

AUGUST 11

Nehemiah 1:1-3:14

Who were the three *shortest men in the Bible*? A: Knee-high My yah, Bildad the shoe-height (Shuhite), and the man who fell asleep “on his watch.”

So, in Ezra, we read about the building of the temple and the intervention that kept the people from making themselves unable to worship God. Now we look at the building of the city and organizing of the government. Ezra will appear there too, when the wall is dedicated.

The rebuilding of the city is very important for biblical prophecy. The book of Daniel had already been written, and in it Gabriel says that the 70 weeks that lead to God fulfilling His plan with the Jews will begin with the decree to rebuild the city, not the temple. That is a small, but huge, point. What Nehemiah is about to do will start the clock ticking. The decree was issued on March 5, 444 B.C.

Don't forget the charts, “The Three Returns from Exile,” and “Chronology of the Postexilic Period.”

Nehemiah 1

The most striking thing in this chapter is Nehemiah's prayer. It shows that he was well read, devout and knew both the warnings at the end of Deuteronomy and Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple. During the time in Babylon, the synagogue system and a tradition of teaching and copying the OT came into being. Nehemiah apparently was a very serious follower of God.

Vs. 1-3 This happened about 14 years after Ezra. The people had been back in Jerusalem about 96 years. It is hard to know what God had been doing in Nehemiah's heart, but this news certainly was a disappointment.

Hanani was apparently Nehemiah's brother, as in they had the same mother. We'll see him again in 7:2.

Vs. 4-11 Notice that in vs. 4-7, Nehemiah confessed his sins and the sins of his fathers. The men who interceded for Israel identified with their sin and their need. The example of someone who actually prayed this prayer was Daniel, 100 years earlier. Today as we pray for the lost, we need to have that sense of pleading to God for them as one of them. We still have that sickness within us, but we have received grace and God's life and Spirit.

Vs. 8-11 Here Nehemiah is appealing to God's mercy on the basis of His promises. It appears that he knew Deuteronomy pretty well.

The cupbearer might have been like the chief butler/organizer of the palace. He might have been responsible for all palace staff and particularly for the kitchen and all the food and drink. When we see what Nehemiah does, it is apparent that he has skills.

Nehemiah 2

Vs. 1-8 Since Nehemiah's prayer, four months have gone by. At this point in time, Artaxerxes had a favorable view of the Jews. He had sent Ezra to Jerusalem 14 years earlier. The prohibition to rebuilding the city had been well before that. The Persian Empire was still living in the afterglow of the book of Esther. Now, his very trusted and respected officer was asking to rebuild Jerusalem. Why all this came to a head now is only known by the Lord. In His plan, the time was right.

V. 6 It is apparently an important point that the queen was there. She would not have been invited to a public event. This might have just been the two of them eating, before they spent the rest of the night watching TV.

Vs. 7-8 Nehemiah had thought this through for four months. Since there was opposition, he would need the king's authority and provision to show the local leaders that this was sanctioned and commanded by the king.

At this point the command is made to rebuild the city. Daniel's 70 weeks begin.

Vs. 9-10 Nehemiah's first stop was to the government offices, which were apparently in Samaria. When you see all the opposition that came out of Samaria, both to the building of the temple and the rebuilding of the city, it is easy to see why the Jews had this irrational feud with the Samaritans. There is evidence that Sanballat was the governor of Samaria. There was already opposition to rebuilding the wall. They might have been impressed with the command of Artaxerxes, but I'll bet knowing Nehemiah was a cupbearer didn't impress them.

Vs. 11-16 So, this opposition is one of the reasons Nehemiah went out at night. Notice that Nehemiah waited three days before getting to work. That's the same thing Ezra did.

Vs. 17-20 Nehemiah didn't just present a vision, he presented a plan. He also showed how the hand of God was working. Gene Getz does Nehemiah in the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 678, and he has a list of what Nehemiah did right in presenting this challenge to the leaders.

V. 18 Notice that here and in v. 8, Nehemiah mentions the *hand of my God*. Both Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28) and Nehemiah were aware that their success was a result of the Lord's prompting and working. It explains why both men were very humble and why we have no negatives recorded against them. As disciples, it is good for us to remember too, that even the promptings of heart we receive are no credit to us. They are from the Lord and we are only His servants following Him in the harvest.

Vs. 19-20 And, as normal, there was opposition from the local government in Samaria. Notice that Nehemiah seems to have addressed these men personally.

Nehemiah 3:1-14

Notice that not everyone repaired opposite his own house. What was brilliant was that the work was divided so quickly and the people dove in. It was a miracle. If we knew the city, it would probably be apparent to us that these sections are being given in some linear order, counter-clockwise. The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT has a map on p. 679, "Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah." It's also located at the end of this document.

V. 1 It is interesting that the high priest began the building, and that the gate was the sheep gate. This is where they brought in the sheep from the surrounding hills for sacrifice at the temple.

