



Nehemiah 1

CONFESSING TO GOD

Ezra and Nehemiah were originally a single book with one overarching argument. The book is structured in four movements that address successive stages of a common theme: the manner whereby the people of God rebuild the house of God. But rebuilding the house of God is not limited to rebuilding the temple.

It also involves restoration of full spiritual vitality to the people of God. Ezra-Nehemiah is a manual on spiritual renewal, and preaching the book is a call to the successive stages of spiritual revitalization.

—George Van Pelt Campbell

Ezra-Nehemiah focuses on the rebuilding of the “house of God” which includes the temple, the people, and the city:

- The Return of the Exiles from Babylon (Ezra 1-2)
- The Rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 3-6)
- The Rebuilding of the People (Ezra 7-10)
- The Rebuilding of the City (Nehemiah 1-7)
- The Revival of the Nation (Nehemiah 8-12)
- The Relapse into Old Ways (Nehemiah 13)

Nehemiah 1 occurs in Chislev (December) 445 BC.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

- 722 BC** Israel (northern kingdom) destroyed by Assyria
- 612 BC** Fall of Ninevah (Assyria) to Babylon
- 606 BC** First invasion of Judah by Babylon
- 586 BC** Destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon
- 539 BC** Fall of Babylon to the Medo-Persian Empire
- 538 BC** Cyrus’ Edict Allowing Jews to Return
- 536 BC** Zerubbabel Leads ~50,000 to Jerusalem
- 516 BC** Temple Completed (Haggai & Zechariah)
- 479 BC** Esther Becomes Queen to King Xerxes
- 458 BC** Artaxerxes Sends Ezra to Jerusalem
- 445 BC** Artaxerxes Sends Nehemiah to Jerusalem
- 430 BC** Malachi Prophecies (last prophet of the OT)
- 331 BC** Alexander the Great Defeats Medo-Persia

THE CONDITION OF THE NATION (1:1-3)

- The walls of Jerusalem are _____.
- The people of Jerusalem are _____.

MEDO-PERSIAN KINGS

- Cyrus (550-530 BC)
- Cambyses (530-522 BC)
- Pseudo-Smerdis (522 BC)
- Darius the Great (522-486 BC)
- Xerxes (486-465 BC)
- Artaxerxes (465-424 BC)

Nehemiah served as the cup-bearer of King Artaxerxes which involved tasting the food and the drink of the king before serving it to him. This position was one of great trust and involved regular access and contact with the king.

The cupbearer was often chosen for his personal beauty and attractions, and in ancient oriental courts was always a person of rank and importance. From the confidential nature of his duties and his frequent access to the royal presence, he possessed great influence.

—Merrill Unger

It is lawful and good to inquire, “What news?” We should inquire especially concerning the state of the church and religion and how it fares with the people of God; and the design of our inquiry must be, not that, like the Athenians, we may have something to talk of, but that we may know how to direct our prayers and our praises.

—Matthew Henry

THE HEART OF NEHEMIAH (1:4)

As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

- He was a man with a _____.
- He was a man with a _____ for his people.
- He was a man with a _____ in God.

THE PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH (1:5-11)

Please, O Lord God of heaven, great and awesome God, who keeps his loving covenant with those who love him and obey his commandments...

Nehemiah's prayer has four main requests:

1. Hear my _____.

Biblical Principles on Sin and Confession:

- We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).
- We are all impacted by the sins of others—both those around us and those who preceded us (Ex. 34:7; Rom. 5:12).
- We all contribute to the sin of our corporate community.
- In confession, we agree that sin is sin, acknowledge our own part, and humbly open our heart to God's transformative grace.
- NT believers do not confess to earn or keep salvation—we are already forgiven of all sins past, present, and future (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13)—but rather to deepen fellowship within our salvation.

2. Remember Your _____ (cf. Deut. 30:1-10).

3. Hear our _____ (cf. Exodus 6:1-8).

4. Help Your _____.

The first step in rebuilding your life is honest confession before God—asking God to search your heart, yielding to His Spirit, being vulnerable with others. The security of God's grace allows you to find freedom and healing as you open up your heart to Him.

You are never used of God to bring blessing until God has opened your eyes and made you see things as they are.

—Alan Redpath

Confess. Hebrew, *yadah*, “to hold out the hand; to confess; to praise; to give thanks” (Strong).

To break the world cleanly into victims and violators ignores the depths of each person's participation in cultural sin. There simply are no innocents.

—Miroslav Volf

The greatest of faults, I should say, is to be conscious of none.

—Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

Hiding the truth about ourselves before men, pretending to be better than we really are, is the supreme sin which Jesus drove home to the Pharisees, the sin of hypocrisy, and was the direct cause of their crucifying Him.

—Norman Grubb

Confession restores fellowship in a relationship, whether divine or human.

—Charlie Bing

The best praying man is the man who is most believably familiar with the promises of God.

Prayer is nothing but taking God's promises to him, and saying to him, “Do as thou hast said.”

—Charles H. Spurgeon

In the eyes of the world Artaxerxes was an important person, a man with influence, who could decide on life or death. In the eyes of Nehemiah, Artaxerxes was just a man like any other man. The Lord of history makes the decisions, not Artaxerxes.

—F. Charles Fensham