

## Bound To God Nehemiah 2

While we are bound to the *mundane* we can not be used by our *magnificent God*.

God could not use Israel while she was in bondage to Egypt. The Lord had to raise up one man, **Moses the deliverer**, who would be obedient in all that He commanded. The Lord needed a man who would *risk his very life* standing before the King of Egypt while demanding:

**Exodus 5:1 ... Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.**

The Lord needed a man who would be willing to do that which appeared *apparently foolish*. The Lord needed a man who would believe that this common stick he had used for walking was now **the rod of God**. Moses, in faith, would hold that rod over the Red Sea and watch its waters recede. He would smite a rock and watch water gush from it. While **Moses held the rod of God aloft in Rephidem** this dear man had to, in faith, tell Israel **when attacked by Amalek**:

**Exodus 17:9 And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.**

While Moses held that rod high in the air Israel triumphed. When he weakened God used two other men of faith, **Aaron and Hur** to hold up Moses' arms.

**Exodus 17:12-13 But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. {13} And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.**

What does this have to do with our lesson today? Simply this: **God's battles are won by faithful people doing what the Lord tells them do do**. We are told in Scripture:

**Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please {God}: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.**

God uses people who are sold out for Him. God uses people who will do as He commands, whether that command seems foolish or not. God uses *people who are unbound to the world but bound to Him*. God could not use the **first generation of Israel** because their hearts were **bound to Egypt and to fear**. Over and over again this Israel strained against God, refusing to obey His command. Their agenda was their own bellies, not on serving the Lord. The Lord said of the first generation of Israel:

**Hebrews 3:10-11 Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. {11} So I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.**

They refused the Lord while doing the wrong. **Moses** made a bad decision when he **let his anger for the people's rebellion** influence his actions. Leaders in particular need to be careful to *live their lives unto God* while ignoring the rowdier elements in the Church. **Following the burial of his sister**

**Miriam at Kadesh** Moses heard two voices: the voice of the people rebelling, and the voice of God directing. **Moses responded to the voice of the people** and, in anger, **lifted up the rod of God and smote the rock that he should have spoken to:**

**Numbers 20:10-12** And Moses ... said unto them, **Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?** {11} And **Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice:** and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. {12} And the **LORD spoke unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.**

Moses and Aaron would die in the wilderness on this side of the Jordan. God cannot use a people - nor a prophet - bound to anything but Him!

Nehemiah was a man bound to God. Though but a lowly **cupbearer** he knew that Israel could never be restored to her former glory while the **walls of Jerusalem** were torn down. The book begins by mentioning that Nehemiah received bad news about Jerusalem in the **month Chisleu (November)**. Chapter two has us in the **month Nisan**, which roughly corresponds to **our April**. Before approaching the King with what he felt led to do **Nehemiah prayed for around four months**. He bound his heart to God. You can see Nehemiah's conviction in the way that he approaches King Artaxerxes. The Bible tells us that Nehemiah **"had not formerly been sad in the King's presence"**. Artaxerxes **could have interpreted sadness in his presence to be dissatisfaction with the King**. If the King saw his sadness in this light then Nehemiah could be cast into prison, and another cupbearer would be found. The King asked Nehemiah **"why do you look sad? You don't appear to be sick!"** Nehemiah assures the King that he is not dissatisfied with his royal person. He states **"let the King live forever"** - you wouldn't say that if you were dissatisfied with the King. Nehemiah then - **after four months of prayer and fasting** - tells the King what is bothering him. **"My birthplace - and the place where my forefathers are buried - is fallen. It's gates are consumed with fire. It lies in ruins."** The King responds: **"What do you want?"**

And **Nehemiah prays to the God of Heaven**. He prays four months before approaching the King, and prays before *and as* he answers the King. Nehemiah is a man bound to God, and bound to please God. The Bible tells us:

**James 1:5-8** **If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.** {6} **But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.** {7} **For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.** {8} **A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.**

