant relationship to Israel

- "...God of heaven" - refers to His sovereignty

- "...great and awesome" - mindful of His power and majesty. Surely such a God could answer Nehemiah's prayer.

- (b) Confession of sin (1:6-7)

6 let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open, to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have committed against You; I and my father's house have sinned.

6 let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned.

6 please turn your attention to observe carefully and listen to the prayer of your servant today that I am presenting to you day and night on behalf of your servants, the Israelis. "I confess the sins that we Israelis have committed against you. Both I and my father's house have sinned.

6 Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.

- In this prayer of confession of the sins of the people of Israel, Nehemiah included himself
- As the Prophet Daniel had prayed almost 100 years before (Dan 9:4-6) and as Ezra had prayed (Ezra 9:6-15), Nehemiah acknowledged that he shared the responsibility for Israel's disobedience to God's laws
- He placed himself and Israel in a submissive attitude under the Lord by calling himself God's servant (Cf. v10-11) and by calling them His servants
- Nehemiah wasn't born during Israel's time of sin; he was born in exile

7 We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

7 We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

7 We have abandoned you by not keeping your commands, your ceremonies, and your judgments that you proscribed to your servant Moses.

7 We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

(c) Reminder of God's promises of restoration (1:8-10)

8 Remember, please, the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples;

8 Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples;

8 Please remember what you spoke in commanding your servant Moses. You said,
'If you rebel, I will scatter you among the nations
8 Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying,
If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

9 but *if* you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I have chosen to have My name dwell.'

9 but *if* you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.'

9 but if you return to me, keeping my commands and doing them, even if your exiled people are in the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I have chosen to establish my Name.'

9 But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

10 They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.

10 They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.

10 These are your servants as well as your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.

10 Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.

(d) Request for success before Artaxerxes (1:11)

11 Please, Lord, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and please make Your servant successful today and grant him mercy before this man."

11 O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man."

Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

11 "And now, Lord, I ask you to listen to the prayer of your servant—and to the prayers of your servants who delight in revering your Name. I ask you, please prosper your servant

today by granting him to receive favor from this man."

Now I was the king's senior security advisor.

11 O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

- Humanly speaking only one person could make it possible for Nehemiah to help the Jews in Jerusalem—the king he served

— Years earlier, Artaxerxes had issued a decree to stop the construction work in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:21), and he was the only one who could reverse that order

— That is why Nehemiah prayed specifically, Give Your servant (Cf. v6) success today by granting him favor (lit., "compassion") in the presence of this man. Nehemiah was referring of course to King Artaxerxes (Cf. 2:1). A favorable relationship with the king could open the door for his petition.