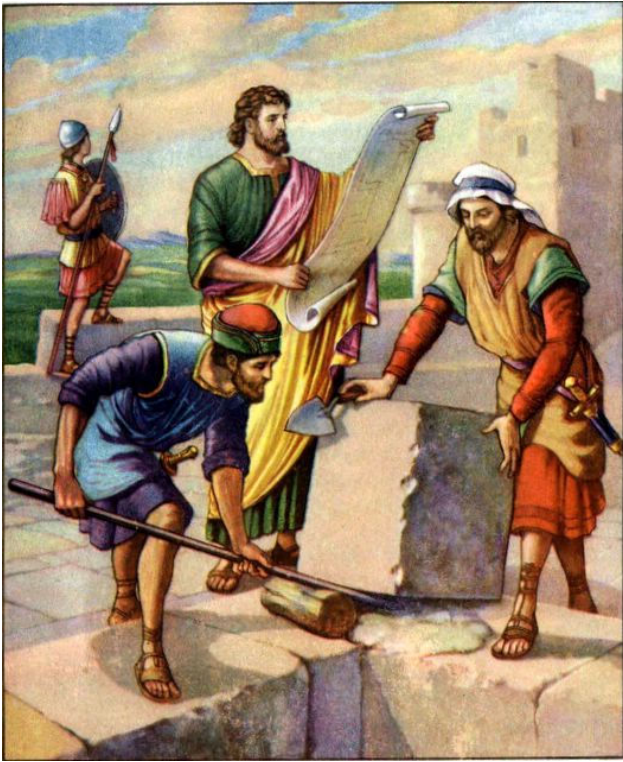


Nehemiah: God's Wall Builder, Principles in Leadership

1. Background to the Book of Nehemiah



Introduction to the Book of Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah is chronologically one of the last books of the Old Testament. The book of Nehemiah connects the closing of the Old Testament period with the New Testament period of Messiah, Jesus Christ. Nehemiah was a man who had vision for God's will, and he moved on the vision. Through Nehemiah's vision, Israel was reestablished in the land of promise, following the Babylonian captivity.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) (465-424 B.C.). When word came from his brother about the deplorable state of Jews who had earlier returned to Jerusalem from Persia, he was moved to action. The walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. and returning Jews under a constant threat. The very survival of Jerusalem, Jewish population and God's promises was at stake. Nehemiah decided something had to be done with this information.

Nehemiah took the news and formulated an action strategy to change the events. Nehemiah formulated a vision of the situation and planned what needed to be done to change it. He was not just a man of dreams; he

was a man of action and planning. He took God's promises serious.

Nehemiah moved forward with his vision, and became the governor of Judah by the decree of the Persian King. God used Nehemiah because Nehemiah made himself available. He was not waiting for someone else to step forward with a vision, he saw the problem, he believed God wanted the problem solved; he was willing to step forward and take the risks. Nehemiah was God's leader at a time, when things seemed desperate and hopeless.

The book of Nehemiah has lessons for those who want to be leaders, to be used by God in these desperate times. As believers in Jesus Christ we are all called to be leaders. As Nehemiah was commissioned by God to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and strengthen the faith of the Jews, we are commissioned to rebuild the walls of humanity, restoring lost people to the Creator. Jesus has transferred his authority to our leadership.

16. Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. 17. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. 18. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20. teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. **Matthew 28:16-20**

What is a leader?

A leader is someone who is willing to lead others. Take the woman at the well who met Jesus in John chapter 4, the Samaritan woman. She was an outcast from the city; she was by herself taking water at the well, apart from the other women. Jesus revealed Himself to her, showing her, He was Israel's Messiah. With that information, she went back to the city and led the people of the city to Jesus (John 4:30), the Samaritan woman was transformed from outcast to leader, almost immediately. She was willing to take the information about Jesus to people who did not know. Jesus stayed two-days in the city as a result.

Nehemiah acted on the information, in the same way Jesus calls us to act on the information of salvation to a lost and dying world. We are called to “Lead” lost people to the Savior. This by its very essence is leadership.

Through the life of Nehemiah and his circumstances, we can gain insight on what it takes to be God’s leader in the face of opposition.

In order to understand Nehemiah, we first need to understand the historical background of the book.

Historical Background

The book of Nehemiah is in the Old Testament, which was written between 1450 B.C. and 400 B.C., a spans of one thousand years. The book of Nehemiah covers the last fifty years of this time period from 444 B.C. to about 400 B.C. To put this in the right time perspective, the books of Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi were all within this time frame. Nehemiah could have known Ester, Mordechi and the prophet Malachi on a personal level as he moved back and forth from Persia to Jerusalem. We know Nehemiah and Ezra worked together in Jerusalem, with Ezra serving as priest-scribe and Nehemiah as governor of the land.

