

# GETTING READY FOR THE WORK

## NEHEMIAH 2:9-20

Text:

Introduction:

Nehemiah chapter 2 is a transition chapter. In it Nehemiah moves from Persia to Palestine and from a servant to a leader. Having obtained the favor of the king for which he had prayed, Nehemiah traveled “...to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters (2:9),” along with a royal escort that had been assigned to him.

This journey was at least 2 months. It was long and difficult, and yet it was necessary if Nehemiah was to reach the city and begin his work. In many ways, the long journey was the just beginning of the process that had to take place in order to get ready for the work of rebuilding.

Before mortar could be mixed and stones laid there were preparations that had to be made. Nehemiah had now carried his burden for some six months, and it would have to be carried a little longer before it could be unloaded into the work of the wall.

This portion of Nehemiah reminds us that our eagerness to do the work of God must not cause us to be impulsive or irresponsible. There is always preparation for any work that is done well. The need may be urgent, but that does not mean that the work can be rushed.

Notice what we observe in this section with regard to getting ready for the work. Nehemiah points us to three important aspects of preparation. First of all, he demonstrates the work of:

## **1. ASSESSING THE CONDITIONS**

In verse 11, Nehemiah's journals records, "So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days." We are not certain why Nehemiah waited these three days. It could be that he needed to rest from the long trip. It may be that he was just trying to lay low. Either way, this three day pause is an example of the methodical way in which Nehemiah worked. He is never in a hurry.

After three days, Nehemiah records that, "...I arose in the night..." He then proceeded to take a midnight ride, and survey the southern portion of the wall. He says in verse 15, "Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned."

In his investigation, Nehemiah points us to the need of assessing a situation before we try to fix it. We can do the work properly until we understand the work fully.

Note a couple of things about this work of assessing the conditions. Note first of all:

### A. Nehemiah's Method

There are a couple of things to note about the way in which Nehemiah assessed the walls.

- It was a discreet assessment.

Nehemiah three times mentions that his work was done at night. He adds in verse 12:

#### **Nehemiah 2:12**

<sup>12</sup> 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.

Notice also in verse 16:

#### **Nehemiah 2:16**

<sup>16</sup> 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.

His method of assessment was not only discreet but it was also

- A Detailed Assessment

Though it does not appear that Nehemiah surveyed the full length of the walls, the parts that he did inspect were examined thoroughly. He says in verse 15 that he “viewed the wall.” The word translated “viewed” is a word that means to look carefully into something. It was a medical term that described probing a wound to assess the damage.

Notice not only Nehemiah’s method of assessment, but note also:

#### B. Nehemiah’s Motive for Assessment

- He had personal reasons

Nehemiah had been given a report about the conditions of the walls, and he was aware that they were damaged to some extent, however, Nehemiah needed to see for himself how bad it actually was.

- He had practical reasons

Nehemiah was about to stand before the people and ask them to join him in the task of rebuilding. He needed first-hand knowledge of what the work was going to require. As the foreman, he needed to know the job-site in order to assign the workers to their position.

Nehemiah reminds us that before we begin a work for God, we need to spend some time surveying and assessing the situation. We need to let God speak to us about what is needed, and how we should proceed.

Notice a further preparation we find in this chapter. In getting ready for work, Nehemiah points us not only to the importance of assessing the conditions, but also to the critical task of: Notice a further preparation we find in this chapter. In getting ready for work, Nehemiah points us not only to the importance of assessing the conditions, but also to the critical task of:

## **2. ASSEMBLING THE COOPERATION**

There is no such thing as a lone leader. Nehemiah illustrates this as he goes about the task of assembling his work-force. As driven as Nehemiah was, he could never have rebuilt the walls alone. He needed cooperation from the people of the city.

Consider a couple of lessons Nehemiah teaches us about assembling a cooperative group. First of all, he teaches us about:

### **A. The Priority of Getting Cooperation**

When we see how Nehemiah approached the people in Jerusalem we see that he recognized just how important it was for him to gain the cooperation of the

people. In the next chapter, you find the fruit of this cooperation, and it sheds light on why it is such a priority in preparation for the work.

Illustration:

### Geese Flying in Formation

Each bird flaps his wings and creates an uplift for the birds behind. A bird has 71% more flying range in a 'V' formation than he does by flying alone.

### B. The Process of Gaining Cooperation

Nehemiah's gifts as a leader are once again on display as he finally decides to speak to the people about the work God had placed upon his heart. He records the heart of his address to them in verses 17 and 18.

#### **Nehemiah 2:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. <sup>18</sup> Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for *this* good work.

There are some things we recognize about the process Nehemiah used to gain the cooperation of the people.

Note:

## A. He Used Association

He talked about the distress that “we” are in. He said, “Let *us* build up” He was not condescending or disconnected. He associated with the people.

## B. He Used Articulation

Nehemiah made clear the problem. He called them to wake up and recognize the terrible condition of the city, and the “reproach” that it brought upon them and consequently their God. People need to be told the truth, and called to see things as they really are. He likewise articulated what needed to be done. He said, “Let’s get up and rebuild these walls!” People need to know what it is they are being asked to do.

## C. He Used Affirmation

He gave the people encouragement about the prospects of success. He assured them that God had blessed him, and he offered as proof the permission that had been given him by the king. Often people need to be motivated by hearing someone simply say, “It can be done! We can do it!”

Nehemiah points to the need for assessing the conditions, assembling the cooperation, and also the necessity of:

### 3. ANSWERING THE CRITICS

Twice in this chapter we are told of people who were less than enthused about Nehemiah and his plans.

#### **Nehemiah 2:10**

<sup>10</sup> When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard *of it*, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

#### **Nehemiah 2:19**

<sup>19</sup> But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard *it*, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What *is* this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?

Often the work of rebuilding is not hindered so much by the conditions of the walls as it is by the critics outside the walls. Nehemiah reminds us that when we are getting ready for work, we had better be prepared to deal with criticism.

What does Nehemiah teach us about dealing with criticism? There are at two lessons in this chapter. First of all, he teaches us to:

#### A. Hear the Criticism

It is important to note that Nehemiah does not merely ignore the critics. He does not stop his ears and act as if no one is being critical.

Some people feel that good leadership is only listening to those who agree with you, and dismissing those who do not. This is a foolish way of handling criticism, because it could be that the critic is right.

Nathan was critical of David's sin, and it is fortunate that David was willing to listen. Criticism must be discerned before it can be dealt with.

Nehemiah teaches us not only to hear the criticism, but also how to:

### B. Handle the Criticism

Once Nehemiah heard what the critics were saying, he recognized that their criticism was not legitimate, and he handled it accordingly. He knew that they opposed the work for selfish reasons. He knew that they were resentful to the rebuilding of the city because they had a financial interest in a weakened Jerusalem, and they likewise cared nothing for God and His people.

Notice what he tells them:

#### **Nehemiah 2:20**

<sup>20</sup>Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

It is interesting to note that Nehemiah did not shake his royal paperwork in the face of his critics, and cite

his earthly authority as the reason why they were working. No, Nehemiah pointed his critics upward and then inward. He informed them of the high nature of the work they were doing, and then reminded them that they had no part of that place or that work.

Close:

No successful work has ever begun without some kind of preparation. God initiated this work in the heart of Nehemiah in the palace. Nehemiah traveled 800 miles to get to the job site, but could not begin until preparations had been made.

We learn from him that we need to thoroughly understand the need, build a coalition of people who will help us with the work, and then we must be ready to handle the enemy who never sits idle when we get ready to work.