V. 12 This guy and his daughters worked.

V. 14 God promised that the Rechabites (Jer. 35:19) would always have a believing man who would stand before Him.

For us as disciples motivating others in the harvest, there is a good lesson here. Vision is great. Vision with a plan is better. Sometimes people don't get involved because they don't know where to start or how their work makes a contribution to the whole.

1 Corinthians 7:1-24

Now for the questions the Corinthians had for Paul.

V. 1 This is a very unfortunate translation. *Sexual relations* shouldn't be there. It is not in the Greek text and isn't necessarily implied in the text. The translator was trying to fill in the sense of the meaning, but the word is "touch." The word has a few meanings and one of them is "ignite,"

in the active voice, but this is the middle voice (It's Greek to me too.) and so “touch” is the better rendering. Growing up in Milwaukee, it was common knowledge that girls had cooties and if you touched them you’d get cooties too. Paul's intent may be that a guy shouldn't start anything that would begin arousing feelings.

Also, the translator makes it seem as if Paul is quoting someone. In the entire context of chapter 7, we'll see that Paul is being led to say what he says because of the distress the Corinthian church was facing.

One of the stylistic things that Paul does is seen clearly in this chapter. Often in one sentence or clause, Paul will refer to men and then women; and in the next clause begin with women and then men and so again, men and women, beginning with the person he referred to last. He did this referring to Apollos and himself earlier and he does it in 1 Timothy 2-3, when he talks about men and women again. That's just trivia for now.

Vs. 2-5 There is some interesting teaching in this passage. Notice that the answer to sexual passion was a spouse, not a partner. Marriage is God's plan. Also, there is no room here for homosexuality. Like every other sexual sin, homosexuality is a violation of God's plan, design and will.

Vs. 3-4 Since the context is talking about the sexual relationship, God appears to be saying that husbands and wives need to care for each other's sexual needs. Verse 4 adds the sense of not withholding sexual fulfillment from one another, and it adds a sense of respecting the other person. This verse has led to some funny marital conversations.

V. 5 The way to understand this is that married couples should be having regular sexual relationships. God made this for couples to experience one flesh and completion. It is built into us. To deny it or to neglect this need is to ask for trouble. If God's view of being one flesh were understood, pornography and other sexual dysfunctions in Christian marriages wouldn't be the problem they are today. Since God is addressing this issue, married people need to treat sexuality with the respect and caution it deserves.

Vs. 6-9 At this point in his life, Paul was single. Some people speculate that he might have been married as a younger man, but lost his wife. To understand Paul's feeling toward marriage here, skip ahead to v. 26. The Roman world was beginning to go to seed. And, particularly regarding the Jews, a massive storm of judgment was on the horizon for the generation that crucified Jesus. In 70 A.D. Jerusalem would be destroyed along with the temple, and there would be a massive persecution of the Jews. Just before that, Nero would lose his mind, and many Christians would be promoted to permanent residence in heaven. Paul and the Spirit could see this on the horizon, and perhaps there was something very specific happening in Corinth. Paul knew that if the people were married, it might create fear and dividedness in their hearts bearing up under the persecution. Tomorrow in v. 36 Paul will suggest waiting to marry, but then say that if you can't wait, get married.

Vs. 10-11 This means that Paul had a copy of Mark, or other words of Jesus where Jesus talked about marriage and divorce. Paul is referring to Jesus' command not to divorce. This command refers to marriages between believers.

Vs. 12-16 What Paul is saying here is a command of the Lord, but it is not something Jesus said that was recorded in one of the Gospels. While the Corinthians were going through some kind of distress which affected the context of these words, the application was broader. In a marriage where one spouse comes to faith and the other remains unbelieving and wants out, the divorce should be allowed. Under Nero and the Roman persecutions, Christians were targeted. Association with a Christian might have meant death too. If the unbelieving spouse desired to get out of the relationship, the brother or sister was not bound to deny the divorce.

Vs. 17-24 Again, this is best understood in view of v. 26. Paul is telling everyone, married or unmarried, to put on their helmets and batten down the hatches. This would have been advice not only in the area of marriage, but job, moving, or making any other change in one's life.

V. 17 Notice that Paul reminded the Corinthians that he is not singling them out and giving them a tougher command than he would give any other church. This is what Paul taught in all the churches.

Psalm 31:19-24

This is the final installment of Psalm 31. It is all about the praise David learned to give, not for the quick, massive deliverance he and all of us would want, but for the daily blessings and the little escapes. The Lord keeps us on our knees because we need to learn of Him.

Vs. 19-20 Notice David's characteristic mentions of *refuge*, being covered and hidden in God's *presence*, and being in God's *shelter*. This was where David found peace in his thinking. It is also the reason why he wanted the ark and the temple close to him.

Vs. 21-22 This is David's hallmark, the *steadfast love* of the Lord. Notice that v. 22 tells us how David learned of God's *steadfast love*.

Vs. 23-24 These verses feed my heart.

Proverbs 21:4

I guess *the lamp* is the view of *the wicked* or the things that guide the wicked as they think and make decisions. I'm glad that by God's grace we have a better lamp.