

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER FOR HIS PEOPLE

BIBLE TEXT : Nehemiah 1:1-11; 2:1-8; 9:1-38.

LESSON 445 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: ""And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Nehemiah 1:1-11

¹ The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace,

² That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and *certain* men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

³ And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province *are* in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also *is* broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

⁴ And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

⁵ And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:

⁶ Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.

⁷ We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

⁸ Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, *If* ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

⁹ But *if* ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, *yet* will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

¹⁰ Now these *are* thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.

¹¹ O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Sad News

Far away from his homeland, in a strange land, lived an Israelite named Nehemiah. He was entrusted with a good position in Shushan, the palace of the king. There he was permitted to serve the king but he was not completely happy. He kept thinking of the land that had been the home of his people, and of Jerusalem where the Temple was built in which the Children of Israel worshipped.

One day he met some men of Judah who had come from his homeland. He was anxious to hear some news of Jerusalem. Nehemiah asked them about the people and the Temple there. But the message the men gave him was discouraging and sad. They said that the people were "in great affliction and reproach." He was told that the wall of the city was broken down and the gates were burned. In those days the cities were surrounded by walls for protection. The people could enter and leave the city only by the gates, which were usually closed at night. Nehemiah knew that the city of Jerusalem and the Temple where God's people worshipped did not have the protection that they ought to have. Nehemiah felt so sorrowful that he wept.

Prayer

To weep and mourn was not all that Nehemiah did. He fasted and prayed. No doubt he knew about Solomon's prayer when the first Temple was built. Solomon had asked God to hear and answer the prayer of the captives who prayed to God "toward this city . . . and the house" which he had built in the name of the Lord (**2 Chronicles 6:34-35** ³⁴ If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name; ³⁵ Then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.). God accepted the sacrifices and the prayers of Solomon, and He also answered the prayers of captives.

Daniel

We have read that Daniel prayed with his windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he knelt and prayed; he gave thanks to his God (**Daniel 6:10** ¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.). We have also read that God answered Daniel's prayer when he was cast into a den of lions. The king called down, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" (Daniel 6:20). We remember that God "shut the lions' mouths" and no harm came to Daniel "because he believed in his God."

Good Example

These men of God set a good example for us today -- to pray. In Luke 18:1, we read that Jesus spoke a parable to teach "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." In other portions of Scripture, Jesus reminds us to watch and to pray. In writing to the Philippians, Paul was inspired to say, "In every thing by prayer

desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

Nehemiah 2:1-8

¹ And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, *that* wine *was* before him: and I took up the wine, and gave *it* unto the king. Now I had not been *beforetime* sad in his presence.

² Wherefore the king said unto me, *Why is* thy countenance sad, seeing thou *art* not sick? this *is* nothing *else* but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid,

³ And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

⁴ Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.

⁵ And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

⁶ And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

⁷ Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;

⁸ And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which *appertained* to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Nehemiah 9:1-38

¹ Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.

² And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

³ And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God *one* fourth part of the day; and *another* fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

⁴ Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, *and*

and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). When Paul listed the "whole armour of God," he stressed that, along with the armour, God's soldiers should always pray (**Ephesians 6:13-18** ¹³ Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; ¹⁵ And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: ¹⁸ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;).

Prayers Answered

Nehemiah knew that prayer is more than words. He knew that there are some conditions one must meet in order to have one's prayers answered. Nehemiah reminded God that He is a faithful God to those who "love him and observe his commandments." Jesus taught His disciples similar words. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). In James 1:22 we read, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only." Nehemiah must have loved the Lord and observed His commandments or he would not have brought it to God's remembrance.

As he prayed, Nehemiah did not justify himself and tell God how good he was. He admitted that in times past he had sinned, but he claimed God's promise of pardon. Nehemiah reminded God of His Word given by Moses: "Return unto the LORD thy God, and . . . obey his voice . . . with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; . . . then the LORD thy God will . . . have compassion upon thee" (Deuteronomy 30:1-3). Nehemiah admitted that the Children of Israel had been scattered because they had broken God's laws, just as God had said. But Nehemiah had turned to God, kept His commandments, and he expected God to help him return to Jerusalem, "the place" where God had "chosen" to set His name.

