

Divine Providence¹

Nehemiah 2:1-8

INTRODUCTION:

1. Many miracles are recorded in the Old Testament.
2. Yet, most of the work done by God was “behind the scenes.”
3. How does God do so much without the supernatural? Nehemiah reveals much of the answer.
4. In Nehemiah 1, there are grief and prayer. In chapter 2, there is given the relationship of the circumstances to the fulfillment of desires.

DISCUSSION: God’s providential working...

I. Is opportune.

- A. “In the month of Nisan...” (2:1): the best time because it was chosen by God.
- B. God’s plans are worked out with the utmost precision.
 1. The Bible has many expressions such as: “in due time,” “the fullness of time,” “appointed time,” “my hour is not yet come,” and “a set time.”
 2. God’s timepiece never gains nor loses.
 - a. All of His plans are carried out with unfailing accuracy.
 - b. “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient...” (2 Pet. 3:9).
 3. Many details, apparently insignificant, combine to work out the most magnificent plans.
 - a. Illustration: A chain link is a small thing, yet the chain depends on the support of every link.
 - b. What may seem to us to be trifles are links in the chain of God’s providential government and would then not be trifles.
- C. God often works on His people’s behalf when they least expect it.
 1. Our most unlikely times are sometimes God’s most favorable times.
 2. Not considering the unseen power of God, we get discouraged.
 3. While looking for Him to appear in one way, He comes in another.
- D. The time of God’s working is sometimes due to the most urgent needs of His people.
 1. Nehemiah was so stressed because of the condition of his people and his capital city that he countenance was sad.
 2. The case of the Jews was desperate.
 3. God worked for His people even as He had done on the shores of the Red Sea...
 - a. To test their faith.
 - b. To gain their gratitude.
 - c. To impress upon them their dependence upon Him.

¹ Taken from “Divine Interposition” in *The Preacher’s Complete Homiletic Commentary on the Book of Nehemiah* by Booth, Goodman, and Gregory (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, reprinted 1974), 9:41-43. Adapted by Andy Kizer (06/07/2012).

II. Requires human co-operation.

- A. God's agents are of two kinds: willing and unwilling.
- B. Both are found in Nehemiah's history.
 - 1. The Allied
 - a. As Esther came into the kingdom (Esther 4:14), so did Nehemiah.
 - b. Though he was a captive and one of an alien religion, he was the king's servant and God's agent.
 - c. Nehemiah was...
 - 1) Duly authenticated.
 - a) Mentally, he possessed forethought (2:5, 6), tact (5:5), and ingenuity (ch. 3).
 - b) Spiritually, he maintained courage, sympathy, generosity, and piety.
 - 2) Favorably situated.
 - a) When God has a work that needs to be done, He providentially places men where they can do it.
 - b) Nehemiah was chosen by King Artaxerxes for an important office. Had he been chosen for another office, he would not have found it so convenient to speak to the king.
 - 3) Rightly actuated.
 - a) No personal ambition
 - b) Pure, unselfish desire for the prosperity of God's people
 - c) No desire for personal gain, using his own fortune to feed the poor
 - 2. The Unallied
 - a. God employs unconscious agents as well as willing ones.
 - b. He used a heathen king to favor a "hostile" religion and defend people his subjects hated.
 - c. God even employs His enemies to carry out His purposes (e.g. Pharaoh).

III. Is accompanied by conditions.

- A. All are known to divine omniscience and taken into account.
- B. Nehemiah was unusually sad.
 - 1. "Now I had not been sad in his presence" (2:1).
 - 2. "No one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth" (Esther 4:2).
 - 3. "A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed" (Prov. 15:13).
 - 4. Nehemiah had been afflicting his soul for four months. No wonder he betrayed it in his countenance.
- C. Artaxerxes was unusually friendly.
 - 1. Sad looks meant bad looks.
 - 2. At another time, Artaxerxes might have banished Nehemiah or condemned him to death.
 - a. Practice of Eastern monarchs

- b. "I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

D. The queen was unusually present.

1. Queens were called at certain times and then by name.
2. "...if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law – to be put to death....But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days" (Esther 4:11).
3. The queen's presence would have been in Nehemiah's favor. The presence of a woman, even without her personal intercession, would temper any harshness the king might feel.

CONCLUSION:

1. Sometimes the hand is used in an ill way, i.e. to inflict punishment (cf. Matt. 26:67).
2. Sometimes the hand is used in a good sense, i.e. in helping others and bestowing favors.
3. "And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me" (Neh. 2:8).
4. By divine favor, which inclined the king to do what Nehemiah desired, Nehemiah succeeded.