

NEHEMIAH

SETTING PRIORITIES - BUILDING UP PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

A. Review

1. Nehemiah saw the need because he was a man under authority
 - a. He had a proper view of God
 - b. He sought a proper relationship to God.
 - 1) Through prayer
 - 2) Through knowledge of the Word of God.
 - 3) Through obedience to the Word of God.
2. Nehemiah personally responded to meet the need.

B. The need revealed (1:1-3), *The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They replied, "The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire."*

1. Nehemiah had visitors from Judea.
2. He had two concerns.
 - a. How were the Jews who had escaped and survived the captivity?
 - b. What about Jerusalem?
3. He received two replies.
 - a. The Jewish remnant was in great distress and reproach.
 - 1) Only the poorest of Jerusalem's people were left behind, the rest led off as captives to distant Babylon.
 - 2) They had to think their present condition was due to disobedience prophesied by Jeremiah, 1:14-16.
 - 3) If God was against them, who could be for them?
 - b. The wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates were burned with fire.
 - 1) It was unsafe and unprofitable.
 - 2) The City of David was a disgrace that did not honor their covenant God.

C. The response of a leader

1. Nehemiah was compassionate (1:4), *When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*
2. He was under authority (1:5-6), *I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned.*
3. He accepted responsibility (1:7), *We have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses.*
4. He was a man of faith (1:8-10), *Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, '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 your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.' They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand.*
5. He was a man of action (1:11), *O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!" At the time, I was cupbearer to the king.*

NEHEMIAH - COVENANT BUILDER

- A. His primary purpose - affirm the covenant, chapters 1 - 7
1. The broken down wall pictured the state of the covenant.
 - a. The Jewish people were in great distress and reproach.
 - b. They wondered if there was any hope of political and religious restoration.
 2. Nehemiah started with the wall but his concern was for the covenant.
 - a. A strong wall would picture not only physical protection but also separation of people from foreign influence.
 - b. A rebuilt Jerusalem with a renewed people would declare the role of Israel as God's covenant people among the nations of the earth.
 - c. He sought volunteers to move into it so that it might have the size and splendor worthy of the capital of the theocratic kingdom, Nehemiah 11.
- B. His greatest task - build up the people of God, chapters 8 - 13
1. Confirm the covenant through genealogical lists
 - a. Legitimize the returnees as part of the covenant.
 - b. Remind the people of their link to the line of promise that originated in Abraham and would continue forever.
 - c. The lists included lineages of priests, Levities, and other religious groups necessary for the theocratic kingdom, Nehemiah 7:39-56.
 2. Obey covenant commands
 - 1) Mixed marriages (10:30), *We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons;*
 - 2) Sabbath rest (10:31a), *and if the peoples of the land bring in merchandise or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy it from them on the sabbath or on a holy day;*
 - 3) Land rest (10:31b), *and we will forego the crops of the seventh year*
 - 4) Cancel debts (10:31c), *and the exaction of every debt.*
 - 5) Support God's work
 - a) Committed giving (10:32-33), *We also lay on ourselves the obligation to charge ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the rows of bread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed festivals, the sacred donations, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.*
 - b) Directed giving (10:39), *For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the storerooms where the vessels of the sanctuary are, and where the priests that minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers are. We will not neglect the house of our God.*
 3. Worship their covenant God
 - a. Daily reading of the Law, chapter 8
 - 1) The people were enthusiastic, attentive, and responsive (1-8)
 - 2) They applied the Word to their lives (9-12)
 - b. Observance of holy times, Feast of Tabernacles, 8:13-18
 - 1) The first time since the time of Joshua, more than 800 years ago.
 - 2) It was to be a reminder of their indebtedness to God.
 - 3) They were and still are a pilgrim people.
 - c. Rededication, chapter 9
 - 1) The covenant was intact but the people needed to repent (1-4), *Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. Then those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors. They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth part of the day, and for another fourth they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God. Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God.*

- 2) A history of the covenant relationship (9:5-35).
 - 3) God initiated the covenant (9:5-6).
 - a) His dealings with His people from the time of Abraham (9:7-35).
 - b) Confession of the covenant people (9:36-37), *Here we are, slaves to this day—slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts. Its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins; they have power also over our bodies and over our livestock at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.*”
 - 4) The covenant people reaffirmed their allegiance to the covenant (9:38), *Because of all this we make a firm agreement in writing, and on that sealed document are inscribed the names of our officials, our Levites, and our priests.*
 - a) The post-exilic community was small but God is great.
 - b) He is faithful despite unfaithfulness of His people.
 - c) Nehemiah’s greatest accomplishment was building up the people.
 - 5) A clear view of God, chapter 9
 - a) He is the eternal God (9:5), *Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.”*
 - b) He is the unique creator God (9:6), *And Ezra said: “You are the LORD, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you.*
 - c) He is a promise keeper (9:7-8), *You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham; and you found his heart faithful before you, and made with him a covenant to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite; and you have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous.*
 - d) He is a protector (9:9-12), *And you saw the distress of our ancestors in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea. You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted insolently against our ancestors. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. And you divided the sea before them, so that they passed through the sea on dry land, but you threw their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. Moreover, you led them by day with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire, to give them light on the way in which they should go.*
 - e) He is a lawmaker (9:13-15), *You came down also upon Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known your holy sabbath to them and gave them commandments and statutes and a law through your servant Moses. For their hunger you gave them bread from heaven, and for their thirst you brought water for them out of the rock, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you swore to give them.*
 - f) He is merciful (9:16-18), *But they and our ancestors acted presumptuously and stiffened their necks and did not obey your commandments; they refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them; but they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them. Even when they had cast an image of a calf for themselves and said, ‘This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,’ and had committed great blasphemies,*
 - g) He is compassionate (note 9:19-25).
 - h) He is patient (note 9:26-31).
 - i) He is faithful (note 9:32-37).
- d. Celebration (note 12:27-47)

CONCLUSION

- A. Building projects demand great leadership skills.
- B. Building up people demands a commitment to them as the priority.
- C. Leaders are called to serve those they lead.