

Nehemiah 1-2 - The Walls of Jerusalem

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Nehemiah, chapter 1. I have to confess that I really like Nehemiah. I like the book. I like studying through it because it's all about responding to the call of the Lord or doing what we feel is necessary in our lives to be obedient to the Lord and all of the challenges that go along with that.

The Book of Nehemiah is about building the city walls around Jerusalem. That's practically, literally, what was happening or what is going to be happening as we go through the course of this book.

But what we're going to find is that there's going to be a great deal of this that's going to apply to our lives because we're all in the building process, aren't we? I mean, we're all in the process of moving forward with the Lord. And we're just trying to walk out our lives in Christ, and yet all this opposition comes our way. There's people, there's circumstances, situations that threaten the things that we're doing in Christ, and life is a challenge.

If you've been discouraged lately about how many troubles and trials you've been going through, can I just try to encourage you tonight, first of all, that God is able to see you through? But second of all, I want to encourage you, and I hope you find this encouraging. Maybe you won't, but life is a battle.

Like, whoever told you that life was going to be easy was blowing smoke. And I'm not sure what drugs they were on, but that's just not reality. Life is a battle. It's not a dance floor. It's a battlefield, and we go from battle to battle to battle to battle. And, hopefully we're doing it in the strength of the Lord, and we're allowing the Lord to go before us and to give us His strength and to enable us. The Bible says He's given us everything we need for life and godliness, but that doesn't mean we're not going to face battles and challenges.

And, when I read through the Book of Nehemiah, we're going to get into some of this tonight, but we'll get into more as we go on, and we start to see the opposition build. And there were people that just didn't want the city walls of Jerusalem to go up. They had been decimated for many years now. You'll

remember that after 3 times the Babylonian army came to Jerusalem, finally the last time they came, they said we're going to destroy the place.

And Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, sent his army in there with enough manpower to literally decimate the entire area. They burned houses, they pushed the blocks of the temple down so that it was completely destroyed. They burned all of the wood. And then the city gates, they completely destroyed as well. And all of the wall around Jerusalem so that it was rubble. And it had been rubble for a long, long time.

And Nehemiah was the man whom God chose to go to Jerusalem and He gave him, God gave him favor with the king to go and begin to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. But there were people that just didn't want that to happen.

And you read through Nehemiah and you're like, what's your problem? And don't you feel that way sometimes when you get opposition? You're like, what is your deal? Can't you just chill and just go with life? Why do you always have to bring drama into everything that you do.

It's like hey, we just want to build the walls of Jerusalem, just get out of our face. We're just trying to serve the Lord. And I just want you to know that you can't reason with satan along those lines. You might, if you ever, I don't recommend having a conversation with satan. It's not a good idea. But I got news for you, he can't be reasoned with and he's not going to look at you and go, yeah, I see life's been dealing you some hard stuff lately, so I'm going to back off a little bit. That's not his m.o.. In fact, if he sees you..., he's liable to walk over and just kick you a few times. That's his m.o..

This is the life that we live and there will always be opposition, there will always be problems. There will always be situations and circumstances that will come against you.

And so many times people try to find the reason for their opposition by seeking the Lord and saying, Lord what have I done to deserve this? Or, have I done something wrong, God, that everything seems to be going belly up on me here? As if God does that sort of thing. We have an enemy and we live in a fallen world.

The world around us, you guys know this, don't you? It's broken, it's busted. You ever have things bust around your house? You go out to mow the lawn and... I went out to start my lawn mower here. I thought, the weather's starting to get warm. I'm probably going to need to get this thing started before too long.

I went out and I couldn't get it started. (Pastor Paul makes the sound of a lawnmower that will not start) Great. And I am like, so unmechanical. I can't even begin to explain how unmechanical I am. Which means if I can't get it started, I got to take it in.

