

The Book of Nehemiah

Chapter 2

Everybody Must Serve, It's Time To Go To Work! Let's Get It Done!

While the books of Ezra and Nehemiah work together (similarly to the books of Kings and Chronicles), the men Ezra and Nehemiah and their **assignments** from God were quite dissimilar and distinct. Ezra was a Priest and a Torah Teacher. His job was to revive the Priesthood into a properly functioning body and to reform the Hebrew religion from the early Judaism it was currently practicing that had been born up in Babylon, back into the God ordained, Torah-based religion of the Bible. We could say that Ezra's mission revolved around religion and spirituality and that indeed his position and purpose was as a religious leader.

Nehemiah on the other hand was primarily a politician. His mission proceeded mostly along secular lines. His job was to revive the city of Jerusalem and to make it defensible by rebuilding its broken down walls and gates. He also needed to raise the economy and increase the population of Judeans in the city. We saw immediately in Nehemiah Chapter 1 that Nehemiah, King Artaxerxes' cupbearer, had a spirit that was sensitive to God and open to His instruction, and that he knew the Torah (probably having been taught it by Ezra). Most importantly we learn that it was the Lord who prepared then called Nehemiah to his new role to govern the people of Judah.



EZRA + NEHEMIAH

DIFFERENT MEN FOR DIFFERENT MISSIONS

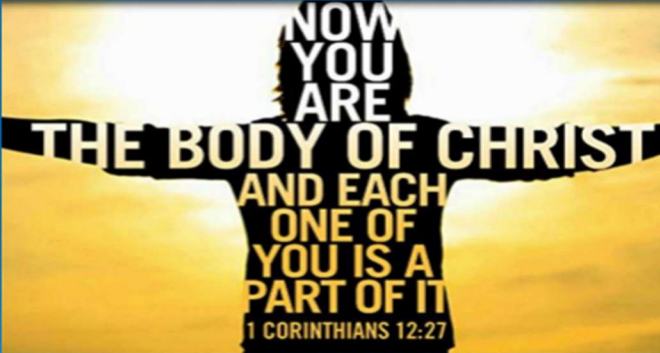
- Ezra was a Priest and Torah Teacher, a religious leader
- Nehemiah was a politician, a secular government leader
- **Nehemiah's mission:**
- 1) Raise the economy of Jerusalem
- 2) Make Jerusalem defensible
- 3) Increase the population with Judeans
- Nehemiah had a spirit that was sensitive to God's instructions
- The Lord prepared and then called Nehemiah to a position of government leadership

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This tells us something important: every element and level of the Believing community plays its role and is needed. From the community leader to those who perform the less desirable tasks like cleaning up after others, everyone is needed to participate and do their part. And the Lord is not more disposed and present (nor is He more impressed) in the life of the leader than He is in the lives of the blue collar laborers. However the Lord does place more responsibility on the leader because the leader invariably has a greater effect on the direction and success of the community.

THE MAKE-UP OF A BELIEVING COMMUNITY OF GOD

- 1Corinthians 12:4 – 27
- Every element of the community plays its role and is needed
- God does not favor leaders more than followers
- Our political leaders are blamed for our national problems
- God usually gives us the leaders we deserve, not the leaders that we need



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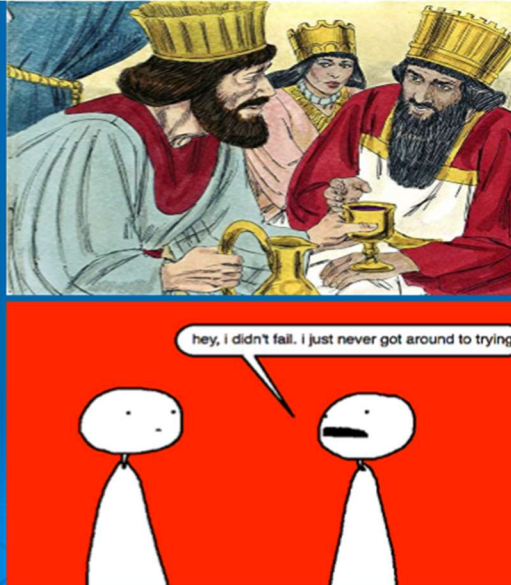
And even though Nehemiah was equipped by God, and providential circumstances trained him up to be a leader of a secular government, and he would fight for the practical, the pragmatic and the tangible things of everyday life for his people, the Jews, he was not a secular man; rather He was a devout worshipper of the God of Israel.

