

# CHAPTER 2

## INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH 2

Nehemiah being sorrowful in the king's presence, the reason of it was asked by the king, which he declared, and then took the opportunity to request of the king that he might be sent to Jerusalem to rebuild it, which was granted him, (<sup><K01></sup>Nehemiah 2:1-8), upon which he set out, and came to Jerusalem, to the great grief of the enemies of Israel, (<sup><K02></sup>Nehemiah 2:9-11) and after he had been three days in Jerusalem, he privately took a survey of it, to see what condition it was in, unknown to the rulers there, (<sup><K03></sup>Nehemiah 2:12-16), whom he afterwards exhorted to rise up and build the wall of the city, which they immediately set about, (<sup><K04></sup>Nehemiah 2:17,18) not regarding the scoffs and taunts of their enemies, (<sup><K05></sup>Nehemiah 2:19,20).

**Ver. 1.** *And it came to pass in the month Nisan; in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes,* etc.] It was still but in the twentieth year of his reign; for though Nisan or March was the first month of the year with the Jews, and from whence the reigns of their kings were dated <sup>f11</sup>; yet, with other nations, Tisri or September was the beginning of the reigns of their kings <sup>f12</sup>; so that Chisleu or November being since, (see <sup><K06></sup>Nehemiah 1:1), it was no more in Nisan or March than the twentieth of the said king's reign, and was three or four months after Nehemiah had first heard of the distress of his people; which time he either purposely spent in fasting and prayer on that account, or until now his turn did not come about to exercise his office, in waiting upon the king as his cupbearer: but now it was

*that wine was before him;* the king; it was brought and set in a proper place, from whence it might be taken for his use:

*and I took up the wine, and gave it to the king;* according to Xenophon <sup>f13</sup>, the cupbearer with the Persians and Medes used to take the wine out of the vessels into the cup, and pour some of it into their left hand, and sup it up, that, if there was any poison in it, the king might not be harmed, and then he delivered it to him upon three fingers <sup>f14</sup>:

*now I had not been before time sad in his presence*; but always pleasant and cheerful, so that the sadness of his countenance was the more taken notice of.

**Ver. 2.** *Wherefore the king said unto me, why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?* etc.] He had no disorder upon him to change his countenance and make him sorrowful, and therefore asks what should be the reason of it:

*this is nothing else but sorrow of heart*; this is not owing to any bodily disease or pain, but some inward trouble of mind; or “wickedness of heart”<sup>f15</sup>, some ill design in his mind, which being conscious of, and thoughtful about, was discovered in his countenance; he suspected, as Jarchi intimates, a design to kill him, by putting poison into his cup:

*then I was very sore afraid*; lest the king should have suspicion of an ill design on him; or lest, since he must be obliged to give the true reason, he should not succeed in his request, it being so large, and perhaps many about the king were no friends to the Jews.

**Ver. 3.** *And I said unto the king, let the king live for ever*, etc.] Which some think he said to take off the king’s suspicion of his having a design upon his life, though it seems to be a common salutation of the kings in those times, (see <sup>2016</sup>Daniel 6:6,21),

*why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, [lieth] waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?* a man’s native place, and where his ancestors lie interred, being always reckoned near and dear, the king and his nobles could not object to his being concerned for the desolations thereof.

**Ver. 4.** *Then the king said unto me, for what dost thou make request?* etc.] The king supposed that there was a meaning in those looks and words of his, that he had a favour to ask of him, and therefore encourages him to it; or the king of himself moved this, as being desirous of doing anything for him he would propose, to make him easy:

*so I prayed to the God of heaven*; secretly, in an ejaculatory way, giving him thanks for thus disposing the king’s heart towards him, and entreating he might be directed what to ask, and in a proper manner, and that he might succeed.

**Ver. 5.** *And I said unto the king; if it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, etc.]* He submits what he had to say wholly to the pleasure of the king, and puts it upon his unmerited favour, and not on any desert of his own:

*that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it;* the wall of it, and the houses in it; the favour was, that he might have leave to go thither, and set about such a work, for which he was so much concerned.

