



Lesson 7 April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## Nehemiah: The Captive Cupbearer Rebuilds the Nation

Study Scripture – Nehemiah 2:11-20

Background Scripture – Nehemiah 1:1 – 2:20

### Key Verse:

*Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.*

**Nehemiah 2:17**

### INTRODUCTION

A captive is someone who has been taken prisoner. The captive does not have the ability to move around or to act freely for they are kept in a limited space. Someone who is in charge of the captive tells them what to do and sets up the job that they have to do.

A captive can be a very educated, skillful, and very educated person. In many ancient kingdoms some of the captives that were taken away from their country did so well that they rose up through the different levels of jobs and became high level individual managers and executives. Some of them became very powerful.

Our lesson tells us about one such man named Nehemiah. He was born of people who have been taken captive from the land of Judah. Judah had been invaded by the Babylonians, the Temple of God in Jerusalem was destroyed, and beautiful houses and palaces there were burned to the ground.

The walls of Jerusalem that protected the city were destroyed and so anybody living there could easily be attacked and robbed. That was a sad state of affairs for the city of Jerusalem had been regarded as a very beautiful and important city. But the people there had not obey the commandments of God and God got so fed up with them that He allowed the enemies of the nation of Judah to attack them and to destroy this beautiful city.

Nehemiah heard that the city was in dreadful shape and that the people living there who had returned from captivity in Babylon were in a bad condition. People were attacking them and oppressing them. They had rebuilt the Temple that had been destroyed but that rebuilt Temple was nowhere near as beautiful as the Temple of Solomon had built and which the Babylonians destroyed.

Nehemiah was a powerful man in the Kingdom of Persia. The Persians had taken over the kingdom of Babylon. The King trusted Nehemiah and gave him a very important job which was to make sure that nobody poisoned or did anything bad to the King. Nehemiah had this job

There. It was a very important job and they called him the “cupbearer” for he had to taste the food before it was given to the king to eat and he had to taste the wine before the king drank it. So if the food or the wine was poisoned the cupbearer would die but if everything went well and the cupbearer did not die when he tasted the food and drank the wine the King knew that the wine and the food was safe to eat and drink.

The King therefore had to trust the cupbearer for his life depended on it. Nehemiah was a captive, but they had this extremely important job and the king trusted him. Nehemiah did all kinds of work for the king and so when he heard that the city walls of Jerusalem had been broken down and the people there were suffering, he asked the king’s permission to go back to the city of Jerusalem and put it back in good shape.

Remember that God loved the city of Jerusalem for His throne on Earth was there. So God arranged it that the king allowed Nehemiah the privilege to leave his job for a short while to go to Jerusalem. Nehemiah had prayed to God for four months asking God to arrange everything so that he would be able to go to Jerusalem. God listened to his prayer and changed the mind of the King to allow Nehemiah to have the time to go. Normally the King would not allow someone so important to him to leave and go anywhere.

Nehemiah made sure that they made special arrangements. He got letters of authority from the powerful King so that he would be the governor of that area. He got permission to have the people living there to cut down wood from the forest and give him materials to rebuild the city. He traveled with an escort of armed soldiers from the King for protection. He also traveled with instructions from the King of Persia to the governors in the other areas so that they would obey what Nehemiah wanted them to do.

Notice therefore that even though he was doing the work that God wanted him to do Nehemiah prayed to God for several months asking God to give him permission to go. Nehemiah behaved very carefully and got all the necessary permissions that he needed to do a great job.

Notice therefore that Nehemiah was not only a captive working for the king of Persia, but he was also a captive of God. He loved God and would do everything that God wanted him to do. He would never be disobedient. He would do the things that God loved him to do. So Nehemiah determined to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and to arrange things so that the people of God who lived there would have a safe, successful, and prosperous life.

When Nehemiah told the other governors of the other nations around Jerusalem that he was there to take over and rearrange things in Jerusalem they did not like it. The governors and some of the rulers were against God and against the nation of Judah and Jerusalem. Some of them were Jews that now followed pagan practices and were disobedient to God. Others were downright pagan who did not care about God at all or what God wanted.

But Nehemiah had planned carefully, and he had the backing of the soldiers with him. He investigated everything that had happened to the walls of Jerusalem and he now planned what



to do carefully and thoroughly to rebuild the wall so that the people would not have to put up with the attacks from the other nations. But Nehemiah knew that he could not do all the work himself, so he prayed to God and he spoke to the people of Jerusalem and told them the great things that God had done to him and how God had changed the heart of the King who sent him with all kinds of materials and soldiers to help him on his task of rebuilding the nation. When the people heard how God had done marvelous things for Nehemiah, they decided to support the work that he wanted them to do, and they agreed that they would work together to build the walls of Jerusalem and complete the rebuilding of the nation.

We can learn many lessons from this. We know that when there is something to be done God would send someone with wisdom and experience who was willing to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Then we also learn that God is Sovereign, that is, He is in complete control of all the affairs that happen on the Earth.

We also learned that God would straighten out all the things that have gone wrong. He will do that in His own time. He might not solve the problems immediately or as quickly as you want but eventually, He will do it in His perfect time.

We also learned that when we pray for help God will always act to help His people and will rebuild His Temple. It might be a physical Temple building, or it might be your body for we are told in Scripture that your body is the Temple of God.

We also learned that you need wisdom and proper planning when you are going to do the work of God. When you're planning you have to think carefully and clearly and ask God to guide you in every respect.

This is important because God has enemies, and you have enemies, and they will try to stop you from doing what God wants you to do.

So we learn that you do not have to be afraid of following what God wants you to do. You have to be patient, you have to pray, you have to plan, you have to trust God making sure that you are doing things exactly the way God wants.

