

# The Restoring Builder

Nehemiah 2:11-20

SS Lesson for 04/18/2021

**Devotional Scripture:** Dan 9:4-19

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Neh 2:17*

*Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### A RESTORER WHO PLANS (NEH 2:11-16)

##### *Planning through investing time (11)*

Investing time because God's time is vastly different from ours (2 Peter 3:8-9)

Investing time because God's timing is Divine and beyond our comprehension (Isa 55:8)

Investing time because God blesses us with time so that we may use it wisely (Eph 5:15-16)

Investing time because God blesses us with time so that we may know that the end is near (1 Cor 7:29,31)

Investing time because God blesses us with time so that we will number our days (Ps 90:12)

Investing time because there is a time for everything (Eccl 3:1)

Investing time by putting on the armor of God because the time is near (Rom 13:12)

##### *Planning through meditation time with God (12)*

Meditation on God's works (Ps 77:12)

Meditation of the heart (Ps 19:14)

Meditation on God's unfailing love (Ps 48:9)

Meditation on God's wonders (Ps 119:27)

Meditation on God's Word, as well as listening, brings insight and understanding (Ps 119:99)

##### *Planning through appraisal (13-14)*

Appraisal of the cost to ensure completion (Luke 14:28-32)

Appraisal to ensure to be well-advised (Prov 20:18)

Appraisal to find out God's will (James 4:13-16)

Appraisal to check for danger and evil (Prov 22:3)

Appraisal to be watchful and alert (1 Thess 5:6)

Appraisal to be prepared to act based on God's Word (Heb 11:7)

##### *Planning how to secure helpers (15-16)*

Helpers to share the load (Exodus 18:13-23)

Helpers to share the responsibility (Acts 6:3)

Helpers to ensure everywhere is reached (Acts 1:21-26)

Helpers called out by God (Acts 13:2-3)

Helpers because two are better than one (Eccl 4:9-12)

Helpers because sometimes the burden is too heavy for one (Num 11:14-17)

##### *On Being Secretive (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

#### A RESTORER WHO HAS THE ABILITY TO LEAD (NEH 2:17-20)

##### *Leading by challenging (17)*

A challenge to be worthy (2 Thess 1:11)

A challenge that could require the giving up of treasures (Matt 19:21-22)

A challenge that must be carefully considered (Luke 14:25-33)

A challenge that could cost one's life (Matt 20:20-23)

A challenge that may be like being sent out as lambs among wolves (Luke 10:1-3)

##### *Leading by giving God the glory (18)*

Give God the glory through thanksgiving (2 Cor 4:15)

Give God the glory because in all things God should be praised (1 Peter 4:11)

Give God the glory because we are owned by Him (1 Cor 6:20)

Give God the glory because we are to give God the glory in all things that we do (1 Cor 10:31)

God is glorified when we are in unity with the Holy Spirit and follow the example of Jesus (Rom 15:5-6)

God is glorified when we live a good life before others (1 Peter 2:12)

##### *Leading by dealing with opposition (19-20)*

Opposition that is never too large for God (Judges 7:4-7)

Opposition where God helps the powerless against the mighty (2 Chron 14:9-12)

Opposition that cannot be overcome by strength and size (Ps 33:16-19)

Opposition that may seem to be overbearing, but reliance on God will always bring deliverance (2 Cor 1:8-10)

## CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM THOMAS CONSTABLE

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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

## Lesson Background and Key Verse

### Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Occasionally we see signs that read, “We Buy Ugly Houses.” Apparently the persons or companies who post these signs are interested in renovating “ugly houses” in order to sell them for a profit. The original home was undervalued because of its various flaws; the refinished product is intended to have good return on investment. The proliferation of television shows, magazine articles, and websites devoted to “flipping” houses demonstrates the wide appeal of this business. Long ago, Nehemiah was interested in renovating an “ugly city,” the once great city of Jerusalem. He wanted to address a condition of disrepair and confusion in Jerusalem, but his deeper motives and his leadership skill in so doing still have much to teach us today.

