

Nehemiah Chapter 1

Introduction: Nehemiah = “Jehovah comforts” or “The Comfort of God.”

- As we study through this short book we’ll learn that Nehemiah was a kind person who cared and empathized for others. He cared about the traditions of the past and the needs of the present. He cared about and hoped for the future. He cared about his heritage, his ancestral city, and the glory of his God.
- Nehemiah revealed his caring attitude in four different ways in this the first chapter.

#1 Nehemiah cared enough to ask:

V: 1-2 Some 14 years after Ezra had returned to Jerusalem.

- Hanani arrived in the 20th year, meaning the 20th year of the reign of “Artaxerxes Longimanus” who ruled Persia from 464-423 BC, that puts these events at 444 BC.
- The month of Chisleu / Chislev, 9th month which equates to right about the end of November or the beginning of December.
- Hanani, one of Nehemiah’s actual brothers as opposed to a “brother” as in a fellow Jew (Nehemiah 7:2) had gone to Jerusalem and and was now back to report to his brother on the situation in Jerusalem.
- Nehemiah was serving in the royal palace, in the capital of Persia, in Shushan.

Map



- Nehemiah was concerned for what was happening in Jerusalem so he inquired of them.
- We too should be paying close attention to the events taking place in and Jerusalem.

Zechariah 12:2 “Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, ...”

- This started out as just another routine day for Nehemiah, he was just working & serving - minding his own business.... when his life was forever changed.

1. **Moses** was just doing his job tending sheep when God called him to the top of Mt. Sinai.

2. **David** was just doing his job, tending the sheep when he was called home suddenly to have dinner with Samuel - and ended up being anointed as king over Israel.
3. It was an ordinary day for **Peter, Andrew, James, and John** - just doing their job, mending their nets after a night of fruitless fishing - then Jesus called them to be fishers of men.
 - You just never know what God has in store for those who are faithful in the small things, doing the ordinary things of life and God works in and through our lives.

In the midst of speaking judgment, the Lord asks a rhetorical question:

Jeremiah 15:5 “For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? Or who shall bemoan thee? Or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest?”

- Nehemiah was the man chosen to do these very things - he asked.

V: 3 Nehemiah learned that the people who had gone back from Babylon to Jerusalem weren't doing well. They were in great affliction, humiliation and reproach.

- The Temple had been re-built, the sacrifices had been taking place but neither the walls nor the gates of Jerusalem had been restored, the city was still in disarray.
- Without walls or gates the people couldn't protect themselves, they couldn't live a normal life with the threat of bandits and marauders, keeping them from living the life that God had called them to.

Proverbs 18:10 “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”

- It is only when we are abiding in Jesus, safely behind His protective walls in our lives that we can live the victorious Christian life that He has provided for us.

V: 4 #2 Nehemiah cared enough to weep:

- The things that make us either laugh or weep are indicators of our own character.
- Having heard this tragic news Nehemiah sat down and wept - and mourned over their situation.
- Nehemiah began to fast and to pray, crying out to the God of heaven.

The Psalmist declares:

Psalm 137:5-6 “⁵If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
⁶If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”

- Nehemiah grieved and wept over Jerusalem, no doubt reflecting the heart of God who was grieved over her condition.
- There are Jews today that have a fervent love for Jerusalem; many who live in Jerusalem who look with disdain upon those who live in Tel Aviv which by many Jews is considered pagan Tel Aviv. In their minds true Jews want to live in Jerusalem.
- I love touring Israel, all the cities and sites, but there is something special about being in Jerusalem.
- So here is Nehemiah in tears over the situation.
- According to **Leviticus 16:29** - fasting was required of the Jews only once a year, on the Day of Atonement.
- Fasting became a custom among the Jews during the Babylonian captivity. They inaugurated several national fast days to mark the destruction of the Temple, to mark other catastrophic events. Daniel fasted while he was in Babylon, The prophet Ezekiel fasted, Ezra fasted. Fasting became a tradition during the captivity in Babylon.

V: 5 #3 **Nehemiah cared enough to pray:** (1st of 12 instances of prayer in this book.)

- This book both begins and ends with prayer.
- Nehemiah is fasting and prays: “I beseech thee...” I beg of you, I cry out, pleading...
- He is humbling himself before God.

Psalm 51:17 “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

Micah 6:8 “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”

- He prays: “**LORD / Yahweh**”- God of Heaven, the great and terrible God. Terrible is a King James era word that meant majestic or awesome.

This is similar to how Jesus teaches us to pray:

Matthew 6:9 “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...”

- Who keeps His promises to those who obey Him. Sometimes it is a helpful reminder to us as we pray, to pray His word, His promises to us - we encourage ourselves in who God is and what He does on behalf of those who fear Him.
- Extolling the virtues of God, praising His character - He is merciful.

V: 6a Lord please listen to our prayer...

- Nehemiah, like Ezra, like the prophets before them knew that God had reason not to listen to the prayers of His people because of their disobedience.

Isaiah 59:1-2 “¹Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: ²But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that He will not hear.”