There are three time periods that play a role in understanding the book of Nehemiah.

1. **Before Babylon:**

1. Before Babylon:

The period before the Babylonian captivity was from the time of Abraham 2100 B.C. until 586 B.C., Most of the Old Testament covers this period. When Israel was led out of the Egypt by Moses in 1450 B.C., he led Israel into the Promised Land, the land promised to Abraham, 500-years earlier. Before Israel entered the land they made a covenant of obedience and disobedience with the Lord. Israel promised to obey the Lord and His commands; because of obedience, they would receive blessings. They also promised if they would fall away from the Lord, they would receive cursing.

1 If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God: 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. **Deuteronomy 28:1-4**

¹⁵ However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not

carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

¹⁶ You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. ⁶⁴ Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.

⁶⁵ Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. **Deuteronomy 28:15-16,64-65**

The nation under the leadership of Moses agreed to these promises of blessing and cursing. Moses did not enter the Promised Land, leadership was turned over to Joshua in 1400 B.C. Israel under Joshua took possession of the land from the inhabitants because of the sins of the land, and the promise to Abraham.

The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, 924 to 722 B.C.

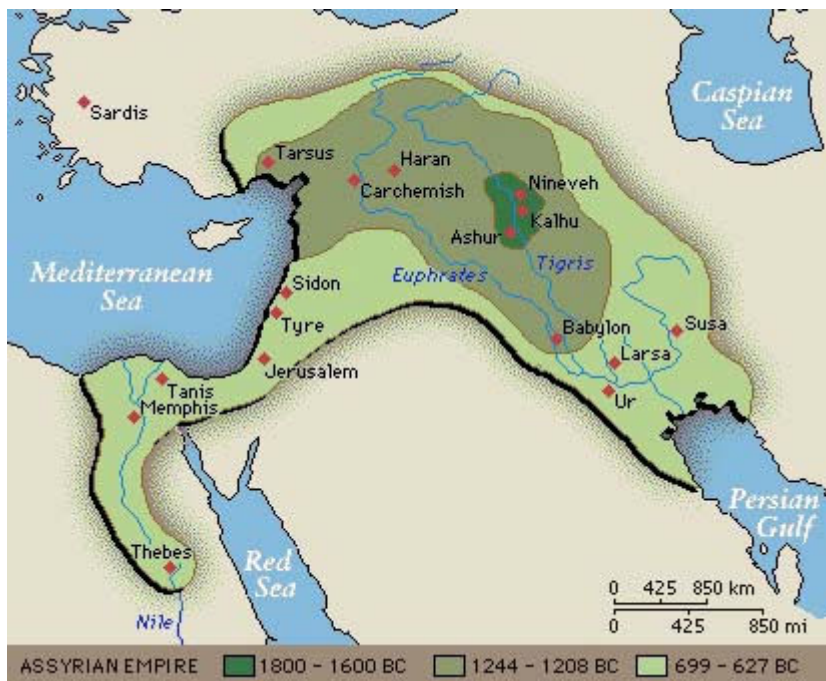


Judges (1400-1050 B.C.)

The next 400-years was known as the period of Judges, from 1400 B.C. to 1050 B.C. Israel was a collection of tribes, with no one ruler over the whole of the people. When the people turned away from the Lord, God would send a judge to rescue them from the oppressors, when they cried out to him. These judges included, Gideon, Samson, Deborah and others. One verse summarized this period in Israel's history. *"In those days Israel had no king: everyone did as he saw fit"* (Judges 17:6). The last judge was Samuel, under his leadership Israel was given a king, first Saul (1047-1007 B.C.) and then David (1003-970 B.C.).

Monarchy (1050 B.C.-586 B.C.)

The period of kings ranged from 1050 B.C. until the Babylonian Captivity in 586 B.C., ending the monarchy of Israel and Judah. After King David's son Solomon (970-931 B.C.), the Kingdom of Israel was divided between a northern kingdom made of 10-tribes (Israel) and a southern kingdom (Judah) composed of 2-tribes, Judah and Benjamin.



During this period, the people of Israel turned away from the Lord as detailed in the books of First and Second Kings. The Lord sent prophets to both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel to turn them back, but these men were rejected time and again by the people. Elijah, Elisha, Amos and Hosea warned Israel, while Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk and others warned Judah. The people turned to the idols of the lands around them, rejecting the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As a result God sent the kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon against Israel and Judah.

The northern Kingdom was taken captive in 722 B.C., the king of Assyria Sargon II (722-705), moved the 10-tribes to the

land of Assyria and other people were settled in the land (2 Kings 17:6). The nation of Babylon would later defeat Assyria in 609 B.C. Babylon would then take Judah, the remaining kingdom in captivity to the land of Babylon in 586 B.C.



