

## Neh. 1:1-11 “Nehemiah’s Grief”

**For the Children:** What do you pray for? People often pray that the Lord may make them better when they are sick, or keep them safe when they travel. They pray that He may give them enough food and money, or to do well in exams. But there are more important things to pray for: for forgiveness of sins; for God to be known by more and more people; for His church to be faithful and His people to stay close to Him. **Questions:** What things can we do that will help us stay close to the Lord? What kind of things will pull us away from Him? How did the OT teach about God’s “presence”?

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### Introduction:

#### First Point: The Content of Nehemiah’s Prayer

- 1) Invocation: In vss. 5,6 and 11 Nehemiah beseeches God to pay attention to his prayer. He calls on Him as “Yahweh,” self-existent covenant-Lord. He appeals for help, despite Israel’s sins – implying the mercy, love and faithfulness of God. “Invocation” is prayer based on the character and authority of God – as revealed in His Word. Christ is the basis of this appeal
- 2) Intercession: Nehemiah intercedes on behalf of Israel, as did Ezra – identifying with his people, even with their sin, which led to Jerusalem’s destruction and Israel’s scattering. The basis for our intercession is the intercession of Christ on our behalf
- 3) Confession: Here, too, Nehemiah’s prayer resembles Ezra’s. Nehemiah confesses the sin of himself, the sin of his father’s house and of all Israel (vss. 6-7)
- 4) Supplication: Nehemiah pleads for the restoration of Israel and the holy city. He prays that the Lord will make Artaxerxes favourable towards his request for permission to rebuild. The basis for this is God’s covenant-keeping Nature (v. 5) and His covenant-promise that He would re-gather His scattered people if they would repent (v. 9). God has brought on Israel the covenant-curses of Dt. 30:1-4 (Neh. 1:8-9). But will He not also deliver the covenant-blessings upon obedience, as promised?. We, too, should pray for daily restoration - that the Lord would constantly bring us back into His presence when we stray – based on the covenant. Prayer is an important part of that restoration

#### Second Point: The Motivation of Nehemiah’s Prayer

- 1) Concern for God’s Glory: Nehemiah’s prayer shows a concern for God’s Name and glory. He is the “great and awesome God” (v. 4). His people are those who “delight to revere Your Name” (v. 11). Our prayers show that same desire that all would see how great God is!
- 2) Concern for God’s Presence: Nehemiah prays because he desires to see Jerusalem restored – the place where God has chosen to cause His Name to dwell (v. 9). This is therefore about the desire to be in God’s presence. But the holy city was only a type of the presence of God in Christ, as revealed in His Word. That presence involves His Spirit indwelling believers and church. Prayer, study of God’s Word and involvement in the church further that closeness with the Lord. Anything that hinders in these areas should be resisted
- 3) Concern for God’s Word: As noted, Nehemiah was motivated to pray by God’s Word – especially as it concerned the covenant promises and obligations. In both, the covenant (like Scripture as a whole) holds forth Christ. Our concern to uphold the covenant-Word reflects a concern to uphold the Name of Christ, the Word-made-flesh
- 4) Concern for God’s Church: Nehemiah is concerned for his people – who are God’s people first and foremost. The church is the “bride” of Christ and the “temple” of His Spirit. God’s people groan over the church’s distress and look for the day she will be “without spot or wrinkle”

### Conclusion:

## **Lk. 13:1-9 (WCF 15:1-3) “Unless You Repent”**

**For the Children:** Imagine you have a terrible disease which makes your skin turn purple and green. The doctor gives you some medicine, guaranteed to cure you. However, he explains that this medicine always makes you turn and face north. A few days later your parents ask you if you have been taking your medicine. You tell them you have. But there is one problem: you are facing south as you say it. There is only one cure for sin, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. But those who take this cure always turn to face away from sin and towards the Lord. They always become people who repent of their sins. Those who never repent simply do not know the Lord Jesus. **Questions:** What is repentance? How does God warn us of the need to repent? How does the Lord show His patience to us?

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### **Introduction:**

#### **First Point: Tragedies That Call to Repentance**

- 1) Two Disasters: Listeners reported that Herod had slaughtered some Galileans as they offered sacrifices in the Temple. Jesus then adds that the collapse of the Tower of Siloam killed 18 people. Perhaps these news items were seen by some as “signs of the times” – or examples of the judgement Jesus had been talking about previously. As with Job’s friends, the usual Jewish idea was that such disasters came upon people who were worse sinners than others. See Jn. 9:1-3
- 2) I Tell You, No!: As in Jn. 9, Jesus here emphatically rejects the assumption that disaster indicates worse sin – “I tell you, No!” (vss. 3,5). On the one hand, all misery is connected to sin in a general way, as a curse from the Fall. The Lord does sometimes send particular temporal punishments for particular sins. But there can be other causes, such as God’s glory (Jn. 9:1-3). The Lord’s reasons behind His Providence are generally “secret.”
- 3) You All Likewise: However, because all misery is connected to the Fall, it should always remind us of our need to repent of our own sin. Jesus points out that “you all likewise” (vss. 3,5) will perish if you do not repent – for all men are born in sin and deserve eternal death. If there is no repentance, death will find us appearing unrepentant before the Judge, leading to eternal death. Every disaster should be taken as a warning of this. WCF 15:2 speaks of that danger as a reason to make repentance an urgent matter – along with God’s view of sin as filthy and hateful

#### **Second Point: A Parable That Calls to Repentance**

- 1) Concerning Israel: The vineyard and fig-tree represent Israel. The owner (the Lord) looks for fruit (repentance) from His people, but even after 3 years (enough time to bear fruit) there is none. He wants to cut down the tree, but the Vinedresser asks for 1 more year of careful tending. If there is still no fruit, then the tree can be destroyed. See Mt. 21:18f
- 2) Time and Mercy: The parable points to the Lord’s mercy in allowing sufficient time for sinners to repent. His patience and mercy are seen even more by allowing yet a further year of intense care. Israel received super-abundant grace when Christ came, with more warnings and encouragements. God’s mercy is another reason to repent (WCF 15:2). In fact, true repentance must be rooted in Christ and His grace. Hence, repentance is an “evangelical” grace (WCF 15:1), i.e., it is based on the Gospel
- 3) Cut It Down!: However, the time allowed for repentance does not last forever. If the tree does not yield after the extra year, it is to be cut down. It is not only wasting time and resources, but using up “ground” that other “trees” could be using (such as the Gentiles). This shows the urgency of repenting while there is still time, “today”
- 4) Continuous and Decisive Fruit: The fruit of repentance is to be shown continually (as implied by the tense used in v. 3) and decisively (the tense in v. 5). We will not repent of all sins, or perfectly of any; but repentance must characterize us as evidence that we really do know Christ and have God’s work of “cultivation” within us. See WCF 15:3. This is why repentance is necessary for salvation, even though it is not the ground of salvation

**Conclusion:**