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Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem's Walls
Nehemiah 2: 11-20

Nehemiah inspects Jerusalem's walls DIG: What do you think Nehemiah did his first three days in Jerusalem? Why was that important? Why do you think Nehemiah said nothing to those who would be doing the work until he had inspected the walls himself? Why inspect the walls at night? What three points does Nehemiah make publicly to rally the troops to rebuild? Which one do you find most convincing? How does Nehemiah respond to his opponents' changes?

REFLECT: When is it hardest for you to act: (a) When your project lies in ruins? (b) When your workers are few? (c) When others mock you? (d) When you must "buck City Hall" to get a permit? How do you know if God is with you in some enterprise? Where are you looking for God's "Yes" to help you overcome others "No?"

445 BC During the ministry of Nehemiah (**to see link click Bt – The Third Return**).
Compiled by: The Chronicler from the Ezra and Nehemiah memoirs (see **Ac – Ezra-Nehemiah from a Jewish Perspective: The Nehemiah Memoirs**)**.**

Nehemiah proved to be a hard worker. But hard work alone does not insure success. You need to work hard *and* work smart. That takes planning. Praying and trusting in **ADONAI** does not mean that research is not necessary. **Nehemiah** wanted to assess the situation before presenting **his** project to **the officials** and **the people**. Specifically, **Nehemiah** needed to know where to rebuild **the** old **walls** and where to construct new **ones** (to see a 3D model of **Jerusalem's gates** and **walls click here**).

Nehemiah came to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:11a). At this point, **Nehemiah** acts quite differently from what we might expect. The hurried reader would think that **Nehemiah**, having reached **his** destination, would be driven to pull out his tools,

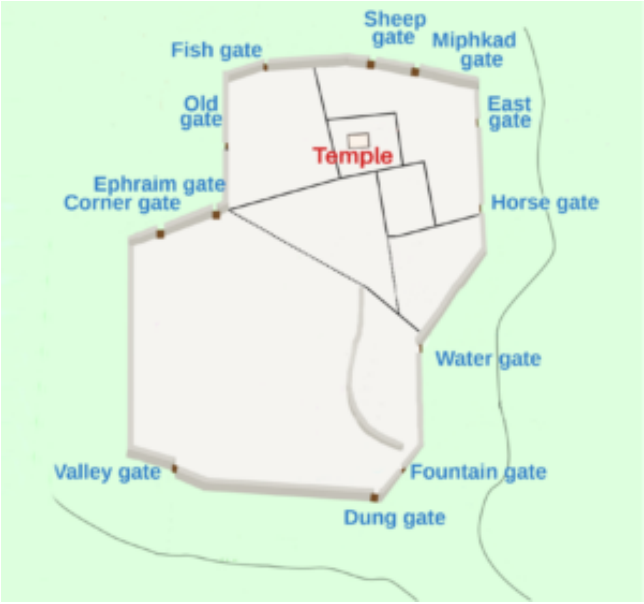
hire subcontractors, hang the plumb line and get to work. But **he** didn't do that. As a matter of fact, **he** didn't do anything **for three days (Nehemiah 2:11b).** Why didn't **he** go to work? Because **he** didn't know what **God** had for **him**. As a matter of fact, **God** was silent.



But shortly thereafter, notice what happened next: **I got up during the night along with a few men. But I did not tell anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no animals with me except the animal I was riding (Nehemiah 2:11c-12). He** only used one **mule** so as not to draw attention to **himself**. Unlike what happened to **Ezra (Ezra 4:12), he** didn't want opposition before **he** got started. **He** gained this information in secret because **he** knew that **his** enemies were watching **him**, and **he** didn't know who could be trusted. **He** probably suspected that even some of **the Jews** in **the City** were loyal to **Sanballat** and **Tobiah**, so to be safe **he** didn't even tell **the Jews, the cohanim, the nobles, the officials or the rest of the workers (Nehemiah 2:16b).**[220]

In the sixth example of leadership in the life of Nehemiah, competent leaders know how to handle themselves in solitude (**to see link click Bt – The Third Return**)**.** This is the side of leadership that the uninvolved observer, or even the workers, never see. People have the false idea that a leader lives an exciting life in the limelight, basking in the experience of one ecstatic round of public applause after another. But **ADONAI** shows us here that successful leaders know how to handle themselves in solitude. In fact, effective leadership is like an iceberg . . . ninety percent is below the surface and unseen, while only ten percent

is above the water line, visible for all to see.



