

6/6/2013 Nehemiah 1:1-11 Two Marks of A Leader:

WCK's outline of the book: Chapters 1-7 Effective Principles of Leadership
Chapters 8-10 Spiritual Reform
Chapters 11-13 Putting Principles into Practice

Key Idea: God calls and raises up men and women to "stand in the gap" for an advance for the Kingdom

Supplemental passages: Ps. 106:23 "So he said he would destroy them—had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before to keep his wrath from destroying them." Also Ezek. 22:30-31. "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not destroy it, but I found none. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done declares the Sovereign Lord."

So Nehemiah, when confronted with the need of the people (1:3), wept out of deep concern for the name of God. God's people were in great trouble and covered with disgrace and shame. This was concern not just for the people, but for the reputation of his God. Note the emotional response (vs. 4 - wept and mourned) coupled with the spiritual appeal to God (fasted and prayed).

Time line: (1:1) month of Kislev = end of November

(2:1) month of Nisan = end of March/begin of April. In our thinking "Thanksgiving to Easter" Nehemiah spent 4+ months seeking God through continual prayer before the plan emerges.

Time line - historical perspective. 20th year of Artaxerxes puts this at 445 B.C. This is 90 years after the return of exiles under Zerub. and the report of the rebuilding of the temple recorded in the early chapters of Ezra. Now two generations have come and gone and the walls remain in ruins.

Citadel of Susa. Same place where Esther had been Queen - that was 484 B.C. some 40 years earlier. Susa is about 1100 miles from Jerusalem (modern day Iraq) - travel through fertile crescent.

What is the problem? A form of true religion has been reestablished in the land - but still so far from what will bring honor to God's name. So.

Lesson for Leaders. Let God break your heart. This is the beginning of true spiritual leadership. Not just a burden for the project - but more importantly, concern for God's name. How could we have a God so great - and the city which is called by his name have its walls broken down and the people who are called by his name be living so far beneath the one whom they serve. For us - How can we have such a Wonderful Savior and Reigning Lord and see the church - which bears his name - be so weak and beset by infighting, worldliness, and compromise. Ultimately, it is a passion for God's name which drives us to see the people and causes which represent that great Name, become what God intended them to be.

WCK's illustration: The church in the 2/3's world is ablaze. They are seeing a virtual pentecost with thousands coming to Christ each day. While the West and N.A. the church seems stagnant. Are we in danger of becoming like the churches mentioned in Rev. 2-3 who had their candlestick removed. Repeatedly God warned, "be faithful to my word or I will remove your candlestick."

That was introduction and led to the first point in his outline:

First Mark of a Leader: (1:1-4) He or she will be a person of PRAYER. The response of Nehemiah to the discouraging news of the situation in Jerusalem is to fervently seek God in prayer. It is a wholehearted response. It grips him passionately.

MEK's thoughts: Is my concern really for the honor of God's name? Too often my focus is a project or worse - my reputation. I'm challenged to be motivated by concern for God's name. Passion for His cause should drive my concern for his church and his people. The issue is His NAME. Then if he allows failure that's ok. I need to strengthen that focus. Concern for his name will move me to stand in the gap & pray. Second Mark of a Leader (1:5-11) He or she will be a person who PRAYS FOR DIVINE SUCCESS.

This is the record of Neh's prayer. Note first that he uses the pronoun "we". He includes himself in the confession even though he personally was acting righteously. Need to see our corporate identity not just our individualistic self. Nehemiah's job was that of "cupbearer" to the king. Local Jewish boy does good. But Nehemiah looks beyond personal comfort to the cause of God's people and so he gets involved and the problems and sins of his people become his personally. MEK. Crucial for leadership. To avoid being *patronizing* I need to honestly **identify** with the people and problems God has called me to serve.

Nehemiah begins his prayer with a high view of God. "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, 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." (1:5-6) The Address: Reveals a Majestic view of God. Nehemiah is quoting Scripture - particularly the Psalms. WCK "The greater God becomes in our sight, the smaller the problems will appear in the light of the greatness of God." We must begin by valuing God as **greater** than all the problems we face. When we come to pray - get your eyes on God before you begin to make requests - then what we pray for is simplified and put into perspective.

Other Scriptures that highlight the meaning of "great and awesome" or "God of heaven".

Deut 7:21 "Do not be terrified by them (the nations who possess the land), for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a **great and awesome** God. The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little..."

Jonah 1:9 "He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the **God of heaven**, who made the sea and the land." (Not to be in dread of the Canaanite nations or the sea - God made them and rules over them.)

God is the One who keeps covenant (Heb. Hesed - 248 times in the O.T.)

Deut. 7:9 "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, **keeping his covenant** of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

Ex. 20:6 "...but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

God simply asks Nehemiah - and US - to trust HIM and take the grace HE gives.

Deut. 10:17 "For the Lord your God is God of gods and lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes."

Micah 6:8 "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Specifically, Nehemiah will ask, "Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man (the king)." After 4 months of intercession Nehemiah has come to figure it out that the one thing he needs is for God to move the heart of the king. That will open the floodgate and all the other concerns will be addressed. Note praying for "success" similar to Abraham's servant in Gen. 24:12, "O Lord, god of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham." That success took the form of finding a wife for Isaac. For Nehemiah, it meant having the king say yes to the things he would need to travel to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall.

Note in vs. 6-7 Nehemiah makes confession. Picks up themes from I Kings 6 (Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple) and IIChron. 7:15 "Now my eyes (God's) will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there." (ref. To the temple).

Note in vs. 8-9 Nehemiah bases his request on the Word of God (see especially Deut. 30:1-5 for the promise of being gathered from the ends of the earth.

Note in vs. 10-11 by importuning with God, Nehemiah expresses the value he places on God's people and the purposes of God.

Ps. 128:1-2 "Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours." Nehemiah "feared the Lord," expressed that in his prayer, and would eventually reap the results of the attitude expressed through the prayer.

Note again, Nehemiah prays for 4 months before the scene with the king occurs. The process was crucial for sensing how God was going to lead and provide.

MEK. I get impatient too fast. God wants me to seek Him in prayer - and wait - and learn. God will lead in his timing.

WCK. Leadership and prayer begin with a high view of God. "All theology and missiology begin in doxology."

WCK. True prayer flows out of our knowledge of the word. Nehemiah could pray confidently because he was basing his requests on the promises God had revealed in his word. So must we. Not mere wishful thinking, but bring his word to bear on the particular situations we face.

MEK. I'm challenged to have a high view of God and base my requests not on just what I think should happen, but on the promises of God. Also, again, to persist to seek what the strategic hinge point is. Pray for that. Nehemiah allowed God to do a great deal of preparation internally, before the simple, yet strategic request was made outwardly.