

Nehemiah: God's Wall Builder, Principles in Leadership

3. Nehemiah Chapter 2: Prayer and Planning

Introduction to Chapter Two



Chapter two of Nehemiah takes place about 3 to 4 months after the events of chapter one. In chapter one, Nehemiah gets word from his brother on the status of Jerusalem and conditions of the Jews living there. Nehemiah is struck to his core by the events in Judah and Jerusalem. Nehemiah takes authority and leadership in the spiritual realms by mourning, fasting and praying for 3 to 4 months.

The time finally arrives in chapter 2, where Nehemiah has an audience with the Artaxerxes I and his queen to serve them wine. His job was cupbearer to the king, he was not show any sort of mourning or sorrow in the king's presence. He was only to be happy and cheerful, and not let his life interfere with his function to the king. However, Nehemiah chooses to intentionally show sorrow, he did not view his job or position as the end-game of his life.

Nehemiah's focus was on God's agenda, how he could play his role to advance the kingdom of God. He saw

his position as cup-bearer to the king as a vehicle to restore Jerusalem. Nehemiah did not just act on what he thought, he prayed, fasted and mourned night and day for God's intervention, he saw himself as God's man to accomplish the task put on his heart.

Nehemiah set for us a template on how God's people can take upon themselves spiritual leadership, by first seeing the problem, then praying and planning for a solution to the problem.

In Chapter 2 the preparation made in chapter one comes to fulfillment, when he come before the King. He intentionally looks sad in the presence of the king and queen violating the established procedure of cup-bearer. His action was designed after much prayer to create an opening for the king to hear his petition. Nehemiah had already made preparation, for he had an agenda all ready for the king once his request was accepted. Nehemiah thought out his planning in Persia, he used the information from his brother to plan. He requested letters of authority, supplies, and position in Jerusalem to administer the task God put on his heart.

Nehemiah 2

Nehemiah's prayer answered

¹ And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. ² Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart."

So I became dreadfully afraid, ³ and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?" **Nehemiah 2:1-3**

And it came to pass: This is a continuation from chapter one. Nehemiah was praying and fasting in anticipation of his day with the king. He spent almost 4 months leading up to this day, when he would show his true emotion of mourning and pain over the situation in Jerusalem.

Month Nisan: This is the Babylonian name for the harvest month, corresponding with end of March beginning of April. Nisan also corresponds with the first month of the Jewish calendar the month of Abib, (Exodus 13:4,23:15, 34:18).



Tomb of Artaxerxes I

Twentieth year: The reign of King Artaxerxes I (464-424 B.C.) The twentieth year of his reign would be 444 B.C., some argue for the date of 445 B.C.... This is a very important given here, because the Seventy Weeks of Daniel begins when the command is given to go and restore Jerusalem. So the date revealed here for the command to go and restore Jerusalem is March/April 444 B.C., this date is exactly 483 Jewish-years to the death of Messiah as foretold in Daniel chapter 9:24-27.

God prophetic began to tick when the King sent letters of authority along with orders allowing the walls and gates of Jerusalem to be rebuilt.

King Artaxerxes: Artaxerxes is the son of Xerxes (485-464 B.C.), his mother is Amestris. Some have speculated Amestris is the Biblical Vashti who was replaced by Esther.

I took the wine: Nehemiah had waited for this opportunity, he had been praying for the last 4-months. He had intentionally planned to show his true feelings. He was not going to mask them behind a façade.

Never been sad: This is being shared from Nehemiah's own personal testimony. Here is where Nehemiah took the risk, by being sad in the presence of the king. This allowed the king to enquire, letting Nehemiah make his request known.

Why is your face sad? The king showed concern for his cupbearer. The king's reaction was the result of 4-months of prayer cover. Had Nehemiah not prayed and sought the king's favor, his sadness could have resulted in

his death. Nehemiah specifically prayed for favor with "this man" (Neh. 1:11).

Dreadfully afraid: Nehemiah understood the risk he was taking. Life was not precious when it came to servants to the king. A fickle king could suspect foul play, have a bad day or just explode in an arrogant rage at any such incitement. Nehemiah did not let the risk stop him, he evaluated the risk to himself versus the work for God.

Whenever we plan to step out and take a leading role there is risk involved. First, there is the risk of failure or rejection. People and circumstance could laugh in our face. Are we will to face rejection? What is our real motive? Before we step forward we should examine ourselves, Nehemiah motives were clear after seeking God's face for month.

