



## "REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

### THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH Lesson 1

Welcome to this 13-week study of the book of Nehemiah. It is with great joy and excitement that we begin this amazing book. Nehemiah was a great leader and has been used many times over the years as an example of a man of faith and determination. He was an ordinary man, yet filled with motivation and willingness to do a difficult job in obedience to God. He became one of the most significant leaders in history.

I pray that the Lord will fill you with His Spirit and give you understanding and wisdom as you study the chapter each week. May you be encouraged by Nehemiah's example to be willing to accomplish incredible projects and finish many tasks for the glory of God's Kingdom, despite difficult circumstances and fierce opposition. May the truths in the book of Nehemiah ignite your heart and stir you to follow the Lord more closely than ever before! Have fun!

#### First and Second Day

Before we begin to read Nehemiah, we need to understand what was happening in history at the time of its writing. Let's briefly get caught up before we meet our man Nehemiah.

Jewish history began with Abraham about 2000 B.C. About 1000 years later, the nation became prominent under the influence of Saul, David, and Solomon. David reigned as king for 40 years, then handed the kingdom over to his son Solomon. Solomon was a wise king, but the end of his life and reign was filled with compromise and moral decay. In 1 Kings 11:11, the Lord told Solomon that He would eventually tear the kingdom away from him. After the death of Solomon, the nation split into two kingdoms. The 12 tribes of Israel split, 10 tribes moving north to Samaria, which were called Israel; and the other two went south to Jerusalem, calling themselves Judah. As in our own civil war, there was much chaos and hatred, and the nation suffered both nationally and spiritually.

In 722 B.C., the Assyrians invaded the north, and the 10 tribes were taken captive or deported and scattered all over. (2 Kings 17) Some of those people fled to the south to escape the siege. Judah (the southern region) remained a Jewish nation for 300-plus years until King Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon invaded and took them all captive. (2 Chronicles 36:18-19, 2 Kings 25). The Babylonians destroyed the temple, burned the nation's treasures found in the temple, and destroyed the walls that surrounded the great city of Jerusalem, leaving the city in ruins. They also took the people captive (2 Chronicles 36:20) to live as slaves under the Babylonian authority. God used the Babylonians to chastise His people, like He said He would, because of their unfaithfulness. They were held captive for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11).

There were two other kingdoms, the Medes and the Persians. King Cyrus ruled Persia, and King Darius ruled the Medes. The two forces joined together and defeated the Babylonians (Daniel 5:30-31). The Persians were much more lax in regard to their captives, and the King of Persia wrote a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homelands. This also fulfilled the prophecy given by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 25:12 and 29:10. So the Lord stirred the heart of Cyrus to make a proclamation. The last verse in 2 Chronicles brings us up to speed. 36:23 says, "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of Heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!'"

Jerusalem had been destroyed for a period of 70 years. Now the Jews were allowed to return. They didn't go all at once, however. They went in three groups. The first group traveled the 800 miles and returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. The second group returned 80 years later in 458 B.C. under the leadership of Ezra. These are both recorded in the book of Ezra. Thirteen more years passed, and in 455 B.C., King Cyrus dies and Artaxerxes then assumes the throne. Sometime after, Nehemiah takes group three back from near the Persian Gulf to Jerusalem to help build the destroyed city. Esther became queen of that kingdom in 479 B.C.

The book of Ezra records the rebuilding of the temple and then the reformation of the people. The "house of God" is the main subject. Nehemiah focuses on the rebuilding of the wall, as well as the restoration of the people. The "wall" of Jerusalem is the subject. In the book of Nehemiah, Ezra and Nehemiah work together, Ezra as a priest and Nehemiah as a cupbearer, a builder, and finally, the governor. Malachi also ministers during this time as the last Old Testament

prophet. The Book of Nehemiah is the last of the Old Testament history books. Most scholars believe that Nehemiah is the author, or at least the writings are taken from his own personal memoirs, perhaps written by Ezra.

