

RUNNING ON JOY
A STUDY OF NEHEMIAH
Part 1 - Nehemiah's world

Let's talk about it:

- 1) If you had the chance to return (permanently) to your ancestral homeland, would you?
- 2) Why were temples seen as "high value targets"?
- 3) When are "thoughts and prayers" an inadequate response to a situation?

I) In the days of Nehemiah, governor of Judah

A) Meanwhile, back at the ranch....

- 1) Ezra is often studied along with Nehemiah - kind of form one unit
 - Ezra returned from Susa (Persia) 12 years earlier to rebuild the Temple
 - Ezra was the priest, so political / civic affairs was not his arena
 - The Temple was rebuilt by Nehemiah's time, but the city was still in ruins
- 2) The prophet Malachi was also prophesying during this time
- 3) These three books represent the end of the Old Testament (mid 400's BC)

B) Who's on the throne (All years BC)

- 1) 722 - Samaria falls to the Assyrians (Northern Kingdom of Israel wiped out)
 - * Most men of fighting age / ability killed
 - * Women and children taken to Nineveh as slaves
 - * Jonah sent to Nineveh to preach repentance
- 2) 722- 710
 - * Assyrians settle in conquered Israel and rebuild Samaria
 - * Much intermingling of peoples and religions in the former Northern Kingdom
 - * Aramaic becomes the *lingua franca* (common tongue)
- 3) 612-609 Babylonian conquest
 - * Babylon allies with the Medes and overthrows Assyrian overlords
 - * Battle of Harran in 609 was the "nail in the coffin" for Assyrian Empire
- 4) 609-539 Babylonian Empire
 - * If tribute was paid, Babylon didn't bother Palestine
 - * Samaria was a Babylonian ally (paid tribute, provided military forces, etc)
 - * 594-587 > Jerusalem rebels and is destroyed
 - Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the walls of Jerusalem in 589 and took many Jews, like Daniel, as exiles / hostages to Babylon
 - 587 Johoiachim revolts (again) and Jerusalem is sacked and Temple destroyed
 - All influential Jews deported to Babylon (unskilled / uneducated can stay)
 - * Isaiah ends and Jeremiah begins during this Babylonian time
 - * 539 Cyrus of Persia (and Mede) defeats Babylonians at battle of Opis
- 5) 539 - 331 Persian rule
 - * Cyrus issued decree in 537 allowing Jews to return to Jerusalem
 - * 521 -486 time of Darius I and Daniel (lion's den)
 - * 485-465 time of Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) and Queen Esther (Haddasah)
 - * 485-465 Xerxes I reign

- Ezra given permission to return and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem
- * Jerusalem remains under Persian occupation (garrisoned)
- * Greco-Persian wars begin
 - in 490 Darius I was defeated at the battle of Marathon, died in 486
 - in 480 Xerxes invaded Greece (Thermopylae & burning of Athens)
 - Straits of Salamis (480) wiped out Persian navy and Xerxes withdrew
- * 464 - 424 reign of Artaxerxes I
 - Time of Nehemiah & Malachi
 - Artaxerxes gives Nehemiah permission to rebuild Jerusalem
 - * this overturned a ruling by Xerxes against the rebuilding of the walls
 - Rebuilding the city walls (2 miles) and gates (8) took just 52 days
 - Not much trouble with the Greeks during his reign
 - had a revolt in Egypt to put down (Judah the land bridge to Egypt from Persia)

C) Samaritan opposition

- 1) Samaria (and Galilee) was a satrap (province) of the Persian Empire
- 2) Samaria grew into the major local power during the Exile
 - Kind of like NYC vs. NY Metro
 - Was “repopulated” with people from Aram (Syria / Assyria)
 - Developed their own religion and culture and Aramaic replaced Hebrew
 - When Babylon defeat Assyria, Samaria became a vassal to Babylon
 - When Babylon was defeated by Persia, Samaria simply switched fealty
- 3) Broke away from the Aaronic / Levitical line
 - Mt Gerazim (Shechem) was the center for religion with its own temple
 - Mt. Gerazim and Mt. Zion were in a power struggle for religious center
 - Temples to many other gods and goddesses scattered throughout Samaritan lands
- 4) How the Persians treated these satraps / vassal “kingdoms”
 - Pay your taxes and keep trade flowing = no problems
 - Often left to their own devices (functionally self-governing) under Persian “princes”
 - Samaria too small for a governor / Persian born “prince”
 - Were *supposed* to enact / follow the decrees of the Emperor
- 5) Because of Judah’s exile and destruction, Samaria sort of “usurped” Judahite lands
- 6) Samaritans were / are “mixed” religiously and ceremonially
 - Kept many of the same feasts as their Judahite counterparts (esp. Succoth)
 - Dietary laws were greatly relaxed (Samaritans ate shellfish - Phoenician influence)
 - Pork was common in the more “Gentile” areas such as Galilee
- 7) Returning Jews did not accept Samaritans, Samaritans did not like Jews

