

NEHEMIAH 1-3

INTRODUCTION...

- THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

- Our desire to is to teach through the whole Bible - Genesis to Revelation
- **Acts 20:27** – “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”
- We have finished **Ezra** - and will continue on to the Book of **Nehemiah**...
- **Nehemiah** is the 11th of the 12 books of the History of Israel in the Old Testament

- OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH...

- 1st - Who wrote the book of **Nehemiah**
 - The Book of Nehemiah is the first person account of Nehemiah – cupbearer to King Artaxerxes
 - Though the Talmud identifies Ezra as the writer of the combined book of **Ezra-Nehemiah**
 - The book was not broken up into 2 separate books until the 3rd century A.D.
- 2nd – The 2nd of the 3 ‘post-exile’ books: **Ezra** / **Nehemiah** / **Esther** (*Hadassah*)...
 - Nehemiah gives us the 3rd wave of migration back to Judah (*first 2 in the book of Ezra*)...
 - 1st return of the exiles was under the leadership of Zerubbabel...
 - The focus of Zerubbabel was to rebuild the Temple of God in Jerusalem...
 - He worked on restoring the religious system that had been destroyed by Babylon...
 - The prophets **Haggai** / **Zechariah** prophesied during this first return of exiles!
 - 2nd return of exiles was under the leadership of Ezra the Scribe...
 - This 2nd wave took place some 80 years after the first exiles returned...
 - Side note – the book of **Esther** took place during these 80 years...
 - The focus of Ezra was to bring about Spiritual revival by teaching the Word of God!
 - The 3rd wave of exiles returned with Nehemiah...
 - His focus was the restoration of the city – building the wall...
 - Nehemiah returned to re-establish the civil government of Jerusalem...
 - The prophet **Malachi** – final prophet in the OT – spoke to Israel during this period!
- 3rd - The book of Nehemiah picks up about 13 years after the arrival of Ezra – 445B.C.
 - It covers a period of about 13 years – 12 of which Nehemiah rules as governor of Judea...

- The book is divided into 2 sections:
- Chapters 1-7 cover the efforts of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem...
- Chapters 8-13 cover the reforms that Nehemiah brought the people of Judah

FORTIFYING THE CITY... (3 THINGS)

● 1ST – A SAD STATE... 1:1-11

○ 1st – Bad news from Jerusalem... vs. 1-3

- Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah (*Yahweh enlightens*) – was in the city of Shushan...
 - We do not know much about the background of Nehemiah (*Yahweh Comforts*)...
 - It is possible that he was from a priestly heritage (*Levite*) – II Maccabees 1:18
 - But more likely he was from a royal lineage (*Judah*) – because of his position...
 - He was a cupbearer to the King of Persia – serving in the winter palace of Shushan...
 - The role of the cupbearer was an important position – food tester to protect the King!
- In the month of Kislev (*November/ December*) – Nehemiah was walking around the city...
 - According to the historian Josephus – he overheard some men talking in Hebrew...
 - When he found out they had just returned from Jerusalem – has asked about the city...
 - Hanai (*Grace*) gave the bad new- the walls were still broken down / gates burned...
- It had been over 90 years since Zerubbabel first returned – but the city was still in ruins!
 - When you get a cut – it does not heal in a matter of minutes – or even hours...
 - And the more devastating the injury – the longer the recovery time!
 - When God restores a life that has been ruined by sin – it does not happen over night...
 - One of the hardest things to do as a believer – is be patient – wait on the Lord...
 - God is not done yet - and it takes time for Him to heal a devastated life!

○ 2nd – The prayer of Nehemiah... vs. 4-11

- Nehemiah sat down and wept – for 4 months (*Kislev – Nisan*) fasted and prayed to God... vs. 4
 - He knew there was a problem – but he had no idea of what the answer was...
 - So he went to the one who had all the answers – till he was given a solution!
 - I fear far too often we give up in prayer too quickly...

