

# Nehemiah

## Chapter 2

*Nehemiah Sent to Judah*

**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. 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. 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?” 4 Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. 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.” 6 And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “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. 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, 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.**

**2:1** *Nisan ... twentieth year.* March-April, 445 B.C. There was a delay of four months from Kislev, when Nehemiah first heard the news (1:1), to Nisan, when he approached the king. Various reasons have been suggested: 1. The king may have been in his other winter palace at Babylon. 2. Perhaps the king was not in the right mood. 3. Even though Nehemiah was a favorite of the king, he would not have rashly blurted out his request. (CSB)

More than three months passed before Nehemiah had a good opportunity to request permission from King Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The king had previously issued a decree that the city not be rebuilt (Ezr 4:21). This decree would have to be reversed. Nehemiah also had to observe the rule of the Persian court that no one was to speak unless first spoken to by the king. Nehemiah wanted to do nothing that might jeopardize the cause he was about to champion. (TLSB)

Nehemiah's time of penitence and prayer may have lasted up to four months, since this chapter opens in the month of Nisan in Artaxerxes' twentieth year. The month of Nisan in 445 BC ran from April 13 through May 11. (CC)

*sad in his presence.* No matter what one's personal problems were, the king's servants were expected to keep their feelings to themselves and to display a cheerful disposition before him. (CSB)

Probably a banquet was taking place, where a large container of wine was present. Nehemiah would draw the wine for the king. (TLSB))

Literally, “I was not sad before him” probably means I had never been sad in his presence. (CC)

On this occasion Nehemiah was the cupbearer assigned to attend to the king. Nehemiah was unable to hide his sadness over Jerusalem, though royal courtiers normally affected a cheerful countenance in the king's presence. (CC)

**2:2** Court personnel were usually cheery in the king's presence (v 1). (TLSB)

*nothing.* King could have suspected Nehemiah was hiding an evil plot against him, but such a concern is quickly dismissed (cf v 3). (TLSB)

*I was very much afraid* – If his request were rejected, he could lose status, his job or perhaps even his life. (PBC)

Nehemiah likely feared that the king suspected him of harboring thoughts of a rebellion and that he might be put to death if he presented his request. Cf Gn 40:1–2. (TLSB)

Nehemiah realized the danger of his situation only after the king mentioned his appearance, indicating that Nehemiah's demeanor was genuine and spontaneous, although the king considered it ill-suited for the occasion. (CC)

Nehemiah's fear may have been that the king would suspect that Nehemiah's somberness was related to some plot being planned against the king. Alternately, it may have been a serious breach of royal protocol for Nehemiah to allow his personal concerns to appear more important than his service to the king. (CC)

**2:3** *let the king live forever!* A common form of address to kings. (CSB)

Nehemiah politely and deferentially dispelled any notion of a plot by immediately explaining the reason for his sadness. (CC)

Middle management involves being able to translate the ideals of one's superiors into practice and, at the same time, knowing how to motivate one's subordinates. It necessitates keeping corporate goals in mind, while encouraging individuals to strive for personal achievement. This chapter describes the principles of successful middle management. From Nehemiah's example we learn the importance of loyalty and tact, how to avoid an unnecessary polarization, the technique of good questions, and the way the administration may be encouraged to adopt our ideas. Tact does not mean that we have to agree with everything a person says. Nor does it mean that we have to lie to keep from hurting others. Tact is based on the truth and character, and an understanding of human nature. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – pp. 28-230)

*city.* Nehemiah does not mention Jerusalem by name (see v. 5); he may have wished to arouse the king's sympathy by stressing first the desecration of ancestral tombs. (CSB)

Nehemiah only indirectly referred to Jerusalem as the city of his ancestors' tombs. However, he noted that it "lies in ruins with its gates destroyed by fire." The mention of the city gates is an indirect way of defining which ruins Nehemiah had in mind: the breached city wall. (CC)

*place of my fathers' graves* – Nehemiah did not mention Jerusalem by name because its enemies branded the city a hotbed of "rebellion and sedition" (Ezra 4:19). Rather he diplomatically referred to it as an ancestral burial place that needed to be preserved from desecration (v. 5; 3:16). (TLSB)

