

## WHAT'S YOUR BHAG?

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**Scripture:** Nehemiah

We are going to look at different parts of the book of Nehemiah. Let's start with ch. 1:2

*<sup>2</sup>Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."*

*<sup>4</sup>When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I was fasting and praying before the God heaven.*

I want to pause there for a minute and say this: Every now and then, God calls us to do something that is big, something that is way beyond our abilities, our capacity, our resources, our own strength, our own intelligence. And it seems to me like this was something that God placed on Nehemiah. It says that when he heard, he sat down and he wept and mourned for days. "And I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven." Then it goes on to give us an account of his prayer and how he prayed asking forgiveness for himself, for the nation, reminding God of His promises and all of that. Then that chapter ends by telling us who he was: "Now I was the cupbearer to the king." That was his job.

*<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. <sup>2</sup>So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid. <sup>3</sup> I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" <sup>4</sup>Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup>I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." Remember who this man is – he's the cupbearer to the king.*

Jim Collins in a book that he wrote many years ago, which has become almost a classic, "Built to Last" says that there is what he calls a BHAG that must drive us to do things that are way beyond our capabilities. The BHAG is an acronym that stands for 'Big Hairy Audacious Goal.' He says that must drive us when we have a project that is way beyond us, but which we believe is ours to accomplish. And he talked about different companies that they had looked at that had lasted – they all had BHAGs. He also references that in 1952, Boeing company had some of the engineers went to the management and said, "We want to build commercial jets. We feel that we ought to be in that space." Now Boeing till then, only built military places – the B-17, the B-29, and the B-52, huge aircraft. Four-fifths of their business came from the military, but these engineers were saying, "We need to get these jet engines into the commercial space." Their rival, Douglas Aircraft at that time, had said that for commercial aircraft, the best aircraft are the ones that are propeller-driven, and that wasn't going to change in the commercial space. To be able to do this, they needed a good workforce. This was 1952. Just years before, they had to prune their workforce from 50,000 employees to 7,500 employees. And it was going to cost them three-fourths of their budget, the money that they had as a company to get this done.

Boeing accepted this as their BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) and the first aircraft Boeing 707 rolled out. From then on, all those wonderful Boeing 700 series. And so it entered a commercial workspace with that. Few engineers felt that this was what this company, primarily into military aircraft, needed to do. A BHAG is very clear as to what one needs to do. It's very compelling; can't get rid of it. It always has a focal point of effort and a team that needs to come around to make this happen. It also has a clear finish line that is going to end at such and such a time. This is how we are going to end it. Remember the moon mission! We are going to send a man to the moon.

Nehemiah told the king: I want to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and he was a cupbearer to the king.

Nehemiah 6:15 *So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month of Elul, in fifty-two days.* In fifty-two days, they completed the wall around Jerusalem with its gates. Remember that many had tried before this. Zerubbabel led the exiles back into Jerusalem. They started building but had a lot of opposition; so they let it go. Ezra also writes about this in 467 BC – there was a group that started to build this wall; again, with the opposition, they let it go. Then in 444 BC, thirteen years later, Nehemiah gets the call to rebuild the walls and he completed it, this cupbearer to the king.

Do you have a BHAG that God has placed upon you – something that you haven't been able to shake, something that you know is God-given, something that you also know is impossible for you to do by yourself? Has it seen the light of day? Or is it on a shelf somewhere? I want to invite you to take it down and keep it in front of you. Look at the way Nehemiah achieved this goal in fifty-two days. Then look at this goal that you have, this BHAG, and maybe it's going to lead you to say: Lord, I'm going to do this.

Let's look at how Nehemiah got to finish this in fifty-two days.

**1. He fasted and prayed.** I think it was to make very sure that this was something that God was laying upon his heart. Not only did this news break his heart, it crippled him. He was devastated by it. But being devastated by something, and being led to go and do something about it, are two entirely different things. There are many things that break our hearts but it doesn't move us to do something about it. Nehemiah found that God broke his heart for this task and then told him what He wanted him to do about it. Go and rebuild it. He prayed! The number of times that he prays! At every junction he prays.

