
Nehemiah Chapter 2

V: 1 Our introduction to Nehemiah and his brother Hanani comes to us in the month of Chislev which is November / December, now we come to the presence of the king in Nisan, the first month in the Jewish calendar which corresponds with March / April - so 4 months later, after the events of chapter 1.

- Nehemiah had the faith to wait on the Lord, he didn't rush to do anything, simply waiting on the Lord, praying, fasting, waiting.

Isaiah 28:16 "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."

- Nehemiah patiently waited on the Lord for direction:

Hebrews 6:12 "That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Isaiah 40:31 "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint."

- Like Nehemiah there are times to weep and pray; but there are also times to wait and pray.

Psalms 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."

- Wine is set before the king, and Nehemiah is his cup bearer.
- Nehemiah was never sad before the king because it wasn't allowed, part of the protocol of the king's court.
- To be in the presence of the king was a rare privilege, people were to be overjoyed, how could they possibly be sad?
- It was considered an insult to the king to be sad in his presence, an insult that at times carried the death penalty.

The Psalmist declares of the Lord:

Psalms 16:11 "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

- The difference being how we get there, and the joy that we experience in His presence is most genuine.
- Coming away from Chapter 1, we see that Nehemiah was truly grieved over the situation in Jerusalem and it could not be hidden.

V: 2 Artaxerxes immediately recognizes the sad countenance of his servant and questions Nehemiah about it.

Proverbs 15:13 “A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.”

- To us this would seem like a trivial situation - but Nehemiah was afraid because this violation of protocol could mean his life.
- “But God” - had seemingly already touched the king’s heart and inclined it towards His purposes.

Proverbs 21:1 “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will.”

- That is one of the common threads between these three Persian kings, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes - God guided each of their hearts to do His will.

2 Chronicles 20:6 “... O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? And rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?”

V: 3-4 Nehemiah had the faith to ask.

- Nehemiah responds boldly to the king that he can’t help but be sad considering the plight of Jerusalem and his brothers who are suffering there.
- Traditionally the Jews have a tremendous respect for the dead and their tombs. Herod built a large building over the top of the cave at Mekkedah in Hebron and Jews will gather there like at Samuel’s tomb, or the tomb of David, and different tombs, and pray, light candles, you’ll see old men with their long beards and their prayer books. The Persians also had the same kind of respect for the tombs and burial places of their ancestors - so Nehemiah makes mention of this
- The king then asks what Nehemiah is requesting.
- “*So I prayed to the God of heaven...*” this was no doubt a very short and concise prayer - something along the lines of what Peter prayed:

Matthew 14:29-30 “²⁹... And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord save me.”

- That short little prayer did not stand alone, Nehemiah has been praying and fasting about this for months, he’s on the spot, that moment has arrived - and he’s all prayed up - so a quick silent prayer, then he goes for it.
- Jesus taught us not to use “vain repetitions...” **Matthew 6:7**

Ecclesiastes 5:2 “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.”

- Short & sweet, and to the point. It’s not the length of the prayer, it’s the depth of heart behind it.
- There is a contrast here between the earthly throne of Artaxerxes and the heavenly throne of grace:
 1. Nehemiah had to wait for an invitation to share his burden and make his request to the king.
 2. The contrast is that we can come to the heavenly throne, and speak our heart to the King of kings, and Lord of lords at any time with any need, freely - because of the shed blood of Jesus.

Hebrews 4:14-16 “¹⁴Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. ¹⁵For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

V: 5-6 His request is basically to be sent to re-build the city of Jerusalem. God answers through Artaxerxes.

- The king’s first question is how long will you be gone? And when will you be coming back? Not how much will this cost, or other practical aspects of his request - this means that he truly cares for his servant.

Nehemiah 5:14 - Nehemiah spent 12 years as the governor of Judah, then he reported back to the king briefly, then he again traveled to Jerusalem (Ch. 13) to make some corrections.

