

In His Presence: Vision and Planning

Nehemiah 2:1–9



Week Two

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Nehemiah 2:1–9

BETWEEN FOUR AND FIVE

Sometimes we gloss over the seemingly unimportant details of Scripture. But once understood, these details can provide great insights. If we compare the first verse of Nehemiah 1 to the first verse of chapter 2, we see that chapter 2 also takes place in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign. The month Chisleu of chapter 1 is the equivalent of November-December of the Gregorian calendar, while the month of Nisan (not the Japanese automobile corporation) of chapter 2 was about March-April of the Gregorian calendar. So, these apparently superfluous details portray that Nehemiah prayed and fasted for four to five months. In other words, God answered his prayers not in decades or years but in a few months (although some of us cannot imagine waiting months for an answer to a prayer!).

Do you have any large decisions that you need to make—for instance, decisions concerning your career, calling, lifework, marriage, or finding your purpose in life? Why not set aside some time to pray and fast for the Lord's wisdom and intervention? It may be a shorter time than you anticipate, perhaps four to five months, before you notice Heaven moving circumstances in your life as a response.



inScribe

Write out Nehemiah 2:1–9 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Nehemiah 2:2–6. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, outline it, or mind map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases



Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help memorization.

Where is tact needed in your life? How do you cultivate tactful communication without being manipulative? Are you tactful in your family interactions?



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THE GIFT OF TACT

A cupbearer was an intimate advisor to the king as well as his personal bodyguard. More than one who pours drinks, a cupbearer was in charge of the king’s vineyards, the entire industry and manufacture of the king’s drink, the servants involved, the royal culinary staff, and everything in between. In essence, he was to ensure the well-being of the royal house. In some cultures, cupbearers were to taste everything before the king ate it to guarantee the absence of poisons with their own lives! If this central courtier had a sad or anxious countenance, surely something must be wrong—or perhaps an assassination attempt was in the works.

With the shift in his expression while serving the king, Nehemiah must explain his sad look with the utmost circumspection. He exercises tact in his speech—a quality of a good servant and a good leader. Here are some indications of Nehemiah’s tact:

Method. There is a certain art in the way Nehemiah speaks to the king. First, the subjunctive phrase “let the king live forever” refutes any assassination attempt or discontent on Nehemiah’s part. Second, instead of defending himself or denying the accusation, Nehemiah responds with another inquiry either to solicit compassion or to convey the burden that God has placed on his heart. Christ never directly parleyed with His opponents but, instead, often responded with another question. The method of answering is just as important as the content of the answer itself.

Reason. Nehemiah appeals to the king’s human sympathies. His reference to his fathers’ sepulchers elicits emotions that transcend cultural boundaries, as all cultures mourn for their ancestors. He makes no allusion to politics with a mention of the city’s name (Jerusalem), which might conjure recollections of its controversial history (cf. Ezra 4:19, 20). In the king, rather than a political opponent, Nehemiah sees and responds to a fellow human being.

Tact is not agreeing with everyone around us as yes-men or compromisers. Nor does tact mean we lie and deceive. Tact, rather, is based on truth and character. It is understanding how to approach people in the way most likely to bring about the desired course of action. It uses the gift of discernment to see what is right and wrong while implementing the gifts of kindness and goodness to make what is right come about in a humane, loving, and godly manner.

“WHAT DO YOU REQUEST?”

Although Nehemiah had already prayed for four to five months, Nehemiah prayed an emergency prayer in a matter of seconds when the king asked the golden question (Nehemiah 2:4). The emergency prayer did not replace the months of praying Nehemiah had invested, and it is not a model for prayers during worship or personal devotions. Emergency prayers are for times of great grief, temptation, and stress. They remind us that God is not hard of hearing (cf. Psalm 94:9; Matthew 6:7). The Holy Spirit answered Nehemiah’s prayer and gave him the correct words.

Nehemiah’s response also reveals that he planned during his months of praying. Planning that comes out of prayer is a guaranteed success in contrast to the planning that is concluded by prayer. Nehemiah had thought things through—he had a time frame, leading him to ask for a temporary transfer, not a leave of his office of the court (Nehemiah 2:5).

Interestingly, the queen is also present (verse 6). Nehemiah had to be careful not to make the king feel threatened, offended, or uncomfortable in any manner. He bathes his requests with “if it please the king” and identifies himself as “thy servant” who must find “favor in thy sight.” Nehemiah has the gift of situational awareness as well as spiritual discernment. Nehemiah’s request encompasses three things:

1. Sent. Nehemiah secures permission and authority from the king to execute and complete this project, following formal protocol. He needs the king’s endorsement, the king’s name, and the king’s credentials.

2. Safety. He asks the king to give him letters for the governors in Judah. Since the trip was far from the capital, Nehemiah would need a military escort for legitimacy as well as safety.

3. Supplies. Nehemiah had already researched the information necessary for his supplies: the name of the keeper of the king’s forest, the location of the forest, and the list of supplies he would need (verse 8). He requests the highest quality materials for the Lord’s project.

His request is granted, but he does not attribute its success to his prayers, planning, cleverness, tact, or position. Instead, he recognizes the hand of God upon him. Nehemiah may have had a Persian education, a noble’s eloquence, a cupbearer’s insight, and a politician’s ambition, but he gives God the glory.

