

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 1 – “Nehemiah Prays For His People”

OBSERVATION

Monday 7:00pm, H 105 (1st floor, High School--foot of stairs, behind the gym, by the vending machine area), Tuesday 7:00am, Family, Room, CCCM – Phil Twente, cell #714 425 9221; email – ptwente@gmail.com For past studies, audio plus notes, go to: <http://www.missioncalvary.com/> Click on “Bible Studies” on the left column. References include commentaries by numerous pastor/teachers.

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 1

Nehemiah hears of Jerusalem’s crisis condition.

1. Some 1,000 years after Moses and some 400 years before the birth of Jesus, the nation of Israel and the Jewish people were in a desperate state. First the northern Jewish kingdom of Israel and then the southern Jewish kingdom of Judah. The city of Jerusalem was completely conquered by the Babylonians and the once-glorious temple of Solomon was destroyed.

When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, they deported almost everyone from the city and the region - for some 70 years, Jerusalem was a ghost town.

When the Jews were deported to Babylon, they began to make homes for themselves there. They settled down, and many still followed their God, but they did it from Babylon, with no desire to return to their land.

Some of these faithful Jews were raised up to places of prominence - Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; Esther was made queen in the courts of a Persian king.

But after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, they were given the opportunity to return to their homeland, the Promised Land, only 50,000 decided to return to the Promised Land. (about 2%). But they did return, and in the days of Ezra, they rebuilt the temple and laid a spiritual foundation for Israel once again.

The Book of Nehemiah begins about 12 years after the Book of Ezra ends; almost 100 years after the first captives came back to the Promised Land; and some 150 years after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed. After this long time, the walls of the city of Jerusalem were still in rubble. They tried to rebuild the walls, but had failed. In [Ezr 4:6-23](#), we see that some 75 years before they tried to rebuild the walls, but were stopped. No one thought this obstacle could be overcome, so the walls lay in ruin and the people stayed in trouble.

Whether the need is small or your greatest need is to PRAY!!! (Nehemiah’s Chap. 1:5-11 prayer)

1 ADDRESS (vs. 5a)

2 THANK AND PRAISE THE LORD FOR HIS

MERCIES, HIS GRACE, HIS FAITHFULNESS (5b)

3 COME IN ALL HUMILITY (vs. 4 & 6)

4 CONFESS YOUR SIN (vs. 6&7)

5 MAXIMIZE GOD’S MERCIES (v. 5b)

6 MINIMIZE YOUR PROBLEM IN HIS LIGHT

7 PLEAD/STAND ON THE PROMISES OF GOD (vs. 8-10)

8 PRAY AND PERSEVERE IN FAITH AND EXPECTANCY (v. 11)

9 PRAY THAT HIS WILL AND NOT MINE, BE DONE

Whenever God wants to get a work done, He lays hold of willing people. The walls of Jerusalem had been ruined; a small remnant had returned; and there was much work that needed to be done. In 536, Zerubbabel and Joshua had taken about 50,000 Jews back and had (by 516) rebuilt the temple. In 457 there had been a small revival under Ezra, but now it was 445, and God was looking for someone to go to the ruined city and restore safety and order. Nehemiah was to be that person. Notice Nehemiah’s activities in these three chapters.

Chapter 1 - Nehemiah Prays for the Work

The report (*Neh 1:1-3*)

As cupbearer to the king, Nehemiah (a Jew) held a high position in the court. He was close to the king and could share his confidence. But Nehemiah was not forgetful of his own people, for he eagerly asked his brother for news about Jerusalem. Read *Psa 122:1-9* and *Psa 137:5-6*. Oh, that saints today had as much interest in their heavenly Jerusalem! The news was distressing: the remnant was suffering shame, the walls were broken down, and the gates were burned. See *Psa 79:1-4*. Instead of being a city of praise and glory, it was a city of shame and reproach.

The response (*Neh 1:4*)

Nehemiah was immediately burdened for his city. The fact that he was more than 700 miles away made no difference; nor did it matter that he was enjoying luxury and prestige in the palace of the king. He did not say, “The city’s plight is not my fault!” Immediately his heart was touched and he wanted to do something to save his city. For four months (from Dec. to April; see *Neh 1:1* and *Neh 2:1*) he wept and prayed. See *Dan 9:1-27* and *Ezr 9:1-15*.

