

Nehemiah 2:1-9 | Kevin Stiles

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[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Good morning.

Good morning. All right. All of you stay awake this morning. So thanks for the music. That was great. Appreciate it.

We're in Nehemiah chapter 2. If you want to turn there. We've been doing it, Wally? Good. You'll give us a summary at the end.

So, all right. Anybody tired this morning? Anybody worn out? Yes. I can feel with you guys. If you're not tired out, I'll let you have my granddaughter for four days.

That'll wear you out. I am so thankful, though, for my daughter, Julia, and for my niece, Abby. And, you know, I don't think I would have made it four days with Jill and Anna being gone.

[1 : 24] Plus, speaking today. I spoke yesterday at a banquet over in Illinois. And so, it was quite a four days here.

So, I'm waiting for my wife to get here. We can hand off. But we're looking at a really nice portion of scripture this morning.

First eight verses. And I'm excited about what the Lord has here. And hopefully you'll be able to say the same at the end of this morning.

But before we start, oh, all right. Now she can. I didn't say anything bad, I hope, while she was gone. So, I got back from the Ozark.

Where else can nine to 15 sister-in-laws get together? And I don't know if they had any big arguments or not.

[2 : 20] But just to get together for four days. That's a remarkable thing. That's a great testimony. But before we start, the only thing etched in stone is when you're born.

And then when you die, they'll etch that probably in stone, too. And so, I want to just share with you before we start that if any of you ever want to share come and meet with the leaders, we really welcome that.

And there's some people that have taken it up. We meet every other Tuesday. And there have been people that have met with us and share what's on their heart, where they're heading, where they're asking for prayer, asking for wisdom.

And we try to give that to them. And Jeffrey, hopefully he can attest that we don't try to scare people off. And we try to hopefully glean some things as people want to meet with us as well.

But it really does come down to if you want to do that, just come and ask David, John, Tom, or myself. We'd love to be able to sit down before or during our time to get together every other Tuesday and see where you're at with the Lord.

[3 : 38] But one of the things that I just want to share, starting at the new year, where we're going to change our schedule. Like I said, nothing's etched in stone except your birth and when you die.

But we're going to be changing our format. We're going to have the Lord's Supper first, Sunday school, and then the Bible hour. And so we've gotten feedback.

We've heard from people. We've, you know, and there's reasons on why we've done this. It wasn't just like last week we decided to do this. But we pray that we've had the schedule that we've had now, about four years.

And so we're praying that this could maybe maximize a little bit more on the Lord's Supper. Still keep the Sunday school because we still need, we like that kind of format and teaching with one another.

And then just for when guests come, they can enjoy the time with us here at 11 o'clock. So we don't have the exact times etched yet.

[4 : 46] We're still hammering those out. But we're looking at starting at January 6th, first Sunday of January. So just swapping things around and praying that, you know what, Lord, may this be pleasing to you.

May we be able to maximize some things more and accomplish what our goals might be. So can I have breakfast at the end of the day? Ed, we've got to talk to you, buddy.

See what time you can come in. I thought we'd have it at the end of the day since we're flipping it around. You know what? Nothing's etched and scone except your birth and when you die.

And taxes, I guess. So, with that in mind, turn to Nehemiah chapter 2.

Nehemiah chapter 2. David gave us our new schedule about a month ago, I think it was. And I've been going through, I was in Esther at the time.

[5 : 52] I picked like three spots in the Bible that I read each day or try to read each day. And at that time, I was in Ezra. And there was a little phrase in there that I came across, and I'll tell you that later on.

I said, that is really interesting. I never saw that before. As far as thinking about possible its meaning and what impact. And so, I was doing a little cross-referencing.

And I saw it right here in this chapter as well. It's only mentioned, I think, six times. Four times in Ezra and twice in Nehemiah. So, I was like, hmm, I'm glad I got that portion.

Plus, I've always really enjoyed this portion, chapter 2, 1 through 9. We're really just going to go through verse 8, though. So, whoever has next week, you might want to pick up on 9. But there's three things I want us to see.

