

## NEHEMIAH 1

## GRIEF AND PRAYER

The Book of Nehemiah begins in the year 454 BC, and it picks up the history of God's people very soon after the Book of Ezra ends – about 13 years after Ezra returned from Persia to Jerusalem. It is worth noting that even though the history of the Lord's people seems to be small and inconsiderable when compared with other great world-powers, yet the Scriptures contain not one word of the mightiest monarchies that were then existing – such as the Persians or the Romans – except in such matters where they have occasional transactions with the people of God. Neither Ezra the scribe nor Nehemiah the governor ever wore a crown, commanded an army, conquered a country, or became famous for philosophy or oratory. But they were pious, praying men who were a great blessing, in their day, to the Lord's people; and so they were truly greater than any of the famous philosophers or dictators of the heathen nations. They were more honorable than Xenophon, Demosthenes, or even Plato himself – the bright ornaments of Greece, who lived at the same time!

This Book opens with Nehemiah's honored position as the royal cup-bearer in the court of the Persian king, Artaxerxes Longimanus (the same man who commissioned Ezra to go back to Jerusalem, in Ezra 7). By his place in the Persian court, Nehemiah would be better qualified for the service of his own country, in that post which God intended to place him – just as Moses was more prepared to govern the Israelites after being brought up in Pharaoh's court. For those whom God intends to employ in His service, He will find proper ways to prepare them for it and to call them to it.

Nehemiah showed a tender and compassionate concern for the state of the Jews in their own homeland. One of his friends and relatives, named Hanani, came to the Persian court; and through him, Nehemiah was informed about the condition of his countrymen and the city of Jerusalem. He himself lived at ease, in honor, and in fullness; but he could not forget that he was an Israelite, nor could he shake off the thoughts of his brothers and sisters in distress. And herein he foreshadowed our Lord Jesus, Who dwelt in the highest heavens, and enjoyed the greatest glory and honor; yet He humbled Himself and took part in His people's sorrows, in order to work the greatest good for them!

A melancholy account was given by Hanani of the state of the Jews in their homeland. He told Nehemiah that they were miserably trampled on and abused. As for Jerusalem, the city walls were still broken down; and the gates were just as the Babylonians had left them 130 years before – in ruins. This made the condition of the inhabitants very despicable; and it also left them in

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ Nehemiah inquires concerning the state of the Jews and Jerusalem – verses 1-2
- ❖ He is informed of the deplorable condition of his people and their city – verse 3
- ❖ He fasts and prays to the Lord after hearing this news – verses 4-11

danger, for their enemies might easily attack them whenever they pleased. The Temple was built, the government was settled, and a work of reformation had been brought to some headway by Ezra; but the rebuilding of the walls was one great work that still needed done.

Hanani's account gave Nehemiah great grief. He fasted and prayed, for the only way to ease his sorrows and unburden his spirit was by pouring out his complaint before God and leaving it with Him. A large section of this chapter



contains Nehemiah's prayer – a prayer that had reference to all the petitions which he had already been putting up to God, day and night, for some time, while he continued his sorrows for the desolations of Jerusalem; and while he prepared to present his request to his kingly master, for favor to be shown to Jerusalem and the Jews. Nehemiah pleaded the great things that Jehovah had formerly done for His people; he reminded Him how He had redeemed them by His great power, in the days of old. And He besought the Lord to give

him favor with his kingly master, so that he might be His instrument for goodness and blessings toward His people.

As we read Nehemiah's prayer, we are reminded of the mighty privilege that we enjoy, in being able to freely access the throne of grace! As seen in the case of Nehemiah, no place or country or situation can keep the awakened soul from God. That throne which John saw in heaven, surrounded with a rainbow, is accessible on every side. Jesus, the Lamb, is in the midst of it. He still hears prayers, He still feeds the Church which He has purchased with His blood, He still acts as a Priest upon His throne, He still wears our human nature, and He is infinitely more ready to take in petitions and bestow blessings than His people are to ask or receive them. May our precious Redeemer hear us as we pray for ourselves, for our country, for the Church, and for the Lord's people!

*Holy Spirit of grace, animate our souls with fire from Your holy altar. Like Your people of old, may we besiege the mercy-seat with clamorous and unceasing petitions – resolving, for Zion's sake, to never hold our peace until we see Your mighty hand at work for the good of Your people and the advancement of Your Kingdom! Amen.*