The request (*Neh 1:5-11*)

This book shows Nehemiah to be a man of prayer (*Neh 1:4-11; Neh 2:4; Neh 4:4; Neh 4:9; Neh 5:19; Neh 6:9; Neh 6:14; Neh 13:14; Neh 13:22; Neh 13:29; Neh 13:31*). The book starts and ends with prayer! *Neh 1:6* tells us he prayed day and night, so burdened was he for the city. Note that Nehemiah confesses his sins and the sins of his people. He also reminds the Lord of His gracious promises (*Neh 1:8-9*) and then offers himself to be God’s servant to do something about Jerusalem’s plight. “Here am I, Lord, send me!” In *Neh 1:11* we see that he has faith to ask God for servants, other Jews who would help him in the task.

TIME LINE – BOOKS OF EZRA – (“Bible Hub” online)

537 BC	The Proclamation of Cyrus	Ezra 1
537 BC	The Exiles Return	Ezra 2
535 BC	Temple Work Begins (70 yrs. from 605BC)	Ezra 3
534 BC	Adversaries Hinder Temple Work	Ezra 4
534 BC	Artaxerxes Orders Work Stopped	Ezra 4:17
520 BC	Tattenai’s Letter to Darius	Ezra 5
520 BC	Temple Work Resumed by Darius’ Decree	Ezra 6
(Books of Haggai & Zechariah occur here)		
515 BC	Completion and Dedication of the Temple	Ezra 6:16
(Book of Esther occurs here)		
BOOK OF ESTHER (about 60 yrs. from 1 st return)		
483 BC	Queen Vashti Deposed	Esther 1
478 BC	Esther Becomes Queen	Esther 2
478 BC	Mordecai Thwarts a Conspiracy	Esther 2:21
474 BC	Haman Seeks Revenge on the Jews	Esther 3
473 BC	Mordecai Informs Esther of Haman’s Plot	Esther 4
473 BC	Esther Prepares a Banquet	Esther 5
473 BC	The King Honors Mordecai	Esther 6
473 BC	Haman Is Hanged	Esther 7
473 BC	Xerxes’ Edict on Behalf of Esther & Jews	Esther 8
472 BC	Purim Instituted	Esther 9
472 BC	Xerxes’ Tribute to Mordecai	Esther 10
458 BC	Ezra to Jerusalem (147 years from 605; 79 years from 1 st return; 57 years from last verse of chapter 6)	Ezra 7
458 BC	Ezra Commissioned by Artaxerxes	Ezra 7:11
457 BC	Families Return to Jerusalem with Ezra	Ezra 8
457 BC	Ezra’s reforms (80 yrs. from 1 st return)	Ezra 9
456 BC	Ezra’s Prayer About Inter-marriage	Ezra 10

BOOK OF NEHEMIAH (about 100 years from 1st return)

445 BC	Nehemiah’s Prayer for the Exiles	Nehemiah 1
444 BC	Artaxerxes Sends Nehemiah to Jerusalem	Nehemiah 2
444 BC	Builders of the Walls Named	Nehemiah 3
444 BC	Builders Overcome Ridicule	Nehemiah 4
444 BC	Nehemiah Abolishes Debt and Bondage	Nehemiah 5
444 BC	Sanballat’s Plot	Nehemiah 6
444 BC	Completion of the Wall	Nehemiah 6:15
444 BC	Census of Returned Exiles	Nehemiah 7
444 BC	Ezra Reads the Law	Nehemiah 8
444 BC	Israelites Fast and Repent	Nehemiah 9
444 BC	Israelites Seal the Covenant	Nehemiah 10
444 BC	People Settle in Jerusalem	Neh. 11, 12
432 BC	Nehemiah Restores Laws	Nehemiah 13

Kings of Persia in Ezra-Nehemiah:

Cyrus (539-530-9yrs); Darius I (522-486-36yrs); Xerxes (Ahasueres – 485-464-21yrs); Artaxerxes I (464-423-41yrs)

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OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

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Neh 1:1 The words of Nehemiah (Jehovah gives comfort) the son of Hachaliah (Jehovah gives light). It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel,

Neh 1:2 that Hanan (grace) one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

