

We Have Sinned Against Thee +++

Nehemiah 1:1 – 6

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~ It's been roughly fifteen years since our last report from Ezra. Of course, for our Spiritual Safari, it's only been a day or two; but at the time in which we are studying, that is the approximate time that has elapsed since we completed the Book of Ezra. In this report, we will meet Nehemiah, a true friend of Ezra's. Nehemiah was Ezra's companion, and their two books are halves that combine to form a whole. Nehemiah was a layman; and we'll examine this book through his eyes. Ezra was a priest – and as we studied Ezra, the emphasis was upon the rebuilding of the temple. In this book, the emphasis is upon the rebuilding of the walls of the city of Jerusalem. In Ezra, we had the religious aspect of the return of the children of Israel from Babylonian captivity to their land; in Nehemiah, we will see the political aspect of the same time in history for the nation Israel. The manner in which the Spirit of God has laid Holy Writ out for us is breathtaking when understood and considered properly, correctly and completely.

Ezra is representative of the priest and scribe; Nehemiah is a noble representative of the businessman. Nehemiah had a very powerful position at Shushan the palace in Persian Babylon while Artaxerxes was on the throne. He was a prominent government worker in the office of cupbearer. Even so, the heart of Nehemiah was with his people — God's chosen people — Israel; and Nehemiah had developed a plan, purpose and program for them in Jerusalem. The very personal note and spirit of this book of the Bible is the chief characteristic of Nehemiah; and we need to keep that before us in our study, to be sure. If you understand Nehemiah properly, correctly and completely, you will likely find yourself returning to this book again and again and again; because of the personal blessing it will bring to your heart! I pray this study is going to bring a personal blessing to many of us as we examine it again this time.

Chronologically, this is the final historical book in the canons of Scripture. This record reaches the farthest point forward in ancient Bible history that

we can go with the nation Israel. You could say we have come to the end of the line as far as time is concerned for the Jewish people. The Old Testament clock and calendar are both frozen at the firstfruits in verse thirty-one of chapter thirteen, where Nehemiah beseeches the Lord — the True and Living God — our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — to remember him and His remnant.

As far as a starting point goes, we are around eighty-five years after the end of second Chronicles. The seventy years captivity has ended; and the first delegation returned as recorded in Ezra under Zerubbabel; and, as we have said, this is some fifteen years after those events. Those time frames are approximate — and there are differing perspectives concerning a proper calculation thereof; we're considering them to orient us with the stages of history of the nation Israel after the captivity. Before the captivity, God had warned Israel for four hundred ninety years to observe the Sabbatic year and to turn from idols. As we know, they transgressed until there was no remedy except to put them out of the land as God had said He would do if they didn't obey His commands.

The place God sent them in Babylon was the queen mother of all idolatry. They got more than their fill of idols down there in captivity! After the appointed time for the land in Israel to make up her Sabbath's, the Lord permitted His people to return home. God always makes a way home for us, friends. God makes a way when there is no way. We will also have an opportunity to closely examine how the seventy weeks mentioned in the book of Daniel actually begin here in chapter two in Nehemiah; as opposed to beginning back in Ezra.

Daniel 9:²⁵ *Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times ~*

The street and walls were certainly rebuilt during troublous times. There were three separate delegations that returned to the land. Zerubbabel the prince led the first. Ezra led the second wave that returned, and, in this book, Nehemiah leads the third. The decree by Cyrus was given around 536

BC and is found in the first four verses of Ezra. The decree from Artaxerxes takes place around 445 BC – in the twentieth year of his reign; we find that in Nehemiah chapter two, in the first eight verses. That places the end of the first seven weeks of Daniel in 397 BC; according to Malachi — and, subsequently, we are enabled to pinpoint the exact time Messiah came. Actually, they should have all been standing around waiting on the doorstep at the inn for the announcement of Jesus' birth. God had pinned it down in just such unmistakable detail.

