**HEAR THE PRAYER OF YOUR SERVANT**

Nehemiah 1:1-2:10

Key Verse 1:6

“Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you.”

**Introduction**



Nehemiah grew up in Persia among the Jews who had been exiles in Babylon. Nehemiah had the honored position of cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes, known as Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther. His position was one of great trust and responsibility. He could have lived comfortably as a successful immigrant. But amazingly enough, he knew who he was and who God is. He knew what he should do for God’s glory. He was a man of prayer and the phrase “hear the prayer of your servant” is repeated in chapter 1 when he prayed before God. May the Lord help us to grow as warriors of prayer to serve world mission and campus mission all together. Amen.

1. Read verse 1:1-4. Who was Nehemiah? (1:1, 11b) What did Nehemiah hear about the Jewish remnant? (1:2-3) What did Nehemiah do upon hearing this? (1:4)

BACKGROUND)

*Some of us may wonder what we study Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah is about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem is not only the center of the nation Israel, but also the symbol of God’s indwelling. So it has been called as a holy city. God seeks to dwell in the center of his chosen people. But in Nehemiah’s time, this city were ruined, and Nehemiah and God’s people worked together to rebuild the walls by faith in God and recovered God’s glory and his people’s new walk with God. \*2 Chronicles 36:15-23 record the Israel’s history very succinctly from the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC) to the proclamation of Cyrus king of Persia who sent the exiled Jews back to Jerusalem to build the temple of God (539 BC). The cause of the fall of Jerusalem was the sins of God’s people. God sent them his words to turn their hearts back to God, but they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until God’s wrath came upon them through Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar took all the temple articles and the royal treasures to Babylon together with the remnant of Israel who survived from the sword. He also set fire to God’s temple and the palaces and broke down the wall of Jerusalem. So the land was desolate for 70 years as God had prophesied through Prophet Jeremiah. Meanwhile Babylonia fell to Cyrus king of Persia. With King Cyrus’ decree, some exiled Jews came back to Jerusalem and built the temple of God under the leadership of* ***Zerubbabel****. In the seventh year of King Artaxerxes (458 BC) the second group of Israelite exiles returned to Jerusalem under* ***Ezra****. 13 years after the second group of people arrived in Jerusalem, the book of Nehemiah begins (445 BC).* ***Nehemiah*** *went to Jerusalem in 444 BC, almost 100 years after the return of the first exiles.*

1-1, Read verse 1:1-4.

The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, 2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

3 They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

4 When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

1-2, Who was Nehemiah? (1:1, 11b)

***The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa,***

***I was cupbearer to the king. (11b)***

* It was the month of Kislev which is in our calendar November or December. At that time, Nehemiah was in the citadel of Susa, the capital city of Persia.
* He was not the prince like Zerubbabel, nor a priest like Ezra. He was just a layman—cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. He was a court officer of high rank whose duty was to guard against poison in the king’s cup.
* He lived a life of peace, prosperity and the king’s trust in the palace of the most powerful empire.

1-3, What did Nehemiah hear about the Jewish remnant? (1:2-3)

***2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.***

***3 They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”***

* These visitors brought the news that the people of Israel in Jerusalem were in great trouble and disgrace.
* The wall of Jerusalem was broken down, and its gates had been burned with fire. In ancient times, the city wall was the wall of protection from the enemies’ attack.

A city without walls was defenseless and insecure.

1-4, What did Nehemiah do upon hearing this? (1:4)

***When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.***

* Nehemiah could have been indifferent about the news, saying “Who cares about the broken wall a thousand mile away?” But he sat down and wept.



