



CHAPTER TWO

The Journey Begins

“When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the god of Heaven. I said, I beseech You, O LORD God of Heaven, the great and awesome god, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father’s house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant, Moses. Remember the word which You commanded Your servant, Moses, saying, “If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.” They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man.’ Now I was the cupbearer to the king.” Nehemiah 1:4-11

The name of Nehemiah means *Jehovah comforts*, which means God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are Comforters. Nehemiah was known as being a famous cupbearer, who never appears in scripture outside of this book. As with the books of Ezra and Esther—named for his contemporaries, this book recounts selective events of his leadership, and he was titled as one of the greatest leaders of the Hebrew people throughout all the Old Testament. Both the Greek and the Latin Vulgate had originally named this book 2 *Ezra*. Even though the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are separate in most English Bibles, they may have once been joined together as a single unit as they currently are in the Hebrew text. That is an extremely significant piece we need to keep in mind. However, the book of Nehemiah has been proven by Jewish history as the very last book that was written before the arrival of Jesus Christ. That is why we are starting with the book of Nehemiah.

THE JOURNEY OF NEHEMIAH

- Leadership should always start with serving, which is described in our book as a cupbearer.
- God only uses men and women of character – a life without lies, deception, and immorality.
- God has a habit of using layman – people without importance. In the Old and New Testament, we see that people of importance are distracted with self-glory, so it became god’s norm to make use of average, day-to-day individuals who have a clean heart before god.
- Leaders classically make use of people closest to them – people of the same beliefs.
- God loves working with people who see opposition as a challenge, which creates endurance. Jesus said to us personally in the Holy Word of God, that *“those who endure to the end, those shall be saved,”* so that makes this statement essential.
- Passionate people, who have the heart to rebuild, become His most active workers.

Special Note: In the Bible, after the book of Nehemiah, you will discover there are 23 more books. That is because of the way it was canonized. In reality, the book of Nehemiah was the last book written before the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Always remember that as we go through our series.

This short passage from Nehemiah applies to our church culture today, without question. Here Nehemiah was in one of the most significant positions, if not the most significant position, and that is of being a cupbearer to the greatest king who lived on earth during Nehemiah's time. I'm going to talk a lot about the impact a cupbearer has on a king, but know this, all quality leadership starts with being a slave to a great authority. In our case, because of Jesus Christ, we were granted a bondsman position, which means volunteer.

RECORDING THE JOURNEY

Jewish tradition identifies Nehemiah himself as the primary author of this historical book. Much of the book is written from his first-person perspective. Jewish history, plus the Bible, unfolds Nehemiah's story as a servant serving the Persian royal court as the personal cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11-2:1). His position was not lowly. Cupbearers are the highest and most trusted positions within a king's service. As in the case of God, this prestigious position reveals something of Nehemiah's righteous character. Though he remained in Persia after the exiles had been allowed to go home, he was highly interested in the state of affairs of Judah, and so was his brother, Hanani.

The book of Nehemiah could be read as a sequel to the book of Ezra. But as I mentioned in the introduction, originally these two books probably were one book. Some scholars believe the two books originally were penned to lay out the journey that God took—not only Nehemiah through but many other biblical leaders, who God gave great respect and purpose. It is possible Ezra compiled Nehemiah's original accounts with other materials to create the book of Nehemiah. However, most scholars believe that Nehemiah wrote the book, and I am one of them.

The Christ parallel: God the Father and Jesus the Son have always recorded the progressive steps to freedom. Revelation's book reveals the concept of every jot and tittle. God is into details. However, there is no record of Jesus using the pen to scribe one single word; He left that to the men and women who served Him.

NEHEMIAH'S PERIOD OF SERVICE

The book of Nehemiah opens in the Persian city of Susa (now Iran) in the year 444 BC. Later that year, Nehemiah traveled to Israel leading the third of the three returns by the Jewish people following their seventy years of exile (bondage) in Babylon. Most of the book centers on events in Jerusalem. The narrative concludes around the year 430 BC, and scholars believe the book was written shortly thereafter.

