

CAPITOL STUDIES

SEPT 15, 2021 • WEEK 1



STUDIES IN NEHEMIAH, THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM SUSAN

Contents

The Report	2
The Response	3
<i>Nehemiah...</i>	
Sorrowed for People	3
Confessed Sins	4
Revered God	4
Prayed for Success	5
About Capitol Studies	7



Verse of the Week

Nehemiah 1:10

“They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.”

Nehemiah: The Builder of Hope



TODAY WE BEGIN A NEW JOURNEY into the life and legacy of Nehemiah. This man of God was the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes Longimanus, the Persian ruler from 465–425 BC. As cupbearer, it was Nehemiah’s job to taste any food and drink that would be offered to the king. In this capacity, he became an intimate friend and confidante of the king. This providential position gave Nehemiah the opportunity to serve King Artaxerxes and God’s people in a powerful way. When God chooses a man to fulfill His kingdom work, no matter what that work may be, He always equips that man to lead for His glory. In the beginning chapters of the book of Nehemiah, God uses Nehemiah to provide Hope (chapter 1), Heart (chapter 2), and Help (chapter 3) for the people of God. As Nehemiah humbly yields to God’s direction, God clearly supplies in amazing ways.

Pastor Arin Hess
Chaplain, Capitol Studies



INTRODUCTION

In the Hebrew Bible, the books of Nehemiah and Ezra are combined into one book. Both books describe the challenges faced by the Jewish community that had recently returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. The book of Nehemiah opens in 445 BC, with this Jew, serving in the court of the Persian king Artaxerxes as his food taster and confidant. We will see how the hope of this humble servant brings things into action for rebuilding the walls of that great city and rescuing them out of disgrace and ignominy. Here we will find spiritual correlations to the walls in our lives. Nehemiah becomes for us God's wall builder.

I. THE REPORT

Nehemiah 1:1a

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.¹

The book starts with "The words." This phrase is from the Hebrew word דָּבָר (*dābār*). It means communication: to give an account, speak of history, share a message, give a report, reveal thoughts, indicate ideas, point out directions, tell tidings. It is a tool for understanding and knowledge which translate into action. It is the same word used for our inspired Bible (the sourcebook for our knowledge of God, His salvation, His instruction for living, etc.). Let's remind ourselves that these are the words of God through Nehemiah to give you and me instruction that should translate into action.

God put Nehemiah in Susa just as He had put Esther there a generation before, and just as He had put Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon. These were real people, real events, relatable experiences. When God wants to get a job done, He always prepares His workers and puts them in the right places at the right time. For this reason, you, Senators and staff, all who are civil servants, are here today. God has placed you here to do His will. What are the circumstances in your life that have brought you to where you are today? What do you believe the Lord wants to accomplish through you? You are here by His providence.

Nehemiah 1:1b-3

Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol,² that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.³ They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

Nehemiah is in his 20th year serving in the palace in Susa, the Persian capitol. Susa, also called Shushan, was situated east of Babylon, about 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf. It was one of the Medo-Persian strongholds, a wintering city for many officials, and the setting of the book of Esther. It is likely that Nehemiah has not had much, if any, contact with his family during this time. Now his brother comes with a report of his people, the Jews, and of his home, Jerusalem. It is no



coincidence that God has Nehemiah in the capitol at the specific time the sad report of Jerusalem's deplorable condition is given. Hanani, whose name means "the LORD is gracious," bears the bad news. But, even this name reminds us that for God's people, there is always hope, no matter how bad the situation.

II. THE RESPONSE

A. He Sorrowed for the Sin and Heartache of His People

Nehemiah 1:4

When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

In Nehemiah we see the heart of a truly great leader. He is tender-hearted. He is broken-hearted for his people. He is not disconnected. He has now become attentive to kingdom priorities. When Nehemiah hears "these words," he is in so much shock that he interrupts his normal activities. It takes a lot to wake some people out of their lethargy. Nehemiah says, "I sat down." Are we more interested in our own agenda or God's agenda?

Though Nehemiah was in a high position in the king's palace, his heart was centered on God and the needs of His people. He was stricken with grief, and mourned, wept, and fasted. Nehemiah's whole outlook on life was transformed. His priorities were changed. He was truly burdened for his people in Jerusalem. This is the kind of burden we need. A burden for our fellow Nebraskans. A burden to provide a culture that would honor the Lord. Lawmaking provides opportunity to impact society for good. That is the reason God has you here.

Before there can be service, there must be true sorrow and a burden. We must have a vision of the need before we can help to meet that need. We must see our homes, our state, our country, our world as God sees them. If we plead with God for spiritual understanding, we will be able to see with the "eye of faith" and clearly know how He wants to use us.

Chuck Swindoll says, "I am deeply impressed with the fact that, though he [Nehemiah] possessed a high-ranking position in the world, he had a heart that was very tender toward God. It is rare to find these combined strengths in a person."²

James 4:9-10

Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Psalms 30:5

Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.

What are some things that God would want me to weep and mourn about? Have I been content to just look the other way and go on about my business?





