

## Nehemiah Lesson 56

### Intro:

- A. Artaxerxes I began ruling in Persia around 465 B.C.
  - 1. He was the king who gave Ezra permission to return to Jerusalem in his seventh year.
  - 2. Now, thirteen years later, he is still the king as we are introduced to Nehemiah who served as his cupbearer.
  - 3. Nehemiah was very close and very trusted by Artaxerxes.
- B. According to **Nehemiah 1:1** and **2:1**, it was in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I when Nehemiah was given permission to return to Jerusalem.

### I. Summary Of The Book:

#### A. **Nehemiah 1:1-11**

- 1. Upon hearing the sad report of Hanani concerning Jerusalem, Nehemiah fasted and prayed.

**(NOTE:** The walls of Jerusalem were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. From the time of its destruction to the time of Nehemiah, we are looking at something in the neighborhood of 140 to 145 years. Zerubbabel brought the first group out of captivity and began rebuilding the temple. However there is no indication the Jews made any effort in a 70 to 75 year period to rebuild the walls. It has been 13 years since Ezra had gone to Jerusalem to reinstate the worship. Ezra's concern, as we have studied, was the spiritual welfare of the people; not anything to do with physically rebuilding. That which sets Nehemiah apart is that he saw the need to rebuild the wall and determined to get it done. He prayed for God's help, gathered the right people, and was given permission and supplies to do the job.)

#### B. **Nehemiah 2:1-10**

- 1. A short time later, Nehemiah's opportunity came.
- 2. The king noticed Nehemiah was sad and inquired as to the cause.
- 3. When Nehemiah explained (but notice the last part of verse 4 "*So I prayed to the God of heaven.*" And remember James 5:16.), the response of the king was to grant Nehemiah permission to go to Jerusalem, gave him letters to the governors to insure his safe journey, and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, to give Nehemiah the wood he needed to rebuild and for his own house to live in.
- 4. It is here we are introduced to Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab - all who would oppose Nehemiah and his efforts to rebuild.
  - a. Sanballat was obviously connected with the Samaritans as indicated in **(4:2)** who were the mixed race.
  - b. The Ammonites, descendants of Lot, had inhabited the land of Judah when the Jews were taken into captivity by Babylon.
  - c. The Arabians were nomads but they, too, and occupied the land of Judah during the period of captivity.

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**C. Nehemiah 2:11-20**

1. After only three days in Jerusalem, Nehemiah, at night, was looking over the damage and the work needing to be done because he had told no one what *"my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem"*. (v. 12)
2. Things were in such ruin there was not room for the animal he rode to get through.
3. After he had seen for himself the destruction and devastation, Nehemiah lets it be know what God had commissioned him to do and says to them, *"Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."* (v. 17); *"Let us rise up and build."* (v. 18)
4. Since Nehemiah had permission of the king, there was nothing the enemies of Nehemiah could do to stop the rebuilding, so they turned to ridicule and making fun of the Jews.
5. Nehemiah denounced the enemies when he stated, (v. 20)

**C. Nehemiah 3:1-32**

1. It is obvious in this chapter that Nehemiah assigned certain families to do certain work on certain sections of the wall.
2. In this way, everyone would know what they were responsible to do and what to get accomplished.
3. However, there are some interesting things to make mention of:
  - a. v. 5 - (We see some family members wouldn't work but that didn't keep the rest of the family from working.)
  - b. v. 12 - The family of Shallum, apparently made up of only daughters, still took responsibility and did their part of the work.

**D. Nehemiah 4:1-23**

1. The opposition begins.
2. Sandballat's words to the army of Samaria: (v. 2)
3. Tobiah adds: (v. 3)
4. Nehemiah's response: (vs. 4-5)
5. The work continued until they reached the half-way mark because (v. 6)
6. Now the opposition turns to violence: The enemies plot to attack Jerusalem.
  - a. And the Jews kept coming to Nehemiah to tell them of their fears. (v. 10)
  - b. After all, a half built wall is not much fortification against an attack.
7. But Nehemiah did not allow all this to frighten him.
8. He positioned people with swords, spears, and bows and encouraged them all: (v. 14)
9. The work of rebuilding continued while half worked and half were guarding with their weapons.
  - a. Those who worked on the wall had one hand working and the other hand holding a weapon.
  - b. At night, everybody stayed inside Jerusalem.

