

## Surveying the Damage (Part 1 of #4)

Nehemiah 2: 11-20

Can you imagine the excitement and anticipation that Nehemiah must've felt at this point in life? God had placed a great burden on his heart for the needs in Jerusalem. There was great devastation, a tremendous task to undertake. He was in a position of prominence, but he wasn't sure how the king would respond to his request. Would he have any sympathy for the needs of Jerusalem and the desire of Nehemiah? Would he be willing to let such a trusted and valuable servant leave the kingdom for such a cause?

Often these opportunities are hoped for and dreamed about, but many times they are never realized. We must remember that Nehemiah was not seeking a project of his own choosing. He was following the leadership and direction of the Lord. God had burdened his heart for this great need and He had made a way for him to return to Jerusalem and begin the work of rebuilding the devastated city walls.

Our text this evening finds Nehemiah in Jerusalem. He has made the long trip from Susa and is about to begin the work God has called him to do. Just making it to Jerusalem would have been a challenge. Many scholars agree it is very likely the trip took somewhere around three months to complete. Nehemiah has arrived and he is about to survey the city, seeking to discover the enormity of the task and to develop a plan for construction.

As we consider our text today, I want to look at the [challenges](#) Nehemiah faced as we think on: [Surveying the Damage](#). First we need to consider:

**I. The Inspection of the City (11-16)** – These verses reveal how Nehemiah inspected the task at hand and the realities he discovered. This was not a casual or half-hearted survey. Nehemiah was very precise and thorough. The details of his inspection offer insight to the challenges we face while serving the Lord. So, what can we discover about this inspection. Notice:

**A. The Secrecy (12a, 16)** – [And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: \[16\] And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.](#) As Nehemiah began the task of surveying the damage, he did so with a measure of secrecy. He did not reveal all of his intentions, or even the fact that he was seeking to discover the extent of the need.

- To us that may seem a bit unusual, but Nehemiah had good reason. He desired to keep the opposition at bay and the pessimism among the people to a minimum. He sought to delay the advance of the opposition. He was already aware that Sanballat and Tobiah opposed the work he planned to perform. There was no need to give them any advance knowledge of his plans for reconstruction. The less they knew about the work, the better off he would be. If they knew nothing of his plans, it would be more difficult to mount any opposition.

- We face a determined adversary who seeks to hinder and defeat us any way he can. He is powerful, but he is not all powerful. He is not omniscient like our God. He only knows what he sees or hears. We would do well to keep our plans to ourselves at times. If the enemy is unaware of what we plan to do, he will not be able to mount an attack in the early going.

- Nehemiah also realized the potential for pessimism among the people. They were probably like the average Baptist. If they fully realized the enormity of the task, they would have been tempted to criticize and complain. He needed to keep them focused on the task at hand instead of panicking over the vastness of the need.

- I am not advocating that we seek to be deceptive, but many times we add to our difficulty by breeding pessimism. We need to look at our task through eyes of faith and determination in the Lord. Do not focus on how big the task is; focus on how big our God is! Seek to encourage each other in the work rather than criticizing and complaining.

- *During his days as president, Thomas Jefferson and a group of companions were traveling across the country on horseback. They came to a river which had left its banks because of a recent downpour. The swollen river had washed the bridge away. Each rider was forced to ford the river on horseback, fighting for his life against the rapid currents. The very real possibility of death threatened each rider, which caused a traveler who was not part of their group to step aside and watch.*

*After several had plunged in and made it to the other side, the stranger asked President Jefferson if he would ferry him across the river. The president agreed without hesitation. The man climbed on, and shortly thereafter the two of them made it safely to the other side. As the stranger slid off the back of the saddle onto dry ground, one in the group asked him, "Tell me, why did you select the president to ask this favor of?" The man was shocked, admitting he had no idea it was the president who had helped him. "All I know," he said, "Is that on some of your faces was written the answer 'No,' and on some of them was the answer 'yes.' His was a 'Yes' face."<sup>1</sup>*

**B. The Sovereignty** (12) – [And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.](#) There is an important fact that we must consider as we study the book of Nehemiah. It is revealed in this verse. He was not engaged in something that he thought needed to be done, even though I'm sure he realized it. Nehemiah had not set out to fulfill or achieve his own agenda. He was pursuing that which God had put in his heart.

