

CHRISTIAN, DOES YOUR LIFE LOOK LIKE SOMETHING THAT
GOD IS BUILDING? NEHEMIAH 6:16



A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

Sunday Morning Bible Study

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STUDY 1 - COMPASSION

Nehemiah 1:1-4

Book BACKGROUND

Author – According to verse 1:1, Nehemiah wrote Nehemiah.

Time Period – **464-423 B.C.** According to Nehemiah 2:1, the Book of Nehemiah takes place during the reign of Artaxerxes I, King of Persia (modern day Iran).

Timeline: DAVID TO NEHEMIAH

King David ~ 1011-971 B.C. Under King David, all of Israel's tribes were united. They were the dominant nation in the region, and Jerusalem became the capitol city with a solid wall fortifying her (1 Chronicles 11:1-9).

King Solomon ~ 971-931 B.C. During King Solomon's early reign, Israel's strength increased and the temple of the LORD was constructed in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6:38).

Divided Kingdom ~ 931 B.C. Shortly after his death, the effects of Solomon's disobedience to God during the latter part of his reign caused the LORD to permit rebellion in Israel. The once united Kingdom of Israel divided into two separate nations. The Northern Kingdom kept the name Israel, and the Southern Kingdom which was made up of only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, kept the name Judah (1 Kings 12:16-24).

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Jerusalem and the temple were located in Judah. God's chosen people continued to exist in a divided state, grew distant from their God and increased in their disobedience and distrust over the next several generations.

Northern Kingdom Removed ~ 722 B.C. The Northern Kingdom's disobedience to the LORD caused God to remove His hand of protection and to permit Assyria (modern day Syria) to rise to power and conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel and capture its citizens and take them away to Assyria in the north (2 Kings 17:5-6).

Southern Kingdom Removed ~ 586 B.C. The Kingdom of Judah lasted another 136 years but they eventually followed the Northern Kingdom's disobedience and the LORD allowed Babylon (modern day Iraq) under Nebuchadnezzar to rise to power, besiege Jerusalem, *destroy her wall*, destroy the temple of the LORD, and to capture and take Judah's citizens away to Babylon (2 Kings 25:1-11). The captive Jews stayed in Babylon until Persia (modern day Iran) would rise to power and overthrow Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:20-21).

First Return to Jerusalem ~ 538 B.C. A year after Persia (modern day Iran) conquered Babylon, Persia's King Cyrus announced that the LORD had commissioned him to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Cyrus permitted Jews captured and deported to Babylon to return to Jerusalem for the project which would fulfill Jeremiah's and Isaiah's prophecies (Ezra 1:1-2:1; Jeremiah 29:10-14; Isaiah 44:28-45:4). Zerubbabel led this first return to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:2).

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Temple Reconstruction ~ 536-515 B.C. The temple reconstruction project took place amid many obstacles and opposition but finally reached completion under Zerubbabel's leadership which had been blessed by God (Ezra 6:13-15).

Wall Reconstruction Forbidden ~ 464 B.C. During this time period of Jewish obedience and blessing, early in Artaxerxes reign in Persia, the Jews of the captivity who had returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple had also begun rebuilding the city and its *wall*. This caused regional Persian governors to complain to Artaxerxes and he ordered a work stoppage of the rebuilding of the city and her *wall* (Ezra 4:7-23).

Second Return to Jerusalem ~ 457 B.C. While Artaxerxes agreed with regional governors to *not* permit the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the *wall*, he *did* permit a second group of captured Jews led by Ezra to leave Persian dominated Babylon and return to Jerusalem in order to beautify the temple of the LORD (Ezra 7:11-28).

Third Return to Jerusalem ~ 444 B.C. A man named Nehemiah, living in a fortified Persian palace, received a disheartening report concerning his native land, Judah, and her capitol city, Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 1:1-3 THE REPORT

Nehemiah 1:1-3 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, 2 That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah;

