

Nehemiah Sermon #1

Turn in your Bibles to the Book of Nehemiah.

Today we begin our journey in the Book of Nehemiah.

An Old Testament study for New Testament people

Times and culture may change, but people and sin remain the same.

Today I want to set the scene/back drop for our study

We need to prepare the foundation to launch into the Book of Nehemiah.

In just a few days – orientation day at college campus for incoming freshman

Financial, office, living quarters, admissions department, health guidelines

Welcome and tour of the campus to help them become familiar/acquainted with their surroundings

That's exactly what we are going to do today with the Book of Nehemiah

I've entitled this opening message "The Introduction to the Book of Nehemiah"

Nehemiah 1

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word

Nehemiah 1:1-5

Let us pray

You may be seated

Introduction to Nehemiah

The historical setting of this passage

Jewish history begins with Abraham at approximately 2000 B.C.

But it was not until one thousand years later that Israel took on world significance as a nation under Saul, David, and Solomon.

In the successive reigns of these three kings, Israel's flag flew proudly over the nation. Israel was finally recognized as a major military power under King David's forty-year reign.

Upon his death, David turned his throne over to his son, Solomon.

When Solomon died, there was split in the nation's military ranks between Rehoboam (Solomon's son forsook Solomon's counselors) and Jeroboam (made golden calves, false altars) – I Kings 12

Israel became a divided kingdom:

Ten tribes migrated to the north and settled in Samaria; the other two went south and settled in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.

The northern tribes during this period of division were called *Israel* and the southern group was called *Judah*.

This was a low time in Jewish history.

God judged Israel (the northern 10 tribes for its idolatry and false worship) when the Assyrians invaded in 722 B.C.

Those ten tribes were finished; the Northern Kingdom ceased to exist.

But some of the people from the north fled to the south to escape Assyrian control.

The land of Judah remained a Jewish nation for more than three hundred years.

However, in 586 B.C. Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem . . . and took the people captive.

This began what is called “the Babylonian Captivity.”

In II Chronicles 36:18-19 the Bible records the end of Judah’s history (Jerusalem was totally leveled) and the beginning of the Babylonian Captivity.

II Chronicles 36:20

Those Jews who lived through this siege of Jerusalem were bound together, chained like slaves, and sent to Babylon, a trek of more than eight hundred miles.

. . . verse 20 concludes: “. . . until the rule of the kingdom of Persia.” . . .

There was a king named Cyrus who ruled Persia and another king, Darius, who ruled the neighboring Medes.

The two nations were allies, . . .

The Medes and the Persians invaded Babylon and overthrew it, . . .

Second Chronicles 36:22 tells us: “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia . . .”

King Cyrus sent God’s people back to Israel – “The Second Exodus”

And so the Jews went back to Jerusalem under the leadership of three men.

“Company A” left Babylon with Zerubbabel as leader

“Company B” left Babylon with Ezra as commander-in-chief.

Then thirteen years later, Nehemiah led “Company C” back to the destroyed city.

“The house of God” was the main subject of the Book of Ezra

When we get to Nehemiah – the Temple at Jerusalem had now been rebuilt and its various services restored. . . .

But the temple was without protection for ninety years until God led Nehemiah to provide the leadership necessary to build a wall!

“The wall” of Jerusalem is the heart of the Book of Nehemiah. . . .

Nehemiah records the third and final stage of the recovery.

The Book of Nehemiah is a post-exilic book

These events are after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and after the Babylonian exile.

Only 6 books like this in the O.T. – Postexilic books

3 Prophetic – Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

3 Historical books – Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah

And when we put these books together we can see the steps that God used to bring His people back to the land and restore their condition.

Ezra had been preaching for 13 years – when we pick up here in Nehemiah 1:1.

There is a recorded conversation between Nehemiah and his brother

Nehemiah assumes that their condition in Jerusalem is far better than it actually is, and when he is told about their condition – Nehemiah is deeply moved.

Nehemiah is presented in three roles.

Early in the book, Nehemiah is the *cupbearer* to the king. (Chapter 1:11)

Midway through the story, he is the *builder* of the wall. (2:17)

In the third part of the Book of Nehemiah, he is *governor* of the city and surrounding sections of Jerusalem (5:14)

Nehemiah 1:1

Vs. 1a

The name Nehemiah means encourager

When he came to Jerusalem, it was said of him “there is come a man to seek the welfare of the people of God.” (2:10)

He put the kingdom of God at the top of his agenda and all of his privileges were secondary

“Seek first the kingdom of God”

As we will see, Nehemiah’s heart was for the things of God **first**

The proper name *Nehemiah* means “the Lord comforts.”

Through Nehemiah, God is going to encourage and comfort His people

Nehemiah is not mentioned in the New Testament, so people infer that he is not important.

Nehemiah is a butler, so people think he is not important

Nehemiah is not a preacher like Ezra, so people think Nehemiah is not important

We shall see what God thinks of him.

We are going to meet one of the greatest leaders of all time. His name is Nehemiah.

Nehemiah will teach us:

. . . how to “plan our work” and “work our plan”

. . . how to set goals and achieve them when everything around us seems to be falling apart;

. . . how to motivate others when morale is at an all-time low;

. . . how to accept promotion and success without abusing or misusing our privileges;

Vs. 1 b

Nehemiah was apparently born during the exile period in Babylon

His father’s name was Hackaliah.

Beyond this, we really know very little about his family background.

Vs. 1 – years

We go from the 7th year to the 20th year – we got 13 years separating Ezra’s arrival and Nehemiah’s arrival

Vs. 1c – Shushan (or Susa) was the capital city of the Persian Empire and the site of the king’s winter palace and residence.

