



## NEHEMIAH 1-2. RISE AND BUILD

### CHRONOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIP OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH-ESTHER

538-515BC	483-473BC	457BC	13 Year Gap	444-425BC
Ezra 1-6	Book of Esther	Ezra 7-10		Book of Nehemiah
<b>First Return</b> of Jews from Babylonian Exile	<b>58 Year</b> Gap	<b>Second Return</b> of Jews from Babylonian Exile		<b>Third Return</b> of Jews from Babylonian Exile

*“Perhaps the classic of the whole Bible on the subject of personal service for God.” (Alan Redpath) <sup>1</sup>*

### 17 Historical books in the Old Testament

- Daniel, Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah are the most recent in date. (in that order).
- Ezra and Nehemiah are both divided into sections.
  - **Ezra 1-6:** Rebuilding of the Temple
    - Elapse of about 60 years between 2 sections of Ezra
      - Book of Esther occurs in this gap
  - **Ezra 7-10:** Restoration of worship
  - **Nehemiah 1-6:** Re-construction of the wall surrounding Jerusalem
  - **Nehemiah 7-13:** Re-instruction of the Jewish people

<sup>1</sup> Victorious Christian Service, Alan Redpath, Fleming H. Revell Company, MCMLVIII

- Out of some 2 or 3 million Jews deported from the land, only 50,000 decided to return to the Promised Land. That's only something like 2%! (David Guzik)
- **538 B.C.** the first group returned to Judah **under the leadership of Zerubbabel** (*Ezra 1:1-2:2*).
  - **515 B.C.** Over a period of years and tremendous opposition from the Samaritans, the returnees eventually succeeded in rebuilding the temple.
- **457 B.C.** a second group of Jews returned, **led by Ezra** (*Ezra 7:1-10*).
  - Arriving on the scene, they found the Jews in Israel in a **state of spiritual and moral degradation**.
  - They had **intermarried** with the unbelieving peoples of the surrounding nations and were participating in their pagan practices.
- **444 B.C.**, 13 years after Ezra's return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah also returned and God used him to guide Judah in rebuilding the city's walls and in reordering the people's social and economic lives. 2

Alan Redpath, *Victorious Christian Service*:

“No winning without warfare  
 No opportunity without opposition  
 No victory without vigilance.  
**“For whenever the people of God say, ‘Let us arise and build,’  
 Satan says, ‘Let me arise and oppose.’”** 3

**1** The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the **twentieth year**, as I was in **Shushan** the citadel,  
**2** that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

- **Nehemiah** = “Jehovah comforts and consoles” 4
- **Hachaliah** = “whom Jehovah enlightens” 5
- **Hanani** = “gracious” 6

2 Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

3 *Victorious Christian Service*, Alan Redpath, Fleming H. Revell Company, MCMLVIII

4 *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

5 *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

6 *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

**Nehemiah 7:2** that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

- **“20<sup>th</sup> year”**

**Nehemiah 2:1** And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the **twentieth year of King Artaxerxes**, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.

- **Encyclopedia Britannica** – tells us that King Artaxerxes, Persia's sixth king, began to reign in the year 465 BC
  - 20<sup>th</sup> year = **445 B.C.**

**3** And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach.

**The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.”**

- Six gates of Jerusalem were later repaired, 3:1, 3, 6, 13-15. 7

**4** So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days;

**I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.**

**Psalm 137:1-6** By the rivers of Babylon,  
There we sat down,  
Yea, we wept  
When we remembered Zion.

**2** We hung our harps  
Upon the willows in the midst of it.

**3** For those who carried us away captive asked of us a song,  
And those who plundered us requested mirth,  
Saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

**4** How shall we sing the Lord's song  
In a foreign land?

**5** If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
Let my right hand forget its skill!

**6** If I do not remember you,  
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—

## **If I do not exalt Jerusalem**

### **Above my chief joy.**

**Psalm 147:1-20** Praise the Lord!

For it is good to sing praises to our God;

For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful.

**2** The Lord builds up Jerusalem;

He gathers together the outcasts of Israel.

**3** He heals the brokenhearted

And binds up their wounds.

**4** He counts the number of the stars;

He calls them all by name.

**5** Great is our Lord, and mighty in power;

His understanding is infinite.

- Most mature Christians realize that the work only really begins once the weeping starts.
  - Weeping over what tasks are at hand.
  - Weeping over the hearts of the Lost.
  - Weeping over how far you must personally go to make the journey.

