**Does ANYBODY Care Enough to Rebuild?**

**Introduction to the Book of Nehemiah**

Nehemiah Chapter 1

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1. **Introduction**
   1. **I am excited!** The study theme this year is going to focus on **two construction books in the Bible: Ezra and Nehemiah**.
   2. Both record the events surrounding the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon and Persia back to Jerusalem
      1. Jeremiah 52:12-14, 27 records king Nebuchadnezzar completely destroying Jerusalem, and Solomon’s glorious Temple in 606 BC
      2. Ezra and Zerubbabel headed up the rebuilding of the Temple that had been completely destroyed by king Nebuchadnezzar 70 years later in 536 BC
      3. And Nehemiah heads of the return to Jerusalem about 90 years later to rebuild the protective walls and gates around Jerusalem.
   3. I hope you will start to see that **these are not just books that record the rebuilding of ruined walls…** God didn’t include them in His Bible just for builders
   4. But actually, they are **God’s instructions on how to rebuild and restore ruined lives!** And as we read and learn each truth carefully crafted into every page, we will see:
      1. How God expects leaders to act
      2. How to share burdens and work together as teams to do impossible tasks
      3. How sin weakens every part of our lives and must be constantly battled against
      4. And about a dozen more great truths!
   5. This morning, I want to show you **how God prepares a man named Nehemiah for an impossibly large task!**
      1. Pay attention as God exposes Nehemiah to the cold, harsh realities of life in the rubble
      2. And then calls him to rise up and make a difference and lead a few thousand families to return home and rebuild what sin had destroyed!
2. **Background**
   1. **This is the Journal of a man named Nehemiah; like a Diary, or a ‘Blog’ (if you will)**
   2. **It begins in the 20th year of the reign of king Artaxerxes**
      1. All calendars were dated according to the reign of the current living king.
      2. So you would date your birth as the thirtieth year of the reign of king Saul, your wedding as the 10th year of king David, and your funeral during the 25th year of king Solomon.
      3. OUR calendar is the 2018th year of king Jesus, because our King, THE King of kings is STILL LIVING!
      4. The Hebrew month of **Chislev** runs from mid-November to mid-December on our calendar, and the twentieth year of Artaxerxes was **the year 444 BC**.
   3. **Time line**
      1. Jeremiah records Judah’s destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 606 BC
         1. Jeremiah had to write some of the hardest things penned by a man of God – the destruction of everything that had started out so good; the slaughter of countless tens of thousands of Jews, and the dragging away of their orphaned children 1000km away to Babylon.
         2. He personally witnessed the chastisement of God’s people for their idolatry and wicked sexual perversions that were being carried out on every street corner!
      2. There were other writers, and prophets that wrote about this dark portion of Israel’s history
         1. **Esther** – whom we will study in our week of Youth Camp in July
         2. As well as **Daniel**, **Ezekiel**, **Haggai**, **Zechariah**, and **Malachi**
      3. Two Books cover the Return of Judah from Captivity - the rebuilding
         1. **Ezra** – records the rebuilding of the TEMPLE and restoration of WORSHIP in Jerusalem
         2. **Nehemiah** – records the rebuilding the WALLS of Jerusalem
         3. Rebuilding not just walls, and the Temple, but lives, and worship, and especially building momentum again to the coming of the Messiah
         4. It would be just a little over 400 years until the baby Messiah would be born in Bethlehem! So there was a lot of work to do!
   4. **Where does this Book take place – in two places:**
      1. In the splendour of Persia at first – in the King Darius’ winter palace in a city called Shushan (or Susa) was the capital city of the Persian Empire. The lap of luxury everywhere!
      2. And then mainly in the midst of the rubbles of Jerusalem
   5. **So, Who is this Nehemiah guy?**
      1. Nehemiah means "The Lord Comforts”
      2. Nehemiah was not a priest, or prophet, or born of royalty, but a layman – a slave of the empire
      3. He is identified as the son of Hachaliah to distinguish him from other Jews of the same name (Neh. 3:16; Ezra 2:2).
      4. Nehemiah is an eunuch – never marries – not allowed to because of his employment – career
      5. He was **the king’s cupbearer**
         1. Cupbearer to the great "Artaxerxes Longimanus,” who ruled Persia from 464 to 423 BC.
         2. A cupbearer was much more than our modern "butler” (see Gen. 40).
         3. It was a position of great responsibility and privilege.
         4. At each meal, he tested the king’s wine to make sure it wasn’t poisoned. A man who stood that close to the king in public had to be handsome, cultured, knowledgeable in court procedures, and able to converse with the king and advise him if asked (see 41:1-13). Because he had access to the king, the cupbearer was a man of great influence, which he could use for good or for evil.
         5. That a Jew, held such an important position in the palace speaks well of Nehemiah’s character and ability (Like Daniel 1:1-4).
         6. It turns out that God had a work for Nehemiah to do that he could not have accomplished anywhere else but in Shushan, next to the king.
            1. God had Nehemiah in Susa just as He had put Esther there a generation before
            2. And just as He had put Joseph in Egypt