As you read Nehemiah, notice his obedience, which is one of the book's major themes. God worked through Nehemiah's obedience. Also notice the opposition that Nehemiah faced, from within as well as from without. But most importantly, notice the sovereignty of God throughout each chapter.

1. Well, here we go. After all that reading, guess what? You guessed it. There's more. It's important to look at a book as a whole before you start breaking it down chapter by chapter. **Your homework for the next two days is to simply read through the book, all 13 chapters. After each chapter, jot down the main point or thought of that chapter. Also, list any questions that you may have. It won't take as long as you think!**

**Chapter 1:**

**Chapter 2:**

**Chapter 3:**

**Chapter 4:**

**Chapter 5:**

**Chapter 6:**

**Chapter 7:**

**Chapter 8:**

**Chapter 9:**

**Chapter 10:**

**Chapter 11:**

**Chapter 12:**

**Chapter 13:**

2. What would you say is the key chapter in this book? What about the key verse? Why?

3. Write your overall impression of the book.



3. Why do you think he mentions that he was the cupbearer? Why is that significant?
  
4. If you are in a position of leadership, how are you using your influence?

The month of Chislev (vs 1) is November/December 446 B.C., four months before Nissan (March/April). Shushan is a city also known as Susa, which is east of Babylon, 150 miles from the Persian Gulf. This was a "wintering" city for many of the government officials. His brother, Hanani (vs 2), had apparently gone to Jerusalem during the second group return.

5. Nehemiah asked about the condition of his homeland, Jerusalem. What was Hanani's reply?

Obviously, the attempt to rebuild the city had not been successful. Nehemiah responds in an interesting way.

6. How did Nehemiah react to the news? Why do you think he was so emotional?
  
7. How do you react when you hear bad news? What's the first thing you do?
  
8. Is there someone in your life that God is calling you to intercede for? Are you faithful to pray for that person?

Instead of making a quick decision, Nehemiah consulted the Lord. He prayed for guidance, something we all should do before we act or react. He reveals his heart for his God and his heart for God's people. Nehemiah had lived in Babylon his

whole life, yet he understood the significance of God's holy city, which represented Jewish identity and national pride as God's chosen people. He wanted to reunite the Jewish people and build the city so they would no longer be shamed. He believed rebuilding the wall and the city would bring God honor and glory and restore His holy presence among the people. The "walls" of the city symbolized beauty, protection, and strength.

Nehemiah understood that God's reputation was at stake. He cared about how the other nations viewed the Lord. He knew the actions of the people would either help people believe, or disbelieve, in the God of Israel.

9. Does your life represent God well? Do you bring Him honor and glory by the decisions you make? How is "His" reputation at stake even today?
  
10. Nehemiah was a man who cared. He cared enough to ask questions. Are you a woman with a caring heart? Do you care what's going on in your world and in the lives of those around you? Or would you rather look the other way so you aren't burdened? Are you only concerned with your own life? Search your heart on this one.

That's all for today. May you always have a heart that cares for God's reputation, and the burdens of God's people. God cares for us, and let's pray for God's love to fill our hearts and help us to pour it out on others.

### **Fourth Day**

**Work on your memory verse.**

1. Read Nehemiah 1:1-11, focusing on 5-11. This is the first of 12 instances of prayer in this book.
  
2. How does Nehemiah address God as he prays? How does he recognize who God is? How would you describe his attitude and approach to God?

The title "Lord God of Heaven" is used five times in the book of Ezra, four times in Nehemiah, and three times in Daniel. J.A. Motyer wrote, "The 'God of Heaven' was a divine title in Persian religion, but Nehemiah uses it as a dramatic apologetic; the Lord Yahweh, He alone (9:6) is God of Heaven, not Ahura-Mazda, the non-existent god of his Persian contemporaries."

3. Why does Nehemiah remind God about His promises to His people?
  
4. What is Nehemiah asking for in verse 6?
  
5. What was the nation of Israel guilty of? Why was Nehemiah taking responsibility?

Nehemiah knew and believed his God. He also knew that the same God that promised blessings and chastisement also promised to forgive His people if they repented (Deuteronomy 30; 1 Kings 8:31-53). He was claiming this promise as he prayed for his people. Nehemiah quoted several verses from Deuteronomy, such as 28:64, 30:1-4, and 12:5.