Jerusalem had been a distinguished city, the political and spiritual capital of the nation of Israel under David’s leadership (1 Chronicles 11:4-9; 15). Solomon added to its greatness by the magnificent temple that he built there (2 Chronicles 3). But following the division of the nation and the rise of ungodly kings who allowed idolatry and accompanying abhorrent practices to flourish in the land, Jerusalem became filled with such wickedness and evil that the judgment of God fell on it. In 586 BC the Babylonians finally breached the city walls, following a siege of 18 months. The city’s state of massive disrepair still existed in the time of Nehemiah, some 140 years later. Nehemiah was cupbearer to Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11), king of the Persians, who ruled from 465 to 425 BC. The Persians had conquered the Babylonians in 539 BC. Cyrus, ruler of the Persians at the time, had permitted any of the Jews who desired to do so to return to their home. Approximately 50,000 did (Ezra 2:64-65), but there were those, such as members of Nehemiah’s family, who chose to remain in Persia. Nehemiah 1 describes what happened in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, which would have been 445 BC. Nehemiah received news from his brother, Hanani, of the sad state of affairs back home in Jerusalem: Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire (Nehemiah 1:3). Deeply troubled over such disheartening conditions, Nehemiah responded with tears, fasting, and fervent prayer (1:4). He confessed his own sins and the sins of his fellow Jews and begged the Lord to honor his promise to bless his people if they turned from their sinful ways (1:5-10). Nehemiah then asked the Lord that he might receive favor from the king (Nehemiah 1:11). That involved Artaxerxes’s granting permission to Nehemiah to travel to his homeland of Judah and lead an effort to repair the wall and the gates of his beloved city of Jerusalem (2:1-9). Nehemiah’s request included protection for the journey (contrast Ezra 8:22) and also provision of supplies needed for the projects that were planned. While the king did indeed grant Nehemiah’s request, Nehemiah knew that any favor he had been shown had come from the Lord to whom he had prayed (2:4) and whose “gracious hand” (2:8) would be seen time and again in the upcoming endeavors. When Nehemiah arrived, he gave the territory administrators the letters provided by King Artaxerxes that verified the king’s support for Nehemiah’s undertaking. The letters also confirmed the king’s allocation of the resources needed for the rebuilding efforts (Nehemiah 2:7-9).

### Key Verse: Neh 2:17

*Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."*

### Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

**2:1-4a.** Four months went by before Nehemiah’s opportunity came—from Kislev (1:1, November-December) to **Nisan** (March-April). Nisan was still in Artaxerxes’ **20th year** (cf. 1:1) because the regnal year started in Tishri (September-October). As Nehemiah was going about his usual duties **the king** noticed something different about Nehemiah’s countenance. He was **sad**. **The king** was immediately curious about

Nehemiah's state of depression, since this was the first time he had seen his cupbearer dejected. **The king asked** a pointed question, **Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill?** Nehemiah was careful in replying. In fact he was even **afraid**. A servant was never to let his negative emotions show before the king, for it might suggest dissatisfaction with the king. To do so might jeopardize his position or even his life. Also Nehemiah knew that his request was a bold one. As already stated, a few years earlier this king had stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem and now Nehemiah was going to ask that the order be reversed. The cupbearer was risking his life! But his response was wise, no doubt reflecting the fact that he had been thinking about this opportunity, should it come, for a number of months. In Nehemiah's response he avoided naming Jerusalem, perhaps so that he would not touch a sensitive "political nerve" in **the king**. He appealed to the king's sense of respect—his sense of "rightness" regarding proper respect for the dead. Nehemiah said **the city where** his ancestors were **buried** was **in ruins** and the **gates** had been burned (cf. 1:3). This was a sad state of affairs for the Jewish city. Seventy-one years before (in 515 B.C.), the temple had been rebuilt. The year was now 444; yet the city itself still needed much rebuilding. Artaxerxes' heart responded to Nehemiah's statements. So he asked Nehemiah what **the king** might do about the situation. With Judea being a Persian province, the cupbearer may have reasoned that perhaps the king would now be sensitive to Jerusalem's condition.

