



Title: Reality & Reaction (Nehemiah: week 1)

Text: Nehemiah 1:1-11

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Intro to Nehemiah:

In order to fully grasp what is going on at the beginning of Nehemiah we need to do a brief summary of the Old Testament. It starts of course in the garden with Adam and Eve and what follows is their rebellion and the subsequent consequences of sin that take us up to Genesis 11. At this point God begins to call out a people to be his people among all the peoples of the earth. He does this by calling Abraham and establishing a covenant with him in Genesis 12. In this covenant God promises Abraham a land, offspring, and blessing so that through Abraham God could bless all the peoples on the earth. As we continue in the story, we see that the city of Jerusalem is the pinnacle of this land and is God's holy city from which his name would go out into all the earth (Deuteronomy 12:5, 11; 1 Kings 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kings 21:4; Psalm 48).

Abraham arrives in this Promised Land and the Hebrew nation of Israel is formed. But, they would not stay in the land. Because of their disobedience, Abraham's descendants find themselves as slaves in Egypt at the beginning of Exodus. God rescues them from this slavery through Moses and then Israel wanders in the desert for 40 years on a journey that should have taken just a few weeks. Eventually, Joshua leads them across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. But, the people continue in their folly and disobedience during this time and eventually demand that God give them a king so they can be like the other nations. He obliges and gives them Saul. Saul starts well but eventually bows down to the fear of man and God gives his throne to a shepherd boy who becomes the great King David. David builds Jerusalem into the great city of God. He desires to build a temple for God in this great city but does not live to see it built. However, his son King Solomon does build the temple in Jerusalem and it becomes the dwelling place of God on earth from which his name would be glorified. But, again, God's people turn from him in disobedience. Israel divides into two kingdoms, and God gives them over to a series of mostly wicked kings who lead them toward a downward spiral as a nation both spiritually and politically. In this fractured state, Israel is taken captive by a wicked Babylonian empire led by Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar takes a large number of the best and brightest of the Jews captive and destroys the temple in Jerusalem. The great city of God lay in waste. But, in his providence, God eventually raises up another pagan king named Cyrus who ruled the Persian Empire. King Cyrus and the Persians overthrow the Babylonians and thus assume their captives, the Jewish people. God moves on Cyrus' heart and makes him favorable toward his people and Cyrus issues a decree that the Jews are able to return to their homeland to rebuild their sacred city. This decree continues beyond King Cyrus to his successors Xerxes and Artaxerxes. During the reign of these Persian kings who are favorable towards the Jews, God raises up leaders like Ezra, Zerubbabel and Nehemiah to return the land of their forefathers and restore the temple and the city of Jerusalem so that it can once again be the city that is set on a hill from which the light of the Lord shines to all the people of the earth.

At the beginning of Nehemiah, we find ourselves in the year 445 B.C. with the Persian King Artaxerxes continuing Cyrus' decree allowing God's people to return and rebuild the city of God.

From this incredible history we should learn at least two very important things:

- 1. God is faithful to his word and controls all things from nations to individuals.**
 - Daniel 4:34-35; Ephesians 1:11
- 2. God works with people who are an absolute mess (like us).**

I. REALITY (Nehemiah 1:1-4)

A). What was Nehemiah's reality?

- Jerusalem was broken down. A city with no walls was completely vulnerable. A modern day equivalent would be like Columbus having no police department or the U.S. not having a military. We'd be sitting ducks.
- Why is this so important? Because the city was absolutely essential in God's plan to make his name great among the nations, this was terrible news.

B). What is our reality?

- If we're honest, the church (our church) is nowhere near all that it needs to be. Just as God chose Jerusalem as the physical location from which he would make his name great to the nations, likewise in the New Testament he has chosen the church (not the building, but rather the people) to be his dwelling place from which he makes his name great.
- Therefore, we have much work to do to become the type of church God desires.

II. REACTION (Nehemiah 1:5-11)

A). How did Nehemiah react to his reality?

- He repented and took responsibility. He did not blame-shift.
- He prayed earnestly.

B). How are we reacting to our situation?

- Many men either escape into some sin, or blame-shift.
- God is calling us to be like Nehemiah and repent and pray.

TWO QUESTIONS:

1. What is our reality as a church?
2. How are we going to react to it?