

Nehemiah 2:1-11 – Moving from Prayer to Action

TSK, HebrewLexicon, Armstrong, Handfuls, Gaebelin, Trapp, Poole, JFB, Delitzsch, Geneva, Expositor, Clarke, Barnes, Gill, Henry, INT? Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: It is quite tough being a leader, especially a leader in Christ's church. Nehemiah was one such example. He had actively investigated what was happening in Jerusalem. He cried and mourned when he heard the deplorable condition of the city. He then fasted and prayed for God's help in the situation. But now it was time to work. We pick up from there today.

Our headings are:

Nehemiah's Dejection

Nehemiah's Petition

Nehemiah's Action

Our goals are: **That you will learn to play your part, and support leaders doing their part, so the kingdom of Jesus will grow in numbers and in strength so more worship and glory will be raised up to God Almighty.**

Nehemiah's Dejection

1 And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.

1. For more than three months Nehemiah mourned and prayed for Jerusalem after he learned the city was exposed to dangers with her walls still unbuilt.

His concern was not simply for a city without walls, but **for a city in which Messiah would come to die for the sins** of the world. His concern was that **worship (and glory and praise) were not going up to Yahweh.**

2. After a while, Nehemiah's face reflected in court what was in his heart, something a steward was not allowed to do.

To be sad in the presence of the king was punishable! But his sadness was overwhelming and he could hide it no longer.

2 Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So **I became dreadfully afraid,**

3. The king expressed concern about Nehemiah's countenance and inquired about what seemed like deep sadness.

Instead of executing Nehemiah for being sad, he showed care for him. He was telling us Nehemiah was a good man. The king did not want to lose him. And knowing the king saw his sadness, **Nehemiah became dreadfully afraid.** He knew he had to act quickly to pacify the king.

3 and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"

4. Nehemiah then expressed his sadness that the tombs of his ancestors were destroyed.

Notice first how Nehemiah expressed his desire that the king would live forever. This would ameliorate any anger the king might have had for Nehemiah for being sad in his presence.

Notice Nehemiah did not talk about the hope for the coming Messiah, as that might have triggered an angry reaction from King Artaxerxes, as he might see that as a threat to his kingdom.

Notice Nehemiah did not mention Jerusalem yet... just the mention of the **ancestral tombs of his fathers.**

The king had stopped the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem because the Jews were considered rebels.

Ezra 4:19 And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. **[21] Now give the command to make these men cease,** that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.

Rather, Nehemiah talked about his great concern for his father's tombs so the king would empathize.

5. Lessons:

a. A good moral example here is to learn to care about those who are sad. Ask! You might save a life.

b. When the church is in a sad state, as it is now, acknowledge it is, and continually mourn and pray for her. (If you don't pray, it means you don't understand God's power, or you don't believe he has power.) Commit to the task. Don't just get excited and then stop. Have a heart for God's people.

c. Learn to think of the kingdom – getting the big picture. You are not an island. You are part of the covenant community.

Nehemiah's Petition

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

1. God worked in the pagan king's heart because of Nehemiah's persistent prayer so he asked Nehemiah what he wanted.

The king, who had no use for the true God, asked a servant of the true God what he could do for him!

What favor God was using the king to accomplish! Kings of the earth (like Cyrus) always served God's purposes.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

2. Before Nehemiah petitioned the king, *he petitioned the God of heaven, the one who was Supreme – the God of all gods.*

5 And I said to the king, "**If it pleases the king**, and if **your servant** has found favor in your sight, I ask that you **send me to Judah**, to the **city** of my fathers' tombs, that I may **rebuild it.**"

3. Nehemiah then *humbly and boldly requested the king to allow him to go and repair the city of his ancestors' tombs.*

Humility: *If it pleases the king. I'm your servant!* This pleased the king and made him more amenable to Nehemiah. Nehemiah didn't ask for a raise...or more time-off. It wasn't about him! It was the land from which Jesus would come.

Boldness: Let me, a servant, go back and rebuild the city of my fathers' tombs. (Nothing of Jerusalem!)

6 Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "**How long will your journey be?** And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and **I set him a time.**

4. The king (with the queen beside him) asked for details about the possible trip – and after finding them agreeable, approved Nehemiah's trip to Jerusalem.