**2:4b-6.** Obviously Nehemiah had prepared for this moment he had **prayed** for. Besides seeking God's help in prayer, he utilized all the human resources available, including his intellectual capabilities, his past experiences, his accumulated wisdom, his role and position in life, and people with whom he came in contact (in this instance, the king of Persia). Between the king's question (v. 4a) and Nehemiah's answer (v. 5), the cupbearer "breathed" a brief prayer **to the God of heaven** (cf. 1:4-5). This short prayer—whatever its unvoiced words—was built on his praying for four months. No doubt he asked for wisdom in stating his request properly and for a favorable reply from **the king**. Speaking with courtesy (**If it pleases the king**; cf. 2:7; this appears elsewhere only in Es. 1:19; 3:9; 5:4, 8; 7:3; 8:5; 9:13) and humility (**your servant**), Nehemiah asked the king to **send him to the city in Judah where** his ancestors were **buried so that** he might **rebuild** the city. Again the cupbearer avoided mentioning Jerusalem specifically (see Neh. 2:3). The fact that **the queen** was seated there suggests this was a private gathering, since it was not customary for queens to appear at formal banquets. **The king** then **asked** Nehemiah when he would return. This question indicated that the king would give him permission. Nehemiah responded immediately with a specific **time** frame, again indicating forethought on his part.

**2:7-8a.** Nehemiah then asked for the biggest favor yet. Knowing he would face opposition from his enemies, he requested **letters** of permission from **the king** to allow him to pass through the various provinces in the **Trans-Euphrates**, the large area west of the Euphrates River. Nehemiah also asked that the king write a **letter to Asaph**, the man in charge of **the king's forest**. Nehemiah knew he would need access to **timber** for rebuilding **the gates** and the **wall** and other parts of **the city**. **The citadel** (cf. 7:2) was a fortification to protect **the temple**. The fact that Nehemiah knew the name of the man in charge of the king's forest near Jerusalem may indicate that he had done some careful research. Artaxerxes' permission to rebuild the city of Jerusalem is the decree Daniel had prophesied 95 years earlier in 539 B.C. This decree was issued on March 5, 444 B.C. (see Dan. 9:25).

**2:8b.** Though Nehemiah had worked diligently to prepare himself for the time when he would have opportunity to share his burden with the king, and though he demonstrated unusual wisdom in responding to the king's questions, he knew that ultimately his success depended on God's help. So he wrote that the king's granting of his **requests** was **because** God's **gracious hand... was upon** him (cf. v. 18; Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31).

**2:9-10.** The journey to Jerusalem, even though Nehemiah probably took the shortest route possible, would have taken at least two months (see 6:15). Ezra's trip, 14 years earlier, took four to five months (Ezra 7:8-9). On the way Nehemiah showed **the governors** of the provinces **the king's letters** of authorization. **Also** the **king** even provided a military escort for him! But as soon as Nehemiah arrived, he began to face opposition. **When Sanballat the Horonite** (perhaps meaning he was from Beth-Horon about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem) and his associate **Tobiah**, from Ammon, **heard** that Nehemiah had arrived on the scene to help Israel, they were **very** displeased. Immediately they began to plan how to stop Nehemiah from achieving his goal. Perhaps they were hoping to gain control of Judah. In fact in the Elephantine papyri written in 407 B.C., 37 years after this event, Sanballat was called "governor of Samaria." But Nehemiah's motivation remained undaunted. He knew that God had brought him to this moment in Israel's history and he was about to tackle a project that others, for almost 100 years before him, had been unable to complete.

**2:11-16.** Nehemiah knew there was no way he could share with the people in **Jerusalem** what **God** led him to accomplish without first doing some research and planning. After taking time (**three days**), presumably to think, pray, and get acquainted with some people there, he took **a few men** into his confidence, men he could trust. Then he made a careful survey of **the walls** to analyze the problem he faced. He did so at **night**, apparently to avoid letting others know his plans before they were firmly fixed in his mind. During these night hours he gained perspective and, as outlined in chapter 3, developed an effective plan to accomplish the task he had come to **Jerusalem** to perform. In his nighttime inspection he rode his horse or mule (**mount**, 2:14) from **the Valley Gate** in the southwest wall east to **the Jackal Well**, the site of which is unknown, **and to the Dung Gate** in the southeast part of the city. Possibly this is the same as the Potsherd Gate (Jer. 19:2). **The Fountain Gate** was north of the Dung Gate on the eastern wall. **The King's Pool** may be the same as the Pool of Siloam which was near the King's Garden (Neh. 3:15), or the King's Pool may have been south of the Pool of Siloam. Apparently the rubble there kept him from proceeding on his mount **so he went up the valley** (probably the Kidron Valley east of the city). Either he went all round the entire wall or, more likely, he retraced his steps from the eastern wall. He went back into the city at his starting place, **the Valley Gate**.

