



One other mark of a person having God's good hand on and with them is then they not only have a godly reputation, ask godly questions and show godly concern, but they give a godly response to life. What was Nehemiah's response to the report he heard and the concerns it gave him? In the last part of verse 4 we are told Nehemiah "*fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.*" In other words, Nehemiah humbled himself before God and fervently prayed to Him for guidance and help with the very dismal discouraging report he had heard. When you have the good hand of God with you and on you, you live with a godly response to all the challenges of life, always giving matters over to God in prayer, pleading His mercy and help, and then also giving yourself over, seeing where you might be able to help and make a difference for God and good to the praise of the Lord and for the wellbeing of His church and kingdom. Next time we will study more the prayer of Nehemiah as given in chapter 1 and then the rest of the book tells us about the work of Nehemiah as servant of God having the good hand of God on and with him.

Do you have the good hand of God on you and with you? Is that what you want too, more than anything else? How do you get the good hand of God on you and with you rather than the righteous hand of God just simply crushing you for your sins and sweeping you off in eternal condemnation and destruction as we only always deserve in and of ourselves? Oh, it is by looking to the far greater than Nehemiah, namely, to Jesus Christ the Lord. The good hand of God was on Him in all His saving work as Saviour of sinners. Looking to Him and always depending on Him and His saving mercy and help, God's good hand may and will be upon us and with us and work through us even! Jesus the Saviour experienced the hand of God's judgment and wrath in the sinner's place that the good hand of the Lord might be on and with sinners like us, even for as many as repent and believe on Him. Nehemiah, in his day, looked and trusted in the promised Messiah, and how the good hand of the God of heaven was upon him and used him for the keeping and upbuilding of God's church and kingdom in his day and for the future, even for the fulfillment of the promises of Christ's coming. Oh, how God can and will use His people with His good hand on them! Will you be a person with God's good hand on you and with you or will you live without this greatest of all blessings? Amen.

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November 25, 2007

Publication No.338

BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America

Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)

HAVING THE GOOD HAND OF GOD ON YOU

Last week we had an introductory message on the book of Nehemiah as a whole. Now we begin a study of the book itself. Hear the Word of the Lord in Nehemiah 1:1-4.

"The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, [says Nehemiah] that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."

In these opening verses we now meet the man with the good hand of the Lord upon him whom God would so wonderfully use for the furtherance of His Church and kingdom. We find out from verse 1 that Nehemiah received a visit while he was serving at his post as special security guard at the Persian King's palace in Shushan, being the king's cupbearer. This palace was probably the winter place for the Persian kings. Nehemiah was employed by King Artaxerxes as we learn in chapter 2:1. How long Nehemiah had been servant to this king, we don't know, but we are told this king was in the twentieth year of his reign when the events here described take place. Indeed, we are told even the month that Nehemiah gets certain visitors. It was the month, Chisleu, which compared to our calendar year, is the time between mid November and December.

Who were the guests that came to visit Nehemiah, coming to him presumably when he was off duty for awhile, maybe between meals even. We are given the name of one of the men only, Hanani, and we are told he was one of Nehemiah's brothers, which from a later reference may also mean here actually a blood brother. Whatever the case, Hanani with a few others came to visit Nehemiah and their visit is important because of where they had just come from. They had been in Jerusalem, a distance of more than 1200 kilometers away, and they had seen how things were going there,

and now they wanted to report about their visit to Nehemiah. Don't forget these were days of no phone or email and no public postal system either. These men probably wanted to tell Nehemiah about their trip, not only because they knew he would be interested but perhaps Nehemiah, having reached the status he did, could be of some influence to bring help in some way.

Now let us go through the first four verses asking ourselves, 'How can you tell when a person really longs for the good hand of God on him, and is one whom God, in fact, may and will use in His service as he did also Nehemiah?' Notice from these verses the four following marks of a person with God's good hand upon and with him. For one, then you have a godly reputation. By that I mean you are known not only as a trustworthy person, but as one who is interested about the matters of God's people and church and kingdom. It is important to notice in our Scripture passage that though Nehemiah was doing so well for himself in the land of Persia, having the position of king's cupbearer, yet he comes across as one for whom the things of God are all important. How many, when they become successful in this world, let their successes distract them from the cause of the Lord. Nehemiah was known as a man definitely most interested in the things of God and his heartbeat was for the covenant people of God and their wellbeing, and the further outworking of all God's gospel promises. Are you known as a person with that kind of passion as well? Whatever your position in life, and whether still a younger person and child even or an older person getting on in years, are you known as a person, above all else, interested always in the matters of God's church and kingdom? Nehemiah had this godly reputation, and doesn't everyone who has the good hand of God on them and with them?

Notice next how when you have the good hand of the Lord on you and with you, that will show also in you asking godly questions. We are told in verse 2 how Nehemiah asks the question about the people and situation in Jerusalem. Nehemiah may have been interested in that situation also on account of extended family there perhaps, but the text suggests Nehemiah really wanted to know about the state of affairs in Jerusalem and how the people who had returned and those who had remained behind and survived the captivity were doing. You get the idea from the text his inquiry to them takes place even before they barely sit down to visit. Nehemiah's questions showed what was uppermost on his heart and mind and he wanted to know the wellbeing of the cause and people of the Lord in Jerusalem, still the city of God then and where the temple of the Lord had been rebuilt.

Are you asking godly questions and inquiries concerning not only the true gospel but in relation to all the work and cause of the Lord Jesus Christ in His Church and her ministry here on earth? Or are your questions and interests generally only about life here and now and the things of self and

this world? Even going by your questions in life, are you someone with obviously the hand of God on you, having a godly reputation and asking godly questions?

We see Nehemiah clearly having also godly concern for the people and cause of the Lord. Verse 3 gives the answer to his questions about the state of affairs in Jerusalem and it becomes clear to Nehemiah that things are not very well at all in the royal city of David. The place is in ruins still, there are lots of troubles, and the people are overall greatly discouraged and distressed. The report of these visitors was not just referring to the ruins of the city as destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar almost 140 years earlier in 586 BC and following, but now still in Nehemiah's day around 445 BC, they report that even with the temple rebuilt, the people were not doing well. There was no protection for the people in the city with broken down walls, there was so very little zeal for the true worship and ways of God, and they were a people scoffed and ridiculed by their neighbors. When Nehemiah heard this all, and you can be sure we are just given the summary statement of the miseries of the people in Jerusalem, then he is filled with godly concern. The text indicates Nehemiah is genuinely shocked by it all and genuinely caring about the dismal situation as he hears about it.

In verse 4 we see his godly concern for the glory of God and the wellbeing of His church and kingdom come to expression. What does verse 4 say? *"And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."* Nehemiah was so concerned for the glory and cause of the Lord. Do we, like Nehemiah, have and show godly concern too? Thinking today of the apostasy and waywardness and shallowness in doctrine and worship in many churches, remembering the suffering persecuted church, considering all those who turn their back on God's Word and His church, and thinking of so much division in the church, is there not so much reason for real and much godly concern also in our times? In the perilous times we live, should we not mourn more the low estate of the Christian church? When have you or I last wept on account of sad reports concerning the church or mission posts or peoples in a broken down, defeated, discouraged condition? Can you not think of reasons for weeping in connection with the church and cause of the Lord, how God's Name is so dishonoured by so many, His truth so disdained, and His people so afflicted often?

When God's good hand is on you and working with and through you, then that will show in you also living in the way of genuine godly concern. People who know God and have the Spirit of God become concerned about sin, righteousness, and judgment. You have learned by God's grace to become concerned about these things personally, and you become concerned about these matters in regards to others in your family, church, community and worldwide.