

## **Nehemiah 1:1-11a**

We know little to nothing of Nehemiah's early life or of the stages of his rise to position and influence in the kingdom of Persia. At the beginning of the book, we see him already established in his role as a high official in the royal court in Susa (**Neh 1:1; 11b**).

### **Summary**

**In Nehemiah 1:1-11a, Nehemiah receives bad news regarding the situation of the Jews in Jerusalem and the state of the city and responds with patient prayer.**

#### **1. Enter Nehemiah vs. 1; 11**

Between the closing verses of Ezra and the first verse of Nehemiah, we have moved forward from the **winter of 458 BC** to the spring of 445 BC (**Neh. 1:1; 2:1**), the twentieth year of the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia (465–424 BC). Nehemiah first appears in Susa, a winter resort of the Persian kings, 225 miles east of Babylon.

It was the duty of the cupbearer of the king duty to taste the wine in the presence of the king to ensure that the king's "cup" was free from poison (**Neh. 1:11**).

#### **2. Troubling Report vv. 2-4**

Nehemiah was going about his regular duties as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, when a group of men arrived from Judah (**Neh. 1:2**).

Nehemiah asked them about the Jews and the cause of the kingdom of God in Jerusalem. Though he had never been to Jerusalem, Nehemiah was burdened for the Lord's work (**cf. Psalm 137:1-6**).

All believers should demonstrate concern for the cause of the kingdom of God and for the welfare of God's people in other places.

The messengers from Jerusalem bring Nehemiah bad news. The returned exiles are "in great trouble and shame" and "the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire" (**Neh. 1:3; c.f. Ezra 4:17-23**).

For some eighty years, the walls of the city had remained in ruins.

#### **3. Appropriate Response vs. 4**

Upon hearing of the situation in Jerusalem, Nehemiah "sat down and wept and mourned for days" and "continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven" (**Neh. 1:4**). For Nehemiah, prayer was not his last resort; it was his first and then he continued praying for several months, patiently waiting on God's timing and God's answers to his prayers.

We are often impatient when it comes to prayer. We think it essential for God to respond immediately, and we sometimes engage in all manner of recriminations and accusations when he does not but God's timetable is different from ours.

We live according to a schedule that we can see and perceive, often a faulty one, but God sees things from a totally different perspective (**2 Peter 3:8**).

God's timing is perfect. He is never early or late.

All things work out according to the execution of a perfect decree from the mind of a loving God who wants the very best for all his people.

### **Nehemiah had caught a vision of the purposes of God that lay outside his own native sphere.**

At this point, it was not at all clear to him whether God would call him to do anything more than pray. It is doubtful that Nehemiah had any idea at this time that he would be making the long and difficult journey to Jerusalem.

There is a discipline in Nehemiah's praying.

It is noteworthy that he continued in prayer for five months. He did not give up.

He did not forget his brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. His heart was engaged.

He had caught a vision for the work of God.

He lived his life for others rather than for himself.

This reveals a man who had a regular habit of daily prayer. Indeed, Nehemiah speaks of his praying "day and night" (**Neh. 1:6**).

Later we will see Nehemiah engage in spontaneous prayer when King Artaxerxes asks him why he is looking so sad (**Neh 2:2-4**), but it is vital to note that his spontaneity in prayer was possible only because he had a habit of daily prayer.

Persistence in prayer is intimately related to maintaining a discipline of regular times of prayer both individually and corporately.

"Are we committed in this way?"

Perhaps this is where you are right now; waiting on the Lord.

The question that faces us is whether we are waiting patiently.

Nehemiah waited for three and possibly upward of five months when all he could do was pray.

It is doubtful that Nehemiah ever saw prayer as "all he could do"!

It was for him the first thing he desired to do.

Christian, has the gospel shaped your praying this way?

Does the love of Jesus Christ for you, Christian, lead you to plead in the way Nehemiah does?