

Nehemiah 1 – Study Leader’s Questions

1. *In what ways did Nehemiah show his concern for the captives who had returned to Jerusalem?*
2. *What was Nehemiah’s first response when faced with a seemingly hopeless predicament?*
3. *What does Nehemiah’s prayer reveal about his view of himself and of God?*
4. *How do you think prayer prepared Nehemiah to lead his people?*
5. *Why would Nehemiah’s position of authority be an asset in improving the situation?*
6. *If God knows all of our fears, desires, and needs, why does he want us to pray about them?*
7. *Based on this passage, what are some of the ingredients of effective prayer?*
8. *In what ways can prayer change a person’s attitude towards life’s difficulties?*
9. *In what ways does God bless those who continually turn to him in prayer?*

Nehemiah 1 – Answers to Questions

See Dr Ruckman's commentary *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* pp 181-198 and the *Ruckman Reference Bible* pp 675-688, 694-695, 1019 for detailed comments.

1. *In what ways did Nehemiah show his concern for the captives who had returned to Jerusalem?*

“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” Nehemiah 1:4. ***“Fasted and prayed”*** occurs once more in scripture, Acts 13:3, before another great enterprise, i.e. missionary work. ***“Fasting”*** with ***“prayer”*** occurs 5 times in scripture; Psalm 35:13, Daniel 9:3, Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29, 1 Corinthians 7:5.

Nehemiah prays for four months, Chisleu (December) to Nisan (April), ***“day and night”*** and with others, Nehemiah 1:1, 6, 11, 2:1. Nehemiah 1:2, 3, 2:5-8 show that he kept himself informed about Jerusalem and did advance planning.

“Prayer works; prayer is work; prayer leads to work” – *Power in Prayer, Navigator Studies in Christian Living*, Book 6, *Growing in Service*, p 28.

“The twentieth year” appears to be the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign, Nehemiah 21:1, 5:14. The expression ***“the twentieth year”*** is explicitly associated with a king's reign in 8 of its 11 occurrences in scripture; 1 Kings 15:9, 2 Kings 12:6, 13:1, 15:13, Nehemiah 2:1, 5:14, Jeremiah 25:3, 52:30. The phrase does not refer to the seventy-year Babylonian captivity; Jeremiah 25:11, 12, 29:10, which ended in approximately 519 B.C. The date of the Book of Nehemiah is 445-440 B.C.

2. *What was Nehemiah's first response when faced with a seemingly hopeless predicament?*

See Nehemiah 1:5. It should also be the believer's response ***“when faced with a seemingly hopeless predicament”*** instead of 'When all else fails, pray!'

“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:”

3. *What does Nehemiah's prayer reveal about his view of himself and of God?*

Nehemiah's prayer reveals that as an Old Testament saint, his view of God and himself was like that of Isaiah. See Nehemiah 1:5-11.

“...I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” Isaiah 6:1.

“Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” Isaiah 6:5.

Nehemiah had a high and holy view of God and a low view of himself by contrast, which is a right view of God and self, as David shows in Psalm 22:3, 6, showing in turn the greatness and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who ***“being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”*** Philippians 2:8.

“But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel...But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.”

Nehemiah also perceives God as a faithful, promise-keeping God.

“Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: 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” Nehemiah 1:8-9.

See Deuteronomy 30:1-4.

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee:”

Restoration of Israel to the land of Israel is essential to God’s fulfilment of His promises to Israel, as is happening in the present day. See *God, Guns and Israel* by Dame Jill Hamilton, especially for the part that late 19th century and early 20th century British politicians raised on the King James Bible fulfilled in helping to establish the modern state of Israel. God made Britain Great then, under the reign of Queen Victoria, through the nation’s belief in the 1611 Authorized Holy Bible.

“That Book accounts for the supremacy of England” – Queen Victoria

See *Halley’s Bible Handbook* by Henry H. Halley, Regency, 1965, p 18.

See Deuteronomy 30:5.

“And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.”

4. *How do you think prayer prepared Nehemiah to lead his people?*

It gave him prosperity and mercy with the king, Nehemiah 1:11. See Nehemiah 2:4-8.

5. *Why would Nehemiah’s position of authority be an asset in improving the situation?*

It gave him access to the king, Nehemiah 1:11. It gave him attention from the king, Nehemiah 2:1-3. It gave him approval from the king, Nehemiah 2:4-8. It gave him assurance from the king, Nehemiah 2:8. It gave him assistance from the king, Nehemiah 2:9.

For the Christian, this is equivalent to praying in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” John 16:24.

6. *If God knows all of our fears, desires, and needs, why does he want us to pray about them?*

That is the rule of the Kingdom. ***“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened”*** Matthew 7:7-8.

“Asking is the rule of the Kingdom. ‘Ask and ye shall receive.’...if the royal and Divine Son of God was not exempted from the rule of asking, you and I cannot expect the rule to be altered in our favour...See how absolutely vital prayer is and abound in it” – Charles Haddon Spurgeon, from *Power in Prayer*, p 21.

It’s also God’s way of keeping the believer humble, rather than attempting to ‘tough it out’ himself according ***“to his own way”*** Isaiah 53:6. ***“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”*** 1 Peter 5:6-7.

It’s also God’s way of enabling the believer to urge God on to do great things in answer to prayer, Ephesians 3:20-21. ***“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”***

7. *Based on this passage, what are some of the ingredients of effective prayer?*

Praise: ***“O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God”*** Nehemiah 1:5

Petition: ***“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”*** Nehemiah 1:6

Confession: ***“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...and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned”*** Nehemiah 1:6, see also Nehemiah 1:7, 8

Supplication/Intercession: ***“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...Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand”*** Nehemiah 1:6, 10, 11

Note Nehemiah 1:11. ***“...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.”***

“God honors definite requests and answers specific prayer...” - The Devotional Life, Navigator Studies in Christian Living, Book 2, Fellowship with Christ, p 19.

““Be definite with God, and God will be definite with you”” – Principles of Prayer, Navigator Studies in Christian Living, Book 3, Fellowship with Christ, p 36.

8. *In what ways can prayer change a person’s attitude towards life’s difficulties?*

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” Philippians 4:6-7.

“Trouble and perplexity drive me to prayer, and prayer drives away perplexity and trouble” – Philipp Melanchthon, Principles of Prayer, p 30. *German Reformer and collaborator with Martin Luther. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philipp_Melanchthon.*

9. *In what ways does God bless those who continually turn to him in prayer?*

Seven ways are as follows:

- Purification: Isaiah 6:5. See *Question 3*. Isaiah 6:6-7 ***“Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.”***
- Perception: Jeremiah 33:3 ***“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”***
- Provision: John 16:24. See *Question 5*
- Peace: Philippians 4:6, 7. See *Question 8*
- Power: Ephesians 3:20. See *Question 6*
- Purpose: Acts 9:6 ***“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”***
- Patience: Romans 12:12 ***“Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;”*** Compare also Nehemiah 2:4, for *on-the-spot instant prayer*

Application: Ask God to enable James 1:4 to be progressively fulfilled with respect to all matters requiring prayer. ***“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”***