**2:17-18.** After Nehemiah had completed his secret survey and was satisfied that he had developed a workable plan, the time had come to reveal to the Jews why he was **in Jerusalem**. **Them** refers to the people mentioned in verse 16: "Jews [i.e., common people], priests... nobles... officials." First he challenged them to notice their deplorable circumstances, which had brought them **trouble and disgrace** (cf. 1:3). Then he challenged them to **rebuild the wall of Jerusalem**, and followed his challenge with a personal testimony as to how God's **gracious hand** (cf. 2:8) had granted him favor before **King Artaxerxes**. When Nehemiah gave his challenge, the people's negative feelings became positive. Despair turned to hope. They responded and began the **rebuilding** process.

**2:19-20.** Apparently word spread quickly regarding the Jews' response to Nehemiah's challenge. As soon as their enemies heard the news they stepped up their efforts to hinder the process. They used every demoralizing technique they knew, beginning with ridicule (*bûz* means "to despise or regard with contempt") and the suggestion that they were rebels. Joining **Sanballat** and **Tobiah** (cf. v. 10) was **Geshem** (cf. 6:1-2, 6) **the Arab**. But Nehemiah was ready for their insidious attack. He affirmed that **the God of heaven** (cf. 1:4-5; 2:4) would enable them to succeed. The Jews, God's **servants**, would rebuild, but the three opponents had **no share or claim** (present) **or historic right** (past) to the city. Once again Nehemiah brought the task—both in the eyes of Judah and his enemies—into clear focus. Their dependence was not to be on their abilities, human resources, or personal genius. Their hope was in the God of heaven! Nehemiah exhibited many characteristics necessary for effective leadership.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **A Restorer who Plans (Neh 2:11-16)**

11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.

12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode.

13 And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire.

14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass.

15 So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned.

16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.

## **Planning through investing time (11)**

*Investing time because God's time is vastly different from ours (2 Peter 3:8-9)*

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

*Investing time because God's timing is Divine and beyond our comprehension (Isa 55:8)*

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord.

*Investing time because God blesses us with time so that we may use it wisely (Eph 5:15-16)*

15 Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

*Investing time because God blesses us with time so that we may know that the end is near (1 Cor 7:29,31)*

29 What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; 31 those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

*Investing time because God blesses us with time so that we will number our days (Ps 90:12)*

12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

*Investing time because there is a time for everything (Eccl 3:1)*

1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

*Investing time by putting on the armor of God because the time is near (Rom 13:12)*

12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

## **Planning through meditation time with God (12)**

*Meditation on God's works (Ps 77:12)*

12 I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.

*Meditation of the heart (Ps 19:14)*

14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

*Meditation on God's unfailing love (Ps 48:9)*

9 Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.

*Meditation on God's wonders (Ps 119:27)*

27 Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.

*Meditation on God's Word, as well as listening, brings insight and understanding (Ps 119:99)*

99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.

## **Planning through appraisal (13-14)**

### *Appraisal of the cost to ensure completion (Luke 14:28-32)*

28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

### *Appraisal to ensure to be well-advised (Prov 20:18)*

18 Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance.

### *Appraisal to find out God's will (James 4:13-16)*

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

### *Appraisal to check for danger and evil (Prov 22:3)*

3 A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.

### *Appraisal to be watchful and alert (1 Thess 5:6)*

6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.

### *Appraisal to be prepared to act based on God's Word (Heb 11:7)*

7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

## **Planning how to secure helpers (15-16)**

### *Helpers to share the load (Exodus 18:13-23)*

13 The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. 14 When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?" 15 Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. 16 Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws." 17 Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. 18 You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. 19 Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. 20 Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. 21 But select capable men from all the people — men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain — and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 22 Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. 23 If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

### *Helpers to share the responsibility (Acts 6:3)*

3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them

*Helpers to ensure everywhere is reached (Acts 1:21-26)*

21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." 23 So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen 25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." 26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

*Helpers called out by God (Acts 13:2-3)*

2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

*Helpers because two are better than one (Eccl 4:9-12)*

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: 10 If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! 11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

*Helpers because sometimes the burden is too heavy for one (Num 11:14-17)*

14 I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now — if I have found favor in your eyes — and do not let me face my own ruin." 16 The Lord said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. 17 I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.