That means I got to load the thing up and take it somewhere and drop it off, and they'll probably get to it in about 6 weeks. And then they'll get it back to me and I'll pay about \$250 and then get to mow my lawn. Yay. I get to pay money so I can go work. Isn't that fun? And, things break in this life. Our bodies begin to break down. I was not prepared for turning 40, let alone getting into my 50s. And just prepared for what it means and it's just, it's not fun. Getting old, by the way, it's not for the faint of heart.

We live in a fallen world and it is not fun. And yet as Christians, we have this pressure on us to somehow convey to other people that life is okay and that I'm doing okay. And, this is... Yeah, I'm good. We're good. I'm fine. How are you? I'm fine. I'm good. How are you?

We don't want to let on that I'm in a battle. I'm in a battle for my life. And this is not going well, and we're being opposed on every side it seems. I get up and I get knocked down. I get up and I get knocked down. We don't want to be able to...

Somehow there's this pressure to convey to other Christians that life is a cake walk when we all know better. We all know that it's hard stuff so be prepared to be encouraged. I hope you find this encouraging, because we're going to get into the thick of it here in Nehemiah and, anyway let's do it.

Father God open our hearts. This is Your word. This is Your truth. This is the stuff that You want us to see.

And Lord, there's a lot of great history here about the nation of Israel, but there's a whole lot of application to our lives. And we pray that You would help us to connect the dots to the things that You want us to see in this passage, in these chapters.

Be with us we pray Father, in Jesus name, amen.

“The words of Nehemiah (verse 1) the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, ...” (ESV)

The 20th year is always referencing the 20th year of the reign of whoever the current king was. In this case, it's Artaxerxes, who is a Persian king.

Let me just back up just one second for those of you that might be jumping in on the study. We did Ezra, which is right on the heels of this, but the nation of Israel has been conquered by the Babylonian Empire; modern day Iraq. Okay, Iraq, even some of Iran. That's that Persian kingdom. They were the big guys on the block. They conquered Israel, what was left of it. Really the southern nation of Judah. Carried him off into exile where they stayed for 70 years.

Finally, God raised up a king and said, you guys can go home. You're still under my dominion, but you can go home and start to build up some things, your homes, the temple, things like that.

Well, that's been a lot of years now since that even happened. And now they're living in... Many of the Jews, there's about 50,000 Jews now living in their homeland. They're back in their homeland. They're still under the thumb of the king of Persia, and Nehemiah is living in the Persian kingdom, okay? He's a servant of the king. He's not back in Israel. He would love to be back in Israel. He'd love to be back in Jerusalem, but he's not.

He's serving the king in the Persian kingdom. He says here again, *“The words of Nehemiah (verse 1) the son of Hacaliah.*

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, ² that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.”

Now when he says, I asked about the exiles, this has been a long time. It's been 94 years since the Jews were first allowed to go back home. That's a long time, 94 years. It has been 14 years since Ezra first arrived there. We dealt with Ezra right before this, and it has been 72 years since the temple was completed. Maybe that gives you a little bit of a timeline.

But he says here that one of my brothers came back from a trip to Judah, and I asked, hey, how are the people doing? How are they doing there? He wants to know what the condition of the people is, if they're getting along well, and if they're prospering. And it says in verse 3 that, *“...they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”*

Now, again, it's been a long time. It's been 160 years since the gates were burned and the wall broken down. Okay? You with me? 160 years. What his brothers are saying is, it remains in rubble. The city remains in rubble. And the people that...

You got to understand something about a wall back in those days, that meant protection. Okay? That was the city's protection, and it was also a sign of blessing. It was almost equated like the blessing or the protection of the Lord.

To say that the wall is down means that the people are exposed, they're vulnerable. It's just not a good situation. And so these roughly 500,000 Jews that are living back in their homeland are in a bad way and Nehemiah hears it from his brother.

Verse 4, he says, "*As soon as I heard these words I sat down...*" Have you ever gotten news and you just couldn't even stay on your legs? And he just sits down right away.