**2:4** *what are you requesting* – Upon hearing the reason for Nehemiah’s sadness, Artaxerxes immediately asked what Nehemiah wanted. This indicates not only Artaxerxes’ concern for one of his courtiers, but also his fondness for and trust of Nehemiah. (CC)

Nehemiah was given permission to state his concern. (TLSB)

*I prayed to the God of heaven.* Before turning to answer the king, Nehemiah utters a brief, spontaneous prayer to God. One of Nehemiah’s striking characteristics is his frequent recourse to prayer (1:4; 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). (CSB)

He had time to send heavenward a quick sigh for help. Throughout his career, Nehemiah remained a man of prayer (1:4–11; 4:4; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14). (TLSB)

Nehemiah trusted God and as a man of prayer apparently prayed silently even as he made his request to the king. Luther noted that such resorting to prayer in an acute moment of need is God-pleasing and fulfills the Second Commandment: (CC)

To pray as the Second Commandment teaches, is to call upon God in every need. This God requires of us; he has not left it to our choice. It is our duty and obligation to obey our fathers and mothers and civil authorities. By invocation and prayer the name of God is glorified and used to good purpose. This you should note above all, so that you may silence and repel any thoughts that would prevent or deter us from praying... It is not left to my choice here whether to pray or not, but it is my duty and obligation. (LC III 8-9) (CC)

“Pray continually” (1 Thess. 5:17).

Nehemiah’s success in presenting his petition to the king may be attributed to the fact that he prepared himself ahead of time and this including praying to the Lord. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 31)

**2:5** *send me to Judah.* Nehemiah’s request indicated that he already had a well formed plan in mind. He knew which officials he needed to contact for lumber from the royal forests and to receive adequate protection for his activities. (PBC)

Nehemiah’s request of Artaxerxes was phrased as diplomatically as possible. He asked for the favor only if both it and he met the king’s approval. He mentioned the region of Judah, but did not mention the city of Jerusalem by name, and he asked to rebuild Judah without directly mentioning the wall of Jerusalem. Artaxerxes had previously stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:21). By not mentioning the city by name, Nehemiah was allowing the king to save face even as he reversed his decision. Nehemiah’s use of prayer, his language, and his diplomacy reveal that he was both wise and God-fearing. (CC)

*rebuild.* Nehemiah dared to ask Artaxerxes to reverse his previous decree (Ezr 4:21). The request was risky because the king could be convinced that rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls was the first step in a conspiracy to end Persian control. (TLSB)

**2:6** *queen.* The Hebrew for this word is used only here and in Ps 45:9 (“royal bride”). It is a loanword from Akkadian and means lit. “(woman) of the palace.” The Aramaic equivalent is

found only in Da 5:2–3, 23, where it is translated “wives.” Ctesias, a Greek who lived at the Achaemenid court, informs us that the name of Artaxerxes’s queen was Damaschia and that he had at least three concubines. Like Esther, Damaschia may have used her influence with the king (Est 5). The Achaemenid court was notorious for the great influence exercised by the royal women. Especially domineering was Amestris, the cruel wife of Xerxes and mother of Artaxerxes I. (CSB)

Mention of her suggests that perhaps she was to some extent responsible for the king’s favorable reply. Cf Est, which describes the reign of Artaxerxes’ father, and the influence wielded by women at the Persian court. (TLSB)

Much scholarly discussion has been occasioned by Nehemiah’s notice that the queen was present. Some believe this indicates that this was a private meal. However, Dan. 5:2 records that the king’s wives were present at banquets, and the Aramaic cognate for the word “queen,” that is in this verse is used here. Scholars have frequently noted that feminine influence was strong in Artaxerxes court, so the queen may be mentioned here because she was influential with Artaxerxes and was favorably disposed toward Nehemiah. (CC)

*How long will you be gone ... ?* Nehemiah probably asked for a brief leave of absence, which he then had extended. We can infer from 5:14 that he spent 12 years on his first term as governor of Judah. In the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, Nehemiah returned to report to the king and then came back to Judah for a second term (13:6–7). (CSB)

Artaxerxes, it appears, was not eager to lose Nehemiah’s services at the royal court, and so he inquired about Nehemiah’s planned timetable. Nehemiah does not reveal his actual words in reply to the king except to note that he gave Artaxerxes a definite time for his return. Nehemiah would go on to serve for a total of twelve years as governor of Judah (5:14; 13:6). This, however, seems to be an excessively long period for Nehemiah to include in his request here. It is more probable that Nehemiah requested a shorter period of time but then his term of office was extended after Artaxerxes received a favorable report about his successful building project. (CC)

