

# Praying, Serving, Remembering: Nehemiah 1

Sunday, May 7, 2023  
Covenant Church  
Pastor Zack Phillips

## Nehemiah 1

**<sup>1</sup> The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, <sup>2</sup> one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> They replied, "The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire."**

**<sup>4</sup> When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. <sup>7</sup> We have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup> Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; <sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.' <sup>10</sup> They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!"**

**At the time, I was cupbearer to the king.**

### A. Introduction

In exile, probably 445 B.C., some 140 years after 586 B.C. and 13 years after Ezra.

### B. The Importance of Prayer

Narration of...	Interrupted by (quick) prayer for...
Opponents Sanballat and Tobiah the Ammonite mocking the Jews for building the wall (4:1-3)	Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their taunt back on their own heads, and give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover their guilt, and do not let their sin be blotted out from your sight; for they have hurled insults in the face of the builders (4:4-5).
Opponents angry at partial completion of the wall and plot to fight against Jerusalem (4:7-8)	So we prayed to our God, and set a guard as a protection against them day and night (4:9).

Nehemiah's refusal to eat the governor's food allowance, whole-hearted devotion to building wall, not acquiring land, and sharing his food (5:14-18)	Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people (5:19).
The plot by Nehemiah's opponents to lure him to the plain of Ono to harm him and their falsely accusing him of attempting rebellion (6:1–9a)	But now, O God, strengthen my hands (6:9b).
Opponents Sanballat and Tobiah the Ammonite conspiring with a fellow Jew to trick Nehemiah into hiding in the temple to appear cowardly (6:10–13)	Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid (6:14).
The priest Eliashib corruptly setting aside a storeroom in the temple for his relative Tobiah and the portions of the Levites wrongly withheld from them—and Nehemiah's reforms correcting both problems (13:4–13).	Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service (13:14).
Nehemiah correcting those who profaned the Sabbath day (13:15–22a)	...Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love (13:22b).
Nehemiah rebukes those who in mixed marriages and those who have corrupted the priesthood and undertakes other reforms (13:23–31).	Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priests and the Levites (13:29).  ... Remember me, O my God, for good (13:31b).

## C. Outline of chapter

### 1. Adoration (*O God*)

<sup>5a</sup> O YHWH,

God (אֱלֹהִים) of Heaven,  
 God (אֵל) who is great (גָּדוֹל) and fearful (יִרָא)  
<sup>5b</sup> [a] who keeps (שָׁמַר) covenant  
 [b] and steadfast love (חֶסֶד)  
 [b'] with those who love (אָהַב) Him  
 [a'] and who keep (שָׁמַר) His **commandments** (מִצְוָה),

Who this God is—tied up with this people

### 2. Plea for attention (*Please hear me/us*)

<sup>6a</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open

to hear (שָׁמַע) the prayer (תְּפִלָּה) of **Your servant** (עַבְדְּךָ)  
 which I pray (פָּלַל) before You now  
 day and night  
 for the sons of Israel (בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל) **Your servants** (עַבְדֵיךָ),

Who the people are = praying servants

### 3. Elaborate personal/corporate confession (*We have sinned*)

<sup>6b</sup> confessing (יָדָה) the sins (חַטָּאת) of the sons of Israel (בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל)

which we have sinned (חָטָא) against You  
 —both I and the house of my father (אָב) have sinned (חָטָא).

<sup>7a</sup> We have acted very wickedly (חָבַל חָבַל) against You

<sup>7b</sup> and we have not kept (שָׁמַר) the commandments (מִצְוָה) and the statutes and the ordinances  
 which You commanded (צִוָּה) Moses **Your servant** (עַבְדְּךָ).

#### 4. Prayer for mercy?

<sup>8a</sup> Remember (זכר) the word that **You commanded** (צוה) **Moses** **Your servant** (עֶבֶד):

<sup>8b</sup> '(If) you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples;

<sup>9a</sup> (but if) you return (שוב) to me and **keep** (שמר) **my commandments** (מצוה) and do them,

<sup>9b</sup> though your outcasts are under the farthest skies,

from there I will gather them, and I will bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name there.'

<sup>10a</sup> They (are) **Your servants** (עֶבֶד) and your people,

<sup>10b</sup> whom You redeemed (פדה)

by Your great (גדול) power

and Your strong hand.



Who this God is—tied up with this people

#### 5. Plea for attention (*Please hear me/us*)

<sup>11a</sup> O Lord, **let your ear be attentive**

to **the prayer** (תפלה) of **Your servant** (עֶבֶד),

and to **the prayer** (תפלה) of **Your servants** (עֶבְדֵיךָ)

who delight in fearing (ירא) Your name.



Who the people are = praying servants

#### 6. Request (*Grant me...*)

Cause **Your servant** (עֶבֶד) to prosper today,

and grant him favor in the sight of this man!"

### D. Preliminary Observations

A-C-T-S? • Old and new • It takes repetition/time • Petition?

### E. Serve the Lord

"Servant" is repeated 8x, "command(ment)" 5x = Torah is simply serving the LORD, putting His way above our Way ("law of Christ" in Paul, "law of liberty" in James)

### F. The Story of God's People

**Romans 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.**

**Jeremiah 29:5–7 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.**

*Question: What is one thing that God may have said to you through this sermon?*