

Nehemiah: Rebuild and Renew

Lesson 2: Planning and Provision

Key Verse: *I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."* (Nehemiah 2:20).

Nehemiah's Request and Sending (2:1-10)

- Four months after Nehemiah received the bad news about Jerusalem's condition, the king noticed Nehemiah's sadness (vv 1-2).
- Nehemiah noted that he had never been sad in the king's presence before.
 - o Servants were never to let their negative emotions show before a king. The king might interpret it as displeasure with the king. Or he might simply be irritated that a servant was detracting from the atmosphere of the court. In either case, the move was a dangerous one that might lead to his dismissal or even death.
 - o Did Nehemiah reveal his sadness on purpose? Perhaps. He had been able to conceal his sadness for four months. His prayer in 1:11 indicates that he had some plan for getting his request before the king.
 - o Intention didn't remove the fear (v 2b), Nehemiah knew both his tactic (public grief) and his request were risky moves.
- The king's words reveal a certain level of concern and trust of Nehemiah (v 2). A king would not inquire about the well-being of just any servant.
- Nehemiah leans into the king's favor bravely but gently by letting him know that the city where his ancestors were buried was in ruins (v 3).
 - o Nehemiah shows proper respect: "May the king live forever!"
 - o He also offers his news in the gentlest of ways by not naming Jerusalem as the city. It was Artaxerxes who had stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem several years before due to rumors of a rebellion.
 - o Nehemiah is attempting to use his own reputation with the king to overcome the king's suspicion about the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
 - o He is also appealing to the high value ancient people placed upon honoring the dead.
- The king asked Nehemiah what he wanted him to do.
- Nehemiah offered a quick prayer to "the God of heaven" as he made his request.
 - o Sometimes called an "arrow" or "breath" prayer, this short prayer was a culmination of four months of praying.
 - o Nehemiah speaks with courtesy and humility, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in his sight..." (v 5b).
 - o He is direct, "send me to the city in Judah...so that I can rebuild it" (v 5b).

- The mention of the Queen indicates that this may have been a private gathering, since queens did not attend formal banquets.
- The king asked Nehemiah how long the project would take, a strong indication that he was open to the trip.
- Nehemiah was ready with a plan – an indication that he didn’t just pray over the last four months, he also worked out what would be needed to rebuild Jerusalem.
 - o He would need a letter assuring safe passage (v7).
 - o He would need access to the royal timber (v 8).
- Nehemiah views the king’s granting of permission as a sign of God’s gracious hand (v 8). No wonder, since the king gave him even more than he asked for including a military escort (v9).
- Not everyone is happy with this turn of events. Several Ammonite officials, who see a strong Judah as a threat, are disturbed by the turn of events (v 10).

Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem’s Walls (2:11-20).

- Nehemiah began the work in Jerusalem by staying three days to presumably, pray, rest, get acquainted with some people there, and to determine whom he could trust (v 11).
- Nehemiah initially kept his plans a secret from the people of Jerusalem.
 - o He told no one of his plans (v 11, 16).
 - o He set out in the night with a few others to inspect the walls of Jerusalem (v 12) to keep his work away from curious eyes.
- Nehemiah’s inspection revealed a city in complete ruin. At times, there was not enough room for his horse to maneuver (14).
- Nehemiah eventually spoke to the people who would be doing the work (common people, priests, nobles, and officials) (v 17).
 - o He called on them to “see” the trouble they were all in.
 - o He called on them to rebuild the wall so that they would no longer be in disgrace.
 - o He testified to God’s gracious provision and the king’s words.
- They respond by agreeing to begin the work.
- As soon as the Ammonite officials heard about it they began to mock and ridicule them and to toss out accusations that got the work stopped the last time: “Are you rebelling against the king?” (v 19).
- Nehemiah answers them with a bold statement of God’s provision and a stark warning that they had no present or historical claim to the city (v 20).

Nehemiah has often been used as an example of an effective leader. What are some of the things Nehemiah did in this chapter that effective leaders can emulate?

Sources

- Derek Kinder, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Academic, 1979).
- Gary V. Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022).
- Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Interpretation (Louisville KY: John Knox, 1992).