**E. Nehemiah 5:1-19**

1. Other problems arise: (v. 2-4)
2. Nehemiah became very angry and rebuked the nobles and rulers.

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- a. In essence what he tells them is they were charging interest from their own brethren! As much as they were able, they had bought back their brethren who were slaves among the Gentiles and now they have turned around and are selling them again to one another.
  - b. No one said anything.
  - c. Nehemiah does not mince words and tells them, **(v.9)**
  - d. He urges them to **(vs. 9,11)**
  - 3. They agreed to do so but Nehemiah required them to take an oath.
    - a. They all said “*Amen*” and did as they promised. **(v.13)**
- (NOTE: The law of Moses had forbidden what they were doing in regards to charging interest to their fellow Jews and taking sons and daughters of fellow Jews and making them slaves. Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-41; and Deut. 23:19-20)**
- 4. For the 12 years Nehemiah was governor over Judah he did not accept the governor’s provisions. The former governors did so, but not Nehemiah.
    - a. He paid his own expenses and took care of 150 who ate at his table every day which consisted of providing one ox, 6 fattened sheep, and fowls each day and every 10 days an abundance of all kinds of wine. **(v. 18)**

**F. Nehemiah 6:1-16**

- 1. When the wall was finished but no doors had been set in the gates, the enemies heard about it.
- 2. Sandballat and Geshem sent word to Nehemiah that they wanted him to meet with them in the plain of Ono.
  - a. Their plan was to do him harm.
- 3. Nehemiah’s answer was **(v. 3)**
- 4. The invitation was extended 4 times and 4 times Nehemiah refused.
- 5. The 5th time Sandballat sent an open letter: **(vs. 6-7)**
- 6. Nehemiah’s reply: **(v. 8)**

**(NOTE: This is similar to the threat made during the days of Zerubbabel when the Samaritans sent word to the king of Persia that the Jews would rebel when they finished building the temple. Ezra 4:7-16)**
- 7. Shemaiah presents a plan to Nehemiah for them to meet inside the temple at night to escape death.
  - a. Nehemiah is not going to run away much less go into the temple to save his life and then Nehemiah realizes this plan is also a plot for Shemaiah had been hired by Tobiah and Sandballat to get Nehemiah to sin by going into the temple so they could give “*an evil report*” and “*reproach*” Nehemiah. **(vs. 11-13)**
- 8. In spite of all the opposition in all its various forms, the wall was finished in 52 days. A truly remarkable accomplishment!
- 9. When the enemies and all the nations heard of its completion, **(v. 16)**

**G. Nehemiah 6:17-19**

- 1. The opposition which Nehemiah faced was even more difficult when it is understood that there was pledging/fraternizing taking place with the enemies by some of the Jews.

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- a. Tobiah had married the daughter of Shecaniah, one of the prominent Jews.
  - b. Then Tobiah's son had married the daughter of another prominent Jew.
  - c. Tobiah's allies spied with him to keep him informed about what Nehemiah was doing and they praised Tobiah to Nehemiah.
- (NOTE: Rarely does Satan have to battle God's people from without. He usually has a few dedicated servants in the middle of the saints to do his work from within.)

#### H. Nehemiah 7:1-4

1. Now that everything is finished, Nehemiah gives his brother, Hanani, and the leader of the citadel, Hananiah, charge of Jerusalem.
2. Nehemiah gave explicit orders concerning the security of the city and its inhabitants because (v. 7)

#### I. Nehemiah 7:5-73

1. God commissioned Nehemiah to gather the people (v. 5)
2. Such a registry was found concerning those who had returned with Zerubbabel and that list is the one included in this chapter.

(NOTE: This list is similar to the one in Ezra 2. Also let us be reminded the third promise God made to Abraham has not yet been fulfilled (The Christ). Therefore it is very important for this genealogy to be kept and correct. Otherwise, it would be impossible for the Messiah to prove He was of the proper lineage to fulfill all the prophecies of the Old Testament.)