**2:7 letters.** A contemporary document from Arsames, the satrap of Egypt who was at the Persian court, to one of his officers who was returning to Egypt orders Persian officials to provide him with food and drink on the stages of his journey. (CSB)

These served as passports. Example from Nehemiah’s era was discovered in a leather postbag, providing for travel from Babylon to Damascus. (TLSB)

Having been granted his first request, Nehemiah became bolder and requested a number of items that would allow him to effectively carry out the task Artaxerxes had granted him. Although it might seem that Nehemiah was being pushy in asking for such things, that impression is mistaken, since the things for which he asked were necessary for him to carry out his commission. A letter of safe conduct was most necessary in the western reaches of the Persian Empire, especially given the political opposition to Judeans in Jerusalem as exhibited by the account in the Aramaic document in Ezra 4:8-6:18 as well as the notice in Nehemiah 2:10. (CC)

When we take on a new assignment we should ask for the public clarification of our role so that others will not hinder us from carrying out the mandate given to us. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 33)

*beyond the River.* The Euphrates River. From the Palestinian point of view the land “beyond the River” was Mesopotamia (Jos 24:2–3, 14–15; 2Sa 10:16). From the Mesopotamian point of view the land “beyond the River” included the areas of Aram, Phoenicia and Palestine (1Ki 4:24). The Persians also called this area Athura.) (CSB)

**2:8 forest.** The Hebrew for this word is (CSB)

Possibly the forest of Lebanon that supplied lumber for Solomon’s buildings as well as for structures at the Persian court

A letter to Asaph has occasioned speculation about where the “king’s forest” was located, with Lebanon or Yehud being the most often suggested places. However, all that can be said for certain is that it was likely somewhere in the Levant (Countries bordering the eastern Mediterranean), since this would minimize the distance the timber would have to be transported. The head of the forest was named Asaph, a Hebrew name. This may explain why he was known to Nehemiah, since he was probably a fellow Judean. (CC)

Nehemiah names three uses for the lumber. The first was to construct gates for “the fortress for the temple, most likely a fortress protecting the northern approach to the temple and the city. Later fortress structures were located north of the Jerusalem temple, including a fortress mentioned in the Letter of Ariteas (ca. mid-third century BC), a fortress that was strengthened by the Hasmonean ruler Simon (141-135 BC), and the Antonia Fortress built by Herod the Great. The Tower of Hananel, apparently located on the north side of the city, may have formed part of this fortress (Jer. 31:38; Zech 14:10; Neh. 3:1; 12:39). Nehemiah’s brother Hanani (ah) was in charge of this fortress (7:2). This would explain Nehemiah’s knowledge of the need to reinforce it. (CC)

A second use for the lumber was to build, the wall of the city. Although Nehemiah previously had avoided any mention of the wall, his words had implied that he intended to reconstruct it (2:3). (CC)

The final use for the lumber was to build, or perhaps repair, a house for Nehemiah in the city. Nehemiah claimed that Jerusalem was his ancestral home, so it would not be surprising for him to lay claim to some tract of land in the city. As a Persian official now appointed over Jerusalem, he would need to have a functional home from which he could carry out the duties of his office. (CC)

*wall of the city.* Probably refers to the fortress north of the temple, the forerunner of the Antonia fortress built by Herod the Great (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 15.11.4; see Ac 21:34, 37; 22:24). (CSB)

May have included the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred (3:1). Perhaps occupied the same site, north of the temple, as the Hasmonean citadel (1Macc 13:52). (TLSB)

*good hand of my God was upon me* – Nehemiah’s plans were well-laid, but when he succeeded, he attributed his success to the hand of God which was upon him. (PBC)

Luther: “Where the king, himself, where Ezra and Nehemiah, proclaimed clouds and consolations, there the earth was opened, and many Israelites arose as from sleep and saw that a state of safety had returned and the earth was sprouting righteousness. No one can understand

this result of prayer unless he has been so deeply afflicted by trials that he sighs with unutterable groaning. Let everyone apply this text to his own trials” (AE 17:126-127). (TLSB)

