

Third Presbyterian Church
Bible Study - Nehemiah
Sermon 1
The Burdened Heart

Nehemiah 1:1-11 (NIV)

¹ The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: 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 survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. 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: "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, 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 house, 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 O 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.

Nehemiah 2:1-10 (NIV)

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 fathers 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 fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it." ⁶ Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. ⁷ I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? ⁸ And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests. ⁹ So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me. ¹⁰ When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

Questions

1. What have you risked for God?
2. What role does prayer play in your life?
 - A. What is the difference in hoping prayer versus praying with expectancy?
 - B. How does praying with expectancy affect your actions when things don't immediately change?
3. The sermon used a term "**Rotten Seed Faith**." This is where foolish risks are taken in the name of faith in God where actions are actually to please the flesh.
 - A. Give examples of "Rotten Seed Faith"
 - B. What can we do to avoid actions that are labeled as such?
4. **2 Timothy 1:6-7 (NIV)** For God did not give us a spirit of timidity(fear), but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.
 - A. What techniques do people often use to cope with fear?
 - B. God does not give us the spirit of fear as scripture above states, but does that mean we shouldn't be afraid? If no, then explain this scripture.
 - C. So, based on what has been discussed above, how do we know/recognize if a technique that is being used to overcome fear is of God?
5. Nehemiah had a sad disposition in the presence of the King, a disposition such as his would result in death because kings were very superstitious and any negativity in their presence would be dealt with severely.
 - A. What does this say about the relationship that Nehemiah had with the King?
 - B. Nehemiah was a godly man serving an ungodly boss.
 - C. How does this scenario inform you as to how you are to respect/serve those who have rule/authority over you?
 - D. How has/should growth and maturity as a Christian affect your employment performance?
6. How did Nehemiah demonstrate his dependence on God?
 - A. Give a personal account that demonstrated a complete dependency on God?
 - B. What impact did it have on your faith?
 - C. Did it have an impact on others who also witnessed or informed this in you?
7. In what situations in your life do you need to depend more on the Lord and what are you actively doing to increase this dependence?
8. Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon.

(1:1-11) Introduction: people with needs are all around us, people with desperate needs. Now think of the great diversity of these needy people around the world, even within our very own communities, neighborhoods, and churches:

- ⇒ the single mothers who are destitute
- ⇒ the children who are physically, mentally, or sexually abused
- ⇒ the poverty-stricken who are hungry, thirsty, or homeless
- ⇒ the unemployed who have lost their jobs and cannot find adequate employment to support their families
- ⇒ the widows, widowers, and divorced who must face a new life on their own
- ⇒ the masses who are lonely, empty, and without purpose
- ⇒ the masses who are diseased, injured, or dying

Men and women of compassion must step forward, men and women who have a genuine and deep concern about meeting the needs of others. Nehemiah was such a man. In fact, he was so gripped with concern for others that it is the first fact he mentions about himself in his great book. The entire first chapter focuses upon his tender heart and his concern for those in desperate need. This first chapter is, *The Broken Heart of Nehemiah Over Jerusalem: A Man of Deep Concern and Prayer*, 1:1-11.

1. (1:1-4) Heart, Tender, Example of—Concern, Example of—Care, Example of—Compassion, Example of—Nehemiah, Heart of—Jerusalem, Concern for—Returnees, Jewish, Condition and State of—Jerusalem, Condition of, at the Return of the Exiles: while serving in the palace of the Persian king, Nehemiah received some alarming, distressful news from Jerusalem. From Nehemiah's reaction, we immediately see that he was a man with a tender heart and deep concern for his people, the Jews. What happened is briefly described by Scripture:

1. Nehemiah was in the palace fortress at Susa, the capital of the great Persian Empire. Because of the warmer climate there, the kings of Persia spent their winter months at Susa. They spent their summer months at Ecbatana. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes I. As the cupbearer, his primary responsibility was to always taste the wine being served to the king in order to protect the king from an assassination attempt by means of poison (v.11). The cupbearer was a very prominent, honored, responsible, and influential position within the kingdom. Furthermore, the cupbearer had to be an honest and trusted man, a man in whom the king could put his complete confidence. A king placed his very life in the hands of his cupbearer. Because of this, the cupbearer sometimes became a trusted advisor to the king, which was apparently true with Nehemiah (2:1-8).

