

Nehemiah

Chapter 1

Nehemiah's Prayer

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, ² Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. ³ They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” ⁴ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I said: “O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, ⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against you. ⁷ We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. ⁸ “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, ⁹ but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’ ¹⁰ “They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. ¹¹ O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.” I was cupbearer to the king.

The book of Nehemiah needs relatively little introduction. It continues the story begun in Ezra; most of the same circumstances and themes appearing in Ezra reoccur in Nehemiah. The two books are so closely connected that the Jewish rabbis and some versions of the Bible have treated them as one book. The book of Nehemiah has sometimes been called Second Ezra. (PBC)

1:1b–6:19 Major Themes – The wall’s restoration is the central concern. This reinforced by the frequency of the nouns “(city wall)”, which is absent from Ezra but occurs thirty-two times in Nehemiah, with the majority (twenty-three) of these in chapters 1-6. Yet it is inadequate to say that Nehemiah 1-6 is simply about rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall. (Hebrew word denotes the large “wall” around a city)

There are other major themes to explore in the opening chapters of Nehemiah. Four are particularly prominent. (CC)

Nehemiah as a Man of Prayer – One cannot help but be impressed by Nehemiah as a man of prayer. He includes five prayers in these chapters (1:5-11a; 4:4-5; 5:19; 6:9b-14). In addition, he mentions that he prayed during his conversation with Artaxerxes (2:4) and that he and other Judeans prayed for protection from their enemies (4:9). (CC)

The longest of Nehemiah's prayers is found in Neh. 1:5-11a. This prayer, prayed as a response to hearing news about Jerusalem, is a corporate confession of Israel's sin and a plea that God would remember his promises to His people. Drawing on passages in Deuteronomy and Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 6), this prayer also contains a hint of Nehemiah's hope in the Messiah, as he prayed for a fully restored Jerusalem, where God's promises would be fulfilled (see, e.g., Jer. 31:27-40; Daniel 9:25; Mal. 3:1-4). (CC)

The rest of Nehemiah's prayers are short – only a sentence or two. At times he prayed imprecations (a curse) on those who opposed God and His people, as in 4:4-5 and 6:14 (cf. 13:29). Despite the fact that Nehemiah could have appealed to the Persian court for help against these enemies, he did not. (*It is good idea not to use full force if you don't have to.*) Instead he prayed that God would deal with those who do evil, trusting in God's judgment and justice instead of seeking personal or corporate vengeance. (CC)

At other times Nehemiah prayed for blessings (2:4; 5:19; 6:9b; cf. 13:14, 22b, 31b). Here we see Nehemiah trusting in God's mercy and grace. He understood that without God's blessings he could accomplish nothing for his people or Jerusalem, their city and the holy city of God. (CC)

At important junctures in the narrative, Nehemiah's short prayers seem to burst out of him as a natural part of his life of faith and trust in God. For Nehemiah, prayer for God's help was as essential as living and breathing. While he did take special time to approach God in prayers as in Nehemiah 1, most often he is seen simply uttering short heartfelt prayers. This is a sign of Nehemiah's trusting relation with his heavenly Father. He could approach the throne of grace in any situation, for he trusted that God is always ready to hear. More importantly, Nehemiah knew that his relationship with God is based on God's gracious love, since God sought out him and all Israel when Israel was not seeking God. This led him to trust that God is anxious to hear the prayers of his people. So faithful Nehemiah prayed spontaneously to the God of all mercy, whom he trusted for everlasting salvation, as did Ezra before him. (CC)

Nehemiah's Wisdom Made Him a Good Leader – Nehemiah's relationship with God not only demonstrated his trust in God, but also was a sign of the wisdom

God granted to him. This wisdom manifested itself in practical ways by which Nehemiah put it to good use for the task of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. One of the first places this wisdom appears is in Nehemiah's conversation with Artaxerxes (2:1-8). There Nehemiah sought permission to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, thereby asking the king to reverse a previous decision (Ezra 4:21-22). Nehemiah mentioned Yehud (ESV Judah), but did not mention Jerusalem by name. He also asked for permission to rebuild Yehud without mentioned the wall of Jerusalem in his initial request (2:5). Nehemiah's request was phrased as diplomatically as possible, allowing Artaxerxes to avoid shame and save face even while he reversed his prior policy. *(It is good to remember that everyone has some Chinese in them.)* (CC)

Psalm 111:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise." (Cf. Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 9:10; and also Job 28:28).

Pulpit Commentary: The meaning seems to be that "the beginning of wisdom is not found in keen insight, nor wide experience, nor the learn-hag of the schools, but in the temper of reverence and awe. The fear of the finite in the presence of the Infinite, of the sinful in the presence of the Holy, self-abhorring, adoring, as in Job's confession - this for the Israelite was the starting-point of all true wisdom" (Dean Plumtre). A good understanding have all they that do his commandments; literally, that do them; but the "commandments" of ver. 7 are, no doubt, intended. His praise endured forever. The praise "of him," not "of it," as in the Prayer-book Version. As he had begun (ver. 1), so the psalmist ends, with Jehovah's praise.

Proverbs 3:5-6, "⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your Own understanding; ⁶in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

As Nehemiah led the Judeans, his wisdom was evident in that he inspired the people to trust God. He did not point to his own abilities, but constantly spoke of God's work (2:18-29). (CC)

When Sanballat and his allies threatened to attack the builders working on Jerusalem's wall, Nehemiah found an effective way to bolster the declining morale of the builders. Instead of allowing them to continue to fear the enemy, he armed them against their opponents (4:13-14). By making them active participants in meeting the challenge of the enemy, Nehemiah was boosting their morale and signaling to them that they could indeed complete the project. Nehemiah armed the people in two ways. First, we are told that he had them arm themselves with their own weapons – swords, spears, and bows (4:13). But he also armed them with the Word of God. His opening words to the leaders and the people in (4:14) are based on Deut. 7:21. After these words Nehemiah called

for the builders to fight for their families and homes. Through their newly configured vocation of armed builders, they themselves would be the instruments which God would defend the whole people. (CC)