**On Being Secretive (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)**

Some secrets need to be kept. Consider the growing problem of identity theft. A lost wallet may provide a thief with enough information to open bank or credit card accounts with the stolen identity and run up thousands of dollars of bills. Sometimes the theft is done by "dumpster diving"—going through trash to find papers with sensitive personal financial information. The high-tech approach to identity theft is phishing—usually an e-mail that throws out some "bait" in hopes of getting someone to "bite" and reveal financial information. Thus phishing is electronic fishing. An example is the e-mail purportedly from a wealthy political refugee whose accounts have been frozen by a dastardly government of a third-world country. The e-mail promises a substantial reward for allowing the deposit of millions of dollars in your bank account. But, of course, you must first reveal your account numbers! Those who do not know when to be secretive about their financial information and when not to will get into trouble. Nehemiah was secretive because a premature disclosure of his plan could have brought unthinking, knee-jerk opposition from his own people. Needed changes in the church are sometimes prevented because resistance builds as a result of partial information that gets out; when "the grapevine" takes over, watch out! There comes a time when people are to be informed, of course. As the old saying goes, "timing is everything."

## **A Restorer Who Has the Ability to Lead (Neh 2:17-20)**

17 Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."

18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work.

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"

20 So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

### **Leading by challenging (17)**

*A challenge to be worthy (2 Thess 1:11)*

11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.

*A challenge that could require the giving up of treasures (Matt 19:21-22)*

21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

*A challenge that must be carefully considered (Luke 14:25-33)*

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

*A challenge that could cost one's life (Matt 20:20-23)*

20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 21 "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." 22 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. 23 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

*A challenge that may be like being sent out as lambs among wolves (Luke 10:1-3)*

1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2 He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

### **Leading by giving God the glory (18)**

*Give God the glory through thanksgiving (2 Cor 4:15)*

15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

*Give God the glory because in all things God should be praised (1 Peter 4:11)*

11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

*Give God the glory because we are owned by Him (1 Cor 6:20)*

20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

*Give God the glory because we are to give God the glory in all things that we do (1 Cor 10:31)*

31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

*God is glorified when we are in unity with the Holy Spirit and follow the example of Jesus (Rom 15:5-6)*

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*God is glorified when we live a good life before others (1 Peter 2:12)*

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

### **Leading by dealing with opposition (19-20)**

*Opposition that is never to large for God (Judges 7:4-7)*

4 But the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." 5 So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." 6 Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. 7 The Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place."

*Opposition where God helps the powerless against the mighty (2 Chron 14:9-12)*

9 Zerah the Cushite marched out against them with a vast army and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. 10 Asa went out to meet him, and they took up battle positions in the Valley of Zephathah near Mareshah. 11 Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, "Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O Lord, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you." 12 The Lord struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled,

*Opposition that cannot be overcome by strength and size (Ps 33:16-19)*

16 No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. 17 A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. 18 But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, 19 to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.

*Opposition that may seem to be overbearing, but reliance on God will always bring deliverance (2 Cor 1:8-10)*

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

# Conclusion and Other Thoughts

## Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable

### Verses 1-8

#### 3. The request of Nehemiah (2:1-8)

Nehemiah prayed for four months about conditions in Jerusalem before he spoke to Artaxerxes about them (cf. Nehemiah 1:1; Nehemiah 2:1). Artaxerxes' reign began in the seventh Jewish month, Tishri (late September and early October), of 464 B.C. [Note: Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp28-30, 161.] Therefore Nehemiah presented his request in late March or early April of 444 B.C.

Nehemiah was probably very fearful (Nehemiah 2:2) because Artaxerxes could have interpreted sadness in his presence as dissatisfaction with the king (cf. Esther 4:2). [Note: J. Carl Laney, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, p77.]

"Persian works of art such as the great treasury reliefs from Persepolis indicate that those who came into the king's presence did so with great deference, placing the right hand with palm facing the mouth so as not to defile the king with one's own breath ..." [Note: Edwin Yamauchi, "Ezra -, Nehemiah," in *1 Kings- Job*, vol4 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p684.]

Nehemiah realized that the moment had arrived for him to ask Artaxerxes to revise his official policy toward Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:11; Ezra 4:21). This too could have incurred the king's displeasure. Nehemiah's walk with God is evident in that he talked to God as he was conversing with the king (Nehemiah 2:4; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Nehemiah 2:4 contains a beautiful example of spontaneous prayer, one of the best in the Bible.

