

## When God Moves 2

We began, last week, a scriptural examination of some the great, life transforming “movements” of God as recorded in the bible. And we are defining “movement” as a time when a large number of people began to confess sins, repent, return to God, worship Him alone passionately and faithfully, resulting in considerable long term transformation of those lives.

I want to know, and I’m sure you do to, what conditions were prevalent among the people and even more importantly what God was saying or not saying, doing or not doing, that brought about such a great stirring of His people. Last Sunday we observed how early in Samuel’s ministry certain conditions prevailed that brought about a time of national awakening and renewal.

**unity** of heart and purpose- agreed on the need to return to God  
**assembly** (in Mizpah)- tearing down the idols, confessed, repented, sought God, worshipped

**submission**- to God through Samuel’s leadership

**waiting on God**- trusting the Lord’s sovereignty and timing to move at the right time in the right way. All the while, remaining faithful to the call of God on our lives and obeying all His commands.

Today we’re going to look at some of Israel’s darkest history and how they were led back to a right relationship with God. That time of renewal was preceded by the destruction of Jerusalem and the near annihilation of Israel at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army. Many Israelites had

been killed during the invasion, some escaped by hiding in caves or avoiding the invading army's path, and some were carried to Babylon as slaves. God permitted all of this because Israel, His people, had grossly forsaken Him for a prolonged period of time.

The captivity lasted 70 years. There were a few bright spots during the captivity- Daniel, Hanniah, Mishael, Azariah and Esther who showed tremendous courage and faith in times of great difficulty. The Israelites survived a regime change. The Babylonians fell to the Medes and Persians. 70 years had come and gone since the captivity first began. A Jewish man, likely born during the captivity, had risen to a position of very high trust and importance. He was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes 1 Longimanus. His name was Nehemiah.

**D**uring the month of Chislev in the twentieth year, when I was in the fortress city of Susa, <sup>2</sup> Hanani, one of my brothers, arrived with men from Judah, and I questioned them about Jerusalem and the Jewish remnant that had returned from exile. <sup>3</sup> They said to me, "The survivors in the province, who returned from the exile, are in great trouble and disgrace. Jerusalem's wall has been broken down, and its gates have been burned down." **Neh** 1:1-3 (HCSB)

This news led Nehemiah into a time of passionate prayer. In his prayer, he confessed Israel's sinful disobedience and rebellion but also remembered God's promise in Deut 30.....In his prayer he quoted.....

<sup>9</sup> But if you return to Me and carefully observe My commands, even though your exiles were banished to the ends of the earth, I

will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I chose to have My name dwell.”<sup>l</sup> Neh 1:9 (HCSB)

**Lesson 1:** To the great and significant degree, **this great movement**, transformation of the nation of Israel to return to God, **began with the burden and prayer of one man-** Nehemiah.

<sup>1</sup> During the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was set before him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had never been sad in his presence, <sup>2</sup> so the king said to me, “Why are you sad, when you aren’t sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.” I was overwhelmed with fear <sup>3</sup> and replied to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should I not be sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” <sup>4</sup> Then the king asked me, “What is your request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven <sup>5</sup> and answered the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, send me to Judah and to the city where my ancestors are buried, so that I may rebuild it.” <sup>6</sup> The king, with the queen seated beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you return?” So I gave him a definite time, and it pleased the king to send me. Neh 2:1-6 (HCSB)

Nehemiah also requested letters of safe passage and permission to acquire building materials from the king's forest. Letters were granted. The king also sent infantry and cavalry to accompany him.

**Lesson 2:** Two major human factors greatly influenced the king's favorable, positive decision. (a) **Nehemiah had earned**

**the king's trust and favor.** This is no small thing. Poisoning was a common method of assassinating kings. The cup bearer had to have had the highest security clearance to be in that position of service. **(b) Nehemiah had never been sad in the presence of the king.** Remember, he was a slave living in a foreign, pagan land. He obviously was well informed of his home land and understood that his captors were keeping him from the land of promise.

It is amazing that the king of the Medo-Persian empire showed compassion and concern for his Jewish slave, cup bearer. It is a profound tribute to the character and pleasant nature of Nehemiah despite his life circumstances. What if Nehemiah had often “showed himself” when he was angry, upset, disappointed, frustrated or not feeling well? Would the king have granted Nehemiah’s request? Would the king have even noticed?

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem. Not revealing his purpose, he examined the gates and walls. He then assembled the remnant of Israelites who were living in the ruined city and revealed what God was leading him to do- rebuild the city. They were encouraged and agreed. When confronted by some neighboring, opposing governors, Nehemiah wrote....

**20** I gave them this reply, “The God of heaven is the One who will grant us success. We, His servants, will start building, but you have no share, right, or historic claim in Jerusalem.” **Neh** 2:20 (HCSB)

The repairs began. New gates were constructed the walls and towers were repaired. It seems that every breathing Israelite, no matter what their trade, even some women, participated in the work. Harassment from the three regional governors heated up but it just compelled the Israelites to work harder.

