

The central focus of these chapters is undoubtedly Nehemiah's success in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and in securing the defenses of the city. But this is not just a construction project. **It is an act of faith, sustained by prayer.** Nehemiah – what a remarkable servant of God he was, yet he is not mentioned anywhere else. Only here, and he is not quoted in the New Testament, so his work was not of a prophetic nature that would be enshrined and go on; his work was very practical on the spot in Jerusalem, and yet he was a deeply spiritual man. He was a man who not only prayed he was ready to be used Himself.

*“The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel,”* (Nehemiah 1:1)

A rich book we learn many valuable lessons from Nehemiah. We learn the Characteristics of a True Reformer. His concern for Gods Cause and for Gods people. His reverence and respect for His God, and His appeal for His mercy. His fervent and heartfelt prayer. His continuous prayer. His confession of Sin. His remembrance of Gods Covenant.

**The Book begins in the reign of the King of Persia, Artaxerxes a very powerful King.** Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer. You may think that was not a very high position, just a servant, but in fact the king's cupbearer would have most probability been his most trusted adviser. Yes, he was the taster of anything that the king drank; yes, the principal person in ceremonial at banquets and all state occasions, but also the person closest to the king. So, a Jewish man, by the providence of God, had been placed in such a position, like Daniel before him, a man of considerable influence.

**Here unfolds the account from the records, of the Medes and Persians.** The Words of Nehemiah, *the sum of what was spoken, the theme of His life and the deeds he did. All recorded.* Traditionally its thought that Ezra wrote this account from the extensive records. While others say, no Nehemiah himself penned these words they base it on “the words of Nehemiah”. **But greater than who the earthly author was,** we remember and believe and know that it was written by divine inspiration. What was recorded was inspired by God. *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,”* (2 Timothy 3:16)

We begin at the Palace the Kings residence of Shushan during the winter months, at this time the King had been reigning for 20 years. Nehemiah is not announced at the beginning of the chapter by His position and influence, He is put across as just and ordinary person. The old writers made much of this, noting the **quality of Humility**, a humble view he had of himself in spite of the fact that he was the Kings trusted cupbearer and close advisor, Nehemiah lived at ease, and in honor, this palace was majestic and very grand, but that is not what the narrative is about. As today there are sadly some that only boast how well off, they are, - how blessed they are with material things. We only find out right at the end of the Chapter he was a cupbearer, may we never boast of position, our great ability, our wealth, and status and the ease in which we live. My we be Humble, meek and trusting like Nehemiah. May we boast in what the Lord wrought through our efforts. *“My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad.” (Psalms 34:2).*

If Nehemiah was not humble, and not trusting and looking to the Lord fully I think we can say he would have failed. *We should look wholly unto the Lord. Our trust is first in Him.* This passage tells us how God prepared a man for a great work, and how the man prepared himself. Because His hope was in His God – we read...

**“And it came to pass” through *this there are valuable lessons we learn from Nehemiah.*** By seeing a remarkable recovery of a desperate situation by just one man who **dependened upon the Lord. And was used to inspire many.** Although he had the king’s ear, Artaxerxes ear, **His trust was in God, in His promises, in His covenant.** How easily he could have mixed his trust in God with the pagan beliefs of the day. Yet he stayed true to Scripture hoped fully in Gods Promises.

V2 **We read that messengers came.** Then Hanani came and certain men of Judah. They came as messengers *possibly* troubled themselves hence the reason they travelled in the deep of winter. Perhaps if they were not so concerned they would have waited for more favourable conditions before they travelled. Nehemiah calls the messenger ‘one of His brethren’, or kingsman. Normally they wouldn’t be introduced to the palace but, Nehemiah is very eager to hear news and asks about Jerusalem; He asks about the people. Supposing and hoping all is well. He thought things must be well - this is Gods City these were people under Gods Promise,, surely they would be doing well, this was Jerusalem Gods people. Although He is in a prominent position he still cares deeply. His interest and concern is genuine.. **The news he gets is very discouraging.** There is

poverty, there is trouble, there are still attacks from neighbouring countries. The walls have not been rebuilt and lay in ruins from Nebuchadnezzar's troops. The Gates are in ruin. Why are the gates mentioned? Well, the gates were very important, and very symbolic in those days. Gates represented a thriving city and represented the Honour of the City. The city was now in ruin, the gates burned with fire. Jerusalem had become insignificant and nothing. A nothing city. The Jews were in great shame. Yes, the temple was rebuilt by Ezra, although it was not used as it ought to have been used and it was a lot smaller than the original temple. . The walls are in ruin. People had rebuilt their homes mostly in the country, but the city was in ruin and torn down, not only was the city torn down but the Honour of God was torn down. It should have been restored.

**V4** When He heard this report of the Spiritual condition of Jerusalem He sat down and wept and mourned certain days. **It deeply moved Him**; it wasn't just a passing sorrow it deeply cut him to the heart. **This is a book about a reforming servant of God. His motive is right**, it's not for selfish gain he seeks, but truth and freedom for his people, for honour to be restored It's a parallel picture describing the condition into which Satan brought the people of the time, it is a type and a picture of the New Testament church.

Nehemiah was not showing weakness that He wept. **“His was the tear most sacred shed for the pain of others.”** His grief at their situation was further shown by his fasting. Nehemiah's grief reminds us of our Lords grief as He wept over Jerusalem. He does what is the most helpful and needful, he goes to prayer.

