

AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

# THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

The Old Testament history closes with the book of Nehemiah, wherein is recorded the workings of his heart, in the management of public affairs; with many devout reflections.

## CHAPTER 1

*Nehemiah's distress for the misery of Jerusalem, His prayer.*

### **Nehemiah 1:1**

Nehemiah was the Persian king's cup-bearer. When God has work to do, he will never want instruments to do it with. Nehemiah lived at ease, and in honor, but does not forget that he is an Israelite, and that his brethren are in distress. He was ready to do them all the good offices he could; and that he might know how best to do them a kindness, he makes inquiries about them. We should inquire especially concerning the state of the church and religion. Every Jerusalem on this side the heavenly one will have some defect, which will require the help and services of its friends. Nehemiah's first application was to God, that he might have the fuller confidence in his application to the king. Our best pleas in prayer are taken from the promise of God, the word on which he has caused us to hope. Other means must be used, but the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails most. Communion with God will best prepare us for our dealings with men. When we have entrusted our concerns to God, the mind is set at liberty; it feels satisfaction and composure, and difficulties vanish. We know that if the affair be hurtful, he can easily hinder it; and if it be good for us, he can as easily forward it.

## CHAPTER 2

*Nehemiah's request to the king. (1-8) Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem. (9-18) The opposition of the adversaries. (19, 20)*

### **Nehemiah 2:1**

**Vs. 1-8:** Our prayers must be seconded with serious endeavors, else we mock God. We are not limited to certain moments in our addresses to the King of kings, but have liberty to go to him at all times; approaches to the throne of grace are never out of season. But the sense of God's displeasure and the afflictions of his people, are causes of sorrow to the children of God, under which no earthly delights can comfort. The king encouraged Nehemiah to tell his mind. This gave him boldness to speak; much more may the invitation Christ has given us to pray, and the promise that we shall speed, encourage us to come boldly to the throne of grace. Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven, as infinitely above even this mighty monarch. He lifted up his heart to that God who understands the language of the heart. Nor should we ever engage in any pursuit in which it would be wrong for us thus to seek and expect the Divine direction, assistance, and blessing. There was an immediate answer to his prayer; for the seed of Jacob never sought the God of Jacob in vain.

### **Nehemiah 2:9**

**Vs. 9-18:** When Nehemiah had considered the matter, he told the Jews that God had put it into his heart to build the wall of Jerusalem. He does not undertake to do it without them. By stirring up ourselves and one another to that which is good, we strengthen ourselves and one another for it. We are weak in our duty, when we are cold and careless.

### **Nehemiah 2:19**

**Vs. 19, 20:** The enmity of the serpent's seed against the cause of Christ is confined to no age or nation. The application to ourselves is plain. The church of God asks for our help. Is it not desolate, and exposed to assaults? Does the consideration of its low estate cause you any grief? Let

not business, pleasure, or the support of a party so engage attention, as that Zion and her welfare shall be nothing to you.

## CHAPTER 3

### *The rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.*

#### **Nehemiah 3:1**

The work was divided, so that every one might know what he had to do, and mind it, with a desire to excellencies; yet without contention, or separate interests. No strife appears among them, but which should do most for the public good. Every Israelite should lend a hand toward the building up of Jerusalem. Let not nobles think any thing below them, by which they may advance the good of their country. Even some females helped forward the work. Some repaired over against their houses, and one repaired over against his chamber. When a general good work is to be done, each should apply himself to that part which is within his reach. If every one will sweep before his own door, the street will be clean; if every one will mend one, we shall all be mended. Some that had first done helped their fellows. The walls of Jerusalem, in heaps of rubbish, represent the desperate state of the world around, while the number and malice of those who hindered the building, give some faint idea of the enemies we have to contend with, while executing the work of God. Every one must begin at home; for it is by getting the work of God advanced in our own souls that we shall best contribute to the good of the church of Christ. May the Lord thus stir up the hearts of his people, to lay aside their petty disputes, and to disregard their worldly interests, compared with building the walls of Jerusalem, and defending the cause of truth and godliness against the assaults of avowed enemies.

## CHAPTER 4

*Opposition of Sanballat and others. (1-6) The designs of the adversaries. (7-15) Nehemiah's precautions. (16-23)*

### **Nehemiah 4:1**

**Vs. 1-6:** Many a good work has been looked upon with contempt by proud and haughty scorers. Those who disagree in almost every thing, will unite in persecution. Nehemiah did not answer these fools according to their folly, but looked up to God by prayer. God's people have often been a despised people, but he hears all the slights that are put upon them, and it is their comfort that he does so. Nehemiah had reason to think that the hearts of those sinners were desperately hardened, else he would not have prayed that their sins might never be blotted out. Good work goes on well, when people have a mind to it. The reproaches of enemies should quicken us to our duty, not drive us from it.

