

**Part I: The World At Your Fingertips**  
**Nehemiah 1:1-11**

Vs.1 "The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah."

Originally, Ezra-Nehemiah was one book and this book (or those books) records the very last events, chronologically, in the Old Testament period. ("Intro to Old Testament," p.273). The events of this book (Nehemiah) take place in the mid-400's B.C. It is a very dark time for God's people. After Israel and Judah had split into two separate kingdoms in 931 B.C., shortly after Solomon's death, the Northern Kingdom of Israel continued on in disobedience to God and continued to thumb their noses up at God for some 210 +/- years (remember Elijah series) and finally, God said enough's enough and in 722 B.C. Assyria conquered Israel, carried its inhabitants away – which consisted of ten tribes – and Israel was never heard from again. **God's judgment is without mercy. (James 2:13a)**

"God's plumb-line."  
Amos 7:7-8

But the kingdom of Judah – the southern kingdom – which consisted of just two tribes (Judah and Simeon) would go on for another 140 +/- years – with some godly leaders, but mostly ungodly leaders and ungodly citizens. And finally, in 586 B.C., the nation of Babylon would destroy the nation of Judah and its capital Jerusalem and carry off thousands upon thousands of Jews into captivity – hundreds of miles away. **This was far and away the most devastating thing that had ever happened to God's people. (This was every bit as devastating to the Jews living in Judah at that time as the Holocaust was!) Those who were not killed were carried off to be subservient to the wicked, pagan, Babylonians, and all – everything was lost. – God's people have no future at all!!!**

Beyond the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

The very 1<sup>st</sup> Holocaust

-goal-

Perhaps your \_\_\_\_\_ today is more spiritual captivity – sin; addiction; behavior; all look lost.

But it is just at that time the scripture begins to speak of man named "Nehemiah." His name means "Yahweh comforts." **Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!** And when this leader/man comes on the scene – a leader/man with great force of personality; a leader/man that is explosively emotional; a leader/man that had incredibly high energy; a leader/man who was unselfish, clever, confident in God, confident in himself, practical, spiritual; a leader/man with a high position as the "cupbearer" to the king (of Persia) yet who exudes humility and only briefly mentions his titles (He has two in Nehemiah) throughout the book that bears his name. He was a man/leader who also had

considerable literary skills as well – very high education and training . . . **Just when things are at the worst for the people of God, God pulls out his best arsenal and raises up a great leader – so great a leader that to the Jewish people today he is revered as almost on the same level as Moses and is credited with being one of the primary architects of the Jewish faith as it is practiced today (“Who’s Who In the Bible,” p. 320)**

- God’s raising up a leader for the Jewish people and it is in the most unlikely of places.

Vs. 1 cont. “Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the 20<sup>th</sup> year, as I was in Susa the capital”

The month of Chislev (pronounced kis’lev) is November-December to us, the 20<sup>th</sup> year is referring to the 20<sup>th</sup> year in the reign of the king. The king at this time was Artaxerxes I, so the precise dating for these events begins in 445 B.C. Now there have been some political shifts since the Jews were taken into captivity. The nation of Babylon had fallen to the nation of Persia, led by Cyrus the Great, who then allowed the Jews to return to Judah (circa 538/537). But only a few thousand did so; thousands more chose to stay in a very

Almost 50 years total in Babylon/Persia

powerful nation > **Wow** the nation of Persia, and live subservient/still as a conquered people in a foreign land (though they did have opportunities in that land – e.g. Nehemiah) the majority of people chose to stay captive/conquered! **Wow! What a sad commentary of God’s people and even God’s people today – what do so many choose to live subservient to the system of the world when God offers us the very kingdom of God right now! Rev. 5:10a “And you have made them a kingdom and priest to our God. . .”** (END)

God help us >

“Susa” was about 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf (modern Iran) and was the winter residence of the Persian kings (Adam Clarke) (the code of Hammuraki) was found there in 1901.) Daniel saw himself in a vision there and it was the site of the story of Esther.

