

"100 to 1"

Nehemiah was able to accomplish in only fifty-two days what others had failed to accomplish in over one hundred years – the repairing and rebuilding of the wall surrounding Jerusalem.

It was sparked by a passion and it was fueled by prayer.

The Jewish people had been taken into captivity in Babylon for seventy years. In the year 530BC the power of the Babylonian Empire was overthrown by the Persians. The king of Persia encouraged Jews to return to the city of Jerusalem and rebuild it's Temple and it's walls.

Immediately about fifty-thousand of them did return. Discouraged by the immensity of the task, and by local opposition, they abandoned the work after only laying the foundation for their Temple.

About sixteen years later God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who challenged the people to get back to work. The Jews completed their Temple, some twenty years after their first arrival.

Sixty more years passed by and another group of Jews returned led by Ezra. He set about reestablishing the spiritual life of the returnees. He, too, faced opposition. Although Ezra had great spiritual success among the people, the rebuilding of the city was still halted.

Ninety years after the first Jews returned from Babylon and fourteen years after Ezra's return the Lord raised-up Nehemiah and sent him to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. **He would accomplish in only fifty-two days what had not been done for nearly one hundred years!**

It was sparked by a passion.

Nehemiah 1:1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel,
Nehemiah 1:2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 1:3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

Nehemiah 1:4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

When you compare the date given in verse one with the date given at the beginning of chapter two, you find that Nehemiah prayed like this for about **one hundred days straight!**

He was deeply affected. His life was now all about praying for Jerusalem. On-and-off, for one hundred days, he wept... he mourned... and he fasted. He went to work; but he continued to weep, mourn, and fast. Jerusalem was what he thought about; it consumed him. It even affected the way he looked to others.

We tend to call this sort of experience a "burden." You've heard Christians talk like that, saying they have a "burden" for missions, or for the homeless, or for some other ministry.

The problem is that we think of the word "burden" as something that hinders or halts our progress. It has a decidedly negative connotation.

In the Bible a "burden" is something that initiates activity. It gets you going. Some of the Old Testament prophets call their messages "the burden of the Lord," to indicate it is something that consumes their heart and mind.

We might use the word *passion* instead. If I described someone as being passionate about something, you'd get the idea they were focused on it, excited about it.

When a spiritual passion is sparked, it needs to be fueled by prayer. Nehemiah began to pray. He adopted an attitude of prayer that lasted one hundred days.

Notice what God did along the way. It's what He always does.

Nehemiah 2:1 And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.

Nehemiah 2:2 Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid,

Nehemiah 2:3 and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"

Nehemiah 2:4 Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

Not a good idea to be sad on the job if you served the king of Persia!

Nehemiah prayed for one hundred days. Now he prayed for just a few brief seconds.

Nehemiah 2:5 And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."

Wow! Where did that come from? It seems unexpected.

Nehemiah served in the court of the king. He was the king's cupbearer. The king's cupbearer was an important royal position. The cupbearer poured the wine for the king, making sure it was safe to drink and not poisoned. When the king was not dining, the cupbearer's duties included deciding who could see the king. He was a trusted person with remarkable access to the throne.

It was a high and respected office. It had perks. He was wealthy. He was comfortable. He lived in ease and luxury and had great influence. He had never even been to Jerusalem.

If I were giving this message a title it might be *"100 to 1."* 100 days of praying prepared 1 man for the job.

When it was during those hundred days he first began to sense that he might be part of the answer to his prayers we're not told. But somewhere along the line he began to understand that God works through men and that God could and would work through him.

E. M. Bounds has written several small classic books on prayer. In almost every paragraph you'll find a sentence worth quoting. One of my favorites is, "Man is looking for better methods. God is looking for better men. Men are God's methods."

You see this over and over again in your study of the Bible.

- When Israel cried out to God for deliverance from the cruel slavery of Egypt, God heard their cry. He saw to it that a baby was born. Forty years later that baby, now a grown man, a prince of Egypt, still wasn't ready. He required forty more years of training in the wilderness.
- Later in their history Israel wanted a king so they could be like the other nations. That was man's method. The king they got, Saul, turned out to be an awful choice. Mean time God was looking down upon the house of Jesse and thinking about its youngest son, David, who would grow to be a shepherd. When the time came God had Samuel anoint the boy king. It would be at least ten years before David would become king over the southern tribes, seven additional years until he united the kingdom.

Nehemiah makes that list. I wonder if in his wildest imagination on day one he thought that in a mere one hundred days he'd play the one returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the wall?

Do you realize if not for his praying and then the change it wrought in his heart we never would have heard of Nehemiah? He would have lived a successful life, retired well, died in the lap of luxury.

Sounds like the American dream! Is that anything to get excited about? To be passionate about? Not if there's something to build for God.

Nehemiah prayed for one hundred days. God would answer Nehemiah by sending him to Jerusalem. As he prayed, Nehemiah realized that he was the answer to his own prayers!

Not always, but I think more often than you realize – **You** are the answer to what you are praying for.

One obstacle to seeing ourselves as the answer to prayer is that we think ourselves unqualified.

How qualified was a cupbearer to lead a massive construction project?

He was as qualified as you are! God wants to use you, to send you, to accomplish His purposes. He has a plan for your life, to use you to help others according to the principles, precepts, and promises revealed in the Word of God.

Part of my prayer this week is that all of us return to or recognize a spiritual passion and position ourselves to be a part of fulfilling it as unto the Lord.