            3. And Daniel in Babylon.
            4. When God wants to accomplish a work, He always prepares His workers and puts them in the right places at the right time.
      6. Nehemiah was God’s selected man for the Mission – even though he didn’t know it and hadn’t planned on it
3. **Message – The News**
   1. **The News (Nehemiah 1:1-3)**
      1. An ordinary day for extraordinary news
         1. No doubt it was just another ordinary day when Nehemiah met his brother Hanani (see Neh. 7:2), who had just returned from a visit to Jerusalem, but it turned out to be a turning point in Nehemiah’s life.
            1. Hanani probably was part of a survey team working for the king to report on how different sections of the vast empire were doing
            2. Most reports were usually of towns and cities THRIVING under the rule of king Artaxerxes
         2. Well, It turned out to be a day that changed Nehemiah’s life forever
            1. It was just another day when **Moses** went out to care for his sheep, but on that day he heard the Lord’s call and return to Egypt to save his people from slavery (Ex. 3).
            2. It was an ordinary day when **David** was called home from shepherding his flock, to be anointed Israel’s next king (1 Sam. 16).
            3. It was an ordinary day when **Peter, Andrew, James, and John** were mending their fishing nets after a night of failure, but that was the day Jesus called them to become fishers of men (Luke 5:1-11).
            4. You never know what God has in store **for you**, even in a commonplace conversation with a friend or relative, so keep your heart open to God’s providential leading.
      2. Nehemiah asked about Jerusalem and about the Jews who were living there (1:2)
         1. Notice how he writes, “*and I asked them*…” This is his own personal journal
         2. He didn’t care about any other region or nation or city
         3. On his mind were questions about how all those people who had left Persia to go back to Jerusalem 90 years earlier – how were they getting on
         4. Were they okay? Were they safe? Were the able to rebuild their ancestral homes? Certainly after all these years, Jerusalem must be beautiful
      3. The news was bad – and it had been bad for a very long time (1:3)
         1. Three words summarize the bad news:
            1. **Remnant** - Instead of a land inhabited by a thriving nation, only a remnant of people lived there
            2. **Affliction** - they were in great affliction (were being hurt by outside enemies) and struggling just to survive in the midst of all the rubble and ruins of the city
            3. And **Reproach** - Instead of a magnificent city, Jerusalem was STILL in ruins, and where there had once been great glory, there was now nothing but great embarrassment and shame.
         2. Of course, Nehemiah had known all his life that the Babylonians had completely destroyed Jerusalem’s mighty walls, gates, and its temple in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:1-21).
            1. These were not just simple garden fences, but 15 metre high and 7 metre thick walls
            2. He knew that fifty years later, a group of about 50,000 Jews had left Persia and bravely returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city under two great leaders named Zerubbabel and Ezra.
            3. But there had been so many hindrances and delays that the temple was not completed for over twenty years (Ezra 1-6), and the gates and walls had NOT been repaired yet!
         3. This news told that… The attempt to rebuild Jerusalem was basically a failure.
            1. Without high, strong walls, and sturdy gates, the city was open to constant attack and easy defeat by ANY enemy that wanted to just rob and destroy every effort the people made to live.
            2. Hmmmm. Sounds like a lot of OUR lives too!
            3. You and I would have just given up long ago if WE had NO PROTECTION from marauders, and bandits
         4. Imagine for a moment, that DUBLIN had been destroyed in the uprising of 1916 – completely burned to the ground - YOUR capital city!
            1. How would YOU feel? Angry? Concerned for the people still trying to live there and rebuild there?
            2. Nehemiah had no anger anymore – the empire that had destroyed his capital, had itself been destroyed by another more powerful empire – the Persians. And HE was WORKING for them now, in pretty good conditions too!
            3. But he still hurt for his city, and the people living there!
            4. Thank God for men and women who still FEEL and still CARE about important things besides what they are going to WEAR, or what MOVIE there are going to watch, or whether they are going to invest in BITCOIN or not!!!
         5. Are there any of us like Nehemiah, anxious to read missionary prayer letters, the news of awful religious persecutions, or even our church’s ministry reports
            1. Are we the kind of people who care enough to ask how things are REALLY going?
            2. Do we want to know all the facts, and do those facts burden us? They SHOULD!
      4. **Why Would Nehemiah Care?**
         1. Why inquire about a struggling remnant of people who lived hundreds of miles away?
            1. After all, he was the king’s cupbearer, and he was successfully secure in his own life.
            2. The ruin of Jerusalem wasn’t his fault
            3. It wasn’t his fault that his ancestors had sinned against the Lord and brought judgment to the city of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah.
            4. Yet there was a cry from a prophet 160 year earlier (Jeremiah 15:5)…

