

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH
"NEHEMIAH--MAN OF PRAYER"
Nehemiah 1:4-11

Introduction

1. This is one of the most astounding books in the Bible concerning a man of vision and burden. In these days of spiritual immaturity, it is well to take this book into serious study and concern.

2. Nehemiah means "comfort" and he was the son of a man named Hacaliah which means "whose eyes the Lord enlivens." He had a rich spiritual heritage (v. 1). He had news from his homeland (v. 2) and was told there was deep distress in Jerusalem (v. 3).

3. It must be remembered that Nehemiah was living in a momentous period of time. Certain Jews had returned to Israel under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1) in 538 B.C. Haggai and Zechariah were raised up of God to encourage the completion of the temple (520 B.C.) and this was done by 516 B.C. Ezra prophesied about 458 B.C. and gives a glorious account of the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the people to the worship of the Lord. The story of Esther fits into this period of history too. Nehemiah was raised up of God about 445 B.C. to stir up the people of God to rebuild the walls and gates of the city of Jerusalem (cf. v. 3). The prophet Malachi held forth in these days (about 435-415 B.C.). Hence, when Nehemiah heard about the walls and gates, God moved upon his heart. Take two responses from him:-

1. HIS REACTION

a. Physically. It is noteworthy that Nehemiah was so moved by what he heard (v. 3) that he "sat down." This is the same sort of response recorded in other books when men became burdened about a situation (Job 2:13; Ezekiel 1:28; 2:2). God give us such men today¹

b. Emotionally. Two words tell the story. "Weep" which is the same verb used of the "valley of Baca" (Psa. 84:7). It means to "distil or flow in drops." But more than this. Nehemiah "mourned" and this means he "languished" and went with his head downward. The tense of these verbs suggests incomplete action, hence linear in force. The text says he went this way for "days." What a broken man!

c. Spiritually. The primary meaning of the word "fast" is "to keep the mouth closed." Nehemiah was touched with the needs of his people and his country that he could not eat (cf. Rom. 10:1). With his fasting, however, Nehemiah "prayed." This is the word for "intercede or supplicate." It is a participle so shows a continuous action. All of what Nehemiah did here was "before (in the face of) the God (Elohim) of heavens (same as in Gen. 1:1). He did not pray with men in view, BUT GOD!"

2. HIS ADORATION

As Nehemiah was moved personally, he adored theologically and this is evident from the text. Look what he says about God:-

a. His person First, God is named the "Jehovah God (Elohim) of heavens (cf. v.3). Hence, He is the "covenant keeping God" (Jehovah) and He is the Strong One (Elohim). As such He is the "great" God. None excels Him. He is the One who is "terrible" and this word means to "tremble." Being the Nifal and a participle it gives the essence of how a human heart is to be moved to respect a holy omnipotent God. Passages abound which give God this single place in the universe (cf. Psa. 95, 96; Isa. 44).

b. His power Using the active participle, Nehemiah brings to light the "Keeping" power of God for those who "love and observe" His Word (v. 5). God maintains His covenant and provides mercy to obedient ones. The item in view here is probably the Mosaic Covenant which was a bilateral arrangement with Israel (Ex. 19:5-8). Incidentally, the peculiar Jewish character of this message is noted by the idea of "covenant" (Cf. Rom. 9:4).

c. His purpose Nehemiah, in the midst of his burdened expression, reminds God and his own heart with assurance that this God "redeemed" the people for whom he is moved (v. 10). The verb used means to "cut in pieces" and thus means to "cut loose, let go, free." Four personal pronouns are used to relate the matter to God ("thy" four times). God's purpose for His people stirs Nehemiah to praise the Lord and take courage in his brokenness over the nation.

Conclusion Here is a portion of what happened after Nehemiah heard what was going on in Jerusalem. It is enough to break the tender hearts of His own today. May it move you and me to a responsiveness to the Lord and His work. Amen!