

The Sacred Gift of Choice

Nehemiah 1:1-6; 2:1-5 ▪ September 21, 2025 ▪ Caleb Smagacz

Nehemiah 1:1-6; 2:1-5

^{1:1} The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachabiah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, ² that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. ³ And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

⁴ As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned."

^{2:1} In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. ² And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" ⁴ Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it." (ESV)

Personal Reflection or Group Discussion Questions

Open: Share about a time when a small decision you made ended up having a big impact.

Read & Discuss: Nehemiah 1:1-6

1. How would you summarize the situation described in verses 1-3? (Remember that Nehemiah was living in Persia, serving as cupbearer to the king, when he receives this news.) What stands out to you about Nehemiah's response in verse 4? How do you typically respond when you hear about suffering or injustice—especially in places or communities you care about?
2. What does Nehemiah's prayer reveal about his posture before God? When, if ever, is there a place for confessing the shared sins of your people (such as your family, church, or nation)? How might confession shape the way we approach decision-making or leadership?

Read & Discuss: Nehemiah 2:1-5

3. Several months pass between Nehemiah's prayer and his conversation with the king (v. 1). What might have been happening in Nehemiah's heart and mind during this time of waiting? Have you ever had to wait before acting on something you felt called to do? What helped you stay faithful during that time?
4. In verse 2 we're told that when the king asked him why he looked sad, Nehemiah was "very much afraid." Why do you think he felt so much fear? What choices do we face when a situation requires us to speak up, even when we are afraid? How can faith shape those choices?
5. Before answering the king, Nehemiah says he "prayed to the God of heaven" (v. 4). Why was this a significant choice in that moment? How can we cultivate the habit of "praying in the moment"—even in the middle of a conversation or decision?
6. Nehemiah ends up making a bold request to the king, not just to go to Jerusalem, but to have letters and timber to rebuild the wall. (See *Nehemiah 2:7-8*.) What choices did Nehemiah make ahead of time that prepared for this moment? How does this passage teach us about the intersection of prayer and preparation?
7. This passage shows Nehemiah making a series of intentional choices—from weeping to praying to speaking up—that had a profound impact. In what ways do you see your own seemingly small, daily choices having a significant impact on your life or on those around you?

Apply: Nehemiah's story shows that prayerful, purposeful choices can shape lives and communities. What is one decision you're facing this week that you want to approach as a sacred opportunity?

Pray: Pray for the wisdom and courage to make godly choices, trusting in God's sovereignty to shape our path.