

Return from Exile

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Call to Excellence

Part 5 – Boldness. October 30, 2016

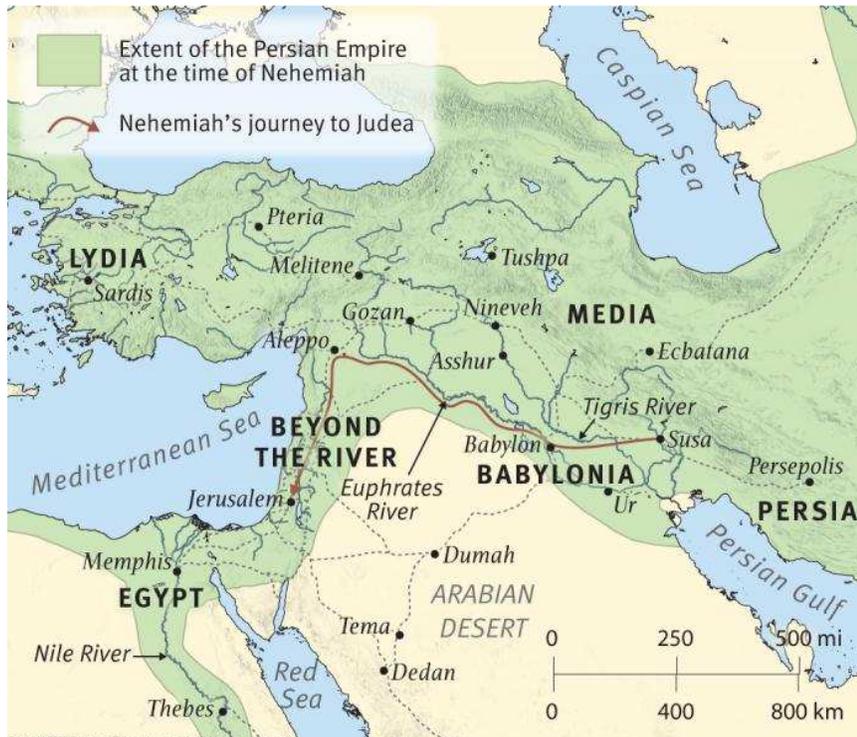
And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. ... Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. – Nehemiah @ Chapter 2

The Story

Nehemiah 1-2



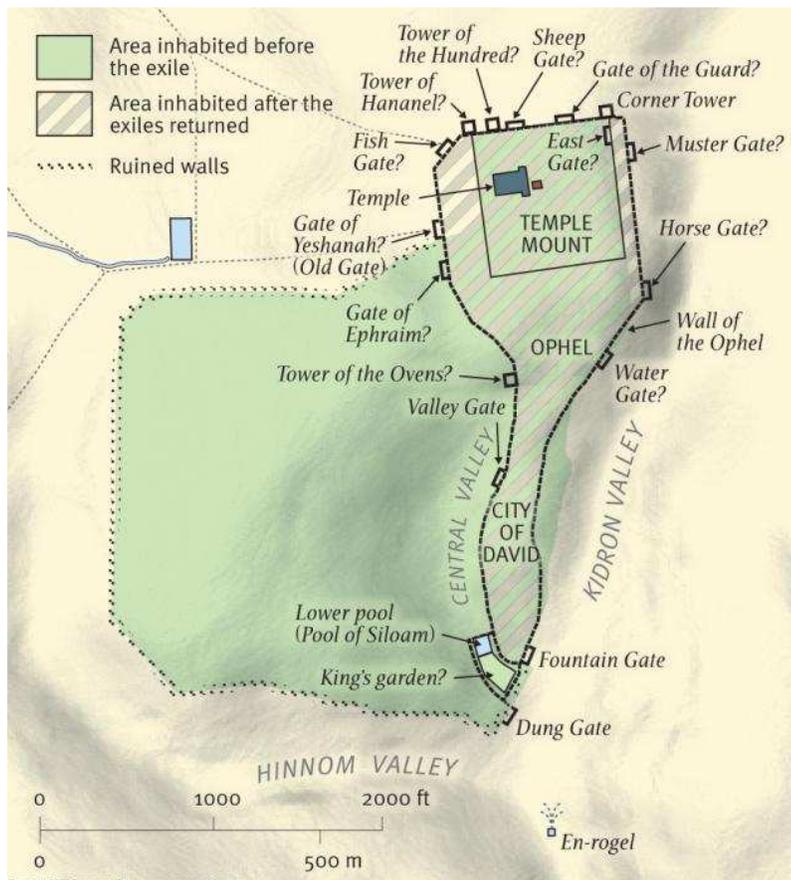
- 516 B.C. Temple completed (Ezra 1-6)
- 464 B.C. Artaxerxes becomes king of Persia
- 458 B.C. Ezra and his mission (Ezra 7-10)
- Opposition to the Wall (Ezra 4:7-23)
- 445 B.C. Nehemiah travels Susa to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1-2)



Nehemiah is cupbearer to King Artaxerxes in Persia in the 20th year of his reign, which is 445 B.C. This is 13 years following Ezra's sanctioned return under Artaxerxes in 458 B.C. where the king not only granted permission but provided abundant resources from the Persian treasury to help Ezra establish the law, the priesthood and the sacrificial system once again in Jerusalem and throughout the region 'Beyond the River.'

Within a decade, however, King Artaxerxes' favor toward the Israelites shifted dramatically when their loyalty to the king was questioned by vehement opponents of the work. No doubt the decree to stop rebuilding the city and its walls is what led to the 'disgraceful' condition of the city as reported by Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, upon his visit to Nehemiah as recorded in Chapter 1. Here are some key points and facts from the first two chapters:

- *Nehemiah offers a poignant and penitent prayer as he learns of the state of Jerusalem
- *He takes personal responsibility for the sins of his forefathers and leaders
- *He waits 4 months before bringing up the issue to King Artaxerxes
- *Note his wisdom in addressing the matter, since the king had recently put the building to a halt
- *Nehemiah's trust and recognition of God's sovereign help is exemplified by 2:8 'And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.'
- *Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, waits three days, then does a nighttime 'reconnaissance' circuit around much of the west and southeastern portion of the wall. See this map:



*He gathers the priests, nobles, officials and other leaders of the project and casts a God-inspired vision for the rebuilding project. 'Let us rise up and build' is their heartfelt and inspiring reply.

*Immediately they are met with opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem who 'jeered' at the Israelites and 'despised' them. More on these adversaries next week!

*Nehemiah boldly confronts them and proclaims, 'The God of heaven will make us prosper and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.'

A Healthy Confrontation with the Status Quo!

1. Prayerful Preparation

How did Nehemiah demonstrate this kind of prayerful preparation? What were the results?

Proper Prior Preparation Prevents Poor Performance – Who said it?

Isaiah 32:8; Proverbs 21:5

2. Bold Decisiveness

Observation + Discernment = Responsibility – How did Nehemiah demonstrate this?

How did Jesus demonstrate this sense of bold decisiveness with perfect timing?

John 7:8; Luke 9:51; Hebrews 4:16; Galatians 4:4-5

Next Week ... Part 6 – Teamwork