

## *A Study of the Book of Nehemiah*

### Prayer and Confidence in the Midst of Chaos (*Nehemiah 2:9-20*)

“The chief danger of the Church today is that it is trying to get on the same side as the world, instead of turning the world upside down. Our Master expects us to accomplish results, even if they bring opposition and conflict. Anything is better than compromise, apathy, and paralysis. God, give to us an intense cry for the old-time power of the Gospel and the Holy Ghost!” ~ A. B. Simpson

#### **I. Overview**

After four months of praying and planning, not to mention, journeying for two months to Jerusalem, Nehemiah finally arrived in Judah. Clearly the task was daunting and the opposition intense. Yet, instead of launching immediately into construction or calling a meeting for Jewish leaders to discuss this building project, Nehemiah spends time with the Lord, assessing the situation first-hand. Nehemiah’s actions reveal not only his character, they also provide some important principles for all those who wish to be used mightily by the Lord.

#### **II. Nehemiah’s Arrival to Jerusalem (2:9-20)**

##### A. Identification of the Task and Recognizing the Opposition (2:9-10)

v. 9 - The military entourage that Artaxerxes extended for this project would have created a great scene. It certainly indicated the King’s approval of Nehemiah. This military presence would have also deterred any threat of a local uprising against this King’s cupbearer.

v. 10 - Both of these men possessed great influence and power. They will serve as antagonists throughout Nehemiah’s time in the land.

“Sanballat the Horonite” - He serves as the prime opponent of Nehemiah. The Babylonian meaning of his name is “Sin (the moon god) gives life”. The reference to “Horonite” may indicate a town by the name of Horonaim in southern Moab. As aptly noted by one scholar, “A Moabite origin of Sanballat, in conjunction with Tobiah’s Ammonite heritage, also would shed light on Nehemiah 13:1 and its reference to Deuteronomy 23:3-6, according to which all Moabites and Ammonites are prohibited from entering the congregation of the Lord” (L.-S. Tiemeyer, “Sanballat,” *DOTHB*, 878). According to historical and archaeological records, Sanballat served as governor of Samaria during this timeframe.

The Samaritans most likely originated from a group of Jews left behind after the fall of the northern Kingdom of Israel—Jews who married other people groups who arrived to the land (see 2 Kgs 17).

“Tobiah the Ammonite servant” - The term “servant” could be pejorative, as Tobiah appears to serve in some leadership role in conjunction with Sanballat.

The Ammonites originated from an incestuous relationship between Lot and his younger daughter (see Gen 19:36-38). This people group continually served as an enemy of Israel throughout the Old Testament (see Deut 23:4).

## B. Evaluation of the Task and Assessing the Situation (2:11-16)

At least six months had passed since Nehemiah heard the news concerning the state of Jerusalem (e.g., four months before he approaches Artaxerxes and two months traveling to Judah). During that time span, much prayer and planning had transpired. And yet, Nehemiah was still cautious and calculated when he arrives to the Holy City. He does not rush into action upon arriving. Rather, he dedicates several days to assess first-hand the situation. “Above and beyond his sound tactics, however, was the conviction that basically the project was not his. It was from God and ‘for Jerusalem’ (v. 12)—not from Nehemiah nor his prestige” (D. Kidner, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 82).

v. 12 - Secrecy was vital for the following reasons: (1) opposition to the building of the wall had already existed in the past (Ezra 4), (2) present hostility existed (e.g., Sanballat and Tobiah), and (3) even distrust and a lack of allegiance existed among some of the residents of Jerusalem.

Similar to Moses, Elijah, and even Jesus, time in private with the Lord is vital to ministry. Chuck Swindoll observes, “The anvil upon which God molds His leaders is silence and solitude. For it is during these interludes that God forges the qualities, thoughts, and character of a true leader” (*A Study of Nehemiah*, 27).

vv. 13-15 - Since several of the names in this passage are unknown, scholars have debated the path that Nehemiah took. However, most likely, he traveled from the west side of the city, around the southern end, and then to the eastern side. Along this ridge of the Kidron Valley, Nehemiah would have proceeded by foot because of the huge rubble. From there, he would return to the west side via the north side of the Temple mount.

