

## Nehemiah 1

### Verses 1- 3

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, *in* the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, <sup>2</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them about the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and disgrace, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire.”

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, *in* the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol,

The month Chislev corresponded to our November-December. It was the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Jewish sacred calendar.

See chart 105

| The Jewish Calendar                                                           |                |            |             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------|-------------|
| The Jews used two types of calendars                                          |                |            |             |
| The Civil: Used for kings, births, contracts & The Sacred: Used for festivals |                |            |             |
| Month Name                                                                    | Corresponds to | Civil Year | Sacred Year |
| Tishri                                                                        | Sep-Oct        | 1st        | 7th         |
| Heshvan                                                                       | Oct-Nov        | 2nd        | 8th         |
| Chislev                                                                       | Nov-Dec        | 3rd        | 9th         |
| Tebeth                                                                        | Dec-Jan        | 4th        | 10th        |
| Shebat                                                                        | Jan-Feb        | 5th        | 11th        |
| Adar                                                                          | Feb-Mar        | 6th        | 12th        |
| Nisan                                                                         | Mar-Apr        | 7th        | 1st         |
| Iyar                                                                          | Apr-May        | 8th        | 2nd         |
| Sivan                                                                         | May-Jun        | 9th        | 3rd         |
| Tammuz                                                                        | Jun-Jul        | 10th       | 4th         |
| Ab                                                                            | Jul-Aug        | 11th       | 5th         |
| Elul                                                                          | Aug-Sep        | 12th       | 6th         |

The 20th year of Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) was 445 B.C.

See chart 110

| Kings of Persia                 |              | 559 to 358 BC              |      |
|---------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|------|
| King                            | Reign        | Event                      | Year |
| Darius                          | 539 - 537    |                            |      |
| Cyrus                           | 537-529      | Cyrus releases Jews        | 537  |
| Cambyses                        | 529-522      |                            |      |
| Smerdis (Bardiya)               | 522 BC       |                            |      |
| Darius I (Hystaspes)            | 521-486      | Second temple dedicated    | 516  |
| Xerxes I (Ahashuerus)           | 485-465      |                            |      |
| Artaxerxes (Longimanus)         | 465-424      | Nehemiah rebuilds the wall | 445  |
| Xerxes II                       | 424          |                            |      |
| Sogdianus of Persia             | 424 – 423 BC |                            |      |
| Darius II (Nothus)              | 423-405      |                            |      |
| Artaxerxes (Mnemon)             | 404-359      |                            |      |
| Artaxerxes III of Persia Ochus  | 358 – 338 BC |                            |      |
| Arses of Persia (Artaxerxes IV) | 338 – 336 BC |                            |      |
| Darius III of Persia Codomannus | 336 – 330 BC |                            |      |

Susa served as a winter capital for the Persian Empire. It was located east of the river Tigris and near the head of the Persian Gulf. The place where Esther became Xerxes' queen in 478 BC

See Map 115



<sup>2</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them about the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

The number of years that had passed from the destruction of the temple in 586 BC until Nehemiah asked this question about the fate of Jerusalem (445 BC) was 141 years.

<sup>3</sup> And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and disgrace, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire.”



The temple was rebuilt 71 years ago but the wall had never been rebuilt since Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it. There had been an effort to rebuild the wall but that was stopped during the reign of Xerxes.

See chart 120

| Exile to Babylon and return to Jerusalem |             |           |                  |
|------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------------|
| Events                                   |             | Year      |                  |
| Deportation to Babylon                   | 1st         | 605       |                  |
| Deportation to Babylon                   | 2nd         | 597       |                  |
| Deportation to Babylon                   | 3rd         | 586       | Temple destroyed |
| Cyrus releases Jews                      | 1st Return  | 537       |                  |
| Second temple begun                      |             | 536       |                  |
| Work stopped                             | 15 years    | 536 - 520 | 70 years         |
| Haggai                                   |             | 520       |                  |
| Zechariah                                |             | 520-518   |                  |
| Work begins again                        |             | 520       |                  |
| Second temple dedicated                  |             | 516       | Temple completed |
| Accusation against Judah                 | Ezra 4:6    | 485       |                  |
| Esther becomes queen                     |             | 479       |                  |
| Work on the wall stopped                 | Ezra 4:7-23 | 465-445   | 71 years         |
| Ezra sent to Jerusalem                   | 2nd return  | 458       |                  |
| Nehemiah rebuilds the wall               | 3rd return  | 445       | Wall completed   |
| Nehemiah's 2nd return                    |             | 430       |                  |

It is interesting that the temple was completed 70 years after it was destroyed and the wall around Jerusalem was completed 70 years after the temple was finished.

