

# Nehemiah 1:1-11

## Nehemiah 1:1-3

1:1 – **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,**

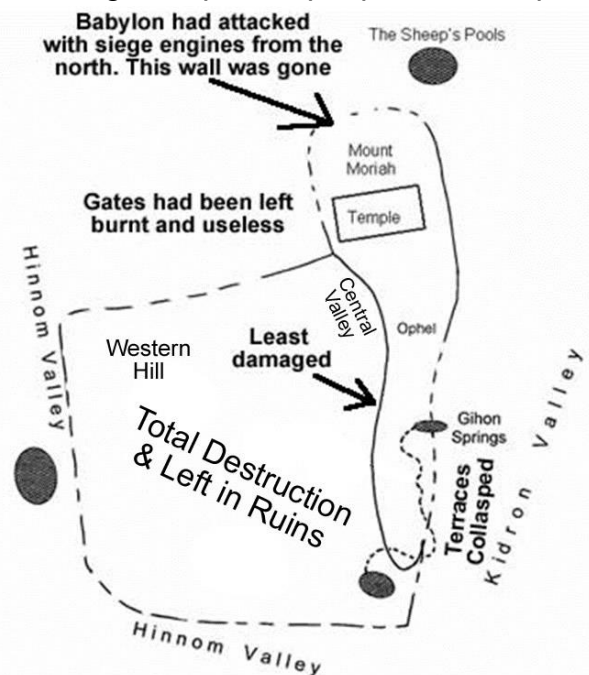
1:2 – **that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.**

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.”**

1. Chislev is the winter month, or our Nov/Dec
2. “twentieth year” is the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Artaxerxes which is 445 since he began ruling in 465 BC.
3. Susa was in the fertile plain 150 north of the Persian Gulf and used as a winter palace. It is in SW Iran today.
4. Hanani is the brother of Nehemiah
  - a. The Elephantine papyri refer to a Hananiah who was the head of Jerusalem. It is likely that when Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes his brother was left in charge of Jerusalem.
5. Artaxerxes had himself stopped the rebuilding of the city in Ezra 4 when a letter was sent to Artaxerxes in 464 BC (during his first year)
  - a. During the reign of Darius the temple was built and work on Jerusalem continued during Darius’ reign and during that of his son Xerxes.
  - b. Ezra 4:6 the opposition rose at the beginning and during Xerxes reign. Xerxes took no action against the Jews.
  - c. Ezra 4:7 the opposition tried again during Artaxerxes first year. It worked-See Ezra 4:7-24
6. Without the walls (and, general city works) the surrounding satraps and people of those provinces could abuse and take advantage of the Jews in Judea and Jerusalem.

- a. They were defenseless.
- b. The terraces that supported the east side and protected and provided the water works lay in ruins yet. Kathleen Kenyon wrote after her excavation of this area:

“The effect on Jerusalem was much more disastrous and far-reaching than merely to render the city defenseless...The whole system of terraces down the eastern slope, dependent on retaining walls buttressed in turn by the fill of the next lower terrace, was ultimately dependent on the town wall at the base, forming the lowest and most substantial of the retaining walls.”



586 BC Destruction and Fire Damage Remained in 445 BC (141 years)

## Nehemiah 1:4

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.**

1. “sat down” was and still is the custom of mourning Jews. Sometimes using low stools.
  - a. Psalm 137:1 – “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.”
  - b. Job 2:8 – “He (Job) took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he **sat in the ashes.**”
  - c. Job 2:13 – “And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.”
  - d. Ezra 9:3 – “As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled.”
  - e. Interestingly, after mourning for three weeks Daniel has a vision while he was standing by the Tigris River – Daniel 10:2-5 (“In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia...”)  
“In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist.
2. “fasting” became a common practice in Babylon as many of the Jews continued to fast for the fall of Jerusalem and for the murder of Gedaliah. This is mentioned in:
  - a. Esther 4:15-17 – “Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a **fast** on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will **also fast** as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.
  - b. Daniel 9:3
  - c. Daniel 10:3
  - d. Zechariah 7:2-7 – “Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men to entreat the favor of the Lord, saying to the priests of the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets, “Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?.....”
  - e. Zechariah 8:19 – “Thus says the Lord of hosts: The **fast** of the fourth month and the **fast** of the fifth and the **fast** of the seventh and the **fast** of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace.”
3. “God of Heaven” –
  - a. In Cyrus’ decree recorded in Ezra 1:2-4, Cyrus refers to “The LORD, the God of heaven” - “The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah....”
  - b. 17 of the 22 occurrences of “The God of heaven occur in Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel.
  - c. This seems to be a Persian reference to the God the Jews identified as YHWH.

