

The building of the Walls of Jerusalem The work of Nehemiah

Chislelev [Nov/Dec] 444 BC
Neh 1.1-2,4-11

Nehemiah hears of the state of the walls of Jerusalem. He prays

[1] In the year 445 BC, [which was the 20th year of Artaxerxes] 7 years after Ezra set out, Nehemiah is visited by his brother Hanani and some others from Judah. Nehemiah asked them about Jerusalem and the Jews who had escaped and returned.

[2] There news about the brethren there was that they were in distress, that Jerusalem was broken down and its gates burned with fire. The subject of the discussion was the city itself and in particular the state of its defences, the walls and the gates.

[3] After being very moved at this news, and fasting, Nehemiah makes prayer to the Lord concerning this matter..

Nehemiah was a cup bearer to King Artaxerxes

The state of Jerusalem

Nisan [March/April] 445 BC
Neh 2.1-8

Nehemiah is commissioned by Artaxerxes and is appointed the governor from 445-431.

[1] With his prayer before God, Nehemiah, as a slave in the service of the king as a cup bearer is asked by the king why he is so sad. In great fear Nehemiah explains the predicament of the broken-down state of Jerusalem.

[2] Neh 2.6; The king grants Nehemiah his request, to send him to Jerusalem to rebuild it. This appointment lasted until 431 [Neh 5.14;13.6]. It pleased the king to send Nehemiah and he gave the king a definite time for the task.

[3] The forests of the king were to provide the timber for the beams of the gates and the fortifications. God was with Nehemiah.

Artaxerxes commissions Nehemiah

440 Arrives in Jerusalem and observes the walls
Neh 2.9-20

[1] Arriving there, and aware that Sanballat and Tobiah were opposed to his work, Nehemiah inspected the walls by night [Ne 9-16]

[2] Then, announcing his intentions, [2.17-18] Nehemiah is mocked by Sanballat and Tobiah, declaring that they have no share in this work. [Ne 2.17-20]

[3] Neh 3: The entrances to Jerusalem are finished

August 439 Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, opposes the work.
Neh 4

[1] Sanballat mocks the Jews and their work in the presence of the wealthy men of Samaria [Ne 4.1-3]

[2] Nehemiah prays [Ne 4.4-5] and the wall came to half of its height all around the city.

[3] Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites conspired to fight the Jews. Nehemiah encourages the builders to keep going [Ne 4.14].

[4] The builders are armed and have a method of being prepared for any attack. [Ne 4.15-22].

[5] Nehemiah rebukes Jews who are enslaving one another [Neh 5.1-19].

Opposition in the province

Dec 437 Wall is finished, ie raised, in 52 days
Neh 6.15

[1] Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem the Arab send for Nehemiah to come and meet with them. Nehemiah refuses [6.1-6] Nehemiah is valiant and is not moved by these overtures and threats.

[2] Gates are hung, guards are appointed.

[3] The city is large and spacious but there are few people [Neh 7.1-4]

Wall is raised

7.445 BC Census is taken of the people, most are in cities Neh 7.5-73

[1] An inventory of the people is taken and by the seventh month they were in their respective cities.

Ezra reads the Law

1.7.445 The people gather to Ezra to hear the Law Neh 8.2-12

[1] The scribe Ezra reads to them from the Torah and there is a translation being made so that they people could understand.

[2] Ezra blessed the people, yet they were deeply moved by the reading of the Law and were mourning and in grief. Nehemiah encouraged them not to be said, reminding them that the joy of the Lord is their strength.

2.7.445 The feast of Tabernacles is celebrated from the 2.7-2.8 445 Neh 8.13-18

[1] Hearing from the Law about the requirement for the feast of Booths, the people are exhorted to do this.

[2] This really opens for us an understanding that the return from Exile is seen as a new Exodus. They are coming to a new start, and re-orienting themselves back to the time when they came out of Egypt. We also note how they thought of themselves as "a remnant who escaped" - understanding this against the background of the original exodus from Egypt.

24.7.445 Sackcloth and fasting Neh 9.1-38

People desire to return to the Law

[1] The people decide to return to the Law under the impact of the full recital of the Exodus from Egypt and the life they have enjoyed since then. They are fasting and dressing in sackcloth and ashes

Neh 10 A formal return to the Law

[1] While living among the people of the land, the sons of Israel take a solemn and binding agreement to live as separated from them. They separated themselves to the Law of Moses. They also, among themselves, decide to provide for the house of the Lord.