- That is what makes all the difference. Much that is being pursued today is being approached through human desire and human ability. The task may be noble and needful, but it isn't of the Lord. We are expected to do good things for our church and those around us, but we must ensure that we are following the voice of God. Good things can become a great hindrance or distraction if they are not ordained of God.
- As we survey the needs in our day we must seek the will of God and His desire for our lives. There is no place to jump into action if we don't have clear direction from the Lord. Many have gotten side tracked and even defeated because they were working according to their own desires or wishes rather than the Lord's.

**C. The Survey** (13-15) – These three verses deal with the realities Nehemiah discovered as he surveyed the city walls. We cannot know for certain, but it appears that he began his trip through the valley gate on the southwest side of the city. He then made his way counter-clockwise around the city and reentered at the valley gate. (Most maps show an additional valley gate on the east side of the city. We really don't know if Nehemiah compassed the whole city or just the southern portion, but either way he realized the extent of the damage.) Let's take a moment and consider a couple aspects concerning his survey. Consider:

**1. The Necessity** – As we consider all that Nehemiah saw as he surveyed the damage to the city walls, we realize that Nehemiah saw the extent of the damage. He got a firsthand account of the devastation and the enormity of the task. He needed to know how bad it was if he was to approach it with any confidence of reconstruction.

- I fear that many times we are afraid to look around and survey the world in which we live. Somehow many believe if they ignore their problems, they will go away. We need to be honest about the needs of our day. We need to take a hard look at where we are and consider where we need to be. We need to make an honest assessment of our progress, as well as our failures.

- We will never accomplish what the Lord desires if we are unwilling to consider where we are. Living with our heads buried in the sand, pretending all is well will not bring the victory we need or the results that we desire.

**2. The Accuracy** – Also we need to consider what Nehemiah saw as he surveyed the city that evening. He was by himself, except for a few select men. Likely these were men that Nehemiah trusted and had confidence in. There is no mention of any conversation as they traveled that evening. It appears that they were carefully surveying the damage they saw.

- It is clear that Nehemiah saw things as they truly were. He was not surrounded by those who sought to present things differently than they were. Nehemiah wanted to see the city as it was and determine how significant the need was. He wanted an honest, unbiased assessment of the situation. It would be impossible to plan and carry out any reconstruction without knowing exactly what they faced. Nehemiah sought the truth and he discovered it.
- There is a profound truth revealed for our generation in Nehemiah's survey. We too need to make an honest assessment of our situation. I fear that many times we are unwilling to face the realities of our day. We are in the midst of a desperate age. The foundations of our faith are under constant attack. The moral fiber of our society is deteriorating with each passing day. The spiritual walls that once stood tall and firm have begun to crumble and fall. We are in desperate need of reconstruction in America.
- We need to do as Nehemiah and assess where we are and determine in our hearts to do all we can to rebuild what has been torn down. It won't be an easy task, but it is essential. At the rate we are going, if something isn't done soon we will have no walls left.
- Take a moment to consider those who have gone before us. I think about saints of God who stood for truth and sought to live according to God's Word. I am reminded of preachers who actually believed in preaching the Bible rather than seeking to please men. I think of parents and grandparents, friends and neighbors, who actually had a burden for the needs of others. They faced the same opposition and difficulties we do and yet they were determined to press on and stand for what was true and right.
- We can choose to ignore the truth of what we see and neglect our obligations, but it will only get much worse if someone doesn't stand. Yes I agree that the task is monumental and we don't have the means or ability to overcome of ourselves, but we can do all things through Christ! I know that I mention this often, but I am burdened about the needs of our day; if we don't stand and seek to restore that which has been lost or torn down, what will be left for our children. I am glad that former generations didn't view the task as too much or undoable. I am

glad that they rolled up their sleeves and stood firm in the Lord. We need that same commitment and resolve.

- None of this will happen until we are willing to be open and honest about the needs of our day. We are the church; this is our responsibility. If not us, who; if not now, when; if not here, where?

I had hoped to cover these verses in one study, but as I prepared the message it opened up so that I felt as if we needed to look at this passage in two parts. We will hopefully conclude these verses next week.

As we close this evening I have to ask where we are in the journey. Surely we all sense the needs of our day. We will have to be honest and admit that something needs to be done. Someone needs to rise to the occasion. Someone needs to sense the urgency and commit to restoring that which has been lost. We are not dealing with a physical wall, but it is no less important. I am convinced that God is no respecter of persons. If He was willing to help Nehemiah, He is willing to help us. If He was concerned about their generation, He is concerned about ours. Who among us is willing to stand? Who is willing to seek the help of the Lord and make a difference in our day?

<sup>1</sup> The Grace Awakening, C. Swindoll, Word, 1990, p. 6