The Answer

How did God answer Nehemiah's prayer? Four months later, Nehemiah, with a sad face, was serving the king. Never before had he appeared sad in the king's presence. The king asked why he was sad. The king said that it must be "sorrow of heart," since Nehemiah was not sick. Even though Nehemiah was fearful, he had to answer the king; so he told him about the pitiful condition of Jerusalem in his homeland. The king asked him what he wanted to do. Nehemiah asked permission to return to Jerusalem so he could rebuild the walls.

Purpose

Not only had Nehemiah prayed and believed God but he was also willing to work and to do his part that the conditions would be better in Jerusalem. Some people pray but are not willing to do anything to help. The Book of James tells about one who sees a brother or sister in need and says, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled" (James 2:16); notwithstanding he gives not those things which are needful to the body. What doth it profit? When we can help, it is not enough only to pray.

Nehemiah was willing to leave the pleasant palace of a king and to work for the Lord. Nehemiah asked and was granted permission to go to Jerusalem. He was given not only a leave of absence but also an escort of men and horses as well as letters of recommendation by the king. In Ecclesiastes 9:10 we read, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Nehemiah did that. He took with him a letter, which entitled him to timber from the king's forest, which shows that he was

Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God.

⁵ Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, *and* Pethahiah, said, Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

⁶ Thou, *even* thou, *art* LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all *things* that *are* therein, the seas, and all that *is* therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.

⁷ Thou *art* the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham;

⁸ And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give *it*, *I say*, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou *art* righteous:

⁹ And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea;

¹⁰ And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as *it is* this day.

¹¹ And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters.

¹² Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go.

¹³ Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments:

¹⁴ And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant:

¹⁵ And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them.

¹⁶ But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments,

prepared to build. Our next lesson tells that Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and that the walls were built.

Word of God

Nehemiah had been concerned about the people as well as the building. He knew that in order to have God's blessing, the people must be obedient to the Word of God. In order to obey, they had to know what the Word of God said. Some time later, after the walls were completed, Nehemiah was Tirshatha or governor (Nehemiah 8:9). The people were encouraged to gather to hear the "book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel." Not only did the people hear, but they also began to do God's Word.

Ezra the scribe opened the book and taught the people. They found written that they should keep the Feast of Tabernacles. They gathered branches and made booths to dwell in during the week of the feast, as the Law commanded. Each day they read the Law, which is in the first part of the Bible. How good they felt because they were obedient to God! Since the days of Joshua, who led the Children of Israel into the Land of Canaan, they had neglected to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. What gladness filled their hearts when they obeyed! So today, one finds true happiness in obeying God's Word, the Bible.

QUESTIONS

1. What was Nehemiah's work in Shushan, the palace?
2. How did he hear about the condition of Jerusalem?
3. How did the news affect him?
4. Why did Nehemiah pray? What else did he do besides pray?
5. How did the king help Nehemiah? Why did Nehemiah go to Jerusalem?
6. How did God answer Nehemiah's prayer?
7. How did Nehemiah help the people?
8. What did the Children of Israel do after they had heard the Word of God?

¹⁷ And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou *art* a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.

¹⁸ Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This *is* thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations;

¹⁹ Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go.

²⁰ Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst.

²¹ Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, *so that* they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not.

²² Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan.

²³ Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess *it*.

²⁴ So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would.

²⁵ And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness.

²⁶ Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations.

²⁷ Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest *them* from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their

enemies.

²⁸ But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest *them* from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies;

²⁹ And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear.

³⁰ Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands.

³¹ Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou *art* a gracious and merciful God.

³² Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day.

³³ Howbeit thou *art* just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:

³⁴ Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them.

³⁵ For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works.

³⁶ Behold, we *are* servants this day, and *for* the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we *are* servants in it:

³⁷ And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we *are* in great distress.

³⁸ And because of all this we make a sure *covenant*, and write *it*; and our princes, Levites, *and* priests, seal *unto it*.