The mention of the queen was to show she had great power and influence. Nehemiah was gone for a total of about 12 years on multiple trips.

7 Furthermore I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must **permit me to pass** through till I come to Judah, 8 "and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must **give me timber to make beams** for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." And the **king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.**

5. Seeing the approval for the king, and his amenability, *Nehemiah asked for more for his brothers.*

He asked for **letters of passage.**

He asked for a **letter to get beams from the king's forest** to rebuild the gates of the citadel that was associated with the temple, for the city wall, and for a house for himself.

He then acknowledged God ultimately granted him what he wanted as God controlled the king.

He was an "unfortunate" servant, but he was God's means of making the nation rich and secure.

6. Lessons:

a. God has power over all earth's leaders. Let that knowledge fortify you when you have to confront wicked men. Let it guide you when you pray.

b. It is always right and proper before making any big decision to ask God for wisdom to make the right decision.

c. Knowing the difficult struggles leaders of the church, pray for them. It would be a form of cruelty if you don't! They have a job that not only requires educational preparation, but it also includes mental and spiritual preparation! How many jobs require spiritual preparation?

d. Be willing to ask help for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Ask man and God to help them – even beg. Doing this will advance the kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

e. Nehemiah was in an unfortunate situation, but it was the means of blessing, and so it can be for you. Don't despise the circumstances of your life. God is training you to be a blessing to his church.

Nehemiah's Actions

9 Then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.

1. Not wasting any time, upon getting the letters from the king, Nehemiah crossed the Euphrates River and headed west, presenting the letters of commendation and lawful orders.

Incredibly, **the king even sent captains and horsemen to ensure Nehemiah's safe passage.**

Nehemiah didn't ask for them, but the Lord worked to show special favor to Nehemiah.

Nehemiah moved from being a servant to a governor.

10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

2. Nehemiah did not back down from his trip knowing there were enemies of God's people there – people who could make his life quite miserable.

Sanballat was like a half-breed Jew of the northern 10 ½ tribes. Tobiah, a former slave, was an Ammonite official. These who were personal enemies, joined together to stop Nehemiah. **Their envy caused them to pursue deadly mischief against Nehemiah.**

11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.

3. Nehemiah stayed in Jerusalem for 3 days to make sure he could adequately survey the needs and assess what needed to be done to secure the walls, preserve the people, the land, and worship.

4. Lessons:

a. Don't be surprised if God uses ordinary people to show you favor. He controls the hearts of kings. He can work in your boss' heart to give you that promotion. He can provide that right spouse for you. That immigration paper is nothing for God!

b. There will always be opposition to the work of God. People will object to your marriage. Christian women are routinely **mocked for submitting to their husbands**. People will **object to your love for worship and the Sabbath**. People will object when you **raise your children in the fear of the Lord**.

c. Take time to assess where the needs are in the church and how you can help to meet those needs.

d. More fundamental, the church needs people who are specialized in thinking...those who would study and assess so we can keep the big picture of our mission on this earth. We have to get people to give good advice, to see where the needs are, to give advice on how to meet those needs, and to understand the weaknesses of the church. We must get these men or we will die.

Conclusion:

Nehemiah, even though things were going well for him personally, was dejected with the situation among the covenant people of God. So he mourned and prayed for her. When given an opportunity to do something about it, he did. He petitioned the king for permission to go to Jerusalem and requested supplies to rebuild the walls and other needed structures for the temple.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord:

1. Never forget the church of Jesus. She is Christ's bride. She is in bad times today. She needs your help. **Be a part of her.** Don't be bogged down by the troubles of your life. That is your refining and preparing fire. Your mission is bigger than yourself. **Pray for her. Speak to her.** Remember the Psalmist: **If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill!**

2. If you forget the church, the work of the cross will come to nothing. Christ will be robbed of his glory. You will be guilty of the body and blood of Jesus.

3. If you remember the church and serve her, praise, glory, and honor will go up to the risen Savior.

Finally: Nehemiah had hope in the coming Messiah – that he would die for the sins of the world. His job was to make sure the way was clear for Messiah to come. That Messiah has come and he did die. Do you know him? Do you believe he died for your sins?