#### J. Nehemiah 7:73-8:18

1. A month after finishing the walls, all the people gathered together and Ezra the scribe brought the Book of the Law of Moses and read it out loud from daybreak till noon and they all "*were attentive*".
2. This gathering and reading of the law had been commanded to be done once every seven years. **Deut. 31:9-13.**
3. Thirteen Levites stood with Ezra and (v. 8)
4. The people wept as they heard the law read, but Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites said to the people, (v. 9)
5. On the second day they gathered and learned they were to dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month.
  - a. The people obeyed and did so for they had not done this since the days of Joshua.
  - b. This occasion was called the Feast of Tabernacles and was to remind them of the years they lived in booths in the wilderness as they made their way from Egypt to Canaan.
6. Ezra continued to read from the law each of the seven days of the feast and on the eighth day a solemn assembly was done according to the law.
  - a. It was a time of great rejoicing.

#### K. Nehemiah 9:1-10:27

1. On the 24th day of the same 7th month they assemble again but this time with fasting, sackcloth, and earth on themselves as a sign of grief.

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2. They separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their own sins and the sins of their fathers.
3. The law of God was read for a quarter of the day, and then they spent another quarter of the day confession and worshipping the Lord their God.
4. Appointed Levites led the assembly in a public prayer recounting God's dealings with them from the days of Abram. They began by saying: (v. 5)
5. The prayer ended with them making "a sure covenant", putting it in writing, the leaders, Levites, and priest sealing it. (v. 38)
6. Chapter 10 is the list of the leaders who placed their seal on the document and Nehemiah was one of the names who signed the covenant.
7. As to the rest of the people they joined with their brethren and entered into a curse and an oath to "walk in God's law". (v. 29)
8. A number of things were specified concerning what they would be careful to do:
  - a. not to intermarry with people of the land
  - b. not to buy or sell on the sabbath day or any holy day
  - c. not plant crops in the seventh year
  - d. to cancel debts in the seventh year
  - e. to give God his portion and to the service at the temple
9. They concluded with (v. 39)

(NOTE: All this is the same covenant God had with the people since the days of Mt. Sinai. They are in affect promising to be His people if He would be their God again. We have studied other renewals of the covenant but this is the most complete, by far.)

10. These people knew God had kept all His promises down through the centuries. Any failure to receive God's blessings came from their own doings or failing to do. God had been faithful but they had not!

(NOTE: Do not let anyone ever deceive you into thinking God still owes the Jews a land or any other physical blessing on the basis of the promises made in the Old Testament. All those promises were kept and any which were not fulfilled were conditional promises in which the people failed to fulfill their part in order to receive them. The Jews of today have no basis for hoping any of these promises are yet to be fulfilled for them.)

L. **Nehemiah 11:1-12:26**

1. The city of Jerusalem could not prosper until its population was larger.
2. Therefore the leaders settled in Jerusalem and then, to be fair, lots were cast, and one family out of every ten was chosen to move into the city.
3. There were some who volunteered to move and they were commended by their brethren.
4. The names of the heads who agreed to move into the city are listed in **chapter 11**.
5. In **chapter 12**, the names of the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel and those who had served from those days until the days of Nehemiah are given.

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**(NOTE:** In my opinion, it must have been interesting for later generations to be able to look back to the lists found in the book of Nehemiah to see which portion of the walls their forefathers built or which fathers added their names to those signing and sealing the covenant or which families moved into the new city of Jerusalem or which priests and Levites served during the period.)

6. The gatekeepers, the singers, the priests, and all the other Levites, were given to their particular tasks and were assigned to their particular order in which to work according to that which was prescribed in the days of David (**1 Chronicles 24 and 26**).

### M. **Nehemiah 12:27-47**

1. With the work being finished on the walls, the time for dedication had come.
2. Levites and singers were called from the countryside to take part in the celebration with special songs and music.
3. They, along with the priests, purified themselves, the people, the gates, and the walls of the city.
4. Nehemiah divided the people into two large thanksgiving choirs to go in procession upon the walls, giving thanks as they went.
5. Ezra went before one of the companies.
6. As it certainly was fitting, Nehemiah followed with the other half of the people.
7. One group started along the top of the wall in one direction and the other started in the opposite direction.
8. The singers sang, the trumpets were played, and many sacrifices were offered.
9. There was great rejoicing that could be heard afar off.
10. On the same day, men were appointed to oversee the storehouse where the offerings, first fruits, and tithes were stored.
11. The whole order whereby offerings were brought and given to the priests and Levites was re-established in accordance with the law of Moses.
12. All Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah gave the portions due the singers and gatekeepers.
13. They also set apart that which went to the Levites and the Levites set apart that portion of their income which was for the sons of Aaron, the priests.

