



**KING'S
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EDINBURGH

2. Getting God's Promises

Nehemiah 1: 4-11

Nehemiah was deeply rooted in the promises of God. This meant that when he received terrible news he was able to respond with a prayer packed full of promises. God wants us to be able to do the same.

Nehemiah starts by focusing on God. When we begin praying by thinking about ourselves or our problems we will probably get depressed but when we focus on God our confidence grows because of how good and great He is. George Müller: “I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord.”

Nehemiah 1:5 is about God’s identity and character:

- “LORD” = “YHWH” – the personal name by which God had revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush, at the start of his rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 3:14).
- “Great and awesome” refers to the mighty acts YHWH did in the Exodus: plagues, parting the Red Sea (Exodus 7-14).
- “Covenant and steadfast love” recalls the deal that YHWH made with Israel after He’d brought them out of Egypt and what He said about Himself (Exodus 19-40 and 34:6)

This shows, as Bill Hybels puts it, that God is willing and able to answer our prayers.

Exodus isn’t the only book Nehemiah had been reading, as 1:8-9 shows. He quotes Deuteronomy 30:1-4. Nehemiah is desperate for Jerusalem to be restored, but what basis does he have for asking God to do this? The promise God had made.

If you want to build your life on solid rock, if you need a shining light to guide you through darkness and confusion, if you want your life to count in the final assessment, you need to know the promises of God that He has given us in His book – He does wonderful things through those who know and believe them.

What promises do we have today? They have been upgraded! The Exodus and God's covenant with Israel, great as they were, are signposts to the ultimate expression of God's strength and love, and commitment to His creation: Jesus coming to live with us, die for us, rise for us.

Where the Exodus was a story of God's mighty strength freeing a people from slavery to Pharaoh, Jesus triumphed over the even greater forces of sin and death to free us from them (e.g. John 11:25, 12:46).

Nehemiah looked forward to the rebuilding of Jerusalem for God to gather His people there, so now Jesus is building His church all over the world and living among by His Holy Spirit (Matthew 16:18, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 5:25-27). This is what God is doing on the earth today, the fulfilment of all His promises, achieved by His Son (2 Corinthians 1:20).

How do we get the promises?

Get them in your head

You need to read and hear the Bible: be part of a church where they will be taught and explained, spend time yourself reading through to find them.

Put key promises (about God's purposes, or ones that He highlights especially to you) in places where you will see them. Especially, make sure that they are close to hand when you are praying...

Get them in your prayers

Nehemiah's pattern is great: "YHWH, You said you would do this. So, please, do it!" Prayer doesn't start with us, it's not a blank page or a silence that we have to fill: God has spoken through His promises, we are responding to this.

Describe what you think it will look like for God to fulfil the promise you're thinking about. Consider what you could do to work with Him on it. Simply say it to Him! The Holy Spirit can work through this and speak to you through them.

Get them in your actions

You only prove that a promise is true when you test it out. Acting on the promises is what God them to us for. This can be part of our arguing, wrestling even, with God and His promises. Many heroes of faith had long struggles to see breakthrough. They prayed, acted in faith, nothing happened. So they prayed again, took action again – and wouldn't give up until God gave them breakthrough. They believed Hebrews 10:23, "He who promises is faithful."

This is our great hope! Nehemiah was a great guy, highly educated and hugely able, but he knew that the task before him was too great – he could only rely on YHWH, the God who fulfils His promises. God is the hero of the story, the one who not only makes the promises but fulfils them all too. We love it when people do this – in real life and in movies - because we are people in a story that will end perfectly. We are creatures made to trust in the great Promise-Keeper, Jesus Christ – who once died but now lives forever, just as He promised, and will return to make all things new, just as He promised. His name is "Faithful and true" (Revelation 19:11).

As we search and listen out for the promises of God, as we tell them to ourselves in memorable ways, and to Him in prayer, and as we act according to them, we will see how faithful He is, and our lives will be lived in accordance with His will.

Questions:

- What did learn about God from Luke's preach?
- How can having God's promises change our response to bad news, and affect our prayer life? Does anyone have examples of this happening for them?
- Is any promise in the Bible legitimate for us to claim? How can we avoid being individualistic about the promises God has made?
- What dominates your prayer life? What can you do to get more of God's promises in there?
- What response did you feel God was calling you to make on Sunday? Luke mentioned repentance for not living in line with God's promises, and fresh faith to believe what God has said in the season you're in.



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