


QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH LYNN AUSTIN
1. What was it about Nehemiah's character that inspired you to write this novel?

Nehemiah had an established career in the most powerful government on earth at the time, yet he willingly laid it aside to do the work that he felt God calling him to do. As soon as he became aware that Jerusalem was in a vulnerable position without protective walls, he began to pray and ask God what he could do. His ability to seamlessly combine action and prayer amazes me.

2. How did his position as cupbearer to the Persian king equip him for the task God gave him?

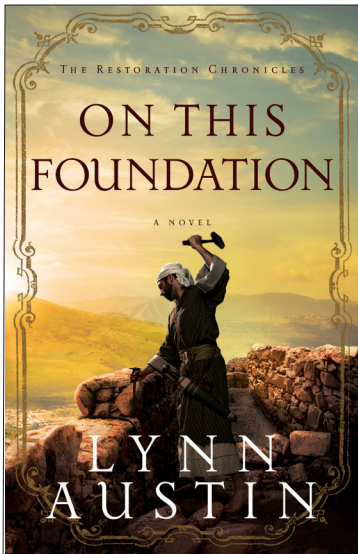
I learned from my research that Nehemiah's job as cupbearer was similar to the job of a secret service agent in charge of all aspects of presidential security. Persia had quite a history of palace intrigue and assassinations, so Nehemiah would have had a crucial task to do. When he learned that Jerusalem and God's holy temple weren't secure from their enemies, I'm guessing that it was his security mindset and experience that compelled him to do something about it. His daily work among Persia's leaders would have provided models of effective (and ineffective) leadership and given him access to the king to request his support.

3. How did the people, in such a short time, accomplish the enormous task of rebuilding a wall that had been nothing but rubble for more than 100 years—while facing enemy opposition, no less?

I believe Nehemiah must have been a truly compelling leader to inspire so many people to take action and get nearly 100 percent participation in his project. Once he gained the people's support, he organized his project brilliantly, dividing the work into manageable sections and delegating a leader to oversee the work in each one. The wall was completed in 52 days, an example of what can be done when people work together in harmony. Nehemiah was so convinced that God had directed him to do this work that he was able to pray and trust God for protection from his enemies—while also arming his men with swords and spears. Again, his example of combining action and prayer is inspiring.

4. You have women working alongside men to rebuild the wall. Are you imposing modern-day ideas by adding something that would have been unacceptable in Nehemiah's day?

Not at all. The Bible lists the names of all the builders of the wall in the third chapter of Nehemiah. In verse 12 it says: "Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters." When I read that, I knew I had to tell these remarkable women's stories.


On This Foundation

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5. What relevance does Nehemiah's story have for us as Christ's body and as individuals?

Nehemiah not only faced the daunting prospects of rebuilding the wall and combatting his enemies, he also faced crippling poverty and social injustice in his nation due to a prolonged drought. All of the actions he took to combat this injustice sprang from a thorough knowledge of God's mercy and of His Word. We would do well to apply Jesus' teachings and His example to the social and economic problems we face today. And we could use leaders who inspire us to pray and take action the way Nehemiah did.

6. Regarding biblical fiction in general, what would you say to someone who worried that fictional accounts of Bible stories might be reading too much into Scripture or even distorting it?

I would tell them that I understand their concern and assure them that I do extensive research before I begin writing. My goal is to stay as close to the scriptural text as possible and not add to it, but merely to fill in some of the historical and cultural background. I hope that my novels will bring the Bible to life and not only help readers visualize the stories, but also to see biblical characters as real flesh-and-blood people. I don't want to replace Scripture with a novel, but to draw readers back to the Bible so they will read it for themselves and maybe understand it a bit better.