

# Unwavering Resolve

Courage to Begin

Nehemiah 2

May 24, 2026

## Introduction

*(Title Slide)*

July 9, 1755. The banks of the Monongahela River.

A twenty-three-year-old officer, burning with fever, sits on a horse that is about to die under him. Around him, the world is coming apart. General Braddock is bleeding out in a wagon. Sixty-three of eighty-six British officers are dead or dying. Thirteen hundred red-coated regulars are breaking and running.

And the French marksmen on the ridge know exactly who to aim at: **\*\*the officers on horseback.\*\***

They shoot his horse out from under him. He climbs on another. They shoot that one too. Four musket balls tear through his coat. Men are falling on every side of him.

And not one bullet touches his body.

Three days later, he writes to his brother:

> **\*\*"By the all-powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation."\***

His name was George Washington. He didn't yet know he would lead an army, refuse a crown, or father a nation. On that day, he was just a sick young man on a dying horse, with four holes in his coat and no idea why he was still breathing.

**\*He\*** didn't know what God was doing. But God knew.

God's providence means that God is always actively involved with everything He created.

**(Slide)** Specifically, He:

- ***Keeps everything in existence (Preservation) — sustaining all things and the qualities He gave them.***

- *Works alongside everything (Concurrence) — partnering with created things in all they do.*
- *Guides everything toward His goals (Governance) — directing all things to accomplish His purposes.*

And he does all of this in a way that is consistent with human responsibility or culpability.

This truth about God's providence and man's responsibility is vividly portrayed throughout Nehemiah's account, but it's certainly the main point in our chapter today. As we look through this chapter (and certainly the rest of the story), we will see *(Slide) God's providence and man's responsibility come together to achieve God's purposes.*

## Body

### God's Providence (2:1–8)

Notice first of all God's providence all throughout the chapter. Preservation. Concurrence. Governance. All throughout the chapter, we can see God keeping, working, and guiding people and circumstances for His purposes.

It's comprehensive. God provides everything that is needed and positions both the King and Nehemiah in all the right ways to accomplish what He wanted to accomplish. God's providence extends to WHAT would happen and HOW it would happen.

Of all the dimensions of God's providence in this chapter, I want to zoom in on one that I think is the hardest for us to trust: **God's timing**. Look at v. 1 with me.

### Timing

*(Slide) During the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes ...*

You might remember from verse 1 of chapter 1 last week that it was the month of Chislev in which Nehemiah heard the news about Jerusalem's state and broke down in a tearful and repentant prayer. And I think we all know that feeling of conviction and resolve that Nehemiah felt in that moment. Usually that feeling is so substantial and powerful that we act on it immediately. But what we learn about Nehemiah is that he lived with that burden not for four minutes, or four weeks, but for four long months. For four months, he prayed, fasted, wept, and waited. *(Title Slide)*

Part of me feels like that this was a very QUICK four months for Nehemiah. Some 140 years removed from the events that led to the exile of his people, and working for the king of Persian, yet here was Nehemiah, still believing and trusting God. What's four months to a guy like that?

Yet part of me feels like Nehemiah would have found this to be a very LONG four months. Day in and day out, carrying this burden in the presence of the King who was partly responsible for their condition and able to do whatever he wished with Nehemiah's life. That daily grind of disappointment and anxiety would drive many of us crazy.

Regardless how he felt, four months was the timeframe in which God was operating to bring about His will for Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem.

Isn't it hard to trust God's timing? Many, if not all, of us would readily recognize that God knows better than we do when it comes to WHAT should happen. And many, if not all of us, would readily admit that we think we know better than God regarding WHEN those things should happen.

- "BB" are the initials on my red pin magnet that I began praying about last week. And to my initial delight, when I went out for a walk Monday morning, there BB was, walking his dog. "God's timing" I said to myself ... only to quickly discover that BB didn't have his hearing aids in and quickly (and politely) moved on into his house. "Still God's timing."

### Application

You see, congregation, we may pray for and envision having a gospel conversation this month. We may even lean in and make efforts to connect with those people. God's providence doesn't merely extend to WHAT takes place and HOW it takes place, but also to WHEN it takes place.