But the question this morning is, does God answer prayer? Or maybe if you want to make it more personal, does God answer your prayer? Or does God answer my prayer? So, that's what I want us to think about today.

[7 : 06] Does God answer prayer? At the end, we're going to see a little clip from a Bible teacher on that very question. Does God answer prayer? We're going to see Nehemiah here.

That God answered Nehemiah's prayer in an unusual way. Maybe not in the way Nehemiah was expecting it to happen. Let's go ahead, though, and read this portion of Scripture.

In verse 1, it says, And it came about in the month Nisan, in the 20th 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.

So, the king said to me, Why is your face sad, though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart. And I was very much afraid. And I said to the king, Let the king live forever.

Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my father's tombs, lies desolate, and its gates have been consumed by fire? Then the king said to me, What would you request?

[8 : 06] 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 father's tombs, that I may rebuild it. Then the king said to me, The queen sitting beside him, How long will your journey be, and when will you return?

So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. 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, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah.

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 which is by the temple, for the wall of the city, and for the house to which I go.

And the king granted them to me, because the good hand of my God was on me. Father, this morning as we spend a little time in your word here, may it come to life. May we be able to wholeheartedly leave here and say, Yes, God answers prayer.

In fact, God answers my prayer. Maybe not in the way we think. Maybe not even the way we wish. But Lord, you're not too big.

[9 : 13] We're not too small for you. We don't have to think of you as someone way out in the galaxy. This will be useless to try to pray to you. But we can know that we serve a great God.

And you love us. And you've demonstrated that to us. So help the speaker to be out of the way. May your word come to life. Amen. Amen. So let me ask you, what's the longest time you've ever prayed for something?

You know what? I think a lot of people say, You know what? I've prayed about this situation a long time. And then when you get down asking some questions, you find out somebody's prayed maybe once or twice about it.

And yet we'll say, I prayed about it a long time. Or I've been in much prayer about it. But really, what's the most intense prayer you've ever had with the Lord?

What's the longest that you've prayed about a situation? David started the book of Nehemiah two weeks ago. And it's one of the neatest prayers in the Bible, at least to me.

[10:25] It's heartfelt. It's revealing. It's got confession in it. And it's also got requests and askings. And, yes, you. You're over there waving to me. So my grandson. Now I got distracted. Where was I? Prayer. Prayer.

And so don't think that Nehemiah, when he first heard about the situation, sent up a heartfelt prayer, and that was the beginning and the end of it.

I didn't get to hear the message. We were in Minneapolis at the time. But notice some of the words there. It said, after they, in verse 4, chapter 1.

It came about when I heard these words. I sat down and wept and mourned for days. For days. For days. I don't know how many days, but it says four days. Not F-O-U-R, but a number of days.

[11:30] And I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. I think Nehemiah could say, I've been praying about the situation. It weighs heavy on my heart.

And I'm bringing it to the God of heavens. The one who can make a difference. And so now, in chapter 2, verse 1, we're in the month Nisan. It's about four months later in the Hebrew calendar. So four months. I don't know if Nehemiah prayed this prayer every day. I don't know how. But we can see here, it's been heavy on Nehemiah's heart.

And if you prayed for anything for four months and then wondered, did God hear me? God, are you listening? I've waited four months. Where's the answer?

What's happening, God? You say to come to you. We don't read anything about that with Nehemiah here. Good or bad.

[12:37] But what we see in that first verse is that the situation has finally overtaken him. You see, he was the king's cupbearer.

And it says, I had not been sad in his presence. So that means he's sad. But now, there's something.

It's overtaken him. It's been too much. And it is so important to know that to be sad in the king's presence was not a good thing.

If you've heard any sermons, they're probably going to share that. You know what? If you were sad in his presence, that could mean that was your last day. It could be over with.

The king would say, you know what? You might be conspiring something. It's over. And Nehemiah had a pretty important position there.

[13:35] He was the king's cupbearer. And so look at verse 2. So Nehemiah's been waiting patiently. He's petitioned God.