The best way to do *anything* for God is to have God involved in ever part of what you're doing. The Lord knows the best way to go about doing His work. The Apostle James tells us that **if we lack wisdom** (and we usually do) then the best thing to do is **ask of God, who gives liberally of wisdom - and does not upbraid or chastise those who ask**. Nehemiah asked God for wisdom before speaking to the King. He was a prayer warrior! Nehemiah was doing what the Apostle commands us to do, to

**1 Thessalonians 5:17** **Pray without ceasing.**

You can see both wisdom and Nehemiah's prayerfulness in what he asks the king for. Nehemiah *didn't*

tell the King "we want to get a rescue mission together to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem". That would have been the wrong thing to tell a king. You see, Israel is in Babylonian captivity. Nehemiah is in the palace of the King because he is a *displaced exile*, an enslaved Israelite. **Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel**, and no king in his right mind would allow a vanquished nation under his thumb rebuild their capital. What does Nehemiah ask for. He says:

**Nehemiah 2:5 And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.**

**Nehemiah asks to go to Judah, not Jerusalem.** Now Jerusalem is a part of the province of Judah so Nehemiah didn't lie. That's where he was going. But Nehemiah was *God directed*, and knew exactly how to ask and *what to ask for*. We can also see in Nehemiah's requests that *he had a God ordained plan*. So many times people pray for God's intervention but fail to pray for God's plan. As Nehemiah prayed over that four month period he allowed God to direct him. We read:

**Nehemiah 2:7-8 Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; {8} And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.**

When an empire conquered other nations it always **set governors to oversee the conquered people**. Nehemiah asks the King for **letters for the governors beyond the river**. Without those letters the rescue mission that Nehemiah was going to lead might be interpreted to be a guerrilla force or slaves escaping from Babylon. Nehemiah didn't want to die before he reached his objective. Furthermore we see that Nehemiah asks for **a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the King's forest**. The King owned the trees and, without trees (lumber), the gates of the city could not be rebuilt. Nehemiah said:

**Nehemiah 2:8 ... And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.**

Dear friends, God blesses those who *wait on Him*. The King not only gave Nehemiah leave to go back to Judah, and not only gave this man of God the **letters** that he requested, but we also read that:

**Nehemiah 2:9 Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.**

**Nehemiah was given an armed escort!** God blesses those who wait on Him. Now *waiting* on God doesn't mean to sit back and do nothing. *Waiting* on God means to *seek His face and seek His pleasure*. To make yourselves available to God. The Scripture tells us that:

**Isaiah 30:18 And therefore will the LORD wait<sup>1</sup>, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait<sup>1</sup> for him.**

The *Lord waits for us to wait on Him*. He wants to bless us, but often cannot, because we are too busy

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1 חָכָה, chākāh, properly to *adhere* to; hence to *await*: - long, tarry, wait.

trying to bless ourselves or to dig our own way out. The Lord often told His Israel:

**Isaiah 40:28-31** Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. {29} He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. {30} Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: {31} But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

When Nehemiah first heard the news of Jerusalem's fall he could have run straight to the King - and would probably have died for that folly. Instead he *waited* and he *prayed*. He sought out the will of God, and submitted himself to the Lord.

**ILLUSTRATE** I started out this night talking about **Israel** and Moses, but I want to talk about someone named **Jochebed**. Jochebed was a daughter of Levi, and was married to a man named **Amram (Numbers 26:59)**. She and all her family were slaves of Egypt. One day the king made a decree. He said "every male child born to the Israelites is to be killed, but the female children shall be allowed to live" (Exodus 1:22). Obviously Pharaoh was a proponent of partial birth abortion! When Jochebed delivered her child it was a boy! A beautiful baby boy! What was she supposed to do? If she *waited on Pharaoh* then she would have to kill her baby by drowning him in the river. Jochebed decided instead to *wait on the Lord*. She hid her child for three months, then, according to **Exodus 2:1-3** she put the child in a little ark and floated him down the river. The Bible tells us that the

**Exodus 2:5-10** And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and ... she saw the ark ... And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. {7} Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? {8} And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. {9} And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. {10} And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses<sup>2</sup>: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

Jochebed waited on God, and God responded to her waiting. **The Pharaoh's daughter ended up adopting Moses (little "Drawing Out")**, and Moses - in turn - would draw Israel out of Egypt!

