

Pain to Progress

Nehemiah 1:3-7,11; 2:1-5

I. Pain v. 3-4

- a. Nehemiah- Nehemiah held the important position of cupbearer to the king of Persia.
- b. Nehemiah's People
 - i. Distressed- under misfortune
 - ii. Reproached – Disgraced shamed
 - iii. The Jews in Judah (a **province** of Persia) were greatly troubled and disgraced, and Jerusalem's **wall was broken down and its gates had been burned**.
 - iv. They were stopped by Artaxerxes who was pressured by some Samaritans and Rehum, the commanding officer, who may have been a Persian responsible to Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:17–23).
- c. Nehemiah's Response
 - i. Wept- to cry freely and profusely from sadness or distress
 1. Mourning was often accompanied with the shaving of the head and beard.
 - ii. Mourned- to feel sadness and express it through vocalizations, tears. Observe mourning rites
 1. Fasting was often added to prayer so the individual could concentrate wholly on the issue at hand, at the expense of physical needs.

II. Prayer v.4-7

- a. Praying - **make intercession** for, **act as an intercessor**
 - i. Pleading on the character of God
 1. Great indicates the one whom Nehemiah feared and the source and object of his deep faith
 2. Awesome - God's awesomeness is the impression his total character and person leaves on all who encounter him
 3. Preserver
 - a. Covenant – In the God's Word
 - b. Lovingkindness
 - c. For those who keep commandments
 - ii. Persistent
 1. Ear be attentive
 2. Eyes open to hear prayer
 3. Day and Night
 - a. On behalf of the sons of Israel
 - b. Fasting - the action of an individual in lamentation

- i. Fasting, though not a requirement of the Law except on the annual Day of Atonement, often evidenced one's distraught condition (cf. 2 Sam. 12:16; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 8:23).
- c. Favor- v.11
 - i. Artaxerxes had issued a decree to stop the construction work in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:21; see comments on Neh. 1:1–3), and he was the only one who could reverse that order. That is why Nehemiah prayed specifically, **Give Your servant** (cf. v. 6) **success today by granting him favor** (lit., “compassion”) **in the presence of this man.** Nehemiah was referring of course to King Artaxerxes (cf. 2:1).

III. Progress 2:1-5

- a. Four months went by before Nehemiah’s opportunity came—
 - i. four months had passed since Nehemiah received news from Jerusalem. He had been praying and planning during these four months so that he would be ready when the opportunity arose.
 - ii. Still Saddened of Heart
 - 1. King thought he was sick
- b. Risk Everything
 - i. He was very afraid
 - 1. According to Ezra 4:21, this same Artaxerxes had earlier issued a decree to stop work on the city of Jerusalem, perhaps on the wall itself. To make such a request clearly contrary to royal policy might even prove dangerous.
 - ii. Talks about his country and people
 - 1. Nehemiah went on to say he was sad because of the condition of the city “where my fathers are buried.” Such a description showed both Nehemiah’s respect for his ancestors and also his sense of shame at the condition of his native city.
- c. Request with Prayer

