



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH Lesson 2

In our chapter last week, we met Nehemiah, the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah discovered the true condition of Jerusalem, the city of God, and it grieved him immensely. It broke his heart, driving him directly to the throne of God. After he mourned, wept, and fasted, he interceded for God's people, asking the Lord to hear his prayers. We left off in chapter 1 with a prayer, reflecting the heart of a man that knew his God intimately.

As we study chapter 2, notice how many times Nehemiah prays. Notice how instantaneous his prayers are. See how he attributes the good things that happen to his gracious God. We can learn so much about leadership from Nehemiah, as well as about prayer, diligence, and faithfulness. Have a great week! Ask the Holy Spirit to prepare your heart, giving you wisdom and knowledge from His Word.

First Day

1. Read Nehemiah 2:1-20. Observe and write the facts you find. What's happening? List any repeated words or phrases.

2. How would you break this chapter up into sections according to the main points?

3. Give the chapter a title that reflects the main point.

4. What do you think is the key verse of this chapter?

5. What inspired Nehemiah's passion to return to his homeland?

6. Who are the main characters of this chapter? Give one word that you think would best describe each of them.

7. Read Ezra 4:11-23, specifically noting verse 21. What decree is Nehemiah asking the king to overturn? What loophole did Nehemiah find in the decree?

8. What lessons do you already see in this chapter?

We'll end here for today. Isn't this a great chapter? I can't wait to dig in. See you tomorrow, and may we be open to whatever the Lord has for us!

Memory Verse of the Week: "So I answered them, and said to them, 'The God of Heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will rise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem.'" Nehemiah 2:20

Second Day

Study your memory verse. Notice Nehemiah's confidence!

1. Read Nehemiah 2:1-20. Go back and focus on verses 1-8. In what month is our story happening? Look back at 1:1. What month does our book begin? If Chisleu is November/December, and Nisan is March/April, how long in between chapters?
2. Notice in 1:11, Nehemiah prayed the Lord would answer "this day." He didn't. What does this say about Nehemiah and his faith in God?
3. What do you think Nehemiah was waiting for? Why didn't he make his request to the king that day?
4. Usually a king and his cupbearer become very close. Why do you think that is?

Nehemiah prayed for four months before moving forward and approaching the king. There may be many reasons for that. One, he could have simply been waiting for God's timing, waiting for the perfect opportunity. Some scholars think that Nehemiah could have been waiting for the month of Nisan, because it is the beginning of a new year, and special requests and favors were granted on a Persian king's birthday, so to speak. There may have been a celebration of some sort, making Nehemiah's sad countenance more noticeable. John MacArthur suggests that perhaps Nehemiah also waited until he tasted the wine, because that act of service strengthened the relationship and trust between a king and his cupbearer. Another thought is that the Lord wanted him to wait until the queen was sitting beside him (vs 6). This may suggest that it was a private occasion, because it was not customary for the queen to appear at a formal banquet together with the king. "Since Esther was the queen of the previous King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) about 486-

464 B.C. and possibly the stepmother of Artaxerxes, it could be that she had previously influenced the present king and queen to be favorably disposed to the Jews." (John MacArthur)

5. Waiting is not wasting time. Why does waiting on God's timing often "feel" like we're wasting time? What can happen while we wait?

6. Paul also learned that many things that "look" like interruptions are part of God's plan and timing. Read about one of Paul's divine "interruptions" in Acts 16:23-35. Then read what he later wrote to the Philippians about that experience in Philippians 1:12-14 and 29-30. Describe Paul's experience and how that "divine interruption" furthered the Gospel.

7. Do you see every opportunity to wait as wasted time, or do you understand that the waiting is also part of His plan? Are you "waiting" for God to do something, or to tell you to "do something" right now?

8. What was the king's question to Nehemiah? Why do you think it scared him?

9. Describe Nehemiah's response. With what attitude did he approach the king? Did fear hold him back? What did he request?

It was dangerous to bear your feelings before the king for many reasons. Sadness could make people doubt the authority and kindness of the king. Being sad in the presence of the king was a serious offense in Persia (Esther 4:2). He was also asking him to reverse a decree he had already made. If Nehemiah made the king mad in any way, he could be executed. I think I'd be scared too!

Nehemiah didn't allow his fear to keep him from doing what God had directed him to do. He had prayed, fasted, and heard from the Lord. He had waited for the right time. It was human to be afraid. Yet Nehemiah moved forward with his plan.

10. Is fear holding you back from doing something the Lord has directed you to do? What can you learn from Nehemiah?

Nehemiah had been praying and waiting, and now it was time to move forward. Here was his chance! The king had asked him for an explanation.

