Nehemiah 1-2 • Biblical Project Management

Introduction

There are definitely times in the Bible where God moves someone to do something immediately with almost no advanced warning or preparation such as transporting Philip into the path of the Ethiopian. However, this is by far more the exception than the rule. The most common pattern is preparation and, yes, even planning: God’s instructions to Moses and Aaron in all their dealings with Pharaoh, the creation of the Tabernacle and priesthood, the building of the Temple, Paul’s own repeated examples in his missionary journeys. But also a common thread is that even though God prepares and communicates in advance, we still have to submit to His timing: Samuel knew of Eli’s demise 20 years before it happened, David was anointed king in Saul’s place many years before it would happen, etc., etc.

God has promised that He would restore the Jews to their native land along with rebuilding the Temple and Jerusalem. In the case of Nehemiah, it’s not God’s intentions that are in question, it’s His timing in how to carry them out.

1The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, 2that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. 3They said to me, “The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.”

4When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. 5I said, “I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, 6let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father’s house have sinned. 7We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. 8Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; 9but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I

[Read 1:1-11]

Q: What is the news that is given to Nehemiah concerning his people and concerning Jerusalem?

A: The news is that his people are in “great distress” and “reproach.”

Q: What does this mean?

A: It probably means that they are poverty stricken and at the mercy of the people who have inhabited the land, including the Samaritans. They have no protection from outside intruders, as all the identifying marks of Jerusalem, except for the Temple, have been destroyed. They are depressed, oppressed, and possibly so forlorn that they are in danger of being exterminated as a result of trying to make it in the land through intermarrying.

Q: What was Nehemiah’s reaction to the news his brother Hanani brought back, and what does this tell us about the person of Nehemiah?

A: It’s similar to the reaction of Ezra in chapter 9 of Ezra concerning the intermarriage of the Jews with the people of the land. He immediately begins spending time alone with the Lord, praying and fasting on behalf of the condition of his people.

Application: What are some of the conditions around us that we ought to have similar reactions to? What do you do when you recognize sin within the life of a fellow Believer, or the church itself?

Q: What was the nature of Nehemiah’s prayer?

(1) He makes his petition on the basis of God’s lovingkindness (hesed);

(2) he confesses sin (noting that he, like Ezra had done, identifies himself with the people);

(3) he acknowledges the rightness of God’s judgment (that is, the Jews got what they deserved);

(4) he asks for success in the next step, which would require the king to reverse the decision he had made as recorded in Ezra 4:21, “So, now issue a decree to make these men stop work, that this city may not be rebuilt until a decree is issued by me.”

[Continued on next page.]
Nehemiah 1-2 • Biblical Project Management, Page 2 of 3

Q: Verse 5 begins with Nehemiah’s request. What does this tell us about the man?
A: He had a plan! He’d already thought out what he wanted to request of the king. He also begins his request by giving the king an out… “If it please the king….” During this conversation, he never speaks arrogantly or discourteously to the king. He maintains a respectful attitude. It’s an application of what Paul would later state in Ephesians 6:5, “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;”

Q: What is Nehemiah’s request when the king asks him how long he wants to take leave?
A: Nehemiah gave him “a definite time.” Once again, he has a well thought-out plan.

Q: What is the significance of the observation in verse 6, “the queen sitting beside him”?
A: Since Esther was the queen of the previous king Ahaseurus (Xerxes) ca. 486-464 and the stepmother of Artaxerxes, it could be that she had previously influenced the present king and queen to be favorably disposed to the Jews.

Q: What was Nehemiah’s final request?
A: Get it in writing! This included a list of materials needed to rebuild the wall.

Application

List the steps Nehemiah used in presenting his request to his boss.
1. He first prayed about it.
2. He waited for the right opportunity.
3. He let the king initiate the situation.
4. He was honest, sharing his feelings and in doing so, not making the king look bad, as if it was his fault.
5. He was respectful the entire time.
6. He affirmed his loyalty to the king.
7. He gave the king many “outs,” or opportunities to say no. In other words, Nehemiah didn’t back the king into a corner or no-win situation. He allowed the king to maintain control of the decision.
8. He had a well thought-out plan that included a timetable.
9. He had anticipated that there might be problems once he got there, therefore he got it in writing.
10. He had the materials list all ready and prepared.

Q: To whom did Nehemiah give the credit when it was all said and done?
A: To God (v.8)