6. In verse 10, Nehemiah quotes Deuteronomy 9:29, the words Moses used when pleading for Israel on Mount Sinai. Read and compare the two verses. What exactly is Nehemiah asking for?
  
7. Nehemiah seems to be very confident. What was his confidence in?

We know that Nehemiah was soon going to undertake a huge task. In his book Victorious Christian Service, Alan Redpath wrote, "The Book of Nehemiah is perhaps the classic of the whole Bible on the subject of personal service for God. To enter a business career, to study for any profession, to go to the uttermost

parts of the earth to preach the gospel, to enter the ministry, to teach a Sunday school class -- to do any service for God without regard for what may be the will of God, without understanding the real principles of Christian service, is not only foolish, but sinful. Why? Because to do that asserts the right to choose your own task, your own sphere of service, your own life, and ignore the claims of the Savior, which should take first place."

Before Nehemiah went to "work" he wept over the ruins. After his despair came the determination. He was a man with deep convictions and compassion. But he didn't just "feel" bad, he wanted to make a difference. He wanted to help solve the problem.

8. Have you inquired of the Lord about what His will is for you regarding Christian service? Have you asked Him to choose your task, or have you chosen it for yourself?

Warren Wiersbe said, "Too often, we plan our projects and then ask God to bless them, but Nehemiah didn't make that mistake. He sat down and wept, knelt down and prayed, and then stood up and worked because he knew he had the blessing of the Lord on what he was doing."

9. It was as if Nehemiah was saying, "Here I am, send me!" Who else in Scripture said those words? Read Isaiah 6:1-8

We'll look at this in more detail next week, but we know that Nehemiah would have to give up a lot if he were to return to a desolate Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. Here he had ear to the king. He had favor and blessings that came with his position as a cupbearer. But he was going to choose to give it up to obey the Lord. Like Moses, he rather "suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). He was willing to sacrifice his comfort for the sake of His God and his people.

10. Read this quote by Alan Redpath. **Write your thoughts.** "The principles of Christian service are just the same today. We are prepared to serve the Lord only by sacrifice. We are fit for the work of God only when we have wept over it, prayed about it, and then we are enabled by Him to tackle the job that needs to be done. May God give us hearts that bleed, eyes that are wide open to see, minds that are clear to interpret God's purpose, wills that are obedient, and a determination that is utterly unflinching as we set about the tasks He would have us do."
11. In his prayer, Nehemiah praises the Lord and acknowledges the uniqueness of God. What verse(s) in this chapter reveal these truths?
- A. God is universally sovereign:
  - B. God is totally reliable:
  - C. God is utterly holy:
  - D. God is compassionately merciful:
  - E. God is uniquely powerful:
  - F. God is infinitely gracious:
  - G. God is intimately near:
12. According to verse 11, what was Nehemiah's desire? (Is yours the same?)

Tomorrow we'll wrap up this chapter. May God stir you to desire to fear His Name. Let's make Him our delight, shall we?

### Fifth Day

**Write out your verse from memory.**

1. Read Nehemiah 1:1-11 one more time. In this chapter alone we can already see the kind of leader Nehemiah is. How can we tell that he is a leader:  
(J.A. Motyer)
  - A. With infinite compassion?
  - B. Under great authority?
  - C. Of transparent integrity?
  - D. With a vision for something great?
  
2. In verse 11, who was Nehemiah referring to when he says "this man"?

**Let's briefly reflect on what the Lord spoke to each one of us:**

3. What spoke to your heart the most from chapter 1?
  
4. What changes, if any, has God shown you to make?
  
5. What kind of leader are you? What kind of leader do you desire to be?
  
6. What kinds of things "break" your heart? What causes you to weep, fast, and pray?

**See you next week. Spend time praying to the "Lord God of Heaven" today. He is our biggest "Reason to Rejoice"!**