11. Explain Nehemiah's response in verse 3.

Notice that Nehemiah doesn't mention the name "Jerusalem" but simply refers to it as the "city." He is choosing his words carefully. It's interesting that he uses "tombs" and "gates" to express his sadness. John MacArthur writes, "A tomb was a place to show respect for dead community members who birthed the living generation and passed on their spiritual values to them. Tombs were also the place where the present generation hoped to be honored by burial at death. Gates were emblematic of the life of the city, since the people gathered for judicial procedure or basic social interaction near the gates. The burned gates represented the death of social life, that is, the end of a community of people."

Nehemiah obviously had thought a lot about how to approach the king. Death was very sacred to the Persians. The king might not care about the city, but he would have a respect for the dead.

Tomorrow we'll continue on with these same verses. Each word of Nehemiah is so fun to study because we know He's been seeking God. Do people hang on our every word, knowing that we, too, have sought after and heard from God?

Third Day

What's your memory verse?

1. Read Nehemiah 2:1-20, focusing again on verses 1-8. In verse 4, after the king asked him what his request was, what did Nehemiah do?

Nehemiah spent four months praying, but he still didn't want to answer the king before asking God what to say one more time. Raymond Brown, in his book The Message of Nehemiah, wrote, "Nehemiah's prayer is one of the most inspiring prayer experiences in Scripture and a high watermark in the history of prayer. His prayer emphasizes (1) The necessity of prayer (2) The immediacy of prayer (3) The naturalness of prayer (4) The intimacy of prayer (5) The confidence of prayer, and (6) The effectiveness of prayer."

2. It was his natural reaction and instinct to pray again at the crucial moment. It was the most normal and rational thing to do. Would you say that prayer in the crucial moments is your most normal response? What role does his daily prayer and fellowship time with God have in this?
3. The king asked him how long he would be gone and when he would return. In verse 6, does the text tell us what Nehemiah said?

We're not sure what the agreement was, but we know that Nehemiah remained in Jerusalem for 12 years (5:14) and then returned to the king for several years (13:6).

4. What did Nehemiah ask for in verses 7-8?
5. To whom did Nehemiah attribute the king's favor towards him, in verse 8? (Read Proverbs 21:1)

Nehemiah asked to have letters to take with him that proved he was acting on the king's authority and with his permission. He needed to pass through territory that saw Jews as enemies, and the letters would prevent him from being attacked or harmed. There were stations set up where travelers stopped to have their documents inspected. Some scholars believe that he also carried papers that declared him to be the governor of Judah (5:14).

He also asked for timber to build the fortified building that protected the Temple. This was later rebuilt by Herod and called the Antonia Fortress.

6. Read verses 9-11. What else did the king give Nehemiah? Why?

The king seemed to think that Nehemiah would come against some opposition and would need the protection and appearance of authority of the army. Nehemiah accepted the escort and traveled the three months to Jerusalem. These escorts appear to have remained in Jerusalem with Nehemiah for his protection (4:23). What I found interesting is that when Ezra led the second group of Jews back to the land, he wouldn't accept an escort. Raymond Brown again writes, "Thirteen years earlier, Ezra had refused the offer of the Persian soldiers to accompany his people on their way back to Judah, believing the *gracious hand of God* is on everyone who looks to Him (Ezra 8:21-23). But Nehemiah maintained that because *the gracious hand of God* was upon him, the king granted his request for protection. One man's commitment to God precluded the escort; the other welcomed it. Ezra regarded soldiers as a lack of confidence in God's power. Nehemiah viewed them as evidence of God's superlative goodness."

7. Referring to the paragraph above, how could both of these men be right?

As believers, we need to stop passing judgment on others and expecting them to exercise their faith in the exact same way as us. On one occasion, God may say to "wait," while to another He may say "go." That's why it's so important to constantly be seeking God's will and praying before each decision.

8. What opposition did Nehemiah immediately face? Why do you think they were disturbed?

Sanballat was the governor of Samaria and became Nehemiah's chief enemy. Tobiah was an Ammonite and governor of the region east of the Jordan, called The Transjordan. Ammonites were enemies of the Jews (Deuteronomy 23:3-4), but he was related by marriage to some of Nehemiah's co-laborers and had many Jewish friends. He was instrumental in gathering information and passing it on to Sanballat.

9. Not only did Nehemiah bring the army for protection, he and his army most likely arrived in style as representatives from the king. Do you think this added to their anger?

10. So far, Nehemiah had planned things very well. But he wants everyone to know that everything was happening because "God's good hand" was upon him. Why was that so important to Nehemiah? Why is that a good characteristic of a leader?