[2] The decision to make an agreement in writing [Nehemiah 9.38] brought a list of signatures to the sealed document. Those who signed were:

[i] Nehemiah the governor

[ii] The priests [verses 2-8]

[iii] The Levites [verses 9-13]

[iv] The leaders of the people [14-39]

[v] The rest of the people [28-31], listed as priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers and temple servants. All of them committed their families to the same agreement.

[3] The agreement was to live as a separated people. Those who had already adjusted their marriages according to Ezra's leading now agreed to separate themselves from the people of the lands [28] and to the Law of God.

They took a curse upon themselves and an oath to show the seriousness of their intention to:

[a] walk in God's Law

[b] not intermarry with the people of the land

[c] not trade with the people of the land on a Sabbath

[d] keep the Sabbatical year in regard to crops and forgiveness of debts

[e] take responsibility for the house of the Lord [34-39]

This was a clear radical decision to be a separated people in regard to the people of the land; not in regard to area, which they shared, but expressed as a different way of life.

[4] In taking responsibility for the house of the Lord the document had specific obligations. They were:

- [i] To contribute 1/3 shekel for the service of the house of God; for its shewbread, offerings and service [verses 32-33]
- [ii] To undertake responsibility for the wood supply to the Levites [34]
- [iii] To bring in the first fruits and tithes into the house of the Lord for the priests [35-39]

Note:

- 1. On the need to invoke a curse upon themselves and take oath, as compared with Jesus' teaching.
- 2. The foundation setting for the understanding of the "Hasidim" as the separated ones.

Neh 11 - A 10th of the people volunteer to live inside Jerusalem

The city lived in and the wall dedicated.

Neh 12.27 The Wall is dedicated

Neh 13 Foreigners are excluded from the land Mixed marriages are forbidden. The Levites are purified.

In reading through Nehemiah we see that this man is constantly speaking to God when he has difficulties.

KINGDOM PRAYERS: NEHEMIAH'S MODEL 1 - A man who had kingdom concerns

- [1] Nehemiah was a man who, whilst serving the Persian King Artaxerxes in the capital city of Susa has his mind upon the matters of the God of Israel.
- [2] He has opportunity to seek out information
 - a. concerning the Jews who had escaped the slaughter of Jerusalem and also those who had survived the captivity, and
 - b. concerning Jerusalem. [Neh.1.2]
- [3] .He was passionate about the matter and is deeply moved in his emotions. He begins to find in the Scriptures promises of God which arouse his mind to action.

Prayers: 1. Kingdom concerns

This teaches us:

- 1. The importance of having one's mind set to see the direction of God's concerns in life.
- 2. How not to have fear to be passionate and emotionally involved in the affairs of God - to see His will and to hasten it forward is a right drive and ambition.
- 3. To seek out information about the situation is an act of will - it implies that the man has a desire to see how things stand in the affairs of God's people. What a person wants to know about is often an indication of what they are prepared to do something about.
- 4. When you are moved to compassion or disturbed, then it is important to go and seek what is the mind of the Lord. Kingdom people are those who do not move until they have enough of the mind of the Lord to pray and then look for the next step. This is all this man had.

Prayers: 2. His approach

2 - On approaching God to ask Him something - Nehemiah 1.5-11

- [1] He understands that God is a King. He understood that kings were to be approached with care.
- ACTION!** If you live in a democracy then you may have to change your mind here right away. For if your ideas of democratic government are influencing

they way you approach God then you are off line before you begin.

You may even have to repent of the way you have not approached God as a King in the past. We shall have to learn this approach carefully. Not because we are unsafe with our heavenly Father, but because He is a King and a holy One - even though we know He loves us.

[2] He approaches God on the basis of knowledge which God has already revealed about Himself in the past.

ACTION!

1. This is important - we need to approach the Lord on the basis of what He has said about Himself. Too often we think of God as the way we like to imagine Him.

[a] Indeed, in these days of "imaging" we are often asked by Christian leaders to "imagine" the Lord and then to speak to Him as if He is what we have imagined. In this way they are encouraging us to set up a mental idol and speak to that as if it is the Lord. There is no substitute for what God has said about Himself. Stay with the Bible - don't depart from it as the only reliable source book concerning the person and nature of God. If you have ever "imaged" something and then spoken to it as if it is the God of heaven then repent and change your mind. Ask forgiveness of the God of the Bible and renounce such a way of "talking/praying".