There is no substitute for *waiting* on God. The Psalmist said:

**Psalms 27:14** Wait<sup>3</sup> on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

In this text the word **wait** means "**to bind yourself together with God**". We as God's people "**wait**" on the Lord by *prayer* and by *study of His Word*. We seek His will for our lives. We let our focus, our all be upon pleasing the Lord Who so loves us. We are told:

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2 מֹשֶׁה, mōsheh, *drawing* out (of the water), that is, *rescued*; *Mosheh*, the Israelitish lawgiver: - Moses.

3 קָיָה, qāvâh, A primitive root; to *bind* together (perhaps by *twisting*), that is, *collect*; (figuratively) to *expect*: - gather (together), look, patiently, tarry, wait (for, on, upon).

**Psalms 37:3-5 Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. {4} Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. {5} Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.**

To **trust** in God **and do good**. Keep doing the next right thing. Do that which God has laid upon your hearts to do. So many Christians stagnate in the faith because - though God has directed their hearts to do a certain thing - they wait on *somebody else* to do it. I found out rather quickly as a Pastor that there are a number of people who will come to their leadership saying "**wouldn't it be a good idea if we**", and then they make a proposal. Dear friends, it is not the job of the Pastorate to do it all. This is why when you come to me with a *good idea* then I turn back upon you. God needed Nehemiah to step out in faith and lead a rescue team to Jerusalem. He needed a man who would be willing to stand in the gap and *do* the Lord's will. If Jochebed had taken the safe route and aborted her baby Israel would have never passed through the Red Sea and into the Promised Land. If Nehemiah took the safe route and, upon hearing of the state of Jerusalem, just sighed "oh well", then the walls of Jerusalem would never have been rebuilt.

**Here come the naysayers.** There has never been a great work of God done that didn't have naysayers carping at the side. This is true of Nehemiah's life as well. We read:

**Nehemiah 2:10 When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.**

The devil has his minions who forever stand against the work of God. The two demons who stood against Nehemiah and against the work of God were **Sanballat the Horonite** and **Tobiah the Ammonite**. Sanballat was called a **Horonite**, that is, he was from the Moabite town of Horonaim. The Moabites were descendants from **Lot, Abraham's nephew** from **Ur of the Chaldees**. They were, in essence, *cousins* to the Jews. Sanballat was the **governor of Samaria** and was completely against this restoration. **Tobiah** was probably a Jew (his name means "Yahweh is good") and was the **governor of Ammon**, a place east of Judah. Tobiah sold out to the Persians and was jealously – as was Sanballat – guarding his "territory". Neither man was focused on honoring God but were those

**Romans 16:18 .. that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.**

Nehemiah kept his eyes on the lord, not on his detractors. He did as the Scripture said:

**Psalms 37:7-9 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. {8} Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. {9} For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.**

When we're doing the work of God we will have detractors – and even people who **lie in wait to deceive (Ephesians 4:14)**. These are agents of the devil. God's people are commanded to ignore their evil ways and – forsaking anger – continue to move forward to accomplish the work of God. The **battle is the Lord's (1 Samuel 17:47)**. Run toward the goal, trusting the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass.

