

The Prayer of a Burdened Believer

Nehemiah 1:1-11

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Introduction: Consider the 3 returns of the Israelites from captivity: First led by Zerubbabel in 536 B.C.; second by Ezra in 458 B.C.; & third by Nehemiah in 445 B.C. It was the role of Zerubbabel to lead in the repairing of the Temple. It would be the task of Nehemiah to repair the walls & gates of the city of Jerusalem. Because of his position as cup-bearer to the King, he would be able to ask for favors for his people, the Jews. “As a child of God, he knew how to present his requests & receive striking answers... Nehemiah was as truly a man of prayer as Elijah, but he wrought no miracles. A need & opportunity called him & that was enough. The ruins of the city filled his soul with grief, & he prayed till his heart was near the breaking point. But nothing extraordinary happened, nothing save performance born of prayer. What pregnant sayings these are & how they summarize Nehemiah’s noble work – ‘So I prayed. So we built’ (Lockyer). Nehemiah 1 verses 1-11 give us the first of several prayers that he offered. Note with me in this text” (1) the context of his prayer (:1-4); (2) the content of his prayer (:5-10); & (3) the consequent of his prayer (:11).

I. The context of Nehemiah’s prayer (:1-4)

A. The immediate circumstances (1:1-3)

1. The setting > the 20th year of Artaxerxes (445 B.C.).
2. The subjects > Hanani (Nehemiah’s brother?) & Nehemiah.
3. The scene >
 - a. There was a remnant.
 - b. There was ruin (“*great affliction*”).
 - c. There was reproach (the once magnificent city now in shambles).

B. The subsequent response (:4)

1. Nehemiah wept >
 - a. “What makes people laugh or weep is often an indication of character (Wiersbe).
 - b. “Sometimes weeping is a sign of weakness; but with Nehemiah, it was a sign of strength” (Wiersbe).
2. Nehemiah mourned >
 - a. Evidence of earnest compassion.
 - b. Compare the response of the captives in Ezra 9:3-4.
3. Nehemiah fasted >
 - a. Evidence of the sacrifice of time & food.
 - b. Compare the fasting of the Jews required yearly (Leviticus 16:29).
4. Nehemiah prayed >
 - a. The first of 12 references of his praying in this book.
 - b. “The Book of Nehemiah opens & closes with prayer. It is obvious that Nehemiah was a man of faith who depended wholly on the Lord to help him accomplish the work (Wiersbe).

C. The resultant concerns (:1-4)

Why such a concern about the broken-down walls?

1. Security of the city > for defensive purposes.
2. Separation of the citizens > for distinctive purposes.

Ramifications for that day & for ours?

What are the ramifications for broken-down walls in that day & for us?

- (1) Security of the city & its citizens.
- (2) Separation of the people from the “world.”
 - a) Implies a burden for the lost (cf. Pro. 28:19).
 - b) Implies a burden for the saved (cf. Pro. 4:20-24).

Consider what should be our prayer for our children, grand-children, & church family. Not only for their salvation, but for our young people to be kept “safe & clean” for themselves & for their spouse to be “safe & clean” for them.

Conclusion: Next week we will look at the content of Nehemiah’s prayer & the consequent of his prayer. By way of summary & looking ahead to next week, consider Wiersbe’s antidote to the indifferent & apathy of so many, yet evident by Nehemiah: He “cared enough to ask (:1-3); he cared enough to weep (:4); he cared enough to pray (:5-10); & he cared enough to volunteer (:11).

But what you & me?