

A GODLY SERVANT

Nehemiah

God finds His servants in surprising places: Moses—a sheep herder in the Sinai wilderness, Joseph—an innocent sufferer in an Egyptian dungeon, David—a young shepherd on the hills of Bethlehem.

Though these men rose to prominence and plenty, they did not begin that way. With Nehemiah it was different. We first meet him in the luxurious surroundings of a Persian palace.

Nehemiah was the cup bearer, trusted advisor, and probably good friend to King Artaxerxes of Babylon. It was there that his call from God came.

When Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers marched out of Jerusalem in 586 BC, they left a desolate city behind them. Its magnificent temple, built by Solomon four hundred years earlier, was reduced to heaps of fallen masonry and charred timber.

The city's gates and all its important buildings were enveloped in flames, and its strong walls demolished. Only the poorest of Jerusalem's people were left behind—the rest led off as captives to distant Babylon, some 1000 miles away.

As the Israelites walked the 1000 miles of desert highway their steps were heavy. Not only was their city burning behind them, but an unknown future lay ahead of them.

Worst of all was the tormenting thoughts that they were responsible for their present situation through the chastising hand of God. The Prophet Jeremiah had severely warned that God's judgment would come to unfaithful people.

The intensity of their guilt and despair weighed heavily on them. But God had not abandoned them. Though they didn't realize it, better days were ahead. God was preparing new leaders for fresh challenges.

People like Ezekiel and Daniel and his companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Prophets like Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi would bring persuasive truths to the people after their return.

And, of course, Nehemiah the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes reigned over the vast Persian empire from 464 to 423 BC. The dramatic events we read about in Nehemiah's story began around 445 BC.

He had never been to Jerusalem. He didn't know the condition of the city and temple. But he had family there, and when his brother, Hanani and others, visited, Nehemiah asked about the city and people.

Nehemiah 1:1-2(NIV) 1The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, 2Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

Though he had never been to Jerusalem, Nehemiah's heart was there. This is what he was told:

Nehemiah 1:3(NIV) 3They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

Nehemiah's heart was broken over the news. Though he didn't know it at that moment, this was God's call on his life. If Nehemiah answered God's call his life would be forever changed.

We are separated from Nehemiah by 2500 years, but the problems he faced are not peculiar to his world. God was calling him to abandon everything he knew; challenging him to a new work and place doing something he had never done before.

Most of all, God was asking Nehemiah to change and to accept change. Is our world so different? We live in a constantly changing society. These changes inevitably have personal repercussions.

Social patterns have changed. Work no longer offers the stability and security it once did. In order to maintain their families many people have to be prepared for dramatic changes at work, and sometimes, like Nehemiah, willing to make a move.

Modern technology makes familiar work patterns disappear, and different techniques have to be learned and new opportunities grasped.

For godly persons, change means opportunity; change means new horizons to explore; change means knowing that we can serve God wherever we are in whatever we do. This was Nehemiah's opportunity.

Here at Del Norte we, too, face change and new opportunities. Probably in a month or two the remodeling of our worship center will begin.

For years, even before I came, we have discussed it, had plans drawn up, had numerous meetings, and sometimes talked it to death. Now is the time.

Our loan application with the Church Finance Corporation of the Baptist Foundation of New Mexico has been approved. We expect the city to give the okay and a building permit issued.

At the lunch today, Martha Speakman of the Church Finance Corporation will talk to us about how we can maximize earnings on our individual savings, and CD's and investments through the Baptist Foundation, which will help with the interest rate on our loan.

You have attended many business meeting where plans and architectural drawings were shown on our screens. Today I'm going to try to show you what's going to happen in the worship center—to give you a better mental picture.

Stage: Let's start up front. Everything's going to be removed from about where the two support beams are all the way back to the baptistery wall.

A new platform of one level will be constructed out to about even with those support beams and back to the baptistery wall. There will be a straight wall on either side. The platform will not be carpeted.

Steps up to the platform will run all the way across the front. The northeast door into the WC will be about even with the support beam. There will also be doors on either side for the choir.

On the west side, because of code, will be a handicap accessible ramp. It will be where the little hallway is to enter the northwest WC.

The baptismal remains where it is. The old narrow steps leading to the dressing rooms will be removed for the enlarging of the platform. Entry to the rooms will now be from the second floor.

The height of the baptistery opening will be lowered about 3 feet. Above the opening will hang a 7' by 9' screen which will utilize rear-screen capabilities—the projector will be behind it. The two screens and hanging projectors will be removed.

Main Auditorium: All of the present lighting will change. All this lighting will disappear. In their place will be indirect lighting and LED lights, which will use less electricity than our present lights. The indirect lights will be hidden by what we are calling “clouds.”

These “clouds” (on screen) will appear to float above, not a solid layer, but with spaces in between. You will still be able to see the ceiling.

The soffits on each side where the fluorescent lights hang will be removed. This will make the room appear to be larger.

Our new heating and A/C units will be mounted on the roof. The main ducts will proceed down each side of the room closer up by the ceiling

The ducts will be exposed but not noticeable because they will be obscured by the “clouds.” The clouds will have slits in them that smaller, hidden ducts will service, to allow the heating and cooling to better circulate in the room.

The overhang at the rear of the room will be removed along with the support posts and large cross beam.

A small sound platform will be constructed off the second floor with multiple capabilities including being able to dim all the lights as needed, and control all our new audio and visual capabilities. Included in the new audio will be devices for hearing impaired.

All the wiring, plug-ins, conduit and so on will be installed in the new stage area and run back to the sound platform. These will all be hidden from our view.

The two small corner doors in the rear of the WC will be closed off. The double doors on the South (rear) and West (side) will remain but will be replaced by new modern doors.

New carpeting will cover the floor except for the platform. It will be chosen at the right time.

Main Entrance: (on screen)

As you know, it is difficult to determine the main entrance of our building. When you enter our building from whatever door you come in, the worship center is difficult for visitors to find. This remodel hopes to change that.

A new main entrance will be created on the east side very close to where the L of the building is and encompassing the south double doors on the patio.

The entrance will be a beautiful addition facing the northeast corner—almost directly facing our new sign. The entrance will access the WC just in front of the present sound booth.

It will also have a stairway to the second floor. The doors will be safety doors and the area will be designed to keep the outside cold and heat from entering the main room.

There will be 2 sidewalks from the parking lot leading to this entrance. One of the things we hope to accomplish is with this beautiful entry, our guests will know at a glance where the main entrance is.

A second thing is that we hope you will use this new entrance rather than the far east doors that lead into the preschool and children's wing.

It is dangerous for the children and workers to have so much congestion there. Of course, if you are using the elevator, that's still the entrance to use.

Application: I hope you have a better picture of what is getting ready to happen. Now there should be a big question on your minds:

When the remodel starts where will we gather to worship? We will not be able to meet in here. You are right, so where?

I started floating that very question to the staff several months ago and, more recently to the deacons. There were several ideas that came out of all that.

We considered trying to keep everything in this building—in other words, was there a S.S. department large enough for us to worship in. We measured, we looked, and we imagined the number of chairs needed.

We considered the pros and cons of utilizing the Conference Center to worship in. Though no solution was perfect, after a lot of considerations, my decision is that the Conference Center makes the most sense.

For those who need help getting back to their classrooms we will organize some cars and vans to bring you. It should be fun.

So this is where we are at. We haven't gotten a permit from the city yet, so nothing can be started until then.