



## **Nehemiah 1:1-12**

### **Prayer of Nehemiah**

The greatest evil in our day is the secular humanism that says we do not need God to do what we want to do. I think an even greater tragedy is how many Christians live their lives on the basis that they can function quite adequately without Him. It is easy to think we can depend upon our own abilities and ignore God. God does not help those who help themselves. He helps those who cannot help themselves. The religion of secularism is the fastest growing religion in America, and it has taken on a sugar coated Christianity. ”

The book of Nehemiah opens with a description of the tragic events in Jerusalem. The people were in trouble. A hundred years have passed and the walls of Jerusalem have not been rebuilt and there are no secure gates to the city.

The walls had been broken down by the Babylonian invasion in 586 B.C. Two groups had returned from captivity to Jerusalem over the last hundred years. There is no historical evidence that the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt before Nehemiah arrived.

The opening verses of Nehemiah sound like the refrain of Psalm 137:1-4. "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst of it we hung our harps. For there our captors demanded of us songs, and our tormentors mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:1-4, NASB 1995)

Do you sing a song like that today? Are your eyes focused on a great need and a great challenge and feel utterly insufficient for the cause? Perhaps your own personal wall and outer gates need to be repaired before you can accept the challenge of a new ministry.

### **THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR WALLS (1:1-3)**

There were spiritual walls in Jerusalem that had to be broken down such as idolatry, arrogant pride, and a secularism that said we don't need God, and don't interfere in our personal affairs. God's indictment was very clear, and He did not stutter. The people of Judah stiffened their necks and hardened their hearts against the Lord God. "Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful following all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the Lord which He had sanctified in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the

His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people until there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36:14-16).

God finally said enough and brought the Babylonians to power and took the people of Judah into captivity for 70 years. When God was through with Babylon, He picked up another hammer and used the Medo-Persians to deliver His people from captivity.

**Old walls have to come down before new ones can be built.**

God had to tear down some old walls before He could build new ones in Jerusalem.

God used the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar to destroy and remove the sinfulness and idolatry of His rebellious people. The old walls had to be broken down, and its gates are burned with fire (1:3).

Nehemiah clearly defined the problem. He saw the people of Jerusalem under great distress. It was a miserable situation. The word for reproach means, sharp, cutting, piercing. They were suffering from misery and calamity. With the walls torn down, they were in a vulnerable position.

What are some of the old walls God needs to destroy in your life? Survey the walls around you in your personal life, your home, your marriage, your work, and your pleasures. Get alone with God and take a hard look at some old walls.

Perhaps your old wall has become overgrown with the briars of sinful habits and entanglements of sinful relationships. Maybe your wall is filled with sinful habits that you now find difficult or next to impossible to break.

Your wall may be wrongful sexual practices that the Bible clearly forbids. You know they are wrong and clearly out of control. Maybe it is the wall of pornography or addiction to prescription drugs or an unquenchable desire for illegal drugs.

Is your old wall filled with a critical attitude and a bitter tongue? Do you whine and complain about everything? Has your faultfinding become compulsive and habit forming? Does it spread like an infection throughout your church?

Maybe the walls of your city have been broken down.

Perhaps the gates to your city need to be repaired. You were burned and no one can get inside anymore. Perhaps it was some bitter experience, betrayal or emotional abuse that caused your gates to crumble. Maybe your ministry was sabotaged by the selfish pride or controlling spirit of someone or perhaps your reaction to him or her. Your gate may have been burned by a selfish, controlling, lying, backstabbing, abusive spiritual leader and now you don't trust anyone, even godly people. You may have been so badly burned that you want to runaway and hide. It has left you with a feeling of reproach and disgrace. The emotional scars on your wall have left you in great personal distress and the last thing you want to do is trust someone with your

your wall have left you in great personal distress and the last thing you want to do is trust someone with your old wall.

Do you find much of your wall and gates to your life in the need of repair?

God will never use us to our full potential unless we see the true condition of our walls and burned down gates to our city. May the Holy Spirit illumine the true condition of our church, our community, and our world. We have to weep over the walls before we can rebuild them God's way.

