

Read

Nehemiah Prays for His People

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.

It came to pass in the month of Chislev, *in* the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down, and its gates *are burned* with fire.”

4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *for many* days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

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, 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, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father’s house and I have sinned. 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. 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.’ 10 Now these *are* Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. 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.

[*The New King James Version*](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ne 1:1–11.

Welcome to God's word for you From Ministry of Sharon R. P. Church in South East Iowa. We want to thank you for listening today and we pray that you'll be blessed by both hearing God's word as well as having it applied to your life in your heart.

What a great last line there. Oh Lord, you are my rock. You have redeemed and set me free.

Let's turn over in our Bibles to the Book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah. Nehemiah is one of the last books of the historical books, and we're going to be spending a large part of the rest of the year, going chapter by chapter through the Book of Nehemiah. And, I'm really excited about it. It's about faith being revitalized, the city of God being built up and the work that God does through His people by His promises.

And so look with me now at Nehemiah Chapter one. Nehemiah Chapter one. And we'll read the first chapter, 11 verses. Nehemiah, Chapter one. You can find that on page 428 of your pew Bibles. Hear now, God's word. The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev in the 20th year. That I was in Shusan, the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came with men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down and its gates are burned with fire. So it was when I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of Heaven. And I said, I pray Lord God of heaven. Oh, great and awesome God, you who keep your covenant and mercy with those who love you and observe your commandments. 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, and confess the sins of the Children of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes nor the ordinances which you commanded your servant Moses. Remember, I pray, the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations. But if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them though some of you were cast out to the furthest parts of the heavens and I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my name. Now, these are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power. And by your strong hand, 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 site of this man. For I was the king's Cup Bear." The grass withers and flower fades, But the word of our God endures forever.

Well, there was a foolish man who died in 1980. There is a foolish man named Harry Truman, who died in May of 1980. And he wasn't the president, this old man living on Mount St. Helens. He was an own untold foolish man who the geologist, and the surveyors, and the Park Rangers came to him time and again, pleading with him. Save your life! The volcano is about to blow and he said, No, no, I got this. I have a mine shaft. It's been abandoned, I have food and I have booze stored in there if something happens, I'll be there. I'll be safe. Up to the very last day he refused to flee to safety. He was a fool. And the next day he died because of this pride. He died because he said he didn't need it to be saved by anyone. But he could keep himself safe. How many of us have experienced this in our own lives, with people we have told the gospel to? When we've told people there's wrath going to come. Flee to Jesus Christ. And they say, No, no, no, I got this. I'm not that bad. How many times have we grieved the way that people are going, making decisions in their life because they refuse to be redeemed? It's engrained in our in our American experience. It's engrained in our we can pick ourselves up by the bootstraps and do it ourselves attitude. It's part of what it means to have gumption as an American. But it's at direct odds with what God says and portrays here in the Book of Nehemiah. And so as we look through Chapter one of Nehemiah, we need to be praying, redemptively. We need to be praying, redemptive prayers. God save us. Our prayers need to be filled with redemption, with humility. And that's what we explore this morning. And Nehemiah, Chapter one.

It all starts with hearing some bad news. The reality is that we have to hear the bad news. Look with me at the 1st four verses. The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev. In the twentieth year I was in Shusan in the Citadel. That Hananai one of my brethren, came with men from Judah, and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity and concerning Jerusalem. People come from Jerusalem. See, why is Nehemiah in the Citadel in Susa? Why is Nehemiah in Persia? He's there because God's people have been taken out of Jerusalem, ripped out of their homeland and transplanted in Babylon. Now the Babylonians by this time, have been taken over by the Medes and the Persians. And we find Nehemiah there, as an alien in a foreign land. And some of his relatives come back from Jerusalem. And he asked them, "What's going on in Jerusalem? How is it going back at home?" See, Ezra had already been sent before to go build up the temple; Cyrus had given that decree. But now, Nehemiah's asking, "How are the people? Is it better there? Are things going well?"

The report isn't good. They have to hear the bad news. "And they said to me," verse three, "The survivors who are left from the captivity, in the province, are in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire." The city of David is still in rubble, The wall is still torn down. The people of God, the Jews are. There are Jewish people living in Jerusalem, but they have no safety. The gates are still burned with fire. Anyone at any whim could walk in and destroy the people again. It's in ruins. It's in ruins, and what do we find Nehemiah's response in verse four?