He's heard about the situation. He's sad. And God's going to answer his prayer in an unusual way. Verse 2.

The king, it says, why is your face sad though you're not sick? The king's a heart doctor. He knows. He's like, you don't have the flu. You don't have cancer.

He says, why, this is the sadness of heart. Now, you've got something going on that's just overtaking you.

So the king had some insight there to be able to pick that out. Now, you can go one of two ways. You can say the king is concerned for Nehemiah, and he wants to know what it is.

[14:38] The way it's translated, they say, though, you can also go another way, that the king's concerned about the king. Like, you're sad. Do you got something planned here against me?

Because remember the close relationship they had. The king drank the wine only after Nehemiah tested it to make sure it wasn't poisoned. And so that was a close relationship there.

And he says, Nehemiah, what's this all about? Nehemiah's response, I was very much afraid.

Again, you are to be sad before the king. Is this it? It's come through. I tried to hide it.

I tried to conceal it. But it's finally come through. And what's he say in verse 3? He just lets it all out. He is so honest with the king.

[15:42] He's not going to sugarcoat it. Look what his response says. Let the king live forever. And you know what? In our thinking, oh, everybody says let the king live forever.

But if you were the cupbearer, you wanted the king to live forever because if it was poison, you're going before the king. And you're not going to live anymore. And so this was heartfelt.

Live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my father's tombs, lies desolate, and its gates have been consumed by fire?

Wow. He has just poured it out right before the king. Think about it. 71 years earlier, the temple was completed.

There was great rejoicing. Sacrifices were happening. But now, 71 years later, the city still lies in ruins.

[16:47] The gates are broken down. And he's like, what's happened? What's happened? It's kind of like at home.

Oh, man, maybe we shouldn't go there. You fix something, but then you think, oh, that bathroom's been that way for 5, 8, 10, 20 years.

Oh, no. When? What's going to happen with it? And that's how Nehemiah was. And he just totally laid it out right before him, not knowing what would happen to him.

It could be the last words he's ever said to the king, and this could be his last day. But he was honest with him. He said, king, this is why.

This is what's on my heart. This is why I'm sad. And it's almost like leaving it in his lap. And this is the amazing thing.

[17:47] Now, look at verse 4. Then the king said to me, what would you request? Nehemiah, what do you want?

What do you want? Wow. Wow. Go back to verse 11 of the previous chapter. What was Nehemiah's request at the end?

Let's just read the whole verse. O Lord, I beseech thee, may thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant and the prayer of thy servants who delight to revere thy name and make thy servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man.

What? Grant him compassion. What's the king just now saying? What would you request?

Unbelievable. In his sadness of his heart, possibly the last day of his life because of being sad before the king.

The king has compassion. Nehemiah, what do you request? What do you want? Is that amazing or not? And it may be not.

[18:53] It had anything done the way Nehemiah thought. But God answers his prayer. What an opportunity.

Nehemiah, what do you want? I'm the king. I can give it. You're not asking another servant who's not able to do anything about this.

What do you want, Nehemiah? Well, king, I would really like a better job because I'd like a little more life security. I really don't like wondering if this is my last drink because it's poisoned.

Or you know what? This is an important job. I'd like a nice little pay increase. You know, they voted \$12 an hour in Missouri, so I think I need a bigger one myself.

Or how about a nice little palace? I've been living in a pretty tight little place all these years. What would you have asked?

[19:58] What would have been your motive? Before we do that, look at what it says, though, in verse 4. So I prayed to the God of heaven. Notice where now he goes.

He prayed to the Lord about his situation. Now he's given the opportunity. It's probably a very quick prayer because we'll see in the next verse he answers them. So it doesn't seem like there's some time frame of a day or two.

Nehemiah, or king, I'll get back with you next week on this one. This is a really big one, so let me think about it. It says, So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said to the king. Notice the word so. So it's the first time it's used in Nehemiah, but it's used 32 times in the book. The idea is that Nehemiah isn't beating around the bush.