After the threat of attack waned, Nehemiah wisely maintained both readiness and morale. He had half his servants working but the other half armed and armored (4:16). By using his own men, Nehemiah was demonstrating that he was leading the way in supporting the rebuilding of the wall. He was not a leader who expected the people to do the work at his bidding without any sacrifice on his part. Nehemiah and his administrations led by example. They were ready at all times, not even changing clothes and always having a weapon in hand (4:23). (CC)

When later confronted with internal dissent, Nehemiah wisely did not vent his anger in precipitous action (5:7). Instead he thought the matter over before confronting the upper classes with their sinful actions, which had fueled the dissent. He appealed to their status as people of God living under the Gospel. They should “walk in the fear of our God,” since doing otherwise would lend credence to the ridicule of their enemies (5:9). Nehemiah did not simply call on others to repent and live in the light of the Gospel, however. As a true leader, he initiated the change by admitting that he, his family, and members of his administration (“I, my brothers, and my servants,” (5:10a) were also guilty of the sin of lending money for profit. Moreover, he showed true repentance and faith when he included himself in the mandate to live in a new way that conforms to God’s Word: “Let’s abandon [the practice of charging] this interest” (5:10b). The wisdom and effectiveness of Nehemiah’s leadership is shown in the pledges of the upper classes. They promised to return the property they had obtained from the poorer classes, to repay the interest they had charged, and not to seek any additional interest (5:12a). (CC)

However, Nehemiah was well aware that while God’s people were saints, justified purely by God’s grace and through faith alone, during this earthly life they still remain sinners due to the sinful nature inherited from Adam. Therefore in any group – even of believers – there will be some who will try to find ways around the Word of God. Therefore, Nehemiah took two further actions to impress upon the people the seriousness of their pledge. First he called the priests to administer oaths to each creditor, solemnizing the pledge (5:12b). Second, he took on the character of a prophet and shook out the folds of his robe, calling on God to enforce the oath by shaking out from the land any creditor who did not keep his word (5:13). (CC)

Following this incident Nehemiah relates how he once again led by example, forgoing the food allowance that was normally the privilege of the governor (5:14-19). Though this decision came at considerable personal expense, it served both to reduce the heavy tax burden on the Judeans and to demonstrate tangibly

Nehemiah's genuine faith and concern as an authentic leader of God's people.
(CC)

When Sanballat and Geshem invited Nehemiah to meet with them on the fringes of Judah as a ruse, designed to facilitate his assassination, Nehemiah nevertheless wisely avoided accusing them of the conspiracy to kill him. Although he recognized the overture by Sanballat and Geshem to be an attempt on his life, his reply was couched in diplomatic courtesy (6:2-3). Since he knew his enemies were fully cognizant of the building project to complete Jerusalem's wall, he did not deny its existence, but insisted that he had to see to its completion. Nehemiah was seeking to defuse the situation instead of escalating it into a confrontation. He replied to repeated invitation in the same way (6:4).
(CC)

Proverbs 15:1, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

Matthew Henry Commentary:15:1 A right cause will be better pleaded with meekness than with passion. Nothing stirs up anger like grievous words.
2. He that has knowledge, is to use it aright, for the good of others.

Pulpit Commentary: Verse 1. - A soft answer turneth away wrath. Two things are here to be observed: an answer should be given - the injured person should not wrap himself in sullen silence; and that answer should be gentle and conciliatory.

In a further attempt to remove Nehemiah from his leadership, Tobiah and Sanballat induced a certain Shemaiah to prophesy to Nehemiah (6:10). Nehemiah seems to have instantly recognized the false nature of Shemaiah's prophecy (6:11-13). Nehemiah wisely understood the likely consequences of following Shemaiah's advice. He would have committed a public sin and his mission and reputation would have been ruined. It would have then been much more difficult for a discredited governor to garner the support of the people. (CC)

Time and again Nehemiah demonstrated the wisdom needed to be an effective leader for the faithful Judeans. This wisdom and leadership came not simply from Nehemiah's inherent personality traits, but also from the one who equipped him for the task – the triune God, from whom Nehemiah sought wisdom and blessing so that he could continue to lead and serve. (CC)

Constant Opposition from the Judeans' Neighbors – Nehemiah's leadership skills often are highlighted by his success in shepherding God's people in the face of the constant and sometimes violent opposition that came from the nations bordering Judah. The leaders of this opposition were Sanballat, governor of Samaria, Tobiah, a leader of the Ammonites and the Arab ruler Geshem. From the time that Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem to the to the completion of its wall,

these enemies devised plots designed to stop Nehemiah and the Judeans. Their opposition is first mentioned in Neh. 2:10, where it says that they were distressed that the Judeans had a leader who supported them. They also taunted Nehemiah and his people and threatened to accuse them of treasonous actions (2:19-20). When the work began on the wall, they resorted to ridicule in an attempt to undermine the morale of the builders (4:1-3). (CC)

Luther said that there three rules which are amply presented throughout Psalm 119. They are *Oratio, Meditatio, Tenatio*, that is, prayer, meditation and spiritual trial. On the basis of his journey of faith and his own personal experience he found these three components of spirituality to be vital, necessary and effective in a faithful appropriation of the Christian heritage.

As is to be expected, he gives first place to the Bible, which is the source of true knowledge and wisdom and which turns wisdom of all other books into foolishness, because no one teaches about eternal life except this one alone. For that reason Luther advises that one kneel down in one's room and pray to God with real humility and earnestness, asking for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit so that one may rightly understand the message of Scripture. This way of beginning one's study of the Word is essential in as much as the Scriptures are not subject to one's own rational powers of understanding and insight. The Holy Spirit has to guide a person in the proper discernment of the truth and meaning of God's Word.

