

Nehemiah 1:5-11 – That Audacity of Faith in Prayer

Poole, Armstrong, TSK, HebrewLexicon, Henry, Gaebelein, Trapp, Geneva, Barnes, JFB, Clarke, Gill, Delitzsch, Handfuls, INT, Eclectic Brothers and Sisters in the Lord: Nehemiah, God's servant, was moved to **tears** (outward action), then to **mourning** (inward sorrow) when he heard about the state of Jerusalem. He then **fasted** and **prayed** for her. But **he was not affected because of strong emotional attachment to the land of his ancestors**, like some people are. Rather, he was concerned because the **land was unsecured** and God's **people were not able to worship** and glorify God as they should! Today, see the prayer Nehemiah prayed as he longed for and prepared the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, restore worship, and get themselves ready for the coming of Messiah.

Our headings are:

Nehemiah's Direction in his Prayer

Nehemiah's Confessions in his Prayer

Nehemiah's Expectations in his Prayer

Our goals are: That you will learn to pray for and pursue reconciliation with God on behalf of his children who have wandered away from the God of their salvation, robbing him of his glory.

Nehemiah's Direction in his Prayer

5 And I said: "I pray, **LORD God** of heaven, O **great and awesome** God, You who **keep Your covenant and mercy** with **those who love You and observe Your commandments**,

1. Nehemiah directed his prayer to the Lord God of heaven – the one he personally knew as his Father through Christ.

You will notice 3 specific things about this God to whom he prayed:

a. This was not some generic God, but this was Yahweh-covenant God.

The covenant was the **means of grace**. God brought man close to him.

The covenant was the **means of mercy**; an animal (and later, the Lamb of God) took the place of the guilty.

b. Yahweh was great, good, and praiseworthy. And Nehemiah could expect great things from him. Remember Moses:

Exodus 15:11 "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

(This word "awesome" literally means "feared," in the sense of holy respect!

c. Because this was the one true, great, and good God, the God who entered into covenant relationship with his people, promising them salvation through his coming Son, Nehemiah was confident that **God would keep his covenant promises**. God kept his covenant in the past and he would keep the covenant again. Yahweh was infinite and sovereign.

2. Nehemiah then said God promised to give these blessings to those who love God and show it by obeying his commands.

Did the Jews in Jerusalem really love and obey God? After all, they had spent 70 years in captivity. Answer: Nehemiah was praying this in light of their faith in the coming Savior. **Jesus kept the covenant for them!**

6 "please let Your **ear be attentive and Your eyes open**, that You may **hear the prayer of Your servant** which I **pray before You now, day and night**, for the children of Israel Your servants

3. Nehemiah then expressed his desire and confidence God would listen to his people's plea and notice the troubles God's covenant people were in.

He knew God who made the ears and the eyes was able to hear and see! (God was gracious.)

Psalms 33:15 He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.

4. Nehemiah reminded God that his prayers for himself and God's children were persistent – praying night and day.

He was being like that persistent widow that Jesus spoke of!

5. Lessons:

a. Know the direction of your prayer is to Yahweh, through God the Son. There is no other God and no other way to pray.

b. Prayer is one grace even your worse enemy can't take from you! He could take your house, job, money, or position, and even your reputation, but he could never take away the freedom to pray and access to God who hears and answers prayers. Even if your enemy shuts your mouth, you could still pray to the Lord in your heart and he hears it as from a loud speaker.

c. Start your prayer with praise – if it is not an emergency.

d. God not only kept his part of the covenant; he sent his Son to keep your part of the covenant because you broke it.

Nehemiah's Confessions in his Prayer

6...and **confess the sins** of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned.

1. Nehemiah confessed the sins of all Israel against God, and he included himself and his relatives.

He was godly, but he knew he wasn't above sinning. No one is! **But he knew that sin hindered progress.**

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

2. Nehemiah did not confess his sins in a generic way...but he gave details.

Israel acted corruptly against God! The sins may have been against each other, but they were ultimately an affront to His Divine Majesty – Yahweh.

Israel did not keep the 3 classifications of laws – commands, statutes, and ordinances.

Commands: This often refers to the 10 commands. It is used this way dozens of times. These were the **moral laws**.

Statutes: These were things prescribed as the statute of Joshua. (Joshua 24:25) These were the **ceremonial laws**.

Ordinances: These refer to legal decisions or judgments. (Zechariah 7:9, Ezra 3:2, etc.) These were the **judicial laws**.

Notice there is **no sin without the law**; the two things are closely connected.

8 "Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 'but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, **though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens**, yet **I will gather them from there**, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.'

