Cupbearer & Condition of Walls

Nehemiah 1
Timeline of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah

Israel
- Northern Kingdom
  - Scattered by Assyrians

Judah
- Southern Kingdom
  - Babylonian Exile

Key Events:
- 930 BC: Division of Israel into two kingdoms
- 732 BC: Assyrians conquer Israel
- 606 BC: Return from Babylonian Exile
God had punished the Jews by exile to Babylon due to their apostasy and sins ... yet by His grace, He would bring them again to Himself.

The Persian King, Cyrus, who overran Babylon allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem.
Historical Background

3 groups of returnees:

i. Zerubabbel
   – rebuilt the temple

ii. Ezra – “cleansed” the people: intermarriage

iii. Nehemiah
   – rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem;
   together with Ezra, reformed the people in the Word
Structure of book

2 basic sections

Neh 1-7  Rebuilding the wall
Neh 8-13 Reforming the people
1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.
And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.”
Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.

For I was the king’s cupbearer.

Nehemiah: Yahweh comforts a man of God

He wants to know about the city of God, the people of God and their condition and was concerned to want to do something about it.
A leader: the king’s cupbearer.

- Final line for safety of king
- 3rd most important man in the Persia

A man of God serving a pagan empire

- Became governor of province
- Trusted to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls
- A leader of the Israelites
A passionate heart for God

16X Nehemiah says “My God …”

Nehemiah’s leadership flows from his relationship with God.

His leadership doesn’t bring people to him but moves people to worship God.
It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 

that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 

And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.”
Hanani’s report

Hanani: חֲנָנִי
God is gracious

Hanani’s report → Nehemiah

People: distressed and shamed
Jerusalem: walls still broken;
  burnt gates not replaced

When faced with distressing situations,
we sometimes forget God is already at work!
Our God is a good God who cares for us and works out all situations for our good. Nehemiah was well positioned to do something about the situation.
So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

And I said: “I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, ...
Nehemiah lived before the Cross.

Lessons from Nehemiah’s prayer:

a) Began with adoration and not accusation
   He is a great and awesome God
   When they fall into distressing situations
   many usually accuse God of being unloving, inattentive, and unfaithful.
New Covenant:
God's goodness is unconditional.

What do I do? I love Him.

Loving Him and keeping His commandments:
not the CAUSE, but the MARK,
of His steadfast love and grace.
...and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father’s house and I have sinned.

7 We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.
b) Confession of sin and not covering sin

Confession: agreeing with God about what He says about our sins.

Confession of sins:

We proclaim that

i. God has forgiven us
ii. The power of sin over us is broken
iii. Christ has set us free and given us freely His righteousness
Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.’
Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”
Nehemiah – prayer

c) Petitioned without presumption but with humility and supplication;
Marked by humility and confidence, not arrogance.
He is confident of who God is, the truth of God’s Word, the promises of God.
Twice he says, “O Lord, please be attentive (hear us) ...”
Nehemiah’s prayer was for favour with the King.

and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”
The objective of Nehemiah is not simply to build a wall nor to hang a gate but to secure the people of God.

The real objective: a people who are secure so that their distress is removed and shame shed.
God’s sovereignty and man’s response to His initiatives are not two contradictory poles.

They are actually two threads woven into the fabric of life.
Confidence in sovereignty of God did not lead to passivity and carelessness.

The same God who has ordained the end will ordain the means.

As we embrace the means our trust is that God will bring it to the proper end
- Man proposes God disposes.
Cupbearer, at right hand of King.
Drink the King's cup to test it for poison - willing to die if necessary.
Jesus too sat at right hand of Father, drank the cup the Father had for Him and died
“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”
Hearing of condition of Jerusalem, Nehemiah wept openly.
Jesus too wept over Jerusalem (Lk 19:41-42)

b) Wept over people’s condition

4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days;
He left his station to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls. Likewise Jesus gave up His position in heaven to for our salvation and free us from the clutches of the enemy.
Nehemiah had to overcome the schemes of his enemies to rebuild the walls. Jesus too defeated Satan on the cross, including sin and death.

d) Defeated enemies

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, (Neh 2: 19)
e) Re-established covenant

2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. (Neh 8:2)
Before going back to king, Nehemiah, along with Ezra, re-established the reading of God’s word and set the priesthood up again so that all would be done according to God's covenant. Before going back to the Father, Jesus established the church and the new covenant.
Nehemiah — a shadow

f) Went back to the King

6 But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. (Neh 13:6)

Nehemiah returned to the King as he had accomplished his initial task. Jesus too ascended to the Father after He finished His work.
f) Returned (Neh 13:6-9)  
Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, and I came to Jerusalem and ...therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room.  
Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms;  

2nd coming of Jesus leads to cleansing of Israel:  
Zech 12: 10 - recognize Him as the One they pierced  
Zech 13: 1 - In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.
Jesus initiated the true Sabbath rest in Himself: *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* (Matt 11:28)

**g) Enforced Sabbath Rest**

Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath. ...they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. (Neh 13:18,22)

Nehemiah – a shadow
Nehemiah rebuilt the walls for their salvation. Jesus is our salvation → our wall, our gate. We are IN Christ - Salvation - Divine Nature - Sonship no more distress nor shame