

Nehemiah 2: 1-20

Week 3 - Looking To The Temple

Learning Objectives

- Explore how the Lord works providentially to bring about his greater purposes
- Examine how Jesus functions as a new temple, allowing us to dwell close to God

Pray for your time together!

PART ONE: Nehemiah's Fear

Read Out Loud: Nehemiah 2:1-20

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before,² so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart."

I was very much afraid,³ but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

⁴The king said to me, "What is it you want?"

Then I prayed to the God of heaven,⁵ and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it."

⁶Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

⁷I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?⁸ And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.⁹ So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

¹⁰When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

¹¹I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days¹² I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

¹³By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.¹⁴

Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; ¹⁵ so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and re-entered through the Valley Gate. ¹⁶ The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." ¹⁸ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?"

²⁰ I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."

? Commentators suggest that a period of four months passed between when Nehemiah first heard the report of the state of Jerusalem's walls (Chislew: December) and this particular interaction with King Artaxerxes (Nisan: March/April). Why might Nehemiah still feel grief after such a long time?

Possible Answers: He belongs to Israel, and the community of Israel is affected through this (see sidebar). There isn't a temple to offer sacrifices. Sin & sufferings grieves God, so it grieved Nehemiah. Constant reminder of exile.

? In verse 4, seemingly mid-sentence, Nehemiah fires-off a prayer to the Lord. His prayer seems to have been only a few seconds long, and it is likely that Nehemiah said the prayer internally. What does Nehemiah's small, interjectory prayer say about his relationship with God? How might it be a good model for our own prayer life?

Possible Answers: Nehemiah responds immediately in prayer. Nehemiah quickly turns his concerns and fears over to God, even if he only has a few seconds to spare, those few seconds are for the Lord.

God's Presence & The Temple

God chose to let his presence dwell with his people in the temple. To the Jews, the Temple was the holiest site in Jerusalem and the place where God's divine presence was manifest. The Temple was a symbol of the Jewish people's place in God's kingdom.

When the temple was destroyed, the Hebrew nation lost more than just a piece of their city, they experienced the loss of the presence of God.

Nehemiah looked to the restoration of the temple as a means of restoring his peoples' relationship with their Lord.

? What do you suppose gave Nehemiah the boldness to ask the King for help? On what grounds should Nehemiah have faith that God would move through this situation?

Possible Answers: His fear of God outweighs his fear of man. Nehemiah's prayer life gave him confidence to ask in boldness and trust that the Lord would work out all things for His good glory.

? The rest of the chapter makes it clear that God was faithful to respond to Nehemiah's boldness and faithfulness. What makes it difficult for you to step out in faith and boldness to do what you feel God has called you to do?

? What steps can we take to improve the way we commune with God throughout our day?

? When difficult circumstances arise, stepping out in faith is a challenge. How can we lean on our community when we face these challenges? How can we point our brothers and sisters towards Christ in these situations?

PART TWO: God's Providence Through Israel

Leader's Note: Let's take a moment to look over what gave Nehemiah the confidence to carry out the work to which God had called him.

Read Out Loud: Genesis 17:3-8

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

Read Out Loud: 1 Kings 9:1-9

When Solomon had finished building the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, ²the Lord appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon.

³The Lord said to him:

"I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

⁴ "As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, ⁵ I will establish your royal throne over

Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.’

⁶ “But if you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, ⁷ then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. ⁸ This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, ‘Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this temple?’ ⁹ People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the Lord their God, who brought their ancestors out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why the Lord brought all this disaster on them.’”

? These passages detail God’s intent to be faithful to Israel. How might these passages have been encouraging to Nehemiah?

Possible Answers: Nehemiah clearly still has confidence in the covenant faithfulness of God towards his people Israel. Nehemiah believes that God wants to have a relationship with the people of Israel, and that they are held to a higher standard. It’s also clear that God is very gracious in continuing to work to change the unfortunate circumstances of Israel.

? God uses King Artaxerxes for bringing about a greater purpose – sending Nehemiah off to rebuild the temple. What confidence do we have today, as believers, that God will continue to sovereignly work out His purposes through our challenging circumstances?

Possible Answers: God working through the king to rebuild the walls. God moving Nehemiah to action. God giving Nehemiah confidence to keep going in the face of opposition. Personal answers will vary, but our God is always working out His glory and he is bigger than all our problem. Even though we don’t always see the good that comes from our troubles, our God does all things for His greatness.

? How does Nehemiah’s temple foreshadow what was to come in Christ? Just as Nehemiah cares for the people of Jerusalem and worked to bring physical aid, healing, and a new spiritual dwelling, how did the Messiah further God’s bigger design?

Possible Answers: Jesus acts as a kind of temple for all peoples, allowing us to have a pure relationship with our creator. Jesus’ sacrifice redeemed us before the Father, healed us of our death curse, and allows us to freely worship and glorify our creator more fully.

? Just as Nehemiah looked to the temple as a restoration of his relationship with God, how do you personally need to look to Jesus as greater fulfillment of God’s promise to Abram?

? What purpose did God bring about through Christ? What does God’s providence mean for us today?

Possible Answers: Salvation for all who believe and put their trust in Christ. Today, God has given mankind access to himself through his son, Jesus Christ.

For Discussion and Accountability

? What are ways God has worked in your past that you should remember next time you endure a hardship?

? Does any part of your relationship with Christ feel like it needs to be rebuilt? What steps can you take this week to move closer to him and actually feel His presence as if it were physical?