

The History Channel: Messages from Israel's Historians
Ancient Marvels, Part 2: Rebuilding the Walls
Nehemiah 1:1-11

Intro: Mr. Knee High Miah has got it made in Babylon. He is cupbearer to the king. Not bad for an exile. He has reached the pinnacle of possibilities in his homeland of exile. He has probably never seen Jerusalem.

Nehemiah is brokenhearted at the report about the Land of Promise, about the walls of Jerusalem lying in ruins and the gates being burned with fire. He is moved by the report that those who have tried to resettle the city are in great trouble and disgrace.

One of the families in our church was troubled by the rising water last Saturday that drowned out our golf tournament. The thought that perhaps they should go to the attic because the levies might collapse.

We are a city that has seen breaches in our walls. We were devastated by those breaches. Every day we know that we live behind the earthen dams. Every day we know that our lives would be in jeopardy if those walls failed again.

Nehemiah is determined to help this afflicted homeland where he has never lived. He is a man of prayer. His story is inspiring. We can learn much about our own course of action given the situation we are in.

I have read through Nehemiah and meditated on its message. Here are a few suggestions for securing the future of our city and our own lives.

I. Confess Our Sins—*I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you*—1:6

A. Confession means we understand the spiritual nature of our dilemma. A political reality prevails in Jerusalem as well as a sociological, military, and geographical reality. One could describe the nature of the city's dilemma in any of these ways. Confession means that we believe the most accurate description of the devastated city is spiritual in nature. We are addressing the spiritual condition of the city first as a matter of priority. This is how Nehemiah approaches the problem.

If we do the same, then we will acknowledge that our own community suffers from the neglect of people who were assigned to protect us. Our community suffers from internal strife, political corruption, and widespread incompetence in public institutions. Like Nehemiah, we have a lot for which to repent.

B. Confession means that we are in part responsible for the condition of the devastated city. Nehemiah is personally embarrassed, broken, and convicted about the condition of Jerusalem. We must feel the same.

It is the responsibility of God's people to do the repenting for their city. The ungodly are not going to do so. The spiritually uninformed will not do so. The proud and arrogant will not do so. It is the privilege and duty of God's church to repent on behalf of the entire city. That is why in 2 Chronicles 7:14 the Bible declares, *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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

C. Confession should be specific. Nehemiah will also lead in a great prayer of repentance again at the end of this little book. He is constantly praying and repeatedly repenting. He repents even though he seems to be the best guy in town.

To find specifics for repentance, review the 10 Commandments in light of your own life, the life of your family, and your city. All ten are important, but the final five are crucial:

1. Thou shalt not kill means we must repent of the spirit of homicide on behalf of our city. Somehow people live here and have grown up here not comprehending how precious people are to God, including themselves. They treat people as if they are disposable. Abortion is likewise the taking of human life for reasons of convenience. We are guilty.
2. Thou shalt not commit adultery. God has called us to absolute faithfulness to the marriage vows. We must practice this loyalty to the covenant of marriage whether we are married or single. Our city is known for its sexual license. We are guilty.
3. Thou shalt not steal or lie or covet. We have a large criminal element in our city. We also have white collar thieves here who steal from the government and from their companies. And we have politicians, elected and appointed, who feed at the public trough and violate the public trust. In fact, we have allowed a culture of theft and dishonesty to exist so long in our city and state that people feel it is how things work—it is the way things are done. You scratch my back, and I scratch yours. I reward my friends from my position of authority. Part of my pay is the kickbacks I receive for granting contracts as a public official. This attitude has got to go. We will never have a government that is responsive to the needs of our citizens as long as corruption robs us of our statesmen, our public servants, and our souls. God hates a bribe because it destroys the very foundation of good government.

***I wanted Danny to go to jail even though he was only 12 years old. The immigration officer told us he would take him to jail at the next stop. We were clattering through the jungles of Chiapas, Mexico, in the middle of the night. An immigration official spotted us and checked our passports. Danny's was stolen in a Mexico City hotel room. The official changed his mind for 10 pesos.

As long as we are too proud to repent on behalf of our community, we will be spiritually afflicted. We must be willing to come to God and take responsibility for our part in the trouble. We have been neglectful, hard-hearted toward the poor, slothful in our civic duties, and sometimes full of despair. We are guilty.

II. [Pray for Success](#): Give your servant success today—1:11.

Then I prayed to the God of heaven—2:4b.

Nehemiah is a man of prayer. We can learn a lot about prayer simply by reading and meditating on the prayers that this man lifted up to God over and over in this book. This first prayer he ends with a petition for God to give him success.

A. [Pray for success with other leaders](#). Nehemiah is asking God to give him success as he speaks to the king. We should be doing the same any time that we are going up the chain of command in our company or in politics. When we are seeking to do God's work, to make things more like the Kingdom of God, to bring the Kingdom on earth, we should always pray.

The next time you have an important conference with people of authority, stop and pray. Ask God for success. If you feel unworthy, that is good. If you are seeking simply to advance your own career, if your motives are purely selfish, that is bad. When you are seeking the good of your city and your company and your fellow workers, you will have God on your side.

When the question comes your way, say a prayer and proceed.

B. [Pray for the opposition to be frustrated](#)—Turn their insults back on their own heads—4:4.

Nehemiah prays several times for the purposes of his enemies to be frustrated. He does not deal in duplicity or trickery. He prays. If you are experiencing opposition because you are a child of God seeking to have a godly influence in your world, then pray that God will frustrate the plans and schemes of those who lay traps for you, that they will fall into the pits they have dug for you. Haman

was hung on the gallows he built for Mordecai, as we will see next week, and the people who oppose your godly efforts will also see their evil deeds come back on their own heads.

C. [Pray for strength for your hands](#)—But I prayed, *Now strengthen my hands*—6:9.

1. If you are doing God's work with your hands, God will lend you his strength. You ought to pray for just such an intervention from God.

2. The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther record no supernatural interventions from heaven. There are not miracles, so to speak. But God is everywhere taking care of business through his faithful servants. He wants our hands strong for the work.

***Look at your hands. Do they do good work? Close you eyes and pray that God will strengthen your hands.

III. [Set an Example](#)—*Neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor*—5:14.

A. Earlier governors had indulged themselves at the public trough. Nehemiah could have followed their precedent. He refused.

B. Show reverence for God when you are in control. *Out of reverence for God I did not act like that*—5:15. Nehemiah felt deeply that his behavior as governor should reflect his respect for God. He made decisions accordingly.

C. Set an example in these three areas:

1. In modesty and devotion. Do not flaunt your prosperity and wealth. God has given it to you, not to throw in the face of others, but so you can bless others. Practice devotion to God and to your fellow man when you are in control.

2. In honesty and restraint. Nehemiah was always perfectly honest. He was prudent and wise, but he was honest. Honesty is fundamental for teachers, scientists, doctors, lawyers, and preachers. Restraint will win the admiration of friends and foes alike. They may make fun of you, but they will respect you.

3. Courage and wisdom. When Nehemiah's life was threatened, he refused to run and hide. He was able to see through the deception and take appropriate action that preserved his life and communicated wisdom to all.

D. Setting an example is dangerous business. It sets you up as a moral authority and means that every word and action of yours will be examined for its consistency and transparency. You can handle the scrutiny. If we want consistency and transparency in our community life, corporate and public, then we must practice it as the first order of business.