> Nehemiah is living in Susa, in the king’s court as his cupbearer. (vs. 11) – which meant he was in charge of the king’s diet and wine (his butler), especially tasting the wine to make sure it was not poisoned. **He held the world in his fingertips** – fingertips were used for **handing the wine to the king . . .** Cupbearers were often chosen for the personal **–HIGH PROFILE** – attractiveness/beauty – **he was most likely young, too** –because it was such a

He would carry the wine to dignitaries – king, queen, etc....

powerful and visible position in the king's court (Unger's Bible Dictionary, p. 267). He also would have been one of the king's most trusted servants! **He's living in the lap of luxury in the most powerful nation in the world as a trusted confidant of the most powerful man/king in the world – Artaxerxes I and EVERYTHING IS ABOUT TO CHANGE - beware of times of (personal) comfort, ease and pleasure!** ★(personal note: come back to later)★

But any way you slice it, he's still a captive

V.2 Josephus writes that Nehemiah overheard these men speaking in the Hebrew language while he was walking around the palace walls. ("New Commentary on the Whole Bible")

**Vs. 2** "that Hanani, (ha-na'ni; "gracious") one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And **k**asked **t**hem concerning the Jews that **e**scaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem."

His brother comes with some other Jews (from Judah) and he asks how those who had escaped (literally "refugees") who had survived the 50+/- years of captivity were doing. He's concerned about his people and he's concerned about the holy city of Jerusalem! (I believe God had been dealing with him before we even hear from him!)

He longed for home.  
God begins to deal with people long before we hear from them!

**Vs. 3** "And they said to me, 'The remnant there is the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are **d**estroyed by fire.'"

70 yrs. before

Vs.3 With the walls down, their hopes & dreams were too! Also, there was no protection for the temple.

Though the temple had been rebuilt and complete in 515 B.C. ★ and there had been an unsuccessful attempt to rebuild the wall years earlier, ★(huge later) the walls of the great city lay in ruins. This was a major problem. This meant that the people were **d**efenseless against their enemies. Also, the walls served as retention walls **f**or **r**ain to water their crops. Most of the Jews chose to remain comfortable and passive and the few/the minority that did return to try to rebuild their city were defenseless.

What's Nehemiah's reaction?  
(It's really quiet shocking!)

**Vs. 4** "As soon as I heard these words I sat down and **w**ept and **m**ourned for **d**ays, and I continued **f**asting and **p**raying before the God of heaven."

Now if we read this quickly, it simply looks like for two or three days Nehemiah wept and

-Explosively Emotional 🏠

mourned and fasted and prayed. Which, by the way, when was the last time you and I got news that caused us to weep and mourn and fast and pray for even one, two or three days? (-hours-) However, because of chapter 21, verse 1, which refers to the month of Nisan (ni'san) when Nehemiah's grief is noticed by Artaxerxes I - four months pass with Nehemiah ("Yahweh comforts") in an extremely emotional state – four months of weeping and mourning and fasting and praying – Here's the extraordinary thing → Nehemiah is most likely quite young → he was probably born in captivity and had never tasted real freedom and possibly had never even been to Jerusalem. But God gives him this vision through a four month state of mourning → "I sat down and wept . . ." – when Jews mourned, they literally sat on a low stool on the ground. (Job 2:13) - Visions are always birthed out of an intensely emotional experience! (World-changing visions)

- Devastating news to Nehemiah – Life altering news – stopped him dead in his tracks
- e.g. I remember when 9-11-01 happened – everyone kept saying "This changes everything. . ." (That day I was at BHBC getting ready to go to Kennesaw Mtn. High School for character ed.)

I don't know exactly what Nehemiah was expecting to hear, but he got a bomb dropped on him that day.

- You ever had a bomb dropped on you like that? A loved one just died? Family members (parents) getting divorced? Your husband/wife telling you that they are leaving?
- Let me ask you something even more personal. Has that news served to strengthen you and make you better (closer to God) now or have you allowed that news to make you bitter? (further from God, blaming Him)

Perhaps even gives you a vision...