### N. **Nehemiah 13:1-9**

1. According to **Deuteronomy 23:3-6**, Ammonites and Moabites could not enter the assembly of Israel unto the tenth generation - which was a way of saying "Never!"
2. The reason they were prohibited was they did not greet the children of Israel with bread and water when they were on their way from Egypt, but rather they hired Balaam to curse them but God turned the curse into a blessing. However, God wanted the Israelites to keep themselves separate from them.

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3. So, when the Israelites heard this read from the book of Moses, they determined to obey it and excluded the Ammonites and the Moabites from the assembly of Israel.
  4. One of the problems Nehemiah already had was with some of the Jews being in league with Tobiah's family through marriages and friendship.
    - a. Eliashib, the priest who had been appointed over the storerooms of the house of God, was one of those who were friendly with Tobiah.
  5. After twelve years in Jerusalem, Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes the king of Persia.
  6. Then, after some time, he asked for and received permission to return to Jerusalem.
  7. To his surprise, when he got back, he learned Eliashib had taken one of the courts of the temple that was supposed to be used to store items for the service of God and had made it into an 'apartment', so to speak, for Tobiah the Ammonite!
  8. Not only was Tobiah an Ammonite, who should have been expelled from the assembly with the others, he was one of the worst enemies of the Jews at this time.
  9. Nehemiah was grieved bitterly.
    - a. He threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the room.
    - b. Then he gave orders that the room be purified and that all the proper things be put back in their place where they belonged.
- O. **Nehemiah 13:10-14**
1. Another thing Nehemiah discovered was the portion due to the Levites was not being brought in by the people.
  2. This was one of the things specifically mentioned in the covenant they had made and yet they were breaking the promise they had made.
  3. The Levites could not do their work at the temple because they had to return to the fields to provide for their necessities.
  4. Nehemiah contended with the rulers he had left in charge: (v. 11)
  5. Once again, Nehemiah set thing right and, once again, he prayed to God that He would remember him for the good which he had done for the house of God and for its services.
- P. **Nehemiah 13:15-22**
1. Another definite point included in the covenant was they would keep the sabbath law.
  2. However, when Nehemiah returned from Persia, he found they were treading their winepress or bringing in sheaves or loading produce onto donkeys in order to bring it to market to sell or anything else they chose to do on the sabbath.
  3. Merchants from Tyre were bringing their merchandise just as they done on other days and were trading.
  4. The law of Moses and the covenant they had made concerning the day were being completely ignored.
  5. Nehemiah asked the men of Judah: (vs. 17-18)

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6. With that, Nehemiah gave orders, when it began to be dark toward the sabbath, for the gates to be shut and not opened until after the sabbath.
  7. He posted some of his own servants at the gates to be sure no burdens were brought into the city on that day.
  8. The merchants continued to come a time or two, lodging outside the city wall.
  9. Nehemiah said, (**v. 21**). (In other words, they would be arrested!).
  10. From then on, they no longer came.
  11. Nehemiah commanded the Levites to purify themselves and to guard the gates regularly on the sabbath day.
  12. Nehemiah prayed again for God's remembrance and His mercy for the action he had taken in preserving the laws concerning the sabbath.
- Q. Nehemiah 13:23-31**
1. Though work had been done to do away with mixed marriages when Ezra first returned to Jerusalem, it was still a problem in Nehemiah's day.
  2. Jews had married women of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab.
  3. Their children spoke half the language of Ashdod and did not speak the language of Judah.
  4. Nehemiah contended with them, cursed them, beat some of the men, and pulled out their hair.
  5. He made them take an oath they would not intermarry or allow their sons and daughters to do so.
  6. He said, (**vs. 26-27**)
  7. One of the grandsons of Eliashib the high priest had married the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, who was another of the Jews' enemies.
    - a. Nehemiah said, "*I drove him away from me.*" (**v. 28**)
  8. So, Nehemiah cleansed the people from pagans and assigned the work of the Levites and priests.
  9. Nehemiah's last words in his book was another prayer: (**v. 31**)
- R.** Let us be sure and notice the people who returned from captivity did not worship idols.
- a. That is not the complaint of Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Ezra, or (as we will be seeing) Malachi.
  - b. They had apparently learned that lesson from their captivity.
1. Instead, they worshiped God but only half-heartedly.
  2. They were not careful to see that the priests and Levites were provided for nor did it seem to bother them when the temple rebuild was stopped or hindered by a lack of workers.
  3. They didn't worry about keeping the sabbath law carefully which was a good indication of their lack of zeal in keeping any of the laws of God.
  4. Neither did they keep themselves separate from the neighboring people.
  5. But God was not through with the nation being His select group of people.
  6. They would not stay faithful if they intermarried with Gentiles nor could God fulfill His promises to the seed of Abraham if they became a mixed race.

