

Session 4 : Nehemiah Prays for Effectiveness

Nehemiah 1:1 - 2:9

Background

Who :

Author is unknown (perhaps Ezra), but scholars believe book uses much of Nehemiah's memoirs (now lost). Nehemiah was a high-ranking officer in court of Artaxerxes II (Persian king).

What:

Account of Nehemiah's work in restoring Jerusalem for Jews. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are a single book, encompassing the story of physical and spiritual restoration of the Jews after they return from captivity in waves, starting in 538 B.C. (approximately 100 years before the events described in Ezra/Nehemiah)

Where:

Susa, the winter home of the Persian court (about 150 miles from today's Persian Gulf)

When:

446 years before the birth of Christ; in late November/early December (chpt 1) and late April (chpt 2)



Read Nehemiah 1:1-4

1. What is the news from Jerusalem?
2. What do you notice about Nehemiah's response to the news?
3. Why do you think this information affected Nehemiah in the way it did?
4. What events in contemporary life might affect us in a similar way?
5. What are some benefits that fasting offers to the pray-er? In your view, should modern Christians practice fasting? Why do you say that?

Read Nehemiah 1:5-11

1. Which of God's qualities does Nehemiah mention in his prayer? Why would these be important in the light of news from Jerusalem?
2. What are some elements of Nehemiah's confession? [what does he confess?]
3. Why do you think Nehemiah confesses sin on behalf of his larger community? In your opinion, is it appropriate for modern Christians to confess sin on behalf of a group they are a part of (e.g nationality, ethnic group, denomination)? Why or why not?
4. For what is Nehemiah praying? Do you consider his prayer specific or general? Why do you say that?

Read Nehemiah 2:1-5

1. The month of Nisan, the first month in the Jewish year, occurs in late March-early April. In the light of this information, how soon was Nehemiah's prayer answered? Do you think Nehemiah prayed all that time? Why or why not?
2. What is Nehemiah's first response when the king notices his distress? What is his second response?
3. How long do you think Nehemiah's prayer in 2:4 was? What does that say to you about prayer?
4. "Given the self-indulgence of the Persian monarchs, it seems in character that they would prohibit their subjects from imposing grief on them." (*The NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* notes at Neh. 2:1-2) What differences do you see in Nehemiah's approaches to the God of Heaven (Neh. 1:4-5) and the Persian king (Neh. 2:1)? What might be the basis of these differences?

Read Nehemiah 1:1 - 2:9

1. What characteristics of Nehemiah made him an effective pray-er?
2. What guidelines for prayerful effectiveness might be developed based on Nehemiah's prayers in this Scripture?
 - How do we prepare for praying? (Neh. 1:4, see also Matthew 6:5-6)
 - Whose work are we depending upon? (Neh. 1:5,10, see also Romans 8:34)
 - What qualifications do we need to pray effectively? (Neh. 1:6,7; see also James 5:16)
 - How specifically do we pray? (Neh. 1:11, Neh. 2:5, Matthew 6: see also I Tim. 2:1-2)
 - How long do we pray? (Neh. 1:4, Neh. 2:5, Neh.1:1 and Neh. 2:1, see also I Thess. 5:16-18)

Prayer patterns

A-C-T-S : Adoration - Confession - Thanksgiving - Supplication

F-A-C-T-S : Faith - Adoration - Confession - Thanksgiving - Supplication

P-R-A-Y : Praise-Repent-Ask-Yield