

Topic	The Prayer of Nehemiah Recapturing the Vision
Reference	Nehemiah 1
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We have concluded our series in 1-Corinthians and we've learned a whole lot about how to live in community with one another and in communion with God and despite our differences and beliefs or doctrines or culture, we can still be united and stand shoulder to shoulder with one another to build the kingdom of God.

We are going to start a new series, studying the Book of Nehemiah for the next few weeks. Nehemiah is an exciting book. It is a story about how this man feels heavy on his heart to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls and it is all about how God sustains Nehemiah through his adversity and guides him as opposition comes and I have heard people use the Book of Nehemiah to teach leadership skills and managerial skills, which is fantastic. I mean there is a lot that we can learn from the Book of Nehemiah that we can take back to the workplace but as always, the main thrust of the book is that we are sinners and are in need of a savior.

Before we get into the text, we need to cover some background to show you where the book of Nehemiah fits into Israel's history and so most of this is just background information that you need to know.

BACKGROUND

God has been making covenants in the Old Testament with Israel and also with us, so I am just going to run you through with a list of the covenants that God has made. Covenants are basically like partnership deals, partnership deals between God and man where He is our God and we are His people and God has been trying to make that happen and so these are the covenants that he makes with us.

The very first covenant is in Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring a and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

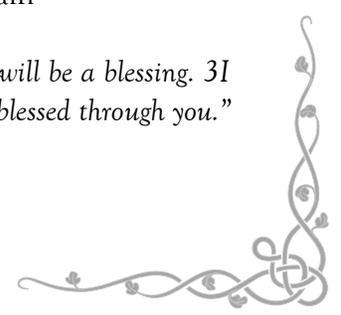
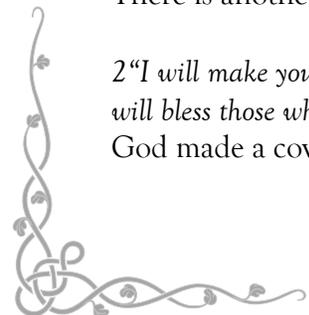
So from the outset, from Genesis 3 we know that there is an offspring of the woman that means a human being who is going to crush the head of the serpent.

Another covenant in Genesis 9:11 with Noah:

I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

There is another key covenant in Genesis 12:2-3 and this one will come up again and again

2"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. *3*I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
 God made a covenant with the Israelites in Exodus 19 in the time of Moses.



5Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

The Davidic covenant in 2-Samuel 7

Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. 10And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed....I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. 13He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

So there will be a Jewish king from the line of David whose reign will be never ending. It will be forever. Finally, this is where we come in. This is the New Covenant that God makes. This is in Jeremiah 31 and also in Ezekiel 36

31“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, ... “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

That’s the new covenant that we are living in. This information will set some context, it will help you to understand the book of Nehemiah a little bit better. I am going to show you where the Book of Nehemiah fits into Israel’s history. We will start from Moses. Everyone is familiar with the story of Moses. The Jews were slaves in Egypt and with God’s mighty hand, Moses leads about 2 million Jews out of Egypt. The Jews were supposed to go into the Promised Land and take it over but they get scared. They are like, “they are too powerful, they are too strong, we are too weak”. So God gets extremely upset with them and sends them wandering in the desert for 40 years for the sole purpose of wiping out that generation, so that whole generation is wiped out and the new generation comes up to take over the promised land. They were led by Joshua.

So they take over the Promised Land and then there are series of Judges and then there are series of kings. First king was Saul then David then Solomon, then Solomon’s son. Solomon sons get into a fight and then the nation splits into two nations, Northern nation of Israel and then the Southern nation of Judah. The nation is Israel is terrible. King after king after king were bad. Bad king, bad king, bad king and then God says, “I have had enough” and He tells the Babylonians to take over the land and bring the people into exile. Judah did a little better. There was good king, bad king, bad king, bad king, good king, bad, bad, bad and eventually God got upset with them as well. He said, “this is the end” and he tells the Babylonians to take them over and so they are in exile. While they are in exile, so they are slaves, they are servants Babylon. Daniel was a servant in Babylon and while they were in Babylon Jeremiah prophesize the word of God that this will last 70 years. 70 years we are going to suffer here for the sins that we have committed and then God will send us back to Jerusalem to be prosperous once again and that’s where we are at and that’s where the Book of Nehemiah starts.