He's not making this big old flowery thinking speech here. It's just cut right there. He asked, so I prayed. It's used seven times, I think, in this chapter alone.

[21:02] Let me see. Verse 6. Verse 6. So it pleased the king. Verse 11. So I came to Jerusalem. Verse 13. So I went out at night. Verse 15. So I went up at night. And then one more time.

Verse 20. So I answered them. And then in verse 18, it was the sixth one. So they put their hands to the good work. It's like cutting through the chase. It's not beating around the bush.

It's getting right to the point. So I prayed to the God of heaven. Where do you go when opportunities knock? Do you think, oh, I really could use that nicer car, the bigger house, the more money, the bigger account?

You know. It doesn't say that those are bad. But where do you go for your advice? Let me read one account here in Mark, if you want to turn to it with me.

Somebody else who had the same question asked of them. Mark 6. Same question. But instead of going to God, she goes to someone else. It said, A strategic day came when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.

[22 : 16] And when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guest. And the king said to the girl, Ask me whatever you want. What do you want? I'll give it to you.

He said, he had a condition on his. He said, I'll give you up to half of my kingdom. He still wanted to be the ruler. What'd she do? She went out and said to her mother, What shall I ask for?

And she said, The head of John the Baptist. So instead of going to God, she goes to her mother. Her mother is mad at John the Baptist because he had stood up to them in their marriage with Herod.

And so she didn't like it. She was like, we've got to get rid of this guy. Get his head. Do you think that's what God would have told her if she went to him in prayer?

So back here at Nehemiah, it says, So I prayed to the God of heaven. And maybe this prayer is more of, thank you, God. This is it.

[23 : 19] This is what I prayed. This is what I asked for. Just give me wisdom now to share my plan. To share it with him and that he'll be pleased with it.

So in verse 5 it says, So I asked, 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 father's tombs, That I may rebuild it. Notice a couple things here. If it please the king. If it please the king. Boy, he's appealing to his emotions.

It is said that the Persian kings were unlike the Assyrians who ruled before them. They were humane. In fact, they wanted to bring back, Let people go back to their hometowns and live.

That was what represented them. And so he's appealing to this kind of thinking, emotion.

[24 : 30] But notice in the full time studies talk to Artaxerxes, What word has he not mentioned? He's not brought up Jerusalem.

He's not brought up that city that could cause an emotion to like, Oh wait, they're the ones that cause all these disturbances.

There's always bad things about Jerusalem. He didn't bring up that name Jerusalem. And you know what? He didn't bring up to the Artaxerxes, Hey, by the way, this is where the king of kings is going to be ruling.

And he's going to overtake. Now, he shared with them, I want to go back to my hometown. The city's in ruins.

My father's tombs are in ruins. I just want to help him rebuild it. That's what I want to do. That was his request. He says, if it pleased the king.

[25 : 29] If it pleased the king. If it pleased the king is only used here and in Esther. Five times, I think, in Esther. Twice, right here in this chapter.

If it pleased the king. So he was very respectful. He was appealing to his emotions. And what's it say? The king said, well, how long are you going to be gone?

Tell me a little bit about this plan. What are you going to do? And isn't it interesting that Nehemiah, probably in that four months, probably had a plan laid out because he told him.

It said, I gave him a definite time at the end of verse 6. I gave him a definite time. It's hard for me to do that. I'm not a great planner.

So if you ask me, I'll say, well, when I'm done, I'll be back. But he said, I gave him a definite time.

Now, don't think he said, I gave him three months or eight months. Because if you go on later in Nehemiah, it says he was gone for 12 years.

[26 : 37] The guy who's his cupbearer, making sure it's not poison, is asking for 12 years to go do something else. But he laid it out there before him.

And what's it say? Verse 6. It pleased the king to send me. It pleased the king. Does God answer prayers? Yes. Maybe not exactly the way you and I want him to answer it. Maybe not in our time frame. But God answers prayer. And it might be no at times. But he certainly answers prayer. And he answered Nehemiah's prayer. Nehemiah had a plan. He laid it before him. It was going to take a while. And it said the king was pleased with him. And do you know, when he said yes, a very important prophecy in Daniel 9, 24, and 25 is now in process. Because historians say that this happened on March 5th, 444 B.C. And I thought, how do they know? And I looked in like five places.

