

Nehemiah 2

STEPPING OUT IN FAITH

Artaxerxes (Longimanus) became king in 465 BC and reigned until 424 BC. ...The whole effort of Artaxerxes during his long reign was to keep his empire intact. Occasionally he had to cope with internal unrest, caused mainly by his continuing the policies of his father [Xerxes]. The court remained luxurious and expenditures rapidly increased. ...It is thus understandable that unrest and revolt should develop. Artaxerxes had to cope with two revolts early in his reign, during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The first revolt broke out in Egypt. ...The Persians suppressed the revolt in 456. It was at this time of uncertainty that Artaxerxes sent out Ezra for his religious reform in Judah. It was politically the right attitude to pacify his Jewish subjects so close to the border of Egypt. Judah was in a certain sense a buffer state and thus very important to the Persians. Out of this event developed the second revolt. Megabyzus, the general of the Persian army in Egypt...started a revolt against the Persian king in 449 BC, a revolt that Artaxerxes was not able to put down. ...It is important to note shortly after the revolt of Megabyzus Nehemiah was allowed to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall and to organize the province of Judah. Nehemiah was a loyal subject of Artaxerxes and could be trusted. It was under the circumstances very important to Artaxerxes to have a loyal governor in one of his minor provinces.

—F. Charles Fensham

Nehemiah is the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. He occupies a position of honor and influence but he also serves under a king who bears absolute power and can execute people on a whim.

In December 445 BC, Nehemiah receives news regarding the continued devastation of Jerusalem and the ongoing despair of his people, the Jews. His heart is broken. His spirit is stirred. And he begins to pray for God to remember His promise, to restore His people, and to give him success in his interaction with the king. Four months later, the situation hasn't changed.

Nehemiah 2 occurs in Nisan (March-April) 444 BC.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

- 586 BC** Destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon
- 539 BC** Fall of Babylon to the Medo-Persian Empire
- 538 BC** Cyrus' Edict Allowing Jews to Return
- 536 BC** Zerubbabel Leads ~50,000 to Jerusalem
- 516 BC** Temple Completed (Haggai & Zechariah)

- 479 BC** Esther Becomes Queen to King Xerxes
- 465 BC** Xerxes Assassinated; Artaxerxes Becomes King

- 459 BC** Egypt & Greece Gain Victories Against Persians
- 458 BC** Artaxerxes Sends Ezra to Jerusalem
- 449 BC** Megabyzus (in Egypt) Revolts Against Artaxerxes
- 449 BC** Artaxerxes Halts the Rebuilding of Jerusalem
- 446 BC** Megabyzus Pardoned by Artaxerxes
- 445 BC** Artaxerxes Sends Nehemiah to Jerusalem

MEDO-PERSIAN KINGS

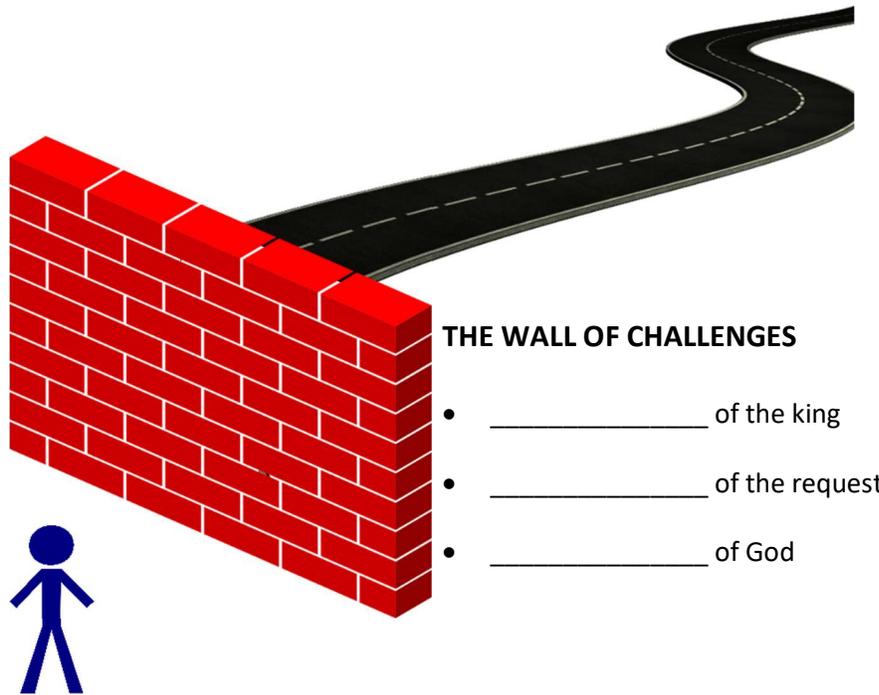
Cyrus (550-530 BC)
Cambyses (530-522 BC)
Pseudo-Smerdis (522 BC)
Darius the Great (522-486 BC)
Xerxes the Great (486-465 BC)
Artaxerxes (465-424 BC)

King Xerxes was assassinated in his bed by Artabanus, his chief bodyguard. Xerxes' third son, Artaxerxes, managed to kill his older brother, Darius, execute Artabanus, and defeat his other brother, Hystaspes, in battle. Thus Artaxerxes took the throne. He was eighteen years old.

Persian works of art...indicate that those who came into the king's presence did so with great deference, placing the right hand with palm facing the mouth so as not to defile the king with one's breath. —Edwin Yamuchi

Dr. Harold Hoehner dates the decree of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem at March 5, 444 BC. Exactly 173,880 days later, Jesus would ride into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Daniel 9:24-27.

THE JOURNEY OF FAITH



THE WALL OF CHALLENGES

- _____ of the king
- _____ of the request
- _____ of God

THE DOORWAY OF OPPORTUNITY

- Be God-_____
- Be _____
- Be _____
- Be _____
- Be _____

God is calling each of us to walk this journey of faith (2 Cor. 5:7). There are certain good works which He has designed for us to do for His glory (Eph. 2:10). We must trust Him, surrender to His will, wait for His timing, and be ready to step out in faith when the opportunity presents itself (cf. Prov. 3:5-6; Rom. 12:1).

What step of faith do you sense that God is calling you to take?

*It is possible to move men,
through God, by prayer alone.*
—Hudson Taylor

*Waiting is, by nature, something
only the humble can do with
grace. When we wait for some-
thing, we recognize that we are
not in control.* —John Ortberg

*Nehemiah did not mention Jeru-
salem by name—"the city"—as
he wished to arouse the king's
sympathy by stressing first the
desecration of ancestral tombs.*
—Edwin Yamauchi

*As the Persian monarchs did not
admit their wives to be present
at their state festivals, this must
have been a private occasion.
The queen referred to was
probably Esther, whose presence
would tend greatly to embolden
Nehemiah in stating his request;
and through her influence,
powerfully exerted it may be
supposed, also by her sympathy
with the patriotic design, his
petition was granted.*

—Robert Jamieson

*Vagueness at this point would
have shown up the project as a
mere dream or sudden impulse;
but Nehemiah prayed long
enough, and had faith enough,
to visualize the operation in
some detail, even to the building
technique he would be using for
the wall.* —Derek Kidner

*God created me—and you—to
live with a single, all-embracing,
all-transforming passion—
namely, a passion to glorify God
by enjoying and displaying his
supreme excellence in all the
spheres of life. Remember, you
have one life. That's all. You were
made for God. Don't waste it.*

—John Piper