Do Not Procrastinate

Of course a reasonable question is: since it's been 4 months since Nehemiah first heard about Jerusalem, why now is he so depressed over it that he can't hide it

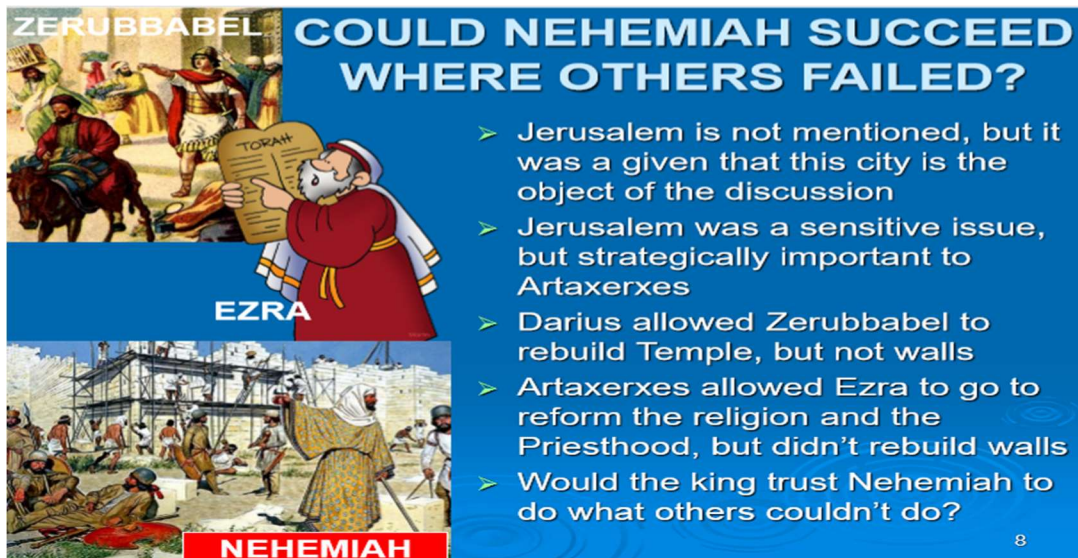
even though he understands that such an appearance is not usually tolerated by royalty? We're not given any reason for it, nor are we given any clue why it took 4 months before he said something to the king. It could have been that the king was not at the palace in Shushan when Nehemiah first got the word from his brother and the king only had recently returned. Or it might have been that Nehemiah was waiting for the right moment. Or perhaps (as I suspect) after walking around the rock and considering every aspect of the matter and what trying to do something about the situation might mean for his career or social status, he was getting cold feet and was ready to drop the whole thing.

And if we procrastinate the Lord is just liable to force the issue when we least suspect it's coming. A word to the wise from my own experiences with the Lord; do what we see the truly righteous of God do all throughout the Bible: get up early in the morning and run to the righteous battle we've been assigned and trust in the Lord for the outcome. If the Lord has willed it for us we're going to face whatever-it-is one way or another. Better to do it in the Lord's will, and in faith, rather than being less-than-willingly throw into battle because we've hesitated.

<p>GOD ANSWERS NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">> If we procrastinate the Lord is liable to force the issue!> Get up early and RUN to the righteous battle> King was not annoyed; he was sensitive to Nehemiah's distress> Desecration of the burial sites brought shame> Loss of honor is intolerable> The king couldn't have a man in his royal court who was in a social status of shame	
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Only You are Uniquely Equipped to Complete your assignment

An earlier Persian king, Darius, had allowed Zerubbabel to go there to rebuild the Temple and the city walls. However when local opposition arose to the project, Darius first took the position to stop all work based on the accusation of the opponents that Zerubbabel's hidden agenda was to create the conditions for a Jewish rebellion. Further, it wasn't Darius's idea that Zerubbabel go to rebuild, it was his predecessor King Cyrus's. Once a records search found Cyrus's original decree to allow the Jews to rebuild their Temple and the city walls, confirming Zerubbabel's claim, Darius allowed the work to begin again. **But only the Temple was completed, the city walls were not rebuilt.**



ZERUBBABEL

COULD NEHEMIAH SUCCEED WHERE OTHERS FAILED?