And he says, "*...and (I) wept and mourned for (a half hour. Doesn't say that, does it? It says he wept and mourned for) days, (for days, in fact, he says,) and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*"

I want you to notice the 4 things that he did there. He wept, he mourned, he fasted, and he prayed.

And you might be wondering, who in the world cares that much about their town? I mean, their city. It's a city, it's a city with walls, there's lots of them. Go get another one. Go find another city, build that one up or go live somewhere where things are going well. Why do you care?

You got to understand, we're sitting here, we're Gentiles, I assume, most, or all of us here in this room. And we don't get the connection to Jerusalem the way the Jews had a connection. It was a spiritual connection that spoke about their life in their relationship, in their covenant relationship with God. And for the walls to be destroyed and for the city to be decimated, that's like a picture, if you will, of their relationship with God.

Their covenant relationship with God is in ruins because you see, God promised that He would bless them in the land if they kept the law. Well, they didn't keep the law. They did everything but keep the law. They were like total mess ups. And so the temple was destroyed. Now it's been built back up, but the wall is,

the walls around the city are still decimated. And so there's still this remaining picture of just chaos and trouble and stuff like that.

And so notice how it affects Nehemiah. He literally cannot hold himself up on his legs, he falls and he weeps for days. Mourning, and fasting, and praying and we're all like wondering, good grief, what is that all about?

There's a beautiful Psalm that is based out of this period of time, what we call the Period of the Exile. That speaks a little bit of what the Jews would say about their love for Jerusalem. Let me show you this. Psalm 137 says,

Psalm 137:1-6 (ESV)

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!

By the waters of Babylon, (that's where they went into exile, that's where Nehemiah's living. He says,) there we sat down and (we cried, we) wept, when we remembered Zion. (remember, Zion is one of the hills within Jerusalem and basically is considered another name for that area. And it says,) On the willows there we hung up our lyres. (which is an instrument of praise) For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" (and they say) How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!

Isn't that crazy? Again, you and I have a hard time getting it as far as the connection to a city. But they're saying, this is a prayer. Lord, if I don't keep Jerusalem as my highest joy, let these things happen to me. But notice in this Psalm, the thing that they say here is that our captors said, sing us a song, one of your joyful praise songs, sing.

And they said, how can we? They're geared to Jerusalem, they're geared to the holy city. They're all about our praise of God and how He has been good to us. And here we are captive in a foreign land. How can we praise when everything around us is decimated?

Boy, have you ever felt that way when you come to church? How can I lift up my hands and praise God when everything around me just seems to be in ruins? I mean, I see these people and you do this, don't you? You compare yourself with other people. And we come to church and you're standing there and the worship time begins. And you stand up and you're looking around a little bit and you're looking at some other people and they're worshipping the Lord. They got their eyes closed and they're singing, oh and praise.

And you're sitting there thinking to yourself, man, if only I could do that, if only my life, this train wreck of a life would just slow down enough that I could begin to praise the Lord. We compare ourselves a lot with each other, which by the way is really dumb, and not at all a good idea.

There are people and you don't know what's going on in somebody else's life. You don't know what's going on in their heart and you don't know what's behind their praise. And sometimes people are offering up a sacrifice of praise and they don't feel like praising. They didn't feel like coming to church.

They didn't feel like standing up when the worship leader said, Let's stand. And they did not feel like beginning to focus their attention on God and lifting up a word of praise. They didn't feel like it at all. They did it because God is worthy, not because they happen to be in a good mood. Right? And that's something important to remember about praise.

But here we are. We're dealing here with Nehemiah's reaction to the news that the city is in ruins. And sometimes there are times when our reactions are such that they're so deep. I don't know if this ever happened to you, but sometimes our reactions are so deep and so profound that we're aware that it's like beyond me. And I don't know if that's ever happened to you.