By night I went out by the Valley Gate (see **Nehemiah's night ride** below)**, identified as the chief gate in the west wall of the City overlooking the Tyropoeon Valley, toward** the now unknown **Jackal Spring and the Dung Gate** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Cz – Judah is Like a Broken Jar**)**, through which the Cities refuse was carried and deposited outside the wall, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down** (Hebrew: *perotzim*)**, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire (Nehemiah 2:13).**

Then I moved on to the Fountain Gate, receiving its name on account of its nearness to the En-rogel fountain, below the junction of the Kidron and Hinnom Valleys, north-east of the Dung Gate and to the King's Pool, or a receiving pool for the overflow of the Pool of Siloam and located outside the City wall, where there was not enough room for my animal to pass with me because of the rubble and fallen stones from **the** destruction of **the City** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Ga – The Fall of Jerusalem**), the **walls** obstructed **my passage.** So, **I** had to dismount and proceed on foot**; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and returned to the Valley Gate** rather than along the wall because of all the debris. Apparently **Nehemiah** did not make the complete circuit of **Tziyon** but retraced **his** steps and entered **the City** where **he** had gone out**. The officials did not know where I**

had gone or what I was doing (Nehemiah 2:14-16a). Nehemiah's leadership is evident here. **He** knew when to keep quiet and when to present **God's** project.

Nehemiah was a leader who knew how to inspire action, and **he** invited all of **the Righteous of the TaNaKh** to join *with **him*** in the work. It was not **Nehemiah's** project but **ADONAI's**, and **He** had called all **His** children to be involved in **His** work. This would also enable **Nehemiah** to discover who was fully committed to the plans of **God**, as those would be **the people** who threw **themselves** into the rebuilding.

While **Nehemiah** identified with **the people** and was personally concerned with the problem, **he** did not hide the hard facts. **Then, on the following day, I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in: Jerusalem is desolate and its gates have been burned. Come! Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a disgrace" (Nehemiah 2:17).** This was **Nehemiah's** motivation in undertaking that huge project: **he** was concerned about the glory of **God**. The destruction of **the Temple** and the city of **Jerusalem** had made a mockery of **God's** name in the eyes of **Judah's** enemies, so **Nehemiah** called on **the righteous of the TaNaKh** to restore **His** glory to the world around **them**.[221]

Then I told them how the good hand of my God was on me (see **Ezra 7:9, 28, 8:22** and **31;** and **Nehemiah 2:8**) **and the words that the king had said to me. Then they replied, "Let us begin building!" Nehemiah** came to the people with compassion, realism, conviction, and faith; thus, **ADONAI** used **Him** to communicate **his** own vision and motivate **the people**. **So, they prepared themselves for this good work (Nehemiah 2:18).**

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem, a powerful chieftain of Kedar in Arabia who was an ally with the Samaritans against the Jews, heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. Those three, then, represented the rulers of provinces to the northeast (Ammon), northwest (Samaria), and southeast (Edom and Mo'ab) of **Jerusalem**. These enemies, especially **Sanballat** and **Tobiah**, knew that **Nehemiah** had credentials from **the king** (see **Bw – The Response of King Artakh'shasta**). Therefore, **they** tried to stop the work by disheartening **the people** who were doing the building. **They** used **mockery and ridicule** as **their** tool. **They** even accused **the Jews** of rebellion. **They** said: **What is this you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king (Nehemiah 2:19)?**