There is a new spiritual wall that needs to be built around the city of your soul. There is a wall of witness and testimony that needs to be built that will exalt high the faithfulness of our Lord God. We need to build a solid wall of strong Biblical theology based on God's faithful revelation. We need to build a strong wall of eternal security based on the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. The strong wall of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ needs to be proclaimed so that everyone who hears it will trust in Him. On that wall we build our witness to the world.

### ***Face the truth about your old walls.***

Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed over the conditions in Jerusalem. He became personally involved in solving the problem. He was a compassionate leader who spent time seeking the mind of God.

That is where God's people must always begin. What is the condition of your spiritual wall?

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). Have you recognized your poverty of spirit? Do you realize it truly is in utter spiritual destitution, helpless and miserable? When you realize your poverty of spirit, you realize your absence of pride, self-assurance, and self-reliance which will not sustain you in God's holy presence or in the building of new walls.

It is only when we come to grips with our utter nothingness and utter dependence upon God that He will rebuild our walls.

How is your relationship with Christ?

Alan Redpath said, "When God takes up a man and uses him in His service, the first thing He does is to show him his own utter inadequacy, insufficiency and unworthiness for the tasks" (p. 22).

A. W. Tozer describes what happens when we neglect the walls of our lives. "Let the owner neglect for awhile his prized and valued acres and they will revert again to the wilds and be swallowed by the jungle or the wasteland. The bias of nature is toward the wilderness never toward the fruitful field" (*The Roots of the Righteous*, p. 100).

What the walls were to Jerusalem, our lives are before God, writes Chuck Swindoll. Then he adds, "...the walls of our lives often lie in ruins through neglect. The leader who brings us to rebuild the walls is the Holy Spirit, and it is He who continues the work of reconstruction inside us. He tries His best to bring to our attention the condition of our walls, but sometimes we don't hear what He is saying. Yet, we are not hard of hearing; we simply don't listen" (*Hand Me Another Brick*, p. 27).

### ***Mourn over your old walls.***

He prayed with a humble attitude and a broken heart.

Nehemiah mourned over the loss of his walls. He sat down and wept and mourned for days (v. 4). God always welcomes a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

The picture is an intense emotion, expressed in weeping, fasting and prayer, and it continued for four months.

Jesus said, Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt. 5:4). Such mourning is too deep to conceal. The sense of personal sin is too deep to hide. The sinner sees his sense of poverty and spiritual conviction and feels deeply. He mourns like a man mourning for the dead. He cries out, O wretched man that I am. Who can deliver me? ”

Jesus saw the deplorable sins of Jerusalem in His day and sat down on the slopes of Mt. Olivet and wept over the city and mourned, prayed and sacrificed His own life for it.

What is your reaction to your walls where you live? You may want to weep and mourn and tell God all about it. He can take it.

Get on your knees in brokenness and mourn with a broken heart at what you see.

I know, that is not the popular fad in our churches. Facing the truth in our lives, mourning and weeping are not the popular church happy talk mentality. But God still demands that we face the facts about our spiritual walls and mourn over them. Our choice is between feel good and restoration of our spiritual life. God's principles have not changed. The popular Christian happy hour reinforces the narcissistic attitude and spiritual depravity in our churches.

Nehemiah did not start working until after his weeping.

Nehemiah could only work after he cast himself in utter dependence upon the LORD God. We work in vain if we are not in total dependence upon Him.

Prayer and fasting before God of heaven is the right attitude (1:4). His heart was tender toward God. It is significant that as a great leader the first thing Nehemiah did was to turn to God in prayer.

Cyril Barber writes, The self-sufficient do not pray; they merely talk to themselves. The self-righteous cannot pray; they have no basis on which to approach God. ”

There is one kind of person for whom God can do nothing; it is the person who is absolutely satisfied with what he is at this moment in the sight of God, says Redpath.

