

Nehemiah

The Memoir

Nehemiah 1:5-11

April 11, 2020

Today

Nehemiah's name means "The Lord Comforts". We know his father was Hacaliah and that he had a relative named Hanani.

Nehemiah served in the court of Artaxerxes I {465-425 BC} as a cupbearer {1:11} – which means he had direct access to the king and was likely a personal confidant and friend.

The book contains a mix of personal journal entries and historical data. There are 2 lengthy prayers – one private {1:4-11} and one public {9} as well as 7 brief prayers in which Nehemiah either asks for God's help or asks God to take notice of his efforts.

It has been 93 years since the original group of exiles returned to Judah {537 BC}. The Temple has been rebuilt but construction on the walls of Jerusalem has stopped.

Journal Entry #1

444 BC - Last Tuesday a group of men, including my relative Hanani, came from Judah to see me here in Susa. They told me those who had returned to Judah are in great distress because the walls of Jerusalem are still a pile of rubble even after all this time.

Well, this news just shattered me!! So, I sat down and wept for days. I also fasted and prayed. {1:5-11}

Journal Entry #2

It's been 4 months and I'm still sad, but I have a job to do... I took the wine into Artaxerxes – he's been on the throne for 20 years already, if you can believe that. I have never been sad in the king's presence before, but today I couldn't help it and he noticed!!!!

He asked me why I looked so sad! Huh oh!! Not good! This could get a guy killed! {I was very afraid!}

I told him I was sad because the city where my ancestors are buried is still a pile of rubble {Persians are big on honoring the dead}. He asked me what I'd like to do about it.

I prayed before replying then told him I'd like to go to Judah and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

This was a bold request considering it was this king who had previously ordered all construction on Jerusalem to stop - Ezra 4:7-23

He asked how long I planned to be gone, which I told him. Then I asked the king to write some letters:

- To the governors of that region allowing me to pass through their territory.
- To Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, ordering him to give me timber for the gates of the Citadel, the walls of Jerusalem and the home where I intended to live.

The king said YES to everything I asked because God was with me!!!

I set off on my trip and when I reached the region west of the Euphrates, I gave the letters to the governors. {I'm grateful to the king for sending so many armed soldiers to keep me company} When Sanballat and Tobiah read the letters, they were not happy!!

Journal Entry #3

Finally arrived in Jerusalem!

Last night I snuck out with a couple of guys {I didn't tell anyone what God had put in my mind to do} and inspected the entire wall.

After I completed my midnight inspection, I called everyone together. ***"We're in trouble"*** I told them. ***"Jerusalem lies in ruins. Let's come together and rebuild the walls so that we will no longer be a disgrace..."*** The priest, leaders and all the people agreed to get to work.

When Sanballat and Tobiah heard the news they mocked us and told us we were rebelling against the direct orders of the king!! But I told them we were going to rebuild the wall because God was going to give us success. I also told them to go away because they had no business being here.....

I made a list of all those who carried out repairs on the wall as well as their location on the wall {Ch. 3}.

Journal Entry #4

Today Sanballat heard that we have started rebuilding the wall – boy is he ticked!! He and Tobiah have joined forces again to try and discourage us. They held a public gathering and mocked us - pointing out the hopelessness of our efforts.

I prayed that God would judge them for their efforts to demoralize us and then we got to work. In short order we had the whole wall built up to ½ its original height.

Soon it wasn't just Sanballat and Tobiah who were mad at our progress. The Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites have all joined forces to try and stop us. We prayed and set a 24-hour guard, but I'm worried that the efforts of Sanballat and his group are having an effect. The wall will not be rebuilt if this continues, so, here's what I did...

I positioned guards behind lower sections of the wall and at openings. Then I set whole families along the wall with their swords, spears and bows. Then I went to the nobles, leaders and the rest of the people and said, ***"Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome! Fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses!"*** {Nehemiah 4:14}

Beginning on that day, ½ the men worked on the wall and ½ the men held spears, shields, bows and wore armor – ready for battle. Those who worked also carried weapons – with one hand they worked and with the other they held their weapon. What an amazing sight!