I'll never forget. I was up in Seattle one time with a pastor friend of mine. He'd actually been my pastor. And now Sue and I had moved up to Seattle and he came up to visit us and he said, hey, I want to go downtown Seattle and I want to meet a guy down there who's got a ministry in downtown Seattle.

I thought, cool, let's go. So we did. And this guy had a ministry to people who, oh were just captive to all kinds of things. Captive to pornography, other kinds of sexual perversion. Lifestyle behaviors that are just, destructive. And he was just a guy downtown Seattle just reaching out to people.

And apparently this pastor friend of mine had connected with him ahead of time and told him we were going to come and chat. And we're sitting, just the 3 of us

in this simple storefront place talking about the people that he ministers to. And I'm just hanging out, listening.

And this pastor friend of mine who, has a very sensitive spirit to the Lord, he just begins to cry. And what was really weird is, he wasn't a crier. He's one of those, in fact, I never, ever saw him cry before. And he wasn't the kind of person who emoted easily. I mean, a lot of men struggle with being emotional, showing certain emotions, which they think are either taboo or not manly or something like that.

And this guy was one of them. I mean, he just didn't do that very often and here I saw, I turned over to him, he's like, weeping. And I was embarrassed for him. You know how that is? I was, well, I'm not going to look. And the other guy, he's just talking away about his ministry and he stopped for a moment when he saw that my friend was crying.

And so now we're both looking at him and he said, and my friend just said, I just feel like the heart of the Lord just got dumped on me here for a second. The sorrow of God for these people that were captive in these sinful behaviors and lifestyles that so envelop their lives that they were caught in darkness, in a web of darkness, and destruction and despair. And suddenly, all this emotion was coursing through him.

Wow, I think that's what happened to Nehemiah. I think he was caught with this, with the heart of the Lord just being opened for a moment to communicate to him the Lord's sorrow.

Have you ever stopped to think about the things that caused the Lord's sorrow? Have you ever stopped to think about it? God what grieves You? What grieves You, Lord? What grieves You about life? What grieves You about our sinful behaviors? I mean, what really grieves You? What causes You, Lord, sorrow? Think about that for a minute.

Think about the things you do that has caused grief to the Lord or sorrow to the Holy Spirit. And we know that we can grieve the Holy Spirit. We know that. The Bible says so. And we do it by our actions. Exactly what is it?

And have you ever thought about asking the Lord to share those things with you? Allow me a glimpse of what You feel, and you probably couldn't take more than a glimpse, otherwise He'd probably kill you. And I mean that. Just, the Lord would just open the door, just a crack there for a minute and you could feel what the Lord feels. How do you think God feels about our country? The

changes we've made legally, like for example, to the redefinition of marriage. How do you think the Lord feels about that? You ever stopped to think about that? What does God think or is He just the rest of us who sit around and just go, yeah, whatever. You think God's saying, whatever. Wow.

Sometimes, the Lord will share those things with these people. And in the response to this, Nehemiah went through this process of weeping, and mourning, and fasting. And it says also that he prayed here as a result.

In fact, as we go through the book of Nehemiah, we are going to read no fewer than 10 of his prayers. Nehemiah was a man of action, but he was a man of prayer. He's a man who, not necessarily big, long, flowery prayers. Sometimes, but not always.

We're going to see one of his prayers right here, beginning in verse 5. Look at it. He says, *"And I said, 'O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,'"* Now that is the Mosaic Covenant right there. Are you with me?

People, be very careful. Be very careful. Don't bring the Mosaic Covenant into your walk with God, okay? You are not under the Mosaic Covenant. That was between God and who? Israel, right? That's not between God and you.

If anybody asked you questions like, do you keep the Sabbath? Are you keeping the food laws? The Levitical food laws. Do you eat kosher stuff? Do you do this? And if they start laying all these things on you from the law, just come back and tell them, I'm not under the Mosaic Covenant.

I'm under the covenant of grace, which is predicated upon the death of Jesus Christ, His burial, His resurrection, and my faith in those things. That's the covenant that I am under so don't lay your trip on me. Don't lay your legalism on me about, are you doing this? And if you really were godly, you'd do this.