In the second place, meditation on Scripture, which follows prayer, involves diligent attention to the meaning of various words in their context and a prayerful reflection on the message conveyed. This meditative process is an undertaking which makes it possible for a person to strengthen his faith and to appropriate the riches of God's grace and truth revealed in his Word. Adhering faithfully to the external Word of Scripture is a precondition for the inner enlightenment of heart and mind by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, spiritual trials are the ways and means by which the knowledge and understanding one has gained from meditating on Scripture are put to the test in the struggles of daily living. As a consequence one will experience "how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom." Such testing of one's faith in the encounter with various persons and events in the multitudinous settings of life is never an easy matter. Trust in God, and His Word will be subjected to all kinds of stresses and strains. The world will respond with opposition, misunderstanding and enmity. Doubts and misgivings will seek to demolish the citadel of faith. But one's eventual triumph over unbelief is assured, as one reverts to

prayer and meditation on God's word and gives God the glory and praise for His grace. (Luther & Prayer, Martin E. Lehmann pp. 136-137)

Later when the project was half-finished, Sanballat and his allies took more drastic action, plotting an attack on the builders to permanently disrupt the project (4:7-12). Their desperation is shown by their willingness to risk reprisal by Artaxerxes who had authorized the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall and who likely would have punished them if they had accomplished their sinister plans. (CC)

In response to this threat, Nehemiah posted a guard to protect the builders as they worked. The posting of a guard did have spiritual and physical benefits for the Judean workers. However, the realization that Sanballat and his associates were threatening to attack caused the builders to realize how hazardous their labor was. The awareness of the perils of their situation in turn made the completion of the project seem less certain, perhaps unattainable, since the opposition appeared insurmountable (4:10). The builders began to believe the taunting words of Sanballat and Tobiah (4:1-3). Were it not for the leadership of Nehemiah, the project might well have foundered at this point. (CC)

Opposition came from another direction when internal dissent threatened to bring the building activity to a halt (5:1-5). The poorer Judeans complained that their richer brothers had been taking advantage of them, reducing them to absolute poverty, and forcing their children into slavery. This division almost accomplished what Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem could not. However, Nehemiah's wisdom in resolving the situation and achieving a measure of justice for the poor kept the project on track (5:6-13). (CC)

Leviticus 25:36-43, ³⁶ Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countryman may continue to live among you. ³⁷ You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit. ³⁸ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. ³⁹ "If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave. ⁴⁰ He is to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident among you; he is to work for you until the Year of Jubilee. ⁴¹ Then he and his children are to be released, and he will go back to his own clan and to the property of his forefathers. ⁴² Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. ⁴³ Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God."

When construction was at the brink of completion, with only the hanging of the doors in the gates to be done, Sanballat and his associates tried two last desperate tactics to destroy Nehemiah's work. They plotted his assassination, and they hired false prophets (6:1-14). Nehemiah recognized both plots and foiled them. (CC)

Opposition did not cease with the completion of Jerusalem's wall, however. Even after the wall was built, Tobiah remained subversively active in Judea affairs by virtue of his familial, political, and economic connections with some of the prominent members of Judean society (6:17-19). While Nehemiah seems to have dealt with this continued opposition, that kind of opposition would prove more virulent than the other attempts by the neighboring peoples to dominate and exploit the Judeans, since Nehemiah would have to deal with it again at a later time (13:4-8, 28). (CC)

Success Comes from God – Despite this unceasing opposition, the Judeans were able successfully to rebuild Jerusalem's wall. However, that success was not merely a result of their own toil and resolve. Instead throughout Nehemiah 1-6, we are reminded that only God granted this success. From the very beginning, starting with Artaxerxes' permission to rebuild Jerusalem, Nehemiah acknowledged that God was responsible for all accomplishments (2:8). In recruiting the Judean leaders to support and organized the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall, Nehemiah told them of God' support, which alone would bring them success (2:18). (CC)

In response to the accusations of treason against the Persian crown, Nehemiah did not appeal to Artaxerxes. Instead he appealed to God, the King of kings. The work, as Nehemiah had implied to his fellow Judeans, was not primarily a political act, but a religious one. That is why it would be the servants of "the God of heaven," the Judeans alone, who would build the wall. Pagans had "no portion or right or (religious) heritage" in the restoration of Jerusalem (2:20). (CC)

When faced with discouragement Nehemiah prayed his shortest prayer, "so now, strengthen my hands!" (6:9b). This prayer sought God's help knowing that he alone can crown our efforts with success. God alone can rescue his people from all evil and enable them to overcome the ungodly forces arrayed against them (cf. Psalms 2; 22; 110; 121; Mt. 6:13; Rom. 8:31-39). (CC)

When the wall was completed, even the Judeans' enemies came to know that the success of the project was from God (6:16). This of course was not the same as abandoning their pagan beliefs and believing in the one true God (cf. James 2:19). Instead they had to acknowledge that they were not simply opposing the Judeans, but God (cf. Ex. 8:19; Luke 11:20). In vain they had fought against the God who could empower his people to accomplish his work despite any opposition (see Luke 13:32; John 16:33; Phil. 1:6). This caused them fear and discouragement, since they now understood that they were unable to prevail against God's will (cf. Acts 5:39). The fact that even these opponents of his people's work reinforces the theme that God's supreme power and His empowerment of His people's work reinforces the theme that God alone grants success to human endeavors. Later the Judeans themselves would celebrate

God's gracious gift of victory as they dedicated the wall of the city (12:27-43; cf. 1 Cor. 15:57; 1 John 4:4; 5:4). (CC)

1:1 *The words of.* Originally an introduction to the title of a separate composition (see Jer 1:1; Am 1:1), though the books of Ezra and Nehemiah appear as a single work from earliest times (see Introduction to Ezra: Ezra and Nehemiah). (CSB)

Nehemiah. Means "The LORD comforts." (CSB)

He was a prominent man exiled from Judah; served as cupbearer (v. 11) to Persia's King Artaxerxes I (464-424 BC) and was later appointed governor of Judah (5:14). (TLSB)

Nehemiah was probably born in captivity and grew to manhood surrounded by all the corrupting influences of the ancient Near East. (Nehemiah and the dynamics of effective leadership – p. 14)

Nehemiah was a high-ranking official in the Persian government. He was the king's cupbearer (1:11). As such he was not a mere household servant, but he had a status equal to that of a member of the cabinet in our government. Presenting the king's cup and protecting him against poisoning were a ceremonial part of the Nehemiah's job, but he was also a trusted and influential advisor to the king. (PBC)