I called everyone together, ***"listen, we are spread very thin on the wall, so whenever you hear the trumpet, come running. OUR GOD WILL FIGHT FOR US!!!"*** {Nehemiah 4:20}

Journal Entry #5

If outside problems aren't enough.... The people have come to me complaining that other Jews are oppressing them financially, to the point they are having to sell their children to pay the debts. Good grief!!

I called a meeting: ***"Listen, we have worked really hard to redeem our countrymen who had been sold to foreigners, but now you are forcing them to sell themselves!"***

SILENCE

I continued: ***"What you are doing is wrong! Please stop! Please, give back their vineyards, olive groves, and houses, as well as the money, grain, new wine, and oil that you have charged them in interest."*** {Nehemiah 5:11}

They all agreed, including the priests.

Then I shook out my garment, ***"May God do the same to every man who does not fulfill this promise – even shaken out and emptied!"***

PS --- I was governor for 12 years and during that time I did not eat the governor's food allotment, which I was entitled to. The governors before me had laid a heavy financial burden on the people, but I did not because I desired to honor God. I fed hundreds of people every day, but I did not demand the governor's allotment because of the burden the people already carried.

Journal Entry #6

The wall is complete – there are no more gaps – but we still need to install the gates.

Sanballat and Tobiah sent me a note today asking me to meet them at ***Chephirim*** – I knew they meant to harm me, so, I declined the invitation. {This went back and forth 4 times!}

Finally, Sanballat sent me an open letter: *"It is reported that you and the Jews are planning to rebel - that's why you're rebuilding the wall. Also, according to the reports, you want to be their king! This report will be sent to Artaxerxes, so let's get together and have a meeting."* {Nehemiah 6:6-7}

I know they are just trying to frighten and discourage us, so I asked for the Lord's strength and ignored the letter.

Later I went to Shemaiah's house and he told me we should go to the Temple and lock the doors because men were coming to kill me... maybe even tonight!

I told him I would not go. First off, I'm not going to run and hide and 2nd I'm not a priest so I can't go into the Temple and expect to live... it's just a bad idea all around!

I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had been hired by Tobiah and Sanballat to "prophecy" against me. They were hoping I would get scared and sin against God and be discredited before the people.

PS --- The wall went up in just **52 days!** When all our enemies saw how quickly the project had been completed, they lost all their confidence because they realized God had helped us accomplish the work – but Tobiah still sent letters trying to frighten me.

Journal Entry #7

Today I put my brother Hanani and Hananiah, commander of the fortress, in charge of Jerusalem.

God has put it on my heart to enroll the people by families. I went and found the Book of Genealogies that recorded the families who returned to Judah with Zerubbabel. This is what it said:

42,360 people returned + 7337 servants and 245 singers {Ezra only lists 200 singers}. They brought 8136 animals. There was also a free-will offering collected at that time:

- 41,000 gold drachmas {Ezra = 61,000}



- 4,200 silver minas {Ezra = 5,000}



- 597 priestly garments. {Ezra = 100}
- 50 basins

Journal Entry #8

It's the 1st day of the 7th month. Today all the people gathered in the square. Ezra brought out the Book of the Law and read it for the whole congregation to hear. {There were men stationed in the crowd to help the people understand what Ezra was reading.}

- *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.* {Nehemiah 8:6}

Tomorrow we are going to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. I instructed the people to go to the mountains and collect olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches from leafy trees and make tents out of them.....

PS --- We celebrated for 7 days and held the sacred assembly on the 8th day – just as the law requires.

Journal Entry #9

Today the people gathered to confess their sins before God. The Levites offered this amazing prayer: *... Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. ⁶ You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.....* {Nehemiah 9:5-38}

- I wrote down the contents of the Covenant and made a list of all those who signed it {Ch. 10}.
- I made a list of all the families who lived in Jerusalem as well as those who lived in the countryside {Ch. 11}.

