

CAPITOL STUDIES

SEPT 22, 2021 • WEEK 2



STUDIES IN
NEHEMIAH,
THE CIVIL
SERVANT
FROM SUSAN

*Bible Studies
for the
Nebraska
Capitol
Family*



*Verse of
the Week*

Nehemiah 2:18

I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work.

Nehemiah: The Builder of Heart



IN THE PRECEDING LESSON, we saw the *hope* of humble Nehemiah which would be used of God to build *hope* in an entire people. Chapter two shows us the *heart* of Nehemiah. In similar fashion, Nehemiah's *heart* will build *heart* in God's people. Look in amazement at God's answer to Nehemiah's heartfelt prayer.

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I. NEHEMIAH'S REQUEST, HIS PRAYER, HIS ANSWER

A. Heart Revealed

Nehemiah 2:1

And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.¹

This was about four months after Nehemiah initially heard the news of the terrible conditions in Jerusalem. For four months Nehemiah waited on God. He prayed. He fasted. He asked God for wisdom. He did not act rashly. One hundred and twenty days allowed him much time to prayerfully contemplate what would be needed to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. (The actual building of the walls took only 52 days. Nehemiah prayed about the project about twice the time he worked on it.)

During this time Nehemiah continued to serve King Artaxerxes by tasting his food and drink and, apparently, kept a cheerful disposition. "We must not be discouraged with or discredit mundane circumstances as they can be just as full of valuable opportunity for Divine service as some more pompous and heralded circumstances."² Nehemiah reached a point, however, when he could no longer hide his broken heart. Sometimes God uses us to give others a vision. "World leaders are still only God's servants, whether they know it or not."³

"O Lord, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You" (2 Chronicles 20:6). "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1).

Nehemiah 2:2

So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid.

When King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah why he was sad, Nehemiah had good reason to be afraid. A cupbearer had to be happy and cheerful before the king, or he would be dismissed and most likely executed. He was also about to ask a king who was famous for not changing his mind to change his mind. But Nehemiah had been waiting on God, and now it was time for Him to work.

Nehemiah 2:3

I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?"

Nehemiah appealed to the sympathy of Artaxerxes by mourning that the burial ground of his family was now wasted and desolate. The Persians had high respect for their ancestors. Now the king could understand why Nehemiah was so upset. Concern for his people and his home overwhelmed his heart. Do we care about people? Let's ask God to instill in our hearts a true compassion for the needs of others.



B. Help Requested

Nehemiah 2:4

Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah what he wanted. This was the opportunity for which he had been waiting. Note what Nehemiah did. He breathed a quick prayer (*palal*—asking someone to intervene or arbitrate for someone) which was backed by four months of powerful, persistent, patient prayer.

This kind of prayer touches the heart of God. Jesus encourages us to pray in the same manner: "Ask, and it will be given to you" (Matthew 7:7). "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16 KJV). Now Nehemiah could confidently answer.

Nehemiah 2:5-8a

I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." ⁶Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will your journey be, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. ⁷And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go."

Nehemiah was respectful in his request. He was specific in his request. He was bold in his request. He asked Artaxerxes to commission him for this mission, for then he would have the authority necessary to accomplish the rebuilding.

One Bible commentator wrote, "Nehemiah was a true patriot whose dreams for the future were motivated by the values of the past. He did not try to duplicate the past, for that was impossible; rather, he built on the past so that Israel would have a future. To Nehemiah, the past was a rudder to guide him and not an anchor to hold him back."⁴ Is this the philosophy of Americans today? Should it be?

Nehemiah shows us how believers seeking to do God's work should interact with unsaved officials. Nehemiah respected the king and sought to work within the lines of authority that existed in the empire. He didn't say, "I have a commission from the Lord to go to Jerusalem, and I'm going whether you like it or not!" When it comes to matters of conscience, we must always "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). But even then, we must show respect for authority (Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:11–25). Daniel and his friends took the same approach as did Nehemiah, and God honored them all (Daniel 1).





C. Prayer Rewarded

Nehemiah 2:8b

And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me.

“For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:11). What happens when we pray and wait on God? We develop patience (Hebrews 10:36). We gain godly perspective (Proverbs 3:5-6). We know a sense of peace (Phil. 4:6-7). We see the “good hand” of God (Nehemiah 2:8).

D. Protection Received

Nehemiah 2:9

Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.

God provided wonderful protection along the way. Though we may not have an army to accompany us, we have the promise of God that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5-6). He will fulfill His will in and through us (Phil. 2:13; Psalm 84:11).

God kept Nehemiah safe from execution, enemy attack, and personal injury. He spoke often of the “good hand of God upon him.” Nehemiah was doing a job for God, and God protected him as he did it.

E. Opposition Received

Nehemiah 2:10

When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel.

There will always be enemies of God’s work. There will always be battles to fight (1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 2:11). Satan will always resist someone seeking the welfare of God’s children. How does this differ from the welfare of today’s society?

II. NEHEMIAH’S INSPIRATION, HIS HEART, HIS GAME PLAN

A. Situation Reviewed

Nehemiah 2:11-16

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹²And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. ¹³So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon’s Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. ¹⁴Then I



passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. ¹⁵So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. ¹⁶The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work.

Nehemiah got alone with God. “*So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.*” It had taken him about three months to arrive after his interview with the king. We can well imagine that these three days were days of rest. But more than that, they were probably days alone with God, waiting on the Lord, praying for guidance and wisdom. There is no evidence that he was with other people. Often it is only when we are truly alone with God that we can hear His voice. Elijah was alone on the mountain when God spoke to him with a “still small voice.” Moses was alone caring for his sheep when God called him. Alone in the desert, Paul learned many spiritual truths from God. When we are alone, God can speak to us and show us His will for our lives. Do you have a designated time to be alone with God?

