

### God's Time: An Exposition of Nehemiah 2, March 1, 2020



In 1978, Diane Ball, mother of 4 worked on a schedule, planned everything to the minute, including family vacation. She had a speaking engagement. Her husband, a maintenance man had a last-minute emergency, so he wasn't ready to go. Diane was furious that she might be late and finally asked God to give her peace. She heard the words "In His time," repeated them over and over, then heard more words: "He makes all things beautiful – in His

time". *See Ecclesiastes 3:11*. Diane and her family arrived just in time... in His time. She wrote the song, "In His Time.

In His time, in His time,  
He makes all things beautiful in His time.  
Lord, please show me every day,  
as You're teaching me Your way,  
that You do just what You say, in Your time.

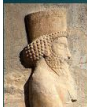
In Your time, in Your time,  
You make all things beautiful in Your time.  
Lord, my life to You I bring;  
may each song I have to sing  
be to You a lovely thing, in Your time.



Nehemiah chapter 2 is about a man with a burden who wanted things to change for his desperate people in their broken down city of Jerusalem. He wanted to fix the city walls.

The walls were broken down, gates burned and the people were terrorized by those who hated them. He waited... and then began to change things, in God's time. Nehemiah waited 4 months in prayer, sadness, fasting, and pain before he was released in God's time to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and take away the people's "trouble and shame" from living in insecurity. From chapter 1: Nehemiah's name means, "deep feelings of Yahweh," under a deep emotional burden hearing Jerusalem's walls were broken down, gates burned by fire, and the people in "trouble and shame" 95 years after freedom from exile. In deep mourning, prayer, and fasting though he was a very trusted high official; the king's cup bearer.

WHO WAS ARTAXERXES?



- Great Grandson of Cyrus the Great, the prophesied one by Isaiah (from his mother)
- Grandson of Darius the Great, Conqueror of Babylon and friend of the prophet Daniel
- Son of Xerxes, husband to Queen Esther

Who was the King? Artaxerxes. It is Nehemiah's relationship with Artaxerxes that sets the events of chapter 2 in motion. He was supreme ruler of the world superpower Persian Empire. Today Iranians are their descendants. The Muslim Iranian government threatens to wipe out Israel but the people of Iran are more upset with their

government than Israel. King Artaxerxes was very familiar with Israel and had strong relationships with the Jews of his empire.

His maternal great-grandfather, Cyrus, freed Jews to return home and rebuild the temple. Isaiah prophesied about Cyrus by name before his birth that he'd make great conquests "for the sake of...Israel" and he'd know it was Yahweh (Isaiah 45:1-6). Artaxerxes lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, this event took place around 444bc. A century before, the prophet Daniel prayed and an unnamed angel told him he and Michael the Archangel had to defeat the demon "Prince of Persia" (Daniel 10) for the Jews to be released from captivity. Soon after Cyrus the great decreed in 538bc that the Jews were free to return to Israel.

Artaxerxes' grandfather, Darius the Great, became a friend of the prophet Daniel. He conquered Babylon after Daniel said Babylon would fall in the night that a mysterious hand was writing on the wall saying Babylon would fall (Daniel 5). Daniel was a high official in Darius' Persia. He was set up by corrupt wise men, called magi, to be thrown into a lion's den for praying to God. Daniel spent the night with the lions and they didn't harm him. In the morning, the corrupt magi then were thrown into the den, immediately devoured, and Daniel was made "Rab Mag," head of all the wise counselors and we can see he was able to set up his own wise men.

Artaxerxes' father, Xerxes, was husband to Queen Esther, also in the Bible and invaded Greece, the story told by the movie *300*.

Artaxerxes authorized the priest and teacher Ezra to restore Jewish religion and culture back in Israel. But many Jews remained in Persia, favored and prosperous. It was from Artaxerxes that Nehemiah would have to get permission to fix the wall in Jerusalem.

Chapter 1 was about praying before doing anything, Nehemiah 2 is about God's timing. **We must learn to do things in God's time, trust God's timing.**



### **1 . Trust God's timing, Wait for God's time.**

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

In chapter 1, Nehemiah wept, fasted, and prayed, when he heard that Jerusalem's walls were destroyed and the city vulnerable to enemies. 4 months later, in the month of Nisan, things happened. God hears the prayers of His people. His answers are sometimes a swift "Yes!" sometimes, "NO," sometimes, "Yes, *but wait.*" God loves our prayers, but it's up to Him what He does. When He delays to grant an answer, it might be because I'm not ready, the situation isn't ready, and others aren't ready. To this point, Nehemiah controlled his emotions on the job, while God delayed the answer to his prayers, but after 4 months of agony, the "burden of the Lord," he couldn't manufacture a good mood.