11. What have you learned about leadership so far from Nehemiah?

12. What examples from his life would you like to imitate?

See you tomorrow, ladies! I pray that we'll wait on the Lord and always pray before we move forward. I hope praying will become as natural to us as breathing.

Fourth Day

Work on your verse. I love how Nehemiah keeps referring to God as "The God of Heaven"!

1. Read Nehemiah 2:1-20, focusing on verses 11-16. How long did Nehemiah stay in Jerusalem before he did anything? What do you think he was doing?

A good leader does not act without a plan. Perhaps Nehemiah was surveying the situation. Also, a good leader knows he needs physical rest. Nehemiah had just traveled three to four months over difficult terrain and was probably very tired. He waited and rested for three days, following Ezra's example (Ezra 8:32). Physical rest is important. We can lose perspective when we're exhausted. We see many examples in Scripture of God giving men the physical rest they need (1 Kings 18:46-19:9; Mark 6:30-32; Matthew 14:12-13).

2. How can being physically tired and drained hinder our effectiveness for God? How have you experienced that in your own life? (Why do we often tell ourselves it's more "spiritual" to be tired?)

3. After three days, what did Nehemiah do? Why don't you think he told anyone what he was doing? Why was it wise to keep his plans secret?

Notice that his companions must have walked, while he alone rode a mule or a horse. They probably would attract much less attention this way. They entered and exited the city through the same gate called the Valley Gate (vs 13 and 15). The walls were so broken and ruined that Nehemiah had to get off his animal to get through the debris.

Twice he talks about "viewing" or "inspecting" the wall. The Hebrew word for inspect means "to look into something very carefully." It's a medical word for probing a wound to see the extent of the damage.

4. How do you think Nehemiah felt as he surveyed the city?

5. Nehemiah was careful, and before he came up with a game plan, he assessed the situation. He did his homework. As a leader, how do you reconcile careful planning with just being "led" by the Holy Spirit?

6. Charles Swindoll said, "Faith is not a synonym for disorder or a substitute for careful planning." What do you think he means?

7. Before you make a decision, are you careful to assess the situation, or do you make decisions impulsively or spontaneously? What can you learn from Nehemiah?

8. Have you ever made a decision impulsively? What were the results? How can God still use our mistakes?

9. As we do our "homework," so to speak, on topics such as marriage, parenting, or friendship, where should we do our research? How does knowing God's Word help us make a plan to follow?

Ask the Lord to help you be diligent in assessing situations and making a plan before just reacting impulsively. And then pray for the Holy Spirit to help you be flexible as those plans get thwarted or changed.

Fifth Day

Write out your verse by memory.

1. Read Nehemiah 2:1-20, focusing on verses 17-20. After a careful inspection and assessment of the work involved, Nehemiah gathers a team. How does he identify himself with them?

Nehemiah presents an interesting perspective to them, in verse 17. The physical condition of the city is bad, but the spiritual disgrace is worse.

2. Why does Nehemiah see the desolation of the city as a reproach to God?
3. From verse 18, what does Nehemiah make sure they understand?

It's important to know that God is on your side. Nehemiah knew they needed to be confident and dependant on God to accomplish this task. He knew and understood the sovereignty of God and felt compelled to share how God had orchestrated this plan.

4. How can your own personal testimony of how God has worked in your life be an encouragement to others?
5. Nehemiah's testimony convinced the men to "rise up and build." What's the first thing that happened? (Who joined the enemies' team?)
6. Has this ever happened to you? Just when you embark on a task you feel the Lord has directed you in, you are confronted by opposition. What did you do?
7. The three amigos mocked and ridiculed the builders. This is still a tool of the enemy today. Why is it still so effective? What does Jesus say about it in Matthew 5:11-12?

8. How does Nehemiah handle the criticism? How did he honor God in how he handled it?
9. How do you handle criticism? Do you honor or dishonor Him when you are mocked or ridiculed?

It seems that these men were sarcastically challenging them, or accusing them, of building a wall that would keep out the Persian army (Nehemiah 6:6). Nehemiah doesn't even remind them of the king's orders. Instead, he points to the authority of God Himself. Since Jerusalem is a holy city, he reminds them that they, who are unholy, will have no place within the city walls.

10. From chapter 1 and 2, name some ways that Nehemiah shows his dependence on God.
11. From this chapter, what encouraged or challenged you as a:
 - A. Christian woman?
 - B. Mother?
 - C. Wife?
 - D. Friend?
 - E. Leader?
12. How can you prepare better for your ministry or Christian service?

**"A man's heart plans his ways, but the
Lord directs His steps."
Proverbs 16:9**