**Ver. 6.** *And the king said unto me, the queen also sitting by him, etc.]* Which it seems was not very common for the queens of Persia to dine with the kings their husbands; though this may be observed, not so much for the singularity of it, as for the providence of God in it, that so it should be, she having a good respect for Nehemiah, and the Jewish nation, and forwarded the king in his grant to him: if this king was Darius Hystaspis, this his queen was Atossa, daughter of Cyrus<sup>16</sup>, who might be the more friendly to the Jews, on account of her father's great regard unto them:

*for how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return?* what time would he ask to do this business in? this shows the king had a great respect for him, and was loath to part with him, at least for any great length of time:

*so it pleased the king to send me,* when he promised to return unto him, not in twelve years, which was the time of his government in Judea, but in a lesser space, perhaps a year at most, since in less than two months the wall of Jerusalem was finished; and it may be that he then returned to the king of Persia, who sent him again under the character of a governor, finding it was for his interest to have such a man in those parts.

**Ver. 7.** *Moreover, I said unto the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, etc.]* The river of Euphrates, on that side of it towards the land of Judea:

*that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;* furnish him with provisions, and a guard to protect him.

**Ver. 8.** *And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, etc.]* The forest or mountain of Lebanon, which, because of its odoriferous and fruit bearing trees, was more like an orchard or paradise, as this word signifies, and so it is translated in (<sup>2015</sup>Ecclesiastes 2:5 <sup>2013</sup>Song of Solomon 4:13)

and at the extreme part of it, it seems, there was a city called Paradisus<sup>f17</sup>; such an officer as here was among the Romans, called Saltuarius<sup>f18</sup>, and is now among us:

*that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertaineth to the house*; not the king's palace near the temple, for that might have occasioned suspicion in the king, that his view was to set up himself as king in Judea; but for the gates of the courts adjoining to the temple, and of the wall of the outward court, and of the wall which was to encompass the mountain of the house, the whole circumference of it:

*and for the wall of the city*; to make gates of in various places for that, where they stood before:

*and for the house which I shall enter into*; and dwell in during his stay at Jerusalem:

*and the king granted me*; all the above favours:

*according to the good hand of my God upon me*; the kind providence of God, which wrought on the heart of the king, and disposed it towards him, and overruled all things for good.

**Ver. 9.** *Then I came to the governors beyond the river*, etc.] Who these governors were, whether the same who were in the second year of this king's reign eighteen years ago, Tatnai and Shetharboznai, is not certain:

*now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me*; both to do him honour, and for his safety; and coming thus attended, must serve to recommend him to the governor, who received him from them at the river Euphrates, and conducted him to Judah.

**Ver. 10.** *When Sanballat the Horonite*, etc.] Who either presided at Horonaim, or sprung from thence, a city of Moab, (<sup>2355</sup>Isaiah 15:5)

*and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite*; who was formerly a slave, but now raised, from a low mean estate, to be governor in the land of Ammon, though still a vassal of the king of Persia:

*heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there came a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel*; to which the Moabites and Ammonites were always averse, and ever bore an hatred to Israel, and envied everything that tended to their happiness.

**Ver. 11.** *So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.*] Before he entered on any business, resting himself from the fatigue of the journey, and receiving the visits of his friends, as Ezra before him did, (<sup><413></sup>Ezra 8:32).

**Ver. 12.** *And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me,* etc.] Both the season of the night, and the small number of men to accompany him, were chosen for greater secrecy, that the business he came upon might not as yet be known, and so no schemes formed to obstruct or discourage:

*neither told I any man what God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem;* he was satisfied that what he had in view was from the Lord, who had stirred him up to it, but thought it prudent for the present to conceal it, until things were prepared to put it in execution:

*neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon;* he only rode perhaps on a mule, being not yet recovered quite from the fatigue of his journey, and for the sake of honour; the rest went on foot, that there might be no noise made, and so pass on unheard and unobserved.

**Ver. 13.** *And I went out by night, by the gate of the valley,* etc.] Where that formerly stood, for the gates had been burnt, and were not as yet rebuilt; this was the gate that led to the valley of Jehoshaphat, according to some; or rather to the valley of dead bodies, through which the brook Kidron ran, (see <sup><419></sup>2 Chronicles 26:9 <sup><210></sup>Jeremiah 31:4) it is the gate through which Christ went to Calvary; it led to Shiloh, Bethhoron, and Golan:

*even before the dragon well;* so called from its winding about, just as a crooked winding river is called serpentine; though some think here stood an image of a dragon, either in wood, or stone, or brass, out of the mouth of which the water flowed from the well; and others, that since the desolations of Jerusalem, serpents or dragons had their abode here:

*and to the dung port;* by which they used to carry the dung out of the city, and by which they went to Joppa, the sea, and all the western parts:

*and viewed the walls of Jerusalem:* in what condition they were, what was necessary to be wholly taken down, and where to begin to build: it must have been a moonlight night or he could not have taken a view; for to have carried torches or lamps with them would have discovered them:

*and the gates thereof were consumed with fire*; nothing of them remained.