Nehemiah notes that his success in obtaining his request was not because of his power to persuade or his interpersonal skills, but solely due to God’s grace: “since the good hand of my God was upon me.” This in effect is an acknowledgement that God had heard and answered his prayers (1:5-11a; 2:4). Phrases referring to “the (good) hand” of God or Yahweh being upon people are used by Ezra and Nehemiah to speak of God’s gracious provisions for the work of His kingdom, ultimately for the sake of Jesus Christ, the everlasting foundation of God’s kingdom of grace. (CC)

*king granted me what I asked* – As for King Artaxerxes, his readiness to grant Nehemiah’s request was based on more than just being big-hearted. The rich province of Egypt was restless. It was in Persia’s interest to have the Palestinian province in friendly, loyal hands. Assisting the Jews in rebuilding their ruined capital would help to insure that. (PBC)

**2:1–8** Nehemiah asks for an opportunity to help rebuild his homeland, and the king answers favorably, because God is guiding the matter. God’s hand is constantly at work in history, though we rarely can foresee and determine what He will do. Pray that the Lord will work for the good of His people even now. His hand is on His children to guide them with the love He has for them in Christ. • Take my hand, O Lord, and lead me in the way of life. Amen. (TLSB)

*Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem's Walls*

**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.”**

**2:9** *officers of the army...horsemen.* In striking contrast to Ezra (see note on Ezr 8:22), Nehemiah was accompanied by an armed escort since he was officially Judah’s governor. (CSB)

Nehemiah's arrival with the letters from Artaxerxes and a military escort must have been impressive. Interestingly, Nehemiah gives no account of his journey to Jerusalem. Neither is there any indication that Nehemiah had asked for a military escort. We are told simply that Nehemiah was provided with an escort by Artaxerxes, which would not have been an unusual procedure, given that Nehemiah was a high official in the Persian court. (CC)

As he began his mission, Nehemiah combined trust in God with determination to use all the resources with which he had been blessed. From the start he realized that he faced a real battle and would need all the strength available to him to triumph. (PBC)

**2:10** Two Persian officials who would constantly oppose Nehemiah and his work are mentioned in here. That these two were "very distraught that a man had come to seek the welfare of the Israelites" testifies to the fact that they sought to attain their political ambitions at the expense of the Judeans in Judah. (CC)

*Sanballat.* A Babylonian name, meaning "Sin (the moon-god) has given life." (CSB)

Probably governor of Samaria, one of the governors who received the king's letters (v 9). Mentioned by Judeans in Elephantine Egypt as one who petitioned the governor of Judah regarding the rebuilding of the temple of "Yaho" (i.e., Yahweh). He had a Babylonian name and is called a Horonite, perhaps because he was a descendant of the foreigners settled by the Assyrians in Beth-horon, c 12 mi NW of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

Sanballat, whose name is Babylonian, Sin-uballit, (the moon god) Sin had given life," was governor of Samaria. His designation as "the Horonite" has been explained by scholars in various ways, but three explanations commend themselves. First, he may have been from Upper or Lower Beth-horon (e.g., Josh. 10:10-11; 16:3, 5; 21:22), towns northwest of Jerusalem. This explanation is favored by the majority of scholars. It has the most to commend it, since it would make Sanballat a local man who was very familiar with Jerusalem. A second suggestion is that Sanballat was from Horonaim in Moab (Is. 15:5; Jer. 48:3, 5, 34). However, if that were the case, why would he not be called "the Moabite," especially since Tobiah is called "the Ammonite (servant)"? A third suggestion is that Sanballat was from Hauran, a region in Bashan near the Sea of Galilee (Ezek. 47:16, 18). The merit of this suggestion is that both Sanballat and Tobiah would have known by the regions from which they derived. (CC)

Sanballat seems to be the leader of the opposition to Nehemiah, since his name is usually mentioned first when he is joined by others in schemes to derail Nehemiah's efforts (2:10, 19: 4:7; 6:1-2). In addition, Sanballat at times acts independently of the others to oppose Nehemiah and to gain influence over Judah (6:5; 13:28). (CC)