***2 And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid.*** His job was to make the king secure, ease his paranoia. Sadness could make him suspicious.

***3 I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"*** A jewelled verse from Proverbs fits the idea of God's timing, "how delightful is a timely word!" (Proverbs 15:23 NASB). That Nehemiah could say

what was on his heart was to his advantage, *“The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips”* (Proverbs 16:23).

**4** *Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.* Prayer #2-- He didn't trust his influence or high position, but looked to God. **5** *And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.”* Wise speech, Artaxerxes' father was assassinated. Israel had a reputation of stubborn rebellion. **6** *And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him),* God timed it for sentiment in lieu of politics. *“How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.* Once again, time is the theme. **7** *And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, 8 and a letter to Asaph,* (Another Jew in high office). *the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.* Because he prayed, with God's burden for God's people he recognized God's hand in God's time.

## **2 . In God's Time He made a Trip to Jerusalem.**

Every follower of Jesus will visit Jerusalem, some will go in their lifetime to modern Israel, but everyone who knows Jesus will live in the New Jerusalem and reign with Him. The walls will be on foundations of precious stones named after the 12 apostles and the gates will be made of pearl!

**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.* Like today, Palestinians hated Israel.

**11** *So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days.* In the Old Testament, 3 days points forward to Jesus, risen from the dead, it's the resurrection code.

**12** *Then I arose* (the word for resurrection) *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.* Still careful about God's time. *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.* The bad news he had only heard about, now he saw for himself. When God burdens us to mourn and pray over the results of ours and others' sin He often lets us see the ugly reality. God's time came to declare his burden. That's what the Spirit does when it convicts of sin.

**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.** He felt their pain, inspired them to change it with the real solution, *boundaries*. That’s a real spiritual message today. Most pain is because people’s boundaries were broken down, or they never had them. To rebuild, he had confidence God was with him, God is good, and even the government agreed! He used the word “rise” pointing to Jesus, alive from death. Jesus is risen and all authority on heaven and earth belongs to him, we can rebuild boundaries broken by sin. Since Jesus has all authority, we can proceed when it is in His time, God is with us, God is good, and He has all authority to rebuild broken lives!

### **3 . In God’s time we’ll encounter the Enemy.**

**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.”** This is Nehemiah’s 1st



encounter with the enemy. They try and make him feel stupid for wanting to change a bad scene. They lie to make him feel like he’s in trouble. Really? That he’s in rebellion against the king? The king sent him! They threw lies and accusations.

Nehemiah didn’t argue or try to come to an agreement, but declared God’s plan and purpose, with the word “arise;” resurrection code. Jesus is alive, God will help us rebuild. Do you want to rise? Notice His confidence was in God, not himself. When we are in God’s time, doing God’s task, which may be something as seemingly mundane as going to work and raising a family, or a specific ministry mission, we can be absolutely confident that God is with us if we fit in His time and live by the, resurrection code, “Jesus is alive!” When Satan tries, and he will, to accuse, confuse, and make us feel ridiculous for serving the Lord, all we have to do is point to God, no arguing or justification needed.

When we are in God’s time, doing God’s task, helping rebuild the boundaries broken by sin, then it’s when God shows up and we see He is so real. And of course for accepting Jesus Christ as Savior, God’s time is certain, according to 2 Corinthians 6:2, **“For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”**

A broken wall, anger and pain, life starts to fall, trouble and shame, I pray for a sign, but I’m...I’m out of time. Remember, Jesus rose from the dead, we can believe what He’s said, He’ll do things, even move kings, when I’m...properly in His time. I’m very flawed, God will build up, I’ll get filled up, by the Spirit of God, yes, by God I’m awed! Remember, Jesus rose from the dead, we can believe what He’s said, He’ll do things, even move kings, when I’m...properly in His time. So give your life, to Jesus Christ, time to be wise, it’s time to rise, everything will be fine, in His perfect time.