### **Nehemiah 4:7**

**Vs. 7-15:** The hindering good work is what bad men aim at, and promise themselves success in; but good work is God's work, and it shall prosper. God has many ways of bringing to light, and so of bringing to naught, the devices and designs of his church's enemies. If our enemies cannot frighten us from duty, or deceive us into sin, they cannot hurt us. Nehemiah put himself and his cause under the Divine protection. It was the way of this good man, and should be our way. All his cares, all his griefs, all his fears, he spread before God. Before he used any means, he made his prayer to God. Having prayed, he set a watch against the enemy. If we think to secure ourselves by prayer, without watchfulness, we are slothful, and tempt God; if by watchfulness, without prayer, we are proud, and slight God: either way, we forfeit his protection. God's care of our safety, should engage and encourage us to go on with vigor in our duty. As soon as a danger is over, let us return to our work, and trust God another time.

**Nehemiah 4:16**

**Vs. 16-23:** We must watch always against spiritual enemies, and not expect that our warfare will be over till our work is ended. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit, which we ought to have always at hand, and never to have to seek for it, either in our labors, or in our conflicts, as Christians. Every true Christian is both a laborer and a soldier, working with one hand, and fighting with the other. Good work is likely to go on with success, when those who labor in it, make a business of it. And Satan fears to assault the watchful Christian; or, if attacked, the Lord fights for him. Thus must we wait to the close of life, never putting off our armor till our work and warfare are ended; then we shall be welcomed to the rest and joy of our Lord.

## CHAPTER 5

*The Jews complain of grievances. (1-5) Nehemiah redresses the grievances. (6-13) Nehemiah's forbearance. (14-19)*

### **Nehemiah 5:1**

**Vs. 1-5:** Men prey upon their fellow-creatures: by despising the poor they reproach their Maker. Such conduct is a disgrace to any, but who can sufficiently abhor it when adopted by professing Christians? With compassion for the oppressed, we should lament the hardships which many in the world are groaning under; putting our souls into their souls' stead, and remembering in our prayers and succors those who are burdened. But let those who show no mercy, expect judgment without mercy.

### **Nehemiah 5:6**

**Vs. 6-13:** Nehemiah knew that, if he built Jerusalem's walls ever so high, so thick, or so strong, the city could not be safe while there were abuses. The right way to reform men's lives, is to convince their consciences. If you walk in the fear of God, you will not be either covetous of worldly gain, or cruel toward your brethren. Nothing exposes religion more to reproach, than the worldliness and hard-heartedness of the professors of it. Those that rigorously insist upon their right, with a very ill grace try to persuade others to give up theirs. In reasoning with selfish people, it is good to contrast their conduct with that of others who are liberal; but it is best to point to His example, who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich, 2 Corinthians 8:9. They did according to promise. Good promises are good things, but good performances are better.

### **Nehemiah 5:14**

**Vs. 14-19:** Those who truly fear God, will not dare to do any thing cruel or unjust. Let all who are in public places remember that they are so placed to do good, not to enrich themselves. Nehemiah mentions it to God in prayer, not as if he had merited any favor from God, but to show that he

depended upon God only, to make up to him what he had lost and laid out for his honor. Nehemiah evidently spake and acted as one that knew himself to be a sinner. He did not mean to claim a reward as of debt, but in the manner that the Lord rewards a cup of cold water given to a disciple for his sake. The fear and love of God in the heart, and true love of the brethren, will lead to every good work. These are proper evidences of justifying faith; and our reconciled God will look upon persons of this character for good, according to all they have done for his people.



## CHAPTER 6

*Sanballat's plot to hinder Nehemiah. (1-9) False prophets try to frighten Nehemiah. (10-14) The wall finished, Treachery of some among the Jews. (15-19)*

### **Nehemiah 6:1**

**Vs. 1-9:** Let those who are tempted to idle merry meetings by vain companions, thus answer the temptation, We have work to do, and must not neglect it. We must never suffer ourselves to be overcome, by repeated urgency, to do anything sinful or imprudent; but when attacked with the same temptation, must resist it with the same reason and resolution. It is common for that which is desired only by the malicious, to be falsely represented by them as desired by the many. But Nehemiah knew at what they aimed, he not only denied that such things were true, but that they were reported; he was better known than to be thus suspected. We must never omit any known duty for fear it should be misconstrued; but, while we keep a good conscience, let us trust God with our good name. God's people, though loaded with reproach, are not really villainy so low in reputation as some would have them thought to be. Nehemiah lifted up his heart to Heaven in a short prayer. When, in our Christian work and warfare, we enter upon any service or conflict, this is a good prayer, I have such a duty to do, such a temptation to grapple with; now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. Every temptation to draw us from duty, should quicken us the more to duty.

