

## **Nehemiah's Burden**

### **Nehemiah 1:1-4**

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

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

Nehemiah comes on the scene after the time of the captivity. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC. The first captives returned in 538 BC under Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest. Ezra brings more captives in 458 BC. It will not be until 444 BC that the events of the book of Nehemiah begin.

The returning captives had a rough time of it. The people who had been in the lands surrounding them did not like them returning. And they did not like them building the temple or the city. They opposed them at every turn. The land had been left desolate for about 50 years. All the walls and houses of Jerusalem had been destroyed.

After Zerubbabel returned they set to building their homes and the temple. They were stopped by the Persian government from finishing the temple. So it stood only partially built till 520 BC when through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the people begin again and finish the temple in 5 years.

But in 444 BC the walls of Jerusalem are still in a shambles, the gates burned with fire.

So when some visiting Jews return from Jerusalem, Nehemiah questions them how things are going back in Judah. He is given a terrible report. That is the beginning of the book.

I. Nehemiah's burden.

A. We see in verse 4 that the situation drives Nehemiah to fasting and prayer.

1. 4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.
2. His prayer in chapter one is one of the greatest prayers in the Bible. Neh 1:5-11
3. Prayer made Abraham Lincoln the man he was, and for the same reason. He said on one occasion, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of those about me seemed insufficient for the day."

Boice, J. M. (2005). Nehemiah: an expositional commentary (pp. 17–18). Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks.

4. The great hymns of the faith tell us that when we have problems that are too big for us, we must turn to Him, for no one else can help us.
  5. Fasting indicates his earnest burden.
- B. His outward appearance is so changed that he cannot hide it.
1. Neh 2:1 And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.
  2. Like many of us, our ignorance of a situation causes us to be unconcerned.
  3. Many times it is not that we do not care, it is that we do not know.
  4. But we must be like Nehemiah and find out the things that should burden our hearts.
  5. We cannot be like the proverbial ostrich with our head stuck in the sand.

II. He is burdened for the people.

- A. In Neh 2:10 he is described as “a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.”
- B. Neh 7:4–5 4 Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt. 5 Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy.
- C. Most problems affect people and we see that Jesus was concerned about people.
  1. Most of the time the people we are concerned about are US.
  2. But if we would be like Jesus we must be concerned about others.
  3. Php 2:4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.
  4. Ro 14:19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.
  5. Ro 15:1 ¶ We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.
  6. 1Co 10:24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.
  7. Jas 2:8 ¶ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well;

III. He is burdened for the city.

- A. Nehemiah 2:17 Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."
  - B. This was the place where God had chosen to place His name.
    - 1. De 16:2 Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there.
  - C. It was the place of His temple.
    - 1. Mal 3:1 "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.
- IV. He is burdened for the things of God.
- A. For the reading of the Word of God
    - 1. Ne 8:1–3 Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. 3 Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.
    - 2. It was the nation's disregard for the Law of God that had lead them to the terrible condition they were in.
    - 3. Only if they continued in obedience to the Word would God bless them.
    - 4. So deep was their concern to abide by God's revealed will that they took "a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law" (10:29) MacArthur, J. (2001). Nehemiah: Experiencing the Good Hand of God (p. 3). Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group.
    - 5. Nehemiah 10:29 (NKJV) 29 these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes:
  - B. Celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles
    - 1. Ne 8:16–18 16 Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards

or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. 17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. 18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

As we will see next week Nehemiah was not just a complainer. He had faith in God and gave himself to the work if God would have him.

He knew that things do not change on their own. So his burden moved him into action by faith.

He never saw himself as the solution to this problem but rather that God had a solution and was just looking for the right people to carry it out.

“Although others had been trying to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls and thus restore the city’s influence for nearly one hundred years, Nehemiah accomplished this Herculean task in only fifty-two days. Then he led a series of religious and moral reforms that were to have the greatest influence on the Jewish nation up to the time of Jesus Christ.” Boice, J. M. (2005). *Nehemiah: an expositional commentary* (p. 15). Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks.

Persian Kings	Dates of Their Reigns	Biblical Events	Scripture References	Dates
Cyrus	559-530 B.C.	Edict of Cyrus for the return <i>First return</i> of 49,897 exiles, under Zerubbabel (to build the temple) The altar and the temple foundation built	Ezra 1:1-4 Ezra 2 Ezra 3:1-4:5	538 B.C. 538 536
Cambyeses	530-522			
Smerdis	522			
Darius I	521-486	Haggai prophesied  Zechariah prophesied The temple completed	Book of Haggai  Book of Zechariah Ezra 5-6	520  520-518 515
Xerxes (Ahasuerus)	485-465	Accusation against Judah  Esther became queen	Ezra 4:6  Esther 2:17	486  479
Artaxerxes I (Artashasta)	464-424	Artaxerxes stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem  <i>Second return</i> of 4,000-5,000 exiles, under Ezra (to beautify the temple and reform the people) <i>Third return</i> of exiles, under Nehemiah (to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem) Nehemiah's second return	Ezra 4:7-23  Ezra 7-10  Book of Nehemiah Nehemiah 13:6	ca. 464-458  458  444 ca. 430