The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah are actually supposed to be one book. Before they used to be one book, so Nehemiah is a continuation of Ezra. So if you want to know the context of Nehemiah, we have to go Ezra 1. So I am just going to read real quick Ezra

1In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia,

So although it was the Babylonians who took over Israel, the Persians took over the Babylonians. So now it is the king of Persia who is in charge.

in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing: 2 “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “ ‘The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. 3 Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. 4 And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.’ ”

So the King of Persia says, God speaks to him and says, send my people back to build my temple because I told them 70 years and I will send them back. So God is faithful to his word. Finally we go to verse 1 of Nehemiah

1The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, 2Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

There is a lot of weird fancy terminology in there but it is real simple. Let me break it down for you. Hanani was a prophet. In the 20th year means the 20th year of the reigning king and the current reigning king we will find it in chapter 2, King Artaxerxes and that is about 445 BC. The month of Kislev is in the Jewish calendar and so in our calendar it is about November-December. So basically what verse 1 and 2 is saying is, in December of the year 445 BC the prophet Hanani came to see Nehemiah.

3 They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” 4When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

No Nehemiah finds out that the walls of Jerusalem are broken down and burnt and then he prays and fasts and mourns, why, is that such a big deal. Well back in the day, the wall is really what makes a city a city. A city cannot function as a city without a wall, because without a wall there would be no protection from wild animals, from robbers, or invading armies and so the city could not prosper. You couldn't grow anything. You would be in constant fear of danger by woman and children would have to stay indoors and we sought of understand this in our modern day community. A lot of us live in condos or communities and you will let your children play in the playground unattended but those of you who live in a condo, lets say if there were no walls and there were no security guards would you let your children go down and play in the playground alone, probably not. Why, because there is no layer of protection. In proverbs 25:28 it says,

A man without self control is like a city broken into and left without walls

Why is the illustration of a man without self control, a city without walls, because you can attack him from every side and he will fall. Every desire that he has, everything that you place before him, he will take. It is like a city without walls. There is no layer of defense and so in verse 4 Nehemiah's response is to weep, to mourn, to fast and pray. Now remember Nehemiah has never been back to Jerusalem. He was likely born and raised in Babylon. He was living a comfortable life in the palace. Remember, he is the cupbearer to the king. So he lives in the palace. He eats the king's food and he drinks the king's drinks. It is a pretty sweet deal if you ask me. He is at the top of the career ladder. So why is he so concerned about Jerusalem, a place he has never been and a people that a lot of which he has never met. Was it because he was nationalistic. Like I am a Jew and so I want to rebuild Jerusalem. Yeah, a bit of that sure. I think there is a bit of that involved. Was it because he was home sick? Not really, I don't think so because home for him actually is Babylon. That was his home. He was born and raised in Babylon. And so why is he so sad about this Jerusalem place.

I think he is passionate about God and His kingdom. The people of God were in disgrace and he couldn't stand the thought of other people ridiculing God because of that and I think that's the reason and we will see that a little bit later in his prayer.

Now we get to Nehemiah's prayer,

5 Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

He starts with praise and adoration of who God is. He starts his prayer by putting God in his place and really that's the foundation of every prayer we pray, big or small. Who God is, is the foundation of our prayers. Let's take the simplest prayer that we all pray, Father God, thank you for this food. In this prayer we are acknowledging that this blessing that you have placed before me comes from you, whether I bought it or whether I cooked it, God it was you who gave me hands to be able to cook. Eyes to be able to see. If I bought it, God it is you who gives the means to be able to earn a living and to buy this food. That's the foundation of all our prayers. Psalms 145:1-5 says,

1 I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. 2 Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. 3 Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. 4 One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. 5 They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty— and I will meditate on your wonderful works.

Do we meditate on the glorious splendor of God's majesty on His wondrous word? How much time do we spend in our prayers praising God? Praising him for his majesty, his power, his holiness, his goodness. You see Nehemiah praise to God because God's sovereignty is undeniable.