D) Breakdown of the Book (and the study)

- 1) Return - Chapters 1 & 2
- 2) Rebuild - Chapters 3 - 7:4
- 3) Repent - Chapters 8 - 10
- 4) Restore - Chapters 11 - 13

For next week read chapters 1 & 2 of Nehemiah and Ezra 4:7-24

RUNNING ON JOY
A STUDY OF NEHEMIAH
Part 2 - the Return

Let's talk:

- 1) What wine do you serve with pork?
- What is a *sommelier*? Have you ever used one?
- 2) What makes a house a home?
- 3) What types / kinds / styles of prayer are there?

II) Jerusalem, my happy home, when shall I come to thee?

A) Who was Nehemiah?

- 1) name means "God is my comfort" (nhm + y + [Yah]weh)
- 2) Not much is known of his personal life (age, wife / kids, etc)
- 3) Lived in the mid to early 400's BC ("time stamp of 1:1 = 445 BC)

B) A man of prayer

- 1) 5 prayers are given in the book and many other mentions of prayers
- 2) Prayer for Jerusalem (part E) in 1:5-11a is the longest
- 3) There are also *impreccatory* prayers
 - * **3:36-37**
 - * **6:14**
 - * **13:29**
- 4) There are also *benedictory* prayers
 - * **2:4**
 - * **5:13**
 - * **6:9**
 - * **13:14, 22, 31**
- 5) Most of these prayers are very short / spontaneous
 - How does this fit in with Paul's words in **I Thessalonians 5:17**
- 6) Nehemiah's prayers are always followed by actions related to said prayers
 - do we ever forget the "go and do likewise" part of prayer?
 - Luther's "comical" explanation to the 4th petition
- 7) Most of his prayers are personal (Ezra was the priest), yet also corporate

C) Now I was cupbearer to the King (1:11b)

- 1) The first mention of cupbearer in the Bible is Pharaoh in the days of Joseph
- 2) Today we would call him a wine steward or sommelier
 - * Knew what the king (and family) liked to drink - white, red, rose, dry, sweet?
 - * Oversaw the management of the wine stores and what was served at banquets
- 3) Had access to the king, even in private chambers (very close relationship)
- 4) Attended all banquets, feasts, and other royal gatherings where wine was served
- 5) Chosen for loyalty and trustworthiness (part of inner circle)
- 6) A very influential person at court; often consulted on political matters

- 7) Chief function was to make sure wine wasn't poisoned
 - what does this say about Jesus prayer in Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:39**)
 - poisoning was the primary form of assassination in the ancient world

D) I've got some bad news (1:1-3)

- 1) The month of Chislev would also become important under the Maccabees
- 2) Susa was the winter capital of Persia (summered in Babylon by the rivers)
- 3) Hanani is likely a biological brother as seen from 7:2
- 4) Who is Nehemiah inquiring about?

5) What had happened in 587 BC according to **Jeremiah 52:14**?

6) Why would a deserted city need a wall? (**Ezra 6:13-18**)

7) How does **Ezra 4:23-24** shed light on this "news"?

E) Let us pray (4-11a)

- 1) What accompanied Nehemiah's prayers?
 - How do we prepare for prayer?
 - How long did do this?
- 2) How does Nehemiah begin his prayer?
 - How do these characteristics / attributes of God affect the main part of his prayer?
 - What is a covenant?
 - Why would this be an important part of his prayer?
- 3) How has Nehemiah sinned against the Lord?
 - Is sin individual or corporate?
 - How can he be suffering for sins which he, himself, did not commit?
- 4) How did verses 8-9 come to pass?
- 5) What "redemption" is being spoken of in verse 10?
- 6) What is the "petition" Nehemiah is praying for?
- 7) Who is the "this man" in verse 11a?

F) A conversation with the King (2:1-8)

- 1) How many months is there from Chislev to Nissn?
- 2) Who initiated the conversation? Why?
- 3) How did the king see the "ask" in Nehemiah's statement?
- 4) What does Nehemiah do before "letting the cat out of the bag"?
- 5) What is the king's concern with losing his cup bearer?
- 6) What else does Nehemiah ask for?
- 7) Why was the king favorably disposed to Nehemiah?

