

Nehemiah: Rebuild and Renew

Lesson 3: Teamwork and Effort

Key Verse: *So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart (Nehemiah 4:6).*

Nehemiah's Request and Sending (3:1-32)

- Big projects require significant organization and coordination to be successful.
- Nehemiah assigned everyone a specific place to work.
 - o The phrases “next to him,” “next to them,” “next to that”, etc., occur 28 times in this chapter.
 - o People were assigned to work near their own houses (see vv 21, 23-24, 26, 28-30).
 - Building the portion of the wall nearest your house likely improved motivation since this portion of the wall would be the first line of defense for your own family.
 - If the city was attacked during construction, workers located near their homes would likely stay and fight to protect their families.
 - This plan reduced the travel time necessary to get to work each day. Family members too old, young, or weak to help with construction could still help in other capacities (preparing/delivering food, etc.).
 - o People who lived outside of Jerusalem (vv 2, 5, 27, 7, 7) were also invited to work on portions of the wall where fewer homes were located. They would still benefit from a strong Jerusalem. During war they would likely retreat into the city.
 - o Nehemiah assigned work to every level of society including the priests (vv 1, 22, 28), goldsmiths (vv 8, 31-32), perfume makers (v 8), government officials (vv 9-12, 14-19), Levites (v 17), and merchants (vv 31-32). Even one man's daughters participated in the work (v 12).
 - o Nehemiah did not let the nonparticipation of a few (see the nobles of Tekoa in v 5) keep the project from going forward. The men of Tekoa put work into two sections of the wall (vv 5, 27).
- Nehemiah's accounting of the work begins with the Sheep Gate (vv 1-2) at the northeast of the wall and proceeds counterclockwise around the city. It serves as one of the best descriptions of ancient Jerusalem that we have.

Nehemiah Responds to Opposition (4:1-23)

- There is sometimes the idea that if we follow God well, our path will be easy. Nehemiah's story is one of many in the Bible that dispels that myth. Nehemiah faced false accusations (2:19), ridicule and slander (4:1-3; 6:5-7, 13); threats of violence (4:7-8, 10:12); an economic crisis (5:1-5); people who were resistant to God's ways (13:10, 15-16, 23-24).

- Challenge one opposition: Ridicule.
 - As progress on the wall occurred, Sanballat became angry.
 - Sanballat may have been from the city of Beth-Horon about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. He likely perceived Jerusalem's rebuilding as a threat to his own status.
 - In 2:10, he was disturbed with Nehemiah's arrival. Now he is incensed at the progress.
 - He began to ridicule the Jews in front of his associates (Tobiah and Geshem – see 2:19) and the Samaritan army. He called them feeble. He expresses doubt that they could “bring the stones back to life . . . burned as they are?” (v 2).
 - Tobiah joined the insults declaring that even a fox climbing on the wall would tear it down (v 3).
- Challenge one response: Prayer.
 - Nehemiah responded to the ridicule by turning to God in prayer (vv 4-5). He strongly asks God to deal with those who oppose him.
 - The implication is that he leaves the defense of their reputation in God's hands.
- Challenge one result: They are able to build the entire wall to half its height! Nehemiah gives credit to the people, “for the people worked with all their heart” (v 6).
- Level two opposition: The threat of violence.
 - With increased progress, the level of opposition also increases. Sanballat and Tobiah are joined by others, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the people of Ashdod all become angry at Jerusalem's success.
 - They plot to fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble (v 8).
- Level two response: Prayer and action and encouragement.
 - They again pray to God, but this time they also post a guard “day and night to meet this threat” (v 9). This alone did not solve the problem.
 - The people begin to face exhaustion under the strain of constant work and constant threat (v 10).
 - Nehemiah began a division of labor in which some people worked on the wall while others guarded the city (v 13, 16-18, 21).
 - He also had a plan to respond to an attack (v 18-20).
 - He also took time to encourage the people (v 14). Without encouragement, people struggle to keep on keeping on.
- Level two result: The people kept at the work and the enemies gave up on their plot (vv15, 21-22).
- They worked non-stop, with Nehemiah noting that they never took off their clothes (think work-clothes!). A sign of diligence and perseverance.

Sources

- Derek Kinder, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Academic, 1979).
- Gary V. Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022).
- Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Interpretation (Louisville KY: John Knox, 1992).