



## EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

1, 2 Kings Sermon Series

Supports Session 7: Hope

Sermon Title: "Having Hope In Despair" (Nehemiah 1:1-11)

### Connection to 1 Kings 19:9-18

Elijah felt despair because he thought he was all alone, and his opponents were after him. He came to realize that his despair was unwarranted as God was providing for him. Nehemiah felt despair when he learned about the state of Jerusalem. His despair was laced with hope as he turned to God in prayer

### Introduction/Opening

It has long been said that we all respond to negative circumstances in one of three ways. We freeze in hopes that the negative circumstance will simply go away. We engage in flight and try to outrun whatever is after us. Or we dig in and fight. Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were torn down, and the city was vulnerable to attack. This brought great despair upon Nehemiah, but he did not let this stop him from fighting for the city and people he loved.

### Outline

#### 1. Nehemiah's Disturbing News (v. 1-4)

a) He received bad news (v. 3). Our freeze, flight, or fight response is triggered by bad news or difficult circumstances. Those who seek to faithfully follow God are not immune to experiencing difficult circumstances. Nehemiah found out that the walls of Jerusalem were down. Walls served as a means of protection and with them being in ruin, the city was vulnerable to attack and takeover.

Some within the congregation today might have received bad news recently. It could have come from a doctor, and you received a negative diagnosis. The bill collectors are still calling, and they threatened you. The wayward child, whom you have been praying for, has still not reached out and you do not know what to do next. We are all going to experience things like this. How we respond to negative circumstances becomes key.

b) He experienced despair (v. 4). Despair, if allowed to control us, will lead to a sense of hopelessness. The Bible indicates that Nehemiah was on the edge of hopelessness. He sat down and began to weep.

But Nehemiah did not stay in this position. He did not allow his circumstances to hinder his ongoing relationship with God. Instead, he used the bad news to lead him to fast and pray. These two actions show continued activity and not a one-time event. Nehemiah was not going to freeze, and he was not going to flee the setting either. Instead, he was going to engage in the fight, and he was calling on the Lord in prayer.

## 2. Nehemiah's Hopeful Prayer (v. 5-11)

a) He acknowledged God's character (v. 5). We all tend to turn towards someone or something when things get difficult. Some can lose themselves in the computer or work. Some can turn towards social media or rally friends to their cause. What did Nehemiah do when he received bad news? He turned towards God and trusted Him to respond.

Nehemiah knew that he was not praying to a man-made God. Instead, he was praying to the "God of the heavens, the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant." This same God makes Himself available to us. It is okay to mourn over bad news, but we need to let this drive us to pray in the same way that Nehemiah prayed.

b) He asked for help (v. 6). We desire someone's full attention when we ask them for help. We would like for them to put down the cell phone, turn the television off, and turn towards us. We want them to engage with us.

Nehemiah asked God to hear his prayers. He asked God to see the one who was talking to Him. If we were to read Nehemiah 2, we would see exactly how God answered Nehemiah's prayers. God was aware and listening. Since He was aware and listened to Nehemiah's prayers, we can trust that He will hear our prayers too.

c) He admitted sinful behavior (v. 6-7). A biblical definition of sin is to miss the mark and we have all missed the mark of God's perfect standard. Nehemiah did not want the sin of the nation of Israel to hinder his prayers in any way. Therefore, he openly confessed them and did not offer any excuses for the sin.

We can experience negative circumstances because of no fault of our own. But we can also experience negative circumstances because of sinful behavior. If our negative circumstance is because of sinful behavior, then we can follow the model that Nehemiah set: Call out to God, Confess our sin. He will restore us and give us the hope we desire.

d) He anticipated the future (v.11). Nehemiah knew that he had to go to the king to request time off to repair the walls of Jerusalem. The king did not have the grant the request. Therefore, Nehemiah asked God for success. This was a very specific prayer and God granted the request in chapter 2. Let's not hesitate to be specific in our prayers.

## Conclusion

Even though Nehemiah received disparaging news, he did not allow this to stop him. We would be wise to follow his model and allow the despair to push us towards God.

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