



## God's Grand Story: When It's Time to Rebuild

April 30, 2023

If there was ever a time in history in which the people of God need to rise up and do the best of things in the worst of times, it is now.

When Cyrus the Great of Persia overthrew the Babylonian Empire in 539 BC, he and subsequent kings released the Jewish people from their 70-year exile in Babylon. In a succession of waves, the Hebrews returned to Palestine, only to find their beloved country in ruins.

Over time, different leaders such as Zerubbabel, Zechariah, Haggai, and Ezra led the Jewish people in returning to Palestine, rebuilding the temple, and restoring the religious rhythms of the nation. However, the Jews repeatedly fell into a backslide. The cycle continued until 444 BC, when the Persian king's Jewish chief-of-staff, Nehemiah, became aware that his homeland was still in dire ruin. In just 52 days, Nehemiah led the people in the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem to their former strength. He also restarted the worship life of Israel.

### How did they go about this rebuilding project?

Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the Persian emperor Artaxerxes I, the most powerful ruler of that day. As cupbearer, it was his duty to taste the wine from the king's cup before personally handing the cup to the king as a personal guarantee that the wine was not poisoned. No one was more trusted by the king than Nehemiah.

*Read Nehemiah 1:1-4*

Hanani, Nehemiah's brother brings news of destroyed walls, burned gates, and the distress and shame of Jerusalem's inhabitants. For a prolonged period, Nehemiah weeps, mourns, fasts, and prays.

### Step 1 of Rebuilding: Start with Prayer and Fasting

*Nehemiah 1:11 – "O Lord, I beseech You...make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man."*

He ends his prayer by asking God to grant him favor before the King of Persia, that he might have His assistance with the project of rebuilding. If you are praying by faith for help, then you should expect an answer as Nehemiah did.

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

After four months of praying and waiting, Nehemiah sensed it was time to step out, take a risk, and trust that God would help.

*Nehemiah 2:2 – "So the king said to me, 'Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.' Then I was very much afraid."*

Nehemiah was purposely sad in the presence of the King, which was a risk because he was the King's most trusted and loyal servant. If he wasn't happy around the King anymore, that could indicate a disgruntlement, or cause the king to be suspicious of his loyalty. When the cupbearer wasn't happy, he risked getting killed. Nehemiah purposefully took this risk, which could have cost him his life. But there was a crisis that demanded that something be done. **Doing the best of things in the worst of times will require some risks on our part.**

*Nehemiah 2:3-4 – "And I said to the king, 'Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?' Then the king said, 'What would you request?' So I prayed to the God of heaven."*

Nehemiah believed that God would come through and he was ready with a plan for the construction project.

*Nehemiah 2:5 – "I said to the king, 'If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.'"*

The king agreed and gave Nehemiah the resources he would need to accomplish his goal of rebuilding.

*Nehemiah 2:11-13 – "So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal which I was riding. So I went out at night..."*

Nehemiah inspected the walls, assessed the situation, and gathered facts.

## **Step 2 of Rebuilding: Get the Facts—Without the facts, there can be no good decision.**

*Nehemiah 2:15-17 — “So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall....And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the rest who did the work. Then I said to them, ‘You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be a reproach.’”*

Next, Nehemiah cast a vision of a preferred future.

## **Step 3 of Rebuilding: See the Vision**

*Proverbs 29:18 — “Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained...”*

Nehemiah saw the condition of not only the walls, but the people, and it was not good. But he saw a preferred future of security and restored purpose and meaning, and he cast that vision to the people.

*Nehemiah 2:18 — “I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me, and also about the king’s words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, ‘Let us arise and build.’ So, they put their hands to do the good work.”*

This preferred future will not happen as Christians sit around watching TV. We must get involved in the process and be the salt of the earth and the light of the world that Jesus commanded us to be.

## **Step 4 of Rebuilding: Do the Work**

*Nehemiah 2:18 — “Then they said, ‘Let us arise and build.’ So they put their hands to do the good work.*

There is much work to do. And we will run into resistance.

*Nehemiah 2:19 — “But when Sanballat the Hornite, and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, ‘What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?’”*

This does not intimidate Nehemiah in the least.

*Nehemiah 2:20 — “So I answered them and said to them, ‘The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right, or memorial in Jerusalem.’”*

We must not be intimidated by those who mock us and let them continue to have their way in our city and in our country.

## **Step 5 of Rebuilding: Stay the Course**

The people of God soon began a 52-day stretch that proved to be harder than any of them had ever anticipated, but they stayed the course. Likewise, it will be hard for us in the days to come. We will face resistance, and it will feel sometimes that we are taking 3 steps forward and 2 steps back. We will persevere, and we will succeed with God’s help and with each other’s help.

When Hitler came into power in the 1930s, the German church didn’t want to get into politics. They didn’t pray like they should have about it; they didn’t get the facts. Then, as trains with Jews headed to death camps rode past the German churches, **the church-goers simply sang a little louder so they wouldn’t hear the screams.**

In 1954, Senator Lyndon Johnson introduced an amendment to the U.S. tax code prohibiting churches and any nonprofit organization from taking a public stand on political candidates. If anyone from a pulpit dared to endorse a candidate, that church’s tax exemption would be repealed. This resulted in most churches backing off and not speaking the truth about the issues of the day.

## **Are we speaking out today on the issues that are important to God? Issues like:**

- The unborn being murdered and their body parts sold for profit;
- Young children in schools being fed pernicious ideas on the subject of sexuality;
- Older children being confused by sexual activists, and agreeing to have their bodies mutilated, so that they can never become the men and women God has created them to be;
- Socialistic and communistic ideas being pushed everywhere, which will end up hurting the poor and not helping them in the long run

*First man resists evil, then man endures evil, then man accepts evil, and then man embraces evil. — Uguritic Proverb*

**May it be said of us one day: “In the year 2023, in Arlington, Texas, when all things sacred were either demolished or profaned, the people of Grace Community Church did the best of things in the worst of times.”**