

Having A Basic Understanding of Some Old Testament Truths

Part 74 – Nehemiah Inquires About Escapees Through Work Under The Watch (Nehemiah 1-4)

1. Who did Nehemiah inquire about?

“(1) *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; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem*” (Nehemiah 1:1-2).

Shushan, or Susa, was the ordinary residence of the Persian kings (Esther 1:2, Esther 1:5, and Daniel 8:2).

2. What was the response to Nehemiah’s inquiry?

“*And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire*” (Nehemiah 1:3).

3. Was Nehemiah excited to hear about the Jews that had escaped?

No: “*And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven*” (Nehemiah 1:4).

4. What did Nehemiah say in his prayer to God?

“(5) *And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: (6) Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned. (7) We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. (8) Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: (9) But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. (10) Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. (11) O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king’s cupbearer*” (Nehemiah 1:5-11).

Nehemiah referred to God’s promise in Deuteronomy 4:25-32.

Think of the honest confession of Nehemiah (Leviticus 26:40-42 and Psalms 32:5).

Remember how sorrow (II Corinthians 7:9-10) lead to repentance (Ezekiel 14:6)?

5. What did Artaxerxes notice about Nehemiah?

His sorrow: “(1) *And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.* (2) *Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart.* Then I was very sore afraid” (Nehemiah 2:1-2).

6. What did Nehemiah say to Artaxerxes when questioned by him?

First, he was sore afraid (Nehemiah 2:2). Then he said: “(3) *And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire*” (Nehemiah 2:3)?

7. What does Nehemiah ask Artaxerxes to do?

“(4) *Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven* [Comment: notice what Nehemiah does here before answering (cf. Mark 14:38)] . (5) *And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.* (6) *And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.* (7) *Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;* (8) *And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me* [See: Ezra 7:6; 9; 28” (Nehemiah 2:4-8).

8. How happy were Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite when they found out what Nehemiah was going to do?

“*When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel*” (Nehemiah 2:10).

9. Who was behind Nehemiah’s plans for Jerusalem?

“*And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon*” (Nehemiah 2:12).

10. What did Nehemiah do when he arose in the night?

“(12) *And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.* (13) *And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.* (14) *Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.* (15) *Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.* (16) *And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither*

had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work” (Nehemiah 2:12-16).

11. What did Nehemiah tell the Jews?

*“(17) Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, **how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.** (18) Then **I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work” (Nehemiah 2:17-18).***

12. What did Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian do when they heard Nehemiah’s words?

“But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king” (Nehemiah 2:19)?

13. Did the words of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem cause doubt for Nehemiah?

No: *“Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:20).*

14. What main point could you make from reading through chapter three?

We can see that many of the Jews were busy working on rebuilding Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3:1-32). The people had a mind to work (Nehemiah 4:6).

15. Was Sanballat happy to see the progress in Jerusalem?

No: *“But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews” (Nehemiah 4:1).*

16. Did Sanballat and Tobiah think highly of the Jews?

No: *“(2) And he [Sanballat; v.1] spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, **What do these feeble Jews?** will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? (3) Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, **Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall” (Nehemiah 4:2-3).***

17. Did Nehemiah ask God to forgive the naysayers (Sanballat and Tobiah)?

No, just the opposite: *“(4) Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: (5) And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders” (Nehemiah 4:4-5).*

18. Were the people willing to work hard to build the wall?

Yes: *“So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work” (Nehemiah 4:6).*

Should we ever allow the naysayers to keep us from working (Acts 5:29-39)?

19. What reaction was there when the walls of Jerusalem were made up?

“(7) But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, (8) And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it” (Nehemiah 4:7-8).

20. Who did the Jews consult when knowing their enemies conspired against them?

God: *“Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them” (Nehemiah 4:9).*

This is a huge improvement since kings of the past had sought the aid of the heathen all too often (Asa, Hezekiah, etc.). Trust in God shows faithfulness to Him (**Psalms 18:30; 20:7**).

21. How confident was Judah in being able to continue building?

Not confident at all: *“(10) And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. (11) And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease” (Nehemiah 4:10-11).*

Maybe they should have asked if anything is too hard for God (**Genesis 18:14** and **Jeremiah 32:27**).

22. Did the workers have to worry about attacks from all sides?

Yes, (**Nehemiah 4:12**).

23. Were the Jews prepared to defend themselves during the work in Jerusalem?

Yes: *“(13) Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows” (Nehemiah 4:13).*

24. What did Nehemiah say unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people (the first time)?

*“And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: **remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses**” (Nehemiah 4:14).*

25. Did the children of Israel stop working at this point in our study?

No: *“(15) And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that **we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.** (16) And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. (17) They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. (18) For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me” (Nehemiah 4:15-18).*

26. What did Nehemiah say unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people (the second time)?

*“(19) And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. (20) In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: **our God shall fight for us.** (21) So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. (22) Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, **that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day**” (Nehemiah 4:19-22).*

God was always willing to fight for His children (**Deuteronomy 1:30; 3:22; 20:4**).

27. Does Nehemiah 4:23 tell us anything about the diligence the children of Israel showed in finishing the work in Jerusalem?

Yes, they didn't even disrobe: *“So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing” (Nehemiah 4:23).*