

Nehemiah 2:1 ¶ And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, *that wine was* before him: and I took up the wine, and gave *it* unto the king. Now I had not been *beforetime* sad in his presence.

Nehemiah 2:2 Wherefore the king said unto me, *Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else* but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid,

Nehemiah 2:3 And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, *lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?*

The month Nisan corresponds to our March/April; so this is 3-4 months after first hearing the report concerning Jerusalem (cf 1:1). The time marker is the 20th year of the reign of Artaxerxes.

Nehemiah served the king his wine, and it was obvious to the king that he was very sad; he had never seen his servant sad before. When the king questioned Nehemiah as to why he was sad, he answered truthfully but with fear. He knew that the king had not shown favor to the people in Jerusalem in the past due to the influence of the governors of the surrounding lands. (See commentary on Ezra 4.)

Nehemiah responded to the king with humility. However, he truthfully declared that he was sad because the city of his fathers remained in ruins.

Nehemiah 2:4 Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 2:5 And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

Nehemiah 2:6 And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

The king recognized that Nehemiah wanted to help his people and asked him what he could do to help him. Even as he gave answer to the king, he prayed for God's intervention. He asked, if it pleased the king because he pleased the king, that he send him (as his representative) to his homeland to help rebuild the city of his fathers.

Nehemiah notes that the queen was present at the time of his request; some commentators conclude this to be a reference to Esther. After the king questioned how long he expected to be gone and when he would return, he granted his permission.

I think it is important to note that Nehemiah was prepared and ready with answers for the king. He had carefully thought about what needed to be done and what would be required to do it.

I liked Ironside's observation about Nehemiah: "He walked with God because he talked with God." I think that is a key to victorious living.

Nehemiah 2:7 Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;

Nehemiah 2:8 And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which *appertained* to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Knowing that he had found favor with the king, Nehemiah proceeded to ask for letters from the king to the governors of the western lands beyond the Euphrates River asking that they provide him support as needed. He also asked for a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, instructing him to provide timber as needed to build the gates that were so important to security, the walls of the city and a house for himself. The king granted his every request.

Chuck Smith makes this observation in light of Daniel's prophecy: "Now this is one of the most important dates in history, the date that the king gave the commandment to Nehemiah to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem. Because we are told in Daniel the ninth chapter that there are seventy sevens determined upon the nation Israel, and from the time of the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem unto the coming of the Messiah the Prince would be seven sevens, and sixty-two sevens, or 483 years (Daniel 9:24-25). So here on the fourteenth of March 445 B.C. the commandment was given to Nehemiah to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem....So just as was prophesied in the word of God, 483 years later, Babylonian years of 360-day years, Jesus came in His triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem on April 6, 32 A.D."

Sir Robert Anderson of Scotland Yard is credited with first presenting this information in his book The Coming Prince (1894) based on his study of the book of Daniel.

Nehemiah 2:9 ¶ Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.

Nehemiah 2:10 When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

Nehemiah delivered the letters from the king to the governors in the west. The king had also provided him with a military escort. Two men in particular were not happy to find out that a representative of the king had come to help the people of Israel, Sanballat and Tobiah.

Eerdman's Dictionary:

Sanballat – “The aforementioned Elephantine papyrus calls Sanballat governor of Samaria, and as such he was also responsible for Judah and Jerusalem. He may well have thought he had jurisdiction over Nehemiah, who instead claimed to be the agent of King Artaxerxes and thus beyond Sanballat’s control.... Despite Nehemiah’s success, Sanballat did not easily relinquish control over Jerusalem, as the marriage of his daughter to the grandson of the high priest Eliashib proves (Neh. 13:28).”

Tobiah – “Tobiah is identified as “the Ammonite,” which suggests he exercised political control over that area. He was allied with nobles in Judah (Neh. 6:17), who may well have opposed Nehemiah’s reforms for economic, political, and/or religious reasons. Further, he was related by marriage to the high priest Eliashib, who prepared a living space for him within the temple precincts while Nehemiah was out of the city (Neh. 13:4-9).”

Nehemiah 2:11 So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

Nehemiah 2:12 And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I *any* man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither *was there any* beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.

Nehemiah 2:13 And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.

Nehemiah 2:14 Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king’s pool: but *there was* no place for the beast *that was* under me to pass.

Nehemiah 2:15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.

Nehemiah 2:16 And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told *it* to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.

When Nehemiah reached Jerusalem, he rested three days before taking action. He and a few of his men got up during the night to secretly assess the walls and gates of the city. For some reason he did not want any of the men of Jerusalem to know what he was doing. I think he wanted to understand the situation before asking the people to follow him in rebuilding the walls.

Guzik made a good application that every Christian should consider: “If someone took a tour of your life the same way Nehemiah took a tour of Jerusalem they might notice many broken down portions in the figurative walls of your life. [Proverbs 25:28](#) says: *Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.* Many lives are like a city with broken walls - living with a constant sense of fear, poverty, and insecurity. We should not hide our eyes from these broken down places; God wants to change them, and make the first steps of change right away.”

Nehemiah 2:17 Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

Nehemiah 2:18 Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon

me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for *this good work*.

I would assume that come morning, Nehemiah confronted the men of the city with what he had found. He urged them to join him in rebuilding the walls of the city and start rebuilding its standing before surrounding nations. He also told them how God had given him favor with the king, showing that what he asked of them was in accordance with God's will.

The people responded positively and determined to get to work promptly. Sometimes, people need the encouragement of a willing leader to accomplish God's will—especially if the task at hand requires a lot of hard work.

Nehemiah 2:19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard *it*, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What *is* this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?

Nehemiah 2:20 Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

When Sanballat and Tobiah heard that the people were rebuilding the walls of the city, they mocked them and asked why they were rebelling against the king. It seems another of Israel's enemies decided to join them, Geshem the Arabian. Nehemiah answered without regard to the king. He declared that the "God of heaven" would prosper them and rebuked them, declaring that they had no authority or right of any kind to interfere with what was going on in Jerusalem.

The enemies of the church are no different today. They like to mock what we do and how we live, hoping to distract us from what God would have us to do. In the spirit of Nehemiah, we should keep our focus on the fact that we are servants of the most high God and not give them the satisfaction of keeping us from doing His will.