

January 19, 2025

Nehemiah 2:9-20 ESV

9 Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. 10 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

11 So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. 13 I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. 15 Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and 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 was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." 18 And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work. 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" 20 Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

Scriptures for further study:

Philippians 2:12-13

1 Corinthians 15:10

Ephesians 6:10-20

John 3:16



The Hand of God in Our Planning, Community, and Opposition Nehemiah 2:9-20

BIG IDEA: If God's sovereignty includes human responsibility, then let us be faithful in our prayers and diligent in our planning.

OUTLINE

1. Renewal Includes Godly wisdom

2. Renewal Includes Community

3. Renewal Includes Opposition

“Nehemiah was asked to exercise his own judgment, trusting that the Lord was in the decisions he would make. Knowing God is sovereign did not cripple him into inertia but motivated him to act prudently and wisely.”

- Derek Thomas

“Above and beyond his sound tactics, however, was the conviction that basically the project was not his. It was from God and “for Jerusalem” (2:12) - not from Nehemiah nor for his prestige.”

- Derek Kidner

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. In this passage, Nehemiah once again wrote of God’s sovereignty and our human responsibility. Where do we find each in this passage? How do these reminders of God’s sovereignty and our responsibilities encourage you and/or convict you?
2. How did Nehemiah use his God-given wisdom in this passage to move forward with His God-given calling?
3. How do you see in this passage God’s aim at His covenant community in His plan for renewal through Nehemiah’s leadership? What are some of the ways that God’s current renewal plan in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit includes His covenant community?
4. Why is it important for us as Christians to be clear about the opposition that we will face? How has God equipped us for this opposition? How does our Christian fellowship help us in facing opposition?

“Brothers and sisters, the work of the gospel is a better work than the one for which the people strengthened their hands in Nehemiah 2:18. Let us strengthen our hands for it. Let us study our Bibles, pray for God to do what He has promised to do in the Bible, and ask for guidance as to how we can be used of the Lord in answer to our prayers. Pray and act!”

- James Hamilton

“The sufficiency of God is a powerful motivator.”

- Derek Thomas

Praise to Jesus. Let us take time this week to praise God for His sovereignty and His providential care over us. Let us also worship Him for the victory He has won over sin, death, and Satan. May we also praise God for the gift of our church community.

Repentance through Jesus. May we ask the Spirit to show us how we need to repent of the occasions when we have twisted the doctrine of God's sovereignty to excuse our inaction and when we have lived as if God is not sovereign.

Consecration for Jesus. This week, ask God to show you how and where to use your Godly wisdom to advance His plan of renewal. Ask some close Christian brothers or sisters to pray together this week about the opportunities you have to tell others about Christ and/or the opportunities you have to encourage another Christian.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nehemiah shows us how grace and works go together. The sovereign “God of heaven” (1:4; 2:4, 20) graciously directs events for his redemptive purposes. As he did for Joseph, Daniel, and Esther, he brings favor with kings: Artaxerxes grants Nehemiah's requests because of God's hand at work (vv. 8, 18; see Prov. 21:1). Knowing God's grace personally (as the first-person narrative demonstrates), Nehemiah responds with wholehearted service: praying continually, preparing carefully, rousing himself for his nighttime inspection, and wisely articulating his plan of action—even when surrounded by the threats and jeers of hostile enemies (Neh. 2:10, 19). Nehemiah's summary: God makes us prosper, and we his servants arise and build (v. 20). This is the pattern of the gospel: God delivers; we gratefully respond. God acts in marvelous mercy, and we respond accordingly out of hearts transformed by grace.

-ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. From verses 10 and 19, what were the initial reactions of the local governing leaders around Jerusalem to Nehemiah's arrival and plans? What does this teach us about the Lord's work in this world? (We read in verse 10 that "it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel." In verse 19, we read that "they jeered at us and despised us." We learn that God's work in our sinful world will face opposition.)

2. Why do you think Nehemiah went out into Jerusalem on his own in verses 12-15? What does this teach us about following God's leading into His work in the world? (Since he has not lived in Jerusalem, Nehemiah wisely knew that he needed to inspect the city and the wall (verse 15) to get the lay of the land and see the scope of the rebuilding project. This teaches us that even with God's leading and control of this rebuilding project, God still expects us to use the wisdom that He gives us to accomplish our ministries and jobs.)

3. What do we learn from the fact that Nehemiah spoke to the Jews in verses 17-18 about the rebuilding project? (We learn that Nehemiah could not do the rebuilding project on His own and that it would take the whole Jewish community to be a part of this project. Remind your children that being a Christian means that we are part of the covenant community that we call the church. We are never to live out our Christian life on our own.)

