

Broken Walls, Burdened Heart: Nehemiah 1's
Prayer of Intercession
Scriptures for Today: Nehemiah 1:1-11

Nehemiah 1:1-11 *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, 2 That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. 4 And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, 5 And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: 6 Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. 7 We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. 8 Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: 9 But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. 10 Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. 11 O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.*

Introduction:

As we have been studying through the Bible book by book, we have seen a pattern of man rebelling against God, consequences of sin and rebellion, and God showing His faithfulness and mercy to man. Leading up to the book of Nehemiah, we need to remember where God's people have come from. Israel had once been a great and mighty nation under King David and Solomon, but sin, idolatry, and rebellion led to their downfall.

Nehemiah is the 16th book of the Bible. It has 13 chapters. It takes less than an hour to read the entire book. About 55 mins.

The book of Nehemiah is an awesome story of God's people rebuilding what was broken. Everything in Nehemiah takes place after Judah was carried away into Babylon. It's important to learn the timeline of the Bible.

- Solomon disobeyed God. (Set up idols of false gods for his wives)
- After his death, the kingdom was divided.
- Continued disobedience led to the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria,
- The kingdom of Judah was conquered (Jerusalem & temple destroyed) and carried away by the Babylonians.
- Babylon was then conquered by the Persians and Cyrus King of Persia made a decree to allow the Jews to go back and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. (Book of Ezra)
- Approximately 70 years after the temple was rebuilt, Nehemiah's story begins.

This book is a powerful story of **restoration, leadership, and faithfulness**. It shows how God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things when their hearts are burdened for His work. Nehemiah touches on themes of **prayer, perseverance, repentance, and community**, reminding us that rebuilding what's broken—whether walls, lives, or faith—begins with seeking God first.

It highlights the importance of **spiritual renewal before physical restoration**, the value of unity among God's people, and the truth that when opposition arises, **God's strength is enough to finish what He starts**.

Outline of Ezra 10, Nehemiah 1 and 2

Ezra 10 – Repentance and Renewal

1. **(vv. 1–5)** Ezra leads the people in confession and prayer.
2. **(vv. 6–14)** The people agree to turn from sin and return to obedience.
3. **(vv. 15–44)** Repentance is recorded, and restoration begins among God's people.

Nehemiah 1 – A Heart Burdened for God's Work

1. **(vv. 1–3)** Nehemiah hears of Jerusalem's broken walls and grieving people.
2. **(vv. 4–7)** He weeps, fasts, and confesses the sins of the nation.
3. **(vv. 8–11)** Nehemiah prays for God's mercy and favor to act.

Nehemiah 2 – The Work Begins

1. **(vv. 1–8)** Nehemiah presents his request to King Artaxerxes, and God grants favor and provision.
2. **(vv. 9–16)** Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem and inspects the walls by night.
3. **(vv. 17–20)** He rallies the people to rebuild despite opposition.

Let's focus in on this first chapter of Nehemiah. There are three main truths that I want us to reflect on:

1. Nehemiah cared about the things of God.
2. Nehemiah cared about the people of God.
3. Nehemiah had a fear of God.

Exposition of Nehemiah 1:1–11

1. Nehemiah cared about the things of God. (v. 1-4)

Nehemiah 1:1-2 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, 2 That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and *certain* men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

From the first verse we clearly see that Nehemiah is the writer and the events are told from his perspective. Nehemiah was in captivity in Persia, which is modern day Iran. He was in Shushan palace and as we see later, he is a cup bearer for the king of Persia.

In verse 2 we see some men of Judah who had been released from captivity and had visited Jerusalem came to Nehemiah, and he asked them how things were going.

Nehemiah 1:3 And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province *are* in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also *is* broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

Nehemiah 1:4 And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

When Nehemiah heard that Jerusalem's walls were broken and its gates burned, he didn't shrug it off as someone else's problem. Notice his response...

"I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven"

That brings us to point number 1: Nehemiah cared about the things of God.

Nehemiah responded to this news about Jerusalem with weeping, mourning, and fasting. Remember that Jerusalem was known as the "holy city". It was a city that was set apart where the house of God was located. The fact that the walls were broken, the gates were burned down, and there was great affliction and reproach throughout the city brought sorrow and grief to Nehemiah.

This shows a man who cared deeply about the glory of God and the condition of the holy city. It shows that Nehemiah prioritized the things of God much higher than the things of this world.

Nehemiah was greatly valued and in a high position as the King's cup bearer. In chapter 2 we see that the King of Persia, arguably the most powerful man in the world at the time, respected and cared about Nehemiah. He found favour in the eyes of the king.

Nehemiah most likely lived a relatively comfortable life compared to others. I'm sure he was able to enjoy some of the luxuries of being a servant to the most powerful man in the world.