Special Note: The Persian Empire is where many of the descendants of Ishmael resided and ruled. One-third of Revelation's book deals with this group; today they are classified as Islamic.

During Nehemiah's service to the Persian king, the city was considered the capital of gods and goddesses—formerly established by the Babylonian Empire. In fact, Persia is the next era that evolved from the Babylonians. Because of this reality, the setting God places Nehemiah in as being a cupbearer to the king, was when this king was battling Egypt in Babylonian influences. They wanted to be their own people. This king was known for having a soft spot for the Jewish people and thus commissioning Ezra to take charge of the ecclesiastical and civil affairs of the Jewish nation. In fact, King Artaxerxes is known for separating the government's interference with religious rights, particularly Judaism. Thus, Nehemiah became an obvious choice to follow up on Ezra's work.

The Christ parallel: as in the case of Jesus, leadership starts with being a servant. From service, leadership is born. When Jesus walked the earth, He was a servant. Although, when we see Him again in Revelation's book, He is in the mode of delivering severe consequences to those who refused to serve Him, the King of kings.

THE LAST BOOK BEFORE CHRIST'S ARRIVAL

Nehemiah is the last historical book of the Old Testament. Although the book of Esther appears after Nehemiah in the Canon, the events of Esther occurred in the period between Ezra six and seven—between the first and second return of the people of Israel. The prophet of Malachi was a contemporary of Nehemiah and so were many leaders from that day forward.

There was a godological reason why the book of Nehemiah was the last Old Testament book written—He was setting up for the birth of Christ by preparing the way for Jerusalem to host the King of kings. His character as a servant leader illustrated the exact triune of a quality leader: cupbearer, builder, and leader. Finally, Nehemiah's style and function as a savior of Jerusalem was a precursor to Jesus coming back to re-establish Jerusalem in the final actions of Jesus, according to Revelation's book.

The Christ parallel: just as Revelation's book was the last pinned book of the trilogy of the Word, the book of Nehemiah is the last writing project before Christ's arrival. It is in this single fact that we know Nehemiah's actions and recordings are historically eschatological.

SAVIOR TO THE JEWS

Nehemiah was a layman, not a priest like Ezra, nor a prophet like Malachi. He served the Persian king in a secular position before leading a group of Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild the city's walls. Nehemiah's expertise in the king's court equipped him adequately for the political and physical reconstruction that was necessary for the remnant to survive. Please keep that at the forefront of your mind. God is always after preserving His remnant. That principle applies, not only up to our present-day culture, but it will be until the last hour of humanity.

Under Nehemiah's leadership, the Jews withstood opposition and came together to accomplish their goal. Nehemiah led by example, giving up a respected position in the palace for hard labor in a political warzone. He partnered with Ezra, who also appears in this book, to solidify the political and spiritual foundations of the people of god. Before God, Nehemiah's humility provided an example for the people. He did not claim glory for himself but always gave god credit for his success. That is why the prayer we read through earlier is so significant. It is an appeal to god and repentance for the wrongs of the Jewish people and that of asking god to transfer His power into his hands to accomplish god's mission.

Nehemiah recorded the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem, Judah's capital city. Together he and Ezra, who led the spiritual revival of the people, directed the political and religious restoration of the Jews in their homeland after the Babylonian captivity. Another thing to keep in mind here is that Babylon is the first generation who came from the descendants of Ham.

The Christ parallel: Jesus Christ was the ultimate Savior to the Jewish people. In Nehemiah's day, while the Jews were waiting for their Messiah, Nehemiah became the preview of their awaited King.

NEHEMIAH MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

Nehemiah's life provides a fine study on leadership. He overcame opposition from outsiders as well as internal turmoil. He exercised his administrative skills in his strategy to use half the people for building, while the other half kept watching for the Samaritans who, under Sanballat, threatened to attack (Nehemiah 4-7).

As governor, Nehemiah negotiated peace among the Jews who were unhappy with the Persian taxes. He exhibited a steadfast determination to complete his goal. Accomplishing those goals resulted in the people being encouraged, renewed, and excited about their future. It is interesting to note that God used the economy and taxes, in general, with the negotiations of a God-appointed leader to create, start, and ignite the Jewish revival.

