



**World Christian Fellowship**

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# NEHEMIAH

## PRAY, PREPARE, PROCEED: A Journey of Faith and Fellowship

Embarking on a journey of spiritual growth and fellowship can be as rewarding as it is transformative. This guide will help you navigate through meaningful experiences that are designed to enhance your connection with both your faith and fellowship. The schedule for Easter camp 2025 is crafted to ensure a balance of worship, learning, and fun. Let's dive into what each day has to offer you.

## Session 3

### Prayer, Action, and God's Sovereignty.



**“When you go through a trial,  
the sovereignty of God is the  
pillow upon which you lay your  
head.” ~ Charles Spurgeon**

#### **Nehemiah 2:1-8.**

##### **Overview**

Four months have passed since Nehemiah heard the horrific news concerning his homeland.

However, rather than throwing up his arms in despair and in hopelessness, Nehemiah turns to the Lord.

Forty-eight weeks of fervent prayer and research, this Persian cupbearer makes a very calculated step to approach King Artaxerxes. This scene displays a beautiful picture of human responsibility and God's sovereignty working in tandem to bring about God's glory.

## **The Request of Nehemiah.**

### **Appearance before the King.**

**Nehemiah 2:1-4**, *And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid,<sup>3</sup> and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"<sup>4</sup> Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.*

"Nisan" was equivalent to the month of April and the beginning of the Persian and Jewish year. It had been four months since Nehemiah had heard the news concerning Jerusalem.

**Nehemiah 1:11**, *O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."*

The ancient historian, Herodotus, indicates that the Persian kings would host an annual feast that would display their generosity. During this event, the King was expected to grant the requests of those in attendance. Thus, one wonders if Nehemiah waited to make his request until this special event.



The Persian court required staff who were pleasant and cheerful. Failure to do so was a serious offense. The last phrase only further supports this understanding.

Such a gloomy countenance could be interpreted as evidence that one was plotting against the king. Certainly, the king's probing suggests that he is suspicious of Nehemiah.

*“This made me very fearful.”*

This phrase only occurs in one other location in the Old Testament.

It is used of Abram in his response to be encountering the Lord in a vision.

**Genesis 15:1**, *After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”*

This fear is intense and expresses concern for one’s life.

Nehemiah, like Esther, had the wisdom to present the matter first as news of a personal blow, not as a political issue.

Ancestral reverence was highly valued in Middle Eastern culture. Nehemiah appeals to Artaxerxes’ heart as he discusses the graves of his ancestors lying in desolation. A topic he will mention twice in this brief interaction with Artaxerxes (**V 3 & 5**).

The King’s second question serves as a turning point in the conversation.

*“The God of heaven”*

This phrase recalls Nehemiah’s initial prayer in **Nehemiah 1:4-5**, *So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the*

*God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And I said: "I pray, Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments,*

## **Requests given to the King.**

**Nehemiah 2:5-8**, *And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."*

<sup>6</sup> *Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "How long will your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.*

<sup>7</sup> *Furthermore I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, <sup>8</sup> and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.*

Nehemiah asks three things from the King.

### **1. Nehemiah asks for a leave of absence to go and rebuild the city (V 5-6).**

The request to return to Judah to rebuild the walls is exactly what King Artaxerxes had officially prohibited several years earlier.

In Ezra 4, the Persian official in Samaria, Rehum, reported to Artaxerxes that the Jews were rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem.

**Ezra 4:12-13**, *Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations. <sup>13</sup> Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished.*



Upon receiving this news, King Artaxerxes halted any work in the Jewish capital.

**Ezra 4:17-20**, *The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth. <sup>18</sup> The letter which you sent to us has been*

*clearly read before me. <sup>19</sup> And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. <sup>20</sup> There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the region beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them.*

Observe that Nehemiah never mentions the name “Jerusalem” or the city walls in his request. It is not until verse 8 that Nehemiah mentions the city walls.

The presence of the queen may indicate that this was a private meeting as normally she was absent at formal banquets.

Note how Artaxerxes values his cupbearer. Despite Nehemiah’s deep affection for Jerusalem, he had given his best to serve this Persian king.