3. Nehemiah then reminded God, not of the innocence of the people of God, for they were guilty before him; rather, he reminded God of his promises to forgive and restore this guilty people when they repented – even if they were sent to foreign nations as captives.

Sadly, at the time Jesus came, there were more Jews living out of Israel than in it. They were not only scattered by Assyria in 722BC, Babylon in 586BC, and the Greek later. Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek, killed many Jews and took others as slaves. This was confirmed by the Jews who would return to Jerusalem to worship. (Peter and James wrote to the dispersed.)

Acts 2: 8 "And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? 9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 "Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 "Cretans and Arabs — we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."

Moreover, Nehemiah reminded God he had promised to *bring them back from the farthest corners of the earth* if they repented. **Deuteronomy 30:1** "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, 2 "and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, 3 "that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. 4 **"If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you.**

4. Lessons:

a. Don't be surprised if the church has to be severely punished by God for her contempt of him. No husband likes to be treated this way. How could a holy God accept it?

b. Any sin you commit is ultimately against God. Yes, you might have stolen from another person, but that property was given to them by God. You might commit adultery, but that person's dignity was given by God. You might hate someone for the color of his skin, but that person was made in the image of God.

c. Every single man, whether a pastor or elder, sins against God and must confess his sins. Every man does sin!

d. Look how well Nehemiah knew the Bible even though he never went to school in Jerusalem. How well do you know your Bible? How well can you quote it? You must know your Bible well to pray well.

Nehemiah's Expectations in his Prayer

10 "Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom **You have redeemed by Your great power**, and by Your strong hand.

1. Nehemiah declared God has rescued his people from Babylonian captivity and gave them freedom in the Medo-Persian Empire by his great power.

God **brought the great Babylonians to nothing**. God put **fear in the heart of the Medo-Persian king**, Cyrus, so he sent some of God's people back. (He had great faith in God's promises!) Notice Nehemiah did not say the Jews were pure or godly, but that they were God's people and he had redeemed them.

11 "O Lord, I pray, please **let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant**, and to the prayer of Your servants who **desire to fear Your name**; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." **For I was the king's cupbearer.**

2. Nehemiah wanted God to pay careful attention to his petition because he badly needed help when he appeared before the king for help, in order to help his people in Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and restore worship.

Nehemiah did not claim he deserved to prosper because of his godly character. In reality, Nehemiah wanted the king of the Medo-Persian empire to show favor to him as he wanted to help God's people.

Psalms 9:20 Put them in fear, O LORD, That the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah

This request was the "audacity of his faith." He had a right to ask these things because of Christ!

3. Nehemiah was in a prominent position, but he still cared for his brothers in poverty.

He was well-trained in court etiquette. He was likely good looking. He was skilled in wines, as he was the taster and wine-selector for Artaxerxes. He had great influence in the court. He was a sounding board for the king. Nehemiah had the full confidence of the king. **And he risked losing it all for the people of God and for the worship of God.**

4. Lessons:

a. Fearing God is not just a condition of the heart but an action of your life.

b. Look how the fear of God banished the fear of man! Nehemiah would dare to go before the king and plead for help for his people...like Esther.

c. Does being rich, educated, or influential cause spiritual failure for you, so much so that you don't care about the people of God anymore? Do these kinds of successes silence your passion for Christian fellowship? Would you be willing to lose your bank account for the good of God's people? **Some of God's servants have become beggars for recognition, just as the Jews had become in Nehemiah's days.** This can make it difficult for you to sacrifice for God's kingdom. Don't be like this!

d. Pray that God will make politicians, policemen, professors, and judges more favorable to Christians than they have been so the church can be free to speak the truth about the law and the Gospel without threats of reprisals or being jailed.

Conclusion:

Nehemiah prayed to Yahweh, covenant God of his people, asking for help. He started with an unqualified prayer, confessing the sins of the whole nation. He minced no words! He then pleaded for the people to be restored.

Brothers in the Lord Jesus:

1. The walls of the church today are broken down. Proper worship is now limited, very limited. It is hard to even find a good church sometimes in a big city to which you might travel.

2. Work to expose the church's sins so she will confess! Is it an uphill battle? More like a Mt. Everest battle! But God will hear and answer. That is his promise. Call out churches that have no standards...those who take in anyone as members without true heart conversion – just to have numbers.

3. Be willing to take risks! Expect you could lose your family or friends. Expect you could lose your job. Expect people will accuse you of being arrogant. God will bless you if you are willing to stand up for truth.

Finally: If you don't worship Yahweh, and you can only do so if your heart has been changed, you will go to hell. If you want to please God and to be saved from hell, ask God to make you his child. He will adopt you for eternity because Jesus removed the impediment when he died on the cross. That impediment was your sins.