Nehemiah was appointed as the governor of Israel by the Persian king, Darius, during the beginning of the second Temple period. He was instrumental in rebuilding the defenses of Jerusalem and the surrounding area while providing much-needed stability and management to the fleeing Jewish community, who had just returned from Babylon. Remember, Nehemiah was born in Babylon and raised in exile, which means being barred from Jerusalem.

Nehemiah understood the ways of the Jewish enemy and the culture of the Babylonians. He was a clever and composed person, and thus, the reason why he made a great cupbearer. Although the wise Jewish leaders of his time had forbidden the drinking of Gentile wine, Nehemiah was given a special dispensation to do so due to his distinguished position.

The Christ parallel: there is no question Nehemiah was the preview of the coming style of leadership that Jesus would demonstrate. When Jesus arrived in His first coming, He led via serving the people. Jesus was/is His Father's cupbearer. While He was serving, He was in the process of rebuilding Jerusalem. These two mission points set Jesus up to rule God's people, which arrives in Revelation's book.

GOD MAKES USE OF INTEL

One day, in the 20th year of the reign of King Darius, Nehemiah was speaking to his brother Hanani. He asked Hanani how the Jews, who had journeyed to Israel years earlier, were doing. The Temple had been rebuilt more than 12 years before this, and the Jews of Babylon were eager to hear news of their fellow Jews' lives and the condition of their hearts.

God used or uses the modality of checking the hearts of His people to determine the strength available to build or rebuild. If or when their hearts are faint, so are their hands. As per God's design, the hands are as productive as the strength of His people's hearts. As history proves, when God's people are put to work without an abundance of belief in faith, they quit when opposition arrives—a modality that permeates our church culture today.

Hanani related to Nehemiah how the Samaritans of the area had been enraged by the completion of the Temple and had descended on Jerusalem, destroying the walls and ransacking the city. The situation was worsening by day four. Overcome with sadness, Nehemiah began weeping and fasting. His grief continued unabated for several days. He prayed to God to help his brethren in Israel—to forgive them for their unfaithfulness and to fulfill His promise to gather all the Jews back to the land of Israel. Does that not sound familiar? When we look at Revelation's book in describing the final times, there will be a great call to bring the Jews back to final Israel.

The next month, Nehemiah was called to serve King Darius his wine. Despite his best efforts his grief could not be contained, and King Darius realized immediately that something was wrong. After being pressed to share what was on his mind, Nehemiah told the king that the plight of the Jews in Israel weighed heavily upon him, and he wished more than anything else to travel to Israel with the permission of the king to assist

the Jews with rebuilding the city while protecting them from their enemies. Moved by his sincerity, Darius allowed Nehemiah to travel to Israel, giving him travel permission and timber from the Royal storehouse for roofing and a Royal escort to accompany him. Nehemiah gathered a few of his friends and set out for Jerusalem.

The Christ parallel: Jesus Christ always checks the heart before advancing His mission. If you read Revelation's book, you will discover a method, which preceded god's action—that of receiving intel from the angels who monitor the earth. In our study, we see the same method via Nehemiah's success.

PRIMARY PRINCIPLES OF OUR LESSON

1. **RECORD:** Document your journey with Jesus Christ for future generations. One of the greatest errors we see in church culture today is that people do not journal. Well, after a particular parent dies, there is nothing written, which future generations can look at and study for their present generation. God has always used the modality of recording every step He has made since the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem.
2. **SLAVE:** Consider yourself a slave. But in our case with Jesus Christ, we are bondslaves, which means, we volunteered.
3. **SAVIOR LEADERS:** Don't muzzle the mouths of your leaders and your prophets. God still uses leaders to this very hour, and He will until His last hour for humanity.
4. **GODLY SUBMISSION:** Submit to biblical leaders. God made it clear in the book of Romans that we are to honor all existing authorities. He went on to say that all these existing authorities were created by Him, meaning, god uses the good with the bad. But if you unplug authority, you unplug the Gospel. If you unplug the Gospel, there is a price to pay.