[27 : 49] And they all had that same date. So I'm going to feel pretty comfortable saying that. 544 B.C. And Daniel 9, the prophecy said that when the proclamation for the rebuilding of Jerusalem comes, then comes the 70 weeks.

That's the start of the 70 weeks. And so on this day, the 70 weeks has begun. Wow. God answers prayer.

He brings it at just the right time. Doesn't he? And that's 70 weeks. Go and do a study on it. That's really neat how that, they say seven weeks, then 62 weeks.

That gives you 69. And then there's one more week. And go into different places and see how that calculation works and what that breaks down to.

It's a really neat study. And so I think you would enjoy that. And so that was prophesied 95 years earlier. It comes to pass. It comes to pass through the, when Nehemiah is asking for the God to have, or Artaxerxes, have compassion on him.

[29 : 05] And now this prophecy comes to life. And this prayer is answered. And the king, it says, I'm pleased. Go for it.

It's a long time, but go for it. You've got my permission. And then in 7 and 8, Nehemiah, he has knowledge, probably from his time there in the king's court.

He knows who's the owner of the forest, who has supplies, who's in charge of things. And he says, you know what, king? If it please you, in verse 7, if it please the king, will you give me some letters? Because we're going to need wood, trees to rebuild this, to redo the gates. There's a lot of work to be done. And it said in verse 8, the king granted them to me.

Does God answer prayer? Yes. And sometimes exactly how we may even ask of him, as far as what we ask for. Lord, grant me that the king would have compassion.

[30 : 12] Oh, did he have compassion? He saw the situation, and he said, yes. It pleases me. But I want us to look then, at last, at this idea of why did this happen?

Is it because Artaxerxes is just a nice guy? The last phrase there, and this is what caught my eye that I was reading Ezra. It said, the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me.

It wasn't because he was lucky. It wasn't because Artaxerxes broke up one day and said, you know what, who can I bless? He acknowledges it was God, and it was his good hand.

Let me just go through a couple verses having to do with this. I've always been interested, when I do the creation at camp, that the first five days, the Lord, it seems like the Lord God is having fun, saying, let there be light.

Boom. Let there be this. Let this happen. Boom. He's just speaking the words. But what happens on that sixth day with mankind? He didn't say, let there be Adam.

[31 : 25] He didn't say, let there be Eve. It says he took his hands, and he took the dust. The very hands of God took the dust, and he formed man, it said. And then it said he breathed into him.

And so to me, it's signifying how intimate God is with us, that he would take his hands, and he would want to create us with his very own hands and breathe into us his very own breath.

And then it says in the next chapter that he took a rib from Adam, and it said he formed it. So women, God took his hands, and he formed a woman because he's intimate with us.

He's intimate with us. I want to quickly go through a couple verses as we finish that part of it and just show you kind of this idea of the hand of God.

Exodus 32, 11. It says, Moses entreated the Lord his God and said, O Lord, why doth thy anger burn against thy people whom thou hast brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.

[32 : 34] With a mighty hand. Joshua 4.22. Or 4.24.

It says, That all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever. May know that the hand of the Lord is mighty.
Judges 16.23. Judges 16.23. Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their God and to rejoice, for they said, Our God has given Samson, our enemy, into our hands.

Contrast the hand of God to man's hand. They meant to do evil. They wanted to kill Samson. They wanted to get rid of him. I'll skip a couple more because it kind of culminates in my mind.

How about Luke 23? Luke 23, verse 46. It says, Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.

[33 : 53] Father, into thy hands. You know what? He was born in the man's hands. Man put him to death on the cross, but the Lord Jesus gave up his life and he, Father, into your hands you're the God.