* Here “some days” means actually “four months.” In December of 445 BC he heard the disturbing news and began praying until the day Nehemiah actually goes before the king that was the month of Nisan which in our calendar Mar/April of 444 BC (Neh 2:1).
* He mourned, fasted and prayed over the period of four months. His heartbreak was real and deep. His prayer is real and deep.
* He wept in anguish because the glory of God was obscured and God’s people were unprotected and humiliated.
* The city of Jerusalem was the holy city where God’s people should live for God’s glory wholeheartedly without fear and humiliation from their enemies.
* Jesus also wept over Jerusalem at least three times because of her sins of killing God’s prophets and rejecting the Messiah.
* Jesus wept because he loved his people in Jerusalem and he earnestly wanted them to live for God and his glory, but they lived in sin.
* Although Nehemiah was a layman, he loved God and God’s people. He could not forget about the news and just continue to enjoy his high-status life in Susa.
* The broken wall became his burden and his own responsibility to fix it. He was strongly compelled to do something practically.
* So first he began to kneel down before God and prayed to God with tears and fasting. He didn’t fall in despair, rather he prayed.
* Today, may God break our hearts and enable us to see and respond to the broken walls of our church and engage in the rebuilding work by praying to God first.

1. Read verses 1:5-11. From his prayer, what do we learn about God? (1:5) About confession of sins? (1:6-7) About the basis of his prayer? (1:8-10) About having a specific prayer topic? (1:11)

2-1, Read verses 1:5-11.

Then I said: “Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you.7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. 8 “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 9 but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’ 10 “They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. 11 Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”

2-2, From his prayer, what do we learn about God? (1:5)

***5 Then I said:***

***“Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,***

* Our God is so great, powerful and awesome God. Our real problem is not the problem per se we face, but that our eyes are blind, our heart is hard and our prayers are cold. Our God is living and he hears our prayers.
* Nehemiah knew who God is in light of His capability and faithfulness to keep His promise no matter what! He must have gained his strength by reminding of God.

Isaiah 40:25-31 reads,

“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. **26** Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. **27** Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God”? **28** Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. **29** He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. **30** Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; **31** but those **who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles**; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

2-3, About confession of sins? (1:6-7)

***6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you.7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.***

* In his prayer, Nehemiah first confessed the sins of Israel, including himself, because he knew that God would not hear the prayers without regaining right relationship.
* He knew that the root cause of the ruined city of Jerusalem was Israel’s sins before God. It is easy for us just to cry over and pray for our ruins and problems.
* But before asking God for what we want, we must first make our relationship with God right. Let us admit our own sin and repent it, since we know it is the first step of recovery and rebuilding work. So Nehemiah used “we” several times.

2-4, About the basis of his prayer? (1:8-10)

***8 “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 9 but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’ 10 “They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.***

* After confessing and repenting of the sins of Israel, he then reminded God of his gracious promise.
* This is a powerful way to come to God, asking Him to remember His promises. He quoted Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 30.
* This is the secret to great power in prayer by pleading the promises of God. We may be annoyed when one of our children comes to us saying, “Daddy, you said.” But our Father in heaven delights to hear our prayer that way.

Psalm 81:10 reads,

“Open your mouth wide, I will fill it.”

2-5, About having a specific prayer topic? (1:11)

***Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”***

* He waited very patiently on the Lord’s perfect timing. Specifically he asked God to give him success today, meaning he had specific plans and prayer topics to solve the problem.
* Nehemiah concluded by asking God to bless him when he would soon speak to the king of Persia about the matter. He knows that without God’s intervention, he can do nothing.

***Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.***

* Nehemiah does not pray that God would make someone to go. Rather he prayed that God may use himself for God. He did not consult with others.
* He did not rely on democratic way or persian way to rely on human ways. Rather he put his deep trust and personal faith in the Lord who would surely orchestrate everything including Persian king for God’s own glory.

1. Read verses 2:1-10. What did king Artaxerxes ask Nehemiah? (2:1-2) What was His request? (2:3-8a) How did he rely on his personal God? (4b, 8b) What was the outcome? (2:9-10)

3-1, Read verses 2:1-10.

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, 2 so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”

I was very much afraid, 3 but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

4 The king said to me, “What is it you want?”

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, 5 and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.”