G) On the road again (2:9-10)

- 1) What was Nehemiah's first stop? Why?
- 2) Why were Sanballat and Tobiah upset? (More on them later)
- 3) Who else came with Nehemiah? What does this tell us about Nehemiah?

H) Initial inspection (2:11-16)

- 1) How long was Nehemiah in Jerusalem before he "got to work"?
- 2) Why did Nehemiah do the first survey at night?
- 3) Why did he not tell anyone what he was up to?

I) Motivational speech (2:17-20)

- 1) What was the reaction of the leaders of Judah?
- 2) What was the reaction of Jerusalem's neighbors?
- 3) Why would those who opposed rebuilding have no share in Jerusalem?

Next week: Rebuilding - Chapters 3 & 4 and 6:19-7:4

RUNNING ON JOY
A STUDY OF NEHEMIAH
PART 3 - REBUILDING

Let's talk:

- 1) How many ways into and out of your house are there?
 - * How many doors (including interior)?
 - * How tall are your doorways?
- 2) What would be the process if Nehemiah were to build today?
- 3) Why do building projects seldom get completed on time / on budget?

III) Rebuilding the walls (chapters 3&4, 6:18-7:4)

A) Repair teams (see appendix)

- 1) How many teams of builders did Nehemiah organize?
- 2) How were they assigned?
- 3) What areas did the priestly class work on?
- 4) Why did Nehemiah have each “team” work by their own ancestral houses (3:10)
- 5) How many gates were repaired / rebuilt?
- 6) What are the boundaries listed in the work orders
 - 3:16 (and Acts 2:29)
 - 2:14
 - 2 Samuel 23:8-39
- 7) How far did they get before opposition set in? (3:38)

B) “Put down your trowels and take up your swords” - Gandalf (4:1-17)

- 1) Why were the “neighbors” upset by this building project? (3:33-34)
- 2) How did they first try to halt construction? (3:35)
- 3) What was Nehemiah’s response? (3:36-37)
- 4) How did things “escalate”? (4:1-6)
- 5) What did Nehemiah and the leaders do to mitigate this “threat”? (4:7-12)
- 6) What was the problem with this defensive strategy? (4:13-14)
- 7) What does it mean that they “never took off their clothes”? (4:17)

C) Internal divisions threatening the work (5:1-19)

- 1) What was the social problem besetting Nehemiah's work force?
- 2) What was Nehemiah's accusation?
- 3) Was this acceptable according to God's Law?
 - Leviticus 25:35-37
 - Exodus 21:7-11
- 4) What was the reaction of the ruling class?
- 5) Why did Nehemiah summon the priests?
- 6) How is "the fear of God {the LORD}" a motivator for proper conduct?
 - is this Law or Gospel?
- 7) How did Nehemiah "lead y example"?

D) It's a trap! (6:1-14)

