

# Once in a Thousand Years

The Feast in Nehemiah's Day

Cast

Hanani

Hanani's wife

Hanani's 3 children 3 nephews

Eliashib's 2 children

Zadock's 2 children

Jadon's 2 children

Judah's 2 children

## Setting:

*Hanani's home with cushions on the floor and oriental carpet and low table with cups for tea/wine and plate of pita bread and cheese, and fruitbowl.*

*Family groups arrive chatting and smiling and take their seats in a double semi-circle around the table facing the audience.*

## Hanani's Wife

I'm so glad you could all come. Wasn't it a wonderful celebration we had last night to begin Succoth! It always brings tears to my eyes when I read David's psalms of ascent and we recite the last one at the beginning of the Feast. This is the tenth anniversary of that wonderful Feast that we celebrated when the wall of Jerusalem was completed, so this is a special event and I invited some of us who worked on building the wall to get together to celebrate and record our memories of that special time. We want a record that we can pass on to our children and grandchildren. The Feast is for remembering and since we have Hanani home from his trip to visit Nehemiah, he can be our scribe this evening and write down your accounts of those days. I know some of you were little children at the time, but we want your perspectives too. So let's get started, and everyone can share their memories.

Hanani \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, why don't we start with the youngest! \_\_\_\_\_

Tell me your part of the story and I will write it down on this scroll. Give me lot's of details so when your grandchildren read it they will be able to picture it in their minds!

## Once in a Thousand Years: The Feast in Nehemiah's Day Hanani's Family

Child 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Though it was many years ago, I still have a vivid picture of that day in Jerusalem in my mind. I was excited and frightened and confused all at once to know that Papa would be leaving.

For weeks a few of the faithful elders had been having intense discussions long into the night with my father Hanani. I could hear them talking excitedly and making plans as I drifted off to sleep each night.

Child 2 \_\_\_\_\_

I was young and did not understand it all but it seemed very important that my father should do something about the difficulties that the people in Jerusalem were having to deal with daily.

The sounds of the caravan still ring in my head when I think of the day he left to ask his brother Nehemiah to come back with him to Jerusalem to help us. We knew it would take a miracle for the King to let Nehemiah his trusted Steward leave and return to Jerusalem.

Child 3 \_\_\_\_\_

I was told Papa would be gone for weeks, perhaps months, and we had said special prayers for a safe journey, because traveling was dangerous. As a child my world was being turned topsy-turvy. I was so afraid for papa, but Mother said we needed to trust in God and be strong and courageous, just like Moses and Joshua who brought God's people through the wilderness and across the Jordan and into our homeland.

Hanani's Family

Nephew 1 \_\_\_\_\_

How excited we all were when Uncle Hanani and Uncle Nehemiah returned together with a small band of the king's guards to aid us. That first night I was asked to lead the way around the city wall. My father said there was no adult who knew every nook and cranny the way I did. I felt very proud that my knowledge of the city wall that I had gained as a messenger boy was so useful.

Nephew 2 \_\_\_\_\_

I helped pack the donkey, then, in the middle of the night, we left the house very quietly and moved cautiously along the wall and through the rubble. Much of it was broken down and the gates had been burned. Nehemiah had his scribe make notes of all the damage. Before a day had gone by, Nehemiah had gathered the priests and other leading families and assigned them each their own section of the wall to repair or rebuild.

Nephew 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Nehemiah did it in an orderly way so we could repair the areas closest to our homes, and he was wise to take into account the number of able-bodied men in each clan. He also provided what we needed, tools and food, out of his own money. We felt confident, now that God had sent such a capable man to lead us. Even though it was a man's work, he let even the youngest of us help if our heart was willing and our parents agreed.

Eliashib's Family

Child 1 \_\_\_\_\_

One of my first memories was seeing Uncle Eliashib, he was the priest, standing with his sons and brothers in front of the new gate – the Sheep Gate. It was a very warm morning, and the sun was shining brightly. I remember the fresh smell of newly cut cedar, and the dust of the masonry mixed with the earthy odours of the oxen and donkeys.

Auntie was holding me so I could see the ceremony as they consecrated the new doors and thanked God for his help in their work.