[b] For there three problems with this "imaging".

[i] First, it commits us to rely upon a mental technique for our relating to God rather than a relationship on the grounds that He has set.

[ii] Second, our "image" is derived from ourselves or other spirits and this commits us to working in the flesh rather than in the spirit with the aid of the Holy Spirit within us.

[iii] And third, the data of the Bible is to be the model for the way we think about God. Thinking about God in this way is different from making an image in our mind. We are not imagining that God is here simply using our subjective abilities, we are trusting that He is here and what He is like has been established on the objective grounds that He has said so. It is this latter revelation which our minds have understood.

2. Commit yourself to become an avid student of the Old and the New Testaments. In this way, your knowledge of what God has said about Himself in various settings will increase. And, so your conversations with Him will be on sure ground and safety. It is just like swatting up on the royal personage before you have your interview. It is wise to do so - and it saves you from bad mistakes in dealing with the King.

3. Nehemiah recognises the holiness of God

Prayers: 3. God's holiness

ACTION! We are in a different place to Nehemiah here - although the holiness of God has not changed, nor the awesomeness of His Person. When he speaks of the God of heaven, he understands that the Lord is inaccessible to the person speaking on the earth.

We also approach God along the same pattern as Nehemiah, but upon the basis of the finished work of Jesus the Messiah, which in our time, is a completed work. We live in a different time slot - in the plan of God we live after the coming of the Son of Man. We also have the Spirit of Christ within us.

When we consider the holiness of God and our unworthiness to approach, we rely upon the finished work of Jesus as the Victim whose blood has atoned for our sins. We understand that we are in a right relationship to the Father through the work of the Son, and finally, we have a High Priest in heaven alongside the Father who intercedes for us there.

But this death of Christ only serves to make us even more aware of the holiness of the Lord. For if the blood of His Son is only that which can bring us near - then He really takes the holiness of his Person seriously. Be impressed with this - in our day it is a lesson which is not often learned.

4. He plead the character of God back to Him

[i] Nehemiah understands about the conditions God has set - and so he asks for attention as he confesses his own sins and those of the people of Israel

[ii] The identification with Israel and confession of sins.

ACTION! This is vital. If you will be serious in your praying for people, you must be prepared to stand with them practically at some cost before you think you can make prayers for them. Too often we get this the other way about. We think that there can be intercession on behalf of others without standing in a costly way with them. For this reason, there are very few things we can individually pray about - they are the ones which we are already involved in at some cost.

The exception to this is where God gives a burden to someone to pray for another in such a way that their spirit receives information from God and they are unusually moved. But the principle of cost is still uncompromised for, usually, such persons are usually getting that information from the Lord because they have indicated their readiness to travail in a heavy way for others whom God indicates.

[iii] His willingness to accept his personal responsibility in the sins of his people.

ACTION! This is a vital place for the church of God to stand as forgiven sinners. For, very often in the church there is a view of the outsider as someone who is in a less than best place with God, and often suffering from the results of their sins. And of course, this is the case - for God says so.

Sadly however, for those who have tasted of the grace of God there is a temptation [and it is that!] to regard the others as less than ourselves in relation to the Lord. This is not the case the grace of God is extended to "whosoever will". Let us understand that to have the joy of the Lord does not mean that we are ever in a place to look down on another human being - it is the reverse. It is the nature of the free grace of God in experience that leads us to have an identity and compassion with others who have not come to know the Lord. Let us keep that!

**Prayers: 4. Pleads
God's character**

5. He pleads God's word and his Promise [1.8,9]

ACTION! We need to understand the whole of God's purposes and where the history of the world is tracking in such a way as we can perceive the agenda of the Lord. He has given us enough information about this. Do study the Scriptures to understand this agenda. In this way, we are asking the "kingdom questions" before we get to pray. We are already having it settled in our will that we want to do the kingdom thing - it is what the King wants - which informs our prayers.

**Prayers: 5. Pleads
God's word and
promise**

**Prayers: 6. Pleads
God's work already
accomplished**

6. He pleads the work of God already accomplished

7. He makes request for conditions to be right for the taking of his first step

He is looking for guidance to go on. Notice how practical Nehemiah is.

First, he has an idea that what he wants to do is to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. This would serve the King of Kings.