Nehemiah 1:5-11

**1:5 – And I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,**

8104 [e] šō-mēr שמר	3372 [e] we-han-nō-w-rā; והנורא	1419 [e] hag-gā-dō-wl הגדול	410 [e] hā-’ēl האל	8064 [e] haš-šā-ma-yim, השמים	430 [e] 'ē-lō-hē אלהי	3069 [e] Yah-weh יהוה	577 [e] 'ān-nā אנא	559 [e] wā-'ō-mar, ואמר
[You] who keep	and awesome	great	God	of heaven	God	Yahweh	I pray	and I said
V-Qal-Prtcpl-ms	Conj-w, Art   V-Nifal-Prtcpl-ms	Art   Adj-ms	Art   N-ms	Art   N-mp	N-mpc	N-proper-ms	Interjection	Conj-w   V-Qal-ConsecImperf-1cs

4687 [e] miš-wō-tāw. מצותיו	8104 [e] ū-le-šō-me-rē ולשמרי	157 [e] le-'ō-hā-bāw לאהביו	2617 [e] wā-ḥe-seg, וחסד	1285 [e] hab-be-rit ברית
Your commandments	and observe	with those who love You	and mercy	[Your] covenant
N-fpc   3ms	Conj-w, Prep-I   V-Qal-Prtcpl-mpc	Prep-I   V-Qal-Prtcpl-mpc   3ms	Conj-w   N-ms	Art   N-fs

1. “awesome” – *nora* – from the verb *yare* meaning “to fear” and “to revere”. YHWH is the God that is to be feared.
2. “steadfast love” or “mercy” is from ***hesed*** which refers to covenant faithfulness. In this case referring to the unconditional covenant of Abraham. Unfailing grace and mercy.
  - a. *Hesed* is “loyal love”, “covenant love”
  - b. *Hesed* is not emotional or human love
3. “You love those who observe your commands” is conditional covenant as in the Mosaic covenant. This word for love *ahab* is used for example of:
  - a. Abraham’s “love” for Isaac – Genesis 22:2
  - b. Isaac’s “love” for Rebekah – Genesis 24:67
  - c. Isaac’s “love” for Esau – Genesis 25:28
  - d. Rebekah’s love for Jacob – Genesis 25:28
  - e. It is also the word used for God asking, “How have I “loved” Jacob” in Malachi 1:2-3 which reveals the difference between Jacob having a covenant love, but Esau not having a covenant love.

**1:6 – let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father’s house have sinned.**

**1:7 – We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.**

1. Nehemiah confesses the sins of the nation. Nehemiah felt the connection, and so, the responsibility/authority to confess the nation’s sins. Even the past generations’ sins.
  - a. Others did this same thing: Ezra (Ezra 9:6-15) , Daniel (Daniel 9:4-6)
2. “Commands” is *miswot* and refers to the commands of Moses’ Law.
3. “Decrees”, “Statutes” – *huqqim* – refers to something in the Law of Moses along with the “laws”
4. “Laws”, “Rules” – *mispatim* – are legal decisions or judgments that came alongside the “commands” and “decrees”

**1:8 – Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples,**

**1:9 – but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’**

5650 [e]	4872 [e]	853 [e]	6680 [e]	834 [e]	1697 [e]	853 [e]	4994 [e]	2142 [e]
'ab-də-kā	mō-šeh	'eṭ-	šiw-wī-tā	'ā-šer	had-dā-bār,	'eṭ-	nā	ze-kār-
עבדך	משה	את	צוית	אשר	הדבר	את	נא	זכר
Your servant	Moses	-	You commanded	that	the word	-	I pray	Remember
N-msc   2ms	N-proper-ms	DirObjM	V-Piel-Perf-2ms	Pro-r	Art   N-ms	DirObjM	Interjection	V-Qal-Imp-ms

## No "if" in Hebrew text. This is more direct.

5971 [e]	853 [e]	6327 [e]	589 [e]	4603 [e]	859 [e]	559 [e]
bā'am-mîm.	'eṭ-ķem	'ā-pîš	'ā-nî	tim-'ā-lū,	'at-tem	lê-mōr;
—	בְּעַמִּים:	אַתֶּם	אֶפְיץ	אֲנִי	תִּמְעְלוּ	אַתֶּם
among the nations	you	will scatter	I	[If] are unfaithful	you	saying
Prep-b, Art   N-mp	DirObjM   2mp	V-Hifil-Imperf-1cs	Pro-1cs	V-Qal-Imperf-2mp	Pro-2mp	Prep-I   V-Qal-Inf

1. "Remember" occurs often in Nehemiah – 4:14; 5:19; 6:14;13:14, 22, 29, 31.
  - a. When God "remembers" he acts.
  - b. When God remembers a covenant or Noah in the ark, then the Lord responds to the situation.
  - c. Nehemiah was asking God to act on the word he had spoken.
2. "If" is added in the English, but is NOT in the Hebrew. The Hebrew says Moses said the LORD said, "You are unfaithful, I will scatter you!"
  - a. Leviticus 26:27-28
  - b. Deuteronomy 30:1-5
  - c. The Babylonian captivity was actually inescapable. Unavoidable if the Jews were human.
  - d. Galatians 3:10 – "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."
3. "I will gather them"
  - a. Deut. 30:1-5 (also above)
  - b. Isaiah 11:12 – "He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.
  - c. Jeremiah 23:3 – "Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply."
  - d. Jeremiah 29:14 – "I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile."
  - e. Jeremiah 31:8-10 – "Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.'

