

OT-OV

Lesson 99

1. Last week we completed our study of 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles and the Book of Ezra.
2. When time expired we were about to begin a study of the Book of Nehemiah.
3. The book of Nehemiah was written by Nehemiah from Palestine in approximately 440 B.C. The book is a history of the Jews on their return from Babylon to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. It also covers certain ecclesiastical matters related to the return.
 - 3.1 Nehemiah was a post-Exilic governor of Judah said to be a son of Hacaliah. He was most likely from the tribe of Judah.

Neh 1:1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of November or December in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa,



Neh 8:9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

3.2 He was a descendant of those carried into Babylonia, Nehemiah gained prominence after the Persians defeated the Babylonians.

3.3 He attained the influential position of personal cupbearer to the Persian king, Artaxerxes I Longimanus. (465-424 B.C.)

3.4 This was a place of utmost trust in that he alone passed on the wine given to the king.

3.5 While serving in this capacity, word reached Nehemiah about conditions in Jerusalem. The walls were still in ruins, the gates were charred remains, and there was no defense against enemy attacks.

3.6 Nehemiah received permission from Artaxerxes to restore the dignity of his ancestral home. After being appointed governor of the province surrounding Jerusalem, he was given letters of safe conduct to the satraps along the way and authority to secure the necessary materials from the king's forests.

3.7 Arriving in Jerusalem in c. 444 B.C., he began his vital work by secretly surveying the remains of the walls toppled by Nebuchadnezzar. (Neh 2:11-16)

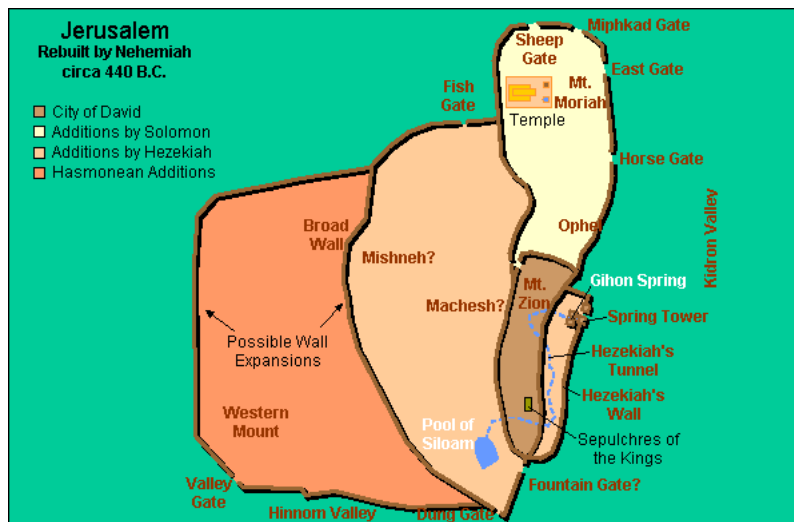
Neh 2:11 I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days

Neh 2:12 I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

Neh 2:13 By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.

Neh 2:14 Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through;

Neh 2:15 so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate.



3.8 The work of rebuilding the walls was constantly thwarted by the selfish interests of Sanballat of Samaria, Tobiah of the Ammonites, and Geshem of Arabia. These men, though powerful and crafty, were no match for the resourcefulness of Nehemiah.

3.9 They attempted insult and mockery; they planned armed attacks; they tried to lure Nehemiah out where they could seize him; and they sent charges of rebellious intentions to Artaxerxes in the hope of discrediting Nehemiah.

3.10 Although they were successful in hindering and stopping the work for a time, Nehemiah continually demonstrated his powerful leadership qualities and organizational abilities.

3.11 The work was completed in 52 days, although Josephus used the figure of two years and four months. Neh 6:15.

Neh 6:15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of August or September, in fifty-two days.

3.12 The duties of Nehemiah went beyond his original purpose in rebuilding the walls. He was able to awaken a sense of national honor and to restore dignity to Jerusalem.

3.13 He appointed officers to whom authority was delegated for better government. He corrected many abuses, settled difficult grievances, and established law and order.

3.14 He revived worship by encouraging the reading of the law, celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, observing other national fasts, and renewing the covenant.