"One of the most striking characteristics of Nehemiah was his recourse to prayer (cf. Nehemiah 4:4; Nehemiah 4:9; Nehemiah 5:19; Nehemiah 6:9; Nehemiah 6:14; Nehemiah 13:14)." [Note: *Ibid*, p685.]

"Quick prayers are possible and valid if one has prayed sufficiently beforehand. In this case Nehemiah's prayer is evidence of a life lived in constant communion with God. Nehemiah had prayed for months, but he knew he was completely dependent on God's work in the king's heart at this moment." [Note: Breneman, p176.]

Divine working and human planning are not necessarily contradictory.

"Prayer is where planning starts." [Note: J. White, *Excellence in Leadership*, p35.]

Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes 12 years after the king had appointed him governor of Judah (Nehemiah 5:14; Nehemiah 13:6). Nevertheless he may have also gone back sooner than that (Nehemiah 2:6). One writer calculated the date of Artaxerxes' decree to rebuild Jerusalem as March 5, 444 B.C. [Note: Harold W. Hoehner, "Daniel's Seventy Weeks and New Testament Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:525 (January-March 1975):64.]

"This date marks the beginning of Daniel's Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:24-27). Sixty-nine of those seventy weeks (173,880 days) were literally fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem, presented Himself at His "royal entry" as Israel's messiah, on March 30, A.D. 33. The prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled to the very day (cf. Luke 19:40-42). The seventieth week of Daniel, the Tribulation (cf. Matthew 24:4-28; Revelation 6-19), will find its fulfillment in the future." [Note: Laney, pp78-79.]

The fortress by the temple (Nehemiah 2:8) was a citadel that stood just north of the temple. Its name in Hebrew was Birah (or in Greek, Baris). It was the forerunner of the Antonia Fortress that Herod the Great built and to which Luke referred in the Book of Acts (Acts 21:37; Acts 22:24). [Note: See Dan Bahat, "Jerusalem Down Under: Tunneling along Herod's Temple Mount Wall," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21:6 (November-December 1995):45-46. This interesting article walks the reader through archaeological discoveries along the Western Wall of Herod's Temple Mount from south to north.]

". . . there were good political reasons for Artaxerxes to grant Nehemiah's request. Inaros had led a revolt in Lower Egypt in the late 460s, aided and abetted by Athens. The Persians had largely squashed this rebellion by 455, but pockets of resistance held out in the delta marshes thereafter. Then, early in the 440s, Megabyses had led a revolt in Syria, which was probably put down just before Nehemiah made his request. Also, just about 445 the Athenians negotiated the Peace of Kallias with the Persians and hostilities between the two powers ceased. At this point in time Artaxerxes certainly recognized that a stronger Judah populated by loyal Jews would help to bring greater stability to Syria and would provide a bulwark on the border with Egypt." [Note: Vos, p91.]

## Verses 9-20

### 4. The return to Jerusalem (2:9-20)

Because of the opposition of the Jews' neighbors, Artaxerxes sent a military escort to accompany Nehemiah to Jerusalem ( Nehemiah 2:9). It is not certain how many Jews traveled with Nehemiah on this occasion. The writer gave us no numbers.

Sanballat may have originated in Horonaim in Moab, but he seems more likely to have come from one of the Beth-horon (Upper or Lower) located just a few miles northwest of Jerusalem (cf. Joshua 10:10-11). [Note: H. H. Rowley, "Sanballat and the Samaritan Temple," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*38:1 (September 1955):166-67.] The Elephantine papyri (ca400 B.C.) name him as the governor of Samaria, which he may have been then or after this event took place. [Note: James B. Prichard, ed, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p492.] There was evidently a series of governors of Samaria named Sanballat. [Note: Yamauchi, " Ezra -, Nehemiah," pp768-71.] Tobiah seems to have been a Jew-his name means "Yahweh is good"-who had attained a position similar to that of Sanballat in Ammon, east of Judah, under the Persians. [Note: L. H. Brockington, *Ezra., Nehemiah, and Esther*, p130.] Scholars have traced nine generations of his influential family. [Note: Benjamin Mazar, "The Tobiads," *Israel Exploration Journal*7 (1957):137-45, 229-38.]

Probably Nehemiah wanted to survey the damage to the walls secretly ( Nehemiah 2:12) because, had Israel's enemies observed him, they might have stirred up the people of the land to riot against him.

