

## Mr. Nehemiah Goes to Jerusalem

The classic movie "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" is a 1939 drama about American government. In the story, the governor of an unnamed state, Hubert "Happy" Hopper, has to pick a replacement to fill the unexpired term of a deceased Senator. His corrupt political boss, Jim Taylor, pressures Hopper to choose his handpicked stooge, while popular committees want a reformer. The governor's children want him to select Jefferson Smith (played by actor Jimmy Stewart), the head of the Boy Rangers. Smith is taken under the wing of the publicly esteemed, but secretly crooked, Senator Joseph Paine, whom he admires because he was his late father's oldest and best friend. The press in Washington quickly vilifies Smith as being a bumpkin, having no business in Washington. Paine, to keep Smith busy, suggests he propose a bill. Through Paine, the Taylor Machine accuses Smith of trying to profit from his bill by producing fraudulent evidence that Smith owns the land and would greatly profit from any sale. When Smith is given the opportunity to defend himself, he is too shocked by Paine's betrayal and runs away. However, his cynical aide and secretary Clarissa Saunders has come to believe in him and talks him into launching a filibuster on the Senate floor just before the vote to expel him. While Smith talks, his constituents try to rally around him, but the entrenched opposition is too powerful and all attempts are crushed.

Although all hope seems lost, the senators begin to pay attention despite Smith's utter exhaustion and the hoarseness of his voice. Paine has one last card up his sleeve. He brings in bins of letters and telegrams from Smith's home state from people demanding his expulsion. Nearly broken by the news, Smith finds a small ray of hope in a friendly smile from the President of the Senate. Smith's filibuster is emblematic of the belief in the difference that one individual can make.

There is a story in the Bible that is similar. It is found in the book of Nehemiah. Let us look at a paraphrase of chapter two:

"And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, *that wine was before him*: and **Nehemiah** took up the wine, and gave *it* unto the king. Now I had not been *beforetime* sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why *is* thy countenance sad, seeing thou *art* not sick? this *is* nothing *else* but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which *appertained* to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard *of it*, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I *any* man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither *was there any* beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but *there was* no place for the beast *that was* under me to pass. 15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told *it* to the

Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for *this* good *work*. But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard *it*, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What *is* this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem."

The Book of Nehemiah records that a great work was accomplished- scandal and corruption were removed; the city's government was established with character and the walls to protect the city were rebuilt.

One individual stood for what was right. He took a risk and faced the challenges. The result was good for an entire nation!

Mr. Smith and Mr. Nehemiah went to their city and brought hope and change...will you?