

Chuck Hickman  
Soteria Church  
January 22, 2012

Introduction to Nehemiah  
Nehemiah 1:1-11

**Jerusalem and the Temple** **Picture of Temple**

Two Temples stood in succession on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Solomon's Temple and later, Herod's Temple.

The First Temple was constructed by King Solomon. It took seven years to complete the Temple. In the twelfth year of his reign, King Solomon dedicated the Temple and all its contents. The Ark of the Covenant was brought into the Temple amidst inaugural celebrations that lasted for seven days.

For the next 400+ years, the Jewish people would bring daily offerings in this magnificent edifice, and here the nation would gather three times a year to "see and to be seen by the face of G-d." Here the Divine Presence was manifest.

Solomon's reign was a golden era. His capital became the center of wisdom, riches, and splendor. Monarchs as well as ordinary people came to gaze on all the marvels to be seen there, and left wide-eyed with amazement and awe. The Land of Israel developed into a great center of commerce. The Jews lived in peace and happiness, "every man under his vine and under his fig tree."

**The Beginning of the End**

At the end of King Solomon's life, he was guilty of indiscretions unbecoming his great stature. God told him he would be punished. After his death, the kingdom would be torn in two.

Indeed, after Solomon's death, the ten northern tribes refused to accept his son Rehoboam as their king. The country was divided into two kingdoms: the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah (containing Jerusalem) in the south.

The kings of the Kingdom of Israel practiced idolatry, but so did many of the kings of the Kingdom of Judah. God sent prophets repeatedly to admonish the Jews, but they refused to change their ways, choosing instead to call these prophets as false messengers coming to discourage them with predictions of destruction.

As a result of the disobedient and corrupt behavior of the Jews, G-d did not provide either kingdom with the peace and security that the united kingdom had enjoyed under Solomon's reign. Their common enemy was the Assyrian empire to the north.

In 555 BCE, Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, fell to the Assyrians, and the Kingdom of Israel came to an end. Scores of thousands of the conquered people were led into captivity. They were transported to distant provinces of the Assyrian empire, and they disappeared completely. The Assyrians

repopulated the land with exiles that had been uprooted from other countries, whose descendants came to be called the Samaritans.

The Kingdom of Judah miraculously survived the Assyrian threat and lasted another 150 years. Their kings were not uniformly evil as the kings of the Kingdom of Israel had been; they had several truly righteous monarchs – notably among them Hezekiah and Josiah – and enjoyed occasional bouts of resurgent spiritual health. But eventually, they would fall victim to the Babylonians.

### **The Babylonians Are Coming**

The Assyrians had long dominated the Middle East, but their power was waning. Even with the help of the Egyptians, who were getting stronger, they were not able to fight off the Babylonians. These three empires were engaged in a power struggle, and the Kingdom of Judah was caught in the middle.

The Kingdom of Judah tried to form an alliance with Egypt. The Jews thought that this would keep them safe. But instead, the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, marched on Judah. He pillaged Jerusalem and deported tens of thousands of Jews to his capital in Babylon; all the deportees were drawn from the upper classes, the wealthy, and craftsmen. Ordinary people were allowed to stay in Judah, and Nebuchadnezzar appointed a puppet king over Judah, Zedekiah.

But Zedekiah, though God fearing and righteous was foolishly courageous, and (despite Jeremiah's repeated admonitions not to) he tried to break free from the Babylonians. So Nebuchadnezzar marched on Jerusalem again.

### **The Destruction**

On the seventh day of Av, the chief of Nebuchadnezzar's army, Nebuzaradan, began the destruction of Jerusalem. The walls of the city were torn down, and the royal palace and other structures in the city were set on fire.

Two days later, toward evening, the Holy Temple was set on fire and destroyed. The fire burned for 24 hours.

Everything of gold and silver that still remained was carried off as loot by the Babylonian soldiers. All the beautiful works of art with which King Solomon had once decorated and ornamented the holy edifice were destroyed or taken away. The holy vessels of the Temple that could be found were brought to Babylon. The high priest and many other high officials and priests were executed. In addition to the 940,000 people killed in the aforementioned incident, millions more were killed inside and outside of the city. Their bodies lined the roadways in and out of the city. Many thousands of the people that had escaped the sword were taken prisoner and led into captivity in Babylon. Only the poorest of the residents of Jerusalem were allowed to stay to plant the vineyards and work in the fields.

