

Broken and Restored

An Exposition of Nehemiah

^{2:11} So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days^a. ¹² And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding^b. ¹³ So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and *on* to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire^c. ¹⁴ Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass^d. ¹⁵ So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned^e. ¹⁶ The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work^f.

¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach^g." ¹⁸ I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the

^a 2:11 **So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.** There is no record of what Nehemiah did during those three days, but it would certainly have been prudent to rest after such a journey before seeking to make a reasonable analysis of anything.

^b 2:12 **And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding.** At this point Nehemiah must have looked like little more than a Persian official to the men of Jerusalem. Those he asked complied with his strange plans without knowing what was going on in his head. He sincerely believed that God had placed this idea in his mind, but he also restrained the revelation of his plan, not knowing how the people would react. He may have ridden a donkey, which would have made less noise than a horse.

^c 2:13 **So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire.** The walls that completely surrounded the temple complex in Jerusalem were punctuated with gates that permitted access and egress from the center of worship. The gates, being movable, were made from wood and were therefore subject to the burning the Babylonians inflicted on them 140 years earlier.

Most mapmakers place the Valley Gate to the west of the city walls, entering into Jerusalem's Central Valley. The Refuse Gate would have led to the city dump on the south end on the city, spilling into the historic and repulsive Valley of Hinnom.

^d 2:14 **Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass.** Nehemiah intended to stay near the eastern walls of the city, but rubble on the steep slope forced him down into the Kidron ravine as he worked his way north.

^e 2:15 **So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned.** We are reminded again that these events happened at night. Nehemiah went around the north end of the city and back into the Valley Gate.

^f 2:16 **The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work.** Nehemiah was a man of great restraint. It had taken him four months to ponder how he would approach King Artaxerxes. His Jewish brothers would take less convincing, but he needed more information before he presented his proposition to them.

^g 2:17 **Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no**

king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good *work*^a.¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard *it*, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king^b?"²⁰ So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem^c."^d

longer be a reproach." Nehemiah had three primary arguments to persuade his brothers to help. The first was the obvious one. The city was unprotected. The second had to do with the reputation of the people of God. They had apparently become comfortable living in shameful conditions. The third argument carried the most weight...

^a 2:18 **I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work.** Nehemiah's third argument for undertaking such a great project was the obvious hand of God over the plan. He shared his own testimony of God's hand moving the heart of the King and bringing him back to his homeland. God's vision had become Nehemiah's vision. By their words we know that Nehemiah's vision had now become the people's vision.

^b 2:19 **But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"** Whenever powerful people make accusations, people believe them because they speak forcefully. Nehemiah and the people of Israel were armed with the truth, however. Holding fast to true thinking guards your heart against forceful falsehoods.

^c 2:20 **I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem."** Nehemiah was not interested in looking good to God's enemies. The same way, it is not the task of the church in our day to impress the skeptics.

^d 2:11-20 You may not consider yourself a leader, but you are. Even if you never hold the title, people are watching you and your example will influence them for good or ill. Perhaps a better word to apply here is the word "encourager." Not all of us are called to lead large groups of people, but all of us are called to build up the people around us. That is what Nehemiah did here. Nehemiah's actions in this text may seem odd until you realize that he carried out his actions driven by a love for God and the love for God's people. Nehemiah's leadership very much mirrored that of King Jesus.

Some people are good at manipulating others into doing what they want them to do. That is not leadership. That is manipulation. Nehemiah's mission was to persuade people to do what would honor God and benefit them. Here are several ways you can demonstrate loving, encouraging persuasion to those around you like Nehemiah (and Jesus) did:

1. Think before you act. Nehemiah waited three days before his inspection. The Lord Jesus did not rush into his public ministry even when his brothers were trying to push him (John 7:1-9).
2. Make sure you gather enough information. Nehemiah counted the cost. Jesus knew His mission very well as the cross drew nearer (John 13:1).
3. Clearly communicate what needs to be done. Nehemiah simply called the people to the work. Likewise, Jesus calls his people to take up the cross and follow him (Luke 9:23-26).
4. Share the ways God persuaded you. Nehemiah correctly assumed that the people would respond when they heard the ways God had made this work possible. Jesus repeatedly spoke of His mission. He even called it His "food" (John 4:31-38).

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5. Persevere when you are opposed. Because Nehemiah's conviction was based on truth, he was not discouraged by threats. Likewise the resistance Jesus gave Satan involved hitting the devil with scripture (Matthew 4:1-11).