The events of Esther took place in Susa, as did the vision of Daniel 8.
So Chapter 1 opens up with our location being in Shushan

The main action of Nehemiah is crowded into the spring and summer of the year 445 B.C.

Vs. 2

In the midst of his life of luxury, Nehemiah’s routine was interrupted one day by a group of men who had come from Judah.

One of them was his brother Hanani. You can imagine Nehemiah’s excitement! This was his first opportunity to visit a close family member who had returned to Jerusalem.

No doubt it was just another routine day when Nehemiah met his brother Hanani, but it turned out to be a turning point in Nehemiah’s life.

Like large doors, great life-changing events can swing on very small hinges.

It was just another day when Moses went out to care for his sheep, but on that day he heard the Lord’s call and became a prophet (Ex. 3).

It was an ordinary day when David was called home from shepherding his flock; but on that day, he was anointed king (I Sam. 16).

It was an ordinary day when Peter, Andrew, James, and John were mending their nets, but that was the day Jesus called them to become fishers of men . . .

You never know what God has in store, even in a commonplace conversation with a friend or relative; so keep your heart open to God’s providential leading.

My wife and I are in Kansas today because of an innocent visit by Sue Penner. We were on vacation in Kansas – she dropped by

Sometimes by invitation to church – a whole family is changed forever

You ever thought about that?

Vs. 2 – “and I asked them”

Nehemiah was interested to know in what conditions his fellow Jews were living.

Such an inquiry would be very natural for somebody who lived far removed from his people and homeland.

Nehemiah’s family were living in Judah and it is to be expected that he would have an interest in the circumstances under which they were living.

Nehemiah cared enough to ask

Why would Nehemiah inquire about a struggling remnant of people who lived hundreds of miles away?

After all, he was the king’s cupbearer and he was successfully secure in his own life. . . .

Some people prefer *not* to know what’s going on, because information might bring obligation. . . .

Nehemiah asked about Jerusalem and the Jews living there because he had a caring heart – spirit!

What did Nehemiah learn about Jerusalem and the Jews? (VS. 3)

Three words summarize the bad news: remnant, ruin, and reproach. . . . only a remnant of people lived there . . . they were in great affliction . . . Jerusalem was in shambles . . .

Perhaps Nehemiah had hoped that the work on the walls had begun again and that the city was now restored.

But without walls and gates, the city was open to ridicule and attack.

Proverbs 25:28 – *“He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls.”*

The temple of Jerusalem could be destroyed easily by the enemies, because no proper stand could be made against enemies without a defense wall.

Nehemiah was brokenhearted over the news.

Are we like Nehemiah, anxious to know the truth even about the worst situations?

Is our interest born of concern or idle curiosity?

Are we seeking to help or gossip?

Are we the kind of people who care enough to ask?

Do we care enough to cry? Pray? (vs. 4) Volunteer?

Does anybody really care? Nehemiah did! Do we?

Vs. 3d

The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down

This report was bad news to Nehemiah and the citizens were in danger!

Notice that this man with an important position had a concern for God’s work.

Nehemiah became extremely concerned about this report.

He could have said, “It’s too bad, brethren. Sorry to hear it. I’ll put you on my prayer list. God bless you.”

The important thing is that Nehemiah was concerned.

He could have said, “The people should have done this, or they should have done that.”

Nehemiah did not respond this way.

We don’t fully grasp how important a wall was to a city in that day.

The city wall had the effect of keeping undesirable elements out of Jerusalem.

It also had the effect of giving shelter and security to all who were within.

In a word, it divided between those without and those within.

Because of this we can reasonably think of it as standing for the principle of separation.

You and I have a wall – personal conviction

You and I have gates – eye gate, ear gate

Probably no doctrine of scripture has suffered so much in its application as the doctrine of separation.

The tendency has been to dwell on the negative side and to see separation in terms of not doing certain things.

The proof of this is the multiplication of separatist groups . . .

I got a call from Hutch News this week

They were looking for an extremist right winger

But the real emphasis needs to be placed on the positive side.

The negative might embrace a thousand and one things, depending upon the circumstances of a given case.

But the positive is always single.

What then is the positive aspect of this great truth of separation?

Biblical separation is always separation unto Christ.

“Let us go therefore unto Him, without the camp, bearing His reproach.”

We must always line ourselves up without reserve on the Lord’s side for the nearer we get to Him, the clearer we shall see what we must be separate from!

In His light we shall see light, and we shall know, almost instinctively, what it is we must refuse.

This is why the Bible is always relevant.

It sets forth great and weighty principles and then calls for personal exercise on our part as to how those principles should be worked out in any given situation. . . .

There is no circumstance through which we are called to pass but the word of God will afford us the guidance we need.

The Gates – vs. 3e – the gates are burned with fire

The traders with their wares entered into the city through the gates and the traders from within carried their wares out through the gates.

Much of the commercial life of old Jerusalem was conducted in the gates.

The judges too, and the elders, met together in the gates.

The wall and the gates are down. It's like having your britches down.

It may be that our present spiritual experience is reflected in the condition of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day.

Does this church care for the souls of people?

Is this church functioning in that we as a body are separating from sin and unto Christ?

We, too, are in need of the spirit of Nehemiah

Let us care for the things of God

Let us take up our cross – denying ourselves and follow Him

Let us live by Biblical separation having gates and walls that protect us and also allow us to live in the liberty that we have.

Jerusalem was not in good shape

This is the introduction to Nehemiah.

Let us stand for closing invitation.

Every eye closed.

Believer, what is our spiritual condition?

Are the walls and gates of our soul broken down?

Do we have Biblical principles and convictions that are the guardrails – the walls of protection?

Have we allowed access through the eye gates and ear gate the very things that can destroy us?

Give Gospel . . .