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7. But think about this: Think about the attitude of the people at this point.
  - a. There is quite a difference between the attitudes of this period and the attitude that was dominate in the days of Christ.
  - b. It is evident that Ezra and Nehemiah have both tried very hard to convince the people to serve the Lord faithfully but they had not been successful.

**II. Lessons From Nehemiah:**

**1. Do Your Job Well!**

**A. Colossians 3:23**

- B. Nehemiah's job was to make sure no one poisoned the king.
- C. Nehemiah did this by tasting any drink served to the king.
- D. If Nehemiah didn't die, the drink was served to the king.
- E. Daily, Nehemiah put his life on the line and, as a result, he became greatly trusted by the king.

**2. Seek The Lord's Help!**

- A. Ask God for help when you have a difficult situation.
- B. Nehemiah **ALWAYS** looked to God for guidance and help.

**C. Hebrews 4:16**

**3. Pray Without Ceasing!**

- A. Watch and pray and work characterized Nehemiah.
- B. In this relatively short book, we have 14 of his prayers given.
  1. Before he set out on the task to rebuild the wall, he prayed.
  2. When he approached the king, he prayed.
  3. When he was in trouble, he prayed.
- C. When the king asked him, "*What do you request?*" - "*So I prayed to the God of heaven.*" (2:4)
- D. What an example: Pray before you start. Pray as you go. Pray when you're between a rock and a hard place. (1 Thess. 5:17)

**4. Expect And Be Ready For Opposition! It's coming!**

- A. No good work goes unopposed!
- B. One form of opposition we have to face daily is attacks from the enemy.
- C. As Christians, it's important that we are mindful of the enemy's presence and his methods of attacks, so that we are not weakened by his false promises and led to sin.
- D. We must always remember Satan will use anything and anybody to get at us! It doesn't matter to him.
- E. We must not be "*ignorant of his devices*". (2 Cor. 2:11)
- D. If we want to protect ourselves from the enemy, we must first turn to God and His word. **Psa 119:11**

**5. Don't Be Discouraged By Adversity!**

- A. As they rebuilt the wall, they were ridiculed and mocked.
- B. Their enemies did everything possible to discourage them.
- C. They spread lies about Nehemiah but Nehemiah knew he was "*doing a great work*" and refused to come down from the wall to talk with his enemies. Nehemiah persisted!

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- D. As Christians we must not and cannot give up! Not even when adversity comes.
- E. In regard to adversity there is an old saying: What doesn't kill us makes us stronger.
- F. We can do as Nehemiah did and put our faith and trust in God.

**CONCLUSION:**

- A. The story of Nehemiah is about a man who saw an overwhelming job that needed to be done and volunteered to do it.
- B. He went to Jerusalem and with great zeal rebuilt the walls of the city.
- C. Let us consider also how we can be so much like the people of Nehemiah's day:
  - 1. They didn't bow down to idols in unfaithfulness to God but served God half-heartedly - not concerning themselves with doing all God commanded.
  - 2. Could we be doing the same?

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**Malachi**

(The Book of Malachi)