

City of God Part 13 - "Prepared in Prayer" (7-19-26)

Introduction: Review where we are in the Series so far, then introduce today's topic - Starting Nehemiah

- **Nehemiah** - 3rd wave of exiles return, the rebuilding of the Wall, the reading of the Law, further Reforms
- **Timeline:** 12-13 years after the events at the end of Ezra 9-10

Today's Text: Nehemiah chapter 1 - **Prepared in Prayer**

1) Nehemiah receives News

Nehemiah 1:1-2 (ESV)

[1] The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, [2] that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.

Note: Susa (Shushan) - Babylon, then Persian kings' "winter home." Many scholars believe it eventually became the primary residence of Persian Kings. The events of Daniel 8 and all of Esther occur here.

Nehemiah is in the palace in Susa, and is visited by family/friends. Wants to hear an update from back home.

Nehemiah 1:3 (ESV)

And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

The People . . .

Great (adjective) - Emphasizes the importance, size, or the significance of something or someone.

Trouble (noun) - The basic meaning of this word displays various shades of evil depending on its context.

Calamities, failures, and miseries are the connotations of this word in this context.

Shame (noun) - reproach, scorn, disgrace. Often a taunt hurled from an enemy

The City . . .

Wall - broken down. Walls provide healthy structure, protection, stability, and established boundaries

Gates - destroyed by fire. Gates are the place of coming, going, and gathering. Conversation and commerce.

Note: The integrity of the city (and therefore it's people) has been compromised and needs to be rebuilt.

Nehemiah 1:4 (ESV)

As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Note: Prayer & Fasting in Ezra focused on personal & corporate repentance. Here, it's concern for the trouble that has come upon the people, including how they are viewed and treated by the outside world.

Alexander MacLaren (Scottish Pastor Mid-Late 1800s) - "So Nehemiah prepared himself for his work by brooding over the tidings with tears, by fasting and by prayer. There is no other way of preparation. Without the sad sense of men's sorrows, there will be no earnestness in alleviating them, nor self-sacrificing devotion; and without much prayer there will be little consciousness of weakness or dependence on divine help."

Nehemiah's Prayer - motivated by His care for the people of God, and their conditions.

This mindset should lead us to genuine concern, sorrow, and prayer. Not just analyzing the condition of others and then judgment. But instead having a heart for the people of God, and then a willingness to help!

2) Nehemiah's Prayer

- **Reflection and Praise** - Based on God's Character and Nature

Nehemiah 1:5 (ESV)

And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments

Note: Prayer should be first rooted in the Character and Nature of God, and giving him the praise He is due.

Jesus - "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name"

- **A Humble Plea** - Based on God's goodness, and not our own

Nehemiah 1:6-7 (ESV)

[6] let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. [7] We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.

Note: Nehemiah asks God for His attention (eyes and ears) to their need. A known pattern of humble prayer.

1 Kings 8:28-30 (ESV)

[28] Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, [29] that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. [30] And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

Note: Solomon prayed this prayer for the future of the Temple and the People of God.

Daniel 9:17-19 (ESV)

[17] Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. [18] O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. [19] O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."

Note: Daniel prays over Jerusalem, he knows (from Jeremiah) that time of exile was coming to a close.

Application: We pray for God's People, not because they (we) are good or deserving, but because they (we) are His, and He loves them (us), and they (we) carry His name!

- **Prayer for Help** - Based on God's Promises

Nehemiah 1:8-10 (ESV)

[8] Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, [9] but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' [10] They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.

Note: Nehemiah is aware of God's promise in scripture (quoting from Moses Lev. 26, Deut 4 & 28). And He recognizes that God has kept this promise in Nehemiah's day, yet the work is not done.

3) Nehemiah's Position

Nehemiah 1:11a (ESV)

O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

Note: Nehemiah, and others are all praying! And now He prays for help in his task. He has considered the need, He has sought the Lord, and now He is participating (still thru prayer) in the task ahead.

Nehemiah 1:11b (ESV)

Now I was cupbearer to the king.

Note: Nehemiah understood his unique position, and the opportunity to help God's people in their trouble.

- We should never neglect or minimize where God has uniquely placed us to make a difference.
- Prayer is the work. Therefore, any work we set our hands to, should begin and continue in prayer.

Conclusion: Anyone can read the “news” and see the trouble around us. But will we find our hearts broken for the people of God, so that we are moved to seek the Lord in prayer. Will we allow Him to open our eyes to how we may participate in the answer to the very prayers we pray.