Neh 1:3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

v. 1 ... Shushan the citadel: Nehemiah lived in *Shushan*, the capital city of the Persians, in the **citadel**, the fortified palace of the Persians. We can note that Nehemiah is someone important, or who has an important position, living in the palace of the king of Persia.

v. 2concerning the Jews who had escaped..., and concerning Jerusalem: Although he was a slave in a very high position in Persia, his heart and interest were in Jerusalem - 800 miles away. He wanted to know from those returning how the people and the city were doing. It would seem that an important man like Nehemiah had more important things to think – like keeping his desired position as the king’s cupbearer - than a distant city he had never been to, and a people he had mostly never met. Yet, because his heart was for the things of God, his heart was not on himself, but on others. He had the heart of **Psa 137:5-6** : *If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth; if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy. If Jerusalem was special to God, then it was also special to Nehemiah.*

v. 3 The wall of Jerusalem...broken down...gates... burned... The news was not encouraging. The people were called with the unhelpful title of *survivors*. They were in **great distress and reproach**, and the walls of the city itself were **broken down** and the city **gates are burned with fire**. The bad state of the people and the city walls were intimately connected. In those days a city without walls was completely open and vulnerable to its enemies. They had no defense, no protection at all. Normally an *unwalled city* was a very poor town, with nothing valuable in it. If there were anything of value, it could be stolen away easily because there was no defense to stop it.

vs. 1-2 Nehemiah was a patriot, who was interested in God’s people. He wanted to see the restoration of the people to Israel.. He was interested in what was happening there in Jerusalem. His brother Hanani and these other fellows had just returned from there. Nehemiah begins to question them concerning these very things. What a heart for a place he had never been to; for a people he didn’t know; wanting them to live has God had promised His people. **How is our heart for our fellow believers and how they are living?**

v. 3 Hanani told of just the sad condition of the people and of the city itself. What an affect upon Nehemiah! To show how true a patriot the man was, when he heard these words he just sat down and cried. He couldn’t handle it and for several days he mourned and wept when he would think about Jerusalem. **Oh that we would have such a compassionate and caring heart for God’s people and their welfare.**

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Nehemiah's Prayer

Neh 1:4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Neh 1:5 And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments,

v. 4 Nehemiah's reaction to the news about Jerusalem and its people. *I sat down and wept*: Nehemiah's immediate reaction was extreme. Immediately *he sat down* and he began to weep and to mourn. *Mourned for many days*: God was going to use Nehemiah to do something about this situation. But first, God *did* something in Nehemiah. Any great work of God begins with God doing a great work in somebody. God prepared Nehemiah's with an important position in Persia. God have him a heart curious about the welfare of Jerusalem and its people. Here we see his heart broken over their needy state. God in heaven knew of the need, but little would be done until the right man also felt the need. God would do something great to meet that need through Nehemiah. Nehemiah could not do this alone. He had to be a *leader* - one who *influences* other people - to get this job done. Nehemiah is a book all about *leadership* - which is much needed today. Leadership is *influence*, and it applies to everyone. leader. Leaders must have a big vision, and Nehemiah had one. We must have a vision, a goal, that is big enough. *I was fasting and praying...* Nehemiah's reaction went beyond an immediate emotion. His concern didn't quickly pass. Such a concern if it is from the Lord, will abide and grow and the burden will remain until the problem that prompted the burden is solved. Nehemiah didn't whine and complain, he immediately did what he knew he could do - pray, and intensely seek God in this situation. *The God of heaven*: Nehemiah also had a clear understanding of Whom he fasted and prayed to. Only the **God of heaven** can really meet our needs.

v. 5 Nehemiah comes to God in humility. *I pray, LORD God of heaven*: Humility begins by simply understanding there is a God enthroned in the heavens, and *I am not Him!* Nehemiah recognizes exactly who God is: You are **LORD God of heaven . . . great and awesome God . . . who keep Your covenant . . . and mercy . . . with those You love**. Martin Luther said, “Genuine faith is faith that dares to move on God's grace!”

