

# Standing in the Gap : Prayer and Planning

## NEHEMIAH 1:1-2:8

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, **2** one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem. **3** They replied, ‘The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.’ **4** When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. **5** I said, ‘**O Lord God of heaven**, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; **6** let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. **7** We have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses. **8** Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; **9** but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.” **10** They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. **11** O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. **Give success to your servant today**, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!’ At the time, I was cupbearer to the king. **1** In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was served to him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. **2** So the king said to me, ‘Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This can only be sadness of the heart.’ Then I was very much afraid. **3** I said to the king, ‘May the king live for ever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors’ graves, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?’ **4** Then the king said to me, ‘What do you request?’ **So I prayed to the God of heaven.** **5** Then I said to the king, ‘If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors’ graves, so that I may rebuild it.’ **6** The king said to me (the queen also was sitting beside him), ‘How long will you be gone, and when will you return?’ So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a date. **7** Then I said to the king, ‘If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may grant me passage until I arrive in Judah; **8** and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, directing him to give me timber to make beams for the gates of the temple fortress, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.’ And the king granted me what I asked, **for the gracious hand of my God was upon me.**



**INTRODUCTION** The year is 445 B.C., about 150 years after the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and deported most of the city's people. Ezra has rebuilt the temple, but the city walls, which had also been rebuilt, now lie in ruins again. This section of Nehemiah tells us how one man responded to the desperate situation.

How is Nehemiah's reaction to the news from Jerusalem different from Hanani's?

What impresses you about Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 1?

What evidence do you see in chapter 2 that would indicate that Nehemiah had planned ahead, in addition to the time he spent praying?

How is Nehemiah a part of the answer to his own prayers?

# What Does It Take To Stand In The Gap?

## INSIGHT :

- ▶ Hanani and others had been eyewitnesses of the desperate situation in Jerusalem. Yet, apparently, they are not moved to mourning, to prayer and fasting, and to taking action, like Nehemiah. What is it that sets Nehemiah apart?

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO WILL STAND IN THE GAP

- ▶ See clearly and feel deeply the [redacted]
- ▶ See clearly and trust deeply in [redacted]
- ▶ Make a [redacted] and a [redacted] to address the need [redacted]



## What keeps us from being like Nehemiah?

FAILURE To:	
...The desperate need	<b>UNAWARE :</b> <b>APATHETIC :</b> [redacted]
...The resources God has at his disposal	<b>RESIGNATION :</b> <b>UNBELIEF :</b> [redacted]
...The part I can play	<b>INFERIORITY COMPLEX :</b> <b>MESSIAH COMPLEX :</b> [redacted]

#### For reflection:

1. What spiritual/physical needs would you see if you walked through your campus, your dorm, or your student union with eyes to see deeply?
2. How would you like your prayer life to be more like Nehemiah's?
3. PRAY about the work God wants to do on campus through you.

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### INTRODUCTION

The year is 445 B.C., about 150 years after the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and deported most of the city's people. Ezra has rebuilt the temple, but the city walls, which had also been rebuilt, now lie in ruins again. This section of Nehemiah tells us how one man responded to the desperate situation.

How is Nehemiah's reaction to the news from Jerusalem different from Hanani's?

What impresses you about Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 1?

- Passionately weeps and mourns
- Prays and fasts for days on end
- Confesses not only his own sins but the sins of his ancestors
- Boldly claims God's promises

What evidence do you see in chapter 2 that would indicate that Nehemiah had planned ahead, in addition to the time he spent praying?

- Note the detailed requests that he made to the king

How is Nehemiah a part of the answer to his own prayers?

- He is cupbearer to the king—a position of access and influence
- He makes a plan of action and is willing to make personal sacrifices to see it come to pass

# What Does It Take To Stand In The Gap?

## INSIGHT :

► Hanani and others had been eyewitnesses of the desperate situation in Jerusalem. Yet, apparently, they are not moved to mourning, to prayer and fasting, and to taking action, like Nehemiah. What is it that sets Nehemiah apart?

Nehemiah's heart is present for hopes that haven't been fulfilled for 150 years ... he has a soft heart that leads him into a pretty powerful prayer. He is allowing "the things that break God's heart" to break his heart."

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO WILL STAND IN THE GAP

- See clearly and feel deeply the **desperation of the present reality**
  - See clearly and trust deeply in **God's promises and resources**
  - Make a **plan of action** and a **sacrificial commitment** to address the need
- 
- It engages both our hearts and minds; it involves both prayer and actions.**

## What keeps us from being like Nehemiah?

FAILURE To: SEE	
...The desperate need	<b>UNAWARE :</b> <b>APATHETIC :</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Unaware--we are often unaware of the needs around us and around the world</li> <li>•Apathetic--we often are apathetic to even the desperate needs of others and have little or no sense of urgency about those</li> </ul>
...The resources God has at his disposal	<b>RESIGNATION :</b> <b>UNBELIEF :</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•we think that the situation is hopeless and sink into despair</li> <li>•we fail to lay claim to the promises God has already made</li> </ul>
...The part I can play	<b>INFERIORITY COMPLEX :</b> <b>MESSIAH COMPLEX :</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we often think that there is nothing we can do about situations some of us think too highly of ourselves, and act as if we are the solution to all the world's problems. Apart from Christ we can do nothing.</li> </ul>

### For reflection:

1. What spiritual/physical needs would you see if you walked through your campus, your dorm, or your student union with eyes to see deeply?
2. How would you like your prayer life to be more like Nehemiah's?
3. PRAY about the work God wants to do on campus through you.

**Note:** Seeing the need and an awareness of God's power are the two essential ingredients to prayer. Without the one, we feel no urgency. Without the other, we fail to go to God. Which of these is more the issue as you think about your own life of prayer?