Hacaliah. Perhaps means "Wait for the LORD," though an imperative in a Hebrew name is quite unusual. The name occurs only here and in 10:1. (CSB)

Kislev ... twentieth year. November-December, 446 B.C. See chart on "Chronology: Ezra-Nehemiah". (CSB)

This was the 20th year of Artaxerxes I (2:1); 444 BC. Some 12 years intervene between the end of the Book of Ezra and this chapter. Artaxerxes I was the son of Ahasuerus, the ruler noted in Ezra 4:6 and Esther. (TLSB)

The best solution to the problem is that Nehemiah was reckoning from some other event important to him. This likelihood is supported by the fact that Nehemiah does not label this year as one of the years of Artaxerxes, but everywhere else he does count years in terms of the reign of Neh. 2:1; 5:14; 13:6). Most likely this "twentieth year" was Nehemiah's twentieth year of service to the Persian court, beginning shortly before Artaxerxes' first official year. Perhaps Nehemiah was part of Artaxerxes' new administration when he assumed the throne sometime in 465 BC. (CC)

I WAS – Parts of the Book of Nehemiah are written in the first-person: these are sometimes referred to as "Nehemiah's Memoirs." (TLSB)

Susa. See note on Ezr 4:9. (The major city of Elam (in southwest Iran). Because of Susa's part in the revolt, Ashurbanipal brutally destroyed it in 640 (two centuries before Rehum's letter). (CSB)

This phrase, "Susa the fortress," is common in Esther (e.g., 1:2, 5) and occurs in Daniel (8:2). (CC)

As the book of Nehemiah opens, Nehemiah was on duty in Susa, one of the Persian capital cities, located in what is now southern Iran. (PBC)

Persian kings used Susa as a winter residence. (TLSB)

1:2 *Hanani*. Probably a shortened form of Hananiah, which means "The LORD is gracious." (CSB)

Nehemiah's brother; one of a group that brought a firsthand report of conditions in Judah. (TLSB)

If the words "one of my brothers" mean that Hanani was a real brother of Nehemiah, rather than simply a fellow Jew, it is more likely that this was not an official delegation. (PBC)

one of my brothers. See 7:2. The Elephantine papyri mention a Hananiah who was the head of Jewish affairs in Jerusalem. Many believe that he is to be identified with Nehemiah's brother, and that he may have governed between Nehemiah's first and second terms (see NIV text note on 7:2). (CSB)

Judah. A province of the Persian Empire (v3). (TLSB)

He received some visitors from faraway Jerusalem. These men may have been an official delegation from Jerusalem or they may have come for family or business purposes. (PBC)

Jews. Judeans.

remnant. See note on Ezr 9:8. (CSB)

Exiles from Judah who had left Babylon and successfully returned to Judah. (TLSB)

These are the Judeans who returned to Jerusalem in previous years beginning with the first return under Sheshbazzar, but also including those who returned with Ezra. Writing in the eighth century BC, Isaiah used this word in Is. 4:3; 10:20-22; 11:11, 16; 28:5; 37:31 to describe those whom God would save by His grace. This includes those who would survive the Babylonian captivity and be

restored to the land. It also implies that Hanani and Nehemiah understood the messianic import of these prophecies: the returned Judean remnant included the line from which God would bring forth the long promised Messiah. Moreover, the Messiah himself would gather all of God's scattered people, including a "remnant" of believing Gentile (Amos 9:11-15; Acts 15:17; Rom. 11:5; cf. John 11:52). (CC)

1:3 *province*. See note on Ezr 2:1. (Probably Judah (cf. 5:8, where the Aramaic word for "province" is translated "district") (CSB)

GREAT TROUBLE AND DISGRACE – It seems that Nehemiah learned of conditions in Jerusalem simply by making a casual inquiry. He was shocked to hear of the appalling situation there. Apparently he had assumed that since the mission of Ezra about 12 years earlier everything was fine. He had underestimated the persistence of Israel's enemies and the continued physical and spiritual weakness of the returnees. Nearly 100 years after the return under Zerubbabel Jerusalem still was not a secure city. Either the walls never been rebuilt at all or whatever work had been done had been undone by Israel's enemies. Even the restored temple, so vital to the nation, was exposed and easy prey to enemies. The people were demoralized. (PBC)

Despite the previous work of Ezra (Ezr 7–10), conditions in Judah were still far from ideal. The remnant living there was mocked by enemies and hindered in their rebuilding efforts (Ezr 4:7–23). (TLSB)

The remnants were, literally, "in great evil and in shame," translated to be bad, harmful, or a cause of suffering. At times it denotes evil or wickedness, but at other times it may denote misfortune, calamity, or disaster from a human perspective, even if sent from or allowed by God. (CC)

wall of Jerusalem is broken down. The lack of a city wall meant that the people were defenseless against their enemies. Thucydides (1.89) describes the comparable condition of Athens after its devastation by the Persians in 480–479 B.C. Excavations at Jerusalem during 1961–67 revealed that the lack of a wall on the eastern slopes also meant the disintegration of the terraces there. When Nebuchadnezzar assaulted Jerusalem, he battered and broke down the walls around it (2Ki 25:10). Most, however, do not believe that Nehemiah's distress was caused by Nebuchadnezzar's destruction in 586 but by the episode of Ezr 4:7–23. The Jews had attempted to rebuild the walls earlier in the reign of Artaxerxes I; but after the protest of Rehum and Shimshai, the king ordered the Jews to desist. See note on Ezr 4:21–23. (As a result of the intervention of the provincial authorities, Artaxerxes I (see v. 11 and note on v. 7) ordered that the Jews stop rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (see note on Ne 1:3). The events of vv. 7–23 probably occurred prior to 445 B.C.. The forcible destruction of these recently rebuilt walls rather than the destruction by Nebuchadnezzar would then be the basis of the report made to Nehemiah (Ne 1:3). (CSB)

The walls and gates of Jerusalem had not been repaired since their destruction 140 years earlier by the Babylonians. (TLSB)