Child 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Everyone cheered and there was such joy and excitement, I think the whole city must have come out to watch. We sang and danced around and praised God most of the morning. I didn't understand what it all meant at the time. But now I can appreciate how thrilled our parents must have been to see the first section of the wall repaired, and to know that God was blessing their work.

Zadock's Family

Child 1 \_\_\_\_\_

I was so proud of my father, Zadock, and his brother's as I watched them day after day sweating in the summer's heat to build the wall in front of our home. We were a small family, but there was such excitement in seeing everyone working together and having a part to play in restoring our city. It's amazing what a good leader can do in helping people who don't even know, or even like each other, to work together for a good cause.

Child 2 \_\_\_\_\_

I know our family had always had some problems with another neighbouring family over some long-forgotten misunderstanding...I was young so I never quite knew all the story of why there was such tension between our families. It was something to do with the fact that they had married into a gentile family, and they couldn't be trusted.

But when we saw them working on the wall with us, we all had a change of heart and helped each other. We could see God's blessing in that. Not only was the wall being mended but so were families and friendships.

Jadon's Family

Child 1 \_\_\_\_\_

I remember carrying food to the men in my family who were working to rebuild the new Governor's residence. We lived outside of Jerusalem in Gibeon, but had come to live in the city while our father, Jadon, and his kin did their share of the work.

Nehemiah, his name means "Comfort of God," was a great encouragement to all of us. Even though he was the governor, he would walk around the wall and speak to us daily - even the women - with a kind word and his wonderful warm smile.

Child 2 \_\_\_\_\_

I had always imagined God's leaders to be harsh and stern. But this man was so kind and thoughtful, and he often had special treats in his hand for us children. He said we were having to do the work of adults, caring for siblings, preparing food, running errands and more, so our parents could do the work of building. He was proud of us, and our service to God.

My parents often spoke of how dedicated and wise he was, especially in dealing with our enemies. At the time I did not know who our enemies were, but my parents said they were powerful and always trying to stop our work.

Judah's Family,

Child 1 \_\_\_\_\_

I knew all about our enemies and their plots as my father, Judah, had heard about Sanballat and Tobiah and their plans to attack us as we worked on the wall. This meant we had to work with our tools in our hands and our weapons beside us. Some of the younger boys were asked to be runners, spies, and sentinels so we could be prepared for the enemy's attacks. It felt like we hardly slept some days, but we knew the lives of our brothers and fathers depended on us doing our jobs well.

Child 2 \_\_\_\_\_

At one point Nehemiah ordered that half of the men should work while the other half stood guard with their weapons ready. So we were prepared when the attackers came, but it was really God who deserves the credit for foiling Tobiah's schemes and protecting us all. In spite of constant attacks, we did not lose even one man while rebuilding the city. I am still amazed by this when I think of all the people who were against us. Nehemiah always encouraged us to be strong and courageous. He told us often, "If God is on our side, who can be against us?"

Hanani\_\_\_\_\_

It was an amazing time building the wall and God blessed every step of the work being done. The best part was the Feast after the gates had been hung! Do you all remember Ezra reading the Torah as we all stood, men, women and children, in the square in front of the Water Gate. I had never seen such a huge crowd, listening so carefully and quietly as the priest read God's instructions. Then there was singing and dancing and shouts of praise. What an awesome feeling to celebrate the completion of the wall.

My heart was so full of wonder as we gathered olive, myrtle, and palm branches and young and old worked together building booths on the rooftops, in the courtyards, and city squares.

We were all so eager to honour God who had saved us, sent us a strong, loving leader, and restored our city.

Hanani's wife\_\_\_\_\_

Those were the most wonderful eight days of my life. I was so glad my husband, Hanani, had been inspired to seek out Nehemiah, his brother. It was marvelous what God had done every step of the way, from Nehemiah's wholehearted service, to the king's royal decrees, to so many willing workers! And the whole project was completed in only 52 days! What a miracle! No wonder we have always said there was no feast like that one, no not since the days of Joshua.

*Everyone sings: Rise, hold hands or shoulders and sway to the music.*

*Some can dance...grapevine in a circle*

*Clap hands on the final chorus*

Chorus:

Those were the days my friends,

In Jerusalem

We set the gates and built the city walls

We knew that God was pleased

He fought our enemies

What a Feast of miracles we saw!