*Horonite.* Identifies him as coming from (1) Hauran (Eze 47:16, 18), east of the Sea of Galilee, (2) Horonaim, in Moab (Jer 48:34), or, most probably, (3) either Upper or Lower Beth Horon, two key cities 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem, which guarded the main road to Jerusalem (Jos 10:10; 16:3, 5; 1 Maccabees 3:16; 7:39). Sanballat was the chief political opponent of Nehemiah (v. 19; 4:1, 7; 6:1-2, 5, 12, 14; 13:28). He held the position of governor over Samaria (cf. 4:1-2). An Elephantine papyrus letter of the late fifth century B.C. to Bagohi (Bigvai), governor of Judah, refers to "Delaiah and Shelemiah, the sons of Sanballat, governor of Samaria." In 1962 a fourth-century B.C. papyrus was found in a cave north of Jericho, listing the name Sanballat, probably a descendant of Nehemiah's contemporary. (CSB)

*Tobiah.* Means “The LORD is good.” He was probably a worshiper of the Lord (Yahweh), as indicated not only by his name but also by that of his son Jehohanan (6:17–18), meaning “The LORD is gracious.” Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah, the leader of one of the groups repairing the wall (3:4, 30; 6:18). Tobiah also had a close relationship with Eliashib the priest (13:4–7). (CSB)

Means “the Lord is good.” (TLSB)

The other opponent of Nehemiah named here is Tobiah, a classic form of Hebrew name that normally would indicate saving faith in Yahweh, the one true God: “Yahweh is good.” Since the Tobiads appear to have had Judean ancestry, it is likely that Tobiah was of a mixed descent and practice a syncretistic form of worship that mixed pagan ideas and practices with those that God had given to Israel. Tobiah apparently was the Persian official over the territory of Ammon, since he is called “the Ammonite servant (of Artaxerxes).” Like Sanballat, he at times acted independently to oppose Nehemiah or to insinuate himself into powerful circles in Judah (6:17-19; 13:4-8). (CC)

Whenever and wherever faithful servants seek to establish and build up the kingdom of God, the devil will not fail to stir up opposition to their work. Those with worldly interests and ambitions are threatened by the advance of God’s kingdom and will attempt to eradicate it. This is exemplified by the enemies of Jesus Christ Himself, who proclaimed and brought the Gospel of God’s kingdom of grace (Mt. 4:23; 9:35) and entrusted His church with the mission to continue to proclaim “the Gospel of the kingdom” until He returns in glory (Mt. 24:14). (CC)

*Ammonite.* See Ezr 9:1. Tobiah was probably governor of Transjordan under the Persians. In later generations a prominent family bearing the name of Tobiah was sometimes associated with the region of Ammon in non-Biblical texts. (CSB)

May have been Sanballat’s assistant or the king’s servant as governor of Ammon, a land east of the Jordan. (TLSB)

*displeased them greatly.* The reasons for the opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah were not basically religious but political. The authority of the Samaritan governor in particular was threatened by Nehemiah’s arrival. (CSB)

Sanballat and Tobiah saw their power and prestige threatened if Jerusalem were again fortified and became the center of a separate province, headed by a governor. (TLSB)

**2:11 Jerusalem.** Excavations have discovered settlements, but only within the city of David (south end of Jerusalem). (TLSB)

*three days.* Nehemiah also took a similar rest period after his arrival in Jerusalem. (CSB)

In Ezra 8:32 Ezra reports that the travelers stayed in Jerusalem three days before they undertook any official work. Since they arrived in Jerusalem on a Friday, the next day would have been a Sabbath, when they could do not work. The following day, the first day of the new week, may have been used to settle in temporary accommodations, to rest from the trip, and to unpack necessary items. (CC)

**2:12** *night...with a few men* – Nehemiah relates that he took a few men with him, who no doubt were local Judeans who could help him find his way around the outside of Jerusalem at night. (CC)

Nehemiah was cautious and discreet as he inspected the city's fortifications. (CSB)

Nehemiah wanted to inspect the walls as inconspicuously as possible because opposition was already developing. (TLSB)

Nehemiah (1) checked things out in order that his decisions might be based on fact. (2) He aroused the interest of the people and wisely withheld details regarding his plan and purpose until he was ready to act.(3) He then convened a public meeting and gave everyone the opportunity of hearing him in person and of interacting with his idea. (4) He challenged them with the work to be done, (5) motivated them to undertake the task, and encouraged them with assurance of success. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 44)

