

## The Prayer of a Burdened Believer (part II)

### *Nehemiah 1:1-11*

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Introduction. Last week we began a look at the prayer of a burdened believer found in Nehemiah 1:1-11. We considered the context of Nehemiah's prayer in verses 1-4, where we see the immediate circumstances, the subsequent response, & the resultant concerns of his prayer. Note with me this evening the content of Nehemiah's prayer by examining the first 2 elements of this prayer: its adoration & its confession. Next week we will look at the affirmation & the supplication in this prayer. By way of introduction, consider Wiersbe's antidote to the indifference & apathy of some by contrasting Nehemiah who "care enough to ask (:1-3), cared enough to weep (:4); cared enough to pray (:5-10); & cared enough to volunteer (:11)." Nehemiah's prayer can be considered a "model" prayer. "This great prayer is impressive in that it is a declaration of divine faith. All through it Nehemiah rests his plan upon the attributes of God" (Lockyer). Also take note of the meaning of Nehemiah's name: "Yahweh has comforted."

#### I. The adoration in Nehemiah's prayer (:5)

##### A. Who God is -

##### 1. He is addressed as "*O LORD God of heaven*" >

- a. The title used by Cyrus for God in II Chronicles 36:22-23 & Ezra 1:1-2.
- b. The truth that all the heathen gods were mere idols but the God of the Jews is the Lord in heaven.
- c. The ascription of this divine title is used in Ezra 5:11-12; 6:9; 7:12, 21, 23 as well as Nehemiah 1:4-5; 2:4, 20 & also found in Daniel 2:18-19, 44.

Application: Compare the phrases in Matthew 6:9, "*Our Father, which art in heaen, Hallowed be Thy name*" – "That God would be treated with the highest honor & set apart as holy" (ESV note).

##### 2. He is addressed as "*the great & terrible God*" >

- a. The description of Him as "majestic & awesome" – cf. 4:14 & 9:32, "*the great, the mighty, & the terrible God...*"
- b. The description of Him in Deuteronomy 7:21, "*Thou shalt not be affrighted at them (Canaanites): for the LORD Thy God is among you, a mighty God & terrible.*"

Summary: "To what kind of a God do we pray when we lift our prayers to '*the God of heaven*'?"

We pray to a 'great & awesome God' (Neh. 1:5), who is worthy of our praise & worship. If you are experiencing great affliction (:3) & are about to undertake a great work (4:19; 6:3), then you need the great power (1:10), great goodness (9:25, 35), & great mercy (:31) of a great God. Is the God you worship big enough to handle the challenges that you face?" (Wiersbe).

##### B. What God does –

##### 1. "*Keepeth covenant*" >

- a. "*Keepeth*" – means "exercising great care over."
- b. "*Covenant*" – means "written agreement or promise."

##### 2. "*Keepeth mercy*" >

- a. "*Keepeth*" – means "exercising great care over."

b. “*Mercy*” – Ryrie notes: “The word is *hesed*, used about 250 times in the O.T. It means loyal, steadfast, or faithful love & stresses the idea of a belonging together of those involved in the love relationship.”

C. Who God sees –

1. “*Them that love Him & observe His commandments*” >
  - a. “With these words, Nehemiah recognizes God as having a nature to love. He approaches Him as One who is faithful & merciful toward those who love Him” (Stevenson).
  - b. The evidence of love is obedience – John 14:15, “*If ye love Me, keep My commandments.*”
2. “The Lord had made a covenant with His people Israel, promising to bless them richly if they obeyed His Word, but warning that He would chasten them if they disobeyed” (Wiersbe).  
Ask: What does the Lord “see” about you?

II. The confession in Nehemiah’s prayer (:6-7)

A. The definition of confession –

1. The word “*confess*” means “to hold out the hand” indicating God sees; nothing is hidden.
2. The word pictured in Psalm 32:5 & 24:4.

B. The description of confession –

1. It is the acknowledgment that men have broken God’s laws; transgressed (I John 3:4).
2. “Nehemiah sets forth God’s judgment of the people as being in just response to the people’s sin (:8). Effective prayer must always begin with the cleansing of the heart (Psalm 66:18)” (Stevenson).

Summary: “The city of Jerusalem was in ruins, & the nation was feeble because the people had sinned against the Lord (see Ezra’s prayer of confession in Ezra 9 & the prayer of the nation in Neh. 9)” (Wiersbe).

Application: Note that Nehemiah says “we” as he identifies himself with the people (a previous generation that he did not even know). He didn’t blame others, but himself & said, “*We have sinned against Thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned*” (:6).

Illustration: Compare Joshua 7 & the sin of Achan. “Since the sin of one man was the sin of the whole nation, it brought shame & defeat to the whole nation. Once that sin had been dealt with, God could again bless His people with victory” (Wiersbe). (See also W.W.’s book: *The Integrity Crisis*.)

Comparison: See Proverbs 28:13; Psalm 38:18; Psalm 32; & I John 1:9.

Conclusion: What are the first (& most important?) elements of Biblical prayer? Nehemiah begins his intercessory prayer with adoration & confession. There is first of all the ascribing of praise to God, the acknowledgement of His character. He is indeed the great & awesome God, worthy of all praise & thanksgiving. Nehemiah’s prayer includes reference to the promises of God in His covenant & mercy. God also recognizes those who genuinely love Him & seek to keep His Word. Therefore “effective prayer must always begin with the cleansing of the heart” (Stevenson). Confession is the only way to have forgiveness. Following confession, Nehemiah’s prayer involves affirmation & supplication. That we will consider in the continuation of Nehemiah 1:8-11.

What lessons can we learn from Nehemiah’s “model” prayer?