The present event took place in the month of Kislev (November–December), the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes I. Artaxerxes I ruled from c.465–423 B.C., which means that this event occurred in 445 B.C.

2. While serving in the palace at Susa, Nehemiah was visited by his brother and a number of other men who had just made a trip to Judah (vv.2-3). With keen interest, Nehemiah questioned them about the Jewish captives who had returned to Jerusalem from their exile. In response to Nehemiah's question, the men painted a dark, dismal picture of the returned exiles. They were in deep trouble and severe distress and were bearing terrible afflictions. They were being reproached and disgraced by the surrounding people and nations. In addition, the wall of Jerusalem had been torn down and the gates had been burned. Other Scriptures reveal the dreadful hardships the returned exiles were suffering:

- ⇒ They were suffering an economic depression due to famine (5:1-3). Famine naturally causes hunger, disease, and eventually starvation, unless relief comes. It also brings loss of income and jobs, decreased sales for businesses, and in some cases bankruptcy.

- ⇒ A large number of people were suffering oppression due to the greed of certain wealthy farmers and businessmen (5:4-5). In order to buy food, some of the people had to mortgage their homes and fields. Others had to borrow money in order to pay their taxes. The wealthy loaned money to the people, but they acted greedily in their own self-interest. They were forcing the adults and their children into some form of servitude or slavery in order to pay off their debts. In essence, the wealthy

were not only amassing all the property of the less fortunate, but they were also enslaving them unjustly.

⇒ The people were suffering persecution in the form of anti-Semitism, ridicule, and harassment from their neighbors and other nationalities who surrounded them (Ezr.4:1-24).

⇒ Above and beyond all their personal suffering, the people were defenseless against enemy attacks since the wall of Jerusalem had been torn down and its gates burned with fire (v.3).

3. Hearing this bleak and discouraging news about his homeland broke Nehemiah's heart (v.4). Grave concern gripped the inner recesses of his soul. He began to weep and mourn over the severe distress of his people. Utterly broken, Nehemiah began to fast and pray for *many days* on their behalf. Just how many days is not stated by Scripture. But *day after day* he sought the LORD, begging the LORD to help his people through these dire circumstances.

Thought 1. Nehemiah's tender heart and deep concern for others were evident in his life by his actions. When others suffered, he was gripped by compassion for their welfare. So it must be with us. When we see or hear about people in need, we must feel empathy, identifying with their need. But even more important than just feeling for others, we must act. We must be benevolent in meeting the needs of others both at home and abroad. On a larger scale, think of these very real and very desperate needs around the world...

- people are literally starving to death on a daily basis, whether due to famine, war, or the greed of their leaders
- the nations whose people have known nothing but war, death, and destruction, whose citizens both young and old live in a constant state of fear
- the nations whose people have been enslaved, oppressed, and dominated by ignorant and cruel individuals or governments
- the nations whose people have contracted and spread dangerous, even deadly, diseases, whose governments lack the knowledge or funding or compassion to seek a solution

The list could go on and on. Countless numbers are hurting in countless ways. Like Nehemiah, we must arouse ourselves to show tender concern for the hurting and suffering of this world. We must reach out in compassion to help all we can. Listen to what God's Holy Word says:

“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me” (Mt.25:35-40).

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*, And went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him” (Lu.10:33-34).

“I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Ac.20:35).

2. (1:5-11) Prayer, Example of—Humility, Example of—Nehemiah, Prayer of: day after day Nehemiah knocked at the door of heaven, seeking the face of the LORD on behalf of the Jews who had returned to Judah. According to the model that Jesus Christ later taught His followers, Nehemiah asked, sought, and knocked at the door of heaven. Scripture will reveal that he received what he asked for, found what he sought, and the door was opened to him by the LORD (Mt.7:8). Nehemiah became an intercessor, seeking the LORD on behalf of his people. Twelve prayers are recorded in his book, nine of which were offered up by Nehemiah himself (1:5-11;

2:4; 4:4-5, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 9:5-37; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). In the present Scripture, his prayer is spelled out point by point:

1. First, Nehemiah began his prayer by acknowledging God, praising Him for who He is and what He has done (v.5).

⇒ Nehemiah acknowledged God's supremacy over all by addressing Him as the "LORD God of Heaven." As the God of heaven, He is supreme, sovereign over all the universe, all that is in heaven and earth. He rules and reigns over all, controlling all events, including the affairs of men.