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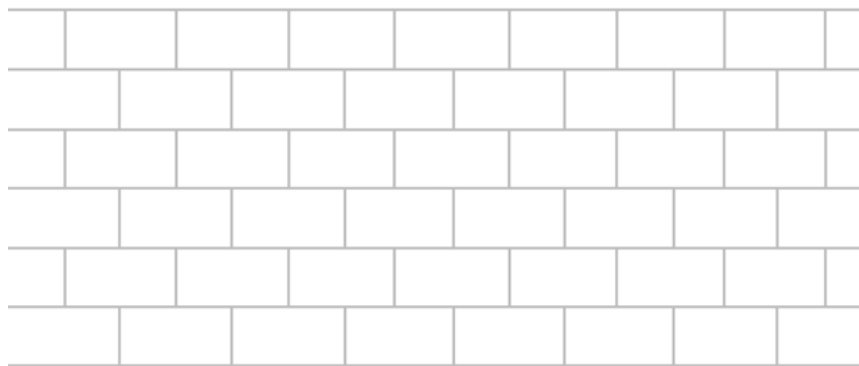
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and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction [*trouble*] and reproach [*disgrace*]: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

Group Questions

- Who is living in Jerusalem at this time? A mix of Jews who have been permitted to return to Jerusalem and other nationalities made up of people from the surrounding areas.
- What is life in Jerusalem like for a Jew during this time? Troubling, and disgracing – disrespectful.
- Is there a connection between the condition of the wall and the difficulties of the people in Jerusalem? Yes.
- What benefit did a fortified wall around a city offer its people? 1 Safety from outside threats. 2 A place to belong. 3 A sense of patriotism or pride in their nation. Others?



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Nehemiah 1:4 THE REACTION

Nehemiah 1:4 And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain [*many*] days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

Group Questions

- What was Nehemiah's reaction to the report from Jerusalem?
1 He sat down (stopped what he was doing) and wept. 2 He mourned for several days. 3 He fasted. 4 He humbly prayed before God.
- What about the report from Jerusalem caused Nehemiah such distress; was he discouraged as a Jewish national that the wall of the former great city was in ruins? The first part of verse 3 reveals the primary reason Nehemiah was so disturbed over the report: ***Nehemiah was moved with compassion for fellow Jews who were suffering.*** Nehemiah's heart was broken for the people. Yes, the wall of the city was down, but the effects of the wall being in ruins was causing the Jews living there great hardship and humiliation. The protection, security, and unity that a city wall brings to its people were missing and Nehemiah truly felt their pain. (Jesus was also moved when considering Jerusalem, Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!)
- What is the probable source for Nehemiah's compassion? A clue to the answer can be seen in what follows Nehemiah's initial reaction in verse 4, he fasted and prayed. It is apparent that Nehemiah's relationship with God was of major importance to him as it is the first thing he calls upon after receiving the discouraging news.

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Life CHANGE

PRINCIPLE 1

Throughout Israel's history, the thing that governed the relationship between God and the Jews was the covenant (agreement) that God made with Israel (Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 7:6-11). God faithfully blessed Israel's trust and obedience and just as consistently disciplined their lack of faith and disobedience.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

Knowing that God always keeps His agreements and still blesses trust and obedience, am I experiencing His hand of **blessing** in my life or his hand of **discipline**? *Circle the appropriate answer.* No matter what my answer is above, what can I do to improve how God and I are getting along with each other?

PRINCIPLE 2

Walls around ancient cities offered protection and a place to belong with others. When a city's walls were torn down by an enemy, life became insecure and people's futures fearful and uncertain.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

Is there a place of **safety** where I belong, yes or no? If I answered "no", how can this be changed? If I see my church family as a safe place to belong, how can I offer its safety to **others**?

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PRINCIPLE 3

Nehemiah was moved by compassion for the people that were suffering in Jerusalem. While these people may have been strangers to him, he related to their pain. Nehemiah was not so caught up in his own world that he could not identify with others who were experiencing pain.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

Does God see me as a **compassionate** person? If not, how can this be **improved**? Will I ask Him to help me be more compassionate? If I think God sees me as compassionate, what are some ways I can show compassion to others? Be specific.

PRINCIPLE 4

The source of Nehemiah's compassion was his relationship with God. His primary response to receiving the bad news from Jerusalem was to turn to God with his sorrow in prayer and fasting.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

What do my reactions **show** about the way I "do life," do I turn to God or tend to handle things on my own? Does my life show that my relationship with God is the most important thing in my life? How much more time on a daily basis could I spend in prayer? When was the last time I **fasted** to grow closer to God?

NEHEMIAH'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WAS
SO CLOSE IT CAUSED HIM TO HAVE
COMPASSION FOR OTHER PEOPLE.