- God says that we are to ask / seek / and knock – **Luke 11:9** - and so we do once...
- But we are not to just go to Jesus once – we are to be constantly seeking Him...
- I imagine we will be amazed at how much God wanted to do in our lives...
- But it never happened simply because we gave up too quickly!
- Nehemiah prayed to the Great and Awesome God of heaven... vs. 5
 - God did not need to be reminded that He was great – but Nehemiah did...
 - It gave him perspective – the city of Jerusalem in ruins / seemed an impossible problem...
 - It was good to remember our God is awesome – and with Him – nothing is impossible!
 - Sometimes it can be very hard for us to look beyond our 'impossible' problems...
 - We do not know what will happen next – and we can be overcome with doubt and fear...
 - But when we come to the Lord – it changes our perspective...
 - We no longer see our problems - instead our God who is greater than any problem!
 - **II Corinthians 4:18** – “Do not look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.”
- Nehemiah prayed for forgiveness... vs. 6-7
 - First he confessed his own sin – and the sins of his whole household...
 - Then asked for forgiveness for Israel – they had not kept the commands of God (*Law*)...
 - Because he understood that until they confessed – God would not see their plight...
 - Until they were forgiven – there was no way for God to hear their prayers!
 - It is sin that keeps the Lord from hearing us – leaves prayers unanswered...
 - Our prayers hit the ceiling of our sin - and we end up talking to ourselves!
 - **Isaiah 1:15** – “Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear.”
- Nehemiah looked to the Word of God... 8-10
 - Because if you want to know what to do – go to the book with all the answers!
 - **Deuteronomy 30:1-8** - If Israel returned to the Lord – God would bring them back!
 - I remember praying about going on a missions trip when I was younger...
 - I asked the two Godliest men I knew for advice - my pastor and my father...
 - My pastor told me he had prayed - and the Lord told him I was not to go...
 - My father told me he had prayed - and the Lord told him I was to go!

- People want to help - but more often than not it is just their opinion'...

- We do not need the opinions of men - we need the Word of God!

- Nehemiah prayed to be used... vs. 11

- He prayed God would grant him mercy before King Artaxerxes – whom he served...

- It was no accident he was the cupbearer – he had unprecedented access to the king...

- And as Nehemiah prayed – he realized God wanted to use him!

- I am often amused when people pray for something – expecting God to send someone else...

- If the Lord is putting something on your heart to pray for – there is probably a reason...

- He may well be preparing you because He wants to use you!

- **2ND – FIXING THE PROBLEM... 2:1-20**

- o 1st – Asking for help ... vs. 1-8

- In the 20th year of Artaxerxes - in the month of Nisan – Nehemiah stood before the King...

- He gave wine to the King – but he had a sad look on his face...

- Artaxerxes was immediately suspicious – his life was in the hand of Nehemiah...

- Terrified Nehemiah answered honestly – he was broken hearted for his people!

- Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah what he wanted...

- Nehemiah shot up a quick prayer – and then asked to be sent to rebuild Jerusalem!

- We should always be talking to God – always in prayer – **I Thessalonians 5:17**

- So that when the time comes – we are ready and know what we are supposed to do...

- Too often people just start to pray – when it is time to get moving!

- Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah how long he would be gone...

- It is mentioned in the text that the queen sat with him – most likely not Esther (*timeline*)...

- Nehemiah gave him a timeframe – perhaps 6 months or a year...

- Although ultimately he would end up extending his time – 12 years as governor of Judea!

- Then Nehemiah asked for letters giving him safe passage to Judah...

- As well as the right to cut down timber for the walls / gates of the city...

- The King granted every one of his requests – and sent him off with his blessing!

- Do you ever wonder why we do not see more healings – miracles today...

- I think many times the reason is that we do not ask – we are afraid to step out and try...
 - Yet God promises to give us anything that we ask for – as we abide in Him!
 - **John 14:14** - “If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*.”
 - Although it our request is selfish – if our heart is not right - it will not be granted!
 - **James 4:2-3** – “You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.”
- o 2nd – Fulfilling prophecy...
- The command was given in the month of Nisan – in the 20th year of Artaxerxes...
 - According to Hebrew tradition – when no day is given – it is 1st day of the month...
 - Meaning the command to rebuild Jerusalem - given to Nehemiah on March 14th - 445 B.C.
 - There is a good reason for the Holy Spirit recording the date of this event...
 - **Daniel 9:24-27** – the 70 weeks of Daniel – the key to unlock End Time Prophecy...
 - Israel is God’s prophetic watch/ timer – it is how God ‘tells time’ prophetically...
 - God told Daniel there were 490 left for Israel until God established His Kingdom...
 - The starting date – the command to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem – **Nehemiah 2:1-8**
 - Now it has obviously been more than 490 years since Artaxerxes gave the orders...
 - But Daniel also predicted the watch would stop - after 483 years – when the Messiah came!
 - **Luke 19:41-44** - Jesus drew near the Jerusalem and wept over it...
 - They had missed their day – Israel was expected to recognize Jesus as the Messiah!
 - Because they had even been told THE VERY DAY Jesus would arrive!
 - **Daniel 9:25** - "Now listen and understand! [483 years] will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until... the Anointed One comes."
 - 483 years or 173,880 days later – on April 6th, 32 A.D.- Jesus arrived (*Palm Sunday*)!
 - God had told the Jews the exact day Jesus would come- but they missed it...
 - The Jews were all very religious- they all went to 'church every Sunday'...
 - But very few of them actually knew their Bible – so they missed the Messiah!
 - We also have been told when Jesus will come (*though not the day or the hour*)...
 - It will kick of the final 7 years of God’s watch – but the question is are we ready!
 - That is why it is so important we learn - read - and get to know our Bible...
 - It is easy to be religious- but miss most important thing of all- Jesus!