vs. 4-5 Nehemiah prays for his people - in humility; looking to God's promises; with a heart ready for action! Nehemiah's prayer -- **This book shows Nehemiah to be a man of prayer (Neh_1:4-11; Neh_2:4; Neh_4:4; Neh_4:9; Neh_5:19; Neh_6:9; Neh_6:14; Neh_13:14, Neh_13:22, Neh_13:29, Neh_13:31)**. Prayer is essential to leadership. If your vision is so big that only God can accomplish it, then you obviously must pray. If prayer isn't absolutely necessary to accomplish your vision, your goal isn't big enough. To do as Nehemiah did here is the proper thing when you are faced with the situation that's just beyond your capacity to deal with it. The proper thing is to just bring it before the Lord. And so with fasting and with prayer day and night, Nehemiah was waiting upon God as he prayed for Jerusalem and were the conditions of the city. It appears that Nehemiah prayed for four months before he did anything. Later, when the work of rebuilding the walls actually begins, it only takes 52 days to finish the job. But that 52-day project had a four-month foundation of prayer. Nehemiah took his pain and stress to God in prayer - and seemingly, was able to leave it there. Prayer will relieve your stress. You may be trying to relieve stress through entertainment, but all that does is divert your attention. Entertainment doesn't give any solutions to stress. Prayer will give you strength; when you wait on the Lord in prayer, He will renew your strength (*Isa 40:31*). **What great emotion shown by Nehemiah! What a heart for Jerusalem and the Israelites there. So he goes to prayer! How vibrant is my prayer life? If my name were inserted in the book, how many references to prayer would there be?**

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Neh 1:6 please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned.
Neh 1:7 We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

Neh 1:8 Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations;

Neh 1:9 but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.'

vs. 6-7 Please let Your ear be attentive: Humility understands my complete dependence on God. When Nehemiah desperately asked God to *hear the prayer of Your servant (let Your ear be attentive . . . Your eyes open)*, it reflected his complete dependence on the LORD. Only God could help, and if God would only *hear*, Nehemiah knew He would help. God will allow you to be fruitless to expose your need for total dependence. *Confess the sins . . . which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned:* Humility will also confess sin openly. Nehemiah plainly and simply confessed sin, without any attempt at excusing the sin. We must avoid *excusing* ourselves in the confession of our sin. May we never say, “Lord, *if* I sinned” or “Lord, I’m sorry, but You know how hard it was” or other such nonsense. We can find great freedom in open, honest confession, without any attempt at excuse or wondering “if” I sinned or not. *Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You:* Humility identifies with the needy. Obviously, Nehemiah was a godly man; but he openly and passionately put himself with his *father's house*, and prayed by using “*we*” instead of “*they*.” The load is not lightened until we have felt the pressure in our own soul. We are never used of God to bring blessing until God has opened our eyes and made us see things as they are.

vs. 8-9 Nehemiah comes to God looking to God’s promises. *Remember:* What a powerful way to come to God, asking Him to remember His promises. Nehemiah said, “LORD, You made a promise to Moses and this nation, I ask you now to make good on it.” Nehemiah quoted from both Lev. 26 and Deu. 30. This, no doubt, is the secret to great power in prayer: to *plead the promises of God*. We may be a bit annoyed when one of our children comes to us saying “Daddy, you promised”; but our Father in heaven *delights* in it - and often *demand*s it before prayer becomes effective. *Psa 81:10* God says to His people, *Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it*. God will not open His storehouse until we open our mouths in asking Him to perform His promises. *If you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them:* Nehemiah quoted a *conditional* promise. The condition was returning to God, and keeping His commandments. He really couldn’t know if the nation was keeping the commandments, but he knew that *he* was keeping them, and because he had identified himself with the nation in their sin the nation could also identify itself with Nehemiah in his godly fulfillment of these conditions.

y. 6 When I come to God it is vital to get this sin issue cleared up. God always cleared it up by confession. *“He who seeks to cover his sins shall not prosper, but who so will confess his sin the same shall be forgiven” (Proverbs 28:13)*. In Isaiah we read. *“My hand is not short, my ear not heavy but your sins have separated you from me” (Isaiah 59:1-2)*. If we have unconfessed and unrepentant hearts, our prayers are not being heard because of the sin that is there. It has broken the relationship, it has broken the communion with God. First I must come to God with the address, recognizing the faithfulness of God; the holiness of God; the faithfulness of God to keep His promise. I need to take care of that which would separate me from God or hold back my petition. As Nehemiah dealt with the issue of sin, he begins by the confession of sin. *“God, I and my father's house we're guilty”*. I’ve got to make that confession, I’ve got to get rid of the sin by the confession of sin if I am ever to get forgiveness of my sin. **How quickly are we likely to go to the necessary confession and repentance whenever we have sinned? Praying day and night! When is the last time I prayed day and night?**

