



The Book of Nehemiah

Nehemiah's Time in the Palace in Shushan

Nehemiah 1:1-11

- I. THE REPORT GIVEN TO NEHEMIAH (Nehemiah 1:1-3)
 - A. The Reception of the Report (Nehemiah 1:1)
 1. The person receiving the report—"Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah"
 - a. The opening words ("The words of Nehemiah") identify Nehemiah as the recipient of the report and ultimately as the author of the book. At the same time, we understand that ultimately these are God's words given to Nehemiah through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).
 - b. Nehemiah is further identified as "the son of Hachaliah."
 - (1) Nothing is known of Hachaliah for he is only mentioned twice in scripture (Nehemiah 1:1; Nehemiah 10:1).
 - (2) Due to this, we have little knowledge surrounding Nehemiah and his lineage although he was likely of the tribe of Judah or Benjamin since all the other tribes were part of the northern kingdom and taken into captivity by the Assyrians.
 - c. Nehemiah is also identified as the Tirshatha (Nehemiah 8:9; Nehemiah 10:1) and/or governor (Nehemiah 5:14; Nehemiah 12:26).
 2. The timing of the report—"in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year"
 - a. The simple—The events began during Artaxerxes' twentieth year (Nehemiah 2:1; Nehemiah 5:14) in the month Chisleu.
 - b. The complex—The exact month is given yet there remains some uncertainty because the Jews have both a sacred and secular calendar.
 - (1) Chisleu is the ninth month in the sacred year, but the third month in the secular year. Nehemiah 2:1 also offers a time reference but speaks of the month Nisan. Nisan is the first month in the sacred year, but the seventh month in the secular year.
 - (2) The reference to the twentieth year speaks to Artaxerxes' reign and would make sense with either calendar considered.
 - (3) Regardless of which calendar is used, the time passing between the months remains the same, four months.
 3. The location of the report—"Shushan the palace"
 - a. Judah was originally taken captive by the Babylonians; however, the Babylonians were later overthrown by the Persians and Medes (Daniel 5:28).
 - b. Shushan is the capital city of the Persian empire (see Esther 1:23; Esther 3:15).



B. The Giving of the Report (Nehemiah 1:2-3)

1. Nehemiah's visitors (Nehemiah 1:2)
 - a. The only individual mentioned by name to have come to Nehemiah was Hanani, who was "one of my brethren."
 - (1) Being called "one of my brethren" could simply mean a fellow Jew; however, Nehemiah later said, "my brother Hanani" (Nehemiah 7:2). All things considered it appears that Hanani was a literal blood-brother of Nehemiah.
 - (2) Hanani "came" from Jerusalem to Shushan and later returned to Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 7:2). To offer some perspective, consider that from Jerusalem to Babylon or visa versa was approximately a four-month journey (see Ezra 7:9).
 - b. There was an additional unknown group that came with Hanani and this group was simply identified as "certain men of Judah." While we may not have much information as to their identity, the word *certain* would lead us to believe that these were chosen men, hand-picked to travel with the respected Hanani.
2. Nehemiah's inquiry (Nehemiah 1:2)
 - a. He asked of the people—"the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity."
 - (1) The wording here poses a question... Was Nehemiah asking about Jews who returned from captivity or those who never went into captivity?
 - (2) This is a valid question, because there were Jews who remained in Judah and never went into captivity—"But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen" (2 Kings 25:12).
 - (3) To better understand Nehemiah's inquiry, consider that the phrase "had escaped" is further explained as "left of the captivity."
 - a) The use of the word *left* does not of necessity imply that Nehemiah referred to those who remained in Judah, never going to Babylon. In fact, the word *left* oftentimes means to cease from or stop (Genesis 11:8; Genesis 17:22; Genesis 18:33; Genesis 29:35).
 - b) That being said, "left of the captivity" could speak of those who had ceased from being in captivity or who had escaped captivity.
 - c) The events of Nehemiah chapter one occurred sometime after Zerubbabel led a large group of Jews back to Judah. Furthermore, it occurred some thirteen years after Ezra led a small group back to Judah. Therefore, there were many Jews in Judah now who had come out of the captivity.
 - (4) In the end, Nehemiah could have been inquiring about both those who had returned from captivity and those who never went into captivity.