Eventually the Persian King, Cyrus the Great conquered the Babylonian empire and ended the exile.

Cyrus is followed by Cambyses then Darius then his son Xerxes and finally we get to Artaxerxes Longarmus "the Long-handed". (allegedly because his right hand was longer than his left).

Under the authority of Artaxerxes, Ezra took 1500 men + women and children to Jerusalem where he reinstated the Temple Service. He also separated all of the Jewish men from the foreign women because the marriages had been contrary to the law of Moses. Ezra, believing the future of the Jewish race was in jeopardy was very severe in his demand that heathen wives should be divorced and the children disowned by their fathers. (Artaxerxes allowed Ezra to do this to help rebuild and fortify the city as a defense against Egypt).

After 13 years of Ezra setting straight the Jewish people, Nehemiah (of the tribe of Judah), and probably of royal lineage, felt a divine call to go from Babylon to Jerusalem on behalf of his people. This is where the book of Nehemiah begins.

The book of Nehemiah was written in 430 BC. Most scholars believe it was written by Ezra who took most of it from the writings of Nehemiah himself.

**Nehemiah 1:1-11** *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachabiah. Now it happened in the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."*

*As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."*

*Now I was cupbearer to the king.*

Who was Nehemiah?

He was the son of Hachabiah; of what tribe or lineage is unknown but he was from Judah as was his actual brother Hanani.

Nehemiah must have been from a prominent family to hold such a high position in the king's palace. Being a cupbearer was a very trusted position that was not just given to anyone who applied. You're family had to be of royalty and in good standing with the leadership. It is thought that Nehemiah was from a bloodline of foreign princes originally sent into exile in Babylon.

The cupbearer to the King was always with the King. King Artaxerxes spent most of his time between three palaces. Susa, Ecbatana and Babylon. He was currently staying in the citadel or palace of the city of Susa, one of the oldest cities in the world (the winter palace of King Artaxerxes). [See Map](#)

Chisleu: The ninth month of the Jews, corresponding to the end of November and the beginning of December. In the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes.

Nehemiah asks his brother and co-travelers about the condition of the Jews that escaped death and were exiled from Jerusalem. He also inquires about the condition of the holy city.

*And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."*

They probably gave a much greater description than just these few words but Nehemiah's account is obviously brief. The things we know about the condition of the people and their city is pretty extensive.

The city was sacked and burned by the Babylonians

The Temple was destroyed and burned to the ground

All of the gates to the city were destroyed and burned

Millions of people were killed and sent into servitude and exile

Those that remained married into pagan families and became idol worshipers

There was much argument over any restoration of the Temple and the city

Ezra went to Jerusalem to restore the people of Israel.

There was much consternation and infighting for many reasons

*As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*

Nehemiah was deeply affected by this report.

*And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants,*

He then falls in humility before God acknowledging His sovereignty, His holiness and His faithfulness. He begs for God to hear his prayer and he did so day and night not for himself but for the people of Israel.

*confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.*

He confesses his sin and the sin of his Father and his entire household. Here he has stayed in the comfort of the presence of King Artaxerxes while his brothers have been suffering in sin and pain.

*Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.'*

Then He calls on God to remember His own words... bold huh?

*They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."*

Human necessities are God's opportunities

The affairs of the Jews in Jerusalem had become desperate; 1,000 miles away, God was making preparations to meet the need.

Nehemiah was a nobleman in a palace yet humble and heroic in faith

How did he maintain his faith in the midst of the Persian empire? He remembered his God and his people.

Nehemiah was a patriot, feeling the people's afflictions as his own.

He is worthy of our emulation. He did not let his people suffer alone even though they deserved it due to their sin. He did not walk away from their need even though all was well with him. He even said, "I and my father's house have sinned". He lost his life in the life of his God and his people

Nehemiah's prayer was not a form of words but a state of mind.

Nehemiah's prayer and mourning took 4 months to complete. He watched as well as prayed. He waited for the right moment to bring his request before the king; He was not anxious or a fanatic. He hoped for the deliverance of his people by the Divine wisdom working through natural agencies. He prayed... He watched and He worked.