



NEHEMIAH

pray plan build

Daily Worship Booklet

Week 2

God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,
day after day and the people of God were filled with joy!

Friday - Nehemiah 2:11-16 – Rest and homework.

Nehemiah is now in Jerusalem with the title of governor of Judah. However, titles are worthless unless one is prepared to do the work that the job requires. But, before he sets about fulfilling his new role, I think it is reasonable to deduce that he took time to rest. Some people find it easy to rest; their life could be described as one long rest, interspersed with the occasional seasons of work. Others tend toward a life of work with occasional times of rest. Neither is good. God has established a pattern of six days of labour and one day of rest at creation, codified in the 4th Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) – the day of rest being a Sabbath unto the Lord; which means it is to be enjoyed and delighted in as a day of physical rest and public worship of God. Then there are examples of when Jesus withdrew to rest (Mark 6:31-32). Whether we are prone to ‘resting’ a little too much or not given to resting enough, we should care for one another enough to identify our respective inclinations and be willing to say, especially to the ‘over’ worker – that it is okay to rest.

On Nehemiah’s fourth day in the city, with its broken-down walls and gates destroyed by fire, he does a night-shift. It is a special night-shift though, one geared towards finding out for himself the extent of what he would be seeking to address. Solomon, the son of the man who built Jerusalem, wrote in his Proverbs, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame” (Proverbs 18:13). Nehemiah was not a man given to folly, and he certainly wasn’t going to fall on his face by saying something in Jerusalem he could not substantiate with hard facts. This is good leadership. Too many in leadership in the church do not take the time to investigate the situation they find themselves in before speaking. They assume too much of the respect due to their role. And they expect God’s people to follow them because they open their mouths. There can be no substitute for walking the unseen hard yards of preparation; God’s Word is full of examples of the preparation He undertook to fulfil His plan of salvation. Experience has also taught me that there is truth in the adage, ‘Fail to prepare, and you are preparing to fail.’

Nehemiah did not go out on his investigation on his own – I have heard it said that he did more it than a few times; I think where the confusion comes in is that they take the fact that he does not tell anyone what he is thinking with what he is doing at this point. The fact that he accompanied, and for security reasons again, shows that he was a measured, wise individual, not given to fits of fantasy, nor recklessness.

Q1. What is the first thing Nehemiah does when he arrives in Jerusalem?

Q2. What is the next thing he does?

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**The book of Nehemiah focuses on the work involved in labouring to see
Christ build his church.**

Thursday - Nehemiah 2:9-10 – Opposition is never far away.

Although Nehemiah had asked for letters of safe passage through the various provinces from King Artaxerxes, he does not tell us anything about his two-month journey from Susa to Jerusalem. Unlike the prophet Ezra, who had made a similar journey some thirteen years earlier (Ezra 7:1-8) along with some of other exiles and had declined a military escort (Ezra 8:22). Nehemiah, as a Persian official, was accompanied by officers and horsemen. Presumably, given who he was and the importance of his role to the king, he did not have much of a say in it. Interestingly, he does not fuss about it and tries to show his faith by arguing that God would protect him as He had the previous exiles. There are times when we need to show our faith clearly – we probably err too much on the cautious side of doing so – but there are occasions when holding our tongue is not an unwise decision, especially when God is providing for us through other means.

Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem was not greeted with overwhelming rejoicing. Two men are mentioned as being greatly displeased about this turn of events. They are:

- Sanballat, a Samaria official from Beth Horan, about twelve miles from Jerusalem. As we shall see, he will prove to be Nehemiah's most strident opponent. The Samaritans were, of course, 'half cousins of the Jews'. The most significant difference is their belief that God had chosen Mount Gerizim near Shechem (John 4:20) to be worshipped.

- Tobiah the Ammonite. We hear quite a bit about the Ammonites in the Bible; they were the descendants of Ben-Ammi, one of Lot's sons (see Genesis 19:38) and avowed enemies of God's people (Deuteronomy 23:3-4). Even though Tobiah was related by marriage to some of those who would work with Nehemiah, including Eliashib, the priest in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 13:4), and had numerous Jewish friends (Nehemiah 6:17-19), it will soon become clear that he is going to use these contacts to gather intelligence in his attempts to support Sanballat's desire to destroy Nehemiah's reconstruction work.

It would be a long while before they would be joined in their efforts. They would be joined by a third man, Geshem, an Arabian (Nehemiah 2:19), also known as Gashmu (Nehemiah 6:6).

The point is simple – the enemies of God's people are not always rogues from outside the church. So-called 'good decent' folk within the church can create real problems for the Bride because their motivations and drivers sometimes have more than just a personal tinge.

Q1. Why did Nehemiah have an armed escort while Ezra did not?

Q2. Does trouble always come to the church from 'outside'?

Monday – Nehemiah 2:1-8 – Faith to wait!

Nehemiah has cried for Judah and her capital, Jerusalem. He has fasted so that he could pray in a focused, earnest way for her. His prayer had been marked with confession for the sin of God's people, among whom he included himself. He had remembered God's promises and, with humility, recounted them to God. Although I didn't mention it last week, verse ten of chapter one is very similar in language and tone to how Moses beseeched God on behalf of the church after she had built the golden calf and began to worship it at Mount Sinai; see Exodus 32:11. Nothing can be achieved with God and for God until there is a true confession of sin, because only then will there be a genuine dependence upon God and a resulting faith-driven clearness of thought.