Verses 4 – 11

<sup>4</sup> Now 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. <sup>5</sup> I said, “Please, Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps the covenant and faithfulness for those who love Him and keep His commandments: <sup>6</sup> 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 committed against You; I and my father’s house have sinned. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Remember, please, the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; <sup>9</sup> 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 bring them to the place where I have chosen to have My name dwell.’ <sup>10</sup> They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. <sup>11</sup> Please, Lord, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and please make Your servant successful today and grant him mercy before this man.”

<sup>4</sup> Now 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

Nehemiah was a prominent and trusted member of the king's court but he could not forget that he was an Israelite. Moses had a similar experience when he was 40 years old and killed an Egyptian who was mistreating (beating) a fellow Israelite.

See Exodus 2:11-12

<sup>11</sup> Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his fellow Hebrews and looked at their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his fellow Hebrews. <sup>12</sup> So he looked this way and that, and when he saw that there was no one around, he struck and killed the Egyptian, and hid his body in the sand.

This event caused Moses to flee to Midian where he would spend the next 40 years in the wilderness caring for his father-in-law’s sheep. He would then lead the children of Israel into the wilderness and spend another 40 years in the wilderness.

<sup>7</sup> **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.** <sup>8</sup> Remember, please, the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, **'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples;** <sup>9</sup> **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 bring them to the place where I have chosen to have My name dwell.'**

When Nehemiah says **we** have acted corruptly, he is referring to the Jewish people as a whole. There were always some faithful people among the population but as a whole the Jewish people rejected God and His laws.

Nehemiah calls on God to remember the words of Moses, hoping that God might help His people who are currently living in Jerusalem but having a very difficult time.

See Deuteronomy 30:1- 6

**"So it will be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have placed before you, and you call *them* to mind in all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you, <sup>2</sup> and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul in accordance with everything that I am commanding you today, you and your sons, <sup>3</sup> then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. <sup>4</sup> If any of your scattered *countrymen* are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. <sup>5</sup> The Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will be good to you and make you more numerous than your fathers.**

<sup>10</sup> They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. <sup>11</sup> Please, Lord, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and **please make Your servant successful today and grant him mercy before this man.**

Nehemiah also prays that God will grant him mercy before the king because without the king's permission, Nehemiah could not return to Jerusalem. There was also a personal risk to Nehemiah because Artaxerxes had already accepted the charge of the Samaritans that Jerusalem was a bad and rebellious city and Nehemiah's request would involve asking the king to rescind his prior decree.

See chart 125

| Kings of Persia         |            | 559 to 330 BC                       |           |
|-------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| King                    | Reign (BC) | Events                              | Year      |
| Xerxes I (Ahashuerus)   | 485-465    |                                     |           |
|                         | Ezra 4:6   | Samaritians send letter to the king | 485       |
|                         |            | Esther becomes queen                | 479       |
| Artaxerxes (Longimanus) | 465-424    |                                     |           |
|                         | Ezra 4:7   | Samaritians send letter to the king | 465 - 460 |
|                         | Ezra 4:12  | Jews working on the wall            | 465 - 460 |
|                         | Ezra 4:23  | Work stopped shortly after it began | 465 - 460 |
|                         | 2nd return | Ezra sent to Jerusalem              | 458       |
|                         | 3rd return | Nehemiah rebuilds the wall          | 445       |
|                         |            | Nehemiah's 2nd return               | 430       |
| Xerxes II               | 424        |                                     |           |

This was mentioned in the Book of Ezra.

See Ezra 4:16, 23

<sup>16</sup> **We are informing the king that if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, then as a result of this you will have no possession in *the province* beyond the *Euphrates River*.**"

<sup>23</sup> **Then as soon as the copy of King Artaxerxes' decree was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their colleagues, they went in a hurry to Jerusalem to the Jews and stopped them by military force.**