
NEHEMIAH 2: 1 In the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, when wine was before him, I took up the wine, and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad before in his presence.

Artaxerxes, observing the sorrow of Nehemiah, inquires into the cause, Neh 2:1, Neh 2:2. Nehemiah shows him the cause, and requests permission to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, Neh 2:3-6. The king grants it, and gives him letters to the governors beyond the river, Neh 2:7, Neh 2:8. He sets out on his journey, Neh 2:9. Sanballat and Tobiah are grieved to find he had got such a commission, Neh 2:10. He comes to Jerusalem; and, without informing any person of his business, examines by night the state of the city, Neh 2:11-16. He informs the priests, nobles, and rulers, of his design and commission, Neh 2:17, Neh 2:18. The design is turned into contempt by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, Neh 2:19. Nehemiah gives them a suitable answer, Neh 2:20.

Verse 1

Month Nisan - Answering to a part of our March and April.

I took up the wine - It is supposed that the kings of Persia had a different cup-bearer for each quarter of the year, and that it had just now come to Nehemiah's turn.

NEHEMIAH 2: 2 The king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart." Then I was very much afraid.

Verse 2

Then I was very sore afraid - Probably the king spoke as if he had some suspicion that Nehemiah harboured some bad design, and that his face indicated some conceived treachery or remorse.

NEHEMIAH 2: 3 I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why shouldn't my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates have been consumed with fire?"

Verse 3

Let the king live for ever - Far from wishing ill to my master, I wish him on the contrary to live and prosper for ever. Aelian, Hist. Var. lib. i. c. 32, uses the same form of speech in reference to Artaxerxes Mnemon, one of the Persian kings, βασιλευ Αρταξερξη, δι' αιωνος βασιλευοις, "O King Artaxerxes, may you reign for ever," when speaking of the custom of presenting them annually with an offering of earth and water; as if they had said, May you reign for ever over these!

NEHEMIAH 2: 4 Then the king said to me, "For what do you make request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

 Verse 4

So I prayed to the God of heaven - Before he dared to prefer his request to the king, he made his prayer to God, that his suit might be acceptable: and this he does by mental prayer. To the spirit of prayer every place is a praying place.

NEHEMIAH 2: 5 I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, that you would send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may build it."

Verse 5

The city of my fathers' sepulchres - The tombs of the dead were sacred among the ancients, and nothing could appear to them more detestable than disturbing the ashes or remains of the dead. Nehemiah knew that in mentioning this circumstance he should strongly interest the feelings of the Persian king.

NEHEMIAH 2: 6 The king said to me (the queen was also sitting by him), "For how long shall your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

Verse 6

The queen also sitting by him - Who probably forwarded his suit. This was not Esther, as Dean Prideaux supposes, nor perhaps the same Artaxerxes who had taken her to be queen; nor does שגל shegal signify queen, but rather harlot or concubine, she who was chief favourite. The Septuagint translate it παλλακη, harlot; and properly too. See the introduction.

I set him a time - How long this time was we are not told; it is by no means likely that it was long, probably no more than six months or a year; after which he either returned, or had his leave of absence lengthened; for in the same year we find he was made governor of the Jews, in which office he continued twelve years, viz., from the twentieth to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, Neh 5:14. He then returned to Susa; and after staying a short time, had leave to return to rectify some abuses that Tobiah the Ammonite had introduced into the temple, Neh 13:6, Neh 13:7, and several others of which the people themselves were guilty. After having performed this service, it is likely he returned to the Persian king, and died in his office of cup-bearer; but of this latter circumstance we have no mention in the text.

NEHEMIAH 2: 7 Moreover I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah;

NEHEMIAH 2: 8 and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple, for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into." The king granted my requests, because of the good hand of my God on me.

 Verse 8

Asaph the keeper of the king's forest - הפרדס hapardes of the paradise of the king. This I believe is originally a Persian word; it frequently occurs in Arabic, ferdoos, and in Greek, παραδεισος, and in both signifies a pleasant garden, vineyard, pleasure garden, and what we call a paradise.