V: 7-8 Nehemiah requested and received letters from the king granting him safe passage to Jerusalem and support for the materials needed to complete the task.

Matthew 10:1 “And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.”

- When Jesus sent His disciples out to minister. First He gave them the power & authority they needed to do the job, then He promised to provide for their needs in the process.
- Nehemiah makes the same request, first for authority, then for provision - and the king grants his request.
- This command to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was given on 3/14/445 BC - and this is the beginning date of Daniel’s prophecy (**Daniel 9:25**) declaring when the Messiah would enter into Jerusalem some 490 years later (173,880 days) - which Jesus fulfilled with the triumphant entry recorded in **Matthew 21**, **Mark 11**, and **Luke 19**
- He also takes a contingent of soldiers to escort him safely to Jerusalem.
- Ezra had all kinds of treasure and no “worldly protection” - the Lord preserved him.
- No mention of valuables on Nehemiah’s trip, but as a Governor on official business he had a detachment of soldiers. He praises the Lord for his safe arrival, God’s hand being upon him.
- They both had the same mission, just different ways of getting there.

V: 5 Nehemiah asked to be sent.

V: 7 Nehemiah asked to be kept safe & protected.

V: 8 Nehemiah asked to be supplied & provided for.

John 16:24 “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

- Nehemiah’s prayer was short but powerful, God said “yes” to all three.

V: 9-11 No mention or description of the trip from Shushan to Jerusalem, just that he stopped on the way by to inform the local governors of his status, and that the king’s military might was behind him on this.

- We’re introduced to two antagonists; Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite, neither of which is happy to see anyone help the Israelites. Another, Geshem the Arabian will be introduced in V: 18.

- Sanballat from Beth Horon, about 12 miles from Jerusalem, an official from Samaria would be their main enemy. Tobiah the Ammonite, the Ammonites being constant and avowed enemies of the Jews.

V: 12-16 Nehemiah conducts a discreet / secret inspection of the city walls to determine their actual status and what the needs are. Doing so at night would prevent their enemies from seeing or knowing what they were up to.

- That gate at the valley would be the gate at the bottom of Ophel at the pool of Siloam. (Not there at present time.)
- They called it the “dragon” well because the Spring of Gihon fluctuates a lot, a pulsing kind of a flow. There are times when the water is just barely flowing out, and there are other times when it’s gushing through.
- The story that they tell is that over the mouth of the spring there is a sleeping dragon and that when he’s awake he swallows the water so that it causes the flow to be less, but when he goes to sleep then all of the water comes surging through the tunnel.
- No one really knows the reason for the ebb and flow, but that’s the story the Arabs will tell.
- The “dung” gate - where the trash & refuse exited the city, the fountain gate, near the pool of Bethesda, used by the kings - both equally destroyed and broken down.

Acts 10:34 “... of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.”

V: 17-18 Nehemiah had the faith to challenge others:

- After conducting his inspection and assessing what was needed he exhorted the people and leaders to get to it.
- Nehemiah has been there 3 days and he’s talking about “we” and “us” - not “you” and “them.”
- Nehemiah encourages the people with the testimony his vision for the city that God had given him and how the king had responded giving both direction and provision. The people were strengthened, seeing how God was working in their midst, even through the king of Persia.
- Nehemiah gives God the glory for his safe arrival and for what God is going to do.

Psalm 57:5 “Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.”

Philippians 4:20 “Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever Amen.”

- So the leaders and people responded: “Let us rise up and build...”

V: 19-20 Sanballat, Tobiah, and now Geshem the Arabian laughed at the promises of God. Where are the Horonites, the Ammonites today?

- They accused the Jews of rebelling against the king, after having been shown letters from the king authorizing this work.

Ephesians 4:27 “Neither give place to the devil.”

- Nehemiah declares to them that God will guide, prosper, and bless them - but that they have no part in any of it - basically it's none of your business!

Philippians 1:6 “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

- Serving the Lord will not always be easy, there will be those who oppose, but God is on our side!

1 Corinthians 15:58 “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”