## **John 11:35 Jesus wept.**

- **GOD wept – He expressed sorrow over the loss of a loved one**
  - **Was He surprised that Lazarus had died? – NOT AT ALL!**
  - **GOD cannot be surprised by anything!**
  - **YET – He wept, He expressed sorrow – sorrow is not a SIN.**

### **Alan Redpath:**

**“Prayer is not mere prattle, it is warfare**

**Real prayer engages in a battle.**

**Real prayer is rooted in the promises of God and in the covenant of His blood.**

**Nehemiah's prayer was grounded in the Word,  
founded upon the promises,  
rooted in God's past dealings.**

**Nehemiah based all his prayer upon God's past dealings,  
and he saw in them a mirror of all God's future plans.**

**Whatever the ruin in your soul or mine may be;**

**Whatever may be the ruin of the impact of your church testimony;  
No matter how great the need may be on the vast mission fields of  
the world, where so many stations lie unoccupied;**

**If only I can go back to God's past  
and ground my prayers upon a cross,  
upon the blood, upon an empty tomb, an ascended Lord,  
Then I will see in these things the mirror reflecting all of God's  
purposes for this world of ours." 8**

**5** And I said:

**"I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God,  
You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You  
and observe Your commandments,**

**6** "please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of **Your servant** which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel **Your servants**, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned.

**7** "We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded **Your servant** Moses.

**8** "Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded **Your servant** Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations;

**9** 'but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.'

**10** "Now these are **Your servants** and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand.

**11** "O Lord, I pray,  
please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of **Your servant**,

and to the prayer of **Your servants** who desire to fear Your name; and let **Your servant** prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

**For I was the king's cupbearer.**

- **8X – Nehemiah mentions a servant's heart**

- Start with a servant's heart in prayer and you can't go wrong

**E.M. Bounds:** “We are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the gospel. This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man or sink the man in the plan or organization. God's plan is to make much of the man, far more of him than of anything else. **Men are God's method.**

**The Church is looking for better methods;**

**God is looking for better men.**

**What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use — men of prayer, men mighty in prayer.**

**The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men.**

**He does not anoint plans, but men — men of prayer.”**

**2.1** And it came to pass in the month of **Nisan** (4 months after Chapter 1), **in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes**, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king.

**Now I had never been sad in his presence before.**

- Now there's quite a statement!
- Could you say that about your countenance in front of your employer?

**2.2** Therefore the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.” **So I became dreadfully afraid,**

- A servant was never to let his negative emotions show before the king, for it might suggest dissatisfaction with the king. To do so might jeopardize his position or even his life. 9

**2.3** and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"

**2.4** Then the king said to me, "What do you request?"

**So I prayed to the God of heaven.**

- Nehemiah is under pressure
- Nehemiah is afraid
- Nehemiah must answer with care and purpose.

**2 Timothy 4:2** Preach the word! **Be ready in season and out of season.** Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16–22**

**16** Rejoice always,

**17** pray constantly,

**18 give thanks in everything; for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.**

**19** Do not quench the Spirit.

**20** Do not despise prophecies,

**21** but examine all things; hold fast to what is good.

**22** Abstain from every form of evil.

**Philippians 4:6-7** Be anxious for nothing, **but in everything by prayer and supplication,** with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

**Proverbs 3:5-6** Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;

**6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.**

**Spurgeon** *"In driving piles, a machine is used by which a huge weight is lifted up and then made to fall upon the head of the pile. Of course, the higher the weight is lifted the more powerful is the blow which it gives when it descends. Now, if we wish to impact our age and society with ponderous blows, we must see to it that we are uplifted as near to God as possible. All our power will depend upon the elevation of our spirits. Prayer, meditation, devotion, communion, are like a windlass to wind us up aloft. It is not lost*

*time which we spend in such sacred exercises, for we are thus accumulating force, so that when we come down to our actual labor for God, we shall descend with an energy unknown to those to whom communion is unknown.”*

*– Charles Haddon Spurgeon, The Quotable Spurgeon, (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, Inc, 1990)*

### **Matthew 6:5-13**

**5** “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

**6** “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

**7** “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

**8** “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

**9** “In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.

**10** Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

**11** Give us this day our daily bread.

**12** And forgive us our sins,

In the same manner that we forgive those that have sinned against us.

**13** And do not lead us into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

**2.4** Then the king said to me, “What do you request?”

**So I prayed to the God of heaven.**

- **Nehemiah was prepared for this moment by 4 months of praying and fasting.**
  - He had no idea that his answer would change the course of the nation of Israel and all mankind.
  - His answer would set into motion one of the greatest prophecies in the O.T.!



- His answer had to be steeped in the wisdom of the “God of Heaven.”

**Daniel 9:25** “Know therefore and understand,  
That from the going forth of the command  
To restore and build Jerusalem  
Until Messiah the Prince,  
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;  
The street shall be built again, and the wall,  
Even in troublesome times.

- That exactly **173,880** days from this day (March 14, 445 BC) Messiah the Prince would enter Jerusalem.
  - Sir Robert Anderson, the eminent British astronomer and mathematician proved that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy exactly to the day.
    - Entering Jerusalem on April 6, 32 AD.
    - Precisely **173,880 days** from Nehemiah's command (Neh. 2:1).

**Matthew 10:16** “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.  
**Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.**”

**2.5** And I said to the king, “**If it pleases the king**, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.”

- Prayer has revealed to Nehemiah the weight of the issues in Jerusalem.
  - No time for being rude or proud.