Nehemiah prayed, planned, and at the critical moment, prayed again before he performed what he had practiced for months. Prayers, whether long and loud or swift and silent, produce powerful results.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/neh2-4



What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

- 1 Thess. 5:17; Exod. 4:15
- Matt. 10:16
- Acts 26:24-31



What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Nehemiah 2:1-9?

Review your memorized verse from Nehemiah 2:1-9.

AIM HIGH AND AIM OUT

“Dear youth, what is the aim and purpose of your life? Are you ambitious for education that you may have a name and position in the world? Have you thoughts that you dare not express, that you may one day stand upon the summit of intellectual greatness; that you may sit in deliberative and legislative councils, and help to enact laws for the nation? There is nothing wrong in these aspirations. You may every one of you make your mark. You should be content with no mean attainments. Aim high, and spare no pains to reach the standard.”

How do spiritual matters intersect with the real world? Is Jesus found only at church on one day of the week, while we invest in the world for the other six days? How spirituality and the real world intersect is a great revelation of the depth of our relationship with Christ. Rather than making our secular callings central and our spiritual values peripheral, we are called to make spiritual values central and our daily work peripheral.

In other words, our relationship with Christ should inform and direct the why, what, and how we do our work. Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33, NKJV). Is God a mere means to bless your secular work? Or is your work a natural extension of God’s calling on your life? The decision to choose job offers, home location, and even your spouse should be on the basis of two things: the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God—evangelism and character.

Nehemiah experienced a shift from having a peripheral God to the realization that God had placed him there for a higher purpose. He may have been in the court for an anthropocentric purpose, expecting God to bless from a distance. But God had placed him in the court for a Christocentric purpose, to help him realize God’s will for his life.

With God’s desire to have His people “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19, NKJV), shouldn’t we aspire for the positions of excellence, greatness, and power, not for human ambition but for God’s ambitions? Is your occupation a beachhead for the gospel? How has your workplace been affected by your spiritual connection to God? What is the connection between heaven and your world?



inVite

Meditate on Nehemiah 2:1–9 again and look for Jesus in the passage.



Is Jesus tactful and strategic in the way He operates?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/neh2-6

In His Presence: Vision and Planning



Review your memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

—————→

As you have studied this
week, what personal
applications have you been
convicted of in your life?

What are practical applications
you must make in your school,
family, workplace, and church?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
www.inverseible.org/neh2-7

PRUDENCE AND FORETHOUGHT

“While Nehemiah implored the help of God, he did not fold his own hands, feeling that he had no more care or responsibility in the bringing about of his purpose to restore Jerusalem. With admirable prudence and forethought he proceeded to make all the arrangements necessary to insure the success of the enterprise. Every movement was marked with great caution. He did not reveal his purpose even to his own countrymen; for while they would rejoice in his success, he feared that, by some indiscretion, they might hinder his work. Some would be liable to manifest exultation that would arouse the jealousy of their enemies, and perhaps cause the defeat of the undertaking. . . .

“The example of this holy man should be a lesson to all the people of God, that they are not only to pray in faith, but to work with diligence and fidelity. How many difficulties we encounter, how often we hinder the working of Providence in our behalf, because prudence, forethought, and painstaking are regarded as having little to do with religion! This is a grave mistake. It is our duty to cultivate and to exercise every power that will render us more efficient workers for God. Careful consideration and well-matured plans are as essential to the success of sacred enterprises today as in the time of Nehemiah. If all who are engaged in the Lord’s work would realize how much depends upon their fidelity and wise forethought, far greater prosperity would attend their efforts. Through diffidence and backwardness we often fail of securing that which is attainable as a right, from the powers that be. God will work for us, when we are ready to do what we can and should do on our part.

“Men of prayer should be men of action. Those who are ready and willing, will find ways and means of working. Nehemiah did not depend upon uncertainties. The means which he lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow. . . .

“Some may question the propriety of receiving gifts from unbelievers. Let such ask themselves: ‘Who is the real owner of our world? To whom belong its houses and lands, and its treasures of gold and silver?’ God has an abundance in our world, and he has placed his goods in the hands of all, both the obedient and the disobedient. He is ready to move upon the hearts of worldly men, even idolaters, to give of their abundance for the support of his work; and he will do this as soon as his people learn to approach these men wisely and to call their attention to that which it is their privilege to do. If the needs of the Lord’s work were set forth in a proper light before those who have means and influence, these men might do much to advance the cause of present truth. God’s people have lost many privileges of which they could have taken advantage, had they not chosen to stand independent of the world.”¹

1. Ellen G. White, “Prudence and Forethought,” *Southern Watchman*, March 15, 1904.



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



What is the relationship between prayer and action?

What are the extremes of too much prayer and too much action?

Is tact necessary? How can you develop your tactfulness?

What is the difference between tact and deceit?

Are planning, logistics, and strategy spiritual gifts?

Why is planning not a demonstration of a lack of faith?

How are spirituality and occupation related to each other?

How has God used individuals in high positions of society in the past?

How can you access resources in the world and harness them for the proclamation of the gospel?