Nehemiah is a broken man – that charismatic, attractive, young, wealthy, powerful man/leader, with the world literally at his fingertips ★ devastated and broken.

(I love him for many reasons - here's just one of the reasons he's such a force – an amazing leader – or one of the main reasons he's about to be an amazing leader.)

What's the first thing he does that the Scripture records for us? He prays: **(four 4 months)**

Vs. 5 "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,

(very eloquent – high education)

"Lord" YHWH – the most holy name for God – the tetragram – the incomprehensible name of God – Jehovah – Yahweh

"awesome" "to fear" or "reverence" (we don't fear God today)

"who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness" – literally "who keeps the covenant and steadfast love" – through Judah has been unfaithful, God is still faithful and still loves his people even when he is meeting out his judgment on his people.

He starts this prayer off with who God is!

Notice "for those who love him and keep his commandments" – there is still a remnant of people seeking God/though a true minority.

-a captive- Vs. 6 "let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant. . ."

Though Nehemiah is the "servant" of Artaxerxes I, the world's most powerful potentate, he is first and foremost a servant of the Lord God of heaven – He goes on to discuss who

He is!

Nehemiah says, "I am your servant, Lord, before I am Artaxerxes I's servant!"

1. God
2. Himself
3. People
4. Confesses sins

" that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants. . . "

He then goes on to discuss who the people are!

They are God's servants, not ultimately the servants of the Persians.

"confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned."

Now Nehemiah confesses the sins of the people, the nation (Judah was a son of Israel), then he confesses personal sins and familial sins. Daniel (9:17) – **POWERFUL** – prayed the same prayer 100 years before Nehemiah and Ezra prayed it too in Ezra 9:6-15.

Vs. 7 “We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.”

Shut down a ship for 8 hrs. because of marijuana

He gets very specific in his confession of sins. I wonder what sort of compromises Nehemiah had made? Women? Drugs? (Drug sniffing dogs in the port getting off ship Sunday A.M.) Power? Self-promotion? One usually did not get that close to a king without compromise [usually]!

Vs. 8 “Remember...” a key word used in Nehemiah 4:14; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14; 22, 29, 31- used at least 8 times “the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘if you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples.’” Leviticus 26:33

(He’s now praying Scripture back to God – God loves to hear this when we pray.)

To receive a vision from God might require a returning to God.

Vs. 9 “but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, (Deuteronomy 30:2-3) from there I will gather them and bring them (Deuteronomy 30:4) to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.” (Deuteronomy 12:5)

Vs. 10 “They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.” (Exodus 32:11 and Deuteronomy 9:29)

Nehemiah really knew his Old Testament – Pentateuch (impression)

Vs. 11 “O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear (revere) your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

-the captive-

Four months, Nehemiah, the man who had all of the charisma, power, passion, wealth and prestige – the young man who literally had the world at his fingertips (he held all that power literally in his hands) prayed a prayer of brokenness, a prayer of holy dissatisfaction (with the present state of affairs in his true homeland – with the present state of affairs in his personal life before God – and God began to unfold to Nehemiah the true reason that he was given all of those gifts. > To use them for a higher purpose (though Jerusalem compared to Susa was really quite unimpressive).

boy, I do...

Maybe you're here this morning and you're a captive...

END

God was giving and had given Nehemiah a clear and distinct vision for the holy city./ That holy nation would eventually produce the Great Comforter Himself. The one/the only Jesus Christ. For it would be just a few yards outside the walls that Nehemiah would rebuild that the Savior of the world would die on Calvary's cross for your sins and mine. -Do you think you have the world at your fingertips this morning – Yet you have a deep, holy dissatisfaction for the current state of affairs of your nation, of your own personal life before God.

transition

Seek Him and you shall find Him when you seek Him with all your heart!

"Now I was the cupbearer for the king" - very mater-of-fact – how he presents such a notable title.

Nehemiah goes in for "the ASK!" Next Week!

Prayer & Invitation.

No walls=  
No nation of Israel/Judah  
No nation=  
no savior  
being born of the line of the tribe of Judah=  
no salvation