Preparing to Rebuild

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[0:00] Welcome to Built on God's Word, the preaching and teaching ministry of Highland Park Baptist Church in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.! Evan George teaches on Nehemiah 2, verses 11-20.

! Nehemiah responds to this news by weeping and mourning, along with fasting and praying.
And as we get into chapter 2, we learn that Nehemiah continues to fast and pray across four to five months. Last week, Jeremy helped us understand that during Nehemiah's persistent petitioning, a plan was formed.
Nehemiah describes this as what God had put in his heart to do. Nehemiah requests that the king of Persia send him to Jerusalem and give him the supplies and political backing necessary to accomplish the task of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.
Nehemiah tells us that God's sovereign provision ensured that he received these, that God provided. And therefore, as we pick up with Nehemiah traveling back, he immediately encounters regional and local opposition.
[1:43] So, Sanballat the Huronite and Tobiah the Ammonite are greatly displeased. These are regional and local officials near Jerusalem. They are displeased that someone would come back and seek the welfare of God's people.

Jeremy, I think, ended helpfully, concisely in this way. Nehemiah is entering a difficult situation with enemies and opposition all around, but he has prayed, planned, and prepared to do what God has called him to do.
So, would somebody mind reading verses 11-20 for us? Thank you, Jeff. Our main emphasis for today will be this.
You can see it there on your handout. Through wise and courageous leadership, God uses Nehemiah to prepare his people to rebuild. Through wise and courageous leadership, God uses Nehemiah to prepare his people to rebuild.
If you want to flip your handout over, this will be the first discussion question. I'm going to read back through those same verses that Jeff just read. And I want you to think about that to answer at your tables, with your table groups, this discussion.
[2:54] What do you notice Nehemiah doing in verses 11-20? So, what actions, what is he doing? And what can we learn from his actions and how he performs them or how he goes about them?

So, listen as I read. Note what you see Nehemiah doing and then discuss at your tables for a few minutes. So, I'll read it back in verse 11.
So, I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. 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.
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. 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.
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. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing.
[3:55] And I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work. 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. 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

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spoken to me.
And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hand for the good work. But when Sanbaot 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? 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.
So discuss that at your tables, and we'll come back. And the answers to this question I think will kind of be the guide of how we walk through the rest of the text for today. So what do you notice Nehemiah doing in his verses, and what do you notice about how he's going about them?
[5:04] I grouped what he's doing in about four sections. And so what do you notice him doing first? Particularly there in verse 11. He went. He moved. He did it.

Yeah, so he went to Jerusalem. What does it say at the end of that verse 11? He was there for three days. Now, this kind of harkens back to Ezra. Whenever Ezra makes this journey, he's there three days. After he gets there.
What's interesting, to get from Zusa down to Jerusalem, where it was, it was probably nearly a thousand miles. So this travel would have been over a couple of months. And so once he gets there, it's interesting that the first blank that you'll fill in there is, I think he's preparing by resting. Preparing by resting. Preparing by pausing. I think there's... So Nehemiah would have traveled nearly a thousand miles. And here we see that when he gets there, he doesn't immediately go to the wall.
He doesn't immediately do this or maybe immediately doing that. It seems like he pauses and rests. Now, the text doesn't tell us exactly what Nehemiah does during these three days, but it does show us that he didn't immediately rush into the work.
[6:09] He took time before beginning the task. The scriptures certainly communicate and command the necessity of rest. We think of the fourth commandment, the call to remember the Sabbath.

So that's Exodus 20. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. For the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. On it you shall all do any work. You or your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant, or your livestock or the sojourner who is within your gates.
Now, this is not talking specifically about a Sabbath rest. But what we understand is that in addition to the intentional, regular ceasing in worship of God, there is the reality of the physical, practical implications of resting from labors.
So our bodies need physical rest. And from the structure of the passage, I guess one question would be, why would the author include that he doesn't do anything for three days? And so I think from the structure of the passage and the way that we see what Nehemiah doing as faithful and virtue formative, I think we can say here that Nehemiah is likely doing this in a depending upon the Lord and a trusting of the Lord manner.
So Nehemiah is not superhuman. He, like us, needs rest at times. And I think practically that's what is happening here. And so maybe just a quick application for us or a quick thought is just considering what does physical rest actually look like in our lives?
[7:34] Or what does the lack of rest in our lives indicate about our relationship with the Lord? I would argue here that Nehemiah rests in dependence upon and in trust of the Lord to ultimately provide. He doesn't immediately get there and think, I've got to do this all on my own.

