

Nehemiah 2:11-20

Previously, Nehemiah took off with the King's blessing, traveled 800 miles from Persia and finally got to his destination and.....**What did Nehemiah do during his first three days in Jerusalem (v. 11)?** We don't know. The scriptures don't tell us. Apparently, he went into isolation for three days in Jerusalem without doing anything or telling anyone why he was there.....what God had placed on his heart. Based on his past behavior, he was probably spending considerable time in prayer.

Godly leaders often learn a sense of God's timing and don't usually get out ahead of God. Nehemiah has been very sensitive to God's timing from the time he was initially informed of the state of Jerusalem.

After three days, what did Nehemiah do (v. 12)? He set out during the night to inspect the broken down walls of Jerusalem along with a handful of men from among the leaders of Jerusalem.

What was his purpose in setting out to explore the walls at night (v. 12)? Again we don't know. Perhaps to avoid letting others know his plans before they were firmly fixed in his mind.¹ Maybe to keep Israel's enemies in the dark because, if they had seen him, they might have stirred up the people of the land to oppose him.

Why did he take a few men with him? He was building a leadership team. In the accomplishment of any major vision or goal - there will be certain people *essential* to accomplishing the goal - you *must* have their help /buy-in. This is a basic leadership principle – surround yourself with the best people you can find. He recognized the scope of the task that lay ahead of him. And he realized he couldn't do it by himself. He needed good reliable help.

What did Nehemiah find when he inspected the walls (vv. 13-16)? He carefully studied the broken down walls and the burned gates. They were just as had been reported to him. The word "*examining*" in vv. 13 and 15 is a medical term which means "probing a wound to see the extent of its damage." Nehemiah wasn't just sightseeing. This was a close inspection. Assessment of the exact extent of damage would help him to plan and strategize.

After Nehemiah had completed his secret survey and was satisfied that he had developed a workable plan, the time had come to reveal to the Jews the plan that God had given him. **What were the leadership tactics/steps he took in conveying the plan to the people (vv. 17-18b)?**

1. "You see the trouble we are in." Nehemiah did not come across as if he was there to fix *their* problem: Nehemiah owned the problem as his also, even though he didn't have to. Nehemiah didn't play the blame game. He didn't criticize these leaders of Jerusalem. He simply identified right along with them regarding the problem. This was the first step in getting them to take ownership of the problem.
2. Then he called their attention to their deplorable circumstances, i.e., the challenge that lay ahead....their city was in ruins.
3. "Come let us rebuild" Nehemiah asked for their partnership. Nehemiah wasn't there to do it *for* them, but to partner *with* them in the job of restoring the wall. He was getting "buy-in."
4. He pointed them to the end result "We will no longer be in disgrace." This effort wasn't really about bricks and mortar; it was about removing a condition of shame, fear, spiritual poverty, and insecurity among God's people. The wall was just a symptom. Nehemiah was not focused on just restoring the wall, but also on restoring the people – their Jewish pride, their relationship with their God.
5. "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me." He followed his challenge with a personal testimony as to how God's gracious hand (2:8) had granted him favor before King Artaxerxes.

Nehemiah assured the leaders that this wasn't his project; it wasn't their project: it was God's project. Nehemiah had a high calling from God, and he asked others to be part of that vision.

Nehemiah didn't offer rewards, incentives, or vacations out at the Sea of Galilee for the ones who got the job done. Those are all external motivators, and aren't God's highest calling. Nehemiah simply said, "Let's stop kidding around. We know there's a job to be done, and God is leading us to get it done now." He relied on the Lord and the leaders to create a true *internal* motivation. External motivation includes manipulation, guilt, pressure and rewards, which can work for a while, but are never a part of God's vision for getting things done. Intrinsic motivation is marked by realizing something is bigger than myself and is a far more effective motivator.

Application: Same thing with our kids also. Reward them for A's on their report cards (extrinsic) or instill a vision of college and the need for good grades (intrinsic).

How did the people respond to Nehemiah (v. 18b)? "Let us rise and start rebuilding." They were excited, willing followers. No whining. Nehemiah had gotten them onboard in a short time. This response of the leaders of Jerusalem was a work of God. They essentially said, "Yes, Nehemiah, we're with you! Count us in!"

Why did they respond that way?? They were starved for effective leadership. Their hearts had been prepared. Every success can be attributed to Nehemiah's four months (and three days (v. 11)) of praying. Prayer must undergird everything we do or plan to do.

Opposition now comes on the scene.....What were the tactics used by Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem (v. 19)? Ridicule, mocking, scorn.....all designed to discourage. They wanted Nehemiah to feel mocked, stupid, and foolish. The problem was not the trio of enemies. This was a spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12). The three men were just the enemy's instruments. Satan's most effective tools include discouragement, fear, worry, doubt, lack of confidence, etc. He would use all of these tools in this battle. But if you know you are in the middle of God's will, He will direct your steps.....so full speed ahead.

Opposition is not all bad. Why not? Character is built in the face of adversity (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-3). Plus, the workers would get to see God at work which is a real faith builder.

Application: Sooner or later, God will allow every Christian to be tested at this point; as to whom they regard more, man or God. We must never be more concerned about what people may say about us than what God requires of us.

How would you characterize Nehemiah's response (v. 20)? Unafraid, didn't avoid confrontation and hope it would go away, unwilling to compromise, he was in their face, no beating around the bush.

"The God of heaven will give us success." **What was he saying?** Nehemiah proclaimed his confidence in God. "It doesn't matter if you are against us. God's work will succeed." He let them know upfront that God was behind this effort. *If God is for us, who can be against us* (Romans 8:31)?

"You have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it." Nehemiah proclaimed the truth about his enemies. They may have been Jews by birth; they may have been legal citizens of Jerusalem; they may have owned property in the city. But their hearts showed they had no claim or historic rights in God's city.

The book of Nehemiah is often viewed as a manual on biblical leadership. Essential elements of biblical leadership like prayer, faith, vision, planning, organization, team building, and perseverance are vividly displayed in Nehemiah's life throughout this book.²

¹ Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 677.

² Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Nehemiah, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 23.