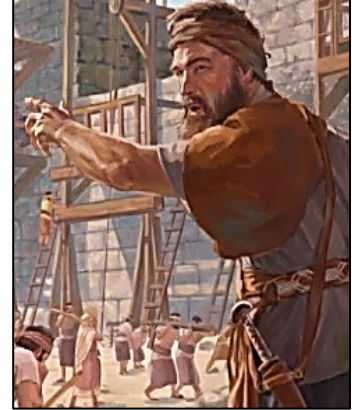


NEHEMIAH

Faith in Action

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PART 2: Nehemiah's Burden and Return to Jerusalem

A. WARM-UP QUESTION

Have you ever felt a deep burden for something that's "broken"—so overwhelming that you couldn't ignore it—but didn't know where to start in fixing it?" See how Nehemiah responded to such a situation.

B. SUMMARY

Nehemiah, an exiled Jew and cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, in the Persian capital of Susa (also called Shushan) hears of Jerusalem's broken walls and is deeply grieved. He prays, fasts, and seeks God's favor. Four months later, he approaches the king and receives permission and provisions to return to Jerusalem. Upon arrival, Nehemiah secretly surveys the damage and then inspires the people to rebuild, facing opposition with unwavering faith in God's guidance.

C. NEHEMIAH 1:4—2:20

Nehemiah's Prayer (1:4–11)

"When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I said, "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands, ⁶ listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! ⁷ We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses. ⁸ "Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹ But if you return to me and obey my commands and live by them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for

my name to be honored.' ¹⁰ "The people you rescued by your great power and strong hand are your servants. ¹¹ O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you. Please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me." In those days I was the king's cup-bearer. "

Petition to the King (2:1–8)

"Early the following spring, in the month of Nisan, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never before appeared sad in his presence. ² So the king asked me, "Why are you looking so sad? You don't look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled." Then I was terrified, ³ but I replied, "Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire." ⁴ The king asked, "Well, how can I help you?" With a prayer to the God of heaven, ⁵ I replied, "If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried." ⁶ The king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked, "How long will you be gone? When will you return?" After I told him how long I would be gone, the king agreed to my request. ⁷ I also said to the king, "If it please the king, let me have letters addressed to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, instructing them to let me travel safely through their territories on my way to Judah. ⁸ And please give me a letter addressed to Asaph, the manager of the king's forest, instructing him to give me timber. I will need it to make beams for the gates of the Temple fortress, for the city walls, and for a house for myself." And the king granted these requests, because the gracious hand of God was on me. "

Journey and Opposition (2:9–10)

"When I came to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, I delivered the king's letters to them. The king, I should add, had sent along army officers and horsemen to protect me. ¹⁰ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of my arrival, they were very displeased that someone had come to help the people of Israel. "

Secret Inspection (2:11–16)

"So I arrived in Jerusalem. Three days later, ¹²I slipped out during the night, taking only a few others with me. I had not told anyone about the plans God had put in my heart for Jerusalem. We took no pack animals with us except the donkey I was riding. ¹³ After dark I went out through the Valley Gate, past the Jackal's Well, and over to the Dung Gate to inspect the broken walls and burned gates. ¹⁴ Then I went to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but my donkey couldn't get through the rubble. ¹⁵ So, though it was still dark, I went up the Kidron Valley¹ instead, inspecting the wall before I turned back and entered again at the Valley Gate. ¹⁶ The city officials did not know I had been out there or what I was doing, for I had not yet said anything to anyone about my plans. I had not yet spoken to the Jewish leaders -- the priests, the nobles, the officials,

or anyone else in the administration.

Public Motivation (2:17–20)

“But now I said to them, “You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!”¹⁸ Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me, and about my conversation with the king. They replied at once, “Yes, let’s rebuild the wall!” So they began the good work.¹⁹ But when Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab heard of our plan, they scoffed contemptuously. “What are you doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” they asked.²⁰ I replied, “The God of heaven will help us succeed. We, his servants, will start rebuilding this wall. But you have no share, legal right, or historic claim in Jerusalem.”

D. KEY CHARACTERS

Sanballat the Horonite (a person from Horon): He is referred to as a governor of Samaria, suggesting he held a position of authority under the Persian empire. Sanballat is the chief instigator of opposition against Nehemiah and the Jews. He mocks the rebuilding efforts and attempts to sabotage the project through ridicule, threats, and political schemes.

Tobiah the Ammonite: An Ammonite official, possibly also of noble or influential lineage. The Ammonites were traditional enemies of Israel. Tobiah works closely with Sanballat and tries to infiltrate and weaken the Jews’ resolve. He has connections with Jewish nobles and even has a room in the Temple at one point, which Nehemiah later clears out.

E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Nehemiah’s first response was prayer and fasting rather than action?

2. What can we learn from the structure and content of Nehemiah’s prayer?

3. What risks did Nehemiah take in approaching the king?

4. Why did Nehemiah initially keep his inspection and plans private?

5. How did Nehemiah respond to opposition? What should we learn from this?

F. FOUR APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

1. Always _____ when facing a tough situation.

Whether facing a burden or opportunity, begin by seeking God's wisdom and favor.

2. Act _____ in faith when God opens "doors."

When God opens doors, don't hesitate—step forward with courage, trusting in His provision.

3. Expect _____ when God calls you to do something.

Doing God's work doesn't mean it'll be easy. Like Nehemiah, stay focused and faithful even when challenged.

4. Gather _____ before making a big decision.

Like Nehemiah who inspected the condition of the Jerusalem wall, before taking action, make sure you have all the facts so you can make a wise decision.

G. PERSONAL NOTES