I don't trust the Lord to accomplish this. So I need to go work towards his effort immediately. So I think initially we see him preparing by resting there in verse 11.
But at your tables, what do you see next? What do you discuss next that he does? Yes. He prepares by reviewing the wall.
That's your second handout. What do you notice about how he goes about reviewing the wall? And that's not just a follow-up to you, Jeff, but for everyone. Yeah. There seems to be some discreteness about that.
[8:32] So if you look there beginning in verse 12. Then I rose in the night. So he goes at night. I and a few people with him. And he tells no one of what God had put into his heart.

There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. He went out by night. And then he goes by various gates and inspecting the walls. Most of those would have been on the southern and

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eastern side of Jerusalem.
You'll notice that even he gets there to verse 14. He goes down to the fountain gate in the king's pool. And the destruction is so severe that his animal can't actually pass. So he has to get off of his animal.
So we seem to see the extent of the damage there. Any thoughts on why Nehemiah might go at night and take only a few people with him and not tell people of what he was doing, as Sierra mentioned?
Less crowded. Less crowded, certainly. Yeah. He also might be more prone to get more people's opinions about what he's doing. Yeah, so he doesn't go alone, right?
[9:33] Like he goes with others. If there's less people to talk and ask questions, what are you doing here? Yeah. Are you checking out? Yeah. If he's going at night with a small group of people, the watching town, watching people, aren't going to see all of what they're doing immediately.

Yeah. What else? So remember, Nehemiah is coming. He's heard this report of what Jerusalem is like.
But he's never been to Jerusalem. So all he knows about the walls is what he's been told. And so I think we see some practical wisdom of him going and reviewing the walls, one, to understand the extent of the actual problem.
He knows that he's not going to do this alone in the rebuilding. But he still needs to practically know what's the extent of the damage. I can't call people up and give them a vision of rebuilding if I don't actually know the extent of the damage.
So I think there's a practical reason. Any other thoughts on night, specifically? Did anybody oppose their mission?
[10:35] Was there any potential threat out there? Yeah. We see that immediately they come back to Jerusalem, and there are people who are against their mission, their adversaries.

And so if they're going out through the day, to Heather's point, people would see them. And so then the enemy, those who are opposing them, would have more information about what's going on and potentially more opportunity to thwart their plans.
So here we see Nehemiah preparing by reviewing the wall. He sets out on this private reconnaissance mission to understand the extent and the damage and to complete the review discreetly.
He does not want the people to know his plan yet, especially the opposition, likely because he doesn't actually have his plan fully formed or know exactly what he's going to call them to without having reviewed it. And I think a helpful reminder is that the people who are opposing him and what Jerusalem has encountered in the past is the plans to rebuild Jerusalem have already been stopped before by the king.
Remember that when Nehemiah goes to approach him and ask him to allow him to go do this, the king is going back and, in effect, reversing what he's already paused historically. So the people there know that the walls in this rebuilding of Jerusalem has been stopped in the past.
[11:57] I think he exhibits courage here. He does what he knows is right despite the opposition, and any potential fear or anxiety that it may have produced in him. Speaking of Nehemiah, commentator Derek Kidner says, knowing that God is sovereign in all of this does not cripple Nehemiah to passivity or to lack of preparation, but instead motivates him to act prudently and wisely.

Nehemiah has prayed and considered the context of the situation, and he is thoughtfully and tactically here working to prepare the people to rebuild. Now, if we consider how this might apply to us as we consider our own obedience to the Lord and stirring up others to follow the Lord, it would be wise for us to understand that we should not haphazardly act and so assume that the Lord might remove natural outcomes or consequences from our lack of preparedness insofar as we seek to lead others or be obedient in any way.
Trusting God's sovereignty is not an excuse for foolishness or a lack of preparation, and we should not be regularly in situations where we're praying for the Lord to bless negligence.
That would be like me going to take an exam, praying the Lord would bless the process, but then having never prepared for the exam whatsoever. Now, is the Lord going to work all things good for his glory and his people?
Absolutely. Am I going to fail the exam and endure those consequences? Almost assuredly, yes. So a question would be, are there areas or actions in your life right now where you're approaching

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without proper planning or consideration in the Lord?
[13:36] Remember, God's sovereignty shouldn't just be this crutch where we do no planning or no preparing, but insofar as we're depending on the Lord, it should move us to careful and thoughtful consideration as we see here Nehemiah demonstrating.

