

April 18, 2021

“The Restoring Builder”
Lesson 7 of Unit

Nehemiah 2:11-20

Intro

Nehemiah is the third and last person to lead a group of Israelite captives from captivity back to the Promised Land. He was the cupbearer to Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, who controls all the land of Israel. Nehemiah gets a letter from his brother, who is in the Promised Land. The letter describes the horrible conditions of the city of Jerusalem and the discouragement of the people.

Nehemiah prays and fasts, then asks Artaxerxes for permission to go, protection on the way, and supplies to rebuild the wall. Artaxerxes grants his requests, answering Nehemiah's prayers to God. When Nehemiah arrives, he has letters from the king, confirming his support for rebuilding the walls and gates, and also verifying his approval for the materials needed for the project.

Today's passage sees Nehemiah inspecting the walls of Jerusalem, still looking like a war zone with massive damage 140 years after the city was taken.

Read Nehemiah 2:11-20

1. vs. 11: Nehemiah stays in Jerusalem 3 days

He has just arrived from Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire
It's about 1100 miles away (from Sweet Home to Los Angeles, roughly)
The trip has taken between 10 and 12 weeks
Nehemiah uses the three days as resting up days after the long trip

2. vs. 12: Nehemiah goes out at night to inspect the walls

He goes at night so few if any will see him
Some in the land are not happy with his proposed project (see 2:10)
He takes a few others with him
People he trusts, maybe people who know the city layout and can be guides
Possibly people who came with him from Persia

3. vs. 13: The gates and walls of Jerusalem

All the gates mentioned here are on the south side of the city
He sees the destruction his brother had written about
Walls broken down
Gates destroyed by fire
Seeing the damage is more impactful than just reading about it

4. vs. 14: Further challenges

He moves toward two other gates, likely toward the southeastern side of the wall
The damage is extensive—too much rubble for the horse he rides to get through

5. vs. 15: He returns

He either can't go further, or has seen enough to confirm what he needs to do
The last part of the verse confirms he's heading back to the Valley Gate, where he started

6. vs. 16: Secrecy re-emphasized

In vs. 12, we see Nehemiah goes out at night—secretively, to avoid notice
Now he reports that he has told none of the officials

He has also not told the Jews, the priests, or the nobility

The best logical reason is negative responses to his plans

Someone might try to prevent him from rebuilding the walls

Some people might get discouraged at the enormity of the task

He mentions “the people who would be doing the work”

There is obviously a lot of work to be done.

7. vs. 17: Nehemiah talks to the leaders

The text doesn't show us how much time passes after his review of the walls

It is likely not a lot of time has passed; he wants to get building!

He mentions “trouble” and “disgrace”

Trouble comes because the city has no walls; defending it is impossible

Disgrace comes because Jerusalem is known as God's city

To have it look so destroyed brings disgrace to His name

8. vs. 18: Nehemiah's reasons for confidence

God has been with him in developing this plan to rebuild the wall and the city

This news would have been encouraging to people returning from captivity

King Artaxerxes has approved and supported this effort

If the king is behind it, the people can have confidence in the work

The people's response

Let's start rebuilding

The people are encouraged and excited; they want to start immediately

9. vs. 19: Those who oppose

Sanballat and Tobiah were mentioned in 2:10 as opposing anyone / anything that
“promotes the welfare of the Israelites”

Sanballat is likely from Beth Horon, about 12 miles from Jerusalem

The area likely belongs to the northern kingdom of Israel, not to Judah

Tobiah is described as an Ammonite official

The Ammonites were enemies to God's people all the way back to Deuteronomy

Geshem is described as an Arab

Many of the Arab people in this time period were merchants and traders

He may be concerned that rebuilding the city will later hamper his business

They bring a false charge against Nehemiah and the rebuilding project

“Are you rebelling against the king?”

We saw that the king gave his approval and support; this is a charge without basis

10. vs. 20: Nehemiah's reply to the critics

He doesn't answer the charge about the king
He says that God will help them succeed

They have "no claim or historic right to it" (Jerusalem)

God divided the promised land into divisions for the 12 tribes of Israel

Sanballat, as a member of the northern kingdom, would get nothing

Those 10 tribes were exiled for their faithlessness

Those northern tribes have no "historic rights" to the city

Jerusalem is part of the land belonging to Judah

Application: Nehemiah and the remnant that returned from exile have a big task in front of them. They have to rebuild the wall and the gates that were destroyed 140 years earlier, and haven't been attended to since then. And they have resistance from various people and groups in the area who aren't in tune with God, His ways, or His people. But Nehemiah has two "aces up his sleeve". The king of the land has given permission and resources to fix the walls. And, most importantly, God Himself has given Nehemiah both the idea and the initiative to carry out the project. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Prayer: Father God, we acknowledge Your greatness and Your power. We who are human and weak in so many ways are strong in Your might. Through You, we can meet and overcome every challenge and obstacle. We pray for wisdom, strength, and determination to meet the needs that You have called us to address. In Jesus' name, Amen.