

## Nehemiah

<b>What's in a Name?</b>	In Hebrew, the name "Nehemiah" comes from two words: <i>naham</i> , meaning to comfort, and <i>yah</i> , the shortened form of YHWH. Put them together and you have: <i>God comforts</i> .
<b>Who Nehemiah Was</b>	In 1:1, we learn that Nehemiah is the son of Hakaliah. Hakaliah means "he who waits for the Lord" (fittingly). 1:1-2 also tells us that he was in Susa when he heard the news of Jerusalem's walls being torn down and destroyed. Susa was the most important citadel in the Persian Empire (modern day Iran). It's both home to Nehemiah and to Esther. The last verse in Nehemiah 1 also tells us that he was a cupbearer to the king. Cupbearers in the ancient times had a high degree of influence, power, and trust because they tested the king's drink for poison. Nehemiah had Xerxes life in his hands, literally. But the most important clue about who Nehemiah was comes from Nehemiah 1:4. Nehemiah was a man of deep and intense prayer and fasting.
<b>Who Nehemiah Was Not and Why That Is Important</b>	When studying Nehemiah, it is important to note who Nehemiah was not. He was not a priest. He was not a Levite. He was not a prophet. He was not a high ranking Jewish elder. He was not a scribe, like Ezra. He was not royalty like Esther. He was a Jewish, praying, layman who was the cupbearer to the Persian king. Why did God use him? Because he prayed and was anguished in His spirit about Jerusalem's ruin. That's why he received a word from the Lord, unlike others.
<b>What the Lord is Going to Use Nehemiah For</b>	Ezra gathered the books (the Scriptures). Zerubbabel rebuilds the temple (or at least a smaller version of it). And Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem. Without the rebuilding of the walls, their temple worship would have been overrun by pagans hostile to their worship of YHWH. As a result, Nehemiah's work sets Israel on a course to prosper once again in their new, post-exilic world.
<b>The Book of Nehemiah in a Nutshell</b>	The Book of Nehemiah is a great book on leadership. Spiritual leadership, in fact, is what the book is about. It moves from prayer at first to purity of the people of God at the end. Consequently, every aspect of his leadership in between is vitally important to the message of the book as a whole.
<b>The Theme of the Book in a Nutshell</b>	"The good hand of God was upon me." Nehemiah accomplished the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem by the hand of providence.
<b>The Best Way to Read Nehemiah</b>	Nehemiah is best read as a series of leadership decisions that come from <u>living and leading</u> in the knowledge that God has ordained the effort and will see it to completion.

### It Started With Prayer

"Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." <sup>4</sup>When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup>Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,<sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. <sup>7</sup>We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup>"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, <sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' <sup>10</sup>"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. <sup>11</sup> Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." (1:3-11)

### To Inspection

<sup>11</sup> I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days <sup>12</sup> I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. <sup>13</sup> By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal<sup>[a]</sup> Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. <sup>14</sup> Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; <sup>15</sup> so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. <sup>16</sup> The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work. <sup>17</sup> Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." <sup>18</sup> I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me (2:11-18)

### To Faithfulness and Perseverance

<sup>19</sup> But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. “What is this you are doing?” they asked. “Are you rebelling against the king?” <sup>20</sup> I answered them by saying, “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.” (2:19-20)

<sup>7</sup> But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. <sup>8</sup> They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. <sup>9</sup> But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat. (4:7-9)

When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates— <sup>2</sup> Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages<sup>[a]</sup> on the plain of Ono.” But they were scheming to harm me; <sup>3</sup> so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” <sup>4</sup> Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer. (6:1-4)

### Forward By the Hand of Providence

#### 1. Gracious Hand of God Was Upon Me

<sup>18</sup> I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. (2:18)

#### 2. God of Heaven

<sup>4</sup> The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, <sup>5</sup> and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.” (2:4-5)

#### 3. To Completion

<sup>15</sup> So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. . . <sup>16</sup> When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. (6:15-16)

### Worship In Light Of What God Has Done

<sup>1</sup> all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. . . <sup>4</sup> Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. . . <sup>5</sup> Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. <sup>6</sup> Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. . . <sup>8</sup> They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear<sup>[a]</sup> and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read. (8:1, 4-5, 6, 8)

<sup>18</sup> Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly. (8:18)

### Calling to Purity in Light of What God Has Done

#### 1. Personally

On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. <sup>2</sup> Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. (9:1-2)

#### 2. Corporately

“We will not neglect the house of our God.” (9:39)

<sup>11</sup> So I rebuked the officials and asked them, “Why is the house of God neglected?” Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts. (12:11)

<sup>30</sup> So I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign, and assigned them duties, each to his own task. <sup>31</sup> I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the firstfruits (12:30-31)

### Conclusion

Remember me with favor, my God. (12:31)