## **2. Nehemiah asks for endorsement letters.**

**V 7**, *Furthermore I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah,*

“Trans-Euphrates” This was a Persian title of the province entailing Judah and Samaria.

Nehemiah was politically astute. Having done his homework, he knew that the local governors of Trans-Euphrates would not look fondly on a rebuilding program of Jerusalem.

After all, it was the governor of Samaria, Rehum, who had halted the building of the walls previously. This local leader may have also been the one who destroyed the walls after Artaxerxes' edict in Ezra 4.

### **3. Nehemiah asks for a donation.**

*V 8, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.*

Boldly, Nehemiah requests that the King personally allocate his own resources to assist Nehemiah!

Observe that Nehemiah was not only cognizant of the location of this forest near Jerusalem, but he also knew the man in charge of that forest. Once again, Nehemiah had done his homework.



The timber is requested for three projects:

1. Gates for the fortress next to the Temple,
2. The city walls, and
3. His own home.

*“The good hand of my God was upon me”*

This phrase also occurs in **Ezra 7:6**.

Both men recognized the miraculous provision of God. No human explanation is viable.

What appears at one level to be the bountiful grant of the Persian king turns out to be merely a channel through which the bounty of the King of kings reaches his people.

No plan of God’s can be thwarted.

When God acts, no one can reverse it. No one can hold back His hand or bring Him to account for His actions.

God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, and works out every event to bring about the accomplishment of His will.

Such a bare unqualified statement of the sovereignty of God would terrify us if that were all we knew about God. But God is not only sovereign. God is perfect in love and infinite in wisdom.

## **Intersect**

Faith is not a permit to forego careful thinking and planning.

**Luke 14:28-30**, *For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—<sup>29</sup> lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup> saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'?*

Changing a heart is God's line of work.

No matter how important the person, God is the one who decides the direction a heart will bend.

Thus, pray and pray often!

**Proverbs 21:1**, *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.*

Failure to step out in faith eliminates the incredible opportunity to be used by the Lord.



**Psalm 5:11-12**, *But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You. <sup>12</sup> For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; With favor You will surround him as with a shield.*

Based upon our study, you may want to spend some additional time this week interacting with the following:

There is no battle anywhere in the spiritual sense until the Christian pitches in. There is no concern in the mind of Satan about the church at all until he sees a selfless Christian seeking only the glory of God, determined to challenge the Satanic grip upon men's hearts and lives in the name of the Lord.

## **Does your service for God cause Satan any worry at all?**

The question is valid.

To word this question another way,

**Is there an area in which you are seeking to serve the Lord which is resulting in opposition?**

This opposition is often used by Satan to deter us from serving the Lord.

Take sometime this week turning this opposition over to the Lord. Allow Him to fight your battle.

**Will you commit to giving the Lord control of this area, or will you allow Satan to win the battle?**



**“Waiting has four purposes.**

- 1. It practices the patience of faith.**
- 2. It gives time for preparation for the coming gift.**
- 3. It makes the blessing the sweeter when it arrives.**
- 4. And it shows the sovereignty of God – to give just when and just as He pleases.”**

**~ James Vaghan.**

## **Planning carefully**

Having identified the need, Nehemiah proceeded to the planning stage.

Planning the work and mission of our church is vitally important. Identifying the need, feeling a burden and pitching into work enthusiastically are all important. But so also are careful planning and organization.

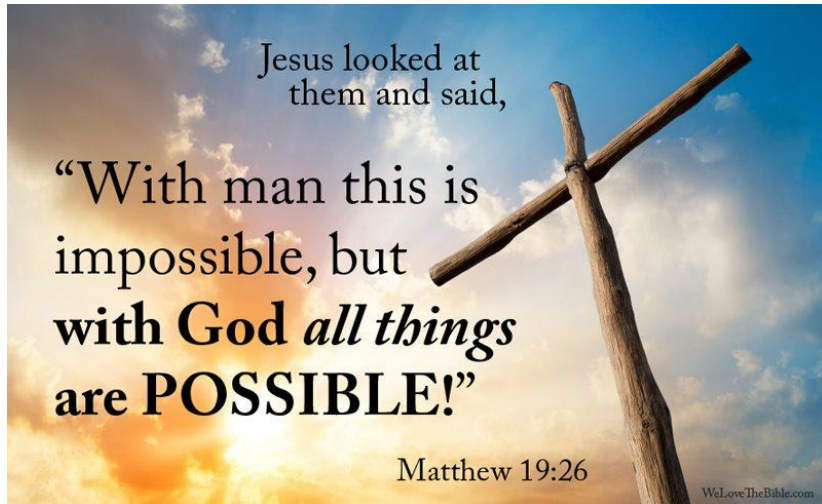
To have time to go to Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to ask the King for time off work. The King did not share Nehemiah's God, so it was really a miracle that the King allowed Nehemiah to follow the mission that the living God had put in his heart.

