

Chapter divides into three scenes - which take place in different locations and/or at different times.

- 1) Scene #1 2:1-9 Nehemiah is at Susa before King Artaxerxes  
Note vs. 10 is transitional as Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem
- 2) Scene #2 2:11-16 Nehemiah inspects the walls of Jerusalem at night by himself
- 3) Scene #3 2:17-20 Nehemiah speaks with the nobles and officials in Jerusalem - they are convinced that God is behind the plan to rebuild the wall and they begin. (opposition arising)

Introduction: Hudson Taylor, "It is possible to move men by God through prayer. Prayer is the means by which leaders formulate strategies. God uses ordinary people who depend on an extraordinary God.

Scene #1: In the King's Palace: Praying and Preparation. Nehemiah 2:1-9

Nehemiah must get approval of the king. In prayer he develops a strategy. Recall that Neh. Has been burdened and praying for 4+ months about this matter. The plan begins to unfold during the time of prayer. Then, outside of Nehemiah's control, the king asks why he is sad in his presence. The king on his own initiative concludes that Nehemiah is wrestling with "sadness of the heart".(vs. 2)

At this point Nehemiah takes a calculated risk. WCK feels that Nehemiah let the king see the distress of his soul. After 4+ months Nehemiah had discerned a God-given plan (the details will come out later), and opens a door by allowing the king to see his "fallen" face. Nehemiah honestly admits, "I was very much afraid," (vs. 3).

MEK. This is natural. Even when convinced you're doing God's will, as the plan begins to unfold, you will probably be afraid. You know you're moving into the realm where you have to see God work.

Nehemiah was convinced of the truth of Prov. 21:1 "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." WCK This is both a declarative and comparative proverb. Declares God's sovereign control over people (even those in authority) and compares the influence of the king (minuscule) to that of God.

WCK: Biblical math. 1 Person + the Lord = A Majority.

MEK: Will I work through the long process of praying and preparation. It may take months to get God's perspective on how to proceed to meet a need. WAIT. God is at work preparing the way and at the right time, He will lead you to take the first step.

When the Artaxerxes made the comment (vs. 2), Nehemiah had the plan all formulated. He knew he wanted a leave of absence from his duties as the cup bearer. He knew he'd need letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates. He knew he needed building supplies - so the letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest. The king must have like Nehemiah and appreciated his service b/c he asks, "how long will the journey take, and when will you get back?" Nehemiah had anticipated this question and was ready with a reply. (vs. 6)

Repeatedly we read that, "It pleased the king to..." fulfilling Prov. 21:1. Also note how Nehemiah gives credit to God. "because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests."

MEK. Once God has moved and opened the way. Be sure to acknowledge his gracious hand. It is a safeguard to keep from thinking that the success hinges upon me.

Mention of Sanballat, & Tobiah. They are just introduced here. But you can be sure when God moves you to lead there will arise opposition to stand against your efforts.

Scene #2: Praying and Planning Together. 2:11-16 Nehemiah inspects the walls of Jerusalem.

Note he stayed for three days - and had not told anyone what God had put in his heart for Jerusalem.

WCK. “As a leader timing is crucial. Don’t spring the details of your plan too soon. The followers may not be ready to receive it. Leaders must do more talking to their Lord than to the people they lead if the leader is to be effective.

Nehemiah knew that the people were disheartened. Those folks can have very strong opinions. The satisfied are easier to mobilized b/c you don’t have to overcome the inertia of discouragement. Leaders must remain sensitive to the Lord and his timing.

So Nehemiah does the final work of his planning in prayer only after he arrives in Jerusalem. 2x in this section we read that Nehemiah “had not told” the leaders in Jerusalem of his plan (vss. 12, 16)

WCK referred to Prov. 16:9 “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.” Or to say it in contemporary language, “Man proposes, but God disposes.”

Scene #3 Praying and Revealing the Plan. 2:17-18 Nehemiah calls the leaders and people to work.

The people were unhappy and discouraged b/c they were not “employed” in God’s work. They had been standing by on the sidelines and not on the playing field. WCK “No joy in a church with high unemployment.” In some of our churches we have 75% unemployment - no wonder the people are grumbling.

Nehemiah honestly assesses the problem. (vs. 17) “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire.” This is a truthful evaluation. No help for leaders to minimize the obstacles that the group will have to face. But to honestly assess and then hopefully call people to united action is the essence of leadership. So Nehemiah will say, “Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be in disgrace.”

Nehemiah gave reasons for the people to be “employed.” The purpose is to put away the “disgrace”. This goes back to chapter 1 where Nehemiah was concerned for God’s name. God’s honor was at stake - not just personal comfort. The work will be for the honor of God.

WCK. “When God’s hand is on God’s work - God’s plan will never go begging.”

Leading from above demands organization and planning. But those human activities must always be undergirded by prayer. Organization and planning will be ineffectual if done without prayer. This is the lonely, but necessary, aspect of leadership. Going before the Lord to seek HIS will, HIS ways, HIS timing is what sets apart the godly leader. CHANGING HEARTS (whether of kings or officials or common workers) IS A SPECIALTY OF GOD.

Opposition takes a further step when scorn and ridicule come as the people begin to mobilize. Nehemiah answers them (and reminds the people), “the God of heave will give us success.” (vs. 20)