

Preparation, Planning & Proposal

Nehemiah 2

In Susa

- ❑ In Lesson 1, we studied Nehemiah's prayer (1:5-11) – an essential part of his preparation. Nehemiah asked God for favor in the presence of the king (1:11). What happened?
- ❑ Read Nehemiah 2:1-10.¹
 1. Nehemiah's conversation with the king happened about four months² after he received the bad news concerning Jerusalem. Why do you think it took so long for Nehemiah to talk to the king? What do you think Nehemiah was doing during these four months?



2. How would you describe Nehemiah's approach to the king? In his conversation with the king, what is evident about Nehemiah's character, planning and communication ability? (2:3-8)³

- ❑ After the king asked Nehemiah, "What is it you want?", Nehemiah "prayed to the God of heaven" (2:4). This quick prayer (likely silent and unnoticeable) sprang from a heart inclined to regular conversation with God. This is a lesson for us.
- ❑ The king responded favorably to Nehemiah's requests.⁴ He not only allowed him to go, he "sent" him, providing safe passage and supplies (2:8-9). While the king was very supportive, Nehemiah still faced opposition (2:10). What happened after Nehemiah reached Jerusalem?

In Jerusalem

- ❑ Read Nehemiah 2:11-20.
 3. Why do you think Nehemiah secretly examined the walls of Jerusalem at night?



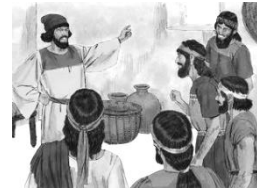
¹ As 'cupbearer to the king' (1:11) it was Nehemiah's job to test the wine and serve it to the king. 'not been sad in his presence before' (2:1) does not necessarily mean Nehemiah had not been in the king's presence since hearing the sad news about Jerusalem, but this was the first time Nehemiah had allowed his sadness to show. Nehemiah was a trusted servant of the king, but approaching him about rebuilding in Jerusalem was still dangerous, especially since the king had earlier issued a decree stopping the rebuilding in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:17-22).

² Nehemiah heard the news in Kislev (Nov/Dec) (1:1). His talk with the king happened in Nisan (Mar/Apr) (2:1).

³ Nehemiah was respectful, submissive and tactful in approaching the king. He referred to Jerusalem as 'the city where my ancestors are buried' (2:3, 5) instead of 'Jerusalem' which might result in a negative reaction. The king had earlier issued a decree to stop the rebuilding in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:17-22). Nehemiah wanted to gain the king's sympathy before going into details. After the king showed support for Nehemiah's mission (2:6), Nehemiah's requests became more bold, direct and specific. It's apparent that Nehemiah had thoroughly thought about what he needed to accomplish his mission, and had developed a plan of action.

⁴ 'because the gracious hand of God was on [Nehemiah]' (2:8).

4. How did Nehemiah get the support and help of his fellow Jews in the rebuilding work? Consider his preparation, and his words in verses 17-18.⁵



- Nehemiah had the support of the king and the participation of his people in “this good work” (2:18). But Nehemiah still faced opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem,⁶ who hoped to discourage the Jews by mocking, ridiculing and accusing them (2:19).
5. Should we expect opposition when we attempt to accomplish a “good work” for God? If so, why? How can Nehemiah’s response in verse 20 encourage us?⁷
6. Nehemiah demonstrates much wisdom, leadership ability and positive action. However, what (or who) is the real basis for Nehemiah’s success? (2:4b, 8b, 20a) What does this teach us about human preparation and participation in God’s work?⁸
7. Nehemiah provides a good example of preparation, planning and proposal.⁹ What lessons can we learn from his example that we can apply to our lives?

Reflection/Application

- What projects or goals are you seeking to accomplish? Is God involved? He should be.¹⁰ Do you need to believe in Him? Do you need to trust in Jesus as Lord, and give your life to Him?
- Brothers and sisters, are you willing to do whatever “good work” God wants you to do? As God’s servants, reflect on question 7 above, and commit to do it by His grace (2:18b, 20a).

⁵ Nehemiah identified with his people – ‘You see the trouble *we* are in...’ (2:17, *emphasis added*). He expressed the seriousness of the situation, including the ‘disgrace’ (shame) they were suffering as a result of God’s former judgment. He appealed to their desire to be restored as God’s people. He called on them to *join him* – ‘Come, let *us* rebuild the wall’ (*emphasis added*). He gave testimony of God’s gracious hand (2:18). This was God’s work!

⁶ Sanballat – probably governor of Samaria; Tobias – perhaps an Ammonite official under Sanballat’s authority; Geshem – likely a powerful chieftain who governed a confederation of Arab tribes that included Edom and the southern part of Judah. Their opposition was basically political. They did not want to lose any of their control.

⁷ ‘The God of heaven will give us success’ (2:20a). This does not necessarily mean that believers will always have success as *we* define it. But God’s side is ultimately the winning side, and faithfully doing His work is true success. Jesus said, ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 5:10). And Paul wrote, ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ (Romans 8:31b; see 8:28-39)

⁸ As humans we tend to rely on our own abilities, thinking and efforts to achieve success while neglecting God in the process. On the other hand, believers can sometimes ‘rely on God’ so much they become passive or inactive in skill development, careful thinking and planning, and positive action. As God’s stewards and servants, we are to develop and use the resources, abilities, gifts and opportunities God has entrusted to us, submitting to His authority, seeking His purpose and guidance, relying on His power, and trusting in His sovereign will and plan.

⁹ His preparation includes prayer and careful evaluation of the situation. His planning includes a plan of action for accomplishing the rebuilding work, and perhaps a strategy in dealing with other people. His proposals, which are based on his preparation and planning, are effectively presented to the king and his fellow Jews.

¹⁰ ‘Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord and not for men’ (Colossians 3:23).