**Ver. 14.** *Then I went on to the pool of the fountain, and to the king's pool.* etc.] That led to the fountain Siloah or Gihon, so called; it was the way to the potter's field, to Bethlehem, Hebron, Gaza, and Egypt. Rauwolff says <sup>f19</sup> there is still standing on the outside of the valley Tyropaeum (which distinguishes the two mountains Zion and Moriah) the gate of the fountain, which hath its name, because it leadeth towards the fountain of Siloah, called the king's pool:

*but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass*; because of the heaps of rubbish that lay there.

**Ver. 15.** *Then went I up in the night by the brook,* etc.] The brook Kidron: *and viewed the wall*; that was on that side:

*and turned back*; did not go quite round the wall, the way perhaps being obstructed with rubbish, and was unpassable or he had not time to do it:

*and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned*; into the city, the same way he went out of it, (<sup><K0B></sup>Nehemiah 2:13).

**Ver. 16.** *And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did.* etc.] The rulers of the city of Jerusalem, who seem to be officers of the king of Persia, since they are distinguished from Jewish rulers in the next clause:

*neither had I as yet told it to the Jews*; what he came about and designed to do:

*nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers*; the principal men among the Jews, both ecclesiastical and civil:

*nor to the rest that did the work*; of building and repairing; neither those that were employed in it, nor those that overlooked it.

**Ver. 17.** *Then said I unto them,* etc.] The priests and princes of the Jews: *you see the distress that we are in*; lie open to our enemies, and exposed to their insults:

*how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire,* (<sup><K0B></sup>Nehemiah 1:3 2:3,13),

*come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem that we be no more a reproach*; to their neighbours about them, who scoffed at them as a defenceless people and frequently came in upon them, and spoiled and plundered them of their goods and substance.

**Ver. 18.** *Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me.* etc.] Of the kind providence of God in exalting him in the court of the king of Persia, in giving him an opportunity of laying the sad case of Jerusalem before him, and in inclining his heart to show favour to him, and grant his request:

*as also the king's words that he had spoken to me*; what passed between them on this subject, the commission he gave him, and the letters he sent by him to his governors on this side the river:

*and they said, let us rise up and build*; encouraged by this account of things, they proposed to set about the work immediately:

*so they strengthened their hands for this good work*; animated and encouraged one another to proceed to it at once with cheerfulness, and to go on in it with spirit and resolution.

**Ver. 19.** *But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian,* etc.] This third man might be both an Arabian by birth, and governor of some part of Arabia near Judea:

*heard it*; of their beginning to build:

*they laughed us to scorn, and despised us*; as very silly people, that undertook what they could never perform:

*and said*; adding threatenings to their scoffs:

*what is this thing that ye do?* do ye know what ye are about? have ye any authority to do it? it is unlawful, you will certainly suffer for it:

*will ye rebel against the king?* the king of Persia; it will be deemed rebellion and treason, and you will be taken up and treated as rebels and traitors; take care what you do, be it at your peril if you proceed.

**Ver. 20.** *Then answered I them, and said unto them,* etc.] With much spirit and boldness, not at all intimidated by their scoffs or threats:

*the God of heaven, he will prosper us*; whom we serve, and under whose protection we are, who will supply us with everything we want, and succeed this undertaking, in whose name we engage in it, and on whom we depend, and we care not what man can do to us:

*therefore we his servants will arise and build*; in spite of all opposition, difficulties, and discouragements:

*but you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem; no part* of the city belonged to them; they had no jurisdiction there; they had no name there, nor their ancestors, in times past; nor had they done anything to perpetuate their memory in it: in short, they had nothing to do with them, neither in religious nor in civil things; and it was best for them to mind their own affairs where they presided, and not trouble themselves about theirs.