B. He Thoroughly Confessed His Personal Sins as well as the Corporate Sins of His People

Nehemiah 1:5-7

I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, ⁶let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses."

He prayed in humble confession. Sins of idolatry, child sacrifice, and immorality had brought God's people, Israel, into bondage. Nehemiah included his own sin with the sins of God's people: "I and my father's house have sinned." Nehemiah knew his own heart and its need for continual repentance and confession of sin. We have lost the discipline of confessing sin. We just want to move on and forget anything happened. But Psalm 66:18 reminds us, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear."

Time may elapse before the burden is lifted and the answer comes. Nehemiah carried his burden of intercession, supplication, and fasting for four months before God worked out all the details. This is seen from the dates in 1:1 and 2:1. Prayer is always the recourse of the Christian. We must not just "say" prayers but learn how to really pray. Timothy Keller says, "There is ultimately no such thing as unanswered prayer. If the answer at first is 'no' or 'not yet,' it is because He gives us what we want in ways better than we asked."³

Nehemiah prayed earnestly day after day. No one could be more in earnest than Nehemiah.

C. He Revered the Majesty and Power of God and Reminded Him of His Promises

Nehemiah 1:8-10

"Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; ⁹but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.' ¹⁰They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand."

He prayed with humility and awe. He adored and feared God for His greatness. Only One is so awesome! Nehemiah appealed to the majestic sovereignty and covenant loyalty of God by reminding Him of His covenants and His promises. He appeals for the mercy of God that



pardons and removes sin and keeps covenants. This prayer was grounded in the Word, founded on the promises, and rooted in God's past dealings. God could never forget or be unfaithful, but He wants us to remind Him of His promises and steadfast loyalty toward us. The key word, "remember," recurs frequently in the book (4:14; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). When we ask God to "remember" His promises, we will "remember" them, too. He prayed about the relationship his people had with God (v. 10). He mentioned the glorious redemption of God's power and might.

D. He Prayed for Gracious Success

Nehemiah 1:11

"Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man." Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

He did this because he had a vision and burden of what God could do. He asked for God's hand of blessing upon him. Shouldn't we personally ask for God's hand to be upon us? The success of God's servant is consistent with glorifying God's name.

"O LORD, I BESEECH YOU, MAY YOUR EAR BE ATTENTIVE TO THE PRAYER OF YOUR SERVANT."

This is intercessory prayer for the benefit of God's people desiring to glorify God's Name. "[T]he prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name," and "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." are the types of prayers we should be making every day. Success only comes as a gift of God's grace. May our prayer be "Make Your servant successful today." Nehemiah had hope for himself and his people. His name means "the Lord consoles." Through Nehemiah God would console His people and give them hope for a future.

In our next study we will see that Nehemiah will actually be putting his own life on the line when he makes request of the king to leave the security and comfort of his posh kingdom position to go labor in isolation and danger for the kingdom of God. Ezra 4:21 tells of the opposition that halted the building of the walls. Success would involve the overturning of a royal edict that stopped the Jews from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

In today's passage, we see that Nehemiah is aware of the limitless power of God to change circumstances that are beyond human control. His tactic was to pray for the stirring up of the compassion of the king. "And grant him compassion before this man." This famous and influential king was only a man under the authority of the King of the universe. Therefore, Nehemiah could implore the King of the universe to move this king's spirit. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes."

It was not just a lucky thing that Nehemiah was in such a position of prominence with access to the King of Persia. God had providentially





directed his life journey and prepared him for this crucial moment in history. This is not some minor position like a present-day butler.

In summary, as an escort of the monarch at meals, the cupbearer had a unique advantage to petition the king. Since the cupbearer tasted all the king's beverages and food for possible poison, the king owed him his life. This brought Nehemiah into a unique relationship as a close confidante of the king. God sovereignly used this relationship between a Gentile and Jew to deliver His people, just as He did with Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and Mordecai.

Is it possible God brought you to such a place and position today to bring about good for His people?

CONCLUSION

My, what a vision Nehemiah had! A vision of his people's need, of God's reputation, of God's omnipotence, and of his own role. This man would bring comfort and encouragement to his people who had returned to Jerusalem. He would bring HOPE. Hope for their special need. God majors in bringing hope to our lives daily. Are you seeing the things He is doing to awaken hope in you?

Let's ask God for a renewed vision of His Person, His work, and His power to meet the needs of those around us. We see in Nehemiah what we need to be today:

1. A civil servant who was a servant leader – the cupbearer
2. A tender-hearted Jew/slave – the compassionate
3. A prayer warrior – the confessor of his people
4. A devoted man – the consecrated one
5. A commissioned man – the called servant

A look toward upcoming studies: Nehemiah provides Heart (Ch. 2) and Help (Ch. 3) for God's people. God can build the walls to protect your life and provide gateways to glory.

Pastor Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

1. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick: Timeless Lessons on Leadership*, Thomas Nelson, 2006; used from Paul Apple, www.bibleoutlines.com.
3. Timothy Keller, *The Songs of Jesus: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms*, Viking, 2015, pg. 250.

