

“DEEP WATERS” – A Man’s Leadership Study in Nehemiah
Lesson Two: A Plan Becomes Realized
Nehemiah 2:1–20

Opening Question: If you had a paid Sabbatical from work – let’s say for 3 months – what would you do?

Personally I can think of a lot of things I would like to do: spend 6 weeks traveling in Israel; complete the editing and writing of my second book; just reading several books that are lying on my shelf; spend quality time with my grandchildren – attending their school functions

As we shall soon see, Nehemiah will ask for time off from work, but he has a planned purpose for asking.

Date as the chapter opens: March of the year 445 BC (Artaxerxes reigned from 465–424 BC)

Verses 1–3 – Servants were expected to keep their feelings to themselves and to always be in a cheerful

mood when going before the King – didn’t want to cause him to be upset; kings were known for their anger – just ask Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego about Nebuchadnezzar’s temper – it reached the boiling point, literally

Why was Nehemiah fearful? (verse 2) – probably not so much because of the question the King asked, but of the response he would request from the King.

- Artaxerxes had earlier stopped an attempt at building the walls of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:17–23)
- Perhaps for that reason, Nehemiah does not mention Jerusalem by name (verse 3)

(Like Queen Esther, Nehemiah had the wisdom to present his request in a personal way rather than in a political way; remember Esther, instead of asking for Haman’s head on a platter, merely invited both the King and Haman to a banquet)

(Sometimes it is best that we do not make our intentions crystal clear at the beginning – but this is only possible when we know the person so well of whom we will be making the request)

Verses 4–6 – Let’s look at the questions the King asks of Nehemiah after he had shared the reasons for

his sad expression:

1. What is it you want? – good leaders always have to be ready to answer that one

“Daddy, what is it you want from me?”

“Honey, what is it you want from me?”

“Pastor, what is it you want from me?”

- line
2. How long will your journey take? – good leaders always have a time
 3. When will you come back?

Nehemiah asked for a leave of absence that would last for twelve years. (One commentator – Derrick Kidner – thinks Nehemiah was gone for just one year at first, returned after the walls were dedicated, and then was reassigned as the governor of the province of Judea).

Verses 7–8 – Nehemiah’s request is detailed

1. He had a dream of what Jerusalem should look like, but what it wasn’t
2. He had prayed about the role God might have him play in seeing that dream become a reality
3. He formulated a plan

“Pray as if everything depended upon God; Plan as if everything depended upon you.”

Nehemiah needed:

- a. The King’s permission – granted
- b. Letters from the King granting him safe-conduct; he was not a marauder common to the times
- c. Letter granting him the right to give (no purchase order required) timber from the King’s woods
- d. In addition, the King gave Nehemiah an army escort – sort of intimidating for those who might oppose him.

Men, I think this is the most difficult part of any plan – and the reason so many fail:

- It is not because we lack a dream – most of us have dreams about what we would like our families, our marriage, even our work environment to look like
- It is not even necessarily because we lack prayer – I think many of us are sincere in our prayer life; we do pray for our families and our work environments
- But we LACK A PLAN! We are not sure how to get from point A to point B

Verse 10 – Whenever God begins a plan, Satan always is there to create opposition; when there is smooth sailing, one wonders if the plan is from God because it has not attracted attention.

Sanballat was the governor of Samaria
Tobiah had gained influence in Ammon (modern day Jordan)
Geshem, the Arab (mentioned in verse 19) – was probably more powerful than either Sanballat

or Tobiah; we know that he ruled a league of Arabian tribes that controlled Edom and Moab (southern parts of today's Jordan), as well as parts of Arabia, extending even into Egypt

So, when Nehemiah arrives on the scene, Jerusalem is already surrounded by opposition:

North – Samaria
East – Ammonites
South – Arab tribes

Verse 20 – Nehemiah's response to those who opposed him:

1. He dismissed the past – “You have no share in Jerusalem” – they had sort of claimed squatter's rights
2. He dismissed the present – “You have no claim” – why are you even here? You do not belong here since you are not of the house of Israel.
3. He dismissed the future – “You have no historic right to it” – this place will always be ours

Verses 11–18 – Arrival in Jerusalem

How long it took Nehemiah to assemble the proper paperwork and prepare himself to make the crossing from Susa to Jerusalem, the Bible does not tell us – typically it was a journey of four to five months.

Verse 11 – Nehemiah spent his first three days in Jerusalem doing what?...the Bible does not tell us

Question: What do you think Nehemiah did those first three days in Jerusalem? What would you have done? (Remember what his purpose was!)

Two important truths for effective leadership are found in verses 11 and 12:

1. Nehemiah did not rush into action
2. Nehemiah did not rush into talk – he pondered his plans and strategy while on site

As a newcomer Nehemiah knew he needed to become familiar with the situation on the ground before going public with his dreams and plans – He wanted to make sure he had all his facts straight.

I think he also wanted to make sure that the plan was truly of God and not Nehemiah's.

Question: How can you know if God is with you in a project you undertake?

1. I believe there will be a sense of inner peace, not necessarily outward peace

2. I believe there will be a sense of God's provision – Nehemiah had already experienced this

3. I believe there will be a connection to something God has either said in His Word or relayed through another person

Verses 13–14 – The path around the problem

Began at the Valley Gate

Went South to the Jackal Well – possibly En Rogel, a well at the junction of the Valley of Hinnom

and the Kidron Valley

Dung Gate – gate leading to the garbage dump in the Valley of Hinnom (was 500 yards South of

Valley Gate)

Fountain Gate – possibly on Southeast Wall facing En Rogel

King's Pool – possibly Pool of Siloam

These were all on the South and East sides of the city. Nehemiah assumed that the Northern walls were totally destroyed. That was the direction Jerusalem was most vulnerable as the armies came down through the valleys of Galilee and Samaria.

Verse 17–18 – Finally a public challenge

Kidner: "Sometimes it takes a stranger to see sharply what has been softened by familiarity" (p. 83)

Nehemiah began by citing the disgrace: Jerusalem should be seen as the city of the Great King.

Nehemiah then shared that he was on a mission for God

Finally, Nehemiah shared that he was on a mission for the King

Verse 18 – The response was a miracle: It had taken 91 years, but finally the time had come to getting the walls built

ASSIGNMENT: Read Nehemiah 2 through at least twice this week.

What one thing has God placed upon your heart that you have been procrastinating?

Why have you procrastinated?

What benefits to you, your family, your workplace, would come if that project/plan/dream were

accomplished?

What steps can you take right now to get that project/plan/dream to become a reality?

(Be specific)