

## NEHEMIAH – FACT SHEET 2



### **Chapter 2:**

After hearing the devastating report from Judah, Nehemiah had prayed at the end of chapter 1 for the God of Heaven to give him 'success today' (1:11) in the eyes of Artaxerxes, the Persian King. However, chapter 2 opens in the month of Nisan – four months later, with Nehemiah about to approach the King with his request. The reason for the delay is not known, perhaps on reflection, Nehemiah needed to think and pray more about the necessary sensitive approach – remember it was the same King whom in Ezra 4, had stopped the work. Alternatively, the King may have been simply unavailable, away – whichever, the Lord had given Nehemiah four months to do his homework.

### **Nehemiah's Brave Request:**

Nehemiah enters the King's presence at the start of the chapter – in a clearly visibly sad state of mind; so much so that the King enquires as to the reason. This was no small risk – showing such negative emotion in the presence of one's King could lead to severe punishment, even death, should the King so desire. On receiving the King's question, Nehemiah states that he was 'very much afraid' (2:2ff) – even the most confident and usually fearless people can be gripped by fear on occasion. The rest of the book does not show Nehemiah to be a timid or fearful person – perhaps the enormity and potential life changing consequences of the imminent conversation, were reasons for his inner fears.

In Nehemiah's initial but brief report (2:3), he is very clever not to mention specifically 'Jerusalem'. It wouldn't be necessary to remind the King of the city that had 'a long history of revolt' (Ezra 4:19). With the Persians respect and empathy for ancestry and their careful burial – Nehemiah puts his appeal well, advising that, '...the city where my fathers are buried remains in ruins'. Having gained the King's sympathy, Nehemiah is asked what he wants to do. Yet prior to giving his answer that could change history forever, depending on its reception and validity – Nehemiah once more consults the ultimate King of Heaven (1:4ff).

In the next few verses (5-9) we see the homework of Nehemiah in his four months of waiting, pay off. He is able to discuss timescales, documentation; even requesting the favour of the keeper of the forest, Asaph. Verse 10 introduces us to the adversaries who would plague the re-building project throughout – more of them later!

### **The Necessary Reconnaissance:**

In verses 11-16, we see Nehemiah entering Jerusalem, keen to get on with the project – yet initially resting for 3 days (2:11). The journey would have taken some 4 months (see Ezra 7:8). Nehemiah had learned the value of waiting on the Lord. Nehemiah, although not a native of Jerusalem, had a passion for his people, something God had put in his heart (2:12).

### **Nehemiah's Recruitment:**

After his survey, Nehemiah addresses the people in verses 17-20. As the great leader he was, he:

- Identified himself with the project – it was the trouble 'we' are in now – whereas in chapter 1, the report was of the people in trouble;
- Identified that the project was both practical and spiritual – not only were the physical walls destroyed and gates burned (vs 17) – but as a result, God's people, and more importantly, God's Name, were in disgrace (vs 17) – is this how the great Yahweh would want His people to be?;
- Told the people that it wasn't him who was ultimately behind the project, but '...the gracious hand of God' (vs 18)

### **Chapter 3:**

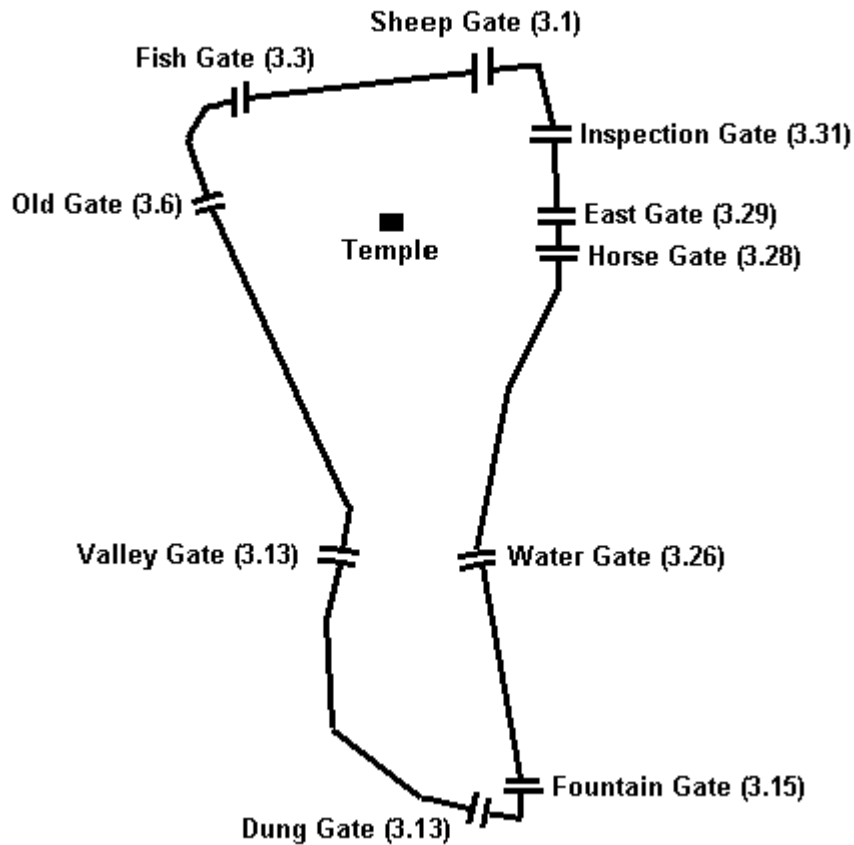
The people's response was one of resolve to start building; and in **chapter 3**, commencing with the priests (vs 1), the spiritual leaders, the building work began. It was a great team effort, not only people from Jerusalem but also from the surrounding areas (Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, Mizpah to name a few – vs 2, vs 5, vs 7). It wasn't all skilled builders either, there were perfume makers (vs 8), Goldsmiths (vs 31), merchants (vs 32) amongst others. Amongst the workers, with new zeal for God's work, was Malkijah (vs 11) whom in Ezra was rebuked for marrying outside of God's people (Ezra 10:31). This was a chance for everyone to start again for God.

### **Conclusion:**

Yet back to chapter 2, whenever God is at work, the enemy is too. And in verses 19-20 of that chapter – we see Sanballat, Tobia and Geshem begin their visible campaign of scorn; their initial concerns against the advancement of God's work being originally mentioned in verse 10. However, for the time being at least, they were rebuffed. Nehemiah knew that 'He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world' (1 John 4:4) and so could answer their taunts, stating, '...The God of heaven will give us success' (vs 20). Such a sure and certain attitude, and such a trust and confidence in the one who called him, would be vital in the days ahead.

## The Jerusalem Gates:

### Nehemiah's Jerusalem



#### For further study:

Some people go the extra mile – can you find out who worked on more than one section of the wall? How many different trades worked on the project in chapter 3?

#### Further Reading/Bibliography – My thanks go to!

- *The Holy Bible – (first of course!)*
- *The Message of Nehemiah, R Brown – IVP*
- *Overcoming challenges, B Hybels – Zondervan*
- *A Passion for Faithfulness, J Packer – Crossway*
- *Ezra & Nehemiah, D Kidner - IVP*

*“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word”  
Psalm 119:18*