

WEEK ONE

The Heart of a Leader • Nehemiah 1:1-11

The Scholar's Corner: Susa (the Shushan of the Bible) was one of the four capitals of the Persian Empire. Archaeologists have found the Apadana," or throne hall, where Nehemiah would have stood. The remnant mentioned here refers to the small group of Jews who had returned to Judah but remained under the thumb of local Persian governors, facing constant reproach (*cherpah* in Hebrew), which implies a loss of status and divine favor in the eyes of their neighbors.

The Heart of the Matter: Nehemiah's first move is to mourn. He recognizes that the physical ruins are a symptom of a spiritual problem.

1. The Historical Context (445 BC)

Nehemiah holds the position of Cupbearer. This wasn't just pouring wine; he was the final line of defense against assassination. He was a high-ranking official who held the King's absolute trust, making him one of the most powerful Jews in the diaspora.

2. The Bad News (vv. 1-3)

The walls are broken and the gates are burned. In the ancient Near East, a city without walls was a city without a soul. It signified that the people were vulnerable and their God appeared weak to the surrounding nations.

3. The Reaction (v. 4)

Nehemiah sits, weeps, fasts, and prays. He allows the brokenness of the world to break his own heart before he tries to fix it.

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4. The Prayer of Nehemiah (vv. 5-11)

Nehemiah uses a Covenant Prayer structure:

- Adoration (v. 5): "the great and awesome God"
- Confession (vv. 6-7): "I and my father's house have sinned." He takes corporate responsibility.
- Remembrance (vv. 8-10): He reminds God of the promises in Deuteronomy 30.
- Supplication (v. 11): He asks for "mercy in the sight of this man" (the King).

Discussion Questions:

1. What "broken walls" in our community is God calling you to notice?
2. Why is "sitting and weeping" a necessary first step before "rising and building"?
3. How can we use God's own Word as a script for our prayers?
4. How does Nehemiah's secular position serve God's sacred purposes?