

Do you like history? Who doesn't appreciate stories of people from the past who overcame great obstacles, oppression, and difficult circumstances. Somehow the human spirit is built for that. That's why some of the best movies like *The Ten Commandments*, *Braveheart*, *42* (Jackie Robinson story), and many others move us. We should not forget the words of George Santayana, a Spanish born American philosopher in 1905, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Biblically, the writer of *Ecclesiastes* said, "There is nothing new under the sun."

The Book of *Nehemiah* records a man who saw great needs among his people and rose to the occasion of guiding them through their fears, limitations and challenges to live freely, wisely, and confidently in a world opposed to their very existence. Certainly in some respects, we find all around us brokenness, inequality and need, as well as opportunity. *Nehemiah* can inspire and guide us all to make a difference in our respective worlds!

"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem." Neh. 1:1-2

The World of Nehemiah

The month of Chislev roughly corresponds to our November/December time of year. It was during the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes I, who was the sixth Persian King to rule after they defeated the Babylonians. His reign began in 465bc., so this takes place in about 445bc., while the King was in his winter palace in southern Iraq, 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf and 275 miles southeast of modern day Baghdad. It's worth noting that Susa is today simply an archeological site while Jerusalem is a thriving city. God's people and ways always endure in the end!

Nehemiah was not the first to challenge and inspire the people of Israel and specifically Jerusalem, to live more purposeful and meaningful lives. He came on the heels of Zerubbabel and Ezra. The southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586bc., and the first return of the exiles was in 536 under Zerubbabel the priest (1 Kings 25:9) to rebuild the Temple. That was about all they did and the Jews in Israel did not make much progress in resettling or reclaiming their land.

Ezra followed about 75 years later, challenging the people to learn and obey God by obedience to His Word, the books of the Law. He was a scribe (Torah-teacher) who was spiritually focused and passionate, yet his reforms did not last. Thirteen years after Ezra (who was still alive), *Nehemiah* came as a government official in the Kings palace. He was *both* a man of God and a wise politician, and his leadership resulted in shaping the way Jewish people lived for the next 400 plus years up to and during

the time of Jesus.

The Heart of the Man fueled his Focus

How he made such a difference is the subject of this study. There were many elements to Nehemiah's impact, but at the heart of it is something that is often missed. Notice in 1:2 what Nehemiah asks his brother Hananiah, "**And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.**" *He wasn't only interested in their plight, but in their purpose.* Jerusalem was the center of God's eye, through the Temple, it was the penultimate place of worship that He promised would never be without His attention. Deuteronomy 12:5 says. "**But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there.**" It was where He would be represented by his people in how they lived, how they worshipped and what they lived for. It was so "**that the world may know that there is a God in Israel.**" Nehemiah's concern for Jerusalem was about God's glory!

We worship what is the true passion of our heart. The greatest problem with the exile of the Israelites wasn't just not getting to live in the Land, but that Jerusalem would not function as it should. In exile, they would not show the world what great things HE had done for them and for anyone turning to the One True God in repentance and belief. That's the great failure of idolatry which causes exile. It's worth pausing to ask ourselves where in our lives are we living in exile because we have moved from the presence and worship of God? *You will never do anything great for God if you live in exile from Him in your heart.*

Think about it for a minute: In exile they could still pray, worship, know God, do business, get married, raise children, and seek the welfare of the city. But they were not to think that they were living out the ultimate purposes of God! Something in Nehemiah was stirred into passion and broken-heartedness that the purposes of God were being ignored.

If all we get from a study of Nehemiah is that some walls got rebuilt, we may miss the whole point. Repentance, forsaking idolatry, and the restoration of our walk with God is always foremost in the potential of our leadership impact for a Cause that will outlast us. As Pastor Eric Mason says, "In other words, God's people are redeemed to represent. 'Redeemed' means 'bought back.' He saves us, and then he **anoints** us to represent him. That's a broad Bible principle; the mission of God is rooted in our identity in in him....God's people of all times have always been called to represent his reign on earth." How well are you representing Him in your life?

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Next Bible Study will be

February 4, 2025

Location: 8E