6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel.

He requests that God be attentive to his prayers. So what he is doing is, he starts off with putting God in His place and then secondly he puts himself in his place. He is saying, God you do not have to listen to me, you are God, you do not have to listen to me or any other human being and especially not any Jew. You do not have to listen to us because the Jews were the ones who had the promise, who had the word of God, who were taught from young all the covenants, I will make you into a great nation, the kingdom of David's line will never end. They were taught the promises. They knew and yet they sinned. So God you do not have to listen to my prayers, but I am going to ask you to anyways because I know you are God. God is a good God and that's why Nehemiah asks this of him. He praise because God's goodness is unending.

I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. 7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

What do you see here? I see real and raw confession. He doesn't try to shirk the responsibility. He doesn't try to shift the blame. Like he could have said, Oh God I want to ask for the forgiveness for the sins of my great great-grandfathers, my ancestors, in the golden years of Israel, they sinned. I ask for your forgiveness for them. He doesn't say that. He says, I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, he puts himself in the middle of the sin. He knows full well that he has plenty of sins of his own. He doesn't make any excuses. He doesn't shift the blame. When David sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband, Uriah and then he was confronted by the prophet Nathan. He wrote Psalm 51:4 says

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

David sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah and the whole nation of Israel and I think what David will say in response to that, yes I have did but Uriah, Bathsheba and the nation of Israel are not almighty God. They are not the holy and righteous one. Every time I sin, I sin first and foremost primarily against God. 1-John 1:9 says

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness

Nehemiah understood that, with his confession comes forgiveness of sins. No strings attached. No caveats. Full pardon, every time if you are a believer and a child of God. God's mercy for you is both just and inexhaustible. Nehemiah praise because God's mercy is unrestrained.

So lets recap:

- Nehemiah praise because God's sovereignty is undeniable.
- Nehemiah praise because God's goodness is unending.
- Nehemiah praise because God's mercy is unrestrained.

8 "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 9but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'

That was the promise. I believe it is Deuteronomy 38. God says, if you return to me, if you start obeying me, I will bring you back if you are at the farthest horizon. Nehemiah knows full well that we have no business reminding God of his promises as if God tends to forget. God never forgets and God always keeps his promises, so why is Nehemiah reminding him. I think he is not reminding God of his promises but he is claiming the promises from God. He is standing on the foundation that God keeps his word. What a different world we will live in if we all kept our word. We like to say things like, Oh I promise, I swear I will do this, we are saying my friend I am so bad in keeping my word that I am about to say if I don't fulfil it may my mother fall down dead that is what we are saying. It is really a terrible phrase and that's why God tells us not to swear on anything on earth because it God's footstool and nothing in heaven because it is God's throne. Let your yet be a yes and your no be a no. Be a man/woman of your word. This world would be so different if everyone would keep their words. Psalms 89 says

34 I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. 35 Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—

Only God can say that. You see we humans have been breaking our word since Genesis 3 but God has never once gone back on his word. So what Nehemiah is praying is this, God I trust you to keep your promise to us and I trust that you are holy and faithful God who keeps his word. He praise because God's word is unfailing.

Now when we read verse 10, I want you to see how many times the word YOU or the word YOUR appears. It happens so many times.

*10 "They are **your** servants and **your** people, whom **you** redeemed by **your** great strength and **your** mighty hand. 11 Lord, let **your** ear be attentive to the prayer of this **your** servant and to the prayer of **your** servants who delight in revering **your** name.*

It becomes obvious what Nehemiah cares about most and that's this, he cares about God's name, God's renown, God's reputation and God's glory over anything else. In essence he is saying, answer our prayers to go home and rebuild Jerusalem. Why? For your name's sake because your name is tied up with your people. Remember what I read in Ezra chapter 1 when the king of Cyrus made his decree. King Cyrus said, any of His people among you may go up to Jerusalem and may their God be with them.