- f. Ezekiel 11:17 – “Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.’”
- g. Ezekiel 20:34, 41 – “I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out....As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations.
- h. Ezekiel 36:24 – “I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.”
- i. Micah 2:12 – “I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men.”

**1:10 – They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.**

1. These are the people of Abraham, the chosen.
2. These are the Hebrews YHWH redeemed from Egypt
3. There is not another people of YHWH.
4. These people have a covenant

**1:11a – O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”**

8605 [e]	413 [e]	5650 [e]	8605 [e]	413 [e]	7183 [e]	241 [e]	4994 [e]	1961 [e]	136 [e]	577 [e]
te·pil·lat	we·'el-	'ab·de·kā	te·pil·lat	'el-	qaš·še·bet	'ā·ze·nə·kā-	nā	te·hī	'ā·dō·nāy,	'ān·nā
תפלת	ואל	עבדך	תפלת	אל	קשבת	אזנך	נא	תהי	אדני	אנא
the prayer	and to	of Your servant	the prayer	to	attentive	Your ear	please	let be	Lord	I pray
N-fsc	Conj-w   Prep	N-msc   2ms	N-fsc	Prep	Adj-fs	N-fsc   2ms	Interjection	V-Qal-Imperf.Jus-3fs	N-proper-ms	Interjection

3117 [e]	5650 [e]	4994 [e]	6743 [e]	8034 [e]	853 [e]	3372 [e]	2655 [e]	5650 [e]
hay·yō·wm,	le·'ab·de·kā	nā	we·haš·lī·hāh-	šə·me·kā,	'et-	le·yir·'ah	ha·hā·pē·šīm	'ā·bā·de·kā,
היום	לעבדך	נא	והצלחה	שמך	את	ליראה	החפצים	עבדיך
this day	Your servant	I pray	and let prosper	Your name	-	to fear	who desire	of Your servants
Art   N-ms	Prep-l   N-msc   2ms	Interjection	Conj-w   V-Hifil-imp-ms   3fs	N-msc   2ms	DirObjM	Prep-l   V-Qal-Inf   3fs	Art   Adj-mp	N-mpc   2ms

p	4428 [e]	4945 [e]	1961 [e]	589 [e]	2088 [e]	376 [e]	6440 [e]	7356 [e]	5414 [e]
	lam·me·leq.	maš·qeh	hā·yī·tī	wa·'ā·nī	haz·zeh;	hā·'iš	lip·né	le·ra·hā·mīm,	ū·te·nē·hū
פ	למלך:	משקה	הייתי	ואני	זהה	האיש	לפני	לרחמים	ותגהו
-	of the king	cupbearer	was	for I	This	of man	in the sight	mercy	and grant him
Punc	Prep-l, Art   N-ms	N-ms	V-Qal-Perf-1cs	Conj-w   Pro-1cs	Art   Pro-ms	Art   N-ms	Prep-l   N-cpc	Prep-l   N-mp	Conj-w   V-Qal-imp-ms   3ms

1. Nehemiah wanted YHWH to give him success in the plan he had formed to work in front of men. In this case the man was the King of the Persian Empire.
2. “success” or “prosper” is *tsalach* /tsaw-lakh/ which means “to rush”
3. “mercy” or “compassion” in the sight of men would refer to favor from Artaxerxes
4. Nehemiah ends his prayer referring to “this man” which is Artaxerxes.

- a. In the eyes of the Empire Artaxerxes was a “god”
- b. In the eyes of YHWH (and, Nehemiah) Artaxerxes was a man that would do what God willed.

1:11b – **Now I was cupbearer to the king.**

- 1. Cupbearer from *masqeh* which means literally “one who gives someone something to drink”
- 2. In Tobit 1:22 (a Jewish writing) it says” Now Ahikar was cupbearer, keeper of the signet, and in charge of administration of the accounts, for Esarhaddon had appointed him second to himself.”
- 3. Nehemiah would have:
  - a. Been well trained in court etiquette
  - b. Good looking, and perfect in appearance
  - c. Know how to taste and select wines. The Babylonian Talmud says, “The wine belongs to the master but credit for it is due to his cupbearer.”
  - d. He would have been in the presence of the king when he shared his thoughts and would have joined him in conversation.
  - e. Been trusted with the king’s life and privacy. Artaxerxes father had been killed by a man such as Nehemiah.
  - f. Had great influence in determining who had a meeting or audience with the king.

