

SAINT & STATESMAN

NEHEMIAH 2:4-8 | Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it." ⁶ And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. ⁷ And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

Before you ask a king, ask God. Nehemiah's silent prayer to God in verse 4 synergises with his spoken request to the king in verse 5: *Send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.* The king's response opens a door on the future: *How long will you be gone and when will you return?*

It all seems too easy. It's no small matter for a Persian king to reverse an official decree (EZRA 4:21). But Artaxerxes does so without hesitation. His affection for his loyal and trusted cupbearer is a human factor. But the divine factor is paramount and decisive. Everything in Nehemiah's career turns on God's answers to his prayers. Before approaching the high king of Persia, he finds favour with the High King of Heaven through many days of prayer and fasting, in humility and brokenness.

Brokenness before God begets boldness before man. Artaxerxes was a king of kings. He ruled over many kingdoms stretching from India to Egypt, from the Black Sea to the Arabian Sea. And yet Nehemiah petitions him with a

boldness that borders on brashness. He asks for a blank cheque and gets it! A royal commission to rebuild Jerusalem? Granted. Official letters for safe passage to Judah? That too. Timber to rebuild the temple fortress, the city walls, and Nehemiah's residence? Done deal.

Persian cupbearers were not mere winetasters. They were high-level government officials with executive powers and administrative duties (TOBIT 1:22). Nehemiah exhibits qualities of both Saint and Statesman. He strikes the balance between Divine Providence and human responsibility. His confidence flows from persistent prayer as well as from prudent planning. He's not too heavenly-minded to tap into the human channels that God will use. Nor is he tongue-tied when the critical moment arrives. He plainly states what he needs and fixes a timeline. *And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me* (:5-8).

We cannot control the winds of heaven or the currents of the ocean. But God gives each of us the power and the obligation to affect the events of our time—if we have the faith to pray and the courage to act. Nehemiah has both. Through faith and courage, he plays his part on the stage of history. Will we?

WALL OF DUTY

■ Acknowledge God. He appointed Saints and Statesmen like Nehemiah who worked up-close with Singapore's founding fathers and nation-builders of the Pioneer Generation. Give thanks to God for each of these who served with distinction on their watch. Plus anonymous others who played their part on the stage of our nation's history.

■ Seek God. He holds Singapore in his hands. We have never been this way before. We face a serious threat of Disease X, a not-yet-known disease that could cause a future epidemic more deadly than Covid-19 (THE STRAITS TIMES, 4 SEP 2020, 11 DEC 2020). But do not fear. God is with us and for us. Ask him to handpick Nehemiah Saints and Statesmen to serve alongside the movers and shakers in our nation's highest office:

- God-fearers who earn the confidence, trust, and respect of those above them, around them, and below them—by their exceptional character, competence, and spirit of excellence.

- God-lovers who regard Singapore a Home worth dying for. Dreamers and doers driven by a clarity of purpose and a deep sense of duty. Noble. Selfless!

- God-seekers who stand in the council of the Lord (JER 23:18). They pay attention to his word in season. They hear his marching orders. They see his blueprint. They trek his timeline. They download his wisdom. They fulfil his good, pleasing, and perfect will for Singapore.

- God-seers who discern the times and know exactly what Singapore ought to do in order to outwit threats beyond the horizon. Sharp thinkers, high-calibre strategists, future-ready chiefs of ops who enjoy favour with God and favour with man.

- Imagine. Our 4G Team surrounded by such Saints and Statesmen. Ask God to exceed our expectations. *For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him* (2 CHRON 16:9).

- Praise God. He orchestrates Christian advocacy in the public square. We see a growing interest to preserve Singapore's conservative values and to defend our moral future. Ask God to grant us brokenness in spirit and boldness in intercession. That we will always privately engage the High King of Heaven before publicly engaging rulers on earth. Ask God to bestow on every Christian advocate the gift of faith: Faith in who God is. Faith in what he does. Faith that pleases God (HEB 11:6). Faith that moves mountains (MATT 17:20). Faith that shapes verdicts. Faith that makes history. *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will* (PROV 21:1).