



# NEHEMIAH

*pray plan build*

## **Daily Worship Booklet**

Week 1

God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,  
day after day and the people of God were filled with joy!

## Friday - Nehemiah 1:4-11 – He cared enough to plan to go.

One commentator has written on these verses, “It has been well said that prayer is not getting man’s will done in heaven but getting God’s will done on earth. However, for God’s will to be done on earth, He needs people to be available for Him to use.” Now, while we may not entirely agree with the thought that God needs us *to be available for Him to use*, the fact is that God has chosen to fulfil His eternal plan through men and women, as well as the elect angels.

As Nehemiah prayed, it became increasingly personal to him. Personal in the sense that he could not extract himself from the thinking about the state of Jerusalem and her people. It seems that it dominated his thinking from when his brother came with the other men in the month of Chislev to the month of Nisan (chapter 2:1), a period of four months. As he prayed, the Lord led him not only to feel the needs of the situation, but also to formulate an understanding of how He would address it.

Becoming acquainted with and confronted by a spiritual need is a wonderful blessing; many travel through life largely ignorant of the spiritual needs around them. To be granted the desire to bring that need before the Lord in prayer is a wonderful blessing. To be granted the privilege of seeing how the need could and should be met is not only a wonderful blessing, but it affords a wonderful opportunity. Nehemiah grasped all these things and began preparing himself before God to step into that opportunity. Moreover, that preparation took time. It wasn’t a case of hearing the news, weeping for a day, fasting, praying for an hour or two, and then jumping straight to a plan to sort the issue. No, it took him months to get to the point where he could pray, “ ‘give success to your servant today and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.’ Now I was cupbearer to the king.” (1:11). He invested himself in asking God and thinking through what should be done – enquiring about his level of involvement, if any – the possibility, let alone the probability, of that given the significance of his current role. This was not merely a matter of transferring some money to his brother Hanani for the ‘rebuilding the Jerusalem walls campaign’; the decision he came to, if God granted, was going to be life-changing for him, and for his family, and he, by the grace of God, was, after prayerful consideration, willing to accept that. That is not easy to do!

Q1. Why was Nehemiah sad?

Q2. What did the king say to him?

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**The book of Nehemiah focuses on the work involved in labouring to see  
Christ build his church.**

## Thursday - Nehemiah 1:4-11 – Nehemiah cared enough to pray.

Nehemiah prayed; this is the first of twelve times of prayer recorded in this book (2:4; 4:4,9; 5:19; 6:9,14; 9:5ff; 13:14,22,29,31). He was a man who lived in personal communion with God. Looking at how he prays, we find five things:

1. *He ascribes praise to the Lord God of heaven.* He knows that he is not prostrating himself before some inanimate object; he is coming into the presence of the Lord God Almighty, the great and awesome God, the creator and sustainer of heaven and earth. In other words, he is bringing this matter of grave concern, something that is burdening him deeply, before the all-powerful God.

He further knows that this omnipotent God is a personal being who keeps His covenant and exercises steadfast love over those who, as recipients of His grace, love Him and keep His commandments. That statement is astonishing in its importance to the people of God. Think of all that is contained within it.

2. *He pleads for God's ear and sight, day, and night.* There is no presumption in his approach to God. Yes, he knows that nothing is beyond the all-seeing eye of God (2 Chronicles 16:9) nor his all-hearing ears (Psalm 34:15,17), but he still expresses his desire with humble, persistent clarity. Familiarity means it can be challenging to be constantly mindful of who we are addressing when we pray, but we should fight such familiarity tenaciously.

3. *He confesses sin.* What is remarkable about this confession is that he includes himself when confessing the sins of the people of Israel. In this regard he is like Ezra, who identifies with the sins of his fellow Jews (Ezra 9). There is a sense of corporate responsibility here that few share today. It is also a confession grounded in the knowledge that God will forgive sin when there is true repentance (Deuteronomy 30).

4. *He calls on God to remember what He has previously decreed and the promises He had made.* He sees God's past dealings with His people as instructive as to how He will fulfil His future plans. Essentially, 'if the curses have been carried out, then so will the promised blessings.' The call to 'remember' is a prominent theme in Nehemiah's interaction with God. (1:8; 4:14; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22,29,31) and is one we should be more familiar with.

5. *He concludes his prayer with an expression of confidence* in the power of God, in the faithfulness of God, and that God would work in the heart of Artaxerxes to provide what would be needed.

Q1. Having wept and fasted, what does Nehemiah do?

Q2. What five things characterize Nehemiah's prayer?

## Monday - Jeremiah 25:1-11; 29:10-14 – The history - God is Faithful.

In 587 BC, the Babylonians sacked the southern kingdom of Judah, including Jerusalem, and exiled its citizens. The prophet Jeremiah had not only predicted this destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, but he had also predicted that these people of God would return to the land from where they had come. The first return of these exiles took place after the Babylonian empire had fallen to the Persians, and Cyrus, the Persian king, revised the Babylonian policy of gathering people into their empire and allowed various exiled people groups, including the Jews, to return to their homeland, which the Jews did in 538 BC. The return of Nehemiah in 445 BC was the final act in rebuilding both the Temple and the city, in fulfilment of the promise of God made through Jeremiah.

This lengthy process of restoration and rehabilitation has some important lessons for us:

1. *God is always faithful to what He has promised.* The promise given through Jeremiah must have seemed foolish and wildly optimistic to those who had seen the city and Temple destroyed. Moreover, for the thousands of people who had been carried off into exile as the years passed, it must have seemed like an impossible dream that would never be realized. Yet, God was faithful. Whatever God has promised in His Word, we can be certain it will come to pass, just as all his prophecies to date have. God is ever faithful, and His Word is eternally true.