Even though Nehemiah was in this position, he was not puffed up with pride.

He was a humble servant, and he cared about the things of God more than the riches and cares of life.

Nehemiah is a great example of someone who had his priorities straight. He cared about the things of God so much, that it brought him to tears, mourning, fasting, and prayer. And ultimately, he stepped outside of the comfort and stability of the King's palace to take on the huge task of rebuilding the wall and the city.

You have that same choice to make in your own life. You can choose to focus solely on your needs and desires, or you can prioritize the things of God to be first in your life.

For example, you can choose to stay home and consume entertainment and food that brings your mind and body temporary pleasure, or you can read your Bible, seek the Lord, and prioritize going to church and growing in faith.

The first choice will bring you harm, the second choice will bring you blessings. Most people would rather choose to harm themselves with the cares of this world than to prioritize God and receive eternal blessings and rewards. That's very sad.

We need to have a passion for the things of God the same way that Nehemiah did. He wept, he mourned, he fasted, and prayed, because the things of God were not in order in Jerusalem.

When was the last time we wept and mourned because we wanted to have a better relationship with God? When was the last time we fasted and prayed over our burden to do the work that God wants us to do?

There is a problem when we can weep and get emotional over Hollywood movies or celebrities, but we can't get emotional and stirred about the things of God.

We need to get our priorities straightened out...

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

If we prioritize the things of God first, then everything else that we need in life will be added unto us.

Care about the things of God, just like Nehemiah did.

2. Nehemiah Cared About the People of God (vv. 5–9)

Nehemiah 1:4-6 And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, **5** And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: **6** Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.

Not only did Nehemiah care greatly about the physical things of God like the fact that the city was still in ruin and disrepair. But we see that he also cared about the people of God.

That's point number 2: Nehemiah cared about the people of God.

During this time of fasting and prayer, Nehemiah is beseeching or begging the Lord to hear him. He takes it upon himself to pray for the children of Israel. He intercedes on their behalf, confessing their sins and his own.

Nehemiah 1:7-9 We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. **8** Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, *If ye transgress*, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: **9** But *if ye turn unto me*, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, *yet will I gather them from thence*, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

Israel turned their backs on God, they did not keep the commandments, the statutes or judgements that God gave them. So God scattered them among the nations just like He had promised.

He also promised that if they would turn again unto the Lord, that He would gather them together again.

Nehemiah is fervently asking God to remember this commandment. He had a heavy heart for the people of God to do right and for God to have mercy upon them.

Just like Nehemiah interceded and prayed on behalf of the children of Israel, we too need to be praying for each other. We need to care greatly for one another.

James 5:16-20 Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. **17** Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. **18** And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. **19** Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; **20** Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

When you see your brother and sister in Christ going the wrong way, encourage them to come back. Encourage them to obey the Word of God. Show them love and mercy. Pray for them fervently. Care for the people of God. If we all do this for each other here, it will make a huge difference in all of our lives.

Another way you can care about the people of God is by doing right. Remember that your sin affects everyone around you. When you choose to disobey God, you are essentially saying, I don't care about anyone but myself.

Not only did Nehemiah confess the sins of all the people, but he also confessed his own sins.

Nehemiah 1:6 Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.

When everyone strives to get things right, you're no longer just thinking about yourself, you're also thinking about the entire congregation of believers. If everyone is constantly living in sin every single day, how can we help each other? How can we exhort and encourage one another if we are doing evil in the sight of the Lord?

We get rid of the sin in our lives out of obedience to God, but also so we can help each other. It's a lot harder to help someone that is in sinking sand when you are in sinking sand yourself.

Let's get things right, and care about the people of God just like Nehemiah cared.

3. Nehemiah Had a Fear of God (vv. 10–11)

Nehemiah 1:10-11 Now these *are* thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. **11** O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

Nehemiah would never be able to care about the things of God, and he would never be able to care about the people of God, if he did not have a fear of God. But it's very clear that Nehemiah did in fact have a fear of God.

Nehemiah's prayer shows great humility and reverence for God. He desired to fear the name of the Lord.

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding.

If you want wisdom in this life it begins with fearing God. In order to fear God, you must read His word to understand who God is.

The fear of the Lord is not irrational fear. It's a reverence and understanding that God is the almighty, all powerful, living God who is capable of showing unimaginable love and mercy while also being able to bring unimaginable chastening and discipline into your life.

If you do not have a fear of God today, then it would be very wise for you to ask God for the desire to fear Him.

Proverbs 16:6 By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD *men* depart from evil.

If you do not fear God, you will not depart from evil. If you do not fear God, you will not have a desire and a passion for the things of God.

The majority of people in this world fear man more than they fear God.

Luke 12:4-5 And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. **5** But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

Nehemiah did not fear man more than God. I want you to notice his prayer...