6 Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

7 I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? 8 And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?” And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. 9 So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

3-2, What did king Artaxerxes ask Nehemiah? (2:1-2)

***In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, 2 so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”***

* The king asked him, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”
* The king had to have a tremendous amount of trust in his cupbearer, who had to be a man of faithful and impressive character.
* The cupbearer was also a trusted advisor to the king, for he was constantly in his presence. It was natural for the king to ask his opinion on different matters and his complexion must have been noticeable to the king right away.

3-3, What was His request? (2:3-8a)

***I was very much afraid, 3 but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”***

***4 The king said to me, “What is it you want?”***

***Then I prayed to the God of heaven, 5 and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.”***

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* Nehemiah was very much afraid. At the same time, he knew that God’s time for him to act came. Nehemiah answered wisely
* Nehemiah knew that the Persians revered graves as sacred places. So without saying the name of the city Jerusalem, he answered of his hometown.
* If someone asks you, “What is it you want?” how will you answer? “I don’t know what I want.” or “I am not sure.”
* But Nehemiah knew exactly what he wanted because he had been asking God for 3 specific prayer topics.
* First, to allow him go to the city of his ancestors and rebuild it; Second, give him king’s letters to provide him safe conduct; and third, to give another letter to the keeper of the royal part so that he could use timber to make beams for the gates of the city and the walls.
* This is very difficult request since he knew that the king issued an order to stop rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. His request to the king was to reverse the king’s order and allow him to rebuild it.
* His request could be considered as an act of rebellion against the king. Moreover he was asking for the leave of absence for 12 years with the authority for safe conduct and material supply from the royal park.
* Nehemiah risked his life and asked the king for these things. Amazingly, however, the king granted all things he had requested. In addition, the king provided him the army escort to Jerusalem.

3-4, How did he rely on his personal God? (4b, 8b)

***Then I prayed to the God of heaven, (4b)***

* Then the king said in verse 4a, “What is it you want?”
* Nehemiah knew that it was God’s open door. So he asked God through an instant prayer to God and God worked in the king’s heart to be very generous to Nehemiah.

***And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. (8b)***

* Nehemiah experienced God’s miracle through his prayer and through his faith to challenge what seemed to be impossible.
* Nehemiah’s honest and precise requests teach us a lesson that to rebuild our life or the walls of our church, we need to assess what we actually need, what steps we need to take. And most of all we must be willing to sacrifice and willing to leave our comfort zone and willing to do God’s work.

3-5, What was the outcome? (2:9-10)

***9 So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.***

***10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.***

* The outcome were remarkable. This is another example of Nehemiah’s godly leadership. He actually went and traveled the 800 miles from Persia to Jerusalem.
* It was known for a dangerous road in ancient time. But he make this journey to rebuild the wall and renew the people of God.
* Our spiritual enemies do not mind as long as all we do is plan, pray and talk. But when we began doing something, they take notice and actions to interfere with God’s work through us.
* Trans-Euphrates means an important landmark that separated one region from another. Once a traveler cross the river, they were on the road to the region of Judea and the city of Jerusalem.
* At this moment. Nehemiah gave the governors king’s letters. He was prepared at each step because he prepared carefully with prayers.
* Sanballat the Horonite & Tobiah the Ammonite: At the governor’s station, Nehemiah met these two enemies of Jerusalem and anyone who cared for the welfare of the city. They were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.
* These two cared nothing as long as Jerusalem was weak and vulnerable; even though the temple was there, and worship conducted, that was fine.
* Notice when this opposition came: not at the prayer stage, not at the planning stage, but at the action stage in doing something.
* Some people fear ever stepping out for the LORD, because they know opposition will come. They somehow think their life will be better or easier if they stay in their low, mediocre state before God.
* What deception! A better life from holding back for Jesus Christ? Tough times are going to come anyway when we are growing and stepping forth in the Lord.

**Conclusion**

May the Lord help us to grow as a man of prayer like Nehemiah for the glory of God. Help us to take actions to serve God by faith. May the Lord richly bless our study on Nehemiah so that we may claim great victory for God’s name. Amen.

**One word: Hear the prayer of your servant!**