- b. He asked of the place—“and concerning Jerusalem.”
 - (1) When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, he had the temple burned and the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed (2 Kings 25:9-10).
 - (2) Zerubbabel and those that returned with him, including Nehemiah, had rebuilt the temple, but left the wall surrounding Jerusalem undone.
 - (3) Since Nehemiah had some knowledge of the early work of the returnees, he would likely have anticipated greater progress and was therefore inquiring as to how the work was coming.
- 3. Hanani’s report (Nehemiah 1:3)
 - a. While Nehemiah would have reason to be hopeful of the report, what he heard was anything but hopeful.
 - b. The condition of *people* was that they were “in great affliction and reproach.”
 - c. The condition of the *place* was that “the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.”
 - (1) This is the same condition the city was in after Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, came in and destroyed it and took the people captive.
 - (2) Even though many Jews returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel, some years before, and had rebuilt the temple, their zeal and service to the Lord was hindered and they left off rebuilding of the remainder of the city.
 - (3) In doing so, even their completed work was made less secure.

II. THE RESPONSE MANIFESTED BY NEHEMIAH (Nehemiah 1:4-11)

A. Nehemiah’s Mourning (Nehemiah 1:4)

- 1. The expression of his mourning—Nehemiah had a strong reaction to Hanani’s report which included weeping, mourning, fasting, and praying. Note: This type of mourning is akin to what took place at the death of a loved one (Genesis 27:41; Genesis 37:5; Genesis 50:10; Deuteronomy 34:8; 2 Samuel 19:2; Esther 4:3).
- 2. The source of his mourning
 - a. It would be understandable to be grieved by these conditions; however, Nehemiah’s grief was likely intensified by the fact that he had been involved in the first return under Zerubbabel’s leadership.
 - b. Best we can tell, Nehemiah was an integral part of the return under Zerubbabel’s leadership. For a time, he was involved in the work of rebuilding but eventually returned to Shushan.
 - c. Learning that the people he led and labored with had declined and were in great affliction and reproach and that no further rebuilding had been accomplished would have been very disheartening (see Galatians 4:11).

**B. Nehemiah's Prayer (Nehemiah 1:5-11)**

1. The content of his prayer (Nehemiah 1:5-11)
 - a. Worship (Nehemiah 1:5)
 - (1) He identified God as the "LORD" and as the "God of heaven."
 - (2) He spoke of God's power as "great and terrible."
 - (3) He praised God's work as keeping "covenant and mercy."
 - b. Confession (Nehemiah 1:6-7)
 - (1) He confessed that the children of Israel, himself, and his father's house had all sinned against God (Nehemiah 1:6).
 - (2) He claimed that they had "not kept the commandments" which God had commanded Moses (Nehemiah 1:7).
 - c. Scripture (Nehemiah 1:8-9)
 - (1) Nehemiah reminded God of what He had promised Israel in times past (Leviticus 26:33, 39; Deuteronomy 4:25-27, 29-31; Deuteronomy 28:64; Deuteronomy 30:2).
 - (2) Obviously, Nehemiah did not believe God had forgotten or neglected His word. Rather, wanted God to know that he was resting in God's promises.
 - d. Request (Nehemiah 1:10-11)
 - (1) It was not until the end of Nehemiah's prayer that he truly presented his request to the Lord.
 - (2) His request was twofold:
 - a) That God would be attentive to the prayers of His people
 - b) That God would prosper him and grant him mercy
2. The cause of his prayer—"I was the king's cupbearer" (Nehemiah 1:11)
3. The considerations of his prayer
 - a. Nehemiah had a healthy fear of God.
 - (1) He knew God as the "LORD God of heaven" and as "the great and terrible God."
 - (2) On the flipside, he saw himself as both a sinner and a servant.
 - (3) In response to Nehemiah's awareness of God and of himself, he did not approach God irreverently or lightly.
 - b. Nehemiah both knew and believed the words of God.
 - (1) We have already pointed out several passages of scripture that Nehemiah referenced when speaking to God.
 - (2) Obviously, this means that Nehemiah read and knew the scripture available to him.
 - (3) It would seem that Nehemiah took the command given to Joshua to daily meditate upon the book of the law to heart and applied it to himself (see Joshua 1:8).
 - (4) Not only did Nehemiah read and study the scripture, but he clearly believed those words to be the very words of God. As such, Nehemiah trusted in those words and took the time to remind God of the promises He had made unto Israel aforetime.