

Prayer, Repentance and Restoration

Nehemiah 1:1-2:5, 8

¹ *The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:*

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa,² Hanani, 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.

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.”*

⁴ *When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.* 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,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. 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.

⁸ *“Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,⁹ but 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.’*

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

I was cupbearer to the king.

¹ *In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before,² so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”*

I was very much afraid,³ but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

⁴ *The king said to me, “What is it you want?”*

Then I prayed to the God of heaven,⁵ and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.”

⁸ ... *And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.*

The Destruction of Jerusalem

2 Chronicles 36:15-23

¹⁵ The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶ But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. ¹⁷ He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and did not spare young men or young women, the elderly or the infirm. God gave them all into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁸ He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD'S temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. ¹⁹ They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.

²⁰ He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power. ²¹ The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.

²² In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, 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:

²³ "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. Any of his people among you may go up, and may the LORD their God be with them."

1. A prophet is God's appointed aide and messenger. They are people through whom God's decisions are put into effect. They can bring a blessing or bear a warning. They called out to the people to return to God and warned them of the coming destruction if they refuse to turn away from their sins. God was desperately trying to save His people. He sent His prophets (messengers) to proclaim His word, but the people despised His word and mocked His prophets. Destruction came as prophesied by the prophets. Yet, because of God's mercy, there was a promise of restoration.
2. Sin and rebellion are very real problems and God will not tolerate evil. But, God always remembers His promises and seeks to restore His people.
 - What does this tell you about the character of God?
3. Several generations of people refused to listen to God's prophets, because they were so confident that destruction will never come. Now, one generation of people must believe that restoration will come.
 - What does this tell you about God and us?

Nehemiah's Grief (v. 4)

⁴ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

1. Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer. He was in a place of ease and prosperity.
2. The news from Jerusalem plunged him into grief that all he could do was to mourn, fast and pray.
3. God moved Nehemiah to rise and do something about the situation. God was stirring His people into action.
4. The grief that Nehemiah had was a selfless one. That grief would lead him to leave His life of ease and prosperity and go to Jerusalem.

Nehemiah's Prayer (vv. 5-11)

Focus on God's Character (vv. 5-6)

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,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."

1. Nehemiah did not present his request to God immediately. His focus is on God and His Character. God is the God of the heavens. God is true to Himself. He never changes and all things are sustained by Him. God is gracious and full of love. He has established a covenant of love with His people.
2. The second focus is on the relationship between God and His people:
The Lord's prayer begins with "Our Father who art in Heaven". The opening words of this prayer bring two powerful ideas together:
 - He is the sovereign God. There is nothing that is His equal and we are nothing compared to Him
 - Yet, He is the God who made us, He is our Father and He has made Himself known to us through His Son. The hallowed God of the heavens loves us.

Confession of Sins (vv. 6-7)

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.

1. Nehemiah's prayer reveals that he has a rich understanding of God's word. God has delivered Israel from slavery and blessed them with a land of their own. God calls Israel His own (Israel belongs to Him) and has given them laws and commands so that they would be a blessing to all nations. Sadly, Israel turned against God.
2. Nehemiah identifies with the sin of His people. He does not stand above the people; he humbly acknowledges that he is part of the problem.

Prayer Built on God's Word (vv. 8-10)

⁸ "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,⁹ but 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.'¹⁰ "They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.

1. Nehemiah's prayer is built on God's word.

Deuteronomy 28:64

⁶⁴ Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other.

Deuteronomy 30:2-3

² and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today,³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

2. The destruction of Jerusalem has happened according to what is written in the word of God. Now Nehemiah appeals to God for a work of restoration as stated in the word of God. He believes when the people of Israel return to God, God will restore them.
3. Sin is always a problem. It affects us deeply. It destroys communities and nations. Confession of sin is the first step towards restoration. We must take responsibility for our sins and seek God's forgiveness.

4. Dealing with sin leads to restoration and healing. Nehemiah knows this well. Therefore, like Moses, he stands in the gap in intercession for his nation.
 - Has God called you to intercede for His people?

1 John 1:8 – 10

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Prayer Led to Action (v. 11)

¹¹Lord, 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. Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man.”

I was cupbearer to the king.

Nehemiah's prayer led to action. Nehemiah not only believed that God was going to do a work of restoration, he also firmly believes that he has a part to play in this work.

- When you pray, do you believe that God calls you into action?
- Do you believe you need to be uprooted from your place of comfort and prosperity?
- Do you believe that we, as the people of God, can do something about the brokenness that exists around us?

Prayer Items

1. Focus on the character of God
2. Repentance from sin
3. May God raise us to pray for renewal and restoration
4. May God stir our hearts to action
5. Church
 - Guidance on restarting services at church
 - Renovation
 - Unity
6. Ministries
 - Life Explores, Redeeming Roses, Sunday School, Lifeline Youth, Destiny Kids & Teens, Worship
 - How to reach out to our new neighbourhood
 - Leaders to lead and actively engage with the community
7. Covid-19 pandemic
 - Deliverance
 - Protection
 - God will give the leaders wisdom and understanding as they lift restrictions and restart the economy
 - Grace and favour upon the foreigners, poor and vulnerable
8. Salvation of souls; opportunities & courage to witness