

## Nehemiah 1-2 – Thursday, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- I've really looked forward to the book of Nehemiah for a number of reasons, chief of which is how God has used it in my life.
- Specifically as it relates to the discouragement that can set in when you're keeping your hands to the plow in God's calling.
- God has also used Nehemiah to help me in fighting the good fight of faith in the face of the enemy's relentless spiritual attack.

Alan Redpath - "There is no winning without warfare; there is no opportunity without opposition; there is no victory without vigilance. For when ever the people of God say, 'Let us arise and build,' Satan says, 'Let me arise and oppose.' "

- By way of a brief introduction to this book, Nehemiah can be divided into two sections, which can help us better understand it.
- While chapters 1-6 are about the "reconstruction" of the walls, chapters 7-13 are about the "re-instruction" of God's people.
- One thing that becomes abundantly clear throughout the study of this book is God can do anything with anyone whose willing.

**Nehemiah 1** -- 1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

- The chapter begins with this report from Hanani who had come back from Judah and apprised Nehemiah of how bad it was.
- Though the temple had been rebuilt and there was a remnant of God's people now living in Judah, they were in great distress.
- It seems that one of the reasons was the wall around the city, along with the gates to the city lay in a heap of charred ruins.

4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

- Nehemiah does what Ezra, who was his contemporary did when he had heard the report of the transgressions of God's people.
- Notice, like Ezra, he was so grieved by it that he had to sit down, and in so doing; he mourns, weeps, prays and fasts for days.
- The difference is that Ezra was in Jerusalem at the time, and Nehemiah is still in Persia, however, his heart is in Jerusalem.

Psalms 137:5-6 (NKJV) — 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill! 6 If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth— If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy.

5 And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, 6 please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. 7 We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. 8 Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.' 10 Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. 11 O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." For I was the king's cupbearer.

- Couple of thoughts on Nehemiah's prayer the first of which has to do with what he says about his being the king's cupbearer.
- The reason why he mentions this is because God is going to get all the glory for what he's going to do through a cupbearer.
- In other words God takes the cupbearers of this life and does extraordinary and supernatural things so He alone gets the credit.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 - 26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

- The second thought has to do with what's in Nehemiah's prayer, in that, there's a resemblance to how Jesus taught us to pray.
- One of the best acronyms for prayer I ever heard was ACTS, for Acknowledge, Confess, Thanksgiving and then Supplication.
- While I certainly don't wish to formulize prayer, this is something that can be helpful when it comes to knowing how to pray.

- By the way, it would be 4-months before God answers this prayer of Nehemiah's, which can be the hardest expression of faith.

Isaiah 64:4 (NKJV) — 4 For since the beginning of the world Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, Nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him.

Isaiah 30:18–19 - 18 Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! 19 People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you.

Isaiah 40:28–31 - 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. 29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

**Nehemiah 2** -- 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. 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 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 Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.  
- The chapter begins with Nehemiah being in a very dangerous position before the king who queries him about his countenance.  
- Notice how that Nehemiah's first response in that very second is to pray to the God of heaven in the quietness of his own heart.  
- The reason I point this out is because once again, this speaks to the paramount importance of prayer in every circumstance.

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."  
- I don't know if it's possible to overstate just how risky this is for Nehemiah, given that it was this very king that stopped the work.  
- In other words, this could have been seen as disloyalty and even betrayal, and as such, it could have meant Nehemiah's death.  
- The only thing that explains Nehemiah's faith in saying what he says knowing what's at stake is that he had first went to prayer.

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. 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.  
- This is one of those places in God's Word where it's important to know Bible prophecy as it relates to what the king agrees to.  
- At the risk of getting too complicated let me simply refer to the prophecy in the Book of Daniel chapter nine about the Messiah.  
- Namely, that of the specificity of 173,880 days from the precise date that Nehemiah would receive this command from this king.

Daniel 9:25–26 (NKJV) — 25 "Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times. 26 "And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

Sir Robert Anderson, the eminent British astronomer and mathematician, makes a strong case that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy exactly, to the day, entering Jerusalem on April 6, 32 A.D., precisely 173,880 days from Nehemiah 2:1. (Good thing Nehemiah waited four months for the Lord to answer his prayer on the exact day.)

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. 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.  
- Here we're introduced to Sanballat and Tobiah, who as we'll see throughout the book, will constantly oppose the work of God.  
- As I mentioned at the beginning, Nehemiah faces relentless attack from the enemy because of the calling God had on his life.  
- I suppose you could say that this is textbook when it comes to those like Nehemiah who seek the well-being of God's people.

11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. 13 And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass. 15 So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.  
- It's important to note that Nehemiah has yet to tell anyone what God put on his heart to do, which is often times God's wisdom.  
- It's also important to note that what Nehemiah does here by going out at night is not being paranoid; rather, he is being prudent.

17 Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." 18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work. 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?" 20 So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

- I love ending a Bible study with what we're told here. I also love this man of God who is an encouragement to me as a leader.
- This because, he's standing firm and in effect tells his detractors; "you can laugh all you want, but God, Himself will prosper us."
- Not only will God bless and prosper them, but these people will be shamed and never have any rights to that which God does!