

Nehemiah 2,3

Day 1

Nehemiah Before the King. Read Nehemiah 2:1-8

1. Four months had passed (Chisleu to Nisan ~ December to April) since Nehemiah had inquired (1:1 - 2:1) about Jerusalem. How had Nehemiah conducted himself as the king's cupbearer during that time? Where do you think that composure came from?

Digging Deeper
See the promises in Isaiah 40:31 about waiting on the Lord.

FYI: "Later, when the work of rebuilding the walls actually begins, it only takes 52 days to finish the job. But that 52-day project had a four-month foundation of prayer."
- David Guzik

"The prayer warrior quickly learns the patience of waiting. And so Nehemiah was doing just that - waiting...and trusting."
- Charles Swindoll (46)

2. What prompted the King's inquiry? 2:2 What did he perceive? (See Proverbs 15:13)

- Why do you think Nehemiah showed his feelings this day?

3. How did the king's questioning affect Nehemiah? 2:2b How could his sadness have been interpreted and treated? (Compare Genesis 40:1-3)

- Consider: What had happened earlier? Ezra 4:12-15,19-21

4. What assurance did Nehemiah give the king before responding? 2:3

- How did he present Jerusalem? (What did and didn't he share? Compare 1:3)

FYI: "Notice how tactful and skillful Nehemiah's presentation is. He doesn't even refer to Jerusalem by name. Jerusalem had a reputation as a troublesome city, a breeding ground for revolution against the empires...He understood that throughout the Middle East, kings were greatly concerned about their burial...Nehemiah targeted his message on the king's own interest, tapping into the king's sympathies, and presenting his case in the best possible light."
- Ray Stedman (42)

5. Before responding to the king's question, what did Nehemiah do? 2:4 What kind of prayer do you think this was?

6. What conditions did Nehemiah put on his requests? 2:5a

- How bold was Nehemiah's request? What danger was he facing?

7. What was the king's concern? 2:6 What does this indicate about his relationship with Nehemiah?

FYI: "the queen sitting beside him"

"Although traditionally, Esther is thought to have married Xerxes or Artaxerxes, some have identified Darius the Mede or even an earlier king as the "Ahasuerus" in the book of Esther. Some have also identified the "Artaxerxes" in Nehemiah as Darius the Mede or an earlier king. This has led some to believe that the queen in 2:6 is queen Esther. Whatever the case, the conversation was in a familial setting - quite the access for Nehemiah to have! The presence of a queen provides a witness to the events that are recorded...and that Nehemiah was in her favor too. Apparently women influenced the reign of Artaxerxes.

"Some scholars believe [Esther's husband] Ahasuerus was the same as Artaxerxes (both being titles rather than personal names). Others believe Artaxerxes was either Esther's son or stepson. In any case, the reputation of Artaxerxes was unusually benign for an ancient emperor, and this may have been in part a result of Esther's influence."
- Henry Morris

"The mention of the queen may indicate that this was a private occasion, since apparently it was not customary for the queen to appear at a formal banquet. It also may suggest that the king's decision owed something to her influence. The whole interview gives the impression that it was Nehemiah's personal qualities that won him the right to speak and that gained his point, overriding all the political obstacles."
- Derek Kidner (81)

8. List the additional requests Nehemiah made. (What do these indicate about his preparation for this?)

- 2:7
- 2:8

FYI: "Nehemiah was not a leader who acted on impulse. After four months of thinking and praying about what needed to be done, Nehemiah could present all the details of his project when the appropriate opportunity presented itself. Prayer does not exclude planning."
- Africa Bible Commentary (545)

"The citadel was a fortress situated just northwest of the temple. It overlooked and protected the temple area."
- The Nelson Study Bible (788)

9. How did the king respond? 2:8b What reason did Nehemiah give for this? (Cross-reference Ezra 7:27)

FYI: "the king granted me. This important decree in effect started the divine clock for the prophesied time of Messiah's first coming to Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25- 27)."
- Henry Morris

10. What do these requests indicate about the kind of obstacles Nehemiah anticipated?

Food for Thought: "Sometimes it may seem that God blesses a lack of planning, and sometimes it seems God does a blessed work completely different from what we have planned. But in every case, God works through planning – if not our planning, then His planning...There may be sometimes when we simply can't plan, but we should never reject planning."
- David Guzik

Applying the Word: *Think of other people God used to meet a great need: Joseph, Moses, King David and Goliath, etc... What does that say to you about the importance of one person's willingness to be used of God?*

Day 2

Nehemiah in Jerusalem. Read Nehemiah 2:9-16

11. Besides sending letters with Nehemiah, what else did the King do for Nehemiah? 2:9
(See Ezra 8:22)

12. What obstacle did Nehemiah encounter? 2:10 What was their reason for opposition?

- What does their being "*deeply disturbed/very displeased/ exceedingly grieved*" say about these men?