As we consider the spiritual and material state of our churches, we are also aware that only a miracle can change them. It is therefore important to remember that the God we follow, and worship can achieve the impossible!

To what extent does the task ahead of us seem impossible?

**What is the lesson to be learned from Nehemiah and Matthew?**

**Matthew 19:26**, *But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*



Jesus looked at  
them and said,

“With man this is  
impossible, but  
**with God *all things*  
are POSSIBLE!”**

Matthew 19:26

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Throughout Nehemiah 2 we see that the planning and preparation are proceeding well, but not without problems. Nehemiah faces some resistance, and how to deal with opposition and frustrations.

After a long journey that would have taken several months, Nehemiah has finally arrived in Jerusalem to start work. After months of prayer, months of travel and a great deal of preparation and expectation, one would expect Nehemiah to start work immediately.

But no. After arriving, he rests for three days before starting work (v. 2:11).

Nehemiah's story shows us that rest and preparation are essential to the life and work of a Christian. This helps us to focus on our work and focus on our relationship with God.

In our busy world it is increasingly difficult to rest.

It's important that we don't see our work with the church as one more responsibility one more ball to keep juggling. It's important that we see our life in the church as something that enriches our lives and sustains us, not one more responsibility that tires us.

**Do you see your life in the church as a responsibility or as a calling?**

**Is there a difference?**

**How do we ensure that we have the right attitude towards God's work in our community?**

After taking time to rest, Nehemiah goes out to start exploring the city to see what lies ahead of them and how they should proceed.

In other words, he intends to plan carefully (**V 12-15**).

Interestingly he goes out at night and with only a few other people. That is, he doesn't go out during the day when everyone can see him, he doesn't make a big show of it 'Look, here I am. Nehemiah has come to sort out you and your city!'

Not at all.

The way he goes about it is very humble.

This is a big challenge for Christians because many people over the years have talked boldly about bringing the gospel to nations, but for various reasons have failed.

A naive optimism is dangerous.

Quiet planning and preparation behind the scenes are important to have the greatest impact when you finally go public with your mission. If you go public without proper planning, the whole plan will fail.

**Do you have experience of holding a mission which was not properly planned?**

**What lessons have you learned from that experience?**

**Nehemiah chapter 2** explores the city on a fact-finding mission.

He examines the wall, the gates and the buildings which are in need of repair.

Nehemiah knows that the work needs to be based on facts and not on perceptions and misleading assumptions.

This is a lesson for us.

**How well do we really know our churches?**

**Where exactly are the families?**

**Is our knowledge of our community based on facts or is our knowledge based on our assumptions and the small circle of people we know?**

**Why not study your community demographics?**

**The statistics are available from your county council website or the Census website. How many children?**

**Young people?**

**Elderly?**

**How many are employed?**

**How many unemployed?**

**What about local churches?**

**Is there an area in the community with no church within reach?**

It is important for us to examine our communities as Nehemiah examined Jerusalem in order to get to know our community and prepare well for the work ahead.



After assessing the situation, getting to know the city and seeing what was in front of him, he begins to draw more people in (**V 17-18**).

He includes everyone. 'Let us rebuild/Let us start rebuilding', not 'I shall rebuild' or 'You must rebuild'.

After sharing his story so far and sharing the vision God has given him, Nehemiah goes on to inspire everyone to take ownership of the work. 'Let us begin to rebuild' and they all get stuck in.

Everyone was now aware of God's will for them.

**Are we all aware of God's will for us?**

**Are we prepared to do the careful planning?**