

Bible Study Family Week 6 – 12 September

Nehemiah 2:1-8

And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. 2 Therefore the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.”

So I became dreadfully afraid, 3 and said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?”

4 Then the king said to me, “What do you request?”

So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.”

6 Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), “How long will your journey be? And when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

7 Furthermore I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, 8 and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy.” And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.

'according to the good hand of my God upon me: central theme in the life of Nehemiah. Israel returning out of exile: rebuilding of the temple, restoration of the worship service, restoration of the walls and gates of Jerusalem: under the gracious hand of God. Proverbs 21:1 : *The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.*

And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes,

Four months between chapter 1 and 2.

Nehemiah prayed, but then waited for God.

The building of God's church, the building of Jerusalem does not depend on him, but completely on God. Nehemiah is ready to act in GOD’s time. Not based on his own opinions.

It must all begin with prayer and listening to God's Word. Patience and willingness to let the Holy Spirit guide you.

See James 4:13-17.

History of salvation:

This passage has its place in the whole history of salvation. In that history of salvation, God uses Nehemiah, but He also uses the king, Artaxerxes.

Question 1:

Discuss, how does this passage fit into the history of salvation? Or in different words: how does this contribute to God's work to prepare the coming of the Messiah (keep in mind also the sermon of Sunday morning)?

Vs. 1-3:

Nehemiah prayed God to grant him mercy in the presence of the king (end of chapter 1). And God did so, but in a completely different way than Nehemiah expected. The king usually did not eat together with the queen (see book of Esther). This time he did: apparently this was a kind of reception.

Now I had never been sad in his presence before

Being sad in the presence of the king is showing disrespect for his reign which should bring happiness. This often was followed by severe punishment. The king jokingly admonished him. Nehemiah was warned. But Nehemiah does not back down. Sees this as God's opening for him. Speaks up to the king.

'May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad when the city the place of my fathers' tombs lies waste, and its gates are burned fire?'

He asks the king to send him to Jerusalem, that rebellious city. The king had a letter sent to the governor Rehum, the commanding officer (see Ezra 4), in which he ordered the Jews to stop building the walls and the gates. Nehemiah is asking the king to change his decision! The answer of the king was only possible through the work of God. God ordains governments and disposes them again. God gave Nehemiah mercy in the presence of this king.

Question 2:

How do we discern between acting boldly in faith and acting foolishly like a zealot?

Question 3:

Nehemiah, with Daniel and Esther, were placed by God on important positions. The church is also told to make all nations to Christ's disciples (Matthew 28:19). At the same time we know that it is hard for Christians to function as politician. How should we look at the task of Christians if it comes to politics?

Vs. 4-8

So I prayed to the God of heaven.

Nehemiah prays. A short and quick prayer. But it was sent up in faith, as part of his continual prayer to God. God uses men and women, who wait for Him to use them, who can be patient, but who also are

courageous when the time comes and God shows them that it is time to act. The king reacted favorably to Nehemiah's request. Nehemiah confesses in verse 8 that *the good hand of my God [was] upon me*.

And because Nehemiah experiences that the good hand of God was upon him, he also found the boldness to ask more. In the verses 7 and 8, Nehemiah now asks for everything he needs. And the king granted all his requests.

There is a difference between what you can ask for in faith, and what is putting God to the test in asking too much. You need wisdom from God to discern what is necessary and what is only your own desire.

Before the king, he experienced the help and the blessing of the God of heaven. And now he knows that God will continue to bless, and with the help of God, he would fulfill his task and rebuild the walls and the gates of Jerusalem. Because it was not his own plan but it was God's plan. And God's plans will never fail.

Question 4:

Nehemiah knew that it was God's will that the king would be favorable towards him. Knowing God's will, Nehemiah could have demanded from the king that he would let him go, in a misguided zealotism. However, Nehemiah shows respect in how he deals with others, as we will see throughout the entire book of Nehemiah and will discuss in other chapters as well. Please pay attention to the way he approaches the king in this passage. What can we learn from this (see also Colossians 4:5-6, Philippians 4:5)?