11 O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

Nehemiah desired to fear God, and prosper. And to be granted mercy in the sight of the King that he would be allowed to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. I want to show you a preview of what happened in chapter 2...

Nehemiah 2:1-3 And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, *that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime* sad in his presence. **2** Wherefore the king said unto me, *Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart.* Then I was very sore afraid...

Nehemiah was sore afraid that the king took notice of his countenance. This was the pit in his stomach moment when he knew it was time to speak up. He had a choice to make. Would he fear man, or fear God? Take a look at his response...

Then I was very sore afraid, **3** And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, *lieth waste,* and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

Nehemiah 2:4 Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 2:5 And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

Nehemiah chose to fear God, more than he feared man. And because he chose to fear God, his prayer was answered. The king did grant his request. And Nehemiah did prosper just like he had asked the Lord.

How about you in your life? Will you choose to fear God more than man? When your family or friends are pressuring you to stop coming to church, when you're being influenced to partake in evil activities, when you're pressured to consume drugs and alcohol, when you're pressured to live according to the world's standards, when you're tempted to seek man's approval...Who are you going to fear more? God or man? Choose the fear of the Lord.

Doctrinal Truths in Nehemiah 1:1–11

1. Doctrine of Putting God First

Nehemiah's first response to broken walls was a broken heart. His priorities reflected God's priorities. He cared more for the glory of God and the spiritual state of Jerusalem than for his own comfort in the king's palace.

This shows us that **God is worthy of being first in all things** — His glory, His work, and His worship must take priority over our pleasure and convenience.

God deserves first place in every believer's life, and blessing follows when His priorities become ours.

2. The Doctrine of Intercession and Confession

Nehemiah's prayer shows the heart of true intercession — humble confession of sin and appeal to God's mercy. He didn't distance himself from the sins of the nation but identified with them: *"Both I and my father's house have sinned."*

This reveals a key doctrine of Scripture: **God's people are called to stand in the gap through prayer**, confessing sin, seeking restoration.

God hears our prayers when we confess sin and plead on the behalf of others and it can lead to spiritual healing and revival.

3. The Doctrine of the Fear of the Lord

Nehemiah's desire "to fear Thy name" reveals a reverence that shaped his courage and obedience.

The fear of the Lord is not dread, but deep respect — recognizing God's authority, holiness, and power to bless or chasten.

It produces wisdom, purity, and boldness to stand for God when it's costly.

The fear of God leads to obedience, courage, and prosperity in His service. Without it, believers live to please man instead of God.

Practical Applications for Nehemiah 1:1–11

1. Trade comfort for calling

Nehemiah probably had a decent life in the palace. He had influence, stability, and favor — yet he left all of it to serve God in a hard place.

Comfort will always compete with calling. God often stirs us to step out of what's easy so He can use us where it's needed.

2 Timothy 2:3-4 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. **4** No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of *this* life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

2. Pray Like You Actually Believe God Listens

Nehemiah's burden turned immediately into intercession. He prayed specifically, and consistently.

Too often, we talk about prayer more than we practice it. But revival, rebuilding, and change always begin with prayer.

Jeremiah 33:3 Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.

3. Take Responsibility for the Spiritual Condition Around You

Nehemiah didn't point fingers. He didn't say, "Those people ruined everything." He said, "*We have sinned.*"

That's maturity — owning the problem instead of blaming others.

When the church is weak, when families drift, when the community grows darker — God's people shouldn't wait for someone else to fix it. Step up. Stand in the gap. Pray. Serve.

The Gospel Connection in Nehemiah 1:1–11

Nehemiah stood as a burdened man between a broken city and a holy God — pleading for mercy, forgiveness, and restoration.

In that way, Nehemiah's heart points us directly to Jesus Christ.

Just as Nehemiah left the comfort of the king's palace to rebuild what was ruined, **Jesus left the glory of heaven to restore what sin destroyed.**

He didn't come to rebuild walls, but to redeem souls.

He saw our affliction, our reproach, and our brokenness — and He came to do what no man could do: to reconcile sinners back to God.

The rebuilding that began in Jerusalem under Nehemiah would one day make way for the coming of Christ — who would walk those very streets, bear that same sorrow, and bring everlasting salvation.

Hebrews 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Conclusion

Before the walls could be rebuilt, God had to rebuild hearts. Nehemiah's burden began with caring about the things of God, interceding for the people of God, and walking in the fear of God. That same pattern still changes lives today. God is looking for believers who care more about His glory than their comfort, who pray more than they complain, and who fear Him more than they fear man. Nehemiah's story reminds us that every great work of God begins in the secret place of prayer and surrender. Before revival happens in a city, it must happen in a heart. So let God stir your heart again — to care, to pray, and to rise up and do the work of God. Let's Pray