And the reason I'm saying it is because there's a movement that is gaining strength, even in our area. We're seeing it. Some of the churches around this region have been hit hard with it and you have to be very careful. And it's moving people toward legalism and law keeping. And if you've gotten wind of it, steer clear of it, and explain to people that we are not under the law. Oh we do this every so often.

We Christians, we mix this thing up. We think we're Israel. We're not Israel. We're the bride of Christ. It is an amalgamation of Jew and Gentile. That's what Paul says in the New Testament. God has taken Jew and Gentile and made one new man, and we are the body of Christ. We are the bride of the Lord. There is no Jew or Gentile in Christ. That's what Paul says.

There's no Jew, Gentile, no slave, no free. In fact, there's not even male or female in Christ. We're just children of God. Okay? All these distinctions people want to lay on you. Are you doing this? Are you keeping the law? Are you...? We really should keep the Sabbath, which is Saturday, if we're really God fearing people.

I'm not under the law. God made the Sabbath regulations with Israel, not the church. Okay? So just don't let people, don't let people do what they've been doing ever since the days of Paul. Okay? And that is drag you into the law. Don't let it happen.

I want you to see that in his prayer. He is praying about the..., he's under the Mosaic Covenant, and he prays the Mosaic Covenant about keeping His, commandments.

In fact, some of these people that are trying to put people under the law will even make reference to the fact that, well, Jesus talked about keeping the commandments.

Well, there's also a beautiful verse that talks about..., that the commandment of God is this: to believe in the one He sent. (John 6:29) That's what God commands, that we would believe in the one that He sent to die for us on the cross.

He says in verse 6, *“let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which (look at this) we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned.”*

Hey guys, Nehemiah was obviously born in the Persian kingdom. Like I said, it's been a long time; 160 years since his forefathers had been taken captive so he was obviously born there.

And yet, look what he's doing in his prayer. He's saying, the sins that we, even me and my father's family, we committed. He is not shirking this. He's not saying, Lord, I'm really sorry that my forefathers were really creeps and they

couldn't keep your law. Good thing I'm not that way but they sure were. He's not doing any of that. He's not casting this thing off. He's making it very personal.

Verse 7, *“We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. ⁸ Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, (oh, this is interesting, he's reminding God of something He said) saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, ⁹ but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’”*

Look what he's doing, he's reciting the word that God gave to Moses. And he's saying, okay, here's one thing you said, that if your people, if we're unfaithful, you'd cast us away from you, and you did that. 160 years ago you did that, but you also said if we return to you, you'll gather us and send us back to our homeland. You've done that too.

Now even though he's in Persia, again, 50,000 of his brethren are living in the land of Israel. For all intents and purposes, the people of Israel have been repatriated back to their homeland. Again, they're still living under the dominion of the Babylonians, but they're back home. He says now you've done that, you are true to your promise. You did...

And that's what he goes on to say. He says in verse 10. *“They are your servants and your people, (in other words, the people that you brought back, they're yours, they're those) whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.”*

Now he says in verse 11, *“O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”*” What man?

He's talking about the king. Talking about king Artaxerxes because he already knows what he wants to do. He hasn't told us yet. But he already knows what he wants to do is, he wants to speak to the king and get permission to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls.

He's already got that in his heart, and so now he's praying for favor when he goes to meet the king. You know why he needs favor? Well, for a lot of reasons,

frankly. I mean, for one thing, the king is a pagan. But second of all, Artaxerxes has already...

See there were some people who already started doing a little bit of building on the walls even before Nehemiah. It tells about this in the Book of Ezra. There were some people who started doing a little bit of building, putting things together. And some folks who were living in the land wrote a letter to the king, this very king, and said, hey, I don't know if you're aware of it, but these people are starting to rebuild the walls. And if you'll look into the annals of your history, you're going to find out that these people are a rebellious people, and if you let these walls go up, this is not going to bode well for you and your kingdom.