⇒ Nehemiah addressed God as the "great and terrible [or awesome] God." This refers to the power and majesty of God. As the *great God*, He possesses all power and might. As the *awesome God*, He is the Supreme Being who possesses all the glory and majesty of perfection and holiness. He is totally set apart from all other beings.

⇒ Nehemiah also addressed the LORD as the "One who keeps His covenant with all who love Him and obey His commandments." God always keeps His Word, His promises to those who choose to love and obey Him. Nehemiah praised the LORD for His faithfulness.

Emphasizing God's love for those who seek after Him, Nehemiah indicated that he was going to be crying out for the mercy of God upon his people. The only question remaining was whether or not the people would turn to the LORD and obey Him. Would they truly repent of their sins and keep His commandments?

2. Second, Nehemiah identified with the people by confessing both their sins and his own before the LORD (vv.6-7). He became an *intercessor* for the people before God, asking God to forgive the sins of Israel and of his own family. Note that Nehemiah did not make this request only once. He sought God's forgiveness day and night (v.6).

Yet Nehemiah did not ask God to forgive his and Israel's sins *in general*. Rather, he spelled out their sins (v.7). They had lived extremely wicked and corrupt lives, defiantly disobeying God's Word, His Holy Commandments, His statutes and laws.

3. Third, Nehemiah pleaded for God's mercy and help (vv.8-11). He asked God to remember His Holy Word, the covenant He had made with His people (vv.8-9; see De.4:25-31; 28:15-68, esp.58-68; 30:1-10). The covenant concerned sin and judgment. If the people sinned, they would suffer the hand of God's judgment by being scattered among the nations, which is exactly what had happened. But the covenant also concerned repentance and obedience and the wonderful experience of God's mercy. If the people returned to the LORD, they would be returned to the promised land. This was the eternal promise of God. Accordingly, if the people of Nehemiah's day would return to the LORD, the blessings of God would fall upon them. They would be delivered from their deep distress and trouble.

Nehemiah then asked God to remember their relationship: they were God's servants, the very people He had redeemed by His great power and mighty hand (v.10). Thus he begged God to hear his prayer and the prayers of other servants who feared and revered his name (v.11).

Lastly, Nehemiah made a very practical request of the LORD. He asked the LORD to make an opportunity for him to approach the king because he wanted to request the king's help (v.11). This was a prayer Nehemiah had apparently been offering up for several months (1:1; 2:1). Now, at last, the door was opened for him to approach the king. This was the day. Thus, Nehemiah asked the LORD to give him success in this critically important matter. King Artaxerxes needed to be aroused or stirred by God to grant the special request Nehemiah was going to make. The actual details of Nehemiah's appeal to the king will be covered in the next chapter. For now, the point to observe is that Nehemiah closed his prayer by asking God for specific help in dealing with the king. Bear in mind Nehemiah's prominent and influential position in the royal court. He was the cupbearer to the king (v.11).

Thought 1. In his prayer, Nehemiah illustrated the coming *intercession* of Jesus Christ. That is, Nehemiah stood in the gap between his people and the LORD. Nehemiah became the intercessor, the representative of the Jewish exiles who wished to plead their case before the LORD. This is exactly what Jesus Christ has done for us. Jesus Christ is our Intercessor, our Representative, our Advocate who presents our case before God. When we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ with any distress or trouble, Christ presents our need to the Father. And the Father hears the plea of Christ on our behalf. Through Jesus Christ we can receive forgiveness of sins and be given a victorious, triumphant life. The power to conquer all the trials, hardships, and distressing circumstances of life can be obtained only through Jesus Christ. As stated, He is our Intercessor, Advocate, and Representative before God. Listen to what the Holy Word of God says:

“But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Lu.22:32).

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots” (Lu.23:34).

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (Jn.14:16).

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Ro.8:34).

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17).

Thought 2. Nehemiah was a man who believed in prayer and who prayed often and much. This is clearly seen in the present Scripture. His prayer life stands as a strong example for us: we should pray, pray often, and pray much. Listen to what God’s Holy Word says about prayer:

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Mt.7:7-8).

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt.26:41).

“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Lu.18:1).

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (Jn.14:13-14).

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (Jn.15:7).

