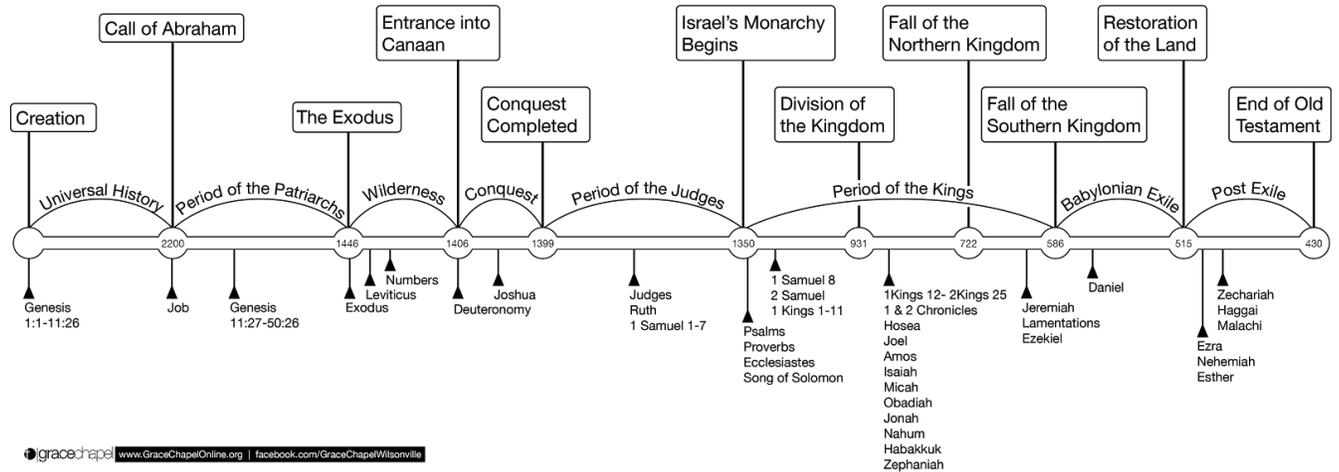


## Background & Call Nehemiah 1:1-4

### Background

- Linked w/ Ezra--Judaism still considered a unit until printed Hebrew Bible in 15th century.
- Ancient manuscripts label book "Ezra" or "Ezra-Nehemiah."

## OLD TESTAMENT TIMELINE



- Post Exile period.
- Cyrus the Great (559-530)
- Cambyses (530-522)
- Darius I (522-485)
- Xerxes (485-465)--This was our King Ahasuerus in the Esther study.
- Artaxerxes (465-424)--This is our King in Nehemiah
- Critical time in history of Israel/Judah--needed an explanation of the theological condition of God's elect people.
- Ezra heads back (as a priest) from Babylon (Persian province) in 458 B.C. armed w/ human and divine authority w/ the task of rebuilding the community in a theocratic body, in spiritual renewal. Problems were huge

- Prays a great intercessory prayer, “weeping, casting himself down before the house of God.” People confess and repent.
- Nehemiah- cupbearer to the King Artaxerxes. Administrator, court official, greatly trusted- close to the king.
- Some of you worrying about how you might serve God...etc. You can be serving God right where you are.
- **Nehemiah, 14 years later, sees the same trouble and disgrace, and comes from Susa with a two-fold purpose--make repair of the physical infrastructure, and to lead the community into spiritual reformation and restoration.**
- This is 141 years after the fall of the Southern Kingdom.
- What happened in our world 141 years ago?
- Restoration of the city, of the people for a purpose--”God-given privilege and task of displaying God’s salvific intentions to the whole world!”
- Though not entirely successful, they prepare the way for the One who eventually restores everything, reconciling everything to Himself--Jesus! (Return of the King-- LOTR)

**Nehemiah 1:1-2** The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, 2 that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.

- Majority of what we know comes from Nehemiah’s personal journal entries.
  - Lived and worked in Susa (capital) in the palace of the king of Persia.
  - Cupbearer (1:10b). Administrator, confident, organizer.
  - Jerusalem is 800 miles away from Susa; due to exile Nehemiah had never been there.
- 2 or 3 million were deported in the exile; only 50k decided go back. They had made homes where they were. Remember Esther--she was as much a Persian as a Jew.
- More than national shame. These are God’s chosen people. This is His city.
- Sometimes you ask a question that puts you on a mission.

**Nehemiah 1:3** And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

- Nehemiah receives what is perhaps old news, with a new perspective.
- The city is vulnerable. The great walled city is decrepit, run-down.

**Psalms 147:2-3** The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

- If it is important to God, it is important to Nehemiah. God’s will becomes our will, God’s concerns become our concerns. (Lord’s prayer). His will is to use His people!
- Perhaps a day before, perhaps 10 minutes before, Nehemiah was just another good guy, content, living a nice life. Now he knows. Now he is responsible.

**Nehemiah 1:4** As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

- He knows now. He cannot “not” do this.
- **There is a moment when the news and need of your city moves you to action.**
- It will be sin now if I don’t take action.
- Now you know.

- Every problem is first, and primarily, a spiritual problem.
  - Individual AND corporate.
  - You attack spiritual problems by calling on the Lord.

### **For the City**

- We must first be convinced that God is “For the City.” For the rebuilding. For the salvation. For goodness and mercy and saving and restoration of families....

**Mark 2:16-17** And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

- Maybe this isn't your favorite city. Maybe you want to move. Maybe not the safest. Maybe not the city w/ the most opportunity. Maybe the city that doesn't have your mix of people.
  - Some so wrapped up in their own stuff. Might care--you simply don't have time to get involved.
  - Some just don't care. Somebody else's problem. Your response to brokenness -- “Get a job.” “Quit dressing like a slut.” “Pull your own weight.” “You're not the right type of people.”
- God is for this city. God is for our people. God is for the lost.
- The church is not a cozy, boutique hospital... it's a front-line combat hospital.
- “We're not a cruise ship, we are a working ferry.”
- **There is a moment when the news and need of your city moves you to action.**
- Like Nehemiah, we begin by praying and fasting.
- Cities begin to be rebuilt, physically and spiritually, when men and women truly see the destruction, remember the heart of God for the lost, and respond with action.