



SoulShare

Saturday, May **20** 2017, 9:00—10:30 am Breakfast & Discussion:
Nehemiah interview

J: This is Jed Topples for the Jerusalem Broadcasting Network. I am pleased to have in the studio today a man much in the news lately for his rapid rise to power, and the author of a newly released book, which bears his name, titled, simply enough, "Nehemiah". Welcome, Nehemiah.

N: Thank you, Jed. I am happy to be here, although, as I told you off the air, my time is limited.

J: To the point then. Your book, Nehemiah, would you characterize it as a "how to" manual or is it just another narcissistic celebrity biography?

N: Neither, Jed. I did not build the wall, so I cannot tell anybody else how to do it and the book is not about me. Rather it is about the Lord, Who was pleased to use me in accomplishing His great work.

J: So, it is true, as some critics have charged, that you see yourself as being on some sort of a divine mission?

N: That the Lord God of Abraham has a plan for this place and this people is no secret to those who understand history. Have you not heard of Cyrus, King of Persia, who conquered the impregnable City of Babylon, on the very night it was revealed to the prophet Daniel? Do you not know that Cyrus' name was recorded in the prophecy of Isaiah written nearly 200 years before? It was Cyrus who released Zerubbabel and 40,000 of the House of Judah to rebuild the Temple. Then, the Lord placed Queen Esther on the throne at the precise time to save His people from extinction...

J: OK, OK, we get the idea. Your God seems to have a pattern of reaching out to save His people... from trouble He put them in.

N: Not really, Jed, because we have all made our own trouble and His chastisement is meant to bring us to repentance.

J: That brings up another of the criticisms I have heard -- low self esteem. You have executive talent that could command a seven digit salary anywhere in the world and the undying gratitude of any ruler of any country, yet you seem to spend an inordinate amount of time confessing sins, not only your own but those of your people and even your ancestors! Why so gloomy?

N: "He who covers his sin will not prosper but he who confesses and forsakes will obtain mercy." The key to accomplishment is to recognize our own poverty and depend wholly on the One Who holds all resources. "If we humble ourselves, He will lift us up."

J: Tell us about your relationship with King Artaxerxes. How did you spring for an extended leave of absence, a small army and a fortune in building materials, all to rebuild a city which He might reasonably interpret to be a threat to his authority in the region?

N: Do you see what I mean Jed? This is clearly the Lord's doing in gracious answer to the prayers of His people. I was cupbearer to the king. I had close daily personal contact with him.

J: What are the requirements for that job?

N: Basically, you need to be reliable but dispensable. If someone poisoned the King, I would die, or at least look sick first. I was highly motivated for his welfare and he was always very interested in exactly how I felt.

J: So when you were troubled about the state of the wall of Jerusalem, he noticed...

N: Exactly, but he knew me well enough to realize that it was not illness and inquired as to the cause. God gave me boldness to speak. Then, amazingly, with the Queen present, the King gave me open-ended leave and a blank check for everything I would need, including letters of safe passage.

J: Business experts tell me that some of your strategic planning and personnel management techniques are brilliant in their simplicity. Where did you learn them?

N: If I have any wisdom, it is from On High.

J: There goes your low self esteem again. They say you did not even accept the food allowance due you and fed 150 mouths a day at your own expense.

N: The Lord had provided me far more than I needed and I did not want to lord it over the people. Besides, I work for the pleasure of the One Who sent me, and I don't mean Artaxerxes.

J: My sources say that you carefully researched the state of the wall secretly before you made your case to the leaders of the city. You motivated them with the inspiring story of the king's cooperation in your effort. You isolated the critics by claiming that God was on your side.

N: Not exactly, Jed, but that God had called us to His work.

J: Whatever. But you divided the work by natural groupings, as families and representatives from other towns took responsibility for sections. Of course no one wanted to have their name on a shabby section. And you completed the entire wall, without Union problems or cost overruns in less than 100 days.

N: It was actually 52 days. And the labor was all volunteer.

J: What's more amazing, when threatened, you had to leave half the work force on guard and yourself patrol the perimeter ready to sound the alarm.

N: Do you believe in miracles yet? But it was not all smooth. In addition to the devious plots of our enemies, there were quarrels among the people over food. The nobles took advantage of the people for profit. I had to come down hard on them.

J: And it apparently worked?

N: On threat of being shaken out of the household of God.

J: These people take their religion seriously!

N: I only wish all people knew both the justice and mercy of the Lord God of Israel.

J: You saw through a call to confer in the plain as a plot to kill you.

N: My place was with the work, not at some distant conference table.

J: At the dedication of the wall, you had the Law read and got the people all upset again, apparently.

N: When the people realized they had disobeyed the Lord, they mourned. But we also praised God and remembered all His wondrous works of the past. Mourning is followed by rejoicing.

J: Your plan to people the city by casting lots was also brilliant and your use of pageantry in the dedication, with a spectacular musical show was pure Hollywood.

N: Pardon?

J: [waves his hand and shakes his head, "waving him off"]

N: Well, I was only following the pattern of our great King David and his son Solomon in using artistic excellence to worship the Lord.

J: Two final criticisms have come forward. It seems that you have been unable to put in place an organization that can continue your vision in your absence. While you returned briefly to Babylon, your high priest provided a storeroom and supplies for one of your enemies and the people went back on some of their promises.

N: It is true, and is a great heartache. But it only reminds me of the great mercy of God who has forgiven my sins many times over.

J: But finally, don't you think that you could be a little more tolerant? You essentially forced the people to break up families if they had married foreigners. You dragged up old grudges and rivalries by "playing the Moabite and Ammonite cards." Couldn't those hatreds be laid to rest?

N: God deals with each person according to His justice and mercy. But this I know, if the wisest man that ever lived, the great king Solomon, was lead astray by wives who worshipped foreign gods, it is only reasonable that the Lord would want to quarantine His people.

J: At the end of your book, you ask your God to remember you with favor. I cannot help but think that He will. And so will we.

N: Thank you.

J: And good night to you, from the Jerusalem Broadcasting Network.

Discussion: How does the fictionalized Nehemiah respond to "media attention"?

What lessons can we take from his real life and work?

Have you been called on to carry out a task for which you had no training or experience?

What are the temptations that follow success?

What evidence was there that Nehemiah was open to the Holy Spirit in his daily life?

How did he deal with delicate situations like inter-marriage with pagans?

What made that hard? What was probably the chief temptation for Nehemiah?

Have you ever been criticized for what you felt was the right thing to do?