Nehemiah carefully inspected the ruin. He went out at night to determine the magnitude of the situation. He “inspected” the walls. This word for *inspection* means to look very carefully. It is a medical word for probing a wound to see the extent of the damage. God made Nehemiah a doctor assessing the damage done to Jerusalem’s walls and gates. This was a sad journey for him. Such desolation, such debris, and such rubbish. And no one seemed to care. (“For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus,” Philippians 2:20-21).

We, too, must evaluate the corruption around us. We need to recognize the true state of hearts. Until we grasp the enormity of sin, we will not be stirred by it. The dearth of righteousness and the overwhelming prevalence of sin must impact our hearts if we are to make a difference in our world. (“And of some have compassion, making a difference” Jude 22 KJV).

Nehemiah kept the burden to himself. He did not confer with others until he had conferred with God. “*I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind (heart) to do for Jerusalem.*” He was looking for God to lead and direct each step of the way. He did not have any personal ambitions. He humbly waited for God to give a burden to the Jewish people so they could work together to rebuild the wall.

This wall reminds us of the “wall of protection” that Christ wants in each of our lives. (“Like a city that is broken into and without walls, is a man who has no control over his spirit,” Proverbs 25:28). In what state is this wall? Does it keep out Satan, sin, and the world? Is it built on devotion for God and concern for the lost?





B. The Jews Rallied

Nehemiah 2:17-18

Then I said to them, “You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach.”¹⁸ I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king’s words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, “Let us arise and build.” So they put their hands to the good work.

It is to the credit of the Jewish nobles that they accepted the challenge immediately and said, “*Let us arise and build!*” They were not so accustomed to their situation that they took it for granted and decided that nothing could be changed. Nor did they remind Nehemiah that the Jews had once tried to repair the walls and were stopped (Ezra 4). “We tried that once and it didn’t work. Why try again?”⁵

Someone has defined *leadership* as “the art of getting people to do what they ought to do because they want to do it.” If that definition is true, then Nehemiah certainly was a leader! Most of the people united behind him and risked their lives to get the work done.⁶

C. Hearts Revived

Nehemiah identified himself with the Jewish people. He did not reproach them for their indifference, unfaithfulness, and neglect. He spoke of the “*bad situation that we are in.*” Living up to his name, “The Lord consoles or God comforts,” Nehemiah encouraged (comforted) them. He gave them *heart*.

He didn’t mention the accomplishments of his own life, nor that the king had favored him with supplies and help. He didn’t tell them of the lonely hours of fasting and praying. He gave God all the glory: “*The good (gracious) hand of God is upon me.*” His message was that God was acting on their behalf.

Nehemiah instilled a burden for restoration. He was brokenhearted about the reproach brought on the holy Name of God. He directed the people’s thoughts to the waste, to the burned gates, and to the terrible, deplorable condition of God’s holy city.

Nehemiah inspired them to cooperation. “*Let us rise up, and build,*” was his cry. He called for unity in vision and labor. They could work together to repair and restore Jerusalem for God’s glory. The people did not react in anger. They didn’t show an independent spirit. They united their hearts and abilities to get the job done. They strengthened their hands to do God’s good work.

D. Opposition Realized

Nehemiah 2:19

[W]hen Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, “What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?”



Nehemiah faced opposition from self-proclaimed patriots. The leaders of the opposition were Sanballat, whose name means “hate in disguise,” and Tobiah and Geshem. All three were indirect relatives of the Jews. These men represent those who profess to be children of God but are not. They were spurious enemies of the Lord’s people, just as many religionists today are enemies of all who claim the Name of Christ.

E. Success Reaffirmed, Enemies Rebuked

Nehemiah 2:20

So I answered them and said to them, “The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem.”

They believed God. “When once a person or a group begins to do something for God’s glory, opposition is only a stone’s throw away.”⁷

Their enemies knew rebuilding the wall would bring Israel back to its God-given separation and blessing. They did not want this to happen. “Nehemiah’s answer to their opposition was magnificent, ‘*The God of heaven, He will prosper us.*’ He put God first, and his utter confidence in God inspired the people to trust Him, also. He believed that God would intervene because it was His work. Nehemiah spoke to the enemy with courage, boldness, and authority.”⁸



The stage is set, and the drama is beginning. Before we join the workers on the wall in our next lesson, let’s ask ourselves a few questions. Like Nehemiah, do I lead with a heart burdened for the work God has called me to do? Am I willing to sacrifice to see His will accomplished? Am I patient in gathering facts and in planning my work? Do I enlist the help of others or try to do everything myself? Do I motivate people on a spiritual basis—what God wants, or simply on a personal basis—what I want? Are people following me or following the Lord as He leads me?

As a follower, do I truly listen when leaders share their burdens? Do I cling to the past or desire to see God do something new? Have I sought God for His plan for me? Am I willing to join hands in the work? Am I cooperating in any way with the enemy and thus weakening the cause?

Anyone can go through life as a destroyer. God has called His people to be builders. What an example Nehemiah is to us! Trace his “so” statements and see how mightily God used him: “So I prayed” (2:4); “So I came to Jerusalem” (2:11); “So they strengthened their hands for this good work” (2:18); “So built we the wall” (4:6); “So we labored in the work” (4:21); “So the wall was finished” (6:15).⁹

Like those of Nehemiah’s day, “*let us*” challenge one another to unite and “*build*” for God’s glory. Together we can build “*the wall*” of God’s protection in our personal lives and in the lives of those around us. Thankfully, He only asks us to do what He promises to give us the grace, ability, wisdom, and resources to do.

“LET US RISE UP AND BUILD!”