1:1–3 Nehemiah recalls the report about Jerusalem that prompted his decision to travel there and assist God’s people. Today, as you hear of other people’s needs, take them to heart as a matter of prayer and concern. Your gracious Savior, who knows and bears all your cares, will likewise care for you as you support your brothers and sisters in Christ. • O Lord, hear my plea for those in need, and grant me a heart ready to serve them. Amen. (TLSB)

1:4-11a This is the longest of Nehemiah’s prayers in the book. It is prefaced by Nehemiah’s reaction to the news about Jerusalem. We are told that he sat, wept, and mourned. As is typical of mourning in the OT, Nehemiah fasted and prayed. Nehemiah’s actions are reminiscent of Ezra’s mourning upon hearing about the Judeans’ marriages to pagan women (Ezra 9:3-5; 10:6). Nehemiah specifically says that he prayed to “the God of heaven” (1:4-5), a term used in the Persian documents in Ezra either by Persian kings or Judeans themselves to refer to Israel’s God (Ezra 1:2; 5:11-12; 6:9-10; 7:12, 21, 23). As a Persian official, Nehemiah adopted that customary title for God (1:4-5; 2:4, 20), but he does not use it in a generic sense; he explicitly identifies “the God of heaven” with Yahweh, Israel’s God, the one true and triune God (1:5). (CC)

Nehemiah’s prayer divides into three petitions: (CC)

1. A plea that God would hear his prayer, accompanied by a confession of sins (1:5-7)
2. A plea that God would remember His promises to restore Israel to its land (1:8-10)
3. Another plea that God would hear his prayers with a request that God would grant him success and mercy before the Persian king (1:11a)

1:4 *sat down*. Cf. Ezr 9:3; Job 2:13. (CSB)

Usual posture when a person “wept and mourned” (cf. Job 2:13; Ps, 137:1). (TLSB)

wept. See 8:9; Ezr 3:13 and note; 10:1; Est 8:3. (CSB)

Because of the remnant’s great trouble and shame” (v. 3). (TLSB)

FOR SOME DAYS – From the month Chisleu to the month Nisan; about four months from the time he received the above information, till the time that Artaxerxes noticed his grief, 2:1. All this time he probably spent in supplication to God; waiting for a favorable opening in the Divine providence. Every good work is not to be undertaken hastily; prayer and watchfulness are necessary to its completion. Many good works have been ruined by making haste. (ACC)

mourned. See Ezr 10:6; Da 10:2. (CSB)

fasted and prayed. See note on Ezr 8:23. During the exile, fasting became a common practice, including solemn fasts to commemorate the fall of Jerusalem and the murder of Gedaliah (see note on Zec 8:19; see also Est 4:16; Da 9:3; 10:3; Zec 7:3–7). (CSB)

Fasting involved refraining from food. It was meant to heighten feelings of shame and self-denial and to enhance humble prayer. (TLSB)

Praying here was done in abject humility. Nehemiah implored God in a prayer similar to Ezra's (Ezra 9:6-15). Though a layperson and not a scribe or priest, he couched his prayer in phrases and sentences from Scripture, particularly from Deut. (TLSB)

Nehemiah was grief-stricken but he didn't despair. Instead he gave evidence of his character as he turned to the only reliable source of help, the Lord his God. (PBC)

Prayer is an admission that there is something in our life that we can't handle. Nehemiah came face to face with a situation which was too big for him. It concerned the people of God in a far away land. He was in Babylon and he felt powerless to help them. He turned to God in prayer; and from his example we learn how prayer may become as effective force in our lives. (Nehemiah and the dynamics of effective leadership – p. 19)

God of heaven. See note on Ezr 1:2. (Of the 22 OT occurrences of the phrase, 17 occur in Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel.) (CSB)

1:5 O LORD, GOD OF HEAVEN – Nehemiah postpones his request by first describing God in two ways, both of which draw on Moses' speech in Deuteronomy 7. This speech of Moses instructed the people of Israel as to how God would enable them to possess the land of Canaan and encouraged them to be faithful to God. Nehemiah is also concerned about God blessing Israel in the land of Canaan, so it should be no surprise that he references Moses' words, delivered a millennium earlier (fifteenth century BC). (CC)

The greater God becomes, the smaller becomes his problem. (Nehemiah and the dynamics of effective leadership – p. 21)

Address to the Ruler of nations was appropriate, because Nehemiah's prayer dealt with an international situation, as did Abraham's prayer many centuries earlier (Gen. 24:7). (TLSB)

GREAT AND AWESOME – This description of God draws on Moses' description of God in Deut. 7:21 and will be used again by Nehemiah when he encourages the builders of Jerusalem's wall (4:14). It is similar to the description of God in the prayer of the Levites (9:32), which has a threefold description of God as "great, mighty, and fearsome," drawing upon Deut. 10:17. (CC)

WHO KEEPS HIS COVENANT – This phrase expresses that God is the one who keeps his covenant and his faithfulness, that is, that he is faithful to the covenant He established with Israel (Deut. 7:9, 12; 1 Kings 8:23; Ps. 89:28; Neh. 9:32; 2 Chr. 6:14). The larger contexts of all these passages show that God's people as a whole had not been faithful to Him. Therefore this language highlights that God's salvation comes purely by His own grace; it is not even partially earned or merited by His people, and they can contribute nothing to their salvation. (CC)

God is also described as keeping "the covenant and faithfulness to those who love Him and His commands" (1:5), drawing upon Deut. 7:9 as well as the First Commandment (Ex. 20:6; Deut. 5:10). The word here refers to God's favor, love, and mercy, which He faithfully showered upon His people to fulfill His gracious promises even though they did not deserve it (see Deut. 7:7-9). This word "love" denotes a special attitude or act toward someone that exceeds the normal, expected attitude or action. The Scriptures repeatedly declare that Yahweh's "faithfulness, mercy and love" endures forever" (Ps. 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1-4, 29; 136:1-26; Ezra 3:11; 1 Chr. 16:34; 41; 2 Chr. 5:13; 7:3, 6: 20:21). The word "love" often points to God's grace, his forgiving disposition and loving attitude toward humans, who cannot by their own merit expect His mercy or kindness. It is to this grace if God that Nehemiah appeals in his prayer, since he knows that because of their sin, he and his people did not deserve God's grace (1:6-7). AS the NT reveals definitely, God's faithfulness, love, and grace are based on the obedience of His Son, Jesus Christ, who faithfully carried out His Father's plan – even dying on the cross – to obtain salvation for all people (e.g., John 1:14-18; 1 Cor. 1:9; Phil. 2:6-11; Rev. 1:5). (CC)

love. Or "faithful love," the quality that honors a covenant through thick and thin. (CSB)