"He wished to lay his plans without any possibility of leakage to the enemy before their execution began, and then to let the execution be so swift that the work would be finished before they could successfully appeal to the king against it once more." [Note: H. H. Rowley, "Nehemiah's Mission and Its Background," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*37:2 (March 1955):559.]

Perhaps Nehemiah only surveyed the southern parts of Jerusalem's wall because those were the only sections still standing.

"Jerusalem was always attacked where she was most vulnerable, from the north; thus there was little preserved in that direction." [Note: Yamauchi, " Ezra -, Nehemiah," p689.]

Another reason for Nehemiah's secrecy was probably that he wanted to formulate a plan before the Jews could marshal arguments why they could not rebuild the walls ( Nehemiah 2:16). When he did present his ideas ( Nehemiah 2:17-18), the people responded positively. This is an evidence of Nehemiah's wisdom as a leader.

"There is evidence that *Geshem* [ Nehemiah 2:19] (cf. Nehemiah 6:1 ff.), far from being a negligible alien, was an even more powerful figure than his companions, though probably less earnestly committed to their cause.... From other sources it emerges that Geshem and his son ruled a league of Arabian tribes which took control of Moab and Edom (Judah's neighbors to the east and south) together with part of Arabia and the approaches to Egypt, under the Persian empire." [Note: Kidner, pp83-84. Cf. Olmstead, pp295, 316.]

Nehemiah continued the policy of not allowing the people of the land to help rebuild Jerusalem, that Zerubbabel had begun ( Nehemiah 2:20; cf. Ezra 4:3). He also continued to trust in God's enabling power primarily, rather than in his own ability ( Nehemiah 2:20; cf. John 15:5).

"Nehemiah was clearly a shaker, a mover, and a doer." [Note: Yamauchi, " Ezra -, Nehemiah," p690.]

(Adapted from URL:<https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/nehemiah-2.html>)

## Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Often when asking for help, we say, "Give me a hand with this." An often told tale illustrates the wisdom of asking for help when a task is too big for us. As the story goes, a father watched through the kitchen window as his small son tried to move a large rock in the yard. The boy couldn't get quite enough leverage to tip the rock over. At one point the father came outside and asked the boy, "Can't you lift the rock?" "No, Dad, I just can't do it." "Are you using all the strength you have?" The boy responded, "Yes, but I just can't move it." The father replied, "No, you're not using all the strength you have because you haven't asked me to help." Nehemiah was going to have, not just one rock, but a whole pile of rocks and rubble to move in order to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. But heavenly and earthly hands would give him more than enough help. Nehemiah could have sung, as a precursor to the old hymn, "He's got the whole wall in his hands." Like the little boy, our efforts matter, but they will not succeed all on their own. If we ask our Father for help, he has us and every task he gives us in his hands as well. Fervent prayer on the part of Nehemiah played a vital part (Nehemiah 1:4-6, 11; 2:4; 4:9; 6:14).

## ***Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary***

The Call - Nehemiah received permission from the king of Persia to return to Jerusalem to repair Jerusalem's wall. The people living there took note of Nehemiah, but he did not discuss his God-commissioned assignment or start any work immediately. First, he traveled around the city at night, inspecting the burned wall and gates. Then, he met with the Jewish leaders and called their attention to the situation. When talking to the leaders, he used the terms "we" and "us," indicating this was a project for everyone together. Nehemiah pointed out the necessity of a wall and the shame, poverty, insecurity, and fear that came with not having one. Then he said this was God's project, and it had the support of the king as well. The men responded positively and agreed to partner with Nehemiah in repairing the wall.

The Opposition - Whenever God's work moves forward, the enemy always steps in to attempt to thwart and even stop the Lord's plans. When those in the surrounding area found out what God's people started to do, they laughed and mocked. The passage explicitly names three leaders of the opposition: Sanballat the Horonite, Tobias the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab. They jeered at Nehemiah and his workers, attempting to make him feel foolish for even endeavoring such a vast undertaking, and they accused Nehemiah of defying the king of Persia, which was false.

The Power - Nehemiah boldly answered that God would give the project success, He had put His stamp of approval on this project. If they didn't want to be a part of what God was doing, they should get out of the way. Jesus faced opposition when He walked their earth, and He said His followers would face it as well. Satan does not want God to establish His kingdom, and just as in Nehemiah's time, our enemies mock and discourage God's children. But the Holy Spirit empowers believers to stay in the fight, knowing this is God's plan, and it will succeed.