**Nehemiah 2:12 And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save**

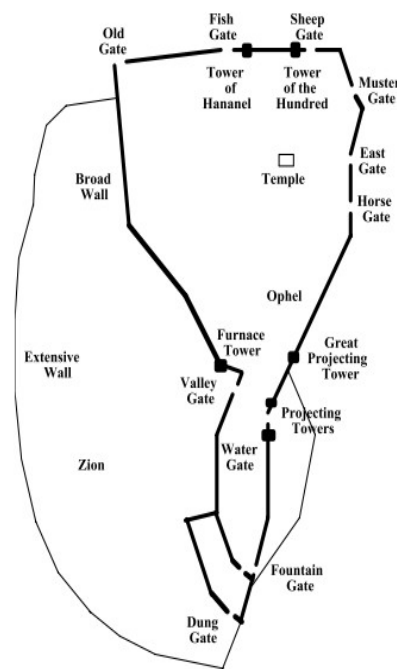
**the beast that I rode upon.**

Nehemiah examined the walls of Jerusalem **at night**, and **kept God's plans in his heart** as he made his initial surveys. The people of God should *never* be stupid. Jesus told His disciples:

**Matthew 10:16-20 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. {17} But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; {18} And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. {19} But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. {20} For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.**

God promised His disciples that He would be with them as they went out to do His work, but He also cautioned us against foolhardiness. Nehemiah knew that **Sanballet and Tobiah** was against him. How foolish it would have been to publish what he wanted to do *before* the Lord told him to do it. There was a motto in World War 2 that said **“Loose lips sink ships”**. The wise leader *surveys* what is before him, *plans* and *prays* that God will give him wisdom. This is what Nehemiah was doing, and it was a wise move. For as soon as he unveiled his plan an additional enemy came against him by the name of **Geshem the Arabian**.

**“There is evidence that Geshem [v. 19] (cf. 6:1ff.), far from being a negligible alien, was an even more powerful figure than his companions, though probably less earnestly committed to their cause. . . . From other sources it emerges that Geshem and his son ruled a league of Arabian tribes which took control of Moab and Edom (Judah's neighbors to the east and south) together with part of Arabia and the approaches to Egypt, under the Persian empire.”<sup>4</sup>**



4 Yamauchi, "Ezra-Nehemiah," p. 690.

## Bound To God Nehemiah 2

Nehemiah 2:1-20 And **it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king**, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now **I had not been formerly sad in his presence.**

{2} Wherefore the king said unto me, **Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?** this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then **I was very sore afraid,** {3} And said unto the king, **Let the king live forever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchers, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?** {4} Then the king said unto me, **For what dost thou make request?**

**So I prayed to the God of heaven.** {5} And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, that

**thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchers, that I may build it.** {6} And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? **So** it pleased the king to send me; and **I set him a time.**

{7} Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, **let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;** {8} **And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest,** that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And **the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.** {9} Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. **Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.**

**Introduction: Exodus 5:1; Exodus 17:9; Exodus 17:12-13; Hebrews 11:6; Hebrews 3:10-11; Numbers 20:10-12B**

**Nehemiah 1:1 ... it came to pass in the month Chisleu, ...**

Nehemiah had been praying for \_\_\_\_\_.

Why was it dangerous to appear sad before the King? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Nehemiah prays before he answers the King.** What does the Bible tell us about *wisdom*? **James 1:5-8** \_\_\_\_\_

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Why does Nehemiah ask to **go to Judah, not Jerusalem?** \_\_\_\_\_

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Comment on the **letters** that Nehemiah asked the King for. Why are these significant? \_\_\_\_\_

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{10} When **Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly** that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

{11} **So** I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. {12} And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; **neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem**: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. {13} And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. {14} Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. {15} Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and **so** returned. {16} And **the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.** {17} Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. {18} Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. **So** they strengthened their hands for this good work. {19} But **when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?** {20} Then answered I them, and said unto them, **The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.**

**Who is Jochebed? (Exodus 2:5-10; Numbers 26:59)** \_\_\_\_\_

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How does God use our detractors to build our faith in Him? (**Romans 16:18; Psalms 37:7-9; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Samuel 17:47**) \_\_\_\_\_

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Why was Nehemiah going out at night and being so secretive about what God had told him to do? (**Matthew 10:16-20**) \_\_\_\_\_

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