2:4 *Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven and then I answered.*

Prayer, prayer, prayer! Constantly. We see that to be able to take a BHAG and get it done, we need to undergird it with prayer and fasting; to be constantly in communion with God who has placed that upon our hearts.

**2. He had a plan.** He didn't just say: This is what I think I should do, and then go and talk to the king. No! In ch. 2 it says: *He went to the king and the king said to him, "Why is your face sad?" He replied, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs lies desolate?" So the king says, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven and I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."*

That was his plan. I'm going. I want to go; will you send me?

**Then he got letters from the king.** *And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the river, so that they will allow me to pass through until I come to Judah."* He made sure that he also had protection along the journey. But he did something

else. His plan included material, as well. he got the timber to make the beams for the gates in Jerusalem.

v. 8<sup>8</sup>“and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, so that he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city, and for the house to which I will go.” And the king granted them to me.

He had a plan. The king’s questions to him: How long will your journey be? when will you return” and so on. He had his answers. He had a plan in place. That’s so important because if you don’t take a piece of paper and write down the things that are in your mind on how to do something, it will just play havoc in your mind. It will play havoc in your mind. It will keep going on and on, on a loop and all it will do is drain you of your energy.

### **3. He did due diligence.**

2:13-15 <sup>13</sup>So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon’s Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. <sup>14</sup>Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King’s Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. <sup>15</sup>So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned.

He made sure that he examined the terrain. He made sure that he went around and saw exactly what the condition of the walls was. He was able to do due diligence. And that’s so important. As we look at the things that God is laying on our hearts, that we look at the things that God has asked us to do. Do the work, find out what we can about it, where it is in its present moment and where it needs to go.

### **4. He motivates the people, or he starts building a team.**

<sup>17</sup>Then I said to them (i.e. he is talking to the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work which we find in v. 16), “You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a disgrace or a reproach.” <sup>18</sup>I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king’s words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, “Let us arise and build.” So they put their hands to the good work.”

He talks to the people; he knows that he cannot accomplish this by himself, and so he builds the team. He gets people around him, and then he starts by motivating them, giving them a reason why they should do this work. And ‘why’ is such an important work in getting the task done. The ‘why’ here was: Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we may no longer be a disgrace or a reproach. Why was it a disgrace? Because in those times, if you didn’t have a wall surrounding your city, it communicated to people all around you that you were without leadership that you didn’t really have people in charge, that you were in desolation, because the wall was the first line of defense against the enemy. If you didn’t have the wall, it just allowed people to trample all over you. It was a disgrace to live in that kind of a city. And he says, “That’s where we are living. We, children of Yahweh, we live in disgrace because the wall has not been rebuilt.”

Then he challenges them and he says: Let’s rise and build this temple! And they are with him. He’s got the people. Then they said, “Let us arise and build.” So they put their hands to the good work. He’s ready to start this work that God has given and he was a cupbearer to the king. But look what he has achieved till now. He’s managed safe passage to Jerusalem. He’s brought timber for the gates; he’s looked at the place. He’s seen what needs to be done. He’s built a team of people around him and then he got them motivated to join him in this mission.

**5. He deals with the naysayers.** The negative people. And there are always negative people around, people who will look at what you're trying to do and say: NO, it can't be done. That's too big for you. You'll never achieve it. You don't have the wherewithal, whatever. And he had his fair share.

2:19 <sup>19</sup>*But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"* <sup>20</sup>*So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will make us successful; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right, or memorial in Jerusalem."*

The God of heaven will give success! By ourselves we are incapable even with this great team that I have. But to those people who were trying to pull him down, he said: Listen, it's not we who are going to establish this. It is the God of heaven who will make this successful. And beloved, God has always got to be in the mix in any of the things that we do. And here's the thing: when we do things, God is in the midst as long as we are doing the things in the right way. God is light and in Him there is no darkness. When we want to establish something, everything that we do has to be about God, only then God can work. God cannot work in the midst of darkness, so we do things in an upright manner, full of integrity. That's the space that God inhabits. The God of heaven will give us success.