“*For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest?*”

Nehemiah was the man God had chosen to ask that very question!!!

* + - 1. Thank God! Nehemiah CARED!
         1. Nehemiah asked about Jerusalem and the Jews living there because he cared intensely!
         2. People who actually CARE about you and what is going on in your life are RARE

People who actually care that their parents are religious but lost are rare

Who actually care that so many in this country are going through life with an anger against God that is all because they do not know Him

Who actually care enough about their work-mates and school-mates to tell them straight up they must be born again to see the kingdom of God!

* + - * 1. Those kind of caring Christians even, are RARE!
      1. I know that SOME people prefer not to know what’s going on at all
         1. Because information might bring obligation.
         2. “*What you don’t know can’t hurt you*,” says the old adage, but is it true? I don’t believe it!
         3. Aldous Huxley said, "*Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored*.”
      2. How about YOU? Do YOU even care to KNOW about how lost the world is? How much emotional, spiritual abuse there is because of RELIGION and ATHEISM?
  1. **The Effect of Such News - Nehemiah Went to Prayer (1:4)**
     1. **It is not always that words affect people**
        1. Countless hours of tv news have only made us numb to all the tragedies of the world
        2. Words in a book have very little power to fire the imagination of modern people
        3. Especially words in this Book – they are only WORDS to people on blank piece of paper
        4. What USED to turn nations upside down, now bores people to death almost – makes people hard, and even less caring
        5. Words don’t always have the desired effect
        6. But GOD uses WORDS folks. So you had better have an ear to hear them!
     2. **But THESE words stopped Nehemiah DEAD!**
     3. **He STOPPED everything and just collapsed onto the ground** – like a kick in the stomach. Tried to take it all in. Didn’t just brush it off, or change the channel or just try and ignore what was happening over in Jerusalem. He let it sink in deep (Cf Luke 9:44)
     4. **And then WEPT** – not just cried, but wept (bewail, moan, lament, be completely broken in defeat).
        1. Sometimes weeping is a sign of weakness; but with Nehemiah, it was a sign of concern, as it was with Jeremiah (Jer. 9:1), Paul (Acts 20:19), and the Lord Jesus (Luke 19:41).
        2. Nehemiah was entering into the warzone by first getting things right with God!
        3. Ironing out any confusion, or conflicts that he and the people still had with God – by just submitting to God and asking God to turn things around!
        4. When God puts a burden on your heart, don’t try to escape it, for if you do, you may miss the blessing He has planned for you.
        5. I like how Nehemiah was like the Lord Jesus in that he willingly took on the burden that was crushing others. “The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon Me” (Ps. 69:9; Rom. 15:3).
     5. **He MOURNED!** Was expressing his deep feelings of sorrow for the people in Jerusalem. It is a good attitude to have sometimes
        1. We mourn the loss of our sports team
        2. We mourn the loss of our wealth
        3. We mourn the loss of a loved one
        4. But we rarely mourn the ruin of a nation – or of a person’s life through drugs and drink and gambling
        5. Nehemiah FELT the loss of his people. That’s what BOWELS of mercies are
     6. Nehemiah **spent several days FASTING**, weeping, and praying. He knew that somebody had to do something to rescue Jerusalem, and he was willing to do anything. So for him, fasting was how he broke loose of the world’s grip on him, so he could be help only by God!
     7. **And then he PRAYED** (1:5-10) – but that’s NEXT WEEK
        1. Maybe that is foreign to you
        2. Maybe it just doesn’t happen “in your culture”
        3. But it ought to! And it NEEDS to, if something big is going to get done in this sin-cursed world