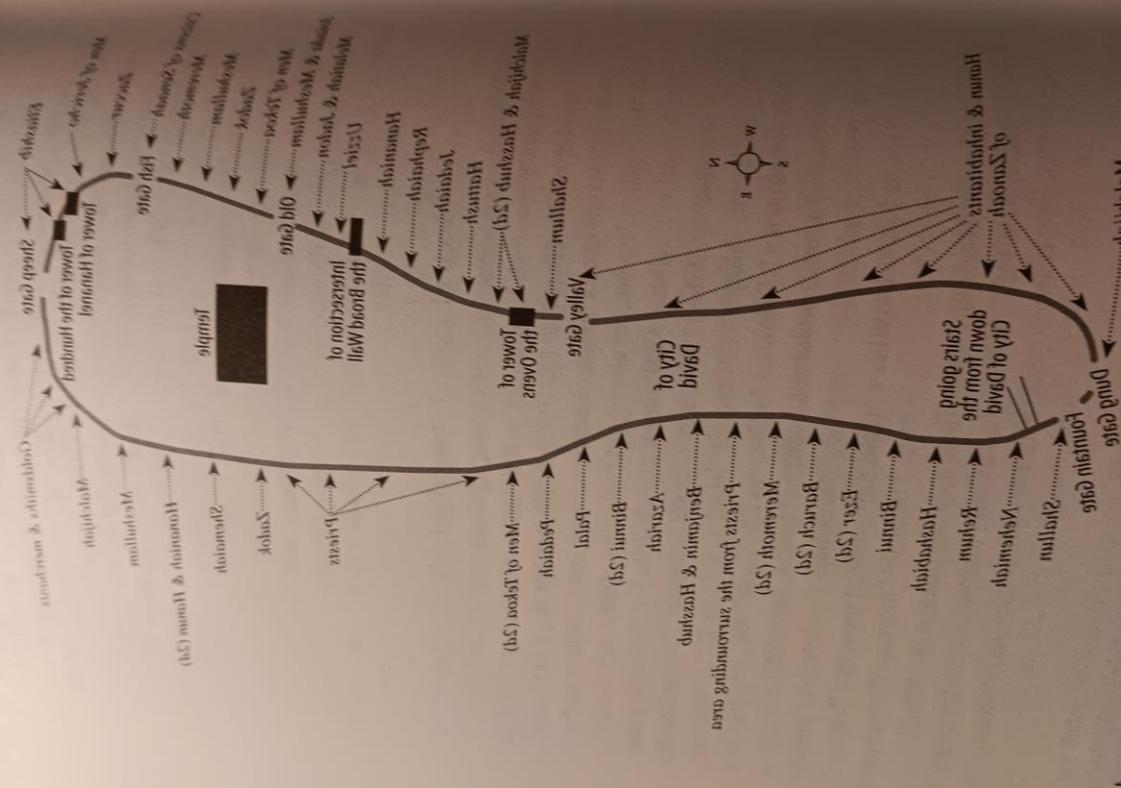
- 1) What was the alleged reason for the meeting?
- 2) What would have happened had Nehemiah stopped working on the wall?
- 3) How many times did Israel's enemies try this ruse?
- 4) What was Nehemiah encouraged to do?
- 5) Why would this cause a scandal?
- 6) What would happen if Nehemiah was harmed?
- 7) What do we call verse 14?

E) The Capstone is laid (6:15-19)

- 1) How long did it take to rebuild the wall?
- 2) What was the connection between Tobiah and the Judean nobles?
- 3) Why could Tobiah not be trusted?

For next week: Repentance (Nehemiah 7-10)

Highways of Jerusalem's Wall under Nebuchadnezzar



David of Nebuchadnezzar, figure 4.

RUNNING ON JOY
A STUDY OF NEHEMIAH
PART 4 - REPENTANCE (CHAPTERS 7-10)

We need to talk:

- 1) How do you know when you've done something wrong?
- 2) What does repentance have to do with joy?
- 3) What does it mean to be "a holy people" (I Peter 2:9)

IV) Repentance and renewal

A) The right man for the job - vocations in Nehemiah 7:1-72

- 1) What is a "vocation"?
- 2) Can you have more than one vocation?
- 3) Why is it important to have the right person in the right vocation at the right time?
- 4) Why do we take roll call at voters' meetings and other times?
- 5) Why dedicate so much ink and paper to a roll call?
 - * These are the lists of exiles who returned in 533 and their offspring
- 6) What are some of the vocations listed in this chapter?
- 7) Is anyone living in Jerusalem yet? (Verse 73)

B) The reading of the Law (8:1-8)

- 1) How long had it been since the people heard the Law of the Lord?
- 2) How was this a fitting "inauguration" to the rebuilt city?
- 3) Why would the people need to hear and understand the Law before the walls (and hence the rebuilt city) could be dedicated?
- 4) The "seventh month" (Tishri) was an important festival month
 - * The feast of trumpets on 1 Tishri (Num. 29:1-6) now called Rosh Hashanah
 - * Yom Kippur (Day of atonement) on 10 Tishri (Num. 29:7-11)
 - * Succoth (festival of booths) on 15-21 Tishri (Num. 29:12-34)
 - * "a sacred assembly" on 22 Tishri (Num. 29:35-38)
- 5) Who / what is Ezra? Priest? Scribe? Scholar? Teacher?
- 6) How long would it take to read the entire Pentateuch aloud?
 - * Ezra read for about 6 hours - Reader's Digest version?
- 7) Who else were the "service assistants"?

C) And the crowd goes wild... (8:9-12)

- 1) What was the peoples' reaction to hearing and understanding the Law?
- 2) How is verse 10 a summary of the book of Nehemiah?
- 3) Do we rejoice that we have heard and understood the Word of God?

D) Let's celebrate Succoth (8:13-18)

- 1) What is the most ancient church tradition you can think of?
- 2) What's the difference between Tradition and traditions? (last month's Witness)
- 3) Look at Leviticus 23:33-43
- 4) How long had it been since God's people kept the feast of booths?
- 5) What was Ezra doing during this feast?
- 6) How was this a fitting festival for those who had returned from Exile?
- 7) How does this festival reflect the reforms enacted in chapter 5?