## **PRAYER WAS THE FOUNDATION FOR NEHEMIAH'S WALL (1:4).**

Nehemiah's faith was focused on the great attributes of God. Nehemiah's prayer came from the heart of a man who fed his soul on God's Word. He knew what God was like. He also knew the great promises of God.

I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven (v. 4).

As a Christian leader, what is the first thing you do when you are made aware of a problem? What is your first reaction as a pastor or immediate supervisor? Is your first instinct to take it to God in prayer?

first reaction as a pastor or immediate supervisor? Is your first instinct to take it to God in prayer?

Hudson Taylor said, "It is possible to move men through God by prayer alone." Nehemiah made prayer his priority.

Prayer is important for every leader because: "Prayer makes me wait and depend upon God. It prevents us from rushing in to fix something when we do not have all the details. It forces us to depend upon God. Prayer not only makes us wait, but it also clears my vision," says Swindoll. It helps us to see things from God's perspective. Moreover, "prayer quiets my heart. It takes away the worry and anxiety and gives a steadfast peace. Prayer activates my faith" (*Hand Me Another Brick*, p. 41).

### **Pursuing God in Praise**

What is this God of heaven like? He is the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments (v. 5).

Your prayer life cannot go wrong when you pray back to God His own great promises and truths. Our friend Nehemiah recognized the attributes and character of God.

He is the great and awesome God. Nehemiah begins with praise to God. He anchors his prayer on the great attributes of God. God is faithful even when we are faithless.

Nehemiah was pursuing God in praise. He is the God Who preserves the covenant. He treats us with lovingkindness."

God is pursuing a love relationship with us. He loves those who love Him and keep His commandments."

Spend some time in the Psalms marking your Bible so you can come to them as you begin your daily prayers. Begin your prayer with reading a few verses on praise and adoration of our great God and Savior. This sets our attitudes right before God. His desire is to hear us praising Him every day. Nehemiah was no stranger to the truths of God's Word. His anchor was in the faithfulness of the LORD God and His covenant.

You may find it helpful to copy some choruses and favorite hymns in the blank pages of your Bible so you can refer to them as you begin your prayer with praise.

### **Reexamining Self and Confessing Sin**

Nehemiah was confident that God would listen to his prayer.

His prayer is an appeal for God's tender mercy. The more intensely we are aware of our sinfulness and failure the more we, too, will bathe our prayers in His mercy.

"Let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned" (Nehemiah 1:6).

God demands that we mourn over our sinfulness. There is no blessing until we look deep down in our own soul and see our spiritual life as it really is," says Redpath.

God demands that we mourn over our sinfulness. There is no blessing until we look deep down in our own soul and see our spiritual life as it really is. Nehemiah had the attitude, There but for the grace of God go I. The person who forgets his sinfulness falls into sin.

Nehemiah includes himself in his confession of sin. There is no blame game going on in his prayer. There is the absence of self-righteousness. He does not excuse himself. He accepts his own responsibility.

"We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses" (Nehemiah 1:7).

"Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples " (Nehemiah 1:8). James Boice has pointed out that God's covenants with Israel had two sides to it: blessing and judgment. It was conditional. If the people obeyed Him, God would bless; if they disobeyed, He would chastise them. And that is exactly what God did.

Nehemiah reminded God of his promise when He said, if "My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Has the Holy Spirit put His finger on some sin in your life where you need to confess to Him and turn from it?

We must do business with God before He can use us to His glory. He has to lay new foundations before He can build secure walls in your lives and ministry.

### **Affirmation of what God is doing in your life.**

Nehemiah's prayer is a great affirmation upon God's past dealings and what He is doing in his life. Real prayer is rooted in the great promises of God. Nehemiah reminded God of His gracious promises. In order to pray like that he had to be familiar with God's promises. You cannot pray back to God His promises if you have not acquainted yourself with them.

Nehemiah claimed the promises of God. He was fully assured that God was able to do what He had promised.

"But if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell " (Nehemiah 1:9).

Nehemiah claims God's promise to restore His people spiritually. His prayer was answered based on God's purposes and His great promises in Deuteronomy 30:1-5 and Isaiah 44:28-45:4. A great sovereign God is the one who made the promises, and He will fulfill them.