You see God is tied with his people because of the covenants that he made with them. You will be my people, you will be my treasured possessions if you obey me and I will be your God. Let's say through the doors, a father and a son walk in. They walk in and the son is dirty, smelly, he has open wounds, he looks extremely malnourished. He has got scars everywhere, is that a bad reflection on the boy. No that's a bad reflection on the father. So, the people of God reflect the glory of God. So even when they were in exile that was to God's glory. That gave glory to God. How does that give glory to God? Well it shows God to be faithful to His word. He says if you obey me you will be my people, if not you will be exile. It shows God to be a faithful God. It shows God to be holy and just because sin does not go unpunished and it shows God to be a God of humble people. God does not glory in the proud people. He glories in humble and weak people. So even they are exile was to God's glory.

But now the 70 years of exile are over and it was time for them to return and be prosperous again, so essentially what Nehemiah is praying is this, God your glory comes before everything. God if it was to your glory that we would be sent into exile for another 70 years then so be it, but I know according to your word, according to your prophecy to Jeremiah, you promised that it is your glory for us to return back to Jerusalem. So let it be so. Whatever is to your glory God, let it be so. That is what he is praying. Nehemiah prays because God's glory is unyielding.

Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."

This short sentence is packed with some great theology. He knows that the only person who can authorize his trip back to Jerusalem is King Artaxerxes, he knows that and he knows that God promised they would return to Jerusalem and so he prays that he would be able to go back to rebuild the walls. He knows God promised they would return to live in Jerusalem and so he prays for it. He prays for what he already knows God has will to happen because whatever God wills God does. Proverbs 19:21 says

Many are the plans in a man's heart but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails

Whatever God wills to happen is going to happen. Whether we like it or not. Adam and Eve did not want to be kicked out of the garden but God will it for it to happen and so out they went. The Israelites did not want to be in exile and be slaves in Babylon but that's what God will to happen and so it happened. It doesn't matter what you and I want, it doesn't matter what you and I have planned, it matters what God wants and what God has planned. So here is a tip from our pal Nehemiah.

If you pray according to God's will, your prayers will be answered 100% of the time.

This idea is throughout the Bible. 1-John 5:14 says, this is the confidence we have in approaching God that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. John 16:24 says, until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. You know why perhaps your prayers are not being answered, a potential reason is not praying according to the will of God. Do you think God will answer you if you prayed, Lord make me more patient, make me a kinder husband, help me to be sympathetic towards my children, help me to understand them, lord give me a heart for the lost. Do you think God would answer those prayers? Absolutely. If we pray according to God's will, 100% of the time your prayers will be answered. Nehemiah prays because God's will is undisputed.

So we have been able to take a look at the private prayer life of Nehemiah and we can learn so much about the God that Nehemiah prays to. He prays to a God whose sovereignty is undeniable. He prays to a God whose goodness is unending, whose mercy is unrestrained, whose word is unfailing, whose glory is unyielding and whose will is undisputed. Here is the question.

Is this the God that we pray to?

If someone took a look at our prayer life would they see a gracious, merciful, compassionate, powerful, majestic and holy God or would they see a spiritual Santa Claus? Do we pray big prayers, powerful prayers, impossible prayers, difficult prayers, God honoring, kingdom building, Satan crushing evangelistic prayers,

do we pray the way Nehemiah prays or our prayers small, weak, selfish and worldly. So we come to the application part of the sermon.

In the book of 1-John, John writes to the church and he gives very specific instructions to three specific groups of people; children, young men and fathers. And he is not literally talking about children, young men and fathers, he is talking about people who are young in the faith, children and young man he is talking about people who have walked with God for a number of years and fathers he is talking about people who have walked with God for many-many years, who know the father. So in this application section, I want to do sort of the same thing.

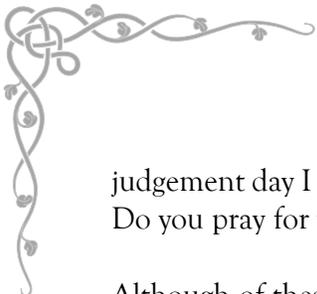
Metaphorically speaking, the children, if you are new in the faith, if you are young in the faith, this is your application. Follow the model of Nehemiah's prayer. A simple acronym that you can use that I like to use a lot is ACTS, which stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication.

