

## 20250105 Rise and Rebuild – Ps Bijoy

### Nehemiah 1:1-4

“The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”

### Context of Nehemiah

In Nehemiah we’re introduced to this eminent Godly person, the problem he becomes aware of, then we listen in on the prayer he prays before he acts using the position he’s in.

The book is mostly Nehemiah’s autobiography and reads like his journal. This story begins in 445 BC, in the winter palace of King Artaxerxes, ruler of the vast Persian empire. Nehemiah is a man of integrity in the Persian government though he’s Jewish by background. Nehemiah’s people having long been in exile and scattered since they were invaded and conquered by Babylon decades before and reduced the Temple that Solomon had built to rubble. Eventually God punished the Babylonian Empire for what they did, allowing the Persian Empire to defeat them in turn.

The Persians were much more liberal in how they treated nations after their conquest, so long as they didn’t rebel. God moved the previous king’s heart to let 50,000 Jews travel back to Jerusalem, with a priest called Ezra, and he provided everything they needed to rebuild the Second Temple, on the same spot and with the same dimensions but in many ways quite different—which often happens in a rebuild.

But for Nehemiah and all the children of Israel wherever they were scattered, the Temple and Jerusalem were their hearts true home, because that was where they had their roots not only in history and identity but in worship of the one true God. The city of David, the city of God. But Nehemiah has a good life in Persia in the palace where he’s powerful, prosperous, and protected. He lived in success and security. In Chapter 1 verse 11 he tells us his job was “cupbearer to the king,” and that did not mean he was a butler! He was a key adviser trusted with access to the most powerful man in the palace.

### The wall is broken

Something happens that day, when news reaches him that disturbs him, though really it need not affect him. News about what life is like for other people, back in the homeland.

“Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

We don’t know if this was his real brother, the word used here means “relative.” But rather than walk back to his comfortable office, he asked more questions. He didn’t just let it wash over him, like so often

we do. Nehemiah was not indifferent, he knew he had to make a difference, rather than walking on, he leaned in. Rather than walk away he listened. Rather than get busy with something else to distract him he learned more—until he found out all the detail on news that broke his heart, the situation, the call to stand up and be counted that changed his whole life.

This was the need he could not ignore, even though this problem was seven hundred miles away. This decision was life changing. God took him out of his very comfortable zone. Because in career terms, remember Nehemiah had made it.

Nehemiah is living in luxury, and as long as he keeps his head down and does his job right, keeps the king happy and above all safe, he gets everything he wants and has everything going for him. At any point in his life he could have rejoined his people, the Jews, back in their homeland of Jerusalem, but instead he had worked his way to the top in the royal court. Because through asking that question, God was going to challenge him, to change him. To take him from comfort to courage. From courage to construction of those broken walls and that was how he would make his life's greatest contribution.

### **Rebuilding**

The dictionary defines it this way: re:building = “to make, restore, construct, to build or form again.” That was the call on Nehemiah's life, and I believe it's the call for every one of us at MBCC. This year God will give us the strength and grace to rebuild our life, church and ministry.

Nehemiah was shaken from the report he heard as he confronted a reality, he could not ignore. A small remnant of people are left, grieving survivors who had escaped, though many had been lost. They feel all alone. There's no comfort that the Temple is there, and that reminds me a picture of the institution of church becoming an empty religious institution around the world. Churches are becoming monuments to past days of glory when its influence was real, vital, and prophetic; not conditional, traditional, and pathetic. I think it's a good time for us to look at Nehemiah now. We the Church are called to rebuild the broken walls of God ordained institutions of family, community and nation.

So, let's look at what Nehemiah did and how Nehemiah acted as a leader during these difficult times. Instead of jumping straight to the plans how to get on with the rebuilding, Nehemiah slows down. There's wisdom in that. I once heard someone say, “Don't just do something – sit there!” Sit there and think and pray. That's what Nehemiah did when he heard the bad news.

### **Nehemiah prayed!**

We can work out those “days” to refer to the months from December to April. Four months of weeping, praying, and lots of fasting. As we start a new year, I want to ask and invite us to do the same. Not necessarily for four months. But cultivate a habit of seeking God. Nehemiah fasted and wept, lamented and prayed, and wrote out his prayer and you can see an example of what he prayed there for himself and on behalf of his people and nation.

Nehemiah resolves to do something, about what God wants to see resolved. He's not a builder, but he's resolved to rebuild the broken walls. He's not a carpenter, but he's resolved to get those gates back in place. He's not going to let what he doesn't know stop him from doing what he knows he's got to do. He prays so long because he can't do any of it alone. Then he'll get started, because we can never start anywhere other than where we are right now. There's no point wasting our time and lives and opportunity wishing we were somebody else or somewhere else doing something else, thinking If I was there, doing that, then I'd serve God and do something for him.

Let's Start now. Start today. Start praying, take it all to God and start rebuilding.