The goal of Nehemiah's night inspection of the ruins was to organize the work so that it could be completed as quickly as possible after it began. In this way Sanballat and Tobiah would have little opportunity to organize their opposition. (PBC)

*I told no one* – He also says that he had not told anyone his plans, apparently not even the men who accompanied him. (CC)

*what my God had put into my heart* – Nehemiah attributed to God his burning desire to serve his countrymen. (TLSB)

*one I was riding on.* Probably a mule or donkey. (CSB)

Nehemiah did all he could to avoid detection. (TLSB)

Furthermore, Nehemiah took only one mount, perhaps to avoid the appearance of leading a military excursion when he left the city. (CC)

All this once again points to Nehemiah's wisdom and discretion. He did not betray to the opposition the plans "God had been placing" in his heart. With only three days in Jerusalem, he may not have had time to learn who was trustworthy and who might have been secretly allied with Sanballat or Tobiah (cf. 13:1-9, 28). God calls believers, who are justified by grace alone, to exercise discretion in their dealings with other sinful people in this world, and God-given prudence sometimes leads believers to withhold information when its disclosure would be harmful to God's people and His plans (e.g., Josh.2; Is. 53:7; Amos 5:13; Prov. 11:12; 17:28). (CC)

**2:13-15** Nehemiah's route is outlined in some specificity in these verses. The passage, together with Nehemiah 3:1-32 and 12:27-39, provides the most detailed descriptions of the topography of Jerusalem's wall in the Bible. Unfortunately, the locations of many of the places mentioned here are now uncertain, and we can only approximately reconstruct Nehemiah's route. (CC)

Impossible to locate with certainty the gates spring, and pool. Nehemiah left by the Valley Gate, which was in the west wall and opened into the Tyropeon Valley. Proceeding southward, he passed the Dragon Spring (location unknown) and the Dung Gate at the extreme south end of the wall. Turning north, he came to the Fountain Gate, perhaps located near a spring named En-rogel

(see note, 1Ki 1:9). Next, he came to the King's Pool, apparently another name for the Pool of Siloam (or Shelah; 3:15). The path close to the ruins grew so impassable that he was forced to continue through the Kidron Valley before turning back and entering again at the Valley Gate. These extensive ruins, likewise noted by archaeologists, show the great destruction brought by the Babylonian conquest. (TLSB)

**2:13** Nehemiah did not make a complete circuit of the walls, but only of the southern area. Jerusalem was always attacked from the north because it was most vulnerable there, so the walls had probably been completely destroyed in that part of the city. (CSB)

*Valley Gate.* According to 2Ch 26:9 Uzziah fortified towers in the west wall, which overlooked the Tyropoeon Valley, i.e., the central valley between the Hinnom and Kidron valleys. Excavations in 1927–28 uncovered the remains of a gate from the Persian period, which has been identified as the Valley Gate. (CSB)

Nehemiah exited from the Valley Gate. According to 2 Chron. 26:9, King Uzziah had fortified this gate during his reign (767-740 BC). From the description of the rebuilding of the wall in Nehemiah 3, this gate must have been on the west side of the city overlooking the Tyropoeon Valley about 1000 cubits (1500 feet) north of the Dung Gate (3:13). (CC)

*Dragon Spring.* Many scholars suggest that this was En Rogel (Jos 15:7–8; 18:16; 2Sa 17:17; 1Ki 1:9), a well situated at the junction of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys, 250 yards south of the southeast ridge of Jerusalem. Others suggest that it was the Pool of Siloam. (CSB)

*Dung Gate.* Perhaps the gate leading to the rubbish dump in the Hinnom Valley (cf. 3:13–14; 12:31; 2Ki 23:10). It was situated about 500 yards south of the Valley Gate (3:13). (CSB)

**2:14** *Fountain Gate.* Possibly in the southeast wall facing toward En Rogel (see 3:15; 12:37). (CSB)

*King's Pool.* Hezekiah may have diverted the overflow from his Siloam tunnel (cf. 2Ki 20:20; 2Ch 32:30) to irrigate the royal gardens (2Ki 25:4) located outside the city walls at the junction of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys. The King's Pool was probably therefore the Pool of Siloam (3:15) or the adjacent Birket el-Hamra. (CSB)