- Your discipleship search team would love to have brought the right candidate by now, but God's timing is better than our timing.
- Your staff is very eager for a preschool coordinator right now, but God's timing is better.
- Your master planning task force would love to have brought us a master plan by now, but God's timing is better than our timing.

Marriage. Children. Jobs. Health. Finances. Location. Sanctification. We all experience life's ups and downs. WHAT and HOW things happen to us are a part of God's providence, but also WHEN. God's providence governs clocks and calendars as much as He governs kings and their decrees.

## Man's Responsibility (2:9–16)

For all that God was doing in and through Nehemiah, it does not surprise to read all about what Nehemiah was doing for God. Verses 9-16 read like a journal or diary ... a relatively detailed account of the work Nehemiah gave himself too as a result of God opening the door with the King. It reminds me of the early chapters of a new book I'm reading called "American Patriarch" by Professor H. W. Brands at the University of Texas. It's the story of George Washington, and I have frequently marveled at the number of journals Washington kept even at an early age. Much of Nehemiah reads the same way, and there is much work recorded as a result.

My takeaway from this is that a biblical understanding of God's providence doesn't release us from involvement or effort. Rather, it compels us to lean into effort. To get involved. To do the work. God's providence and our responsibility are **friends**. And as we read through Nehemiah's story this summer, there's no missing the impact that God's providence has on our effort.

*(Slides as I say them)*

- ***It leads us to act with wisdom.*** In vv. 9-10, we read that Nehemiah traveled with official letters and an armed escort. He didn't mistake the King's authority or the divine favor of God as a license to be careless with his work. He works prudently and faithfully.
- ***It leads us to act with discernment and patience.*** In vv. 11-15, we read about Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem. He spent three days inspecting, viewing, and assessing conditions. The verbs in this passage carry a medical connotation. Like a patient and discerning doctor, Nehemiah diagnosed. He looked at things long enough to conclude what efforts would be necessary. And as you can see in v. 16, Nehemiah was also patient with his communication. He knew that even the best news required discretion.

So you see, Nehemiah models a tension that every Christian knows: God is providential (preserving, working, guiding) ... and because of that, he took action. Yet his actions are not that of a person who feels like everything is up to him. His actions are impacted by God's providence. Faith that truly trusts God's providence moves with diligence, humility, and dependence.

### Application

The odds are that we go through our lives imbalanced with regard to God's providence and our responsibilities. Either we are too passive, treating God's providence like a recliner that we put up our feet in and "rest our eyes" ... or we are too anxious, white-knuckling our way through our work as if everything depended on us. ***(Slide - recliner/white knuckle images)***

The recliner mentality sounds spiritual on the surface. "I'm just trusting God." But underneath, it's often a cover for passivity, fear, or even disobedience. We pray for our marriage but never pursue our spouse. We pray for our prodigal but never pick up the phone. We pray for revival but never share the gospel. The recliner Christian wants the harvest without the plow and the wall rebuilt without the rubble removed. And the danger is subtle but severe. Opportunities pass us by, callings go unanswered, and we slowly grow numb to the very promptings of the Spirit we claim to be waiting on.

Nehemiah could have stayed in the comfort of the palace and trusted God to "do something" about Jerusalem. Instead, he got up and rode 800 miles to do the work. **Faith doesn't recline. It responds.**

The white-knuckle mentality is the opposite error, but no less dangerous. It looks like devotion. Busy, driven, sacrificial. But underneath, it's often pride, fear, or doubt that God will come through unless we force the outcome ourselves. The white-knuckle Christian wakes up

exhausted and goes to bed anxious, gripped by the lie that "if it's going to get done, I have to do it." Over time, this breeds burnout, bitterness, and brokenness. It strains marriages, wears out leaders, and turns ministry into a performance rather than a partnership. Worst of all, it erodes our prayer lives, because deep down we've stopped believing we really need God to act.

Nehemiah could have stormed into Jerusalem with blueprints and barked orders. Instead, he prayed, he waited, he watched, and he worked, always as a man who knew the outcome rested in God's hands, not his own. **Faith doesn't white-knuckle. It walks in step with the One who is already at work.**

### Segue

But providence and responsibility are not the end of the story. They're the means to something far greater. Because the God who stirs hearts and opens doors and equips workers is the same God who guarantees the outcome. Nehemiah didn't ride to Jerusalem hoping things might work out. He rode there knowing that the God who started this work would finish it. And that brings us to our final point: God's victorious purpose.