- Adoration is praising God for who he is us.
- Confession is laying your sins at the foot of the cross and saying God I am sorry and repenting
- Thanksgiving is being grateful for what God has done and what God has given you.
- Supplication, God I need this, asking God for what you need.

Young men: Pray and fast for an extended period of time to pray for big things. Often times our prayers are way too small. We need to pray big. Pray for revival in Malaysia. Pray for the growth of the church in KL. Pray for the salvation to our neighbors. 60% of our population is unsaved. Pray for justice. Pray for hope and restoration for broken relationships.

Fathers: Do an audit of your prayer life. That will help you to identify really what matters to you most. Do you pray for your kingdom or do you pray for His. For example, if you are praying for your career. Do you pray, Lord help me to get that promotion, Lord help me to increase my salary, give me favor in the eyes of my employer. I want to climb the corporate ladder and be in a managerial role. OR do you pray, Father God give me favor in the eyes of my employer, my superiors and my subordinates, so that they would see me as a man of integrity, honesty, someone who is hard working, diligent, disciplined, wise, smart, makes good decision so that when the time comes for me to speak to them about you, about Godly things they will listen and they won't think that I am just some fool. Do you pray for your kingdom or do you pray for his. When you pray for your ministry, what do you pray for. Do you pray God, help me to remember everything that I have prepared. Help me not to fumble my words, help me not to stutter but to have a smooth sermon all the way through or do you pray God if my weakness up here on stage causes you to have glory, causes your glory to shine more brightly then let it be so. Let me stumble and let me fall. Let all my words be stuttered. If it is to your glory. God, I don't care about my ministry because really it is your ministry.

Do you pray God to help my children to grow or do you pray that God these are children given to me by you. I have just been commissioned as their parent for this time, so help me Lord to bring them up in the fear of the Lord. So that they would fear you more than they fear anything else or anyone else in all the years. I pray God that when the time comes you would send them to the frontlines where the Battle is the fieriest to fight for your armies, to build your kingdom and if that means they would suffer and if that means they are persecuted and even if that means I have to bury my own child, God it will all be worth it if on



judgement day I can just overhear you saying to my son to my daughter, well done good and faithful servant. Do you pray for your kingdom or do you pray for his.

Although of these three potential applications, you and I both know that we are not going to be able to do this. We can't do this in and all by ourselves. We can try. Those of us who are disciplined can last up to two to three weeks. Because in ourselves we have no strength, no will power, no discipline and no love for Christ, enough to pray like this. We don't have it in ourselves and that's why it is so amazing that we have someone who did pray like this and more. I am talking about Jesus now. He only prayed perfectly. He was the perfect prayer warrior but he was also the perfect woman. He lived the perfect life and impacted that perfection onto you and onto me. Jesus really is the one who showed us how to pray. Jesus was the one who fasted and prayed for 40 days and 40 nights and every corner being tempted, being tormented by Satan and his demons. Satan threw everything he had at Jesus and Jesus was the one who lived a kingdom focused life even if it meant him going to the cross. When he went to the cross, though his sovereignty is undeniable, he denied it to come down as a son of man because it had to be an offspring of woman who would crush the head of the serpent, although his goodness is unending, for a period of time there was nothing good to be found in Jesus because as he hung on the cross your sin and mine were piled onto him. Although his mercy is unrestrained, he was shown no mercy by the father but receive the full weight of God's judgment, of God's wrath and God's justice, every last drop until it was finished.

Although God's word is unfailing, although with a word he created the universe and with the word he could have called down 12 legions of angels to rescue him, but Christ gave no such orders for the scriptures to be fulfilled. Although his glory is unyielding he yielded it. There was nothing glorious about the bloody bruised and beaten body of Christ on the cross and though his will is undisputed he lay his will at the feet of the father and say, father your will be done. That is the gospel. That's the good news and we sang about this. Three days later he rose from the dead. This is good news and because of the life that Jesus lived and imparted onto me, I want to pray the way Nehemiah prays. That's where the power lies. In and off myself, I cannot do it, but through the power of the gospel I can.