FYI: "Sanballat was governor of the Persian province of Samaria. His name has been found on one of the famous Elephantine papyri, dated 407 B.C."
- Henry Morris

"Sanballat undoubtedly envied Nehemiah's close relationship with the king and saw himself as a political rival of Nehemiah - perhaps even the governor of Samaria. Tobiah was an Ammonite, an official of the government of Ammon, the country we now call Jordan (whose capital is Amman...). The Ammonites were descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham. So the Ammonites were related to the Israelites but **were** always an enemy of Israel."
- Ray Stedman (46)

"At the time of Nehemiah, the Ammonites had pushed west into the land vacated by Judah. The prospect of a strong Jewish community in newly fortified Jerusalem would have seemed threatening to the Ammonite power."
- The Nelson Study Bible (788)

13. How do you think this animosity affected Nehemiah? Do you think he expected this?
How would it help him prepare for the future?

14. Under what circumstances did Nehemiah survey Jerusalem? 2:11,12

- Write the phrase that describes what he didn't share. 2:12

FYI: Viewed/inspected/inspected Strongs OT:7663 *sabar*, to scrutinize; by implication (of watching) to expect (with hope and patience)

"Nehemiah inspected the wall by night, accompanied by several trusted men. He rode his own mount, being accustomed to its master, it would make no noise. Discretion in the smallest details is an important element in the success of any undertaking."
- Africa Bible Commentary (547)

"Nehemiah "gained this information in secret because he knew that his enemies were watching him, and he didn't know yet who could be trusted. He probably suspected that even some of the Jews in the city were in league with Sanballat and Tobiah."
- John MacArthur (93)

15. (Trace the path Nehemiah took on the map at the end of the lesson.) What difficulties did he run into? 2:13-15

16. What did Nehemiah emphasize about this excursion? 2:16 Why do you think it was important for Nehemiah to survey the condition and extent of the damage of the city and the walls privately before consulting others? Do you think he was sensing resistance or opposition?

Food for Thought: As much as anything, Nehemiah took time to count the cost before starting the work. He has a *heart*, he has *faith*, he has a *vision* – but before that vision can become a reality, he has to see exactly what has to be done, and what it will cost – in terms of time, effort, money, and leadership. "
- David Guzik

"Without doubt, Nehemiah learned many crucial leadership lessons as the cupbearer to the king of Persia. He had seen the king in the midst of making difficult decision, in the midst of discussions with his advisors, in the midst of mapping strategies and making plans. Nehemiah had studied under one of the great leaders of the ancient world."
- Ray Stedman (49)

Applying the Word: What has impressed you the most so far about Nehemiah's actions to "rebuild" Jerusalem? If you could, what question would you ask him about this?

Day 3

Nehemiah Talks to the Leaders. Read Nehemiah 2:17-20

17. What words did Nehemiah use to describe the conditions of Jerusalem and the people to the leaders? 2:17 What reason did he give for rebuilding? See the reasons for why God made Israel a *reproach* among the nations? Ezekiel 22:1-16

18. How did Nehemiah encourage the leaders? 2:18

- What effect did his words have? 2:18b (What calling/vision had he given them?)

FYI: "Nehemiah didn't offer rewards, incentives, or vacations out at the Sea of Galilee for the ones who got the job done. Those are all external motivations and aren't God's highest calling...He relied on the LORD and the leaders to create a true *inward* motivation. External motivation – manipulation, guilt, pressure, carnal rewards can work for a while, but are never a part of God's vision for getting things done." - David Guzik

The good hand of God: This "was his genuine conviction and as such it was infectious. But in truth, so total a response from such a group was as miraculous as that of Artaxerxes." - Derek Kidner (83)

19. What kind of opposition did Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem level against the people? 2:19

- How serious would the charge of *rebellion* be? (Why would they know this was false? 2:9,10)

FYI: mocked/laughed us to scorn Strong's OT:3932 *la' ag*; to deride; by implication (as if imitating a foreigner) to speak unintelligibly: KJV - have in derision, laugh (to scorn), mock (on), stammering.

despised /ridiculed Strong's OT:959 *bazah*; to disesteem: KJV - despise, disdain, contemn (-ptible), + think to scorn, vile person.