Second, there is the risk of change; how will taking a stand change your life? Nehemiah had access to the palace, the very presence of the king. By all accounts he was successful compared to other Jews and Persians. If his request was granted, he would be entering a world described by his brother one with "*great distress and reproach*". Comfort and fear of risk keeps many people from stepping forward. Because of this risk of change, we fail to act. In the parable of the talents, the two men who act on the responsibility given them are rewarded, while the third is rejected for his caution and failure to act.

²⁰ "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' ²¹ His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' ²² He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' ²³ His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' ²⁴ "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*.' ²⁶ "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. ²⁷ So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. **Matthew 25:20-26**

What separated the two men from the one in the parable of the talents? Two were risk takers, who were interested in advancing their masters cause, while the third was afraid of risk and failure. All of us are given 24-hours a day, 7-days per week or 168-hours at the beginning of the week. What do we do with these gold coins of time given to us? Do we hoard our time for self, or do we invest our time in God's kingdom.

Why should my face not be sad: What concern would this king have for Nehemiah's trouble? At any moment there were thousands and thousands of people with pressing matters for the king. Yet he wanted to know the reason Nehemiah was sad. Nehemiah understood his request was a geo-political one, it would upset many people, yet Nehemiah bathed his request with prayer and planning. He knew what he was going to say to the king before he had the opportunity.

The city of Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon in 586 B.C., Cyrus allowed the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple. The Temple was completed in 516 B.C. However the walls and gates of Jerusalem lay in ruins and rubble. From 516 to 444 the status of Jerusalem was at a standstill, as various parties and factions worked to keep the city in a state of desolation.

Nehemiah request to the King

⁴ Then the king said to me, "What do you request?"

So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."

⁶ Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "How long will your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

⁷ Furthermore I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River ^[a] that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which *pertains* to the temple, ^[b] for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." And the king granted *them* to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.

⁹ Then I went to the governors *in the region beyond the River*, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. ¹⁰ When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official ^[c] heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel. **Nehemiah 2:4-10**

So I prayed: Nehemiah was a man of prayer who acted only after prayer. He was acting for God's kingdom, he prayed before he spoke to the king about his request. This prayer was built on a foundation of 4-month of praying. Nehemiah had already made plans about what he would request from the king.

Nehemiah was someone who prayed and planned. He thought about what would be needed even before he had an audience with the king. He had repeated these prayers for months, so now was the time of action.

And I said to the king: Because of information from his brother and others had returned from Judah, Nehemiah knew the circumstances. Nehemiah was focused on the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its walls; this was the target of direct prayers. The king was merely the vehicle for God to show his power through his servants. The heart of the king was moved as a result of the prayers of his servants.

This is another example for us to be specific and fervent in our prayers. Nehemiah did not just pray a general prayer but a specific prayer, and he prayed and fasted over this issue for month. Jesus tells us the power we have through prayers, the problem is many of us don't believe Him; therefore we hinder God's ability to act on our part because we don't seek His face.

¹⁸ Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. ¹⁹ And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away.

²⁰ And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?"

²¹ So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. ²² And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." **Matthew 21:18-21**

Nehemiah had power with God because He believed God would act, he knew His prayers and desires were inline with the Word of God, therefore he took a leadership role by understand the word of God.

Then the king said to me: The force behind the king's actions was not the king's desires but God, who was acting to answer Nehemiah's prayer. Most writers feel this was a private meeting because of the presence of the queen, since it was not common for both the queen and king to be present. According to the Greek historian Ctesias, who live at the Achaemenid court, the wife of Artaxerxes was Damaspia. Artaxerxes had at least 3 concubines in addition to her. According to accounts the mother of Artaxerxes was Amestis, (Vashti?), she was

known as both domineering and cruel in her actions. With this in light, the joint meeting of king and queen with Nehemiah could have turned out a lot different without prayer and fasting which proceeded it.

I set him a time: A key to Nehemiah's success was his willingness to be specific in prayer and planning. He prayed to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and he believed God would answer his prayer. So when the answer came he had already thought how much time he would need. He done preparations before he prayed.



Furthermore: Nehemiah knew the King was operating under the force of God, therefore Nehemiah took authority, because he understood where the assaults against Judah and Jerusalem were coming. His request was for the king to grant him resources, authority and position to accomplish the task. The people of Judah were under assault by the governors and officials who were opposed to Jerusalem. **let letters be given to me:** These letters were signs of authority from the Persian ruler to those under him. The letters were needed because the enemies of Judah, were plotting against Jerusalem, so he need to arrive in the authority of the king of Persia.