E) Confession and Covenant (9:1-10:26)

- 1) When was the last time you attended a corporate service of repentance?
- 2) Is this "out of place" given the joyous festival of booths? (See 8:9)
- 3) How did the day begin? Why?
- 4) How does recounting their history lead to repentance?
- 5) What is the chief "sin" being confessed?
- 6) What is the main request asked of God in 9:32-38)
- 7) What action follows this lengthy prayer of confession?

F) The fine print (10:28-39)

- 1) Why note the signatories of this covenant?
- 2) What obligation is laid on the people in verse 30?
- 3) What do they further promise in verse 31?
- 4) Is verse 32 the first example of "blue laws"?
- 5) What is being promised in verses 33-34?
- 6) How is verse 40b a summary of all that they have pledged?
- 7) What "covenants" have you entered into as a member of a congregation?

Next week Restore and Repopulate - chapters 11-13

RUNNING ON JOY
A STUDY OF NEHEMIAH
PART 5 - REPOPULATE AND RESTORE

Let's talk about it:

- 1) What are some things for which you need a minimum number of people?
- 2) What is "Christian Nationalism"?
 - How does this differ from the Biblical term "a holy nation" or "the holy city"?
- 3) What is "critical mass" as applied to congregational endeavors?

V) Is a city defined by its walls or by its people?

A) The leaders dwelling in Jerusalem - Chapter 11

- 1) Why would it be important for the leaders to reside in the city?
- 2) Why did they need to cast lots?
- 3) How does this show the tithe as promised in 10:37-39?
- 4) How many "categories" of leaders are there?
 - Israelites: Sons of Judah and Benjamin (and a few of the other tribes)
 - Priests; descendants of Aaron who oversaw the sacrifices and offered prayers
 - Levites: Temple workers of the tribe of Levi who were not descended from Aaron
 - Temple servants; those who worked in the Temple not of the tribe of Levi
 - Solomon's servants; Jews and proselytes who served the administrative peoples
- 5) Total tally of those chosen to live in Jerusalem = 3,044

| | | |
|---------------|-------|-------|
| - Judah | 468 | 15.4% |
| - Benjamin | 928 | 30.5% |
| - Priests | 1,192 | 39.2% |
| - Levites | 284 | 9.3% |
| - Gatekeepers | 172 | 5.6% |
- 6) Almost half (48.5%) of this new population is made up of priests and Levites. Why?
- 7) 3,000 doesn't seem like much of a population. Why not let everyone come out of their cities and resettle in Jerusalem? (See Joshua 13:8-21:48)

B) Allocation of the priests and Levites - 12:1-26

- 1) Zerubbabel and Yeshua were the "first wave" of those returning from exile (533 BC)
 - why begin with this generation?
- 2) In I Chronicles 24:1-19, 24 priestly divisions are listed, here there's only 22. Why?

- 3) Jaddua (12:11) was the last high priest during Persian rule (330 BC)
- a later scribe, working from temple archives, likely compiled this list
- 4) Eliashib (12:22) was the high priest during Nehemiah's governorship (see chapter 13)
- 5) What is the point of preserving these genealogies?
- 6) What are the "requirements" of God's servants (pastors) today?
- 7) How does this list of names show commitment to the covenant of 10:28-39?

C) Mopping up - Nehemiah's final reforms - 13:1-31

- 1) What had the people forgotten from the Law of Moses according to 13:1-3?
- 2) What happened when Nehemiah returned to the king in Babylon? (4-9)
 - * Who was Tobiah?
 - * How would this void the covenant made in chapter 10?
- 3) What happened to the Levites in 13:10-14?
- 4) How were the people back to their old habits in 13:15-18?
- 5) What was the "remedy" for this offense against God?
- 6) What warning from Solomon is given in 13:23-27?
- 7) How did the sins of Eliashib continue in his son? (28-29)
- 8) Is verse 30 in praise of exclusivity or Jewish purity?
- 9) Why was a provision for firewood worth mentioning? (31)

Coming Soon (Lenten Study)

"Life Together" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (our Christian Classic for this year)

Available from amazon. If needed, I can order some just let me know how many.

Our Lenten study (due to midweek services) will be on Thursday nights (2/26, 3/05, 12, 19, 26)

- we will be looking at the "each other" or "one another" passages of Scripture for Lent

* Ash Wednesday is February 18th

* Holy Week begins March 29th.