

Nehemiah 2:1-10

After four months of praying and fasting, what has happened? Nothing!

Application: How long should we wait upon God? At what point do we step out in faith and go?

When Nehemiah brought the king his wine, why did the king notice that Nehemiah was sad (v. 2)? Because Nehemiah had prayed for favor in the eyes of the king for four months.

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?"¹ *Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it wherever he pleases.* **Who are the possible "kings" in your life?**

Why was his sadness a danger for Nehemiah? As was true in the courts of many ancient kings, it was forbidden to be sad in the presence of the king. The idea was that the king was such a wonderful person that merely being in his presence was supposed to make you forget all of your problems. When Nehemiah looked sad, it could have been taken as a terrible insult to the king. Artaxerxes could have interpreted sadness in his presence as dissatisfaction with the king which might jeopardize Nehemiah's position or even his life.

Why was Nehemiah afraid (v. 2)? Nehemiah knew that his request was going to be a bold one. A few years earlier King Artaxerxes had stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem (*Ezra 4:21-23*) and now Nehemiah was going to ask the king to reverse his previous order. The cupbearer was risking his life!² There was a lot riding on what was going to happen to both Nehemiah and the Jewish nation in response to this question. Nehemiah was careful in replying.

Why did the king not react negatively to Nehemiah's sadness? Because Nehemiah had prayed for four months for favor in the eyes of the king. The king was apparently a man of compassion. A relationship of trust and probably fondness had been established between the two of them.

How did Nehemiah present his case (v. 3)? In Nehemiah's response, he chose his words carefully. 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/ancestor's graves. Nehemiah said the city where his ancestors were buried was in ruins and the gates had been burned. This was a sad state of affairs for the Jewish city.³

How did the king respond to Nehemiah's explanation of his sadness (v. 4)? With a question.....He asked him what he wanted.

How did Nehemiah respond to the king's question (v. 4)? He prayed! No doubt he asked for wisdom in stating his request properly and for a favorable reply from the king.⁴ This verse contains a beautiful example of spontaneous prayer, one of the best in the Bible. One of the most striking characteristics of Nehemiah was how quickly he resorted to prayer in difficult times (4:4, 9; 6:9, 14; 13:14).⁵

How did this prayer differ from the prayer of chapter 1? How would you classify this prayer? This was an arrow prayer. This was not a long, extended prayer. He could have said, "Well king, let me pray about it for a few days and then I'll get back to you." Instead, this was an immediate, silent, "Help me Lord" kind of prayer. Nehemiah knew this was an incredible opportunity, and he did not want to miss it.

Application: The effectiveness of prayer is not related to the length of the prayer. **What is it related to?** The heart of the one praying. Note that Nehemiah already had everything covered with his first prayer yet he still prayed at every opportunity. He had a mindset of prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Caution: Arrow prayers should not become our standard method of prayer when communicating with God.

What important leadership quality is evident in the words “so I set a time” (v. 6)? The ability to plan and organize. Nehemiah's well-thought-out itinerary came from planning his way through the whole project while prayerfully waiting on God to move Artaxerxes' heart. Going out in faith doesn't mean you go out haphazardly without any plans (Luke 14:28-30).⁶

What do vv. 7-9 tell us about Nehemiah? As a capable leader, he was not passive. He wasn't winging it. He was prepared. The four months in prayer were not only spent in talking to God, but also in listening to Him and in working out a Spirit-led plan for what to do when God did open the door. For Nehemiah, this was a timing issue – when opportunity presented itself he would be ready.

What did Nehemiah request from the king (vv. 7-8a)? Nehemiah 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 safely through the various provinces in the Trans-Euphrates. 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 fact that Nehemiah knew the name of the man in charge of the king's forest near Jerusalem reaffirms that he had meticulously prepared for this mission.

To whom did Nehemiah attribute his favorable response from the king (v. 8)? Though Nehemiah had diligently done his homework to prepare himself for this mission, 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 (v. 18 also).⁷

Why did Artaxerxes sent a military escort to accompany Nehemiah to Jerusalem (v. 9)? Because of the potential opposition of the Jews' enemiesbut there was more than protection to be gained from the military escort. It meant an arrival in style, impressively reinforcing the presentation of credentials to the neighboring governors, and making very plain the change of royal policy.⁸ Plus Nehemiah was officially Judah's governor.

Who appeared next (v. 10)? What did they think about Nehemiah coming to town? When Sanballat the Horonite and his associate Tobiah, from Ammon, heard that Nehemiah had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites, they were very displeased. Immediately they began to plot how to stop Nehemiah from achieving his goal.⁹

Sanballat was apparently the governor of Samaria while Tobiah seems to have been a "Godfather" type of boss in Jerusalem: his "family" was very influential and intimidating.¹⁰

¹ Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 675.

² Ibid., 676.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Nehemiah, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 18.

⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷ Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 676.

⁸ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Nehemiah, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 21.

⁹ Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 677.

¹⁰ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Nehemiah, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 20.