

FPFWC Christian Development



Prophets of Restoration

April 2021

Spring Quarter

April 17, 2021

Lesson #3 -The Restoring Builder

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Nehemiah 2:11-20

ICE BREAKERS-

1. Why is it important that God's powerful hand (guidance) be at work in your daily life?
2. How can we experience spiritual renewal in our life?

Key Verse- 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 2:17

LESSON BACKGROUND – Jerusalem had been a distinguished city, the political and spiritual capital of the nation of Israel under David's leadership (1 Chronicles 11:4–9, 15). Solomon added to its greatness by the magnificent temple that he built there (2 Chronicles 3). But following the division of the nation and the rise of ungodly kings who allowed idolatry and accompanying abhorrent practices to flourish in the land, Jerusalem became filled with such wickedness and evil that the judgment of God fell on it. In 586 BC the Babylonians finally breached the city walls, following a siege of 18 months (see lesson 8). The city's state of massive disrepair still existed in the time of Nehemiah, some 140 years later.

Nehemiah was cupbearer to Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11), king of the Persians, who ruled from 465 to 425 BC. The Persians had conquered the Babylonians in 539 BC. Cyrus, ruler of the Persians at the time, had permitted any of the Jews who desired to do so to return to their home. Approximately 50,000 did (Ezra 2:64–65), but there were those, such as members of Nehemiah's family, who chose to remain in Persia.

Nehemiah 1 describes what happened in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, which would have been 445 BC. Nehemiah received news from his brother, Hanani, of the sad state of affairs back home in Jerusalem:

The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire (Nehemiah 1:3).

Deeply troubled over such disheartening conditions, Nehemiah responded with tears, fasting, and fervent prayer (1:4). He confessed his own sins and the sins of his fellow Jews and begged the Lord to honor His promise to bless His people if they turned from their sinful ways (1:5–10).

Nehemiah then asked the Lord that he might receive mercy from the king (Nehemiah 1:11). That involved Artaxerxes's granting permission to Nehemiah to

travel to his homeland of Judah and lead an effort to repair the wall and the gates of his beloved city of Jerusalem (2:1–9).

Nehemiah's request included protection for the journey (contrast Ezra 8:22) and also provision of supplies needed for the projects that were planned. While the king did indeed grant Nehemiah's request, Nehemiah knew that any favor he had been shown had come from the Lord to whom he had prayed (2:4) and whose "good hand" (2:8) would be seen time and again in the upcoming endeavors.

When Nehemiah arrived, he gave the territory administrators the letters provided by King Artaxerxes that verified the king's support for Nehemiah's undertaking. The letters also confirmed the king's allocation of the resources needed for the rebuilding efforts (Nehemiah 2:7–9).

LESSON COMMENTARY –

2:11–12. Waiting **three days** (v. 11) may have given Nehemiah time to settle into his home and identify the local leaders and power structures. Waiting a few days may also have begun to lull the opposition into thinking that he was not any immediate threat. Verse 12 and v. 16 serve to bracket the intervening verses, and emphasize that Nehemiah had **not** told **anyone** his intentions (v. 12), that is, what God had put into his heart. After being in the land and city for nearly 100 years, the disrepair of the walls and corresponding spiritual poverty of the people had sadly become normative. Nehemiah's audacious intent to reverse both of those conditions would require a clear understanding of the situation and a specific plan to address it. Scouting the walls alone in secret gave him the time to come up with a plan to follow. That there is **no animal with** him (i.e., he walked inconspicuously) is in contrast to v. 9 where Nehemiah travels with the king's horsemen.

2:13–16. Nehemiah does not circumnavigate the whole of Jerusalem, but only surveys the southern portion. The **Valley Gate** (v. 13) faced southwest towards the Hinnom Valley; the **Dragon's Well** likely refers to a spring at the junction of the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys on the southeast edge of Jerusalem. The Dung Gate or **Refuse Gate** would have been at the southernmost tip of the city, as deep into the valley and far from the temple area to the north as possible, accessing the garbage dump to the south. The **Fountain Gate** (v. 14) faced southeast, toward the Kidron Valley, and the **King's Pool** may be a reference to the Pool of Siloam (cf. Jn 9) at the southern edge of Jerusalem. The state of the walls, gates, and approaches to the city were so poor that even a single horse was unable to navigate the area. Not only is this a dangerous situation (enemies can approach unobserved, criminals can slink in and out of the city), but also it is a reflection of a people without self-respect or hope. Compare this to the earlier and later comments (in Neh 1:3 and 2:17) that the people suffer reproach. In keeping with the book's theme of the reconquest of Canaan (see the Introduction), the author may have included the record of Nehemiah's puzzling nighttime inspection of the walls as a parallel to the spies' secret visit to Jericho before Joshua's conquest (cf. Nm 13 and Jos 2).

3. Beginning the Work of Rebuilding (2:17–20)

2:17–18. The reproach of the people (v. 17; cf. 1:3) is personal shame, corporate disgrace, and a reflection on the nation and its God. Here Nehemiah announces his bold plan to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. It may be that although the local governors knew of Nehemiah's royal support, the people and priests did not yet know of his intent to rebuild the city. Even upon hearing of it, they may have felt the task was impossible, or would be merely more of the same in accordance with previous failed attempts. However, upon hearing of the king's direct sponsorship of the project, and understanding that this must indeed be an instance of divine provision (**the hand of my God had been favorable**, v. 18) they were strengthened to do the good work.

2:19–20. Sanballat and Tobiah begin a public mockery of the work (v. 19). They are joined by **Geshem the Arab**, whose province comprised the regions south of Judah, thereby completing the circle of political opposition around Nehemiah and Jerusalem. This collection of opponents recalls the nemeses of Israel from their time of wandering and conquest: Ammon (Dt 23) and Jericho with Samaria (Joshua). The meaning of **portion** includes the idea of inheritance as well as ownership. **Portion** occurs more often in the book of Joshua than any other OT book (Jos 14:4; 15:13; 17:14; 19:9; 22:25), and is used here to signal the reclaiming of Israel's inheritance under Nehemiah. Further, talk here of an inheritance immediately precedes the assigning of sections of the walls to various families, paralleling the division of the land to various tribes and clans under Joshua. Nehemiah looked beyond what **Jerusalem** was in his day (a wrecked town) to what it would become—a great city in which these opponents would have no part.

Though this section is historical, it has practical application for today. There is such a thing as a proper use of secular power, and practical wisdom. Certainly Nehemiah was convinced that the success of his endeavors would come by the abiding hand and favor of God; however, he did not presume upon the favor of God by acting foolishly and assuming that God would work everything out. Instead, he marshaled his resources, acted circumspectly, and then was prepared to act boldly when the proper time came. Also, those who expect to enjoy a portion in God's blessing (in contrast to those opponents who have no such expectation) should also anticipate taking a portion of the labor, as the following chapter illustrates with the rebuilding of the wall.

LESSON NUGGET – Nehemiah paid attention to this advice. “Whoever believes will not act hastily.” (Isa. 28:16). Before enlisting the leaders, Nehemiah became personally acquainted with the needs (v. 11; Ezra 8:32). Dedicated leaders are awake when others are asleep, but they see more in the darkness than others do in the light (Prov. 20:18).

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*