The fruit of faith include

s both love for God and the desire to keep His commands, which include the command to love one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18). This is similar to the way in which Jesus summarized the whole Law of God (Mt. 22:37-40; cf. Rom. 13:9-10; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8). (CC)

1:6 LET YOUR EAR BE ATTENTIVE...EYES OPEN...HEAR – This prayer reveals much about Nehemiah. He felt the some oneness with God's people that

Moses, Ezra and other leaders of Israel had shown in the past. He was moved to intercede with the Lord on their behalf. (PBC)

Nehemiah also draws upon another tradition in his first petition: he uses language from Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple in the tenth century BC. He seems to draw on the wording recorded in Chronicles when it differs slightly from the wording preserved in 1 Kings 8. (CC)

Nehemiah's request that God's eyes be opened and his ears hear Nehemiah's prayer mirrors Solomon's request for the temple: (CC)

"Let your ear be attentive and your eyes be opened to listen to the prayer of your servant." (Neh. 1:6)

"Let your eyes be opened and your ears be attentive to the prayer of this place." (2 Chronicles 6:40)

This remarkable similarity to Solomon's plea for the temple indicates that Nehemiah's concern for his fellow Israelites – and therefore, for Jerusalem and its wall – was not simply a political concern for the Judeans in Jerusalem, but was a theological concern for the holy city and its temple, the place that God had chosen to dwell in His grace. Nehemiah viewed Jerusalem in the way that Solomon regarded the temple. This equation of the whole city of Jerusalem with the house of God derives from a theological perspective that has been called Judean Zion theology: God's house in Zion, where He graciously dwelt with His people, included the city, not simply the temple. (see page 391 CC) This same equating of the two is found in the Aramaic document in Ezra 4:8-6:18 (see Ezra 4:21-24), document that most likely was prepared at Nehemiah's request to aid him in persuading Artaxerxes to allow the reconstruction of Jerusalem's wall. Thus from the beginning Nehemiah's concerns were at least as much spiritual and theological as they were political. In fact, it is Nehemiah's faith that informed and guided his political actions. (CC)

Nehemiah's deep feelings were based on the fact that God had chosen a specific people, a specific land and a special city as the scene of his actions to provide salvation for the whole world. There was only one chosen people from whom the Savior could be born as the seed of Abraham and David, namely Israel. Jesus Himself referred to this when He said, "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). There was only one Promised Land – God's plan had to be fulfilled in Bethlehem and Jerusalem as the prophets had foretold (Micah 5:2; Zech. 9:9). There was only one city – Jerusalem – where the sacrifices which pointed to the coming Savior could be offered. Nehemiah's love for the Lord and his hope of salvation could not be separated from his loyalty and love for the people, the land and the city which God had chosen. (PBC)

There still is a special people of God, the church of all believers. This church is sometimes called God's Israel, his new Jerusalem. We should have bonds of love for God's people of today, as Nehemiah did in his day. We can no more separate our love for God from love for His people than Nehemiah could. After all, "since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). (PBC)

praying before you day and night. Cf. Ps 42:3; 88:1; Jer 9:1; 14:17; La 2:18; Lk 2:37; 1Th 3:10; 1Ti 5:5; 2Ti 1:3. (CSB)

This adverbial phrase is literally, "the/this day, daily and night(ly)," and it modifies the participle "praying," indicating that Nehemiah is engaged in constant prayer. (CC)

Nehemiah continues his references to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple by stating that he was praying "day and night" (1:6). The only other references to "day and night" in a prayer in the OT is in Solomon's prayer: (CC)

Yet pay attention to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, Yahweh my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you, that your eyes may be opened day and night toward this house, the place where you have promised to set your name, that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. Listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Listen from heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive. (2 Chron. 6:19-21; cf. 1 Kings 8:28-30). (CC)

Nehemiah, trusting that God does listen "day and night," knew that in response to Solomon's prayer God had promised: (CC)

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. (2 Chon. 7:14-15). (CC)

Nehemiah's persistence is noteworthy. He continued in prayer for his people day and night. He might have done what we so often do, namely promise to pray about someone's need only to forget our commitment as soon as they pass out of our presence. (Nehemiah and the dynamics of effective leadership – p. 22)

He knows that if they are relatively free from personal anxiety, they can perform better on the job. No business corporation or church, educational institution or mission, can succeed in achieving a goal without the willing assistance of those who are prepared to give themselves for the sake of the work. (Nehemiah and the dynamics of effective leadership – p. 25)

WE – Nehemiah, a high ranking political figure, identified himself with his downtrodden people in confessing his sins and theirs (cf. Ezra 9:7). (TLSB)

sins ... myself and my father's house. Nehemiah does not exclude himself or members of his own family in his confession of sins. A true sense of the awesomeness of God reveals the depths of our own sinfulness (Isa 6:1–5; Lk 5:8). (CSB)

In addition, Solomon envisioned the time when the Israelites' sins would cause them to be carried away into exile. He asked that if the Israelites then confessed their sins and directed their prayer to God toward the Promised Land, Jerusalem, and the place of the temple, Yahweh would hear their prayer and forgive them (2 Chron. 6:36-39; cf. 1 Kings 8:46-51). Nehemiah, therefore, clung to God's promise to forgive His people – especially His promise to “forgive their sins and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). Nehemiah first confessed his sin and the sin of the people (1:6-7) and then asked for mercy before the Persian king (1:11a), so that the king would uphold the prior permission given for the Judeans to rebuild the city and the temple. (CC)