So is that maybe in your own personal Bible study or prayer? Is that in potentially family worship or discipling opportunities? Is it in ways you get to serve in the church or the ways you're caring for other people?
God's sovereignty and his promises move Nehemiah to exert tremendous effort to plan and act wisely and thoughtfully for God's people and himself. So the takeaway is not simply, you know, work hard and plan better.
The takeaway is, as we trust and depend on the Lord, that should move us to plan and prepare in faith well. Now maybe a question, what problems could arise if Nehemiah doesn't review at night or at all?
Just to make sure we're clear on that. What potential problems if he doesn't review at all or he doesn't review at night? What? Yeah, thank you for that, Jeff.
[14:47] And then what happens if he, say, goes by day instead of night? We mentioned earlier, but just to make sure we understand, what happens if he goes by day and not by night?

He can be stopped by those who desire to do them harm. Yeah, thank you. Yeah, there's the reality of he's tactfully understanding there's a shrewdness to this.
We need to understand that there are enemies working against God's purposes, God's plan, God's people. And so he's going to think wisely and tactfully about it and how he approaches it. And the locations that he goes through, again, are mostly on the southern and eastern sides of Jerusalem. I think next week in chapter 3, we'll get to expound on those locations more specifically to help you understand the layout. So we see him pause and rest at the beginning, and we see him go actually survey, actually review the extent of the damage.
And then what else do we see Nehemiah doing? Particularly there in verses 17 and 18. Yeah, he points out the problem and calls them to action.
[15:57] He's preparing by raising up God's people. That'll be your third fill in the blank. Preparing by raising up God's people. Heather, can you repeat your answer one more time? He calls out the problem to them.

He points out the problem and then calls it to action. Yeah, so we think about as he's raising up these people, and we think about how does he do that, he honestly tells them the problem.
See there in verse 17, Then I said to them, You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates burned. And then, as you mentioned, he calls them, Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer suffer derision.
So he calls them up. He's honest. Who does he say is in trouble? We.
He doesn't say you are in trouble. We see him identifying with God's people. So, we are in trouble. And then if you continue to read, That we are in trouble.
[16:59] Come, let us build. So it's not a, hey, you need to build. It's a, hey, we need to build. Let us build. That we may no longer suffer derision.

So he is calling them to do it alongside them. So he gives them the what and then calls to join with him. And you can almost think back to the discipling overtones from our last study, where it's not, hey, you go build, but hey, come build with me.
Just in so far as we're discipling others, it's not, hey, here's the gospel. Go follow Jesus. It's, hey, here's the gospel. Let me teach you what it means to follow Jesus. Come follow Jesus with me.
Okay. What else do you notice about how he goes about raising up God's people there in verses 17 and 18? Yeah, thank you, Cedric. I think it's well said. That we see he's identifying the problem. He's calling them to do this. And he's giving them this vision for how and why we can actually do it. How we can accomplish it. And it's not in that Nehemiah is an expert wall builder. Or that Nehemiah can do anything incredible.
[18:00] But that the Lord has sent him. That the Lord has been orchestrating and allowing, enabling and empowering all of this to happen. We have the resources. We have the authority from the king.

We have all of these things. And we have this personal testimony that the hand of my God has been upon me for good. And also the words that the king had spoken to me. And so then because

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of him casting this vision, not in anything of himself, but who the Lord is, what he said, what he's doing.
Then we see their response. And they respond in faith. Let us rise and build. And so they strengthen their hands for the good work. I think a few of the practical thoughts is it seems as though he's speaking to not just one person, but to all of them.
It seems to be a corporate communication. As he's calling them up, it seems like he's trying to maximize clarity and minimize confusion as he's going about it.
You can think of almost like the game telephone. Like if I gave a message to one person and then they were going to distribute to everybody else about how we're going to raise up and rebuild this wall, the message would be distorted, if not completely different, by the time it got to everybody.
[19:04] So the result is they agreed to the work. They're ready to go. And it almost feels like these verses 17 and 18 are a playbook for how we might seek to walk in Hebrews 10, 24. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works as we seek to communicate with people, to be honest, to point them to the Lord and his promises, to cast a vision for them of what faithfulness looks like, and to understand that as we're seeking to obey the Lord and follow the Lord and stir up others, it's a corporate endeavor.