Well, in the time we are studying, the king, the priest, and the prophets had all failed to rebuild the city and cleanse the temple. Obviously, it's going to take a layman to get the job done. So, God raised up this particular layman, Nehemiah, at this time. I am absolutely sure that's how God operates today, too. God uses obscure men to build His work on a sure foundation; and it needs rebuilding today. Only a man who is not a product of modern seminaries or Bible colleges is going to be capable of making it happen. We need an expert. You can just trust me on that, my beloved; what we need is a layman like Nehemiah today. Nehemiah was a *LOYAL* layman, too, by the way; loyal to the task at hand.

It's a dire mistake to form a distinction between the clergy and lay-congregant. One is the half of the other that forms the whole – just like Nehemiah and Ezra; we need them both — but we don't need division. For example, there are preachers and ministers who wear the most ridiculous clothes to appear uber-pious and high; but, they're just like anyone else sitting in their pew. They cannot connect with the average man if they are wearing costumes – impossible. Honestly, I think they all look pathetic wearing religious habits. That type of carnality makes a false distinction; and it makes the layman feel as if he cannot say the things and act normally as he otherwise would. See, God hears and sees what *BOTH* do. Friends, the preacher is just like you; and if you don't see him as your equal, then you can never learn from them – and you can just write that down.

So, there is one strikingly impressive feature about this book of the Bible. That is the little word "so!" We hear it *ALL* the time today. Many of you might have noticed I use that word *ALL* the time. It occurs thirty-two times in Nehemiah; and denotes a man of action, working, and producing – and

praying – and also a man of few words. Of course, in my case, it denotes a small man who is overly wordy – so, I am not trying to compare myself to this man, Nehemiah. Just want to be clear on that. Either way, we’re going to call attention to “so” as we see it again and again and again.

Nehemiah could have remained at his cushy position in the palace without regard for furthering God’s work; and I think he would have done so as a good and moral man. However, if Nehemiah had chosen that route, he would not appear in the record of God with his own book. He may have been used by God and mentioned in Scripture but, friends, you do not receive a place in the canons of Scripture without actually doing something; again – write a little note to yourself about that; and put it on your refrigerator or something. Nehemiah was deeply concerned about God’s cause towards His people. So, with that, let’s get introduced to Nehemiah, the loyal layman....

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 returned to the land, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

³ 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.

~ So, one day as Nehemiah is busy in the palace, he sees one of his brethren who had just arrived back in Babylon from Jerusalem. This man was likely bringing a field report to the palace and king about how construction was progressing back in the city. Nehemiah probably pulled the man aside while waiting to see the king and asks, “.... *how’s it going back there?*” Well, the answer wasn’t good, as we just read. It is a sad and pitiful report to the king because the people have failed – no other reason. That’s when Nehemiah became very concerned about the condition of his people.

Nehemiah could have just shook his head in a feigned sympathy, and said, “... *wow, that’s too bad – sorry to hear that....I’ll be praying for you*” – and Nehemiah could have simply gone about his own business from there. There are myriad Christian clichés Nehemiah could have thrown out. Maybe Nehemiah, being a layman, didn’t know about those insincere sayings? Well, either way, he is concerned. This man was not cold and indifferent to his fellow man and others suffering, and he wasn’t a carping critic. It would have been very easy to opine from afar and criticize what was happening back in Israel. Instead, Nehemiah became involved.

I wonder if we, who constantly criticize the church and criticize other Christians are really concerned with the welfare of others. I wonder if those who are, at least, pretending that they’re interested in *me* really are interested in my well-being. Honestly, that realization disturbs me. What will you do and what do you do for the cause of Christ? Do you do *ANYTHING* to get the entire Word of God out to the entire world? Or is it the same old closed-Bible bible study, week after week? Friends, the proper, correct and complete teaching of the Bible just happens to be in jeopardy today. Does that mean anything to you?