Well, the king got the letter, looked into the archives, and said, and of course read all these things from these past kings that said, yeah, these Jews, they're trouble. Right? So he put a halt to the work. So they've stopped. They have..., they're doing nothing. It's still just in rubble.

Nehemiah knows this. He knows that he's going to go before the king who shut it down. Okay, so he's praying for favor. Favor from the king.

And then he tells us here, at the very end of the chapter, *“Now I was cupbearer to the king.”* Alright.

Here we go. Nehemiah, Chapter 2. *“In the month of Nisan, (that's not Nissan, not like the car) in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, (which by the way, means that he waited about 3 to 4 months between when he got the word to when he finally is given that opportunity to go before the king. He says) when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. (cause he's the king's cupbearer) Now I had not been sad in his presence.”* Meaning up to this point, I had never shown my emotion in front of the king.

“² And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid.” And you might wonder why he was afraid. Well, it's because Persian kings weren't particularly fond of people showing emotion around them.

In fact, we know from the Book of Esther that when Mordecai was fasting and praying over the condition of the Jews. It says that because he was in sackcloth, he wasn't allowed to go before the king. If you were in the clothes of mourning, okay, you could not approach the king, you weren't allowed to. He only wants

happy people, I guess, in his presence. And if the king finds you displeasing, there's no limit to what he might do to get rid of you.

Verse 3 says, *“I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, (in other words, where my fathers are buried) lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”*

⁴ Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. (in verse 5 it goes on to say) ⁵ And I said to the king, ...”

Now you know there's not a lot of room here for a prayer. You know what I mean? I mean a long prayer. It's not like Nehemiah heard from the king. It's not like the king said, okay, Nehemiah, what do you want? He went, hang on. And ran off to his prayer closet and prayed for a half hour, an hour, and came back and said, okay, here's the... No, he's been praying for about 3 to 4 months.

So it says, he says, I prayed, *“So I prayed to the God of heaven.”* Have you ever done one of those quickie shoot up to the Lord's prayers? Like, right before, when the teacher puts the test on your thing and says, alright, you have 30 minutes. And you're going, oh, God! Please help me with... No, it's just those prayers of just, I need you. You just say, Lord, okay, here we go, be with me.

So he shoots up this quick prayer to the Lord, and he says to the king, listen, *“If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, (that's what I'm asking) to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.”*

⁶ And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.” Isn't that interesting that the big issue that he was concerned about was when Nehemiah was coming back. That's all right.

“⁷ And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.”
Nehemiah knows, this is the Lord.

By the way, these letters were vitally important for him because he didn't live in a period of time when there was instant communication. Remember, Artaxerxes, the king, had halted work on the city when they just started even, just started doing it. And all the people of the area knew that Artaxerxes had stopped the work. So Nehemiah is getting permission from the king to go and get the work started up again on the city walls, but what are the people going to think? What are the rulers and some of the other people going to think about it? They're going to go, hey, what are you doing? The king said not to do this.

He's got to have something in his hand that he can show them and say, I got a new proclamation from the king and he said go for it. All right, so he's got to have this and while he's asking, he's also asking the king for letters for supplies and that sort of thing.

Verse 9. *"Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River..."* How you like that? Just like that, they went through, they travel a thousand miles, just like that.

He says, *"...I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River (and that's their way of calling the area of Jerusalem, what they do) and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen."* And that probably didn't hurt either, having royal troops along with him to corroborate this letter that he's got from the king.

But look at verse 10. *"But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel."* Stop there.

We don't know a whole lot about these two guys, except that they're trouble. And they opposed the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem. It says, they were greatly displeased. We don't want this to happen!

This is what I was talking about earlier when I said that, your life in Christ is growing and changing and building, and God's got you doing things as you walk out your obedience to Him. But there's always going to be opposition and some of it's going to be like this.