#### **His Team:**

This is the workforce that he has collected to build the wall. In ch. 3, if you go through that list, you will find that he has officials, he's got the daughters of some of the people, he's got priests, perfumers, goldsmiths. But you keep reading, trying to find out if there was a mason in his list. There must be a mason if he's going to build a wall. But no! No mason! Long before it became something that we use in the corporate world, God Himself knew that you can hire for attitude and train for skills. Get people who have a similar vision and then they will work. You can train them, and under God's anointing, they will do the work. No masons in the list. No stone layers. They are just people who bought into the vision and said, "We'll do it." That was his workforce.

#### **He defied opposition:**

There's always going to be people who will oppose you, who will confront you and say, "You cannot do it." But he defied that.

4:2 *He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria (i.e. Sanballat) and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore the temple for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish it in a day? Can they revive the stones from the heaps of rubble, even the burned ones?"*

Then 4:3. This is what they thought of the wall that they were building. <sup>3</sup>*They said, "Even what they are building – if a fox should jump on it, it would break their stone wall down!"*

They devised a plan to stop this work, and yet, Nehemiah also had a plan. He knew how to withstand this kind of opposition.

4:15-16 *And it happened when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. And it came about from that day on that half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah.*

Can you imagine it? They are building the wall and half the people are standing in front with spears and shields to be able to withstand any attack that comes, while the people behind were building.

<sup>18</sup>*As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me to signal that, if there was an attack, everyone should move to where the sound of the trumpet was, so that they could withstand the attack.*

They were ready and they were so committed to what God had placed upon them. And the wall was finished in fifty-two days! In record time. "I will need to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem" was Nehemiah's Big Hairy Audacious Goal. God-given, God-inspired, and then we find that God fueled His strength, His wisdom into it so that it stood tall.

I want to ask you beloved, that goal, that plan of God that you brought out at the beginning of this sermon, what does it need to see the light of day? What does it need for it to be completed? At what stage is it? Have you done anything about it? Did you start and then just got discouraged along the way? Is that where you are? And yet, you know in your heart that God hasn't given up on that goal, on that BHAG that He placed on your heart. He is still waiting for you to say, "Yes Lord, I'll do it. This is way beyond me, but I'll do it, Lord.

I know a gentleman who was in government service throughout his life, retired at the age of 58 or 60, and then God placed a mission on him that that was to start a school for children of those who are serving God, because they didn't have a place to go. So, he took his money, and he went and started a school for these children. Today it is a flourishing school with 1500 children. His BHAG, and today 1500 children and an immense number have been touched by it.

God's BHAG, God's plan that He places on you always touches the kingdom. It's not just for you. It's a work that He places on your heart because He knows you are capable of doing it. If He's given it to you, you can do it. But He knows that once it's done, it will bless many people. And that is God's heart. So I wonder whether this goal that you have front and center in your hand, whether God is still knocking at your heart's door and saying: When are you going to start it? when are you going to put down a plan? When are you going to fast and pray, when are you going to restart this? We're going to finish this together because I am in the midst of it, but you've got to get up and start the job.

He was a cupbearer to the king. But God placed a huge BHAG on him on him and in fifty-two days it was done.

God has placed on some of us here, some things that He is waiting for us to do. And what you need to know, beloved., is that when God does that:

- He knows that it can be accomplished, or else He wouldn't have put it on your heart.
- He knows that He will never let you do it by yourself, that His Spirit will be there empowering you to get it done.

What's your BHAG? My prayer is that you will either dust it off and do something about it or pick it up again and finish it. But God waits to be a part of it. the God of Jacob will give you success.

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