4. What did Nehemiah say in verses 18 and 20 that was meant to give the Jews confidence for this rebuilding project and to warn the opposition leaders? (In verse 18, Nehemiah once again says that God's hand is guiding this renewal. In verse 20, Nehemiah said, "The God of heaven will make us prosper". Remind your children that Nehemiah was in an influential role with the Persian King, who was the most powerful leader in the world at that time. Yet Nehemiah was clear that the Persian King was not going to ensure success in this renewal. It would be God who is guiding and leading this renewal.)

Scriptures for further study:

Proverbs 18:17

Luke 14:28-30

Psalms 1:1-3

Joshua 1:8

John 16:33

FOR STUDENTS

1. Where do you see both God's sovereignty and human responsibility in this passage? How does this encourage or challenge you in following Christ?
2. Why do you think Nehemiah inspected Jerusalem and the walls on his own before sharing his plan? What does this teach us about using the wisdom God gives us to make decisions or take action?
3. How did Nehemiah involve the Jewish community in God's plan for renewal? What does this tell us about the importance of working together as part of God's covenant community, the church?
4. What kind of opposition did Nehemiah and the Jews face in this passage, how did they respond, and how can Christian fellowship and God's promises help us when we face challenges in our faith?
5. What does Nehemiah say in verses 18 and 20 to give confidence to the Jews and warn their enemies, and how does this remind us to rely on God's power instead of our own strength or other people?

FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. Jerusalem is in total ruins at this point in time. And maybe your life feels the same way, broken down and lying in ruins. Take heart that someone greater than Nehemiah is here for you. His name is Jesus Christ. And he has come to forgive, save, restore your life, and make you whole.

QUESTION: Would you now seek and put your full faith and trust in him?!

2. The Book of Nehemiah describes real events, real people, and real places in biblical times. Modern archaeological studies and findings have verified the truthfulness and accuracy of what is described in the Bible. For example, we even have evidence of the fire from when the Babylonians (Nebuchadnezzar) set Jerusalem ablaze in 586 B.C.

QUESTION: How does knowing this help move you closer to faith or help encourage you in your faith?

3. When we read 2:12, we see that Nehemiah's desire to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem is motivated first by his sense that God is calling him to this, and second by his concern for the city and the people of Jerusalem.

QUESTION: Can the same be said of you? That the desire to please God and serve others is what drives your life? If not, then what lesser desires are driving you instead?

4. The New Testament shows us that the people of God are the real city and the real temple. Thus, in terms of application, it would be best for us to think not in terms of rebuilding a literal city but rebuilding lives.

QUESTION: In your own personal life, what walls and gates need to be repaired? How about your marriage and family? Also, in what ways can you be a leader and agent of change in your church? How can you improve or build up the greater health of your church family?

The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



The Ancient of Days, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork and artist.

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Blake's poem "Europe", depicts a world filled with suffering based on the political climate of Europe and politics in England in the 1790s. It is appropriate in light of the suffering of God's people described in Ezra and Nehemiah. The artwork by Blake serves to remind and encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances. William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to connecting the prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible with the events in his country; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)

Introduction to Nehemiah

From January to May 2024, we heard sermons from the Book of Ezra. The introduction to Ezra, recorded sermons, and discipleship resources can be found on our church website at this address: <https://www.fpcrome.org/pdd-ezra/>

Ezra and Nehemiah were, for centuries, received as one book narrating the return of God's exiled people to their land, as under Persian rule they were allowed to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem. These two books cover three different waves of returning exiles, from 538 to 433 BC. But they tell one story: the restoration of God's covenant people according to his Word—which they are now called afresh to obey.

This restoration required, first of all, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of ceremonial worship. The first leader, Zerubbabel, led the initial wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to accomplish this goal (Ezra 1–6). The second wave came more than half a century later, led by Ezra, who rebuilt not the temple but the people, teaching them—and calling them to obey—the law of Moses (Ezra 7–10).

Thirteen years after Ezra arrived, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He first led the people to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1–6). Then, along with Ezra, he sought to restore the people (Nehemiah 7–13) as God's holy nation, followers of his Word.

The restoration was not complete, however. These books picture God's people regathered but struggling; they are poor subjects of a foreign king; their city is devastated; enemies oppress from without; sin threatens from within. We see the faithful hand of God mercifully preserving his people according to his promises. We also see the dire need for the perfect fulfillment of God's promises in the salvation accomplished by his Son. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible.)