3.15 He protected Jerusalem by ordering that one of ten must reside on the city walls. He further separated mixed multitudes, purified the temple, improved the support of the priesthood, and revitalized the observance of the sabbath.

3.16 Nehemiah was originally appointed for a definite period of time, beginning in the 21st year of Artaxerxes I. However, this time limit was undoubtedly extended owing to the pressing need at Jerusalem.

3.17 In the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, he again returned to the city of Babylon. It appears that he was officially governor during the intervening years, though not always on hand.

3.18 The fact that many abuses had to be corrected immediately upon his second arrival in Jerusalem suggests that the "after certain days" in (Neh 13:6) may have been a considerable time.

Neh 13:6 But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission to return.

3.19 The mention of "Darius the Persian" (Darius II Nothus, 423-404 B.C.) in the book of Nehemiah (Neh 12:22) further suggests that Nehemiah continued for some time in active leadership at Jerusalem.

Neh 12:22 The family heads of the Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan and Jaddua, as well as those of the priests, were recorded in the reign of Darius the Persian.

3.20 He ruled as governor until c. 405 though that date is somewhat problematic. The character of Nehemiah is almost without blemish in the material available. He was as gifted and accomplished as any man of post-Exilic times.

3.21 His deep and intense patriotism was contagious, causing men to leave their harvests in order to journey to Jerusalem for work on the walls. His strict integrity, coupled with kindly humility, makes him stand out as an outstanding example of lay leadership.

3.22 His unselfish practice of refusing any pay for his services (Neh 5:14-18) must have left an indelible impression upon the poor of Jerusalem.

Neh 5:14 Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year--twelve years--neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor.

Neh 5:15 But the earlier governors-- those preceding me--placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.

Neh 5:16 Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

Neh 5:17 Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations.

Neh 5:18 Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

3.23 His intense faith in God and genuine piety were evidenced in his zeal for both the ethical and ceremonial side of religion. Above all, his devotion to duty, his untiring energy, and his determined persistence swept forward a group of men who had all but given up.

3.24 Nehemiah was a man of action, not one to sit down and wait for God to cause some supernatural event to pass. The desperate position of his people called for rather extreme measures without delay. Viewing the work of Nehemiah as a whole, he was truly God's man of the hour.

4. Esther. The author must have been a Jew who lived in Persia at the time of the events narrated and who had access to the official chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. Many believe it was Mordecai; the time of the writing was somewhere around 475 B.C. Let's review the Doctrine of Esther as our overview.

4.1 Xerxes I (486-465 B.C) had just lost the battle of Salamis. He turned his attention toward home. On the last night of a particularly debauched seven day festival the King calls for his queen, a lady named Vashti.

4.2 Vashti had heard tales of the boy's rogue like conduct and refused to come. The King was infuriated so he divorced his "Queen". What else could he do, he had to save face for he had called for her in the presence of all his Satraps. Est 1:1-22

4.3 A contest is held and a Miss Persia selected. Women in Persia, unless royalty, were treated a little better than animals, so maidens were herded to the Palace for the great contest.

4.4 Esther, a closet Jewish maiden, had lived with her cousin Mordecai, also a closet Jew, ever since her parents death. Esther was selected, making Mordecai very proud, he urged her to hide her true ethnicity.

4.5 Soon a couple of eunuchs named Bigthana and Teresh plotted to kill Xerxes but Mordecai found out about the plot and told Esther. The Queen told Xerxes, giving credit to Mordecai, and the plot was foiled. The two conspirators were hung on a tree; the custom was to impale them first and then hang them for show.

4.6 Mordecai was rewarded by being listed in the Chronicles of the King of Persia. His heroic act was recorded for posterity. Est 2:1-23

4.7 A Satrap named Haman, an Agagite, was promoted to the number two man in the Kingdom; the power of the new position went to his head. Haman made a rule that all must bow before him when he arrived for work at the Palace Gate.

4.8 This to Mordecai was unthinkable given the fact that such behavior was an acknowledgement, at least in the eyes of the Persians, that Haman was a god. Mordecai refused to bow and gave as his reason his Jewish heritage.

4.9 Haman informed the King of his confrontation. Keep in mind no one knew Esther was kin to Mordecai. Haman got permission from the King to have the man who refused to bow killed.