<sup>6</sup> So we rebuilt the wall until the entire wall was joined together up to half its [height], for the people had the will to keep working. **Neh 4:6** (HCSB)

**Lesson 3:** Leading up to the time of the great movement of God to restore and be reconciled with Israel after 70 years, we begin to see **unity & assembly**, at least in the willingness to work and I believe we will find this common, biblically and historically, in all great movements of God.

As threats of invasion became known, Nehemiah posted guards around the clock. Half worked while the other half stood guard. Every worker had a sword strapped to his side and a spear in one hand while he worked with the other.

Issues among the people and corruption regarding taxes, came up and Nehemiah dealt with the wisely restoring integrity and fairness to the local system of government. Also, Nehemiah, though appointed by Artaxerxes as governor of the region, refused to take the tax from the people that he was allowed to collect. (like Paul)

<sup>19</sup> Remember me favorably, my God, for all that I have done for this people. **Neh 5:19** (HCSB)

**Lesson 4:** Nehemiah's **integrity and wisdom** was serving as a catalyst for a nation changing movement of God among the remnant of Israelites.

(C6) Intimidation increased by way of the opposing governors, multiple traps were set for Nehemiah to lure him out of the city and kill him. Then they threatened to report to King Artaxerxes that Nehemiah and the Israelites were planning a rebellion, then

a false prophet was sent to discourage him. It all failed. Nehemiah remained steadfast in his resolve to complete the reparation of Jerusalem. His prayer.....

**B**ut now, [my God,] strengthen me. **Neh 6:9 (HCSB)**

The wall was completed in 52 days.

(C7) Israelites, those who had remained in the land and exiles who had previously been allowed to return were called together and counted.

(C8) When all the work was and everyone had settled back into their homes and town, they were all called to an assembly.

**2** On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. **3** While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law. **4** Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiyah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah stood beside him on his right; to his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. **5** Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up. **6** Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, “ Amen, Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

<sup>7</sup> Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places. <sup>8</sup> They read the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read. <sup>9</sup> Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, “This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. **Neh 8:2-9 (HCSB)**

**18** Ezra read out of the book of the law of God every day, from the first day to the last. The Israelites celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day there was an assembly, according to the ordinance. **Neh 8:18 (HCSB)**

**1** On the twenty-fourth day of this month the Israelites assembled; they were fasting, [wearing] sackcloth, [and had put] dust on their heads. <sup>2</sup> Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the guilt of their fathers. <sup>3</sup> While they stood in their places, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day and [spent] another fourth of the day in confession and worship of the LORD their God. **Neh 9:1-3 (HCSB)**

**Lesson 5:** This was no elaborate shindig with lasers, smart lights, multiples screens, awesome music, and world renowned speakers. **They just read from the law**, God’s law and it was read for six hours. “All the people listened attentively.” As Ezra opened the book the people stood, lifted their hands, and said “Amen, Amen! It led to weeping and repentance. Then they

bowed and worshiped. And they did this for a week! It brought revival and renewal to a nation!

The most irritating thing I've heard since I've been in the ministry is "I'm not getting fed." It may be true in a few extreme cases, but what it more accurately, most often means is "I'm not being entertained enough." **Fact:** The only thing you need to be fed, unless something has drastically changed since Nehemiah's time, is the Word of God. "It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness so that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." All else, relatively speaking, is fluff. Unless the preacher and bible teachers have put aside the bible, and just started talking and telling stories, you are being fed. The problem isn't with the food. It is your appetite. Sin has caused you to seek stimulation, feelings, and entertainment, rather than God and His holy perfect Word.

Please don't misunderstand. I am not diminishing the necessity of offering God our very best in all the elements worship, preaching, and teaching. But on the other hand, let's be honest. All we really want is to be entertained, stimulated, made to feel good. We think that if we bring in a high profile evangelist or talented musician that all of a sudden the church is going to be on fire for God and people in Cape Coral are going to be saved right and left.

We're missing something... It's not the messenger. It is God's Word that is "alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as to divide soul, spirit, joints, and marrow; it is a judge of the ideas and thoughts of the heart." Heb 4:12 (HCSB) It is God's Word by His Spirit alone that will

bring a genuine movement of God causing transformation of lives and whole communities.

We have come to rely way too heavily on people to go to God on our behalf- to pray for us, worship for us, witness for us..... We need to approach the throne of grace ourselves and the principle vessel is the Word of God. Crave it, hunger for it, read it, study it, memorize it, and do it.

Remember, in all this story, Nehemiah was a layman. On those days when God moved so mightily that it brought bring tears, repentance, and worship, Nehemiah was not even on the platform. It was God's Word that was on the platform.

Do you want to see a great moving of God in this church and community? Get a burden and pray. Live a life of impeccable character. Seek unity and be faithful all assemblies. Crave the Word.