### **Nehemiah 6:10**

**Vs. 10-14:** The greatest mischief our enemies can do us, is, to frighten us from our duty, and to lead us to do what is sinful. Let us never decline a good work, never do a bad one. We ought to try all advice, and to reject what is contrary to the word of God. Every man should study to be consistent. Should I, a professed Christian, called to be a saint, a child of God, a member of Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost, should I be covetous, sensual, proud, or envious? Should I yield to impatience, discontent, or anger? Should I be slothful, unbelieving, or unmerciful? What effects will such conduct have upon others? All that God has done for us,

or by us, or given to us, should lead us to watchfulness, self-denial, and diligence. Next to the sinfulness of sin, we should dread the scandal.

 **Nehemiah 6:15**

**Vs. 15-19:** The wall was begun and finished in fifty-two days, though they rested on the Sabbaths. A great deal of work may be done in a little time, if we set about it in earnest, and keep close to it. See the mischief of marrying with strangers. When men once became akin to Tobiah, they soon became sworn to him. A sinful love leads to a sinful league. The enemy of souls employs many instruments, and forms many projects, to bring reproach on the active servants of God, or to take them from their work. But we should follow the example of Him who laid down his life for the sheep. Those that simply cleave to the Lord and his work will be supported.

## CHAPTER 7

*The city committed to Hananiah. (1-4) Register of those that first returned. (5-73)*

### <KOT> **Nehemiah 7:1**

**Vs. 1-4:** Nehemiah, having finished the wall, returned to the Persian court, and came to Jerusalem again with a new commission. The public safety depends on every one's care to guard himself and his family against sin.

### <KOT> **Nehemiah 7:5**

**Vs. 5-73:** Nehemiah knew that the safety of a city, under God, depends more upon the inhabitants than upon its walls. Every good gift and every good work are from above. God gives knowledge, he gives grace; all is of him, and therefore all must be to him. What is done by human prudence, must be ascribed to the direction of Divine Providence. But woe to those who turn back from the Lord, loving this present world! and happy those who dedicate themselves, and their substance, to his service and glory!

## CHAPTER 8

*The reading and expounding the law. (1-8) The people called upon to be joyful. (9-12) The feast of tabernacles, The joy of the people. (13-18)*

### Nehemiah 8:1

**Vs. 1-8:** Sacrifices were to be offered only at the door of the temple; but praying and preaching were, and are, services of religion, as acceptably performed in one place as in another. Masters of families should bring their families with them to the public worship of God. Women and children have souls to save, and are therefore to acquaint themselves with the word of God, and to attend on the means of grace. Little ones, as they come to reason, must be trained up in religion. Ministers when they go to the pulpit, should take their Bibles with them; Ezra did so. Thence they must fetch their knowledge; according to that rule they must speak, and must show that they do so. Reading the Scriptures in religious assemblies is an ordinance of God, whereby he is honored, and his church edified. Those who hear the word, should understand it, else it is to them but an empty sound of words. It is therefore required of teachers that they explain the word, and give the sense of it. Reading is good, and preaching is good, but expounding makes reading the better understood, and preaching the more convincing. It has pleased God in almost every age of the church to raise up, not only those who have preached the gospel, but also those who have given their views of Divine truth in writing; and though many who have attempted to explain Scripture, have darkened counsel by words without knowledge, yet the labors of others are of excellencies use. All that we hear must, however, be brought to the test of Scripture. They heard readily, and minded every word. The word of God demands attention. If through carelessness we let much slip in hearing, there is danger that through forgetfulness we shall let all slip after hearing.

### Nehemiah 8:9

**Vs. 9-12:** It was a good sign that their hearts were tender, when they heard the words of the law. The people were to send portions to those for whom nothing was prepared. It is the duty of a religious feast, as well as of a

religious fast, to draw out the soul to the hungry; God's bounty should make us bountiful. We must not only give to those that offer themselves, but send to those out of sight. Their strength consisted in joy in the Lord. The better we understand God's word, the more comfort we find in it; the darkness of trouble arises from the darkness of ignorance.