*no room for an animal.* Possibly because of the collapse of the supporting terraces (cf. 2Sa 5:9; 1Ki 9:15, 24) on the east side of the city. (CSB)

**2:15** *valley.* The Kidron. (CSB)

**2:16** *officials did not know where I had gone* – After reporting his night inspection of the wall, Nehemiah states that he did not tell “the officials twice in this verse. It covered all kinds of officials. Nehemiah's statement probably refers to any Persian officials, whether or not they were Judeans like he was. (CC)

*had not told the Jews* – These were Judeans whose help Nehemiah planned to enlist. They were not aware of his rebuilding project. (TLSB)

*nobles.* The Hebrew root for this word means “free.” (The Hebrew for this word is different from that in 2:16 and means “mighty” or “magnificent” (see 10:29; 2Ch 23:20; Jer. 14:3). These aristocrats disdained manual labor.) (CSB)

The “nobles” probably were hereditary leaders of the various clans of Judah and Benjamin. Nehemiah does not tell us what steps he took to assemble these leaders, but instead simply tells us what he told them. (CC)

**2:17 ruins.** The condition of the walls and gates of the city since their destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., in spite of abortive attempts to rebuild them. The leaders and people had evidently become reconciled to this sad state of affairs. It took an outsider to assess the situation and to rally them to renewed efforts. (CSB)

Nehemiah’s message was simple: the Judean, including himself, were in dire straits, but it was now time to reverse this situation by rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall. Note he uses the pronoun “we” and twice he uses first person plural verbs, let’s rebuild” and “we will no longer (be exposed to shame.” The dire straits were not only because Jerusalem was defenseless without a wall, but also because they city was consequently exposed to “shame.” This Hebrew word is used elsewhere in the OT, especially in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, to describe the shame and derision that Jerusalem and its inhabitants experienced as a result of the Babylonian conquest and captivity. (Jer. 23:40; 24:9; 29:18; 44:8, 12; Ezek.5:14-15; 16:57; 22:4; Lam. 5:1; Dan. 9:16; cf. Ezek. 36:15, 30) The other nations knew that the Israelite had been punished by their on God, which is the worst form of humiliation for any people. For example, see the graphic picture of God shaming Jerusalem in the sight of other nations in Ezekiel 16:27-59. (CC)

Nehemiah soon won the support of Jerusalem’s leaders when he presented his credentials and his plan. (PBC)

Nehemiah begins by focusing their attention on the problem. He also links himself with them by using the pronoun “we.” This prepares them for the challenge. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 41)

*we will no longer be in disgrace* – He gives them purpose and arouses their pride. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 41)

From people such as Sanballat, Tobiah, and other outsiders living in the area (4:4; 5:9). (TLSB)

Nehemiah’s motivation to rebuild the wall was to demonstrate that the God of Israel had finished punishing His people and how He was displaying His favor toward them. God rescued His people from the Babylonian captivity and now would remove their shame and disgrace. As long as the wall of Jerusalem remained in ruins, that disgrace would not be fully removed. Jeremiah had specifically linked the ultimate removal of Israel’s disgrace by the work of the promised Messiah and the new covenant He would establish (Jer. 31:31-34) with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its wall (Jer. 31:38-40; cf. Ezek. 36:15, 30). (CC)

**2:18 my God ... and ... the king.** Nehemiah could personally attest that God was alive and active in his behalf and that he (Nehemiah) had come with royal sanction and authority. (CSB)

Nehemiah then reinforced his contention that now was the time to rebuild Jerusalem by explaining that God’s “hand” upon him had been “good” (cf. 2:7-8), as shown through the permission given by the Persian king Artaxerxes for Nehemiah to rebuild the city (2:5-8). By the reaction of the Judean leaders, we can see that Nehemiah’s Gospel encouragement not only persuaded the leaders, but also motivated them to encourage one another “for the good work” of acting upon the constructive opportunity that God had set before them. (CC)

He persuaded them that he not only had authority from the Persian king, but more important, he had the blessing of God on his project. (PBC)

*strengthened their hands.* They were filled with emotional determination to rebuild the walls. (TLSB)

Nehemiah was wise enough to know that if he is to challenge the people to rebuild the wall, he must be prepared to set them to work at once. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 41)

