

## Let Us Rise and Build? Nehemiah 2:1-20 Explained

### Scriptures for Today: Nehemiah 2:1-20

#### ""Nehemiah 2:1-20

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. 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, 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? 4 Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. 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. 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. 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; 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. 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. 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. 11 So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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? 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.""

## Introduction — From Ruins to Resolve

When Nehemiah 2 opens, Jerusalem is still broken. Ezra has already led a return. The Temple has been rebuilt. Sacrifices are happening again. But the walls are still destroyed. The gates are still burned.

And a city without walls in the ancient world is not secure. It is vulnerable. It is exposed. It is humiliated. Nehemiah is in Persia. He is cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. He is not a prophet. He is not a priest. He is not living in Jerusalem. But he hears about the condition of the city.

### ""Nehemiah 1:3

And they said unto me, 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.""

That broke him. He fasted. He prayed. He confessed sin. He sought God. Now in chapter 2, we see what happens when prayer turns into action.

## Section 1 — The Moment Before the King

### Nehemiah 2:1-8

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

Nehemiah is the king's cupbearer. We saw that in Nehemiah 1. In the Persian court, the cupbearer handled the king's wine. Made sure it was okay to drink. This is a position of extreme trust. You need to be that type of person that people can trust. Nehemiah was a trustworthy man.

Nehemiah didn't hear the bad news and immediately run to the king. He first heard about the broken walls in the month Chisleu — that's late fall. But he doesn't speak to the king until the month Nisan — that's early spring. That's about four months. Four months of carrying that burden. Four months of praying. Four months of fasting. Four months of waiting for the right moment.

He didn't act out of emotion. He didn't rush into the throne room with excitement. He let the burden settle deep. He let prayer shape his thinking. And when the door finally opened, he was ready. That's how God often works. There is a season of praying before there is a season of building. But when the moment came, he acted.

And notice what happens. The king sees his face. He asks what is wrong. Nehemiah is afraid. Why? Because appearing sad before the king could be dangerous. But Nehemiah answers honestly. "The city, the place of my father's sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire." The king says, "For what dost thou make request?"

And as soon as Nehemiah hears the king's response, what does he say? "So I prayed to the God of heaven."

That is not a long fast. That is not a 30-day prayer meeting. That is a split-second prayer. He prayed in the moment. And then he spoke. We can also do these quick prayers. When we are speaking with people, we can say these quick prayers. ALWAYS. Lord, give me the right words. Decisions like this one are important. Pray. Lord, please help me.

Prayer does not replace planning. Prayer empowers planning. Look at how specific he is in his request to the king. Nehemiah asks for permission to go. He asks for time. He asks for letters for safe passage. He asks for timber from Asaph a keeper of the king's forest for gates, the wall, and his home. Again, Nehemiah asks for authorization, time, protection, and materials.

This is not emotional impulse. This is prepared vision given to him by God. Prayer works. And notice the end of verse 8: "The good hand of my God upon me." The king granted him what he asked for. He does not credit luck. He does not credit his position. He credits God.

Don't miss this either — the king granted his request. That didn't happen randomly. Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer. That meant the king trusted him. He handled what the king drank. He stood in his presence daily. You don't give that job to a careless man. You don't give that job to someone unreliable.

Nehemiah had likely proven himself long before this moment. He had done his job well. He had been faithful in a foreign government. He had earned credibility. So when he finally made his request, the king listened. God opened the door — but Nehemiah had built trust over time.

That matters. Sometimes the opportunity God gives you later is built on the faithfulness you show now. Before Nehemiah ever rebuilt a wall, he was a trustworthy worker. And when the moment came, his reputation carried weight.

## Section 2 — Opposition Appears

### ""Nehemiah 2:9–10

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. 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.""

The moment progress begins, opposition shows up. Sanballat the Horonite. Tobiah the Ammonite. They are grieved that someone cares about Jerusalem. Opposition is often proof you are doing something right.

Sanballat the Horonite was likely connected to Samaria — a region that had long tension with Jerusalem. Tobiah was an Ammonite, from a people group that had opposed Israel for generations. These were not random critics. These were historic enemies.

And the Bible says they were grieved that someone had come to seek the welfare of Israel. That tells you everything. They were fine when Jerusalem was broken. They were fine when the walls were burned. But the moment someone showed up to rebuild, they were disturbed. A strong Jerusalem threatened their influence. And that's how it works — when God starts rebuilding something, someone who benefited from the ruins will not like it.

