

# Building for God: Preparations

Goldstone Church – 27-Sep-15 10:30am

Nehemiah 2:1-20

## Introduction

Successful job often dependent on accuracy and insight *before* job starts. It's all about the *preparations*.

Studying book of Nehemiah to learn how God wants *us* to be involved in building His kingdom. Context of **Building for God**. How does God want me to be involved in building His kingdom at Goldstone church?

## To serve God realistically, we must learn to

### 1. WAIT ON GOD (NEH 2:1)

Note: 5 or 6 *months* have passed since Chapter 1.

Neh 1:1 - "month of Kislev" = our November/December.

Neh 2:1 - "month of Nisan" = our March/April.

All in 20<sup>th</sup> year of King Artaxerxes. Long wait.

God often works this way today. We are hasty, impatient creatures. We pray, and expect God's answer right away. But God often delays his answers; but not because He is unwilling or unable to answer prayer. Bible teaches perseverance in prayer - keep praying until the answer comes. Nehemiah has been doing this.

What does Nehemiah do during wait?

#### a) Nehemiah **Continued Praying** (Neh 2:4)

In whole book, Nehemiah is seen praying 11 times. Prayer an essential activity: before, during and after project.

Two main types of prayer:

- i) **Continuing Prayers**: pray without ceasing, to be persistent
- ii) **Arrow Prayers**: praying on the spot, "Help!"

Two types of prayer went hand-in-hand. *Because* Nehemiah had been praying for so long, he knew that God knew what it was that he was asking.

#### b) Nehemiah **Developed Patience**

Nehemiah: was a man of action. But he waited 5-6 months – learning patience, but working as normal.

King David wrote about patience - Psalm 37:7-9

#### c) Nehemiah **Planned Carefully**

Main request (v.5) - permission to leave

But note "I also asked" (v.7) – "furthermore". There were additional request & details... He asked for Letters:

– for safe travel (v.7)

– for supplies (v.8)

And there was Bonus – army & horsemen (v.9)

Suggestion: Nehemiah was carefully planning what he would say if king ever asked. Waiting on God can be a tough, frustrating time. We must ensure to be in step with God. God is calling us to action – but on His timetable.

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### 2. WORK WITH PEOPLE (NEH 2:1, 9, 17, 19)

Church is **not** a business. Goldstone Church is a collection of unique relationships. There's place for order & structure, but ultimately, how we relate to one another is a reflection of our relationship with God. Christianity is all about people; both inside and outside the church building.

Nehemiah worked with lots of different types of people.

#### a) Worked with Unbelievers.

He was Cupbearer: had exclusive access to King Artaxerxes and royal household. King Artaxerxes in Nehemiah, same king called *Xerxes* or *Ahasuerus* in book of Esther. Culture at the time: royal women exercised great influence on king. Explains "the queen" (v.6)

Nehemiah was working with people who may not be believers of Yahweh, but at least sympathetic, i.e. not *against* Nehemiah. Being a loyal and faithful worker, Nehemiah established an open channel of communication.

To serve God realistically, we must learn to work with unbelievers – working to keep lines of communication remain open; when the opportunity arises to share faith, there will be "ears that will hear".

#### b) Worked with Believers.

Note how Nehemiah spoke and engaged with the people when he arrived in Jerusalem (v.11-16). Initially, Nehemiah says nothing nor asks for opinions. Instead, he quietly / thoroughly assesses real problem.

Then he speaks to everyone - altogether (v.17): the Jews, the priests, nobles, officials and the Gentiles (cf "others"). Note his opening words (v.17): "the trouble we are in." In God's kingdom, there is only "we" - togetherness.

As Christians, we are all part of the same body of Christ. We are not a random collection of individuals; we are united.

#### c) Worked with Enemies.

Useful to learn more about the three main opponents mentioned. Knowing who they are helps us to understand some of their motivation, also shows scope of challenge.

##### i) Sanballat the Horonite.

Name means "*Sin* (the pagan moon god) *has given life*" (double meaning). Came from Upper or Lower Beth Horon, 2 cities about 11 miles north west of Jerusalem, cities that guarded the road to Jerusalem. Sanballat governor of Samaria, i.e. a political opponent.

##### ii) Tobiah the Ammonite.

Name means "*The Lord is good*", suggests may have worshipped Yahweh. Neh 6:18: son, Jehohanan, married to daughter of leader repairing wall.,

Neh 13:4: close relationship with Eliashib the priest. Put this altogether, Tobiah's social and family links, i.e. an opponent in the community.

iii) **Geshem** the Arab.

Archaeological inscriptions: Geshem led north Arabian confederacy, controlled large areas northeast Egypt, northern Arabia, poss. southern part of Israel. Also evidence: Geshem had lucrative spice trade, i.e. a business opponent.

Working together, these 3 people formidable opponents.

Attacks with politics. Attacks with family & social links. Attacks with business.

**Geographically**: Sanballat covers north, Geshem covers south, Tobiah within city.

Important note: *when* and *how* Nehemiah responds to the sabre-rattling (v.10), Nehemiah doesn't say anything.

But mocking questions (v.19), Nehemiah answers.

NT comparisons:

**Jesus' trial** – "*Jesus remained silent and gave no answer*" (Mark 14:61).

**Paul's trial** – before Festus (Acts 25), gives a sermon as his defence.

We fully accept Jesus' teaching to "love our enemies". But we must also carefully and prayerfully consider *how* and *when* to respond to what enemies say and do.

**To serve God realistically, we must learn to**

### **3. WRESTLE WITH PROBLEMS (NEH 2:19-20)**

As soon as people agree to rebuild the walls (v.18) next verse: start of the opposition. Problems started in earnest when building started in earnest.

God was with the builders, but this no guarantee of trouble-free life.

Hostility (v.10), Mockery and Ridicule (v.19), and even the threat of treason (v.19).

We'll see more opposition in later chapters.

Ruth & I have had our share of problems. One way that we coped was by using Psalm 31:1-4 as prayer.

Some people think, when become Christian, everything easy / perfect. Instead, constantly facing problem after problem.

Polite reminder: Jesus never promised that becoming a Christian would be easy. But He did promise He would be with you every moment of every day. Jesus is our refuge.

### **Conclusion ...**

Last week, **Foundations** for building with God based on our personal relationship with God. Our relationship deepens as we interact & communicate with God through prayer. This is the Foundation, the Bedrock that we must have with the Master Builder.

Nehemiah 2 goes next step –shows importance of **Preparation**.

**To serve God realistically we must:**

1. **Wait for God:** continue praying, develop patience and, with God's guidance, plan carefully for the future.
2. **Work with People:** learn to be willing to work with unbelievers, be open and accepting to working with fellow believers, and when interacting with our enemies, to be "*as wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*"
3. **Wrestle with Problems.** We need to be ready and prepared for when the problems and challenges will come our way.

As disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to enlarge and expand God's kingdom. God's work requires the combined efforts of all His people. Are you ready to play your part? Are you ready to be used by God?

Four possible responses to message:

- Moses - "who, me?"
- Jonah - "not me"
- Habakkuk - "why me?"
- Isaiah - "use me".

**AMEN**