

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

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

BEFORE THE KING (NEHEMIAH 2:1-8)

Nehemiah first heard of the report of Jerusalem in the month of Chislev (November/December, 1:1), and now we pick up the story in Nisan (March/April, vs. 1).

- For four months Nehemiah had been fasting, praying, and waiting on the Lord to give him an opportunity to act.
- Waiting on the Lord in prayer is so difficult- but it's so necessary and it's not a waste of time.

Finally God opened the door for Nehemiah to act through what seems to be a divinely arranged conversation with the king.

- In ancient times, monarchs were sheltered from anything that might bring them unhappiness, but on this particular day, Nehemiah couldn't hide his sorrow any longer (vs. 2).
- When he brings the king his wine, Artaxerxes notices that he looks sad.

When the king asked why, Nehemiah was afraid!

- Artaxerxes had the power to either banish or execute any of his servants that displeased him for any reason, but on this day his heart seemed sympathetic & interested in Nehemiah.
- Prov. 21:1 tells us that "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water"- God was granting Nehemiah "mercy in the sight of this man" (1:11).

Despite his fear, Nehemiah seems to have recognized that this was his God ordained opportunity, so he responded with ritual courtesy ("Let the king live forever!) and shared the reason for his grief (vs. 3).

- Amazingly, the king responded with, "What are you requesting?" (vs. 4a).
- Think of all the power and wealth wrapped up into that question!

Nehemiah understands the gravity of the king's response, and prays before he answers (vs. 4b).

- He asks for the king's permission to return to Judah to rebuild the city of Jerusalem (vs. 5).
- From what we see in verses 6-8, this is not a spontaneous, on-the-spot, spur-of-the-moment request - he's not making this up as he goes along or flying by the seat of his pants!
- He's planned as he's prayed.

Nehemiah can give the king an amount of time the journey and rebuilding will take (vs. 6), the kind of authorization he'll as he travels (vs. 7), and exactly what materials he'll need for the temple, the wall, and his own personal dwelling (vs. 8).

- During his time of praying for an opportunity, Nehemiah had also planned for it and had his answer ready.

Waiting on the Lord to open a door is so difficult - but it's so much easier than breaking your foot trying to kick open a door God isn't opening!

- While we wait, we pray and we plan - there is nothing unspiritual about planning and preparing (Luke 14:28).
- Practical, prayerful, & prepared wisdom married to bold, radical, & obedient faith can accomplish more than we can ever imagine.

THE PLAN UNFOLDS (NEHEMIAH 2:9-18)

The journey from Susa to Jerusalem would've taken at least 2-3 months (800-900 miles).

- Nehemiah traveled with an escort of army officers and horsemen that the king had provided, and received passage from Persian governors in various provinces because of the king's letters (vs. 9).
- Not everybody was happy about Nehemiah coming to Jerusalem.

Two men in particular- Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite - were greatly displeased that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel (vs. 10).

- For whatever reason (loss of power? Anti-Semitism?) these two opposed Nehemiah, his work, and anyone that wanted to be a part of it.
- We have a real enemy that sometimes influences others to discourage and oppose God's work in us and through us.

After his long journey, Nehemiah took time to rest, because good leaders need to take care of themselves if they're going to be effective (vs. 11).

- Without creating much of a stir, Nehemiah took time to get an accurate picture of the situation in Jerusalem by surveying the city by night with only a small group with him (vs. 12).

Verses 13-16 describe Nehemiah surveying the situation, as he moved from west to south to east, concentrating on the southern section of the city.

- The officials didn't know where he'd gone or what he was doing (vs. 16), because good leaders often work without being noticed and don't announce their strategy or plan until it's been thought and prayed through.

After his assessment of the walls, it's not clear whether Nehemiah called a large assembly of the citizens or only the rulers.

- But he did speak honestly about the seriousness of the situation in Jerusalem and communicated his vision on what he intended to do (vs. 17).
- Nehemiah saw and communicated the real problems, but he also gave the people hope and a solution for what needed to be done!