When the enemies of **God's** work cannot find any legitimate basis for opposition, they may use **ridicule**, questioning the significance of our labors. This sometimes does more harm than even questioning one's credentials or good intentions (which **Nehemiah's** enemies also did) because it attacks the very motivation for action. **Ridicule** is especially hard to endure when you are outnumbered. Believers experiencing **ridicule** should remember what **Hebrews 11:36-39** says about the biblical heroes of our faith: **Some faced jeers and flogging . . . the world was not worthy of them . . . these were all commended for their faith. Yeshua** also suffered **ridicule and mocking** on many occasions (see **The Life of Christ Lu – Jesus' First Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of Man**), and **His children** can expect to face the same kind of opposition.[222]

And you know something? **Nehemiah's adversaries** didn't leave. **They** criticized, **ridiculed**, and dogged **his** steps through the entire project, until the last stone was set in place. When it was halfway finished, **they** said mockingly: **Even if a fox climbed on what they are building, it would break down their stone wall (Nehemiah 4:3)!** This was just a foretaste of the opposition to come.

I responded to them saying: **The God of heaven will bring us success. We His servants will arise and build. But you have no part, right, or historical claim in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:20). Apparently, these opponents thought they were following the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob if we can judge by the names of their children, and were demanding participation in the rebuilding (Ezra 4:3).** Yet, mixing the worshiping **YHVH** with other gods just ends up being paganism. **Nehemiah** wouldn't accept **their** brand of syncretism, but declared that **God** would only bless those who served **Him** alone. Some of the **Jewish** families, however, did form relationships with the pagans. Later, one of **Sanballat's** daughters was married to a member of the **Jewish** high priest's family **(Nehemiah 13:28)**.

However powerful the drive might be to labor in the service of our **Lord, Nehemiah** adds another, arguably even more powerful motivation: the promise of divine approval and divine help in the task before us. The plan to rebuild **the walls** was not merely **Nehemiah's** or **the people's**; it was **ADONAI** who put it **into Nehemiah's heart (Nehemiah 2:12). He** reassured the people that this was indeed the case, saying: **I told them how the good hand of my God was on me (Nehemiah 2:18).** Nothing could have signaled **YHVH's** hand more clearly than the fact that **King Artakh'shasta** had **himself** given written, documented support **for** the project! Of this they could be certain; **Ha'Shem** was behind this work, no

matter how difficult it might be and no matter what threats might exist against **them** if they were to undertake it.

The sufficiency of **YHVH** is a powerful motivator. **Nehemiah** was a leader whose vision was filled with the greatness of **God**. No task is too difficult when **the Creator of heaven and earth** is **the One** orchestrating it and in whose hand you are but a tool. A **God** who can turn the sea into dry land, and can cause a bush to burn without it being consumed, is not going to balk at a **Sanballat**, a **Tobiah**, a **Geshem**, or whoever is opposing you! No sooner had they begun their work, as we have seen, than opposition reared its ugly head. But **Nehemiah's** response was this: **The God of heaven will bring us success. We His servants will arise and build (Nehemiah 2:20).**

Nehemiah's attitude is captured vividly in **Psalm 87: He has founded His City on the holy mountain of Tziyon. ADONAI loves the gates of Tziyon more than all the other dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are said of you; City of God; I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge Me – Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush – and will say, "This One was born in Tziyon."** If there is one particular lesson that this section of **Nehemiah** is meant to teach us, it is that we should trust **YHVH** more than we do. In matters in which **His** will is made clear to us, we are not to believe the forces of opposition that come against us, no matter how great they may be; rather, we are to put our confidence resolutely in **the Lord**. If we trust **God**, we have nothing to fear.[223]

A plan is primary; waiting for **God** to work is essential; but following through with people is where it's at. In the next file we will move into the phase where the rubber of leadership meets the road of reality – the whole issue of stimulating and motivating others to roll up their sleeves and get the job done.[224]