"So it was when I heard these words. I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days. I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven." Nehemiah find about this hard providence, Nehemiah finds out about the disastrous state of what's going on. He hears this bad news, and what does he do? He weeps, he mourns, and he goes to the only place he knows to find comfort. See Nehemiah's very name means God comforts. And here in his mourning, when he hears this bad news, he sits down. He weeps. He no longer desires food around him, but his food is going to be in the presence of God. And that's where he goes to be comforted when he hears the bad news. When bad news comes to you in your life, where do you go? When bad news comes into your own experience, what do you do? Again, and again, and again in the Scriptures we find that when God's people encounter bad news, they do not run to themselves as if the strength is in them. But, they run in prayer to God. Where do you run to when bad news comes? Run to the Lord in prayer.

And in this prayer, as we look at the remaining of the chapter, almost all of it is taken up by this godly man's holy prayer. And it starts with Nehemiah invoking God's name. Look with me at the first part of verse five, "And I said, I pray Lord God of heaven, oh, great and awesome God, you who keep your covenant and mercy." Nehemiah calls, he invokes on God's very own name. Here, I want you to seriously put your finger on verse five. Look at it. One, two, three, four, five, sixth word in, in the in the pew Bibles is the word Lord, do you notice it's got a weird type text to it. Capital L, Capital O, Capital R, Capital D, Lord, this is the Hebrew Tetragrammaton, this is Yodh, He, Vav, He. This is the name that God gives to Moses. He says, "I am who I am." I am the Covenant keeping God full of mercy and long suffering. This is the God who Nehemiah calls on. It's not some, you know, "Oh He's kind of out there." It's maybe kind of like a fuzzy image of who God is. No. Nehemiah invokes God's holy name. What does he call Him? He calls the Lord

the God of Heaven. He calls Him the Great God and the awesome God. He calls Him the God that when you come into his presence, your mouth drops, and you're rendered speechless. This is the God that before his name the angels bow and sing his praises. When we pray, we invoke God's name. When you pray, know that there is a God in heaven who truly hears you and loves you. There is a God we pray to. And this is exactly what Jesus tells us to pray in Matthew six.

Do you remember the different petitions that we've been working on over the last month in the Lord's Prayer? "Our father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name." This is how Nehemiah starts his prayer. He prays to his father, who is in heaven, and he immediately invokes His holy name. See Jesus' prayer, his model prayer is not like it's brand new. We never known this before. It's a model of prayer we find all throughout the scriptures, but it starts with praying His holy name. It's God centered prayers. But as Nehemiah continues this prayer, look with me at the second half of verse five. He not only calls upon God's name, but he says, "you who keep your covenant and mercy with those who love you and observe your commandments." When Nehemiah prays, he does not just invoke God's name, but he appeals to his covenant nature. See when we pray we invoke God's name. But we also appeal to God's covenant nature. That's what Nehemiah does here. Did you catch it? How he appeals to God's covenant nature? How he appeals to how God has said he interacts with people? "You who keep your covenant and mercy." See God doesn't make covenant's that he's willy nilly going to break. God doesn't make promises that he's just going to toss aside. When God makes promises, those are things that we can cling to; and know that they're ours. Pray the promises of God. When we appeal to God's covenant nature, we're appealing to who He is. We're saying, God, you're the one who shows hassed. You're the one who shows loving kindness, loyalty, devotion, grace, and mercy to your people. You're the one who who loves your people and our patient with them. Do you see Nehemiah doesn't jump in his prayer to, "Oh, God save us." Nehemiah jumps the who God is, first. Do you see the God centeredness of this redemptive prayer?

But he also in that same sentence takes an evaluation of his own heart, doesn't he? "Keeping his covenant mercy to those who observe your commandments." Later we're going to see that he confesses that he doesn't. But he also calls on God. He makes an appeal to God. Pleads with God For him to hear him. Look with me at verse six. "Please let your ear be attentive and your eyes be open that you may hear the prayer of your servant which I pray before you now day and night." Why does Nehemiah have to pray for God to hear him. I mean, maybe we're just too familiar with the Bible, right? Maybe we've just been in the church for too long? Maybe you've just prayed too often to take notice of this. Why does Nehemiah have to ask God to hear him? When you pray, I'm guessing you just assume that God hears you. But see, God doesn't owe us anything. God does not owe us anything. Everything he gives to us, even hearing our prayers is an act of grace. And Nehemiah recognizes that. Nehemiah recognizes that unless the Lord decides to turn his ear to him, to open his eyes and see him, it's God's prerogative. Now God has promised that he's going to hear our prayers, but it's an act of grace. And Nehemiah doesn't take that for granted, and neither should we. Neither should you in your own life plead that God would hear you.

