

# Building for God: Foundations

Goldstone Church – 20-Sep-15 10:30am

Nehemiah 1:1-11

## Introduction

We're starting a series looking at the book of Nehemiah. Over the next few weeks we're going to look at the first 7 chapters of Nehemiah.

Why Nehemiah? Good question!

On the face of it, the book of Nehemiah is a *random* account of how some *random* people rebuilt a *random* wall and renovated several *random* gates of a *random* city at some *random* time in Old Testament history. It all seems a bit *random*!

What's more, the book of Nehemiah has several lists of people with names that most people struggle to pronounce.

So, why Nehemiah?

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray that God's Kingdom would come "on earth". We are praying that God's rule and authority would be established here on earth.

God uses everyone here at Goldstone Church to fulfil His plans.

God *could* fulfil His purposes without us, but, because He loves so much, God chooses to involve us in building His kingdom. What a privilege we have!

We're *not* going to look at the book of Nehemiah as a history lesson, and *not* as a training course on how to physically build walls and hang city gates. 😊 Instead, we'll use Nehemiah as an analogy and as a template. We're going to learn how God wants us to be involved in building His kingdom.

Or to put it another way, as Christians, as disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, how does God want me to be involved in building God's kingdom here at Goldstone church?

Firstly, we need to see the book of Nehemiah in some sort of context.

Three Old Testament books, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, belong together because they cover the same period of time – about 500 years before birth of Jesus. This is the period *after* Israel has been in captivity in Babylon, and now the people were returning to Jerusalem.

Interestingly, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in the Hebrew Bible, but in reverse chronological order. Some Bible scholars suggest that the book of Esther comes first chronologically, then Nehemiah, then Ezra. And some Bible scholars even suggest that "the queen" (see Nehemiah 2:6) is actually Queen Esther.

The book of Nehemiah starts (v.2) with Hanani meeting Nehemiah and telling him about the plight of the Jews in Jerusalem; the message he brings is *devastating* news.

In Old Testament times, the condition of the city walls represented an essential ingredient of the identity of the people. Broken walls *physically* showed that the people were defenceless against enemies. But also, a city with broken walls revealed a

defeated people. The people were humiliated and disgraced because they were living in a destroyed city.

It is therefore no surprise that Nehemiah weeps, mourns, fasts and prays when he hears the news (v.4). This is significant: in response to what he hears, Nehemiah's first response is to pray.

Look more closely at Nehemiah's prayer.

## 1. NEHEMIAH RECOGNISED GOD'S CHARACTER

(NEH 1:5B-6A)

*Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open...*

Note the meanings of some of the words in the verse:

- Lord = Jehovah, 'the existing One', Holy God. He is Alive!
- God = He is the divine ruler
- Heavenly = God is not confined to earthly 3-D limitations
- Great = He is immeasurable in size
- Awesome = God is to be revered, to bow down
- Keeps = God is faithful
- Covenant = He is a total commitment towards His people
- Love = God is goodness and kindness

These characteristics are echoed in New Testament; e.g. where Peter (Matt 16:16) describes Jesus as: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*"

Sadly, when we have a long list of very important issues to pray about, it is easy to overlook who it is that we are actually praying to.

But here is Nehemiah, with a huge list of genuine worries and concerns. He is despairing about the future of his nation, he fears about his community, he is uneasy about his family – and yes, Nehemiah is even uncertain about his *own* future! And yet, Nehemiah starts his prayer by focusing on who God is.

Do our prayers start by recalling and focusing on God's majesty?

## 2. NEHEMIAH REPENTED OF SIN

(NEH 1:6B-7)

Nehemiah is still not ready to present his prayer-needs to God. Instead, he focuses on getting himself right with God. He confesses and repents of his sins.

*I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. (Neh 1:6)*

As Christians, we often associate confession and repentance with just saying 'sorry'. But heartfelt apology to God for what we have done wrong is only a part of repentance. In the Bible, the word 'repent' means "to change one's mind". In other words, repentance is saying sorry to God in such a way that it is accompanied with a change of action.

But Nehemiah repents of his own *personal* sins, and also confesses the *corporate* sins of his family, the sins of his community, and the shared sins of his nation.

Sadly, when we have a long list of very important issues to pray about, repenting is easily overlooked. And it is even more unlikely that we will confess the sins of our family, our community or our nation.

Nehemiah repented; praying that his mind will be changed, praying that his family and community and nation will change their hearts, their attitudes and their actions.

Do our prayers include a time a repentance – for ourselves, our family and our church community?

### **3. NEHEMIAH REMINDED GOD OF HIS PROMISES (NEH 1:8-10)**

Nehemiah still doesn't present his urgent prayer requests to God. Instead he does something strange - a mortal man is reminding an infinite God! (v.8)

*'Remember the instruction you gave.... to Moses and Children of Israel.*

Why does Nehemiah remind God of His promises?

Nehemiah reminds God of His promises to deepen and enrich his personal relationship with God. And the promises that God made to Moses & Nehemiah in the Old Testament are still relevant today.

Sadly, when we have a long list of very important issues to pray about, it is easy to overlook and remember God's promises.

Do our prayers actually deepen our personal relationship with God?

### **4. NEHEMIAH REQUESTED GOD TO INTERVENE (NEH 1:10-11A)**

Finally, Nehemiah presents his requests to God. But what a strange prayer request! v.11 *"Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant."*

Where's the rest of the prayer?

Having already (1) Recognised God's Character, (2) Repented of sin, and (3) Reminded God of His Promises, Nehemiah realises that God knows exactly what issues are on his heart. In other words, Nehemiah has such a close relationship with God, that he doesn't need to repeat what Hanani reported.

Nehemiah knows, that God knows, the deep yearnings that Nehemiah has. In the context of his close relationship with God, Nehemiah's prayer is sufficient: *Lord, be attentive.* Nehemiah was absolutely certain that Almighty God would intervene.

And even here, Nehemiah is making a reference to another of God's promises: *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)*

## CONCLUSION

As disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to build, enlarge and expand God's kingdom. That process starts with our own relationship with God. The foundation for **Building for God** is a personal relationship with the Master Builder.

One of the ways we can engage in a meaningful relationship with God is to speak with Him in prayer - prayers that can be similar to how Nehemiah prayed:

1. **Recognise** – to recognise God's character.  
To try and discover the infinite depths of God's love towards us.
2. **Repent** – to get ourselves right with God.  
To openly and honestly say sorry to God and follow it up with a change of action.
3. **Remind** – to remind God of His promises.  
But, more importantly, to remind ourselves of God's promises towards us.
4. **Request**. In the context of our relationship with God, to humbly ask that God will intervene in a particular situation.

Prayer is a discipline. Nevertheless, we are called to Build with God and He is urging us to engage with Him in prayer.

So our challenge is to look again at our prayer life.

To **Recognise** who God is.

To **Repent** of our sins.

To **Remember** God's promises.

And to make our **Requests** in the context of our personal relationship with Him

**AMEN**