Nehemiah first has the faith to wait. Remember, we're looking at an extremely competent, courageous individual here. A Jew who had risen to the highest security position in the most powerful nation in the world – as he says, "I was cupbearer to the king." (Nehemiah 1:11). He is a master manager of people and commodities, someone who could get things done, yet he waits – waits on who or for what?

After hearing the news about the plight of Jerusalem, Nehemiah waits for four months for God to direct and lead his thinking. Why? Why not just go ahead and use his position to do what he thinks should be done? Surely, with every passing day, things in Jerusalem are only getting worse. Nehemiah waits because of what he knows – he knows that this is more than a reconstruction project; he is dealing with the Church here, and the church can never be a project. She is a living entity in the Hands of the Living God; the only thing that matters is what He desires to be done in Her.

Two of the best decisions I have made in my life involved waiting for the Lord to lead. I also have to say that two of the worst decisions in my life were made when I was impatient and would not wait on the Lord. There is wisdom in taking to heart the command of God to "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (Psalm 46:10). Where are you at when it comes to waiting on God? I'm not talking about being lazy; I am talking about wanting to get something done, but making sure that the Lord's Hand is in it before you jump!

Q1. What must precede the clearness of faith-driven thought?

Q2. After he had prayed, what was the first thing Nehemiah did?

Tuesday – Nehemiah 2:1-8 – He planned and stepped forward.

Having waited, Nehemiah was granted the wisdom he needed to take the next step. It's not that God gave him a checklist of what to do and when, but when seeking the Lord, one gets a sense of the correct time to do something. It also does not mean that it is a case of just barging on without preparation and thought. If I can say it reverently – God is big into planning and order. Look at salvation; it has been planned not from Day One but from before the foundation of the world (see Ephesians 1). And what strikes you about creation is that it is the epitome of order. So, we, too, should be big into planning and order. After all, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, saying, "All things should be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The first thing Nehemiah planned was how he would approach the most powerful man in the world, King Artaxerxes. Eastern monarchs of the period were carefully sheltered from anything that might cause them offence or make them unhappy (Esther 4:1,2). So, he could not just walk in and blurt out what he wanted the king to do. It is obvious that he thought through and planned his approach carefully.

First, he chooses the right time. We read in verse six that the queen is present. So what? Persian queens were rarely present when the king was engaged in state business, so Nehemiah broached the subject in his 'relaxed at home' mood.

Second, he devises a thoughtful approach. Given the protocol about looking happy in the king's presence, a courtier was not there to trouble the king with the trifling of their life. Despite his broken heart at the plight of Jerusalem, Nehemiah had carefully observed the palace protocol throughout this four-month period. That is until this day when he decided it was time to reveal the pain he was carrying in his heart to the king. (We do not always have to carry our emotions on our sleeve or our Facebook page.) Obviously, as he entered the king's presence, he must have been shaking inside, knowing what might transpire, but he confronts his fear and steps forward. His unusual, sad countenance does not go unnoticed by the king, who is perceptive in what he observes. He knows his cupbearer, and he knows that there is more to this than him just having a bad day. So, Artaxerxes asks Nehemiah why he is sad. You would think that this would bring relief to Nehemiah, but it just increases the fear pulsating through him, for this is the moment of no return. The next few moments are crucial, not for what must be done in Jerusalem, but for his very life.

Nothing is easy in the kingdom of God; serving Christ can be daunting at times, but he is not ignorant of the cost involved.

Q1. How did Nehemiah approach what he did?

Q2. Why was he afraid when in the king's presence?

Wednesday – Nehemiah 2:1-8 - Prayed, thought, and planned!

In verse 3, having been asked about the reason for his sad demeanour, Nehemiah acknowledges the king and then asks him a question without a hint of manipulation or political intrigue. Why? Well, the state of a long-since-destroyed, insignificant city, some 1200 kilometres to the west, was not going to interest Artaxerxes too much. So, this question about how he would feel if (by implication) the city of his ancestors had been destroyed by fire personalizes it for him. This is another sign that a lot of prayer and thought had gone into Nehemiah's intelligent approach.

The praying, thinking, and planning works; Artaxerxes asks him what he wants, and Nehemiah speaks to God before he responds. God is at the heart and centre of all this man thinks and does. He is not just engaging God to come and help him; Nehemiah is living and breathing with God through this entire experience and encounter. How exciting it is that we can live in such a close relationship with our Father in Heaven.

Nehemiah's response is absent of waffle, 'ifs, buts, ands, and maybes.' Everything about it speaks of clarity, conciseness, and directness. He asks for something remarkable – to be given a sabbatical from his job – so that he could go to Jerusalem to rebuild it. What!? Did he know what he was asking, first regarding leaving his job and then rebuilding a city? The king's question is obvious: "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" Nehemiah is ready with his reply. Again, there is no 'hemming and hawing'; this man is on top of what he is thinking and planning to do. This is further underscored when Artaxerxes permits him to take his requested leave of absence to go to Jerusalem, and Nehemiah immediately recites a series of specific requests. He needs letters from the king, one for each of the Governors of the province. Moreover, he will need a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, to get the materials he will need for the various reconstruction projects he will face in Jerusalem.

That is what comes from forethought and planning – how the church needs leaders today who are given to prayerful, rigorous planning. Men who can grasp the enormity of what they are involved in and forsake the human inclination to be lazy and live on the misguided hope that everything will turn out all right because we are all Christians.

Q1. How did Nehemiah approach the task God had brought his way?

Q2. What must we not do regarding how we approach God's work?