### **Nehemiah 8:13**

**Vs. 13-18:** They found written in the law about the feast of tabernacles. Those who diligently search the Scriptures, find things written there which they have forgotten. This feast of tabernacles was a representation of the believer's tabernacle state in this world, and a type of the holy joy of the gospel church. The conversion of the nations to the faith of Christ, is foretold under the figure of this feast, <sup><3846></sup>Zechariah 14:16. True religion will render us strangers and pilgrims upon earth. We read and hear the word acceptably and profitably, when we do according to what is written therein; when what appears to be our duty is revived, after it has been neglected. They minded the substance; else the ceremony had been of no use. They did it, rejoicing in God and his goodness. These are the means which the Spirit of God crowns with success, in bringing the hearts of sinners to tremble and to become humbled before God. But those are enemies to their own growth in holiness, who always indulge sorrow, even for sin, and put away from them the consolations tendered by the word and Spirit of God.

## CHAPTER 9

*A solemn fast. (1-3) Prayer and confession of sin. (4-38)*

### Nehemiah 9:1

**Vs. 1-3:** The word will direct and quicken prayer, for by it the Spirit helps our infirmities in prayer. The careful study of God's word will more and more discover to us our own sinfulness, and the plenteousness of his salvation; thus it calls us to mourn for sin, and to rejoice in him. Every discovery of the truth of God, should render us more unwearied in attendance on his sacred word, and on his worship.

### Nehemiah 9:4

**Vs. 4-38:** The summary of their prayers we have here upon record. Much more, no doubt, was said. Whatever ability we have to do any thing in the way of duty, we are to serve and glorify God according to the utmost of it. When confessing our sins, it is good to notice the mercies of God, that we may be the more humbled and ashamed. The dealings of the Lord showed his goodness and long-suffering, and the hardness of their hearts. The testimony of the prophets was the testimony of the Spirit in the prophets, and it was the Spirit of Christ in them. They spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and what they said is to be received accordingly. The result was, wonder at the Lord's mercies, and the feeling that sin had brought them to their present state, from which nothing but unmerited love could rescue them. And is not their conduct a specimen of human nature? Let us study the history of our land, and our own history. Let us recollect our advantages from childhood, and ask what were our first returns? Let us frequently do so, that we may be kept humble, thankful, and watchful. Let all remember that pride and obstinacy are sins which ruin the soul. But it is often as hard to persuade the broken-hearted to hope, as formerly it was to bring them to fear. Is this thy case? Behold this sweet promise, A God ready to pardon! Instead of keeping away from God under a sense of unworthiness, let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. He is a God ready to pardon.

## CHAPTER 10

*The covenant, Those who signed it. (1-31) Their engagement to sacred rites. (32-39)*

### **Nehemiah 10:1**

**Vs. 1-31:** Conversion is separating from the course and custom of this world, devoting ourselves to the conduct directed by the word of God. When we bind ourselves to do the commandments of God, it is to do all his commandments, and to look to him as the Lord, and our Lord.

### **Nehemiah 10:32**

**Vs. 32-39:** Having covenanted against the sins of which they had been guilty, they obliged themselves to observe the duties they had neglected. We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well. Let not any people expect the blessing of God, unless they keep up public worship. It is likely to go well with our houses, when care is taken that the work of God's house goes on well. When every one helps, and every one gives, though but little, toward a good work, the whole will come to be a large sum. We must do what we can in works of piety and charity; and whatever state we are placed in, cheerfully perform our duty to God, which will be the surest way to ease and liberty. As the ordinances of God are the appointed means of support to our souls, the believer will not grudge the expense; yet most people leave their souls to starve.

## CHAPTER 11

*The distribution of the people.*

### **Nehemiah 11:1**

In all ages, men have preferred their own ease and advantage to the public good. Even the professors of religion too commonly seek their own, and not the things of Christ. Few have had such attachment to holy things and holy places, as to renounce pleasure for their sake. Yet surely, our souls should delight to dwell where holy persons and opportunities of spiritual improvement most abound. If we have not this love to the city of our God, and to every thing that assists our communion with the Savior, how shall we be willing to depart hence; to be absent from the body, that we may be present with the Lord? To the carnal-minded, the perfect holiness of the New Jerusalem would be still harder to bear than the holiness of God's church on earth. Let us seek first the favor of God, and his glory; let us study to be patient, contented, and useful in our several stations, and wait, with cheerful hope, for admission into the holy city of God.



## CHAPTER 12

*The priests and Levites that returned. (1-26) The dedication of the wall. (27-43) The officers of the temple settled. (44-47)*

### <121> **Nehemiah 12:1**

**Vs. 1-26:** It is a debt we owe to faithful ministers, to remember our guides, who have spoken to us the word of God. It is good to know what our godly predecessors were, that we may learn what we should be.