## The God of Victorious Purpose (2:17–20)

Read vv. 17-20 with me.

***17 So I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned. Come, let's rebuild Jerusalem's wall, so that we will no longer be a disgrace."***

***18 I told them how the gracious hand of my God had been on me, and what the king had said to me.***

***They said, "Let's start rebuilding," and their hands were strengthened to do this good work.***

***19 When Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about this, they mocked and despised us, and said, "What is this you're doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"***

***20 I gave them this reply, "The God of the heavens is the one who will grant us success. We, his servants, will start building, but you have no share, right, or historic claim in Jerusalem."***

Notice in this passage that Nehemiah speaks the same truth regarding God's inevitable victory to two different audiences. The first audience is identified in verse 16. It's all the Jewish officials in the community who would soon be doing the work. And his message to them in v. 18 was about God AND human responsibility. The second audience is identified in v. 19. Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab were regional political leaders

surrounding Judah, each representing neighboring people groups who had grown quite comfortable with Jerusalem's weakness and saw a rebuilt city as a direct threat to their power, influence, and economic interests. Nehemiah's message for them in v. 20 is the same as it was for the first audience, just stated in terms that they needed to hear. *(same slide as currently up).*

***“The God of the heavens is the one who will grant us success. We, his servants, will start building, but you have no share, right, or historic claim in Jerusalem.”***

***To his people, Nehemiah's message was an invitation: 'God is with us, so let's build.' To his enemies, the same truth became a warning: 'God is with us, so you cannot stop us.'***

This will be something that Nehemiah says to himself, to his people, and to his enemies over and over again. As God's providence and human responsibility play out through this story, Nehemiah and his people will have ample reason to throw in the towel and succumb to their opposition. But they won't. They knew that the same God who moved the king's heart, inspired Nehemiah's action, and united them for the work would ensure His promise succeeded. The walls around Jerusalem will rise because His covenant love stands firm.

#### Application

If you are here today as a believer, weary from the recliner or worn out from the white-knuckle, hear this: *(Slide) You serve a God who finishes what He starts.* The walls in your life that He has called you to build, whether in your marriage, your parenting, your ministry, your witness ... **they will rise.** Not because you are strong enough, but because His covenant love stands firm. The same hand that was gracious on Nehemiah is graciously on you.

The same is true for Beech Haven.

- There is work to be done in our preschool hallway every Sunday at 9:30. Fifteen dedicated leaders are needed. We are praying for God to bring His people, and we are asking the congregation to rise up and serve. God's gracious hand is on us, and He will provide.
- There is work to be done in our life groups and discipleship groups. Group leaders are needed. Teachers are needed. We are praying for God to bring His people, and we are asking the congregation to rise up and serve. God's gracious hand is on us, and He will provide.
- There is work to be done with our master planning. Clarity is needed. Wisdom is needed. We are praying for God to bring these things and more, and we are humbly doing the work required. God's gracious hand is on us, and He will provide.

## Conclusion/Invitation

Of course, it is impossible to read and study this passage today, alongside these great truths related to God's providence, human responsibility, and God's victory, and not think of Jesus.

*(Slide) The God who moved a pagan king's heart for the sake of a broken city is the same God who moved heaven and earth for the sake of broken sinners like you and me.*

God's providence sent Him at just the right time, in the fullness of time, not a month too early and not a day too late.

Human responsibility was fully embraced as He obeyed His Father perfectly, did the work no one else could do, and set His face toward Jerusalem.

And God's victorious purpose was accomplished when He cried out from the cross, "It is finished," and three days later walked out of the tomb, having rebuilt what we could never rebuild on our own.

So if you are here today and you have never trusted Jesus, hear this good news: ***the same God whose providence guided Nehemiah is the God who has been guiding your story to this very moment.*** He is inviting you, right now, to stop trying to rebuild your own life from the rubble and to trust in the One who already rebuilt it for you.