Regardless which direction Nehemiah traveled around the city, the job was enormous. The circuit of the walls was more than a mile, their width was three to four feet thick, and they towered approximately 15 to 20 feet high. Nor should one forget that these walls had laid in ruin for approximately 150 years!

v. 16 - Nehemiah was extremely cautious not to let anyone know where he had been or what he was assessing.

## C. Motivation for the Task and Securing Full Participation (2:17-18)

v. 17 - Nehemiah’s all-nighter had confirmed what was relayed to him in 1:3. Whereupon he finally addresses the people. In so doing, Nehemiah asks for two things: (1) They recognize there is a serious problem; and (2) They need to join him in rebuilding the city.

What is Nehemiah's ultimate reason for rebuilding the walls? See Psalm 48:1-3.

Note that three times Nehemiah identifies with the people (e.g., "we" and "us").

v. 18 - Nehemiah "points first to the Lord's favor as the cause for their change in fortune (cf. 2:8 and Ezra 7:6), and only secondly to the king as God's instrument" (Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 191).

"good project" - The project is good because it originates from a good God.

#### D. Defending the Task and Responding to Opposition (2:19-20)

v. 19 - A third opponent is now added, "Geshem the Arabian". Not only is Israel faced with opposition from the north and the east, they now encounter disapproval from the south and southeast. Jerusalem was virtually surrounded by opposition—powerful opposition that could possibly dissuade the heart of King Artaxerxes and strike fear in anyone who might assist Nehemiah.

v. 20 - While the situation may seem out of control, Nehemiah operates under the control of the Spirit. There is no retaliation. Nor is there any foreign diplomacy. Instead, Nehemiah evokes the Lord's name in His ability to see that the task is completed. Nehemiah's response denies his opponents any civic, legal, and cultic rights to Jerusalem. "His emphasis, however, is positive: come what may, 'we . . . will start to rebuild'." (H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 193).

One commentator writes, "Nehemiah in reply does not even bother to refute the disloyalty charge. Instead he goes to the heart of the matter. Those who maintain the cause of God will prosper" (J. G. McConville, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 85).

### III. Intersect

A. Faced with enormous "walls"—a project or a relationship which seems irreparable—then look to the Lord. Nehemiah's hope was not ultimately in the King's resources, his own engineering prowess, or the willing work force of the residents of Jerusalem. Instead, Nehemiah's hope rested confidently in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

Psalm 33:13-22 -

B. If you are faced with ongoing opposition, then turn it over to the Lord. Let the Lord handle your enemies. After all, if you are doing His will, then their attacks are ultimately an affront to the Lord and His reputation.

Psalm 91:1-10 -

### For further thought . . .

*Based upon our study this morning, you may want to spend some additional time this week interacting with the following:*

Ultimately, Nehemiah's opposition did not stem from the Ammonites and Samaritans. Instead, his enemy was Satan. And yet, Nehemiah did not waver, nor did he compromise. He stood securely in knowing that the Lord's hand was upon his life. Such truths are very applicable for us. Observe these words from Francis Schaeffer:

"We as Bible-believing evangelical Christians are locked in a battle. This is not a friendly gentleman's discussion. It is a life and death conflict between the spiritual hosts of wickedness and those who claim the name of Christ... But do we really believe that we are in a life and death battle? Do we really believe that the part we play in the battle has consequences for whether or not men and women will spend eternity in hell? Or whether or not those who do live will live in a climate of moral perversion and degradation? Sadly, we must say that very few in the evangelical world have acted as if these things are true... Where is the clear voice speaking to the crucial issues of the day with distinctively biblical, Christian answers? With tears we must say it is not there and that a large segment of the evangelical world has become seduced by the world spirit of this present age. And more than this, we can expect the future to be a further disaster if the evangelical world does not take a stand for biblical truth and morality in the full spectrum of life."

~ Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian View of the Church*, 316-317

Spend some time this week reflecting on Schaeffer's words. Are there any areas in your life that you have let down your spiritual guard, turned a blind eye, or simply compromised for convenience sake? Recommit these areas of your life to the Lord.

"Show me a person focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ—never tiring of learning about Him, thinking about Him, boasting of Him, speaking about and for and to Him, thrilled and entranced with His perfections and beauty, finding ways to serve and exalt Him, tirelessly exploring ways to spend and be spent for Him, growing in character to be more and more like Him—and I will show you a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit." ~ Dan Phillips