Instead of blaming Israel's sins solely on his ancestors or on his contemporaries, Nehemiah takes full responsibility for his part in the guilt of corporate Israel. This shows his awareness of (1) original sin, inherited from Adam, with which all people are born; (2) his actual sins, since due to their sinful nature all people, including justified believers, commit sins during this life (see Romans 7; and (3) the corporate character of the people of God as one body of believers, so that all may suffer as the result of the sin of a few (cf. Joshua 7; 1 Corinthians 5). (CC)

Nehemiah had the same consciousness of sin which appeared in Ezra. He acknowledged his own sins and the sins of the people, but trusted the Lord for forgiveness. When any part of the body of Israel suffered, Nehemiah felt the pain. Nehemiah felt the same love and longing for Jerusalem which is expressed in so many of the psalms, notably Psalm 137. This devotion was especially remarkable since Nehemiah lived a thousand miles from Jerusalem – the place chosen as a dwelling for (God's) Name” – and had probably never been there. (PBC)

1:7 WE HAVE ACTED VERY WICKEDLY – Lists of curses in Deut. 27:15-26 suggests ways in which the people had acted corruptly. (TLSB)

commands, decrees and laws. See note on Ge 26:5. († Legal language describing various aspects of the divine regulations that God's people were expected to keep (see Lev 26:14–15, 46; Dt 11:1). Addressing Israel after the covenant at Sinai, the author of Genesis used language that strictly applied only to that covenant. But he emphasized to Israel that Abraham's faith, “credited ... to him as righteousness” (15:6), proved its sincerity by being obedient to God's

will in his time and that the Israelites must follow Abraham's example if they were to receive the covenant promises.) (CSB)

Nehemiah's confession combines a confession that all Israel had sinned with his personal confession that he and his family had sinned. In this he is parallel to Ezra, who included himself in his prayer of confession about exogamy among the Judeans in Jerusalem and Yehud (Ezra 9:6). Like Ezra, Nehemiah's prayer joins him not only with the present Judeans and their sins, but also with the past – "my ancestral house" (1:6). He confesses together all of the sins of the past generations as well as his own and those of his contemporaries. The confession that Israel has acted corruptly is made more specific by stating that "we have not kept the commands, statutes, and ordinances that commanded Moses your Servant" (1:7). This is once again a reference to Deut. 7, where Moses instructed Israel to be careful to "keep" God's "commands, statutes, and ordinances" (Deut. 7:11; cf. Deut. 5:31; 6:1; 26:17). (CC)

Moses. For the prominence of the law of Moses in Ezra and Nehemiah see Ezr 3:2; 6:18; 7:6; Ne 1:8; 8:1, 14; 9:14; 10:29; 13:1. (CSB)

Nehemiah's prayer also reveals that he was a student of Scripture. The language of his prayer reflects the history of Israel and the promises of God as they were revealed in Scripture. The Exodus, when God redeemed Israel from Egypt with His mighty hand and made them His chosen people, was the basis for Nehemiah's hope in the present difficulties. (PBC)

1:8-9 Quotation here is not a specific verse in the Book of Moses but is a summary of Mosaic teaching in such passages as Lev. 26:33-45; Deut. 4:27-31; 30:1-4. (TLSB)

The second petition of the prayer builds on the implications of the first. It also calls on God's promises – this time his promise to gather His people and return them to Jerusalem, which He chose as the dwelling place for His name. As the confession ended with a reference to the Law commanded through Moses (1:7), this petition begins with another reference to Moses' words (1:8). In this case Nehemiah summarizes the words of Moses from the Pentateuch. (Lev. 26:40; Deut. 4:27; Deut. 30:2; Deut. 30:4; Deut. 12:11; cf. Deut. 12:5). (CC)

1:8 *Remember.* See note on 13:31; a key word in the book (4:14; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). (CSB)

The middle part of his prayer echoed the warnings and promises recorded in Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy must have been especially meaningful to believers in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, because it not only threatened the exile, but also promised the return which they were experiencing. For example, Deuteronomy 30:4, states, "Even if you have been banished to the

most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. (PBC)

unfaithful ... scatter. Dispersion was the inescapable consequence of the people's unfaithfulness. By the NT period there were still more Jews in the Diaspora (dispersion) than in Palestine. (CSB)

1:9 *I will gather them.* See Dt 30:1–5; a frequent promise, especially in the prophets (e.g., Isa 11:12; Jer 23:3; 31:8–10; Eze 20:34, 41; 36:24; Mic 2:12). (CSB)

The Lord selected Jerusalem as the place where His name would dwell (1Ki 14:21; Is 8:18). (TLSB)

chosen as a dwelling for my Name. See Dt 12:5 and note; (The tabernacle, the Lord's dwelling place during the desert journey, will be located in the city in Canaan where the Lord would choose to dwell. Moses stresses the importance of centralizing the place of worship as he prepares the people for settlement in the promised land, where the Canaanites had established many places of worship.) Ps 132:13. (CSB)

1:10 *your people ... you redeemed.* Although they had sinned and failed, they were still God's people by virtue of his redeeming them (see Dt 4:34; 9:29). (CSB)

By quoting from Moses, who foresaw the sin, exile, and return of the people, Nehemiah acknowledged that God has showed grace toward His people and brought them back from captivity to Jerusalem. Nehemiah also reveals his motive for wanting to restore Jerusalem's wall: to glorify the temple, the place that God chose to make His name dwell. (See 1 Kings 8:16-20, 29, 33, 35, 41-44, 48; 2 Chron. 6:5-10, 20, 24, 26, 32-34, 38). Moreover, he refers to the exodus redemption of the people of Israel from Egypt by God's "great power and... mighty hand" (1:10), a reference to Exodus 32:11, where Moses pleaded with God to have mercy on Israel despite their idolatrous worship of the golden calf. So also, Nehemiah pleads for mercy despite Israel's idolatry, which provoked God so that He let the people be taken out of the land by the Babylonians. By this petition Nehemiah seems to imply that he considers the process of God restoring Israel to the land to be incomplete until the temple – including Jerusalem's wall – is fully restored. This may hint at Nehemiah's messianic hope, since God had inspired His prophets to predict that the new covenant, brought by the Messiah, would come only after the restoration of Jerusalem and its temple (Jer. 31:27-40; Dan. 9:25-27; Mal. 3:1-4). (CC)