And two more here. Colossians 3, 1. It says, If you then have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking those things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

At the right hand. The Lord Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. 1 Peter 5, 6. It says, Humble yourself therefore under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time.

Humble yourself under the mighty hand. You know what? We think we, at times, are the ones who are making things happen. No. No, not at all. God's mighty hand.

He says, Humble yourself under it. And one other, we won't go to it, Revelation 1. A brother shared it two weeks ago up at Minneapolis at the Lord's Supper of the vision of John.

[35 : 12] And he falls down when he sees the Lord in the vision. He said, I fell as a dead man. And it said, he put his right hand, touched me. He says, Hey, it's okay.

So, I thought that was just a neat little study and Nehemiah saying, you know what? This is the Lord's work. It's not Artaxerxes. Lord, you used Artaxerxes, but it's your work.

It's your hand. Your hand is with me. And we can do this job. And he says, tells the people that in the next chapter, we can do it because the Lord's hand's in it.

You know what? Here, Bethel, I don't want to do anything that's not in the Lord's hand. That he's not in. I don't want to spend my life doing that. I don't want to do the things that he, that has his hand in it.

I want us to, before we go into the remembering the Lord, the question was, does God answer prayer?

[36 : 14] You know, about half a year ago, I've shared several times about this guy named Tom Wilkinson. And he's in jail serving 20 years because he refused to sign a document for the, for the judge saying that he did something to his kids.

He said, I cannot sign that because it'll be on my record for life. And it hasn't happened. This man was an elder out at Lake Charles where my in-laws go.

has four children. They're doing great. They adopted five, four, and then they adopted a fifth one and some accusations came.

And he said, I'm not. You can say, I'm not going to go to jail, but I'll have it on my record and I didn't do it. And so he's got 20 years serving for something he hasn't done.

How would you, fathers, how would you feel having to go to jail for 20 years for something you haven't done? And you could go and look on this case. It's, the, the, how crooked it's been, it's been on 60 Minutes, something else about these judges and how they've been in cahoots.

[37 : 34] But, just think, after three years, he's been in there now three years. The life with his children is over. Got this letter a couple weeks ago.

His wife says, we are seeing so many amazing answers to prayer daily. Wow.

Lord, I've been in jail for three years already. I got 17 more years to serve for something I haven't done. And yet they say, we're seeing so many amazing answers to prayer.

Small things, even like a new roommate for one of the believing fellows on Tom's floor. This is here in the prison. Big things like Tom's ministry there on Wednesday night worship with 100 men.

It ends with the Lord's Supper. It's so exciting to the men who know the Lord and they're so encouraged. He's teaching them how to do the Lord's Supper and they're not dependent on one man.

[38 : 45] The hymn and chorus singing was just over the top, loud from the heart, amazing. At least 10 men shared from the word or prayed and he talked about eating and drinking the bread

and cup and about confessing sin and living holy lives.

We're so thankful for a breakthrough. For a breakthrough? He's in jail three years and yet they're seeing God answer prayer.

I know it's because of everyone's prayer and the timing of the Lord. It's like doors are opening for him. Folks, I asked you that question that we asked at the beginning.

Does God answer prayer? Do you think this is the way God, they expected God to answer prayer and yet they're seeing amazing things happen and that's in today's life.

With respect to that, I know some people got this from my wife, this video, a guy named Jade Nicholson. He's a, I think he's a pretty good speaker and it's a five minute video that is going to lead us, I pray, into the Lord's worship.

[39 : 56] Does God answer prayer? My heart just earns aches for them. Lord, help us just to have a, your heart, a heart for people.

Lord, so often I get in the way and I think I'm the one that's going to save somebody instead of just doing my part of letting them know about you and just trusting you.

And Lord, this man spent faithfully so many years in praying and yet never knew here on this earth.

And Lord, there are probably people here that say, you know what, that's my family and I yearn for them to know you.

Lord, may we just continually bring them before you knowing that you're a mighty God. Thank you for this example of an answer prayer with Nehemiah this morning.

Help us now just to really set our heart on the things that you have done. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[41 : 13] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.