4.9.1 The King further gave his approval to have those of Mordecai's ethnos killed. An irrevocable proclamation was issued authorizing the killing of the troublemaker and all his fellow Jews. Est 3:1-15

4.10 Mordecai, in response to the proclamation mourned outside the gate, in sack cloth and ashes. Esther heard of his actions so she sent a messenger named Hatach to comfort Mordecai and to inquire what was wrong.

4.10.1 Mordecai gave Hatach details concerning Haman and his conversation with Xerxes. Mordecai sent a message to Esther urging her to go see the King and to plead the case of her people.

4.11 Esther is not too thrilled with Mordecai's plan and sends Hatach back with the message that only people who are summoned can go into the presence of the King. When unannounced people did arrive the King either would be pleased and permit an audience or the unannounced person would be executed.

4.12 When she protested that Mordecai's plan might prove fatal, Mordecai insists that this is her responsibility to God. Mordecai urges Esther to think clearly about two facts; first, her nationality will be found out ultimately and second, that both she and what is left of her family will be executed when it is known they are Jewish.

4.13 He further tells her that God is going to save Israel and she can either participate or not participate. She is also reminded that her being in the Harem with opportunity to save Israel may have been the sole reason why she was born into the Kingdom of God. Esther agrees to go if Mordecai and his friends will pray and fast for her.

4.14 The only possibility left open to Esther was to appear at the entrance of the throne room and hope for a gracious response from the king. This was for Esther a very dangerous plan even under the best of circumstances. Est 4:1-17

4.15 Fortunately the king graciously received Esther, even offering her half the Kingdom if she so desired. She very coyly asks for nothing except to host a banquet for both Xerxes and Haman.

4.15.1 At the banquet, rather than asking for deliverance of her people, she for whatever reason, asked instead that the two of them come to another banquet the next day.

4.16 Haman was overjoyed at the special invitation. He had to pass by the gate on his way home where Mordecai was lamenting and was angered once more when Mordecai did not bow.

4.17 Haman tells his family and friends what a great day he had; he was excited about the banquet with the King and Queen and the second invite. He also reveals his anger over the "jerk Mordecai" who just would not bow.

4.18 Haman's wife and friends suggest that he obtain permission from the king to hang Mordecai on gallows built right there in his own courtyard.

4.19 It would seem Esther's purpose in inviting the king and Haman to a 2nd private banquet, was to accuse Haman of plotting to destroy her people.

4.19.1 Although given her situation this was not a bad plan but with God involved He will make it a superb plan. Est 6:1-14

4.19.2 Why she didn't accuse Haman at the first banquet can only be conjectured? Maybe she was afraid but in hindsight we know it was God in action!

4.20 Unable to sleep that night, the king had the official chronicles read to him. One such chronicle told of Mordecai's unrewarded loyalty in exposing a plot against the king. It was no accident he could not sleep and it was no accident he read of Mordecai's exploits. God is in this thing, knee deep.

4.21 Haman arrived at the court to ask the King if he could hang Mordecai. He was preempted by Xerxes who asked Haman "what honors should be bestowed upon a favorite of the king?"

4.22 Thinking himself to be the King's favorite, and supposing Xerxes was going to give him special honor, he suggested a very elaborate celebration, only to be told later these honors were for a man named Mordecai, a Jew.

4.23 "Bring him ... through the street ... and give him a ticker tape parade" recommended Haman. And then those strange words from the mouth of the King: "Do even so to Mordecai" said the King to the surprised Haman.

4.24 Keep in mind a proclamation had been signed by Xerxes authorizing the death of Mordecai and all Jews. What was going on in the King's mind is unknown, what and if he knew and or remembered about his earlier proclamation is unknown.

4.24.1 I would conjecture he may have forgotten his earlier command to annihilate a complete race.

4.25 Being a fickle and forgetful monarch, he for whatever reason had failed to connect this latest desire with his earlier fiat or maybe he didn't recall the specifics of his earlier command to exterminate the Jews! Who knows - God may even have clouded his thinking.

4.26 Later, at the second banquet hosted by Esther, the King indicates he doesn't remember any edict to kill Mordecai and his "ethnos."

End Lesson