That what the Lord's seeking to accomplish through his people is not through Lone Ranger Christians, but through the joined and fellowshiped efforts of his people. If we look there in verses 19 and 20, I'll read that, and the fourth little blank will be preparing by remaining resolute under opposition.
So remaining is the last fill in the blank. But when Sambal 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? 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.
These three opponents, the non-Jewish leaders in and around Jerusalem, hear what Nehemiah says and how the people are preparing to build the wall, that they've been rallied and raised up to do this, that they're preparing to do this. And so they come along and ridicule and mock them.
[20:30] They seek to discourage God's people. And they even imply there that they're rebelling against the king, which would mean sure death. So they're leveraging these threats.

They're leveraging whatever they can to dissuade the workers from proceeding. And we must remember that when God's people faithfully pursue God's purposes, God's enemies will likely soon follow to oppose him and his people.
And though not inherently easy to endure, it should not surprise us. And so in the face of this opposition, we see Nehemiah remain resolute. As you read verse 20, I feel like you just almost get chills reading it.
So I'll read that one more time. 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.
They've basically come and said, certainly mocking them, jeering at them, and also saying, I mean, aren't you rebelling against the king here? So there's this threat of death. And he says, not that the king has told me I can, but he appeals to the ultimate authority, the greater authority, that the God of heaven will make us prosper.
[21:40] It's a sure thing. And we, his servants, will arise and build. But you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem. And as a part of that, Nehemiah is declaring that they have no covenantal claim, no legitimate authority.

They're not from one of the tribes of Israel. The Lord God has not given them this place, but he has authorized Nehemiah in this work. And you can see Nehemiah's faith and his confidence in the Lord that it will be accomplished, that they will arise and build, and that these opponents will not ultimately defeat or thwart God's plan.
Okay. Now, with that, for the sake of time, I think across these verses, what we see is through wise and courageous leadership, God uses Nehemiah to prepare his people to rebuild.
You may have been led poorly in the past. We are all fallen and sinful. And so I know we have led poorly in the past. Here, Nehemiah is a wise and courageous leader, but he's ultimately not our ultimate savior.
And so as we think of all of what's happening here in Nehemiah, Nehemiah is not the ultimate leader that we need. Nehemiah's work in totality was a partial restoration after the exile.

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[22:56] Christ comes and accomplishes the ultimate redemption and restoration that we need. And we could go through point by point here and show ultimately that Jesus is a greater Nehemiah, but he also accomplishes a greater restoration.

And that's what we're learning throughout this series. But just as Nehemiah leaves the security of the Persian palace, he identifies with God's people, he gathers them for the work and remains resolute when opposed, these point forward to Christ who left heaven's glory to come to be with his people and perfectly identify with them, to gather them to himself.
We think of him enduring ultimate opposition faithfully unto death that he might accomplish ultimate redemption for them. So there are a few points of application there.
Just for the sake of time, I mentioned some of them. The one I haven't mentioned so far is just that number four. I encourage you to pray that Lord would help you to lead more wisely and courageously to help others follow the Lord and walk in what he's called them to.
The other three were mentioned throughout our discussion this morning. I'm going to pray and then we can dismiss. Father, we praise your name this morning.
[24:03] We're thankful for the example of Nehemiah here. But Lord, as we think about what you're doing, one takeaway is certainly we see what Nehemiah models and how he demonstrates wise and courageous obedience to you.

But ultimately, even more than that, we see your sovereignty working through Nehemiah to prepare your people to accomplish your purposes. When we think of your hand being placed upon Nehemiah, of Nehemiah alluding to you who will give them success.
And so Lord, as we get to leave today, Lord, I pray that you would move within us to be more confident, more resolute, more trusting of you.
Lord, knowing that you care about us and about your people, that your promises remain true, that you remain faithful. Lord, as you give us work to do, Lord, would we respond when we're called out and called up to obey you.
We seek to stir up and encourage others to do the same. Lord, we're thankful that as we see the Old Testament stories that point forward to Jesus and the partial pictures of restoration that we see, we're thankful for Christ Jesus who's come to save us from our sin and provide ultimate restoration.
[25:15] So Lord, we praise you for that this morning. Be with us as we go to main service. Help us to delight in you all the more. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. To learn more, visit us in person or see the website at highlandparkbaptist.net.

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