He is a God who forgives. He is a God who restores His people. He is a God of great power. He is the God of the covenant.

Do you base all of your prayers upon God's Word? Nehemiah learned to do that. All of the great prayer warriors down through church history have learned to do that.

"They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand" (Nehemiah 1:10).

God has given Christians great promises to claim as we reaffirm our walls upon which we build.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

"The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for in God the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock " (Isaiah 26:3-4, NASB 1995). The KJV reads, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD forever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength."

What is God doing in your life? What has He been doing over the past year? What kind of ministry has He had you involved in recent weeks? Ask Him to guide you and provide for what He wants to accomplish in and through you.

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. . . . And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:13, 19).

He is looking for a vessel that is completely available to Him.

Nehemiah spent four months, from December to April, praying over the great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem and its gates that were destroyed by fire. That was the burden of his heart. And he unloaded that burden on the Lord.

Verse eleven tells us that Nehemiah had other believers praying over the situation. "O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man. Now I was the cupbearer to the king" (Nehemiah 1:11).

What is the burden God has laid on your heart?

Make your prayer request specific. Put your faith in God to help you and start praying specifically for the burden He has laid on your heart. Ask Him for grace and strength to accomplish the task that is before you.

### ***Yield yourself to Christ.***

Jesus said, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

The servant of God does not go to God and make demands on Him. He does not insist on his rights because he has none.

Nehemiah was determined to know the mind and direction of God before he acted upon the terrible news of the deplorable situation in Jerusalem.

Servants of God do not have any right to choose their own task or sphere of service. Nehemiah realized the claim of God on his life and for that reason he sought the mind of the LORD God before he acted. Lord,

claim of God on his life and for that reason he sought the mind of the LORD God before he acted. Lord, what will You have me to do, and how would you have me do it? Only as the Lord achieves His eternal purpose in and through you will your life be successful in His sight.

God wants absolute submission to His will.

The only way we can possibly live the Christian life to its fullest and to enjoy that quality of life which is made possible in Him is by virtue of allowing Him to live His life in us. When we focus our eyes upon Him we draw from His fullness.

God is looking for a man, a woman, a youth who will make himself available to Him.

King David said to his son Solomon, As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever (1 Chronicles 28:9). Those are words of wisdom for us today too.

### ***Expect God to answer your prayer.***

The Lord wants us to trust Him. Have you ever noticed that God does not provide until we need it?

Nehemiah expected the Lord to give him success. "O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man. Now I was the cupbearer to the king" (Nehemiah 1:11).

He was praying something like, Lord, something has to happen! Do something, anything. Change our lives. This is no way to live. Lord, you take over my life. "

I like the simple prayer of Jabez because it came from his heart. "Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me! And God granted him what he requested" (1 Chronicles 4:10).

That is what God wants from us. When I pray I expect God to answer it. I expect Him to give me success in what He is doing in my life.

The father of the modern missionary movement, William Carey declared: Expect great things of God; attempt great things for God. "

Swindoll suggests that we pray a bold prayer. Lord, make me successful. Make me find that place in the center of Your will where heavenly prosperity rests, in whatever level it may be. May I reach the maximum so that I am, in Your eyes, prosperous. And, Lord, grant me favor with those in authority over me! (p. 40).

Make me successful, Lord. Make your servant successful today in the things that please You. Nehemiah was available to meet the need, if that was God's will.

### ***Rejoice in Christ.***

When God answers your prayer, please don't forget to stop and thank Him. In fact, before you end your prayer, break out in praise to Him rejoicing in His faithfulness.

## SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Obviously we have made many applications along with the observation and interpretation in this study. The opening chapter of Nehemiah gives us some basic principles for an effective leader.

1. Nehemiah was available to God and to people. He had an open door policy with people and a direct line with God.
2. He recognized the need and clearly defined it. He could state the problem in a concise statement.
3. Nehemiah got involved in solving the problem.
4. He got eternity into the picture. What is God's perspective of the circumstances?

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