1. **Conclusion**
   1. **Closing Thoughts…**
      1. The book of Nehemiah begins with **“great affliction”** (Neh. 1:3) in the lives of the people in a far away city called Jerusalem, and then great affliction in the heart of Nehemiah at such news
      2. But before this Book **finishes, there is great jo**y (8:12, 17). “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Ps. 30:5). Our tears, and burdens and sorrows are often for a greater purpose that we could evert imagine.
      3. **I hope you start to see that…**
         1. **These are not just books that record the rebuilding of ruined walls…**
         2. But actually, they are **God’s instructions on how to rebuild and restore ruined lives!**
   2. We are getting a small glimpse into how **God was preparing a man named Nehemiah for an impossibly large task!**
      1. **By waking him up to the straight-up reality of what was going on back in Jerusalem**
         1. The Remnant - Instead of a land inhabited by a thriving nation, only a remnant of people lived there
         2. In Affliction - they were in great affliction (were being hurt by outside enemies) and struggling just to survive in the midst of all the rubble and ruins of the city
         3. And Reproach - Instead of a magnificent city, Jerusalem was STILL in ruins, and where there had once been great glory, there was now nothing but great embarrassment and shame.
      2. **God prepared Nehemiah by tapping into his heart and pulling him to do something great**
      3. **What’s it going to take to wake all of US up?**
         1. How about YOU? Do YOU even care to KNOW about how lost the world is? How much emotional, spiritual abuse there is because of RELIGION and ATHEISM?
         2. Are there any of us *like Nehemiah*, anxious to read missionary prayer letters, the news of awful religious persecutions, or even our church’s ministry reports?
            1. Are we the kind of people who care enough to ask how things are REALLY going?
            2. Do we want to know all the facts, and do those facts burden us? They SHOULD!
         3. Do we have to wait until it is OUR children being persecuted for the name of Jesus? Do we have to wait until this nation throws off almost ALL of its morality before we rise up and start rebuilding what should have been built a long time ago – the worship and following of Jesus Christ alone!
   3. **Have YOU Heard The News?**
      1. **About YOUR soul’s ruin?** Ezek 18:20 “*The soul that sinneth, it shall die*.” “*The wages of sin is death*”
      2. **About the needs of your FAMILY?** God CAN save and rebuild them!
      3. **What about the condition of people all over this country & the world** “*without God and without hope*”
      4. **Jesus is far better than Nehemiah!** He is the Saviour and Rebuilder of anybody!
      5. **Let God’s News sink down deep into our hearts and provoke US do something!**