- I made a list of all the Priests and Levites – from 537 BC to the present {Ch. 12}.

Journal Entry #10

The Wall was dedicated today! What a sight! Musical instruments of every sort and people everywhere! The 2 Thanksgiving choirs stood on the wall. Ezra went with 1 choir {right} and I went with the other {left} and we met at the Temple.

- *And on that day, they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. {Nehemiah 12:43}*

PS--- 432 BC - I have spent 12 years in Judah. It is time for me to go back to Susa and my responsibilities to Artaxerxes.

Journal Entry #11

I find myself once again in Judah. Today we read from the Book of Moses. It was after this that the mixed multitude was separated out from Israel.

Let me back up....

- While I was in Susa, Eliashib - the priest, the one in charge of the store houses in the Temple, prepared a large room for Tobiah --- **{yes, THAT Tobiah – the 2 are relatives}**, that once held grain offerings, frankincense, utensils and other contributions for the support of the Levites.

When I came back to Jerusalem and learned that Eliashib had done this evil thing, I was so mad that I threw all of Tobiah’s stuff out of the room and had it thoroughly cleaned then had the utensils, grain offerings and frankincense returned.

I also discovered that the Levites had not been getting their Temple wages so they had returned to plowing fields to make a living. *“Why is the house of God forsaken?”*, I asked. Then I gathered the Levites together and restored their jobs.

- On Sabbath I saw people working! Not only that, Men from Tyre, who were living in Jerusalem, brought fish and all kinds of merchandise into Jerusalem and were selling to the people.... Did I mention it was Sabbath!!

I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing-- desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath." {Nehemiah 13:17-18}

PS --- The next Friday night, just before sundown, I instructed the gates of the city to be closed – not to be reopened until Sunday morning. Once or twice merchants spent the night outside the gates, but that stopped after I warned them to leave or I’d use force.

- Some of the men of Judah have married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab! ½ their children don’t even speak our language!

I rebuked them and called curses down on them.

I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair.

I made them take an oath in God's name and said: *"You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. ²⁶ Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. ²⁷ Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?" {Nehemiah 13:25-27}*

One of the offenders was the grandson of Eliashib, the high priest. He was the son-in-law of my old enemy Sanballat!! I threw him out of Jerusalem!!

PS --- *I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign, and assigned them duties, each to his own task. ³¹ I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me with favor, O my God. {Nehemiah 13:30-31}*

Take Aways

There are few men in the Bible who exemplify the strength of character, faith and trust in God that Nehemiah exhibited:

- He was a layman - not a priest like Ezra or a prophet like Haggai and Zechariah, however, he was exactly what God needed to accomplish the goal of rebuilding Jerusalem.
- He was resourceful and a man of action who had an unwavering trust in God. He planned and did what was in his power to do and left the rest to God.
- He was sensitive to God’s will and obedient to the call.
- He aligned himself with God’s plans and purposes.
- He had a heart for God’s people – he cared about the things God cared about.
- He was bold. He was direct and did not shy away from asking for what he needed.

- He was fearless.
- He had an active prayer life and often turned to prayer before making decisions:
 - **Nehemiah 4:8-9** - They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. ⁹ But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.
- He was decisive.
- He led by example.
- He was an encourager and routinely reminded the people where their strength came from:
 - **Nehemiah 4:14-20** - After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "**Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome,** and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." ⁹ Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. ²⁰ Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. **Our God will fight for us!**"
- He was humble – he did not claim glory for himself, but always gave God the credit for his success.
- He had tremendous administrative skills.
- He was wise and discerning.
- He was unwavering and did not bend under the mocking attacks of outside enemies.
- He was forceful when he needed to be and he stood for truth.

Nehemiah was the right man for the job!! He teamed up with God to accomplish a seemingly impossible task and it took just 52 days to complete a job that had been sidelined for 93 years.

John Huss: One man + God is a majority.