**Judaism: Theology and Practices through Primary Sources**

**Jeremiah 25:9-12**

8-11The verdict of God-of-the-Angel-Armies on all this: “Because you have refused to listen to what I’ve said, I’m stepping in. I’m sending for the armies out of the north headed by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, my servant in this, and I’m setting them on this land and people and even the surrounding countries. I’m devoting the whole works to total destruction—a horror to top all the horrors in history. And I’ll banish every sound of joy—singing, laughter, marriage festivities, genial workmen, candlelit suppers. The whole landscape will be one vast wasteland. These countries will be in subjection to the king of Babylon for seventy years.

12-14“Once the seventy years is up, I’ll punish the king of Babylon and the whole nation of Babylon for their sin. Then *they’ll* be the wasteland. Everything that I said I’d do to that country, I’ll do—everything that’s written in this book, everything Jeremiah preached against all the godless nations. Many nations and great kings will make slaves of the Babylonians, paying them back for everything they’ve done to others. They won’t get by with anything.” God’s Decree.

**Nehemiah 1-2**

1 1-2The memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah.

It was the month of Kislev in the twentieth year. At the time I was in the palace complex at Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, had just arrived from Judah with some fellow Jews. I asked them about the conditions among the Jews there who had survived the exile, and about Jerusalem.

3They told me, “The exile survivors who are left there in the province are in bad shape. Conditions are appalling. The wall of Jerusalem is still rubble; the city gates are still cinders.”

4When I heard this, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God-of-Heaven.

5-6I said, “God, God-of-Heaven, the great and awesome God, loyal to his covenant and faithful to those who love him and obey his commands: Look at me, listen to me. Pay attention to this prayer of your servant that I’m praying day and night in intercession for your servants, the People of Israel, confessing the sins of the People of Israel. And I’m including myself, I and my ancestors, among those who have sinned against you.

7-9“We’ve treated you like dirt: We haven’t done what you told us, haven’t followed your commands, and haven’t respected the decisions you gave to Moses your servant. All the same, remember the warning you posted to your servant Moses: ‘If you betray me, I’ll scatter you to the four winds, but if you come back to me and do what I tell you, I’ll gather up all these scattered peoples from wherever they ended up and put them back in the place I chose to mark with my Name.’

10-11“Well, there they are—your servants, your people whom you so powerfully and impressively redeemed. O Master, listen to me, listen to your servant’s prayer—and yes, to all your servants who delight in honoring you—and make me successful today so that I get what I want from the king.”

I was cupbearer to the king.

2 1-2It was the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king. At the hour for serving wine I brought it in and gave it to the king. I had never been hangdog in his presence before, so he asked me, “Why the long face? You’re not sick are you? Or are you depressed?”

2-3That made me all the more agitated. I said, “Long live the king! And why shouldn’t I be depressed when the city, the city where all my family is buried, is in ruins and the city gates have been reduced to cinders?”

4-5The king then asked me, “So what do you want?”

Praying under my breath to the God-of-Heaven, I said, “If it please the king, and if the king thinks well of me, send me to Judah, to the city where my family is buried, so that I can rebuild it.”

6The king, with the queen sitting alongside him, said, “How long will your work take and when would you expect to return?”

I gave him a time, and the king gave his approval to send me.

7-8Then I said, “If it please the king, provide me with letters to the governors across the Euphrates that authorize my travel through to Judah; and also an order to Asaph, keeper of the king’s forest, to supply me with timber for the beams of The Temple fortress, the wall of the city, and the house where I’ll be living.”

8-9The generous hand of my God was with me in this and the king gave them to me. When I met the governors across The River (the Euphrates) I showed them the king’s letters. The king even sent along a cavalry escort.

10When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very upset, angry that anyone would come to look after the interests of the People of Israel.

11-12And so I arrived in Jerusalem. After I had been there three days, I got up in the middle of the night, I and a few men who were with me. I hadn’t told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal with us was the one I was riding.

13-16Under cover of night I went past the Valley Gate toward the Dragon’s Fountain to the Dung Gate looking over the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken through and whose gates had been burned up. I then crossed to the Fountain Gate and headed for the King’s Pool but there wasn’t enough room for the donkey I was riding to get through. So I went up the valley in the dark continuing my inspection of the wall. I came back in through the Valley Gate. The local officials had no idea where I’d gone or what I was doing—I hadn’t breathed a word to the Jews, priests, nobles, local officials, or anyone else who would be working on the job.

17-18Then I gave them my report: “Face it: we’re in a bad way here. Jerusalem is a wreck; its gates are burned up. Come—let’s build the wall of Jerusalem and not live with this disgrace any longer.” I told them how God was supporting me and how the king was backing me up.

They said, “We’re with you. Let’s get started.” They rolled up their sleeves, ready for the good work.

19When Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they laughed at us, mocking, “Ha! What do you think you’re doing? Do you think you can cross the king?”

20I shot back, “The God-of-Heaven will make sure we succeed. We’re his servants and we’re going to work, rebuilding. You can keep your nose out of it. You get no say in this—Jerusalem’s none of your business!”