Nehemiah arrives. He does not announce his plan immediately.

## Section 3 — The Inspection

### ""Nehemiah 2:11-16

So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.""

Nehemiah gets to Jerusalem and waits three days. He doesn't rush. He doesn't gather a crowd. He doesn't make a speech the first night he arrives.

Then he goes out quietly — at night — with just a few men. He rides around the city and looks at everything for himself. The broken gates. The collapsed walls. At one point, the damage is so bad his animal can't even pass through.

He needed to see it. He didn't build on second-hand reports. He didn't rely on emotion. He inspected the reality with his own eyes. And notice this: he told no one what God had put in his heart.

That doesn't mean he was hiding sin. It means he was careful. He was surrounded by political tension. Sanballat and Tobiah were already grieved. If he had announced everything too early, opposition would have formed before the people were ready.

There is wisdom here. Not every vision needs to be broadcast the moment you receive it. Some things need prayer. Some things need quiet evaluation. Some things need clarity before they need publicity. Nehemiah didn't stir excitement before he understood the scope of the work.

He inspected first. He spoke later. That's strength — not secrecy.

## Section 4 — The Call to Rise

### ""Nehemiah 2:17–18

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. 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.""

Now is the time to share the plan. He does three things: He names the problem. He shares God's hand. He calls them to act. And they respond: "Let us rise up and build." That is leadership. He is leading them and they are with him. Nehemiah must be an honorable man. In your life, be a man or woman of honor and people will have respect for you.

## Section 5 — The Mockery

### ""Nehemiah 2:19–20

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? 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.""

They laughed at them. They mocked them. They tried to turn it political — "Are you rebelling against the king?" That's what opposition does. It doesn't just disagree. It questions your motives. It tries to make obedience look dangerous.

Nehemiah doesn't argue. He doesn't panic. He doesn't start defending himself emotionally. He says, "The God of heaven, he will prosper us." In other words, this isn't about my ambition. This isn't about power. This is about what God is doing.

And then he draws a hard line: “You have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.” That’s not arrogance. That’s clarity.

It’s like if someone breaks into your house and starts rearranging furniture, and when you tell them to stop, they laugh at you. At some point you don’t negotiate — you say, “You don’t belong here.” That’s what Nehemiah is doing. Jerusalem was God’s covenant city. These men had no claim to it. And he makes that clear.

Sometimes rebuilding requires encouragement for your people and a firm boundary for your critics. Not compromise. Not apology. Clarity.

## Practical Applications

- 1. Prayer must lead somewhere.** Nehemiah prayed for about four months before this moment. But when the king asked him what he wanted, he gave an answer. He had been talking to God, and now he was ready to speak to the king.
- 2. Burden is not enough — you need a plan.** He didn’t just say, “Jerusalem is broken.” He asked for permission, time, letters, and timber. He had thought it through before he ever opened his mouth.
- 3. Don’t be surprised by resistance.** The moment they said they were going to build, the mocking started. Some people prefer things broken. When you try to fix something, expect pushback.
- 4. Say “let us,” not “you.”** Nehemiah didn’t stand at a distance. He included himself. “Let us rise and build.” That’s how you move people — you stand with them.

## Conclusion

Nehemiah 2 shows us something real. The walls were still broken. The gates were still burned. Nothing had changed physically yet.

But something changed in the heart of a man who was willing to pray, willing to ask, and willing to lead. He didn’t ignore the ruins. He didn’t pretend things were fine. He faced the damage, made a plan, and called others to step into the work.

I want you personally to think about a huge project or ministry you can lead for this church. It’s the greatest work you can do in your life. And it’s all available right here in a great area for ministry.

Jerusalem was still in pieces but the rebuilding began the moment someone stood up and said, “Let us rise and build.” Nehemiah was that man. He stepped up. 16 times the phrase “Here am I” is in the Bible. Here’s my favorite:

**""Isaiah 6:8**

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.""

It's time to step it up like Nehemiah. Not tomorrow. Not when it's easier. Not when everyone agrees. They strengthened their hands and started. Who's going to do this? "Here am I; send me."

That's how God restores what is broken. Someone cares. Someone prays. Someone steps forward. And others join. Think about. Pray about it. Plan for it. And then let me know.

Let's pray.