Why does God hear us? Right? I mean, Nehemiah doesn't just strut into the throne room of God full of pride. But he comes, humble, asking God to hear him, but why does God hear you? Well,

God hears us. God hears you in your prayers because you have a high priest who makes intercession for you. See, you're able to cry out to your father who is in heaven because you have a redeemer who makes your prayers perfect for you. And Jesus Christ is ever faithful. And your prayers don't go unanswered because we pray in Jesus' name. We pray relying on Jesus, on the Holy Spirit to take our prayers to Christ, who make them perfect, to the Father. Pray to your Father who is in heaven. But you need to plead with him that he would hear you because of Jesus.

But as we continue to look at this prayer that Nehemiah has, he continues to humble himself. See, he said that God is going to show covenant love to those who keep his testimony. But Nehemiah knows that he doesn't do that. Nehemiah knows that he is not a righteous person in and off himself. And he doesn't hide that from God. One of the most prideful things we can do in our lives, one the most foolish things we can do in our lives, is to act as if we're righteous before a Holy God, in and of ourselves. Nehemiah here tells us to confess our sins. Look at the second half of verse six and verse seven with me. "For the Children of Israel, your servants, and confess the sins of the Children of Israel." Nehemiah could have just stopped there. "God, I'm gonna confess their sins. Man, Lord, they are sinful people. They really need your help. They really need your Grace." But that's not what he does. Notice what he says, "which WE have sinned against you. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which you commanded your servant, Moses." See, Nehemiah is saying it's not only the people who sinned, but it's me, I've sinned, my household have sinned. We're all sinners. And again, some of us might just take this for granted. We've been raised in evangelical churches, or been in evangelical churches for long enough that we just are used to this. But, you realize what Nehemiah is doing? He's saying, "Lord I've got a problem. I'm a sinner. You show love to those who keep your testimony, but I'm not one of them. I've broken your ordinances. I've broken your statutes. I've broken your judgments."

The book first John is clear. We cannot be those who say that were without sin. If we do that, we lie to ourselves and we make God to be a liar. But when we confess our sins, He is faithful and He is just, to forgive us of all of our sins and to cleanse us from all of our unrighteousness. When you pray, will you pray what Jesus told you to pray in the Lord's Prayer? "Forgive us our debts." Will, you humble yourself before God in prayer like Nehemiah does here. This is part of redemptive praying. It's part of us humbling ourselves before God. When we confess our sins to God. We remember Jesus Christ. When we confess our sins, see Nehemiah is looking forward to the day of redemption. The day of redemption has come brothers and sisters. Jesus Christ was numbered among the transgressors, and His very name means he will save his people from their sins. Will you confess your sins? Will, you rely on Jesus Christ in your prayer life? Will you go to him? See, Nehemiah is praying a prayer both very personal as well as corporate. We should not hide in our congregation like we're a holy huddle bunch of people. When people in the community look at our church, we should have a reputation of those people are sinners. And they know it. And they love Jesus because of it. Is our reputation in the community, "Oh, those holier than thou people?" Or do we know that we are those who fall. And that we need redemption, and that Jesus Christ is the one we rely on? See, this is what redemptive praying looks like. This is why Jesus tells us we're to pray daily. Because we need this reminder. We need to be humbled by God and we need to be looking to Christ.

Nehemiah doesn't just stop there. He doesn't just pray this prayer of confession. But, he pleads God's promises. When we pray, we must plead God's promises. Look with me at verses eight through 10. "Remember, I pray the words that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations." That's the first part. God did that. See, when God that says something, He's going to do it now. Now God is also patient and merciful, and he waited hundreds of years to do it. But Nehemiah can't deny God told Moses in Deuteronomy Chapter 30 versus 1-4 that He was going to scatter his people across the heavens. That's happened. That was a promise and God brought to fruition. Now he's praying the second part of that promise, Verse nine. "But if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them though, some of you were cast out to the furthest parts of the heavens. But I will gather them from there and bring them to the place, which I have chosen as a dwelling place for my name. Now there are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power on by your strong hand." Nehemiah is giving us a pattern here. God is giving you a pattern that when you pray you need to run to the promises like your life depends on it. You need to run to the promises of God that He gives you in your prayer life. When God says that he is going to complete the good work that He has begun in you and you live in your experience and you realize, man, I got a whole lot more to do. You better plead with God in your prayers. Lord finish the work! You promised it! When you plead with God in your prayer of confession, you better cling to the promise. "God, You have promised that you will make me as white as snow. Do it, Father, You have You have promised that you will remove my sin as far as the east is from the west. You've promised it God. Do it." Do you do have confidence in God's promises like Nehemiah has here? God has done a good work and God has made many promises. Will you call on your covenant God to keep his promises? Will you do it?