### <122> **Nehemiah 12:27**

**Vs. 27-43:** All our cities, all our houses, must have holiness to the Lord written upon them. The believer should undertake nothing which he does not dedicate to the Lord. We are concerned to cleanse our hands, and purify our hearts, when any work for God is to pass through them. Those that would be employed to sanctify others, must sanctify themselves, and set themselves apart for God. To those who are sanctified, all their creature-comforts and enjoyments are made holy. The people greatly rejoiced. All that share in public mercies, ought to join in public thanksgivings.

### <124> **Nehemiah 12:44**

**Vs. 44-47:** When the solemnities of a thanksgiving day leave such impressions on ministers and people, that both are more careful and cheerful in doing their duty, they are indeed acceptable to the Lord, and turn to good account. And whatever we do, must be purified by the blood of sprinkling, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, or it cannot be acceptable to God.

## CHAPTER 13

*Nehemiah turns out the mixed multitude. (1-9) Nehemiah's reform in the house of God. (10-14) Sabbath-breaking restrained. (15-22) The dismissal of strange wives. (23-31)*

### **Nehemiah 13:1**

**Vs. 1-9:** Israel was a peculiar people, and not to mingle with the nations. See the benefit of publicly reading the word of God; when it is duly attended to, it discovers to us sin and duty, good and evil, and shows wherein we have erred. We profit, when we are thus wrought upon to separate from evil. Those that would drive sin out of their hearts, the living temples, must throw out its household stuff, and all the provision made for it; and take away all the things that are the food and fuel of lust; this is really to mortify it. When sin is cast out of the heart by repentance, let the blood of Christ be applied to it by faith, then let it be furnished with the graces of God's Spirit, for every good work.

### **Nehemiah 13:10**

**Vs. 10-14:** If a sacred character will not keep men from setting an evil example, it must not shelter any one from deserved blame and punishment. The Levites had been wronged; their portions had not been given them. They were gone to get livelihoods for themselves and their families, for their profession would not maintain them. A maintenance not sufficient, makes a poor ministry. The work is neglected, because the workmen are. Nehemiah laid the fault upon the rulers. Both ministers and people, who forsake religion and the services of it, and magistrates, who do not what they can to keep them to it, will have much to answer for. He delayed not to bring the Levites to their places again, and that just payment should be made. Nehemiah on every occasion looked up to God, and committed himself and all his affairs to Him. It pleased him to think that he had been of use to revive and support religion in his country. He here refers to God, not in pride, but with a humble appeal concerning his honest intention in what he had done. He prays, "Remember me;" not, Reward me. "Wipe not out my good deeds;" not, Publish them, or record them. Yet he was

rewarded, and his good deeds recorded. God does more than we are able to ask.

### **Nehemiah 13:15**

**Vs. 15-22:** The keeping holy the Lord's day forms an important object for their attention who would promote true godliness. Religion never prospers while Sabbaths are trodden under foot. No wonder there was a general decay of religion, and corruption of manners among the Jews, when they forsook the sanctuary and profaned the Sabbath. Those little consider what an evil they do, who profane the Sabbath. We must answer for the sins others are led to commit by our example. Nehemiah charges it on them as an evil thing, for so it is, proceeding from contempt of God and our own souls. He shows that Sabbath-breaking was one of the sins for which God had brought judgments upon them; and if they did not take warning, but returned to the same sins again, they had to expect further judgments. The courage, zeal, and prudence of Nehemiah in this matter, are recorded for us to do likewise; and we have reason to think, that the cure he wrought was lasting. He felt and confessed himself a sinner, who could demand nothing from God as justice, when he thus cried unto him for mercy.

### **Nehemiah 13:23**

**Vs. 23-31:** If either parent be ungodly, corrupt nature will unequalled the children to take after that one; which is a strong reason why Christians should not be unequalled yoked. In the education of children, great care should be taken about the government of their tongues; that they learn not the language of Ashdod, no impious or impure talk, no corrupt communication. Nehemiah showed the evil of these marriages. Some, more obstinate than the rest, he smote, that is, ordered them to be beaten by the officers according to the law, <sup>(1520)</sup>Deuteronomy 25:2, 3. Here are Nehemiah's prayers on this occasion. He prays, "Remember them, O my God." Lord, convince and convert them; put them in mind of what they should be and do. The best services to the public have been forgotten by those for whom they were done, therefore Nehemiah refers himself to God, to recompense him. This may well be the summary of our petitions; we need no more to make us happy than this; Remember me, O my God, for good. We may humbly hope that the Lord will remember us and our services, although, after lives of unwearied activity and usefulness, we

shall still see cause to abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes, and to cry out with Nehemiah, Spare me, O my God, according to the greatness of thy mercy.