**V5** “And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and **terrible God**, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:” **He has great reverence for God.** The modern translations say great and awesome God. Yes, He is great and **awesome** but the original meaning is a *God to be greatly feared. It means to fear, reverence, honor, respect.* He gives great honour to God and draws near. **It teaches us to draw near to God**, it reminds us of our great privilege. **He pleads directly with God** – What privilege granted that we can cry Aba Father. That we can request help from the God of heaven and earth... **Nehemiah shows us how we should come with a holy awe of his majesty and glory, remembering that he is the God of heaven, infinitely above us, and sovereign Lord over us, and that he is *the great and terrible God.*** ***We are reminded-*** That He is God to be worshiped. He has Holy confidence in His grace and in his truth. He is a God who keeps covenant and shows mercy to those who

love Him, and nothing shall be thought too much, for God to do for those who love Him and keep His commandments.

**V6-7 His general request for the audience and acceptance of all the prayers.** “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.”

When we look at the church how it is in need of reform, how it is in need of Gods Glory. How there are more in the streets on Sunday afternoon and not even thinking about going to worship God. We blame the times in which we live, we blame the media affecting our young. It's not our fault. But not Nehemiah he says both my fathers house and I have sinned. We have corrupted your commands.

**Hear my prayer** I'm not just saying a prayer, Prayer is not just talking into the air. - Bless the church, bless the pastor, bless this and bless that.. no, rather it's a cry from his heart. **let your eyes see my heart from which this prayer comes.** I'm presenting my case from a longing heart - and usually God answers a longing heart and here this prayer was wonderfully answered. He that formed the *ear*, shall he not hear his children's cry? He that made the *eye*, shall he not see the sufferings of his people?

**It was prayer day and night.** Not for Himself only but for the children of Israel. Not only the walls to be restored but for **Society to be restored.** His confession of sin, not only Israels sin, but the sins of His father's house and I have sinned. Nehemiah recognizes that Israel's disloyalty has led to forfeiting of the covenant blessings, and the result has been exile, He says I and my father's family have acted very corruptly against you. **He bases His prayer upon Gods covenant** and Gods steadfast love for his people not on any merit of his own or the people of God.

**V8** He says, Remember. This was a common prayer and petition- It's not forget or overlook our folly Lord, but rather act on our behalf oh Lord. *Do not abhor us, for Your name's sake; Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory. Remember, do not break Your covenant with us. Jeremiah 14:21.* We know you haven't forgotten us but rather we have not heeded your command as you gave it to Moses. *We have strayed and done wrong. and he quotes Deuteronomy 28:64: 'If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations.'* *He knows that has happened, .... But he also knows if we confess our wrong and return to you. You will*

**gather us and make your name to dwell among us.** Deut 30:2 He basis his prayer upon a promise of God.

**Nehemiah understands that this promise has a condition.** We would do well to understand Gods promises have conditions. If you sin ( depart from my ways), I will withdraw my blessing from you, as a church, as a community (as I did for the Jews, these things are written for our learning). **The basis of His prayer is sincere repentance.** If our repentance is sincere, it's not just words I'm sorry I ask you to forgive me, true repentance is coupled with a desire to do what is right. To do better, to be pleasing in Gods sight. If we repent and you mean it, if we keep the words of His covenant He will bless us. Deut 29 The Lord I will come back to you. But only if you are going to represent me, and live for me, to seek my glory and serve me. If you're going to come back to me only to have happy homes, and happy families, and a happy life – those are all good things, but if that's all you want, God seems to say – don't count on me forgiving you and blessing you.

**Why did He pray, what motivated him, why did he repent?** There was eternal purpose, not just to build the walls and the gate. No, it was far higher, this is all about bringing honour and glory to God. This was His prayer before action- prayer is vital before any action.

V10 He says Lord these your people you have redeemed. He finds grounds for encouragement for what God has already done. That He will bring it to completion to that which He has begun. He uses this logic and pleads and reminds God of His intention to bless them. He knows God will not part with that which He has purchased and redeemed from the gods of Egypt. or obscure the glory of thy conquest over the gods and people of Egypt, by leaving this thy people destitute?

**Nehemiah 1:11 (KJV 1900)** — 11 O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, **who desire to fear thy name:** and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

**who delight to fear your name.** The fear of the Lord is the proper response to God. To fear God is to know Him (*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."* (Proverbs 9:10) **To Fear God is to trust Him** (*The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned*), **obey Him** (*"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate."* (Proverbs 8:13) **and show Him reverence.**

As Nehemiah thinks about the terrible situation. The way enemies come night after night to raid and plunder the city without protection from any wall. He realizes the complete social decay. The poverty and just how terrible the situation is. **He realizes it may be that the Lord uses Him as an instrument.** His heart is being stirred and he has a great concern for the city to be restored. He understands it's not going to depend on his personal hope and resolve. He is standing on the promise of God. His hope is in the Lord.

This prayer of Nehemiah's is very beautiful, saturated as it is with quotations from Scripture, and so effective with God, because based on His own Word.

It was steeped in tears of sorrow for sin, and offered without ceasing *day and night*. Nor was it individual only, for there seems to have been a little band of others united with him, *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; .*

Lord, teach us to pray Like he did, till others are found kneeling with us. Here is a good petition for us as we go forth to our daily life, in which so much depends on the attitude of our fellow-men.

*Prosper thy servant this day and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.*

An appeal that God will help him as he takes the dangerous path of approaching the king on their behalf.

Those who desire to fear your name, and keep your covenant. They not only reverence and worship but they keep His ways. They delight in His ways, they regard not iniquity in their hearts. Therefore, God hears them. They delight to fear God, delight to obey God. They enjoy being His servants. This is the Character of a reformer like Nehemiah. This is to be our character as believers.

Amen