The Babylonians took captives at first such as Daniel and Ezekiel, and other high-ranking people in Judah, but the people rebelled against Babylonian rule. As a result, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 B.C. Most people were killed, some taken captive and others escaped to Egypt. Jeremiah was taken captive to Egypt by the Jews fleeing Babylon.

The judgment on the land by Assyria and Judah was the result of the sins of the land. God was fulfilling the promises of judgment and cursing for Israel's disobedience.

2. Babylonian Captivity (586-539 B.C.)

The Babylonian Captivity was a short but large part of Israel's history. The period essentially began in 605 B.C., when Babylon took Daniel and others as hostages to Babylon. They were taken to keep the

Judean rulers inline. However, Judah rebelled against Babylonian rule, causing Babylon to attack again in 597 B.C., ten-thousand hostages were taken, and Ezekiel was numbered among them. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both warned of the Lord's impending judgment on the land, they were both ridiculed and rejected.

Therefore in 586 B.C. God sent the armies of Babylon to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, fulfilling the promises He made through the prophets. Thus began the Babylonian Captivity, Israel as a nation ceased to exist in the Promised Land. Babylon had defeated Assyria; so the Jewish captives of the Northern Kingdom became Babylonian captives. The books of Daniel and Ezekiel span both the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity. Both Daniel and Ezekiel were written in the land of Babylon.

The captivity lasted until 539 B.C., when Persia under the leadership of Cyrus the Great defeated Babylon's last remaining stronghold the city of Babylon. Daniel chapter 5 reveals this coming fall in the "handwriting on the wall" proclaiming the fall of Babylon to Persia.

Cyrus was foretold by Isaiah as a coming deliverer who would free the captivity. His decree allowed the Jews to return Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (536 B.C.).

¹ In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: ² "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

" 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. ³ Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴ And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.' " **Ezra1:1-4**



A portion of the Jews returned to Judah most stayed behind living in the Persian Kingdom. In future years there would be migrations into Judah from Persia; Nehemiah would lead one of those groups returning.

3. The Return from Captivity (539-425 B.C.)

Cyrus the Great's defeat of Babylon brought to an end the captivity. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to the land of forefathers, they were no longer captive. The people had grown to like their captivity, there was little incentive to return to a distant land with no

security. Could they give up their positions of power and responsibility and risk it their lives on a frontier of the Persian kingdom? Jerusalem was no longer a walled city, Babylon had destroyed it's walls in 586 B.C., a city without walls was not a safe place.

First Return (539 B.C.)

Cyrus freed the Jews and gave them permission and provisions to rebuild Solomon's Temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon. Ezra Chapters 1 to 4, detail this first return of almost 50,000 people from Babylonian Captivity. Ezra explains how the people living in Jerusalem tried to prevent the rebuilding of the Temple, first by wanting to be a part of the rebuilding and then by accusing the Jews of rebellion against Persia. After the death of Cyrus, rebuilding efforts were hindered, until the arrival of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (520 B.C.) urged the people to move forward and complete the Temple.

In 516 B.C. the Second Temple was complete, 70-years after it's destruction by Babylon, the Jews again had a Temple to replace Solomon's. Jerusalem's wall still destroyed and the Jews constantly threatened by the surrounding people. During the coming years there was probably a steady stream of Jewish travelers to and from Jerusalem.

Second Return (458 B.C.)

The second migration of Jews from Babylon was under the leadership of Ezra the priest and scribe in 458 B.C. Ezra returned with about 1496 men, not including woman and children, he returned with authority from the Persian King Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) (465-424 B.C.), who requested Ezra to offer sacrifices on his behalf (Ezra 7:7-26)

Artaxerxes I was the son of Xerxes (485-465 B.C.), who married Esther, he had a very favorable relationship with the Jews. While Ezra was with the Jews who returned in Jerusalem, Nehemiah is cup-bearer to the very same king. Nehemiah's brother was probably one of the Jews who accompanied Ezra on this return.

Ezra saw the conditions of the Jews and their situation when he arrived. The Jews who had returned under Cyrus had compromised themselves. They were falling away again by marrying foreign woman and doing the same practices of those living in the land were doing.

¹ After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. ² They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness." ³ When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. ⁴ Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice. ⁵ Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God ⁶ and prayed:

"O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. ⁷ From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today. **Ezra 9:1-7**

Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the 7th year of Artaxerxes I reign (458 B.C. Ezra 7:8), while Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem in the 20th year of his reign (445/444 B.C. Nehemiah 2:1). Nehemiah heard from his brother Hanani (Nehemiah 1:1) about the condition of the exiles. He was moved to action, Nehemiah prayed and God opened the heart of Artaxerxes I to give Nehemiah letters of authority to rebuild the walls and city of Jerusalem at the King's expense.

Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judah by the King Persia, under his direction the walls to the city of Jerusalem were rebuilt in 52-days.

