

P A T I E N T E N D U R A N C E

Hand me another brick.

(1) "The Need and Our Response" HIGHLIGHT: Nehemiah 1 and 2 NLT

H

Below are excerpts from the overall passage for use with the APPLICATION and RESPOND. It will be beneficial for the group to read the whole passage to understand the entire context.

Nehemiah 1 (NLT)

vv. 1-11

1 These are the memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah.

In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. 2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem.

3 They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire."

4 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.

Nehemiah 2 (NLT)

v. 1-20

1 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.

9 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.

11 So I arrived in Jerusalem. Three days later, **12** I 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 Valley 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. **17** 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."

EXPLAIN

E

The purpose of this section is to deepen everyone's understanding of the Word.

Sooner or later most of us will stare a problem in the face that will force us to take inventory of our real self—fear, courage, determination, and "confidence in the Lord's goodness" (see *Psalms 27:13*). Welcome to Nehemiah's world.

Nehemiah 1

vv.1-2 Nehemiah son of Hacaliah was a captive of the Babylonian Empire. Like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego he found himself in a high-ranking position—“**[Artaxerxes’]** cupbearer” (v.11)—circa 444 B.C. **Susa** (Shushan in Hebrew) was one of the capitals of the Persian Empire. It is likely Nehemiah worked in the same palace that Esther earlier reigned as Queen to Xerxes (circa 475 B.C.; see *Esther 2:16-17*). Nehemiah’s heart was with **Judah**—his homeland—and its capital—**Jerusalem**.

vv.3-4 Under Ezra, a company of Jews had returned to Jerusalem for the express purpose of rebuilding the Temple which was destroyed when Jerusalem finally fell to the Babylonians in 587 B.C. Nehemiah’s heart was broken when he heard the people were in **great trouble and disgrace**. Nehemiah’s remedy for his broken heart was **mourning, fasting, and praying to the God of heaven**. When “the seas have lifted up their voices and pounding waves” the proper response is not fretting and wringing our hands, but going to the One “whose voice is mightier than the thunders of the waters and the breakers of the sea” (*Psalms 93:3-4*) and listen for Him to speak through the storm and into your heart. But we, like Nehemiah, must not think only of ourselves. The church (our brothers and sisters) in other parts of the world is being persecuted in horrible ways. Let us pray with broken hearts for the persecuted church—men and women, boys and girls who are dying for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

vv.5-11 Nehemiah’s prayer gives us a pattern of praying that helps us align our lives with the purposes of God. (1) He prays **to the great and awesome God of heaven** (v.5). He is sovereign. Even David, King of Israel recognized he had a higher King (*Psalms 5:2*); (2) He **confesses his own sin** (vv.6-7). Our own pride often gets in the way of God using us effectively (see *James 4:4-10*); (3) He **repents and asks God to be faithful to His promise** of forgiveness (vv.8-11b); (4) Nehemiah realizes he cannot solve this problem on his own. On his own he can do nothing that will honor God (see *John 15:4-5*). Let’s not be afraid to surrender ourselves to ask God for success so He will be glorified. “Lord, do what only you can do!” **The king’s cup-bearer** had more access to the king than most anyone in the kingdom. Artaxerxes trusted Nehemiah with his life. Nehemiah tasted the wine and food before the king was served. That is true friendship (see *John 15:12-13*).

Nehemiah 2

vv.1-2 Nehemiah had been fasting and praying for four months. Maybe God prompted him to act. Maybe the fire in his belly could not be contained. Whatever, it became obvious to the king that **[Nehemiah] was deeply troubled**. That **terrified** Nehemiah. To paraphrase a saying about momma, *If the king ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy!* And woe to the one who makes the king sad! But Nehemiah’s heart was breaking for Israel, God’s people. He could not hide it. Does my heart break for the things that break God’s heart—the shattered lives of the people He made in His image?

vv.3-8 Nehemiah’s fear was not as strong as his trust in the **gracious hand of God** (v.8). During his four months of fasting and praying, God was impressing on him a plan for rebuilding the broken walls of Jerusalem and “honoring the name of God” (1:9). When the king asked, “**How can I help you?**” Nehemiah fired another **prayer to the God of heaven** and made his **requests** known. And **the king granted** them. I think it was D. L. Moody who said, *The world has yet to see the impact of a man who is totally surrendered to God*. Nehemiah was getting there. Am I ready to be the person who jumps to the glory of God when He says “Jump”? to experience the thrill of jumping into the arms of the God of the universe?

vv.9-10 Being a person who is ready to be used by God *for God’s purposes* does not guarantee smooth waters. The three young men experienced a great deliverance from the fiery furnace, but not before being thrown into it. Daniel was saved from the lions, but not before being thrown into the lions’ den. Jesus brought about the redemption of the world, but not before the cross. Nehemiah had to deal with **Sanballat and Tobiah** (see also vv.18-19). Make sure your theology makes room for “trials and sorrows” (see *John 16:33*).

vv.11-20 We have an enemy who wants to destroy us and our usefulness to God (1 Peter 5:8 and Ephesians 6:10-17). The devil doesn't always use people to frustrate our efforts; sometimes it's the circumstances themselves that stand up between us and the joy—**broken walls and burned gates** (v.13), piles of **rubble you can't get through; you have to turn around** (v.14), explaining to people about how bad the **trouble** is (v.17). We often have to adjust our plans because bridges are out, roads have been closed, COVID arrives, the economy tanks, turmoil fills our cities. But through it all we stand up to the challenge, we sharpen our tools, and **begin the good work of re-building the walls because the gracious hand of God is still on us and He will help us succeed** (vv.17-18). "[We] belong to God...[We] have already won a victory...because the Spirit who lives in [us] is greater than the spirit who lives in the world" (1 John 4:4). **"The God of heaven will help us succeed...[so let's] start rebuilding this wall** (v.20)!"

APPLY

A

Be comfortable with some silence as people think back to the sermon or reread the text. Answer honestly. You don't have to answer every question.

1. What stuck out to you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. Reread Nehemiah 1:3-4. What can we learn from Nehemiah's response to the bad report about Jerusalem?
3. Notice in chapter 1, vv. 5-10, Nehemiah's pattern of prayer: acknowledging who God is, confessing his sins and his people's sins, recounting God's promises and appealing to God on the basis of His promise, and then asking God for what he needs. What can you learn about prayer from Nehemiah's prayer?
4. Nehemiah knew if King Artaxerxes disapproved of his request in 2:4 it could mean his life, but in that moment he prays to God. What do you think this prayer looked like? Do you draw near to God in prayer **on the spot** in a moment of fear?

RESPOND

R

The purpose of this section is to take action with the truths you're learning. Answer honestly. Find someone who will hold you accountable to living out your response to Scripture.

1. Nehemiah made a pretty bold request of King Artaxerxes, going so far as to ask for timber from the King's forest (2:8-9). He had intentionally prayed for months about how he was going to handle the situation and God gave him boldness in the moment.

Are you making bold requests to God on behalf of someone else's well-being? Write down the name of one person and a bold prayer you will pray for them this week.

2. Nehemiah heard of the ruin of the city of Jerusalem and had a mind set to change things. Do you find yourself broken over the ruin you see in our world and in the lives of those around you. Do you have a mind and heart set to change those things for the good?

Think about a practical way you can serve the community this week.