But Nehemiah also understood that God had been at work - and if God had been faithful to provide favor with the king and the necessary resources, He'd be faithful in their work to rebuild the walls (vs. 18).

- The people responded, "Let us rise up and build!"
- Nehemiah was a strong leader, but any true work of God takes active ownership of that work from the people of God.

OPPOSITION BUILDS (NEHEMIAH 2:19-20)

We have a real enemy that sometimes influences others to discourage and oppose God's work in us and through us.

- Sanballat, Tobiah, and their friend Geshem the Arab began to actively oppose the Jews by "jeering and despising" them (vs. 19).
- When a person ridicules someone or something, it's an effort to demote, point out ridiculousness, and elevate themselves in relationship to it.

Sadly, ridicule and mockery have become our default weapons (even as Christians) of trying to invalidate or disqualify someone or something we disagree with.

- This is the weapon the Enemy often uses against the people of God (Acts 2:13, 17:18, 26:24) as they work to repair the walls of their own lives or the lives of those around them.
- With ridicule comes discouragement and hurt.

Another tactic of the Enemy is false accusation and condemnation.

- Notice that Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem suggest that the Jews are rebelling against the king (vs. 19)?
- If the Enemy can get us to question our calling and condemn us even as we're trying to be obedient, he knows our confidence in what God has called us to do will be shaky.

Nehemiah could've responded to the attacks by ignoring them, and sometimes that's the wisest thing to do (Prov. 26:4).

- But instead, he responded boldly and confidently with three things he seemed to be convinced of.
- First, God was with them and He'd grant them success (vs. 20a).
- The attacks will come, but if we're on God's side then attacks against us are really against Him.

Secondly, the Jews working to rebuild the city walls were simply serving God (vs. 20b).

- We don't live or work for the approval of others - in our desire to be obedient to the Lord, we will get misunderstood, falsely accused, ridiculed, and condemned.
- But ultimately, we work to serve the One who gave us everything through Christ.

Lastly, Nehemiah tells the enemies of God's work that when the work is done, they won't have any portion or right or claim to it because of their disbelief and mockery (vs. 20c).

- When the New Jerusalem is established and King Jesus takes His place on its throne- every cynic, mocker, ridiculer, and enemy to God will see and have no claim to it.
- God's Kingdom will come - we must have faith to believe that nothing can stop it.

COMPELLED TO ACT AND TO MOTIVATE OTHERS TO ACT

- For Nehemiah, the glory of God's name is at stake in Jerusalem - and **the city is in ashes and rubble**.
- Today, God's name is no longer at stake in a city with walls and gates - it's at stake in the lives of His people, who are the temple of the Holy Spirit and His church, which is **our spiritual Jerusalem**.
- What walls and gates need work in your life? Your marriage? Your family? Your character? Your purity? Your self-control? **Your finances? Your mouth?**
- What walls and gates need work in the lives of those around you in the church? Who is in "ashes and rubble" that **you could possibly help rebuild?**

WAITING, PRAYING, AND PLANNING (VS. 1-8)

- Does God have you in a time of waiting? Are you **listening for His voice and watching for His answer** as you wait?
- Are you praying for God's direction as you wait?
- Are you **being responsible and using wisdom to plan, strategize, prepare and be ready** when God opens a door? Do you recognize when God opens a door?

SACRIFICING, STRATEGIZING, AND ENCOURAGING (VS. 9-18)

- Rebuilding a city is **very hard work** - but so is rebuilding a marriage, overcoming addiction, growing in godliness, and serving the Lord in any form of ministry.
- All things of value come with a cost - **without sacrifice, we simply can't see the worth** of something.
- Are you willing to sacrifice to rebuild the walls in your own life? Are you willing to wait and listen to the Lord, be intentional, to prepare, to strategize?
- Are you **willing to encourage others** in their walk?

STANDING FIRM (VS. 19-20)

- Have you experienced the attack of your enemy as he attempts to **invalidate or disqualify** you?
- Have you experienced the false accusations and condemnation as he attempts to shake your confidence?
- Stand firm (Eph. 6:13)- God is with you, you're working to serve Him, and **His Kingdom will someday come**.