

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 31TH - AUGUST 1ST, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

THE OPPORTUNITY (NEHEMIAH 2:1-4) FOUR MONTHS LATER

The month of Nisan would have been the springtime (March/April). After 4 months of praying and fasting, Nehemiah was finally given an opportunity to go back to Jerusalem.

- In the time Nehemiah was praying and patiently waiting, he also worked on a strategy to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. **We learn that we must pray and act.**

“I HAD NEVER BEEN SAD IN HIS PRESENCE”

Evidently, Nehemiah had kept his composure during the 4 months of seeking God's favor and will, but eventually, his feelings came out in front of the king.

- Being transparent and lowering one's guard in front of the king could be dangerous, but Nehemiah felt like he could finally be vulnerable.

VULNERABILITY CAN BE A SCARY THING

Artaxerxes noticed depression, or “sadness of the heart,” in Nehemiah. Nehemiah was also afraid because of the possible response of the king. After letting his emotional guard down, he was honest about why he was sad.

- **Vulnerability and openness can get us hurt, so we must pray for strength, wisdom, and the favor of God with others.**

“MAY THE KING LIVE FOREVER”

Nehemiah knew his audience, so he addressed the king with proper respect. He also knew that **respect would be the best bridge to accomplishing his plans.**

- Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah what his request was, but before he responded, he “**prayed to the God of heavens**” for a wise answer.
- **Luke 12:11-12**
- **James 1:19**

FAVOR AND OPPOSITION (NEHEMIAH 2:5-10)

A BOLD REQUEST

King Artaxerxes had shut down previous rebuilding initiatives in Jerusalem. So, Nehemiah's request to go back and rebuild the wall was pretty gutsy.

- Nehemiah also chose his words very carefully. He made the project very personal and spoke to his boss, and somewhat friend, with proper etiquette.

LIKE MOST (SMART) MEN

Artaxerxes was heavily influenced by women, mainly his wife Damaspia. More than likely, they went to a private setting with Art's wife and discussed the terms of Nehemiah's travels.

- Nehemiah was **prepared** beforehand. **We must also prepare (pray, read, listen) on the front end for opportunities that God may put in our path.**

LETTERS WRITTEN TO THE GOVERNORS

Though Nehemiah had the blessing of the king, he wanted assurance that he would get safe passage on his way to Israel. So, he had Art write letters to the governors of the regions of Persia to keep him safe.

- Nehemiah went further and asked for a letter to get supplies to rebuild the gates of the wall, and the king granted both.

EVEN GETTING SECURITY GUARDS?

The “gracious hand of God” was definitely on him! Not only did he get to go, get safe passage, and free supplies, Art even sent some soldiers to protect Nehemiah on his trip.

- **What we learn is that when we want the things of God, He creates the path for those desires to be successful** (John 14:14).

I KNEW IT WAS GOING TOO WELL

Everything seems to be going smoothly until Nehemiah gets into the region of Judea near Jerusalem. Several officials start to get word of the plan to refortify Jerusalem and they “were greatly displeased.”

- We also learn that **being a true Christian comes with an inescapable and constant opposition from an enemy.**

AN EVEN GREATER HATRED

The antagonism from Sanballat and Tobiah was not as much pointed just at Nehemiah, but at what he stood for.

- Jesus said in Jn. 15 that the hatred we experience as Christians is actually a hatred of Him. **The question isn't will people hate us, but how will we respond to that hatred?**

LET'S BEGIN (NEHEMIAH 2:11-20)

NEHEMIAH ARRIVES IN JERUSALEM

After 3 days, he goes out at night to inspect the city walls. He goes at night with a few other men because of the physical danger he could've faced.

- At this point, Nehemiah hadn't told anyone his plans, but word had probably traveled about a restoration project because of the letters to the governors.

INSPECTING THE WALLS

Nehemiah carefully inspects the gates and walls of the city. The gates are named after their function (Dung Gate for waste, Fountain Gate to get to the fresh water spring, etc.).

- He already knew what to do, but he wanted to see just how bad the situation was.

REVEALING THE PLAN

We're not sure if Nehemiah called a large assembly or just the leaders of Jerusalem when he told them of the plan to rebuild the wall. The problem was obvious, “Jerusalem lies in ruins.”

- **Anyone can point out the problem, but only real leaders can offer a solution**, and that is what Nehemiah did **with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**

THERE WAS A GREATER ISSUE THAN SAFETY

The shambles of Jerusalem reflected poorly on their religious faith. Nehemiah appealed to the national and spiritual heritage of the Jews in Jerusalem. Though safety and peace were important, the real focus was to restore **honor** and **respect**.

- **Christians today should feel the same shame over the state of our country today.**

“LET'S START REBUILDING”

Because the people listened, were humble, and depended on God, they were “strengthened to do this good work.”

- **It is not enough to pray for direction or read about the principles of God in the Bible, we must put the teachings and direction of Jesus to work in our lives if we are to see results.**

THERE IS ALWAYS A REACTION

Of course, right after the community decides to band together and rebuild their city in the name of God, there is mockery and threats from those that “despised” the people of God.

- Nehemiah **wasn't drawn into an argument and he doesn't return evil for evil, but simply says their success will be because of God's provision and guidance.**

PREPARATION

- If we are going to be ready for the trials and opportunities in life, we must **prepare** through **prayer, study, and patiently listening** to God.
- In our preparation time, we must be **vulnerable** and **honest** with God and with other Christians that we trust to help guide us in our decisions.

WE PREPARE TO TAKE ACTION

- We must first depend on Jesus to give us the **wisdom and discernment** to know what to say, what to do, and when to do it.
- It is not enough to pray and know the instructions of the Bible, **we must act on and live out the teachings and principles of the Word and our convictions** (Js. 1:22).

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE PUSHBACK

- The pushback we feel when we listen and respond to God is a spiritual attack, though not all opposers realize it.
- The question isn't if we will face opposition, but how will we as Christians respond to it?
- **Do we believe that our “success” is contingent on our reliance on Jesus?**