Well, I’m sure Nehemiah was a younger man. Ezra would have been much older. Ezra may or may not have been born in captivity, but Nehemiah had *definitely* been born in Babylon. Remember, when we were in the book of Ezra, we didn’t criticize those who stayed behind when the decree had been made allowing them to return. They were certainly out of God’s will – and we’ll see that in the Book of Esther – but, frankly, there were some wonderful people who loved God; but who did not return at that time for whatever reason. I must admit I wonder why they didn’t return. However, Paul asked, “... *why do you judge another man’s servant; before his own master he stands or falls.*” I think we need to be extremely careful about judging other believers, friends; particularly when we do not know all of the circumstances and dynamics of their lives.

Our Spiritual Safari closes out this leg of our expedition through the entire Word of God with Nehemiah praying to the Lord God of Heaven as recourse. Ezra did the same thing; and prayed to the same Lord God of Heaven, you will recall. After Ezekiel saw the Shekinah Glory go out over

the wall and through the Mount of Olives – and then ascend back up to Heaven – God is called the Lord God of Heaven in the Word of God. The next time we see the visible presence of God, He is in Bethlehem and an angel says, “.... *glory to God in the Highest.*”

Today, Christ is back in Heaven at the right hand of God; but, someday, He’s going to return. First, Jesus will return to call the church out of the world and, subsequently, to establish His Kingdom. Jesus said, “*then shall ye see the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven.*” Well, I don’t know what that sign is, but I suspect it will be the Shekinah Glory — the visible presence of God — returning. The point is: God is the Lord God of Heaven today — just as He was when Nehemiah prayed to Him at the time in which we are studying....

⁴ 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,

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:

~ The word “*terrible*” in verse five has created much abuse; and it has led to men calling themselves “*reverend*.” That’s truly unfortunate because “*reverend*” means “*terrible!*” “*Reverend*” happens to be a term that is reserved exclusively for the Lord God of Heaven, friends. God incites terror today, make no mistake about that. I know many of you don’t like to hear that truth, but Nehemiah wants us to *REALLY* understand this angle today. God is a gracious and loving God – but – He is also a God of judgment. I know it seems appropriate to apply the term “*reverend*” to some men today because they are terrible — and they usually incite terror, too — but I digress; and there was a time when ministers were held in high regard in the community. That’s simply not true anymore, of course; in fact, it isn’t even true in the church today. Some church members think they’re designated to crucify the preacher. I know your church isn’t like that and your church doesn’t have those people or problems — but most churches I have been in had a little group who were constantly undermining the efforts of Spirit-filled Bible teaching. They were generally very successful,

too. Well, I think we should revere our preacher and thank God for him every chance we get....

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.

~ Who sinned? “WE” have sinned, says Nehemiah. How many times do you hear that type of confession these days? I suspect the answer is: never. God is attentive to the sincere and humble prayer of His children, my beloved. Prayer is a privilege by which we can approach the throne of the Lord God of Heaven. Can you go before God in prayer right now and tell Him you are a sinner and detail your transgressions? I know many cannot do that; and that is precisely why they *NEVER* grow in grace and knowledge. As we continue forward from here, Nehemiah is going to lead us very definitely in prayer.

The wonderful truth revealed in the Word of God is His forgiveness; but until we confess each of our sins — and repent from them — God cannot cleanse us from all unrighteousness and be just to forgive us. You may want to write that down, too! If you are feeling the despair of sin in your life right now — and we all do, if we are honest with ourselves — then why not turn to Christ right *NOW* and receive His forgiveness? If you are feeling that conviction and need for forgiveness for the first time, then you are experiencing the election of God for salvation! If you need to know more about what that means — let me know. Well, alright, that’s as far as we’re going with Nehemiah in this report, but we’re going to pick up right here in our next. As we proceed, we’re going to become well-acquainted with one of the most delightful persons we will come across in the Word of God: Nehemiah, the layman ~

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