**2:19 Geshem.** Inscriptions from Dedan in northwest Arabia and from Tell el-Maskhutah near Ismailia in Egypt bear the name of Geshem, who may have been in charge of a north Arabian confederacy that controlled vast areas from northeast Egypt to northern Arabia and southern Palestine. Geshem may have been opposed to Nehemiah's development of an independent kingdom because he feared that it might interfere with his lucrative spice trade. (CSB)

Chieftain of desert tribes in northern Arabia who aligned himself with Sanballat and Tobiah. (TLSB)

*Arab.* See 2Ch 9:14; Isa 21:13; Jer 25:24. Arabs became dominant in Transjordan from the Assyrian to the Persian periods. Sargon II of Assyria resettled some Arabs in Samaria in 715 B.C. Classical sources reveal that the Arabs enjoyed a favored status under the Persians. (CSB)

*despised us*– They did this hoping that it would cause them to despair of their ability to complete the project and give up before they even began. (PBC)

*are you rebelling* – This was the second step to try to get the Israelites to stop building. (PBC)

Obviously a false charge. (TLSB)

He boldly confronts those who are attempting to thwart what is doing and, at the same time, avoids being drawn into a debate. He refuses to argue. He states the reason for his confidence; “the God of heaven will give us success.” (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 43)

Apparently the enemies of the Judeans heard about Nehemiah's plan shortly after he announced them. Their opposition demonstrates that Nehemiah's caution (2:12, 16) had been warranted. In addition to Sanballat and Tobiah (2:10), Geshem is mentioned for the first time as one of the opponents. Their accusation against Nehemiah and the Judeans was that they were rebuilding the wall in order to rebel against Artaxerxes. (CC)

**2:20** *the God heaven will make us prosper* – This is Nehemiah's reply to the tactic described in verse 19. They were not building the city to rebel against Persia, but to honor God. (PBC)

Although Nehemiah could have appealed to Artaxerxes' permission for him to rebuild the wall (2:5-8), he did not. Instead he appealed to God. The work, as Nehemiah had implied to his Judeans, was not primarily a political act, but a religious one. That is why it would be the servants of “the God of heaven,” the Judeans alone, who would rebuild the wall. Pagans had ‘no portion or right or (religious) heritage’ in Jerusalem. Similarly, the NT mandates that the body of

Christ should exercise church discipline, including excommunication of the impenitent (1 Cor. 5; cf. 1 Cor. 19:6-22; 11:27-32), and in the eschatological vision the new Jerusalem, idolaters and immoral people are excluded for the holy city (Rev. 21:7-8, 27; 22:14-15). (CC)

*will arise and build* – It is difficult to understand the descriptions of the rebuilding of Jerusalem in this and following chapters without some descriptions of the terrain of OT Jerusalem. Ancient Jerusalem stood on three large hills. The smallest of these hills, Ophel, made up the southeast quarter of the city. Mt. Moriah where Solomon built the temple, formed the northeastern part of the city. After the time of Solomon the city spread westward onto the largest hill, which is now called Mt. Zion. Deep valleys surrounded the whole city. It is likely that Nehemiah's Jerusalem did not cover the entire area of the city had occupied before its destruction. Rather, it was limited to Ophel and part of the temple mountain. Jerusalem had become a small city, covering only about thirty acres with room for about 5000 inhabitants. (PBC)

Nehemiah sets a great example for us:

1. He checked things out in order that his decisions might be based on facts.
2. He aroused the interest of the people and wisely withheld details regarding his plan and purpose until he was ready to act.
3. He convened a public meeting and gave everyone the opportunity of hearing him in person and of interacting with his ideas.
4. He challenged them with the work to be done.
5. He motivated them to undertake the task.
6. He encouraged them with assurance of success.

*you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.* Declaration of independence on behalf of Judah. Nehemiah rejected outside intervention in any form, just as Zerubbabel had rejected the Samaritan offer to help build the temple (Ezr 4:1-3). (TLSB)

**2:9-20** The Word moves Nehemiah's heart to begin plans for rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. As you read God's Word, recognize that He will move you as well to serve Him and His people. Studying the Word is never an end in itself, because the purpose of the Word is to console you in Christ and equip you by the Holy Spirit. • Console and equip me this day, dear Savior, to overcome all obstacles to Your good and gracious will. Amen. (TLSB)