

Nehemiah

The scriptures tell of many individuals and their accomplishments. Some demonstrate the unrighteousness that should be removed or kept from our being. Some of them demonstrate the virtues that God desires. One such righteous individual is Nehemiah, the subject of an Old Testament book named for him. Nehemiah was, above all else, a God-fearing and prayerful man. Three times he asked God to remember him for good (Nehemiah 5:19; 13:14; and 13:31). He stayed in Persia long after Cyrus and Darius had released the captives. His thoughts were always with the Living God, God's people, and the promise God made to restore Jerusalem. He dedicated his life to serving and asked God to use Him to accomplish the security of Israel and Jerusalem.

Scripture defines the characteristics of a mature child of God. *"Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply **moral excellence**, and in your moral excellence, **knowledge**, and in your knowledge, **self-control**, and in your self-control, **perseverance**, and in your perseverance, **godliness**, and in your godliness, **brotherly kindness**, and in your brotherly kindness, **love**"* (2 Peter 1:5-7). Nehemiah was a man who possessed all of these characteristics.

Moral Excellence: King Artaxerxes trusted Nehemiah to determine how long to be gone, gave him large amounts of money, and letters to obtain all materials needed. The king trusted his life to his cupbearer, Nehemiah, and now trusted him to secure a city. The king's actions spoke louder than words in praise of Nehemiah, a man of high moral excellence (Nehemiah 2:1-8).

Knowledge: Nehemiah demonstrated knowledge about God, God's people, God's law, politics, construction, economy, and leadership. His education allowed him a position in the court of the king and to safeguard the king's food and drink. As a Jew, he knew the Law of Moses. His experience prepared him for the jobs God needed him to do in Jerusalem. He surveyed the city's walls and led the people to repair them while under attack by their enemies. He helped Ezra restore the temple services and ended injustice by the leaders. He could have enforced many of the changes upon the people since the king had sent troops with him. Instead, he chose to use the Law of Moses to teach and encourage the people to correct their error.

Self-control: Nehemiah demonstrated patience and self-control in all that he planned and accomplished. He prepared to ask the king for help for Jerusalem and waited until the opportunity came (Nehemiah 2:1-8). He could have retaliated against those who hindered the building project, but he waited and obtained a lawful solution from the king (Nehemiah 4, 6:1-14). He could have arrested the unjust and distributed their property, but he reasoned with them to repent (Nehemiah 5:1-13).

Perseverance: Facing many setbacks, Nehemiah pressed on to the goals set before him. Rebuilding the walls, restoring lawful worship in the temple, restoring justice and equality among the people were some of the goals toward God's promise to restore Israel to Jerusalem.

Godliness: The prayers offered, the reforms to honor the Sabbath, enforcing God's marriage requirement, and expelling foreigners, all show a zeal for God. Nehemiah is a prime example of a faithful shepherd leading God's people.

Brotherly Kindness: As governor, Nehemiah faced many problems. Some of the leaders of the people were abusing the people by forcing them into bond service and demanding high interest on money

needed for food, the king's tax, and other necessities. Both groups were brethren. The Law condemned charging a fellow Israelite interest and selling each other into slavery. Although very angry, he persuaded those at fault to forgive the interest and release the bond servitude. Nehemiah was buying the "contracts" on those sold into slavery outside of Israel and hosted more than 150 people daily for meals (Nehemiah 5)

Love: (ἀγάπη agapē) This love is deeper than brotherly love and affection. It is the John 3:16 love that God and His son had to cause Jesus to give himself up to the cross. It is the unselfish love that causes one to do anything possible for another. It is the love Jesus had when He "set the example" by washing the disciple's feet. It is the love that Nehemiah showed when he did everything, and more, that he asked the people to do (Nehemiah 5:14-18).

People often ask, "Can we stand for God as Joshua did?" A better question might be, "Can we demonstrate righteousness as Nehemiah did?"