“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (Jn.16:24).

(2:1-20) **Introduction:** bold and righteous leaders are needed today. Being just bold is not enough, because uncontrolled boldness can violate the rights of people, dominating and trampling them under foot. And being just righteous is not enough, because without initiative and the courage to follow through with ideas and projects, nothing is accomplished. So, while boldness is needed by leaders, their boldness must be controlled by righteousness. A leader must know right from wrong, and know what is right and know the right thing to do. He must then act decisively, and boldly carry out the righteous act.

In addition to boldness and righteousness, there is a crying need for visionary leaders, leaders who will challenge us with great visions of the future. Most people want an ideal to follow, a cause to which they can commit themselves, a purpose for living, a goal to strive for, a task that is fulfilling, and work that is satisfying. But first comes the vision. Someone somewhere has an idea, sees a need, solves a problem—and thus begins the

process. Visionary leaders are desperately needed, leaders who can drive us to better ourselves and our society. The ministry of exhortation, of challenging people to a higher cause than themselves, is one of the greatest needs for which the human heart cries. We all want to be encouraged, pushed to be better and to do better and to achieve more. If the cause is great enough, most of us will sacrifice much, if not all that we have, to achieve the cause. In fact, this is the very demand of Jesus Christ, the challenge He presents to us:

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gained the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?” (Lu.9:23-25).

Nehemiah was such a man. He was a true leader, a visionary who was both bold and righteous. He was a leader who exhorted and challenged others to action. Remember that Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia. While in the palace at the capital Susa, he had received alarming news from Jerusalem. The exiles who had returned to Jerusalem were facing terrible trouble and suffering, being reproached and disgraced by people all around them. In addition, the city of Jerusalem was in shambles with its walls torn down. Hearing this news had broken Nehemiah’s heart, arousing deep concern within him. For many days he had fasted and prayed about the matter. And during these days he had sought the LORD for an opportunity to bring up the subject with the king, to seek his help for the distressed Jews back in Jerusalem. He personally wanted to return to help the people himself, but first, he had to secure permission from the king. However, seeking a long leave of absence from the king could be dangerous. If the request displeased the king, he could imprison Nehemiah and even have him executed. Because of the seriousness of his request, Nehemiah took four months to carefully plan his strategy for approaching Artaxerxes (1:1; 2:1). The suspenseful drama is graphically depicted in this chapter. This is, *Nehemiah’s Royal Commission and His Preparations to Rebuild Jerusalem: A Man of Boldness, Filled with a Spirit of Exhortation*, 2:1-20.

1. Nehemiah’s royal commission to rebuild Jerusalem: a man who spoke openly and boldly (vv.1-8).

2. Nehemiah’s journey to Jerusalem and his preparations to rebuild the city walls: a man who exhorted and challenged others (vv.9-20).

1. (2:1-8) Boldness, Example of—Trust, in God, Example of—Confidence, in God, Example of—Nehemiah, Trust in God—Nehemiah, Commission, to Rebuild Jerusalem—Jerusalem, Rebuilt, Commissioned by Nehemiah—Artaxerxes, Commission to Nehemiah, to Rebuild Jerusalem: Nehemiah requested and secured a royal commission from the king to rebuild Jerusalem and its walls. It was now the month of Nisan (March–April), four months since he had received news about the dark, dismal circumstances of the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem (1:1-4). During these four long months Nehemiah was heavy hearted, gripped with concern over their desperate plight. Day by day he had been seeking the LORD for an opportunity to approach the king about helping his people. Nehemiah felt compelled to do all he could to relieve their terrible distress and suffering. At last, he sensed from the LORD that the time had come to safely approach the king. Scripture paints an intriguing picture of Nehemiah’s apprehension as he shared his broken heart and request with the king. Yet, despite Nehemiah’s fear in approaching the king, note how courageous he was and how well he had prepared to grasp the opportunity:

1. While serving the king, Nehemiah did a courageous but dangerous thing: he showed a sad countenance, acted downcast and distressed. His behavior was dangerous because the king could have become suspicious of a plot to assassinate him. In most cases a king was sheltered from all the sorrowful experiences and suffering of human life (Est.4:1-2). To appear in the presence of a monarch with any attitude other than a positive, uplifting one was extremely hazardous. Thus in light of this, Nehemiah was risking his life by appearing unhappy and distraught before the king.