- That is why we go to Bible studies / read the Bible/ listen to the Bible on the radio...
- So we get into the Word to learn all about our Lord- so we do not miss Jesus!
- o 3rd – Evaluating the problems... vs. 9-20
 - The problem of Sanballat / Tobiah / Geshem...
 - Sanballat (*from Moab*) / Tobiah (*from Ammon*) / Geshem (*the Arab*) opposed Nehemiah...
 - o When they heard what Nehemiah planned – they laughed and mocked...
 - o They accused the Jews of trying to rebel against the King of Persia!
 - Moab and Ammon were the descendants of Lot - nephew of Abraham - **Genesis 19**...
 - o Meaning these men were actually the relatives of the Jews!
 - o Some of the hardest people on us when we get saved – are our family and friends...
 - o The problem is they know us too well – our mistakes / flaws / and sins...
 - o When we try and follow Jesus – they are quick to remind us of them all!
 - o What they miss is that all that we were is gone – **Psalms 103:12**
 - o No longer defined by who we were – but now by Jesus who is in us!
 - The problem of the broken wall and gates...
 - After 3 days in Jerusalem – Nehemiah snuck out at night to look at the wall...
 - o He had told no one of his plans – and he wanted to keep his purpose secret...
 - o He went out through the Valley gate – passing on the south by the Dung gate...
 - o Portions of the wall were in such bad shape – he had could not pass by!
 - o So he climbed out of Kidron valley and viewed the wall from the Mt. of Olives...
 - o When he returned he gathered the leaders of Judah – and told them his purpose...
 - o They rallied behind Nehemiah – and agreed to start rebuilding the wall!
 - The men could have started rebuilding the wall at any time...
 - o It needed to be rebuilt – they had no defense against the influence of the world...
 - o Yet it took one man being willing to step out in faith – to get the people to act!
 - o We live in nation that is in moral free fall – and its influence is penetrating the church!
 - o Most believers / churches – just stand by watching – not sure what to do...
 - o They know things need to change – but they are just one person / one church...
 - o Yet even when just one is willing to stand up – God can do a work...

o As we stand up for Jesus - God can use us to rebuild a wall – restore a nation!

● **3RD – MANY HANDS MAKE FOR LIGHT WORK... 3:1-32**

- o 1st – Nehemiah must have done extensive planning and organizing before beginning the work...
 - He broke the project down into manageable chunks (*see diagram of Jerusalem*)...
 - Sometimes people emphasize the body of Christ is a living organism - not an organization...
 - While that is true and must not be forgotten - every living organism is highly organized...
 - And there is nothing wrong with organization - as long as we remain flexible to the Spirit!
- o 2nd – Nehemiah was not alone in the work...
 - Nehemiah could not possibly have done all this work by himself...
 - He had to entrust it to the workers and give them the authority to get the job done....
 - Sometimes it seems like it might be easier to do the job ourselves rather than to delegate...
 - Maybe it is because of pride - we think we are the only ones who can do the work...
 - Maybe it is trying to please men - thinking if we say no they will be upset...
 - Either way - when we try to do too much - we end up getting into a lot of trouble...
 - We end up burned out - tired - frustrated - unable to get anything accomplished...
 - We end up upsetting others - telling people we will help them out – but are spread too thin...
 - We keep others from being able to help out – they do not have the opportunity to serve!
- o 3rd – Not everyone did the same work...
 - Some worked in front of their own homes – others came from far away towns...
 - Some worked on the walls / others worked on the gates...
 - Some built small sections – others seemed superhuman in the scope of their efforts...
 - But each worker was important to the cause – every person was necessary!
 - **I Corinthians 12:12** - “The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ.”
 - We are all part of the body of Christ - we all have different roles in the church...
 - One might be called cut donuts/ another teach kids / another drive golf carts...
 - But no matter your gift/calling - all have a critical role to play in the Kingdom of God!
- o 4th – The sheep gate...
 - The work began and ended at the Sheep gate – where the sacrifices came into the Temple...

- I like that because the work began and ended with The Lamb – **John 1:36**
- Because we can be confident – He who began a good work in us with finish it – **Philippians 1:6**
- **Hebrews 12:2** - “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...”