Above the hall of audience, in the imperial palace at Dehli, the following Persian couplet is inscribed: - "If there be a paradise on the face of the earth, this is it, this is it, this is it."

Thus we find that the word is applied to denote splendid apartments, as well as fine gardens; in a word, any place of pleasure and delight. The king's forest mentioned in the text might have been the same to Artaxerxes, as the New Forest was to William the Conqueror, or Windsor Forest to the late amiable sovereign of the British people, George the Third.

And the king granted me, etc. - This noble spirited man attributes every thing to God. He might have said, I had been long a faithful servant to the king; and he was disposed, in reward of my fidelity, to grant my request; but he would not say so: "He granted my request, because the good hand of my God was upon me." God favored me, and influenced the king's heart to do what I desired.

NEHEMIAH 2: 9 Then I came to the governors beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me captains of the army and horsemen.

NEHEMIAH 2: 10 When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly, because a man had come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

 Verse 10

Sanballat the Horonite - Probably a native of Horonaim, a Moabite by birth, and at this time governor of the Samaritans under the king of Persia.

Tobiah the servant - He was an Ammonite; and here, under the Persian king, joint governor with Sanballat. Some suppose that the Sanballat here mentioned was the same who persuaded Alexander to build a temple on Mount Gerizim in favor of the Samaritans. Pelagius thinks there were two governors of this name.

NEHEMIAH 2: 11 So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

NEHEMIAH 2: 12 I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God put into my heart to do for Jerusalem; neither was there any animal with me, except the animal that I rode on.

NEHEMIAH 2: 13 I went out by night by the valley gate, even toward the jackal's well, and to the dung gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and its gates were consumed with fire.

 Verse 13

The dragon well - Perhaps so called because of the representation of a dragon, out of whose mouth the stream issued that proceeded from the well.

Dung port - This was the gate on the eastern side of the city, through which the filth of the city was carried into the valley of Hinnom.

NEHEMIAH 2: 14 Then I went on to the spring gate and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the animal that was under me to pass.

Verse 14

The gate of the fountain - Of Siloah.

The king's pool - Probably the aqueduct made by Hezekiah, to bring the waters of Gihon to the city of David. See 2Chr 32:30.

NEHEMIAH 2: 15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall; and I turned back, and entered by the valley gate, and so returned.

Verse 15

By the brook - Kidron.

By the gate of the Valley - The valley through which the brook Kidron flowed. It was by this gate he went out; so he went all round the city, and entered by the same gate from which he had gone out.

NEHEMIAH 2: 16 The rulers didn't know where I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest who did the work.

Verse 16

The rulers knew not whither I went - He made no person privy to his design, that he might hide every thing as much as possible from their enemies till he had all things in readiness; lest they should take measures to defeat the work.

NEHEMIAH 2: 17 Then I said to them, "You see the evil case that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come, let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we won't be disgraced."

NEHEMIAH 2: 18 I told them of the hand of my God which was good on me, as also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. They said, "Let's rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

Verse 18

Then I told them - He opened to them his design and his commission.

NEHEMIAH 2: 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they ridiculed us, and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"

Verse 19

Geshem the Arabian - Some chief of the Arabs contiguous to Samaria, who had joined with Sanballat and Tobiah to distress the Jews, and hinder their work.

Will ye rebel against the king? - This they said in order to raise jealousies in the king's mind, and induce him to recall his ordinance.

NEHEMIAH 2: 20 Then answered I them, and said to them, "The God of heaven will prosper us. Therefore we, his servants, will arise and build; but you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem."

Verse 20

Ye have no portion, nor right - To be a citizen of Jerusalem was a high honor; and they would not permit those who did not belong to the tribes of Israel to dwell there. Zerubbabel gave the same answer to the Samaritans, Ezr 4:3.