The governors of the region beyond the River: The river is the Euphrates which is the eastern boundary for the region. So the lands west of the Euphrates would have

included, Phoenicia, Syria, Judah, Egypt. These governors and rulers all had a vested interest in preventing Nehemiah's prayer. Nehemiah was already thinking about these issues so when the answer came, he was ready.

Letter to Asaph: Nehemiah also asked for supplies to rebuild the city. Not only was he asking for authority, but he was asking for the Persian government to finance the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The exact location of the "king's forest" is not known. Some feel this would have been from Lebanon, others feel it could be identified as Solomon's gardens at Etham about six miles south of Jerusalem.

According to the good hand of my God: Nehemiah understood the who event was orchestrated by God. He was merely the instrument in the hand of God. Nehemiah was given the authority of the Persian king, but his authority was really heavenly. The battle over Jerusalem was taking place in the spiritual realms. In 520 B.C., about 70-years earlier, Jerusalem and the temple were the focus of conflict, Zechariah revealed the plans God had for Jerusalem. Nehemiah new God's plans for Jerusalem based on the prophets, Zechariah words more than likely would have been known by Nehemiah. Nehemiah wanted to be used by God, to fulfill His words.

20 "Thus says the LORD of hosts:

' Peoples shall yet come,
Inhabitants of many cities;

21 The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying,
" Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD,
And seek the LORD of hosts.
I myself will go also."

22 Yes, many peoples and strong nations
Shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem,
And to pray before the LORD.' **Zechariah 8:20-22**

Sanballat: Nehemiah's chief opponent, who attempted to thwart Nehemiah's plans. Nehemiah would have known about him from those who returned from Jerusalem. Correspondence from Egypt in an Elephantine Papyrus confirms his existence. There was a letter to Bagohi (Bigvail), the governor of Judah, refers to "Deliah and Shelemiah" sons of the governor of Samaria.

The king had sent captains: Nehemiah was given more then he requested, because the king not only gave him the letters, but he sent a military detachment with Nehemiah protecting him along the way.



Nehemiah Views the Wall of Jerusalem

¹¹ So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹² Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. ¹³ And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. ¹⁴ Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass. ¹⁵ So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. ¹⁶ And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.

¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." ¹⁸ And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me.

So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work.

¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"

²⁰ So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem." **Nehemiah 2:11-20**

So I came to Jerusalem: Nehemiah's trip to Jerusalem would have take at least two months if not more. Ezra who arrived 13-years earlier spent 4 to 5 months making his way from Susa (Sushan).

There three days: Before Nehemiah acted he listened and prayed. He waited 3-days after recovering from his journey to know the status of Jerusalem first hand. Nehemiah was a man focused on his mission; he had a humble presence and plan. He did not announce himself but waited, he wanted to get a true perception of the situation without people knowing the authority he had.

He had a group of trusted people, who were like minded. They along with Nehemiah without any fanfare and at night surveyed the ruins of Jerusalem.

I told no one what my God: Nehemiah's authority and power came from God, not from the king of Persia. His confidence was in the Lord.

I went out by night: Nehemiah conducted a night inspection, surveying the situation at night, getting a feel for the city without trying to draw notice to himself. With a full moon, he could have seen remains of the walls and gates. His inspection can be traced on the map below. He inspected the lower part of the city.

the officials did not know where I had gone: Nehemiah was silent about his position until he had the full scope of the situation. Only then would he announce his true mission.

Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem: After 3-days and a night time inspection he had a "Vision" of action. He had a goal, now he had to transfer his vision to those around him.

And I told them: Nehemiah announced to them the authority he brought with him, both from God and from the king.

they laughed at us: Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem opposed Nehemiah and the Jews. They

So I answered them: Nehemiah answered according to the word of God. Israel's leaders today can take a clue from Nehemiah.

you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem.": Jerusalem belonged to the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Nehemiah was not a pluralist, but a literalist. He believed in the words of the prophets. His goal was not to please men but to fulfill God's plan.

- 1 Upper house of the king
- 2 House of Azariah
- 3 House of Benjamin and Hasshub
- 4 House of Eliashib the high priest
- 5 Ascent to the armoury
- 6 House of the mighty men
- 7 Artificial pool
- 8 Sepulchres of David