"**Sanballat** was probably from a town named Horonaim in Moab and thus most likely was a Moabite. **Tobiah** was an Ammonite and **Geshem** an Arab. All three peoples were leaders of anti-Jewish regions and peoples adjacent to Judah and Jerusalem, fearful of the growing influence of the Jews." - Henry Morris

"There is evidence that **Geshem**, far from being a negligible alien, was an even more powerful figure than his companions..Geshem and his son ruled a league of Arabian tribes which took control of Moab and Edom (Judah's neighbors to the east and south) together with a part of Arabia and the approaches to Egypt, under the Persian empire. So, with already a hostile Samaria and Ammon to the north and east, Judah was now virtually encircled, and the war of nerves had begun." - Derek Kidner (83,84)

20. On what basis did Nehemiah defend their building? 2:20a What would the title "God of heaven" convey?

- What did Nehemiah say about their enemies' right to attack? 2:20b (Whose authority did Nehemiah uphold and whose did he reject? Compare Acts 5:29)

FYI: "In facing our enemies, we must always keep focus on *who we are* and *what we should do*. Failure to see these will always lead to defeat. These are exactly the things our spiritual enemies want us to forget! And sometimes, you just have to proclaim it." - David Guzik

"The first attack on Nehemiah's work was ridicule and slander. Nehemiah repudiated his enemies as having 'no heritage' or inheritance in Israel, no 'right' or legal position over Jerusalem regardless of past treaties, and no 'memorial' [or control over worship in the temple]. This eliminated past, present and future ties with Jerusalem." - The Woman's Study Bible (760)

21. How did Nehemiah recognize God's power in chapter 2.

- 2:4
- 2:8,18
- 2:12
- 2:20

Applying the Word: How would you explain the blending of Nehemiah's' personal preparing and planning coupled with dependence on God's guidance and sovereignty? See Proverbs 16:3,9

Day 4 Builders of the Walls

22. Read through Nehemiah 3. What impression does this give you of the magnitude of this project and the organization it required?

23. Who was the first to step up? 3:1 What interesting thing did they do with their projects? (See Colossians 3:17)

FYI: "Eliashib the high priest...did not act as if he was too "spiritual" for the hard work of rebuilding the walls.

"They consecrated it: The idea behind consecration is to recognize something as special, as uniquely set apart for God's glory and service...it was a way for them to say, 'All of this work belongs to You, LORD. This is a special work done unto You.'" - David Guzik

"The knew that unless God blessed the city with His presence ,no wall and gates would keep the people safe (Ps 127:1)." - The Nelson Study Bible (789)

24. Instead of "building", what did many of the groups do? 3:4,5

FYI: repaired..."The Hebrew verb is a general term meaning 'to make firm or strong.' It does not necessarily mean restoring everything as before." - Derek Kidner (87)

25. What dishonorable thing did Nehemiah note in 3:5?

FYI: "The people of the city of Tekoa were more than willing to work – **but their nobles...**thought they were above the hard work, so they didn't join in.

Would not put their shoulders/did not support "Literally, the idea in the Hebrew is that they wouldn't submit – they would not 'bend their necks' to what the LORD wanted them to do. The real issue was submission...they stand in infamy as the only people mentioned in this chapter who *did not* join in the work." - David Guzik

"Perhaps the 'Tekoite' nobles did not work enthusiastically because they feared repercussions from Sanballat."
- The Woman's Study Bible (761)

26. From 3:8,9,12,22, what differences do you see in the make-up of people building the wall? *How knowledgeable would some of these people have been about repairing walls? How do you think they learned?*

FYI: "These were men of different professions, not professional builders... **They fortified Jerusalem**, even though many would not think them qualified or able. The most important ability in the work of the LORD is **availability**.

Viggo Olsen, who helped rebuild ten thousand houses in war-raved Bangladesh in 1972, derived unexpected inspiration from reading a chapter ordinarily considered one of the least interesting in the Bible: '*I was struck... that no expert builders were listed in the 'Holy Land brigade.'* *There were priests, priests' helpers, goldsmiths, perfume makers. and women. but no expert builders or carpenters were named.*' (Yamauchi)" - David Guzik

27. Where were many people placed to do their work? 3:10,23,28,29 How benefits would this have?

28. What word is used to describe Baruch's work? 3:20 Why do you think the Lord had Nehemiah describe so carefully who, what and even how each person was doing their work?

29. Underline what the Bible teaches about the focus/motivation for our work.

- Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men NIV
- Colossians 1:10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, NIV
- 1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. NIV

30. Underline how God empowers us for work:

- Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. NIV
- 2 Thessalonians 2:16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. NIV

Digging Deeper

What amazing calling is there to our work?
Ephesians 2:9-10

31. Read through the appeals and warnings in the following verses. Underline things that impress you.

- Acts 20:34-35 "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." NAS
- Galatians 6:9-10 Let us not become weary in doing good [work] , for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. NIV
- 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. NIV
- 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and with the tradition that you received from us, For you yourselves know how to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 no one do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. 10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. 11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. NAS
- 1 Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. ESV
- Ephesians 4:28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. NIV

32. From Nehemiah's description of workers and work, what would you say about the importance of the following in getting the job done?

- Unity
- Diversity
- Individual responsibility/ministry

Applying the Word: What is one of the best examples you have seen of a group working together to meet a need? How helpful is it for you to be "next to" someone in a project or activity? Why?