However, on this particular day, the LORD had obviously prepared the way for Nehemiah. When the king noticed his cupbearer's distressed countenance, his thoughts did not turn suspicious. Rather, a sympathetic spirit arose, for the king asked Nehemiah why he was so sad when he was not ill.

Just as Nehemiah hoped, the door was wide open for him to make his request of the king. But as Scripture says, intense fear gripped Nehemiah's heart. He knew the king had stopped the building of Jerusalem years before. The king had feared a Jewish rebellion if they were allowed to rebuild their city and nation (Ezr.4:6-24, esp.vv.18-24). Now, here was Nehemiah risking his life, ready to ask the king to reverse his decision—a very dangerous thing to do. Nevertheless, during Nehemiah's four months of intense prayer and planning, he had thought through the most wise approach he could make to the king.

2. With his heart pounding rapidly, Nehemiah respectfully but anxiously approached the king with the common form of address: "May the king live forever!" He then wisely explained his sadness with a question that would hopefully arouse compassion within the king: How could he keep from being sad when his home city lay in ruins and its gates burned with fire, the very city where his ancestors were buried? Note how Nehemiah showed a deep respect for his ancestors and a broken heart over the plight of his home city. Mentioning these two facts was intended to arouse the king's sympathy for his cupbearer, for ancestral grave sights held great meaning for Eastern cultures.

As hoped, the king's interest and concern for Nehemiah was stirred, and he asked how he could help (v.4). Before answering, Nehemiah offered up a quick prayer. He asked the LORD to give wisdom and to move the king's heart to grant his request.

Wording his petition in the most humble way he could, Nehemiah acknowledged that it could be granted only by the king himself. Additionally, the request should be granted only if it pleased the king and only if Nehemiah, the king's servant, had found favor in his sight. Then, after acknowledging the supreme authority of the king, Nehemiah boldly made his petition. And it was bold! He asked for a royal commission to travel to Judah to rebuild his home city. This meant that the king would lose the services of his trusted official. No doubt, the appeal shocked the king, for the thought that he would be losing his trusted servant was bound to cross the king's mind. A suspenseful silence hung in the air for a few seconds, perhaps for a minute. Then the king gave his answer.

3. Nehemiah's petition was granted (vv.6-8). With the queen sitting by his side, the king questioned Nehemiah about how long he would be gone and when he would return. Undoubtedly after some discussion, a time was agreed upon and the request was granted (v.6). The time frame is not spelled out by Scripture; however, Nehemiah ended up staying in Jerusalem for 12 years (5:14).

Having planned carefully, Nehemiah knew exactly what he needed for the building project. Thus he made several additional appeals to the king (vv.7-8). He asked for letters for safe passage and provisions for his journey. The letters were necessary to present to the governors who ruled over the Persian territory west of the Euphrates River. Nehemiah needed the cooperation of these governors in order to be given safe passage through their territory. Also, he would have a large military escort accompanying him, an escort that could be interpreted as a threat to the local governors. Nehemiah even asked for an official letter to secure building materials from the king's forest (v.8). He needed timber for three projects: the building of the gates, the city walls, and his own personal residence.

4. Special attention should be paid to Nehemiah's strong testimony (v.8). His bold request was granted by the king because of God Himself. The LORD's gracious hand was upon Nehemiah, so the LORD stirred the heart of the king to grant Nehemiah's request.

Thought 1. Nehemiah was a man with a fearless spirit and a strong trust in the LORD. He *boldly* went before the king because he trusted the LORD to guide and help him. And because of his trust, the LORD gave him this spirit

of strong determination. So it is with us. When we trust the LORD, He gives us a spirit of courage and stamina to carry out our tasks. Scripture teaches us two wonderful facts about boldness.

1) We can boldly approach God for help in times of need. However, we can approach Him only through Christ. It is Christ alone who gives us access into God's presence. But when we come to Christ and approach God through Him, Christ gives us the right to be bold before God. We can then boldly request that God meet our needs. And He wonderfully promises to hear us.

“In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Ep.3:12).

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15-16).

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And *having* an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:19-22).

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world” (1 Jn.4:17).

2) If we will be bold in our work for the LORD, He will guide, deliver, and protect us. Through Him we will have the power to be strong, courageous, and fearless in the face of difficult or trying situations.