It's going to be like..., you might have a Sanballat the Horonite in your life who just looks at you and scowls and goes, oh, you're an idiot. Or whatever, they say, just to discourage you and whatever.

But you know what? It could be a smiling face. It could be the face of a friend. It could be the face of a loved one who, while they're smiling, is discouraging you from being obedient to God. And they're actually trying to convince you away from what you are there to do. Given by God to do, whatever that may be. You might have people in your life who really, truly believe that they are giving you the best advice they can, but it is contrary to what the Lord has told you to do in His Word.

And they're just dragging you down, they're pulling you back. And you're trying to be obedient to God and you got these people smiling at you, encouraging you to not go forward. And that's a challenge. That's a big challenge because you love these people. You love them, you want them in your life, but yet they are your Sanballat the Horonite, even with a smile.

Verse 11 says, *“So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹² Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And (he says) I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode.*

¹³ I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.” I like this.

I like the fact that Nehemiah is taking a look at what needs to be done. And before he talks to anybody, he's going to assess the situation. And sometimes in our lives, we've got to do that. We got to assess, what's the need here. What exactly is the need in your life? What are the areas in your life that are broken down, chaotic, vulnerable, right? Vulnerable to attack because that's what a city wall... It's supposed to be a place of protection.

Where are you vulnerable in your life? What needs to be repaired? What needs to be repaired in your walk with God, in your relationships with others? What needs to be fixed? What do you need to bring before the Lord? What work is He asking you to focus on in your life, to bring it into His order? Right? I like the fact that he's surveying the situation.

Verse 14, he says, *“Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. ¹⁵ Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned.”*

Notice, as he's going around, riding, I assume, probably a horse. Could have been, I suppose, a mule or whatever. But, the rubble is so significant that he can't even pass through, okay, I can't fully survey all this damage because I can't even get my animal, I can't get through there. That's how much rubble was just strewn all around.

Verse 16 says, *“And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.”* Finally he's going to spill.

“¹⁷ Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” ¹⁸ And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work.”

It was important for Nehemiah to say, let's do this, and we've got the king's permission because, again, the king had previously shut them down. And nobody wants to start a work just to get shut down again. But now they know they got permission. The king's with us on this one, so they're encouraged.

It says, *“they strengthened their hands for the good work.”* But then again, you got your haters.

Verse 19, *“But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab (they've added another one to their little team) heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?””* They knew better. But they're going to say those kinds of things anyway.

“²⁰ Then I replied to them, (and look at this reply, very good) “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.”” I like that response.

Isn't that good? *“The God of heaven will make us prosper.”* What has the God, what has the God of heaven given you to do? What has the Lord laid on your heart to be involved in? What has God given you to be thinking about? In other words, what's on the front burner of your life? What's He got on the front burner?

I like to ask people that very question sometimes. If I haven't seen somebody for a long time, I'll say, hey, what's on the front burner? What does God have on the front burner of your life? Sometimes people have to think before they, oh, I haven't thought about that.

But the Lord is, if we're taking time to listen, He's got things to say to us. And there's work that He has, that He wants us to do. He wants us to be obedient. What is God speaking to you about, as far as your obedience to Him?

Well, I want you to know something as you step out in faith. The God of heaven is going to make that prosper. He's going to make that work prosper as you trust in Him as you go forth in faith and just say Lord, I'm going to be obedient. I'm going to be faithful. You can know that God is going to be there to help that work prosper.

Now, I didn't say there wasn't going to be more opposition. In fact, as we get into the..., we're not going to do it tonight, but as we get into some of these next chapters, we're going to see that the opposition, not only did not lessen, it intensified.

And we're going to see how Nehemiah met the opposition. How he continued the work while remaining diligent toward the opposition. And we're going to find there's a great balance there.

There's a wonderful balance that the Book of Nehemiah strikes for us between the practicality of living life on earth and trusting the Lord of Heaven.