

How Did He Do That?

Brenton Friesen – January 19, 2025

Nehemiah 1:1- 2:8 These are the memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes 'reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. ² Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem. ³ They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire." ⁴ When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I said, "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands, ⁶ listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! ⁷ We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses. ⁸ "Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹ But if you return to me and obey my commands and live by them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honoured.' ¹⁰ "The people you rescued by your great power and strong hand are your servants. ¹¹ O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honouring you. Please grant me success today by making the king favourable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me." In those days I was the king's cup-bearer. ¹ Early the following spring, in the month of Nisan, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes 'reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never before appeared sad in his presence. ² So the king asked me, "Why are you looking so sad? You don't look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled." Then I was terrified, ³ but I replied, "Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire." ⁴ The king asked, "Well, how can I help you?" With a prayer to the God of heaven, ⁵ I replied, "If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried." ⁶ The king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked, "How long will you be gone? When will you return?" After I told him how long I would be gone, the king agreed to my request. ⁷ I also said to the king, "If it please the king, let me have letters addressed to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, instructing them to let me travel safely through their territories on my way to Judah. ⁸ And please give me a letter addressed to Asaph, the manager of the king's forest, instructing him to give me timber. I will need it to make beams for the gates of the Temple fortress, for the city walls, and for a house for myself." And the king granted these requests, because the gracious hand of God was on me.

1. Nehemiah's heart was burdened for what burdened God

Nehemiah 1:4 When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven.

Daniel 9:3 "So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes."

- **Fasting: This was a form of deep mourning and seeking God's will**
- **Sackcloth: A coarse, uncomfortable garment that symbolized distress and grief**
- **Ashes: Sitting in ashes or putting ashes on the head was another expression of mourning, grief**

All three actions demonstrate the degree of the burden Daniel carries for his people and are "customary for the day when genuine contriteness of heart was felt." - The Expositor's Bible Commentary

Romans 9:2-3 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race.

Nehemiah 1:6-7 listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! **7**We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses

Daniel 9:5-6 we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. **6** We have not listened to your servants the prophets

Isaiah 59:16 He saw that there was no man; He was amazed that there was no one to intercede. So His own arm brought salvation, and His own righteousness sustained Him.

Ezekiel 22:30 I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one."

2. Nehemiah's first response was prayer and fasting

Nehemiah 1:4 When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven.

- **PRAYER AND FASTING: Opens doors and positions us to sense God's direction and timing, and receive the boldness to take action.**

Proverbs 21:31 The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.

King Asa of Judah, after initially trusting God to deliver him in earlier battles, faced a threat from **Israel** (the northern kingdom) and turned to **foreign alliances** instead of relying on God. God sent the prophet **Hanani** to confront Asa for his lack of faith and reliance on human solutions rather than seeking God's help.

2 Chronicles 16:7-9 At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. ⁸ Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. ⁹ For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war."

- **Years later King Jehoshaphat of Judah faced a grave crisis when a large alliance of enemies (the Moabites, Ammonites, and others) gathered to wage war against him and his kingdom.**

2 Chronicles 20:3-4 Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

- **If you want God to fight your battles you need to send out worshippers to the front lines of your life! Make prayer your first response not back up plan!**

James 1:5-8 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. ⁶ But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

3. The hand of the Lord was on him

Nehemiah 1:8b And the king granted these requests, because the gracious hand of God was on me.

Nehemiah 4:14 "Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the nobles and the rest of the people and said to them, 'Don't be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes!'"

Ezra 7:28 – "Because the hand of the Lord my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

- **When you are aligned with God's heart and carry the burden and lead with prayer — GOD'S HAND IS ON YOU! — to step out!**

What is God hand on your life for?

2 Chronicles 16:9 (NIV) For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

Acts 13:22 (NIV) After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: '**I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.**'

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.