- If there is a problem related to un-answered prayer we need at times to examine our own behavior - that broken communication is usually on our end of things.

Isaiah 59:3 “For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.”

- Knowing they were guilty, Nehemiah confessed the sins of the nation and as Ezra did, he included himself and his father’s household in that confession.
- When one man, one Jewish soldier, Achan, sinned at Jericho we read:

Joshua 7:1, 11 “¹But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan...” - “¹¹Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed...”

- Since the sin of one man was the sin of the whole nation, it brought shame and defeat to the whole nation. The sin had to be dealt with before God could bless His people with victory.
- Nehemiah is doing the only thing he can do being faced with an impossible situation, a situation beyond his capacity to deal with it - he cries out to God with prayer and fasting.

Sometimes it's just beyond our ability to express:

Romans 8:26 “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

- Like Ezra, Daniel, Nehemiah and others who didn't actually participate in the sins of the nation - they recognized their own responsibility in the sins of the nation. We can't divorce ourselves from the responsibility that we bear for the sins of our nation.
- We can talk about abortion, homosexuality, pornography, greed, and dishonesty that is rampant in our nation - and our part of the responsibility for not expressing our opinions on the subject, for not opposing those who support these things, for not showing up to speak out or protest what is taking place.
- The liberals have pretty much taken control of the educational systems, kindergarten to college, they've taken control of the press & media, and now the government.
- It's interesting that if we speak out against these things, then the liberals really aren't so liberal about it - in their minds we're not allowed to have an opinion contrary to theirs. Speaking out on these issues causes us to be labeled as ignorant, narrow minded, Bible thumping bigots.
- Freedom of expression and speech are only for those with politically correct views - how did we get to this?
- Through complaisance and apathy. It has been said that all that is necessary for evil to triumph over good is for good people to do nothing. And good people bear a certain responsibility for that.
- Nehemiah sees and acknowledges his part in all of this - and the first thing to get straight in our prayer if it's going to be effective is to deal with / confess our sins.

Proverbs 28:13 "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

- With confession we remove the barrier described in **Isaiah 59:1-2**.

V: 7-9 Nehemiah is quoting and acknowledging what God has said about those who rejected or were disobedient to God's Word.

- This is most likely a reference to what Moses recorded in **Deuteronomy Ch. 28**; the blessings of obedience, and the cursing of disobedience.
- At the same time he is invoking God's Word, reminding Him of His promises to those who would confess their sins, and repent of their sins, and turn to the Lord.

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all un-righteousness."

- “*Lord here we are, in Shushan because of our disobedience, just like you said.*”
- “But you said if we would turn back to you and keep your commandments then you would gather us up from these far away places and bring us back....”
- Nehemiah is invoking God’s Word back to God, reminding Him, making it part of his prayer to God.
- As Nehemiah is quoting God’s Word back to God in his prayer; you can’t do that unless you already have God’s word stored up in your heart!
- We need to spend time studying God’s Word and memorizing God’s word, being able to recite God’s Word, so that the Holy Spirit can draw it out when we pray.

Psalm 119:11 “*Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee.*”

V: 10-11 We are your people Lord, you have redeemed us by your strong hand, by your great power. Nehemiah is reminding God that we have this relationship with you, we are yours! You redeemed us...

“O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to thy servant...”

- Nehemiah sort of lays the groundwork, the foundation of his prayer, then he comes to the point: “Lord please hear my prayer, please be merciful to us your people, please take up our cause and help those who fear your name.

#4 - Nehemiah cared enough to volunteer:

- It’s been said that prayer is not getting man’s will done in heaven but getting God’s will done on earth.
- Part of getting God’s will done on earth means that there needs to be people who are willing to get involved, people who are available for His use - as:

Ephesians 3:20 “*Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,...*”

- Grant me mercy in the sight of the king - because I’m his cup bearer.
- A cup bearer was more than a modern butler. He would often stand or sit near to the king and taste the wine or food brought to the king, that meant that he had to be handsome, without blemish - cultured, intelligent, knowledgeable of court procedures, and able to converse with the king.

- Because he had access to the king, this equated to influence and power. Over time this became a position of great honor, and often times the cup-bearer became a counsellor to the king, sometimes even to the equivalent of a “chief of staff” type position.
- Like so many others he had been put in a key position for God’s use.
- Esther had been placed in a key position a generation earlier. Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon.
- When God wants to accomplish a work, He prepares His workers and puts them in the right place at the right time.

1. Abraham cared and rescued Lot.
2. Moses cared and delivered the Israelites from Egypt.
3. David cared and brought the nation and the kingdom back to the Lord.
4. Esther cared and risked her life to save her nation from genocide.
5. Paul cared and took the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire.
6. Ultimately, Jesus cared and died on the cross for a lost world.

- God is still looking for people like Nehemiah who cared enough to ask, to weep over the needs, to pray for God’s help, and then to volunteer to get the job done.

Matthew 9:37-38 “³⁷Then saith he unto His disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; ³⁸Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.”

Isaiah 6:8 “..... Here I am Lord, send me!”