“Only let your conversation [conduct, behavior] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God” (Phil. 1:27-28).

“Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he *it is* that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (De.31:6).

2. (2:9-20) Exhortation, Duty—Challenge, Duty—Stirring, Duty—Arousal, Duty—Courage, Duty—Admonish, Duty—Persuade, Duty—Motivate, Duty—Inspire, Duty—Spur, Duty—Stimulate, Duty—Nehemiah, Preparations to Rebuild Jerusalem—Jerusalem, Rebuilding of, Preparations of: Nehemiah's journey to Jerusalem and all his preparations were for the purpose of rebuilding the city and its walls. The journey from the capital Susa to Jerusalem would have taken about two to three months. Nothing whatsoever about the journey is recorded by Scripture. However, after Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, events began to happen rather quickly, events that suggested the unfolding of a suspenseful drama about to happen. Scripture describes the gripping events:

1. After crossing the Euphrates River, Nehemiah went at once to the governor of the province to present his letter of authority from the king. This was necessary to gain safe passage through the territory, in particular since Nehemiah had a large armed escort of cavalry accompanying him (v.9). Without the king's authority, the armed regiment could have aroused suspicion of a revolt. But with the king's authority and cavalry regiment, the governor and officials clearly knew that Nehemiah had the king's support behind him and his building efforts. Yet not everyone was willing to offer their support.

2. Almost immediately Nehemiah got his first hint of coming opposition (v.10). Another Scripture tells us that Nehemiah had actually been appointed as the new governor of Jerusalem (5:14). Two officials in particular, Sanballat and Tobiah, were very angry that a new governor had been sent to rebuild Jerusalem. Sanballat was a Horonite, which means that he was from Beth Horan, a town about 12 to 18 miles from Jerusalem. Although

Scripture does not say that he was the governor of Samaria, archeology has discovered an ancient letter that actually refers to him as the governor of that district (The Elephantine Papyrus or letter).

Apparently Tobiah the Ammonite was either the governor of Ammon or else a high official who served under Sanballat. Tobiah was married to the daughter of Shecaniah, one of Nehemiah's key workers (3:29; 6:18). And his son Jehohanan married the daughter of Meshullam, one of the supervisors of the building project (3:4, 30; 6:18). Thus through marriage, Tobiah had both family and friends working in the crews employed by Nehemiah to rebuild the city. In addition to this fact, Tobiah was closely related to the High Priest Eliashib (13:4-7). Of course, both of these officials, Sanballat and Tobiah, served under the authority of King Artaxerxes. In view of this, they had to be very careful in opposing or plotting against Nehemiah, for their very livelihood or political positions were dependent upon the favor of the king. But for now, the point to note is their disturbance over Nehemiah's mission to rebuild Jerusalem and its walls. Obviously, they feared Nehemiah politically, feared they would lose some of their power and authority and influence over the people. Thus Nehemiah was a threat to them.

3. On arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah rested for three days. The trip had been exhausting, so he did just what many of us would do: he took care of his body and gave it the necessary rest (Mk.6:31). In all probability, Nehemiah used this time for prayer, planning, and getting acquainted with some of the people in the city.

4. At the end of the three days' rest, Nehemiah secretly inspected the walls at night (vv.12-16). As a wise planner and builder, he knew the need for surveying, inspecting, and evaluating the awesome task that lay before him. This he needed to do before he revealed his plans and attempted to motivate the people to join him in the awesome task ahead. Taking only a few trusted men and one horse, he crept out through the Valley Gate, past the Serpent or Jackal Well and the Dung Gate (vv.12-13). Nehemiah then went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, where he had to stop following the wall because of the huge mound of rubble from Jerusalem's earlier destruction (v.14). He then turned and rode through the Kidron Valley where he could look up at the wall from a distance (v.15). At some point, he was either unable to continue his inspection due to so much rubble or, feeling that he had seen enough, made the decision to return. Note the emphasis upon the secrecy of Nehemiah's inspection: he conducted his investigation without the knowledge of any of the leadership. This was necessary until he could formulate the details of his plans (v.16).

5. Once Nehemiah completed his plans, he assembled and motivated the people to action (v.17). The assembled group included all the Jews of Jerusalem and the surrounding territory, which would have included the common people, the landowners or farmers, the business owners, the religious and political leaders—all who would be contributing to the work of rebuilding the city and its walls.

