

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

"Prayer Requests"

Nehemiah 2:1-8

Introduction

1. Nehemiah was an unusual man of God. His caliber is not ordinary. What he saw about Jerusalem and his land never dimmed. It was entrenched in his thinking. Therefore, the report given to him (1:1-3) serves as the background for the events of this chapter.
2. God always has his man to do the jobs which need doing. There are employment problems in the household of faith, but the Spirit leads until the right man is in the right place doing the right job! This is illustrated in our text. Note two significant items included here:-

1. The historical SITUATION vv. 1-3.

a. Presented v. 1.

The time for the events here is 4 months after the initial comments of the writer (1:1). This is an amazing truth. Nisan is March-April whereas Chislev is December. It means that Nehemiah had contemplated the report of his brethren for 120 days! It means that his involvement in prayer was not a fly-by-night experience, but one which was truly in depth (cf. 1:4-11). Nehemiah carried the burden until God got him to the king! There is no sense serving in a capacity for the Lord unless you have such a burden. You will never be fruitful without it. To serve the Lord with any less than this is absolute insanity. The incident of the wine accents the important position which Nehemiah held in the court. Being a "cup-bearer" (1:11) meant that Nehemiah actually washed the cup in the king's presence, drank a little wine first, then handed the cup to the king. This has been confirmed by archaeology. BUT for the first time Nehemiah was "sad" (Hebrew "evil") in the sight of the king. Such disposition was irregular before the king.

b. Questioned v. 2.

The "wherefore" of the English is not a special particle in the original; it is a common waw connective, showing that the story is continued and does not end with the previous verse. The king responded to Nehemiah's sad face! He is very incisive in his

perception. He takes the role of both the physician and the psychiatrist. The interrogative pronoun "why" is a compound word meaning "what is known." The suggestion is that the king discerned that the problem was not physiological, but Theological. The use of the emphatic personal pronoun "thy" face personalizes the whole incident. Hence, the king gets down to the root of the problem. Nehemiah has "heart-sickness" but it is not physiological. What a meaningful understanding of a man's face! This whole matter is instructive. Nehemiah has "heart-sickness" but it is not physiological. What a meaningful understanding of a man's face! This whole matter is instructive. Nehemiah did not speak to the king, yet he did through his face! The king got the non-verbal communication and replied to the servant of God. The Lord moved upon the king to speak to his humble cupbearer! This is divine intervention of the first order. Because this sort of conduct was not the usual in the king's presence, Nehemiah expressed great fear! But then, God was in the matter as the end reveals. For Nehemiah, however, in the situation, the end was not known. We now read the account too glibly!

c. Explained v. 3.

Nehemiah was respectful toward the king. God's servants, even in captivity, acknowledge the right of governments. This is a word needed in our day. Christians should be the finest citizens. The wish for the king's health and government are given in the will of God. He has a real reply to the king for his sad countenance. After all, it has been the subject of his concern and prayer life for four months! Fancy it was at this particular cupbearing that the king responded. It shows again that God had control of the entire situation. Blessed be His Name. Would to God more of his own would come to grips with this sort of understanding of their places of service. Nehemiah mentions

the real problem: the city of Jerusalem is lying in waste and the gates are consumed (both Hebrew verbs used here are different than in 1:3, but the ideas are the same). It should be noted that Nehemiah adds a touch of personal concern. The city is the "place of my father's sepulchres." This item of personal interest was intended to move upon the compassion of the king. God truly burdened Nehemiah's heart and he let this be known to the king.

2. The spiritual SUPPLICATION vv. 4-8.

a. Directed vv. 4, 5.

When the king heard the report of Nehemiah (v. 3), he was prepared to hear him out. What did Nehemiah want? But that is not the strategy of Nehemiah. Instead, the Scriptures report that he prayed to GOD! The original uses the term "Elohim" which means the "Mighty God." What a fantastic truth. It evidences that Nehemiah did not look to the king of Persia for his needs, but to the God of heaven. What a lesson for the children of God today. If there ever was a day of need, it is today. If ever there was a day when the temptator is raised to look to the government for help, it is today. Nehemiah looked to God! Beloved, there is NO other help than that which comes from God (Psalm 108:11, 12). The verb used here for prayer is the same as above (v. 4). It is the hithpael form and means "to supplicate." This was no ordinary praying! When God's people learn this kind of dealing with Him, things will really take place! Interestingly, after Nehemiah had dealt with God, then he turned to the king (v. 5). This is the order of the spiritual man. He already had his answer from the Lord. He knew the outcome from man!

b. Detailed vv. 5-8

Five huge requests are uttered by Nehemiah to the king. Did he ask too much? Certainly not! He couldn't in view of the fact that he had already spoken to the Lord. The earthly requests were merely a repetition of the heavenly ones. This was just routine for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose. Three specific items are addressed to the king: please him, thy servant, and favour

with him. It is the same sort of respect evidenced earlier (v. 3). Note the requests:-

- 1) Geographically v. 5. Nehemiah wanted to be sent to Judah, to the City of Jerusalem. The mention of the province Judah is an addition to the report of the men (1:3). But there is no doubt in Nehemiah's mind. He knew exactly where he wanted to go. It is an indication of God's leadership that his servants know where their appointment is! Nebulous statements about God's leadership often indicate fleshly and human decisions. Abraham knew where he was going (Gen. 12:1). It was the land which God would show him. He knew where to pitch his tent along the way (Gen. 12:5-9). The kind of guidance which does not specify is often a guidance not received from the Lord.
- 2) Purposefully v. 5. This is a good word. Nehemiah had but one intent: to build the city of Jerusalem. This sort of positive action is so needed. The true servant of God is not involved in the work of the Lord for any other purpose but to build it! Sad to say, the action of some seems to indicate that they are in the work of the Lord for another purpose: to tear it down. God give us more of the Nehemiah kind of worker.
- 3) Chronologically v. 6. The king was concerned about the time element in the work to which Nehemiah was called. No specifics are recorded, but surely there was a clear understanding. This shows that God does not agree with the endless plans of man, but the specific sort of goal-orientated ministry. Far too many just move along in the work of the Lord and have no idea where they are going, what they intend to accomplish and what the eternal issues are all about! Heaven help us! It is true that later on Nehemiah spent considerable time as governor of the

- city (5:14).
- 4) Protectively v. 7. Again Nehemiah recognizes the authority of governments. He knew that only the king of Persia could give him the rights he needed. He wanted these and asked for them. His goal was to get to Judah and the phrase "until I come unto Judah" is significant. The phrase "beyond the river" shows that Persia had possessions on both sides of the Euphrates river. The modern visa might be a recognized "letter" of Persia's time.
 - 5) Materially. v. 8. The job which was to be done in Jerusalem required a man (Nehemiah) and means (timber). God will not call a man without giving him the material to do the job. It is so clear here. Nehemiah adds the word "house" to the needs known earlier (1:3). He got all he asked for because it was the hand of the Lord upon him (v. 8). Nothing we receive is from men, but all comes from the Lord (James 1:17).

Conclusion The man who walks with God is the man who talks with God. The man who talks with God is the man who acts with God. It is thrilling to see the Word give an account of a spiritual ministry in a day when so much is done in and through the means of the flesh. Amen.