I'm gonna warn you. There takes a certain amount of biblical literacy to be able to do that. So we need to be in our Bibles to know how to pray this type of prayer. How did Nehemiah know that God had promised to gather back in his people? How did Nehemiah know that he had told this to his servant, Moses? How did Nehemiah know these things? That's because He knew God's word. He knew God's word and he loved God's word. You cannot pray scripture filled, scripture rich, promise overflowing types of prayers, if you don't know the promises. The way you find the promises are by opening it up. Go to the word of God. Eat your daily bread. Find what He has for you. We go to the word in prayer. We remember what Christ has done. Then plead for Christ's work to be done in our lives. This is what it means for, again Nehemiah, Nehemiah's teaching us in different ways what Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Nehemiah is praying, "God, don't let your words just be something that's written on a page. But let it actually happen God." Do we pray for God's kingdom? Do we believe God's promises? That's what Nehemiah is calling you here to this morning to plead those promises.

But we also, again he goes back and verse 11 asking for God to hear him. "O Lord," Verse 11, "Oh Lord, I pray please let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and of the prayer of your servants who desire to fear your name." I mean, this is like bookends of his prayer. Are the bookends of your prayer humility? Are the bookends of your prayer relying on God that He alone hears you and shows you grace? Are the bookends of your prayer pleading that God would hear you for the sake of Jesus? We plead for hearing.

Lastly, we rely on the King of kings. In our prayer lives we must realize that we pray, we rely, on the all Sovereign king of kings. Look with me at the 2nd half of verse 11. "I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer." Nehemiah asks to prosper. Or a better word there is to thrive. Nehemiah has a request for the Lord. And, that's to have success with "this man." That's Artaxerxes I the king of the Medes and the Persians at this time. He's the cupbearer. He knows he's going to go into the king's presence. And, well the Medes and Persian kings are fickle kings, who will kill people who walk into their presence without their authority or without their permission. And he knows the only way that he is going to walk into that throne room and not possibly face death is if the king's heart is in the hands of the Lord. If the King of kings grants him prosperity before the king of the earth. Do you see how he says that there? "And let your servant prosper this day I pray. And grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Nehemiah gives us a pattern of realizing that we might have wonderful plans. We might have great things we're planning to do. But I hate to tell you, all the power of Satan and the demons and of the rulers of this world are against the kingdom of Jesus Christ and His righteousness and don't want His kingdom to advance. Do you want to know why we don't see revival in our land today? The kingdom of this world doesn't want it! Do we not want to know why our families are disintegrating before our eyes? Because that's exactly what Satan wants. Unredeemed people outside of the hand of the King of kings, who redeems people by His mighty right hand, who brings him up with His righteous right arm, will always stay there. When we pray, we plead to the King of Kings. When we pray, we make petition to the Sovereign Lord of the universe. Who can actually do something about it. When you pray, you don't pray to some futile, lonely, impotent, can't do anything god. In chalk and talk, in a few hours, we're going to look at what the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians covered. From India to Greece, from Turkey to Egypt. And, a king who can cover that great swath of land can be controlled by the God of the universe. So can every ruler and principality today. Do we pray that type of prayer? With that type of confidence? Do we pray that the kings of the nations would bow to Jesus Christ? And, do we have confidence that he can do it? Pray like that? Pray those types of redemptive prayers. Let's pray now.

Lord, do a heart work in us now. Father, you are the one who can bury these words in our hearts and can transform the ways we think, and believe, and pray. Lord, please turn our hearts to cling to you to look up to you with awe. Father, forgive us for how often we don't treat you that way. We don't fear you. God. Please, Lord, if we don't fear you now, make us fear you. Do that heart transplant work. And Father, please throughout all the nations, let your glory be proclaimed. In Jesus name, Amen.

Thank you for listening to God's word for you. A Ministry of Sharon RP Church in Morning Sun, Iowa. We pray that you would be blessed as you grow when your love for God, your love for his word, as well as your love for his people. Until next week, God Bless.