

A Time to Pray

Nehemiah 1:1-11

It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

5 And I said: "I pray, Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, 6 please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. 7 We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. 8 Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.' 10 Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. 11 O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

For I was the king's cupbearer. NKJV

The three little books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther finish out the historical books of the Bible.

And there are many things unique to these books. God is never mentioned in Esther although He is seen working behind the scenes on every page.

Ezra and Nehemiah are centered in the return of the people to Jerusalem 50 years after it was utterly destroyed. While Esther is centered in the Persian capital, although the events affect the Jews around the world.

In our passage this morning Nehemiah is informed of the terrible situation at Jerusalem. And he is broken hearted about it. There is a whole series of lessons to be learned from this book. Let us look at a few.

- I. Nehemiah is broken by the condition of the city of God, Jerusalem.
 - A. From Ezra we learn that the city was in ruins when the people returned in 538 bc
 - B. They had to case lots to determine who would have to live in Jerusalem.
 - C. The walls had been destroyed, thus making the city vulnerable to marauders.

- II. He confesses his sin and the sin of his people as the cause of the situation.
 - A. Most people would have blamed God.
 - 1. Why has God done this to us?
 - 2. Why is it so hard to serve God?
- III. He quotes the Scriptures to enlist God's favor.
 - A. Lev 26:40-42 40 'But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, 41 and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt — 42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land. NKJV
 - B. He knew that God is a merciful God.
 - C. He knew that God will honor His word.
 - 1. 2 Chron 7:12-15 12 Then the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. 13 When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, 14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. NKJV
- IV. He becomes the answer to his own prayer.
 - A. He could have made a thousand excuses.
 - 1. I am just a cup-bearer
 - 2. I don't know anything about building wall.
 - 3. There must be someone there that could do the job.
 - B. But it is when you realize that the burden on your heart might just be God calling you to do something.