

**ARISE AND BUILD!**

Nehemiah prayed four months, seeking not his own will, but God's, and God's timing. "Waiting is part of God's process of becoming what He wants us to be," observes John Ortberg. Nehemiah was praying and waiting for an opportunity to speak to King Artaxerxes about rebuilding the wall in Jerusalem, some 1,000 miles away. Though Nehemiah held the office of cupbearer, the highest ranking minister of the king, he faced a risky proposition. He was asking to reverse official policy of the very king who ordered the stoppage of the wall (Ezra 4:21). But in Nehemiah chapter 2, God is still at work.

**2- GOD ANSWERS the prayer of His people.** The king noticed Nehemiah's sadness. Though he was very much afraid, similar to Esther, Nehemiah personalized the tragedy to his own people. The king pressed him, "*what are you requesting?*" Before he answered, Nehemiah writes in his personal memoir that "*I prayed to the God of heaven.*" Just as we must do, praying in all circumstances, and without ceasing (Ephesians 6:18, 1Thessalonians 5:17-18). Nehemiah then bravely answers the king.

He asks to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. Remember, he had prayed four months already, so he had God's plan. He could give the king a timeframe, and asked for official letters of passage, for timber and supplies. Amazingly, the king grants the request of his trusted servant. Nehemiah records, "*for the good hand of my God was with me.*" M. Breneman says Nehemiah shows profound understanding and faith in what God has promised in His Word. This challenges us to prayer based on understanding God's will and purpose as found in His written Word, as we turn in relationship to Him in humility and obedience.

**2- GOD MAKES provision for His people.** Once in Jerusalem, Nehemiah went alone at night to inspect the walls and assess the extent of the project. Then he talked to the priests, nobles, officials, and those who would do the work: "*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.*" He told them how God's hand had been upon him for good, and the King's words. And the people said, "*Let us arise and build.*"

And they "*strengthened their hands for the good work.*" The need was obvious, and so was God's provision and preparation already made. God was the cause, and the effect was their proper response of "yes" to God, to trust and obey Him. Nehemiah had already been praying for months on their behalf, even confessing their sins, asking God for success. Derek Kidner notes this partnership of heaven and earth looked to God for vindication against opposition, which was dwarfed by faith, unity, and energy. This was God's answer to prayer and provision for a task bigger than His people, and worthy of His name!

**3- GOD OVERCOMES opposition to His plans.** Ambitious outsiders heard about Nehemiah's plan. They jeered. Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab accused Nehemiah and the people of rebelling against the king. Nehemiah replied, "*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.*"

Nehemiah presents the profile of a great leader: planner, discreet, courageous, godly, prayerful, strategic, inspiring. He develops the plan and gets ownership of the people. He declares that the political opposition, the governors of surrounding territories, have no part in God's work. It is God's plan. That's his trump card. And many have noted his parallels with President Trump, as "God does not choose perfect men, but men perfect for the job." We face similar challenges, as God's people seek to return our nation to His principles, rooting out corruption, and even building a wall. Even the New Jerusalem has a wall! We too must regularly pray for our leaders, for God's purposes to prevail, and His protection and provision.

**4- GOD ACTS as His people trust and obey.** Chapter 3 describes how Nehemiah implemented the plan. He arranged work teams of related people, who took personal ownership of the great project. Sanballat became enraged. The Jews building their wall threatened his power. He plotted with other governors to fight against Jerusalem. Nehemiah prayed, and set a guard day and night. As God's people discern His will through Scripture and prayer, we must take action by trusting and obeying. God provides all that is needed - but you must step out in faith, trust His plan, obey His Word, and get to work!

When the people became afraid, Nehemiah rallied their response. He arranged them by clan, arming them with swords, spears and bows. "*Do not be afraid of them,*" he urged, "*remember the LORD, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, sons, daughters, wives, and homes.*" For those you love, pick up hammer, trowel, sword, and get to work. Realize what God wants, and give it all you've got.

**5- GOD PROVIDES protection as you serve Him.** Nehemiah declared, "*our God will fight for us*" and so each person kept his weapon at hand as he worked. But then, their own financial distress became too much. Why does it not seem such a problem until we are asked to give to God's work? Then we're "sacrificing too much." They had borrowed to pay for grain and the king's taxes, even enslaving their own children in their debt - because they had been disobedient to God's express words and principles in the Bible. Nehemiah became angry. Like Trump, he took no pay as leader, and paid government expenses out of his own pocket. In chapter 6, he faces unjust accusers, conspiracies by neighboring governors who stirred up trouble, and even false prophets against him. Will God's work prevail? ☐