THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH
"Prayer Requests"
Nehemiah 2:1-8

Introduction

1. Nehemiah was an unusual man of God. He learned, while in captivity, about his own people in Jerusalem and the devastation of the walls and gates of the City (1:2, 3).

2. Response to what Nehemiah learned, he was reminded of the character of God (1:5, 10). Additionally, he was moved in his soul (1:4), confessed to God (1:6), and prayed to God (1:8, 9, 11).

3. With these thoughts in , it is understandable to read the record in the text (2:1-8). Here is patent evidence that God always has His man to do the jobs which need doing. There may be employment problems in the household of faith, but the Spirit of God surely will lead the right man, at the right time, to do the right job, in the right place. See how this is illustrated:

1. The Historical SITUATION VV. 1-3

a. Presented v. 1

Consider that four months elapsed between the initial report (1:1) and the response recorded (2:1). Nehemiah contemplated 120 days on what he had heard. His prayer burden was truly in depth (cf. 1:4-11). That burden got Nehemiah to the King. To serve the Lord with less intensity would be insanity. Nehemiah was in a unique position to be used by God (cf. 1:11 with 2:1). Scripture states this is the first time Nehemiah was "sad" (Hebrew: sorrowful, sullen, evil) before the King's face.

b. Questioned v. 2

"Wherefore" (KJV) is the common "waw connective" indicating the account is to be continued and does not end with the previous verse. Seeing Nehemiah's face, the King took the role of physician and psychologist and concluded the "shy" ("what is known") was not physiological but theological. Nehemiah had heart-sickness which was vented in facial sorrow (note plural).
This is a clear example of non-verbal communication. What a meaningful understatement of a man's face! At the King's observation, Nehemiah became very afraid. He had reason to fear the King (cf. Esther 4:2).

c. Explained v. 3

In the first instance, Nehemiah gives an accolade to the King and respect. Although in captivity, Nehemiah acknowledged the right of governments (cf. Ro. 13:1-7). All of this is within the will of God (Ps. 75:6, 7). Then, God's servant has an answer for the King. It was easy in one sense because it had been his concern for four months! The problem: Jerusalem lay in waste and its gates fired. Nehemiah adds a personal item: Jerusalem is the "place of my father's "). God's burdened man sought to gain compassion before the King by this personal addendum.

2. The Spiritual SUPPLICATION vv. 4-8

a. Directed vv. 4, 5

The King was ready to hear the request of Nehemiah (cf. Esther 4:11). Scripture records how the King asked about them (v.4). Incredibly, God's servant does not reply to the King immediately. Rather, the Bible states: "So I prayed to the God of Heaven." What an amazing and fantastic act of Nehemiah! The concerns of God's servant required Divine intervention. This is the same way Esther responded (cf. Esther 4:12-17). Help ultimately must come from God (Ps. 108:11-12). The verb used for prayer here is the same as employed earlier by Nehemiah (cf. 1:4). Prayer to God of this sort yields results before God. After Nehemiah dealt with God, he turned to he King (v. 5). This is the order of the spiritual man.

b. Detailed vv. 5-6

The list of requests to the King are given, but prefaced by respectful statements to the King: 1) If it is good tot the King; 2) if thy servant; 3) if thy servant finds good before the King. There is not a whit of dishonor for the King.

Having humbled himself before God and the King, now Nehemiah is prepared to express his petitions. There are three:

1) Send me geographically v. 5

God's servant wanted to be sent to Judah. The Tribe of Judah is called a "province" (1:3). Specifically he wants to be sent to "the city of my father's sepulchers." Nehemiah demonstrated God's leadership in his life. He knew God's appointment. He knew where God wanted him to go. Abraham knew where to go (Gen. 12:1) and where to pitch his tent along the way (Gen. 12:5-9). The kind of guidance which does not specify may well be suspect guidance and not of the LORD.

2) Send me purposefully v. 5

Nehemiah had one intent: to rebuild the city, the walls, the gates of Jerusalem. A true servant of God is involved in the LORD'S work for no other purpose, but to build (edify).

3) Send me chronologically v. 6

The King wanted to know how long Nehemiah would take to accomplish his mission…going/returning. Interestingly, the Queen was privy to this matter as a witness. This shows that God does not agree with the endless plans of men, but He does approve of a goal-oriented ministry. The King approved of the plan and Nehemiah gave the time required, having previously determined this.

4) Send me protectively v.7

Again the authority of government is recognized by Nehemiah. He asked for and received "letters" so as to reach Judah. These "letters" probably served as our modern Visa. It is significant that Persia was in control of land on both sides of the river Euphrates.

5) Send me materially v. 8

The job to be done in Judah required a man (Nehemiah), permission (God first, King second), and means (timber). Nehemiah did not hesitate to ask the King for the material to do the job totally—beams, gates, wall, house. He had a firm "site plan." Success was guaranteed because the "good" hand of the LORD was upon Nehemiah (cf. v. 4).

Conclusion

The man who is called of God (1:1-4) will walk with God (1:5-11), will talk with God (2:4), and will act with God (2:5-8). To view a spiritual ministry like this in a day when so much is generated by the flesh is indeed refreshing and exemplary! Glory to God!