Refers to the exodus from Egypt (Ex. 6:6). (TLSB)

1:11 *Give your servant success today.* Cf. Ge 24:12. (CSB)

Nehemiah's short final petition asks God to hear his prayer and acknowledges that it is not his prayer alone, but the prayer of God's other servants who "delight to fear your name." Nehemiah was not the only one concerned with the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall, as Ezra 4:12 attests. However, Nehemiah had access to the Persian king, and his petition to God asks for success and for mercy before the king. Artaxerxes had already halted the construction of Jerusalem's wall (Ezra 4:21). Nehemiah needed God to make the king favorably disposed toward him, because asking Artaxerxes to reverse his order was a great risk to Nehemiah's position at the court and even to his life. (CC)

A leader who closely identifies with those whom he leads will be able to motivate them to greater accomplishment. (Nehemiah and the dynamics of effective leadership – p. 25)

By becoming aware of what God wanted done, Nehemiah was led to reorder his priorities. (Nehemiah and the dynamics of effective leadership – p. 26)

Prayer not only established Nehemiah's priorities, it also gave him a sense of purpose. (Nehemiah and the dynamics of effective leadership – p. 26)

PRESENCE OF THIS MAN – In his prayer Nehemiah showed that although he was a servant of the king of Persia, he was first of all a servant of God. The king of Persia was a powerful world ruler, but in this matter he was no more than "this man." For all his power, he was still a man, not a god. Like everything else in this universe he was subject to the God of heaven and earth. Nehemiah put his trust, not in men, but in the one true God who always cares for His people. (PBC)

King Artaxerxes I, whose permission Nehemiah needed to journey to Jerusalem. (TLSB)

If this prayer tells us a lot about Nehemiah, it also reveals a lot about God. He is the God of power, who rules and controls everything. The God of heaven who rules the stars and planets would have no trouble controlling a puny king, whose vast empire is like a drop in the bucket compared to the vastness of the universe. The Lord is great and awesome in His power. He is also awesome in His holiness. The threats of His law are not to be trifled with or despised. Israel had ignored the warnings given through Moses and had suffered the threatened devastation and exile. Now the nation was again flirting with disaster. The people needed to take warning from the way in which God had fulfilled his threats in the past, lest they provoke the awesome God by continued sin and impenitence. (PBC)

In the 2500 years that have passed since Nehemiah's time, God has not changed. Nor will He ever. He is still holy and awesome. He still threatens those who despise His Word. "it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the

living God” (Hebrews 10:26-31), for “our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 10:29). We need to take warning, so we don’t repeat Israel’s ingratitude and disobedience. But, above all, we need to remember that God is faithful to His covenant of love. He has made a covenant – that is, a promise, a commitment – to forgive our sins. “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel...I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins nor more” (Jeremiah 31:33, 34). God will never break that promise; it rest on His own truthfulness and on completed work of Christ. When is weakness we sin, we can confess our sins as Nehemiah did. And we can enjoy the same confidence of forgiveness he had. This is possible because our confidence does not depend on our own achievements, bt on the promises of God. (PBC)

cupbearer. Lit. “one who gives (someone) something to drink.” The Hebrew for this word occurs 11 other times in the OT in the sense of “cupbearer” (Ge 40:1–2, 5, 9, 13, 20–21, 23; 41:9; 1Ki 10:5; 2Ch 9:4). According to the Greek historian Xenophon (*Cyropaedia*, 1.3.9), one of the cupbearer’s duties was to choose and taste the king’s wine to make certain that it was not poisoned (see 2:1). Thus Nehemiah had to be a man who enjoyed the unreserved confidence of the king. The need for trustworthy court attendants is underscored by the intrigues that characterized the Achaemenid court of Persia. Xerxes, the father of Artaxerxes I, was killed in his own bedchamber by a courtier. (CSB)

Nehemiah was more than a wine steward at the royal table; he was an important official. The king relied on him for protection against assassination by poisoning (cf. Gen. 40:21; 1 Kings 10:5). (TLSB)

The short note that Nehemiah was the royal cupbearer speaks volumes about this man. He was a trusted royal official, often responsible for serving the kings’ wine. Xenophon describes the duties of cupbearers for Astyages, the Median grandfather of Cyrus the Great: (CC)

Now, it is a well-known fact that the king’s cupbearers, when they proffer the cup, draw off some of it with the ladle, pour it into their left hand, and swallow it down – so that, if they should put poison in, they may not profit by it. (CC)

Duties of cupbearers went beyond simply ensuring that the king’s wine was fit to be drunk. For instance, Tobit 1:22 notes: “now Achiacharos (Ahikar) was cupbearer and keeper of the signet and in charge of administration and accounts, and Sacherdonos (Esarhaddon) appointed him second to himself (NETS, G1). We could also note the Assyrian king Sennacherib’s powerful official called “Rabshkeh” in 2 Kings 18:17-19:8 / Isaiah 36:2-37:8. “Rabshakeh” derives from the Akkadian, “chief cupbearer,” But Sennacherib’s Rabshakeh clearly exercised authority beyond tasting the king’s wine. (CC)

Nehemiah was a powerful and valued person in Artaxerxes' court. Nevertheless, he did not rely on his own position, but on God to grant him success. (CC)

As such he was not a mere household servant, but had a status equal to that of a member of the cabinet in our government. (PBC)

1:4–11 On behalf of those struggling in Jerusalem, Nehemiah fasts and prays with great empathy as guided by God's Word. God's Word grants confidence in prayer. As you call on the Lord to confess your sins and to plead for others, use God's promises as your guide, for all His promises to you are "Yes" and "Amen" in Christ the Savior. • Holy Spirit, increase in me the desire to know the Word and to pray according to it in all things. Amen. (TLSB)