y. 7 We can see from this verse that Nehemiah believed God's Word. He rested in it. He knew God's Word well. He was concerned because God's commandments were ignored. **How concerned are we when fellow believers ignore God's commandments?**

y. 8 *Your servant Moses* – We see the parallel places in *Lev 26:33; Deu 4:25-27; Deu 28:64*. Though in an enemy's country, and far from the ordinances and the Word of God, Nehemiah did not forget the law: he read his Bible well, and quotes correctly. **Can that same thing be said of us? To what degree?**

y. 9 Nehemiah said to the Lord, “You said that You would scatter us if we disobeyed You, and we have disobeyed. You also said that if we turned and came back to You, that even though we be ‘*cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.*’ Nehemiah believed that the Jews would return to the land. He counted on it and that is why he prayed this way. **Do we usually stand on a promise or promises of God, that He has made, when we pray?**

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Neh 1:10 Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand.

Neh 1:11 O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." For I was the king's cupbearer.

What a Friend We Have in Jesus – Alan Jackson - The Maranatha! Singers

1. What a friend we have in Jesus All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer. 2. Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness Take it to the Lord in prayer. 3. Are we weak and heavy-laden, Cumbed with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge—Take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer! In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.

v. 10 Now these are Your servants and Your people,... Meaning those that were in Jerusalem and Judah, gathered out of several countries, and returned to Jerusalem: **whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand**; touching and moving the heart of Cyrus to proclaim liberty to them.

v. 11 Nehemiah prays with a heart ready to *do* something. **Grant him mercy in the sight of this man**: Nehemiah concluded by asking God to bless him when he would soon speak to the king of Persia about the matter. Nehemiah was going to *do* something about the sorry state of Jerusalem's walls and people, and he knows without God's intervention, he can do nothing. **Let Your servant prosper this day**: This is a prayer of a man of *action*, not a sideline critic. Nehemiah does not pray “God, make it all better” or “God, get someone *else* moving on this problem.” Instead, his prayer is “God, *use me* to make it better.” Recognition of need must be followed by earnest, persistent waiting upon God until the overwhelming sense of world need becomes a specific burden in my soul for one particular piece of work which God would have me do. Laying the matter to heart, he did not begin to speak with other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise; but it occurred to him that he would do something himself.

A Cupbearer will build the wall in 52 days! Not a engineer, construction expert – no, but he had it in his heart!!!! He would undertake the reconstruction.

v. 10 He finally got to the petition but it's good not to just rush in with the petition. We so often just rush right in and say God I need this and this and this in a hurry, if you can't do it in the next five minutes, I'll praise you anyhow. But we don't bother to establish a proper relationship. Acknowledging who He is, acknowledging the faithfulness of God to keep His word, acknowledging our sin, I don't deserve it. But Lord, You promised that You would be gracious and merciful to those who would call upon You and who would confess their sins, that You're faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness! We are your children. You've redeemed us by the blood of Jesus Christ. You have called us to be your children. You've drawn us unto Yourself. Lord, we're in the terrible situation. Things are going bad. The condition of the nation is deplorable. God hear, God answer, God work, please Lord. It's on that basis that we approach God as we establish the relationship, then we can bring our petitions, then we can offer our prayers unto God. He doesn't really get around to the petition until he has taken care of the relationship. **Is that how we pray?**

v. 11 For I was the king's cupbearer. Nehemiah realizes I'm soon going to be standing before the king. I'm soon going to be bearing the cup to him. His desire is that God might give him favor in the eyes of the king, mercy in the sight of this man, because he was the king's cupbearer. **What an example for us – to seek the Lord even when we are in a totally tenuous position with respect to the world, as Nehemiah was!**

Seventieth Week of Daniel – Messianic Prophecy!

Sir Robert Anderson; Dr. Harold Horner; Frederick Holtzman – all have done in depth works on Daniel 9:25 prophecy!