Second, he recognises that he is a slave to the Persian King. Which means

- Third, that if he is to accomplish this idea, then he shall need it to become the project of the Persian King. For the permission of the Persian is necessary for Nehemiah to act - being under his authority. [Notice he doesn't seek his freedom from the king so that he can act himself. He is not a man wanting to do the will of God who is cluttered by some side agenda which has benefit for himself. And this is his genius - he believes that God is such a King of kings that He can actually cause His agenda to be effected through the word of Artaxerxes. In this way Nehemiah is a man who demonstrates that God has the nations His hand and that He can use them to do His will.]

Fourth, he understands the court protocol. He is not in position to speak

**Prayers: 7 Conditions
to be right.**

1. A small thing
2. Being consistent
3. Tremblingly going forward
4. Arrow prayers
5. Glory for God

to the king unless the king should speak to him first.

Fifth, he is need of compassion from the king. For, unless he has that, it is unlikely that a Persian king will agree to the rebuilding of the fortress of a people who his people have conquered in the past. Such an act is contrary to the interests of the empire.

So, his prayer is for the chain of events to begin where it must - he needs the compassion of a king before he can begin. It is this first link in the chain which is the request he makes to the Lord.

ACTION! This is very instructive. It alerts us to not asking for things which we cannot carry out. It also means that Nehemiah is prepared to become the answer to his own prayer. He is actually prepared to do the work - all he is asking is, that God should grant him the start off, so that he can have the confidence that he is on the right track. And then, he shall prove it, step by step, that the plan he has in his mind has actually come from God Himself. The book is a record of that plan.

2 - HOW TO WATCH AND SEE THE ANSWERS TO PRAYER

1. It may be a very trivial thing

Answers: 1. A small thing

ACTION! Do not be put off by this. Be prepared for the smallest thing to indicate the answer to your prayers. Many people, who see certain things happening, would not even know the significance of them in the eternal purposes of God. That is because they either do not know the general overall purposes of God or they do not have a prayer before the King of kings or both. Only the man with an iron in the fire is watching it to see if it glows red. This means that it is vital to not be casual about what we pray in the first place, nor casual about watching for the answer.

Have you ever prayed a prayer which you have not waited to see what the answer was? Then you probably didn't pray it very intensely. Casual prayer in the first place leads to not seeing the answer even when it comes. If you have forgotten what you have asked then maybe you weren't even interested in asking it in the first place. This is very important in these days of people asking you to pray for them. Don't do it under pressure. If you do, then you run this risk of speaking casually to the King. It is not wise and it ruins our conversations with God. For we have let the fear of man become the basis for our speaking with God.

Answers: 2. Matters of personal consistency matter

2. God uses the past consistency and godliness

ACTION! Stay faithful even in hard places and trust the purposes of God for you and His people. Be prepared to bend to the purposes of the Lord.

Answers: Fearfully going forward

3. When the answer comes we must walk forward; often accompanied by fear

4. You walk forward uttering arrow prayers to God

Answers: Arrow prayers

ACTION! Right here we need to see something awesome. If God looks on the heart, and Nehemiah has prayed that God would grant him compassion in the sight of the king, then this prayer is only answerable by God IF Nehemiah's heart is uncluttered and true. For otherwise, the king would have discerned a rebel - which his natural bias would have looked for.

Our heart needs to be true in these places where God grants us opportunities for which we have prayed. Otherwise, we will be compromised or misread.

Answers: God's own glory

5. When the way is opened by God, you give Him glory

ACTION! There isn't a place at the moment where God is opening doors for you and you are forgetting that it is his show? Repent and make certain that you give Him glory.

Consider the following - it may have application to something, some

dream, which God has given you, or which if you are uncertain He has given it, then you would like to test it -

1. I am a person with kingdom concerns - I want to further God's kingdom with my life before I die.

2. I know the overall plan of God - what He wants done

3. I understand what God is doing now, and why we are where we are in this country where I live.

4. I see what is in accordance with the overall plan and I see [OR I have some ideas which have been with me a long time,] what God wants me to do.

5. What stands in the way of me doing this?

[i] myself ? then I shall repent of these matters

[ii] my circumstances?

6. Then I shall think out what is step 1. Which is the thing without which I cannot get started. I shall pray for that to happen - if it was then I shall go forward step by step and establish this kingdom purpose.

this is what they call a purposeful blank page.