- Jerusalem is not mentioned, but it was a given that this city is the object of the discussion
- Jerusalem was a sensitive issue, but strategically important to Artaxerxes
- Darius allowed Zerubbabel to rebuild Temple, but not walls
- Artaxerxes allowed Ezra to go to reform the religion and the Priesthood, but didn't rebuild walls
- Would the king trust Nehemiah to do what others couldn't do?

EZRA

NEHEMIAH

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Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem would be a supreme challenge and few could pull it off (the fact that those important walls lay in ruin for about 175 years is proof enough of the difficulty). The king thought Nehemiah could be that special man and so fully supported Nehemiah's requests. What the king didn't know is that all of this was being orchestrated from Heaven to serve Jehovah's purpose.

We have to be patient, wait and trust God

The king responded by asking Nehemiah how long he'd be gone. We're not told what Nehemiah's answer was, but we can probably assume that the time

Nehemiah estimated was substantially less than it turned out to be (11 or 12 years). What king would be concerned that a man that he considered important to his administration not be gone too long, but find 12 years to be an acceptable number? Besides, how could Nehemiah possibly know in advance how long all this would take having never even seen Jerusalem in his life? Thus in chapter 13 we find King Artaxerxes, after his cupbearer being gone for about 12 years, finally sending for Nehemiah to return to the palace.


The Father is concern about the whole person

Remember that Nehemiah's mission, on the surface, was a purely secular one. Rebuild the walls so the King of Persia could have a formidable strategic outpost from which to control the region; revive Jerusalem's economy; grow the population with Jews; and provide safety and security for the residents or none of the aforementioned would amount to much. None of this sounds very pious or Godly, but rather more like a worldly endeavor that any government leader might undertake. Yet, the Father knows that this is the world, not Heaven, and His chosen people were in a stagnant and disadvantaged condition until these very practical matters of daily life were resolved. Sending another Priest was not the answer because a Priest would not be equipped to deal well with politicians and enemies and fortress construction and defense no matter how devoted to the Lord he might be (as Ezra demonstrated); it was going to take a cunning and savvy political leader, with all the downsides in personality that come with it.

I want to end our time together with this thought: we can know as Believers that while we can't live on bread alone, we still need bread to live. And while a job and a place to live won't get us any closer to Heaven, we (and our families) still need income and shelter. It's harder to think on the higher things of God on an empty stomach or when we are under siege, than when we feel safe and secure. And our merciful Father knows this because He created us. So don't ever become so idealistic (or Heavenly minded as some put it) as to think that you can pray your way to solving all the practical things of life that you already have the means to obtain by your own labors and actions. Life with God is a partnership; He does His part and you do yours. And what we see in Nehemiah is a great partnership

forming between this pragmatic man who says “yes” to God, and seeks Him at every turn; but then is also ready to take action, get his hands dirty and take risks. I admire Nehemiah as a role model of a Godly form of let’s-get-it-done leadership more than I can express.

THIS IS THE WORLD, NOT HEAVEN



- The Father knows we need these things
- Sending another Priest, like Ezra, wasn't the answer
- Believers don't live on bread alone, but we need bread to live
- Harder to think on things of God on an empty stomach than when we're safe and secure
- Nehemiah had a partnership with God
- Ready to take action, takes risks and gets his hands dirty
- A role model of Godly let's-get-it-done leadership

Threats to your assignment

1. Offense
2. Laziness/Procrastination
3. Pride
4. Superficial Business
5. Fear

End Of Notes

(Content adapted from A Study of Nehemiah by Tom Bradford)