

NEHEMIAH'S HEARTACHE (Neh. 1:4)

Previously, we were with Nehemiah in the comfort and splendour of King Cyrus's winter palace in Shushan (Susa) when the news was brought to him of the calamitous condition of Jerusalem. Although he enjoyed a privileged position of being the king's winetaster, his heart and soul were very much with his fellow-Jews who had returned to the beloved city.

The Jews were taken from Jerusalem in 586 BC and it wasn't until 48 years later in 538 BC, 42,360 of them returned in the decree announced by King Cyrus. This was led by Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David. The second *aliyah* took place eighty years later in 458 BC when 5,000 men, including Ezra returned. At first, there was great excitement and anticipation of all they were hoping to achieve. However, they soon realised the dangers and obstacles awaiting them, for example, there was the opposition from certain men belonging to the ten tribes of the northern kingdom. Also, the building of the temple was a greater task than they had previously realised. And to confound matters, they allowed their own personal needs to take priority over the Lord's work. All-in-all, it was a disaster for when Nehemiah returned in 445 BC, the city of Jerusalem lay vulnerable and exposed!

And so, over one thousand miles away, Nehemiah felt so hopeless and helpless! No wonder he sank into a pit of despondency, and wept, and mourned, and fasted when he heard the devastating news. ... Is it right for a Christian to be in despair? The hymnwriter wrote, "When Satan tempts me to despair?" ... Is it a sin? Is it wrong for a believer? Jeremiah wrote of how good the Lord is towards those who wait for Him and seek after Him for great is His faithfulness (Lam. 3:23,25). ... If a Christian is in despair, is it a breach of our trust in God?

The Bible teaches us we are secure in Him, There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (I Cor. 10:13). ... That is His promise. Therefore, if we despair, are we wrong?

Some people say depression *is* wrong, and Christians should never be depressed. Some say it is a medical condition ... William Cowper, the hymnwriter, suffered from severe depression throughout his life. Joseph Scriven, - "What a Friend we have in Jesus", - may have taken his own life because of depression. ... Spurgeon constantly struggled with depression. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote an excellent book entitled "Spiritual Depression – Its Causes and Its Cures".

I think it is difficult, - if not well-nigh impossible, - to deny Christians can face what is commonly described as ‘depression’ ... but sometimes you are made to feel as if you are a failure, and as if you have strayed away from the Lord. But that is not always the case. Granted, if we head off in a direction completely contrary to how God would instruct us through His Word, - if we stubbornly commit ourselves to disobedience, - ... what do you expect for when it turns out wrong, and we become despondent, dejected, disheartened and unhappy ... well, yes, depression then is the result of our sin and turning away from God.

But look at Nehemiah ... He had not done anything wrong. He was a faithful follower of Jehovah. He was not to blame for how he felt. He had heard the devastating news about his beloved city and country, and his heart was breaking, **Neh. 1:4** And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted ... I suppose we need to define what we mean by depression for it is a general term describing a common condition. It can be from mild to severe, and its symptoms can include being overwhelmed with sadness and darkness, and a loss of interest or pleasure in pursuits we once enjoyed. It can affect our appetite, and we lose weight, we have bother sleeping ... either that, or we sleep too much. We have no energy, we feel worthless, and we have no purpose. We have difficulty thinking straight, and we might even have thought of ‘ending it all’. ... Is it wrong for a Christian to feel like that? ... Well, look at Nehemiah, - sitting down and not wanting to go anywhere, or do anything ... and weeping and mourning for days on end ... with no appetite. ... Basically, he had many of the recognised symptoms of depression.

However, here is where the subject of depression differs with the Christian, - let’s read v.4 again, **Neh. 1:4** 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.* ... The Christian has *God* to turn to, and there is nowhere you as a believer can be where the Lord is absent from your company ... and Nehemiah knew that for *he prayed!* God has promised to make for you a way to escape, so you will be upheld through the testing times, - He will never leave you nor forsake you (Heb. 13:5) ... If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell [*sheol*], behold, thou art there (Ps. 139:8). ... Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness (Is. 41:10).

Yes, depression can be brought on by unconfessed sin. It can also be a consequence of a heavy dose of self-pity, or a lack of faith. ... And yes, it can be due to a chemical imbalance ... but for the Christian, there is hope ... it is treatable for the help of the Lord is available!

I mentioned Spurgeon suffered from depression. He made no secret of it. He tried to understand it by understanding God's purpose in it so that he would actually *profit* in it. In commenting on I Peter 1 (3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls) he wrote, "when the gold knows why ... it is in the fire ... it will thank the Refiner for putting it into the crucible, and will find a sweet satisfaction even in the flames". ... That's similar to how Paul felt (II Cor. 12:9 My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness) ... and David, and Elijah, and Job, and Jonah, and Moses, and Jeremiah ... and even Jesus Himself.

But it is not a place the Lord would have us dwell alone, for He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart (Ps. 34:18), and when you are passing through the waters, and the rivers threaten to overwhelm you ... or when you feel as if you are walking through the raging fire, He promises, I will be with thee (Is. 43:2) ... And here is why ... you are precious to God for He loves you, and He has loved you long before any of the heartaches and anguish. ... It is as David wrote, Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God (Ps. 43:5). ... He loves you and He will keep on loving you. And no matter how formidable the trials become, you know within your heart you belong to Him through grace for He has called you according to His eternal purpose (Rom. 8:28), and you are sealed with His Spirit (Eph. 1:14).

Who or what, then, dares condemn you? The devil will try to accuse you for that's the kind he is, but he can never take away God's claim of ownership upon your life ... Heartache and trial cannot take it from you either, and neither can death for *already* we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us and *nothing* can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37,39). ... "Though sorrow befall us and evils oppose ... Through grace we can conquer, defeat all our foes, God leads His dear children along". ... As David struggled in the mud and mire of those desperate times, he called to the Lord and the Lord heard him, and reached down into the pit, and lifted him up and out, and set his feet upon the Rock ... "The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to his foes; That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake, I'll never, no never, no, never forsake".

And when Nehemiah was sitting weeping in despair on the floor in the beautiful palace of Susa ... alone, and with his head in his hands, - it doesn't matter where you are when it strikes, - ... he was weeping, he was mourning, he was fasting, but also, he was praying for he had the still small voice speaking within him, "Leave it there, leave it there, take your burden to the Lord and leave it there" ... And he cast his cares upon the Lord for he knew the Lord cared for him. And in his prayer, he confessed how he and his nation had "wandered far away from God" and needed to repent, "Lord, I'm coming home", **11** O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper. ... We don't always understand but as another hymnwriter put it so beautifully, "Though shadows deepen, and my heart bleeds, I will not question the way He leads; This side of Heaven, we know in part, I will not question a broken heart".

Satan accuses God's people *daily* and he *could* have 'dragged' Nehemiah 'down' ... but Nehemiah looked *up* to the LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible *[awesome]* God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments (v.5). ... And looking up, - that's where *our* strength comes from too ... **Ps. 121:1** I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. **2** My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. **3** He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. **4** Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. **5** The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. **6** The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. **7** The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. **8** The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.