2. *Sometimes, the fulfilment comes gradually.* It was more than a hundred years from when the first of the exiles returned from Babylon until the walls of the city were finally rebuilt in the time of Nehemiah. God's timeframe is not our's. He works as pleases Him and in accordance with His own plan. The believer's responsibility is to obediently follow God's revealed will in each circumstance and seek wisdom as they do so. Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6) as we submit ourselves to God's perfect plan.

3. *God uses more than one person to carry out His plan.* There are many moving parts to God's plan; in realizing it, He uses people with differing gifts and abilities. For the finished picture to be complete, each must faithfully fulfil their part according to how God has prepared it.

Q1. What did God promise to do in Jeremiah?

Q2. Did this happen right away?

## **Tuesday - Nehemiah 1:1-4 – Nehemiah cares enough to ask.**

The book opens by identifying the author as Nehemiah, the son of Hacaliah. (which distinguishes him from other Nehemiahs, e.g., Nehemiah 3:16 and Ezra 2:2). The name Nehemiah means ‘the Lord has comforted’. He had grown up a member of the Jewish exile community in Babylon, where he had risen to a position of authority within the household of the most powerful ruler of the day, the Persian Emperor Artaxerxes Longimanus, who ruled Persia from 464 to 423 BC. He was serving as the king's cupbearer, a position akin today to that of a top security aide. Among other responsibilities, it was his duty, having played an integral role in the provision of the king's wine, to personally taste it before handing it to the king. Given that the stability of the Persian empire depended on his doing his job correctly, Nehemiah's appointment would not have been made lightly. So, here is a man of recognized character, competence, and courage – a cultured individual, knowledgeable in court proceedings and able to converse with powerful men.

The first encounter we have with Nehemiah is when he is at Artaxerxes's winter palace in the city of Susa. Incidentally, this is the same place where Esther had lived as queen a generation before. Who is to say that his role might have resulted from how she lived her life? Whatever the background, as so often happens in the Scriptures, it seems that the events that now unfold do so by way of ‘chance’ – verse 1 has the words ‘Now it happened’, but nothing is by way of chance; it is all being worked out in fulfilment according to God's eternal plan (Ephesians 1:5). As is evidenced by the exact dating of the encounter Nehemiah had with a group of men who had come to Susa from Jerusalem, (a thousand miles to the west), one of who was his brother Hanani.

Nehemiah does something interesting: he asks about the welfare of the Jews who had returned to Judah from captivity and about Jerusalem, and you get the sense that it wasn't simply a question to keep the conversation flowing. Why is that interesting? It shows that despite his high civil position, not only was he aware of what had occurred following the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, but it also shows his concern for the state of the former nation and her capital. Psalms 48, 79, 84 and 87 show how much men like Nehemiah loved Jerusalem.

This begs the question of ourselves: How much are we interested in and concerned for the state of the professing church in our land?

Q1. What sort of a man was Nehemiah?

Q2. What did Nehemiah do when his brother came to see him?

## **Wednesday - Nehemiah 1:4-11 – Nehemiah cared enough to weep and fast.**

Three words summarise what Nehemiah learned from his brother and the other men: remnant, ruin, and reproach. Where once the people of God filled and prospered in the land, now only a remnant of people are left. Where once the city of Jerusalem was a great city set on a hill, now it is in ruin, with its gates destroyed by fire and the walls lying as piles of stones. Where once the nation was the fear of the surrounding countries, now she is an object of reproach; glory has been replaced with ridicule.

The first thing Nehemiah does is to sit down and weep. Sitting down is the typical Jewish posture when mourning (Ezra 9:1-4), and when he hears the news of the state of Jerusalem, that is what Nehemiah does. That says an awful lot about the man. It tells us that, like the Lord Jesus, he felt the pain of others and was willing to share their burdens (Luke 19:41). And note, this was not a heartfelt but cursory five minutes of mourning and weeping; it was for days. This man was seriously impacted by what he heard about the state of the nation and its capital. That is challenging; as those living in or close to our nation's capital, how much are we given to mourning and weeping before God for the state of this city and Canada? Yes, we can rail against the evils of the government and their godless policies, but does it cause us to sit down and weep? You see, little is ever achieved out of anger, for anger tends to blur the vision; it is pain, it is feeling the hurt, it is compassion, it is weeping that gets one onto the road of addressing what needs to be addressed.

Note that it wasn't just that he wept. He fasted. He went without food so he could focus on what was before him. Throughout history, all kinds of distractions have surrounded mankind, but never like what we are experiencing in this current age. The revolution that has taken place in the last thirty years, and increasingly so in the past 15 years, is unparalleled in the history of the world. A revolution that has seen almost limitless entertainment and information available 24/7 on our phones. Even those of us who barely use social media, etc., find our weekly screen time notifications shocking us, and we wonder how we could be out of storage when we haven't downloaded anything, until we actually look and see what our phones are clogged up with. How many of us find that the time for serious, contemplative reflection is almost zero in our lives, unless we conscientiously pursue it? Maybe it is time for a pause, time to take a second look at the biblical practice of fasting, to see if it is something we should increasingly be considering to purify our minds for the task of focusing.

Q1. What is the first thing Nehemiah did when he heard the news?

Q2. What is the second thing Nehemiah did when he heard the news?