In addressing the people, Nehemiah first presented the problem they faced. Jerusalem and its walls lay in ruins (v.17). Although he had been with them for just a few days, note how he identified with them. It was not the trouble the people were in, but rather the trouble "*We are in.*" As long as the walls remained unbuilt, the people were in serious trouble, being fully exposed and left without any protection from marauders or enemies.

Second, Nehemiah challenged the people to action, to join him in rebuilding the walls in the great city of God (v.17). This was not a new vision for the people. The very first exiles had also returned with the great hope of rebuilding their temple and homeland. But due to opposition through the years, they had backed off the project and become lethargic and complacent. They had resigned themselves to the dark, dismal circumstances of their lives and to the hardships they were to suffering. But at last, here was a *man of God*, Nehemiah, who challenged the people to arise and recommit themselves anew to rebuilding the city.

Third, Nehemiah closed the challenge by giving his personal testimony (v.18). He shared how God's gracious hand had been upon him and guided him in securing the very authority of the king himself. Through his personal testimony, the people could rest assured that God would be present with them in the awesome task of rebuilding the walls and city (v.18).

Obviously, the Spirit of God was working in the hearts of the people, for they responded to Nehemiah's challenge. They made a strong commitment to start rebuilding immediately (v.18). And they began the "good work."

6. But immediately after launching the work, Nehemiah was forced to take a bold stand against those who opposed the project (vv.19-20). The opposition had quickly reared its ugly head up, seeking to dishearten the people. Sanballat, Tobiah, and a third opponent known as Geshem the Arab began to mock the project as foolish. Moreover, they actually accused the Jews of rebelling against the king. Their opposition will be discussed in more detail later (Chs.4-7), but in the present passage they begin their destructive path through ridicule, mockery, and false accusations. Because the walls and city had been so completely destroyed, any attempt to rebuild must have seemed foolish. Making the most of this fact, these three key adversaries aroused their followers to mockingly laugh and scorn the workers as they tackled such an unrealistic project. They called the Jews fools for attempting to rebuild. Also, by planting the charge of rebellion against the workers, these opponents hoped to instill fear of the king's retaliation within the Jews.

Just how Nehemiah responded to this enemy's first attack was very important. If he miscued, the workers could have easily become discouraged. Thankfully, Nehemiah was walking faithfully with the LORD. Thus the LORD clearly strengthened him and gave him just the right answer for these enemies. He withstood their attack and dealt forcefully with them. His response was threefold:

⇒ The LORD would help the builders, give them success and prosper their efforts.

⇒ The workers were totally committed to the project: they would rebuild the walls and the city—no matter what.

⇒ The opponents had no claim—no share, no authority, no rights—in Jerusalem (God's Holy City, the promised land of God). Up until this time, while the city was devastated and lay in ruins, they may have exercised some authority over the city and the unprotected exiles who had returned. But no longer. Their authority was now ended. Legally, they had no claim to any part of Jerusalem, and they had no authority over its citizens. Politically, Nehemiah had been appointed governor by King Artaxerxes himself. Spiritually and historically, the city had been given by God to the Jews who followed and obeyed the LORD.

Thought 1. Nehemiah was a man of exhortation, a man who challenged others to follow the LORD and to complete their tasks. Likewise, as true believers in the LORD, we must exhort and challenge others to follow the LORD, to keep His commandments and live righteous lives, fulfilling their God-given tasks.

These are days of complacency, days when many are lethargic, self-satisfied, and unconcerned. Far too many of us have become spiritually lazy, apathetic, disinterested, and passive. Some of us have even become drowsy and sluggish, paying little attention to the Word of God, prayer, and worship. We are living self-centered lives, doing what we want when we want. We disobey God's commandments, never giving a second thought to the righteousness He demands. We are living sinful, wicked, and shameful lives, breaking one commandment after another. The fact that we must live for Jesus Christ, faithfully worshipping Him and bearing strong testimony for Him, seldom if ever crosses our minds.

If there has ever been a day when the ministry of exhortation and challenging people to follow Christ is needed, it is today. Listen to what God's Holy Word says about the need for us to exhort others:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen" (Mt.28:19-20).

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk.16:15).

“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Ti.4:13).

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Ti.2:2).

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Ti.4:2).