**2.6** Then the **king** said to me (**the Queen** also sitting beside him),  
“How long will your journey be? And when will you return?”  
**So it pleased the king to send me;** and I set him a time.

- “**the Queen**” – One commentary suggested that this must be Queen Esther  
*“The queen referred to was probably Esther, whose presence would tend greatly to embolden Nehemiah in stating his request; and through her influence, powerfully exerted it may be supposed, also by her sympathy*

with the patriotic design, his petition was granted, to go as deputy governor of Judea, accompanied by a military guard, and invested with full powers to obtain materials for the building in Jerusalem, as well as to get all requisite aid in promoting his enterprise.” 10

**2.7** Furthermore I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah,

**2.8** “and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy.” And the king granted them to me **according to the good hand of my God upon me.**

- Letters to:
  1. Governors west of the Euphrates river
  2. Asaph (lit. “gatherer”) – keeper of the King’s forest

**2.9** Then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.

**2.10** When **Sanballat the Horonite** and **Tobiah the Ammonite** official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that **a man** had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

**2.11** So I came to Jerusalem and was there **three days.**

**2.12** Then I arose in the night,  
I and a few men with me;

I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem;  
nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode.

- The journey to Jerusalem, even though Nehemiah probably took the shortest route possible, would have taken **at least 2 months** (see comments on 6:15).
  - Ezra’s trip, 14 years earlier, took 4 to 5 months (Ezra 7:8-9). 11
  - **2 – 5 month journey to stay 3 days!**

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10 Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A.R.; and Brown, David, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1998.

11 Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

- **Sanballat the Horonite** “strength”, **a Moabite** (perhaps meaning he was from Beth-Horon about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem in Moab) <sup>12</sup>
- **Tobiah the Ammonite** = “Jehovah is good” <sup>13</sup>
- Note Nehemiah's resolve to do God's will:
  1. He was willing to go alone if necessary
    - Counting the cost of ministry
    - **Nothing fruitful can ever be easy in ministry.**
      - **C.H.Spurgeon:** *“He who would serve God to any purpose must be willing to serve Him all alone, for if thou can’st not stand the brunt of being forsaken thou wilt scarcely do to be a soldier of the cross.”*

## **2 Timothy 4:16-17**

**16** At my first defense **no one stood with me**, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

**17** **But the Lord stood with me** and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

## 2. He was willing to accept the help of others

- “a few men with me” (v12)
  - **J. Paul Getty:** *“I’d rather have 100% from one man than 1% from a hundred men.”*
- A pastor was once asked to define “Faithful Service,” and this was his reply:
 

*All that I ask is that we apply the same standards of faithfulness to our church activities that we would in other areas of our life. That doesn't seem too much to ask.*

*Consider these examples:*

  - *If your car started one out of three times, would you consider it faithful?*

<sup>12</sup> Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

<sup>13</sup> *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

- *If the paperboy skipped Monday and Thursdays, would they be missed?*
- *If you didn't show up at work two or three times a month, would your boss call you faithful?*
- *If your refrigerator quit a day now and then, would you excuse it and say, "Oh, well, it works most of the time."*
- *If your water heater greets you with cold water one or two mornings a week while you were in the shower, would it be faithful?*
- *If you miss a couple of mortgage payments in a year's time, would your mortgage holder say, "Oh, well, ten out of twelve isn't bad"?*
- *If your employer paid you as often, and as much, as you give to the Lord with your full tithes would you deem him faithful?*
- *If you miss worship and attend church meetings only often enough to show you're interested but not often enough to get involved, are you a servant?* <sup>14</sup>

### 3. He was willing to give God all the glory

V8 – “according to the good hand of my God upon me”

V18 – “And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me.

- A humbled man.

2.13 And I went out by night through **the Valley Gate** to the Serpent Well and **the Dung Gate**, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire.

2.14 Then I went on to **the Fountain Gate** and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass.

2.15 So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned.

2.16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.

2.17 Then I said to them, “You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire.

Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.”

2.18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work.

- Nehemiah's midnight ride.
- Nehemiah makes a secret survey of the task at hand.
- Oh, you mean God's on our side?
  - Let's go for it!

2.19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"

2.20 So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

- Geshem or Gashmu = "rain" 15

**Nehemiah 6:5-6** Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. **6** In it was written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king.

**Psalms 124:1-8** A Song of Ascents. Of David.

**1** "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side,"  
Let Israel now say—

**2** "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side,  
When men rose up against us,

**3** Then they would have swallowed us alive,  
When their wrath was kindled against us;

**4** Then the waters would have overwhelmed us,  
The stream would have gone over our soul;

**5** Then the swollen waters Would have gone over our soul."

**6** Blessed be the Lord,  
Who has not given us as prey to their teeth.

**7** Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers;  
The snare is broken, and we have escaped.

**8** Our help is in the name of the Lord,

**Who made heaven and earth.**