

[Read RBC's vision statement here.]

I believe RBC's greatest day is NOW and her greatest days lie ahead. Brag on church: the way we love on one another; Family Promise; Christmas Eve; when church members pass away; etc. Expand on vision statement .

**Sunday Sermon**  
**January 22, 2012**  
**"Diligence vs. Destruction"**  
**Part 3**

Nehemiah 2:11-3:1

- Nehemiah has been called the "Paul Revere" of the Jewish faith.
  - Nehemiah is actually the only complete autobiography in the entire Bible, (Dr. Harold Wilmington, audio)
- \*based on Daniel 9:25 – "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens', and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble." **The coming of the Messiah is directly tied to the rebuilding of the wall.**

-The period from Nehemiah (445 or 444 B.C.) to Jesus' death at Passover in A.D. 32 or 33 was exactly 483 years with the 70<sup>th</sup>, 7 being postponed! Sometimes, everything rises and falls on a decision and then to carry or see that decision through.

Illustration of worst crime riddled area (in Atlanta) you can imagine and living there not just without locks on your door – but NO DOOR!

**"Building the Walls"**

& diligence takes the day -

Diligence (defined as): the quality of being diligent; careful in work; done with careful and steady effort (Webster's Dictionary).

(Remember, these are the very last events, chronologically, of the Old Testament.)

The year is 445 B.C. and the walls of Jerusalem lie in ruins – the great and holy city sits unprotected – very sparsely populated and vulnerable → while her former inhabitants live as captive colonists hundreds of miles away in the cities of Persia. (“comfortably captive,” though they had been freed by Cyrus the Great...) The Jews have had no political leader for some 150+/- years. The nation is all but completely destroyed – the children of God (theirs is a special, covenant relationship – the descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) have almost disappeared from the face of the earth. **But then** God began to work in the heart of a young and handsome Jew hundreds of miles away, in the city of Susa (the winter capital of the King of Persia, Artaxerxes I). A young man who had been born into captivity but had still risen to a very high position as cupbearer – not necessarily because he was smart, well-educated, fiercely loyal, strong, etc., but because the “good hand” of his God was upon him. When this young man – who had never tasted real freedom, who had probably never even seen Jerusalem before – was given word in chapter 1: 3, by one of his brothers and some men from Judah that:

A POLITICAL LEADER interesting
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diligence { “The remnant there is the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

When he heard this, his heart was broken and he sat down for days and mourned and then spent four months praying and fasting to God and during that time period God **a vocation = “a calling”** births a vision in him; a vision to go “to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.” (vs. 5, chapter 2). So he, with every ounce of strength he had, went before the

mighty king, Artaxerxes I, the mightiest king in the world leading the mightiest nation in the world at that time (Persian Empire). A king who had viewed Jerusalem as a rebellious city (Ezra 4) before and asked him if he could return (Anyone can go through life as a destroyer; God has called His people to be builders! [1 Thessalonians 5:11](#))

☆ [“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as in fact you are doing.”](#) and rebuild Jerusalem and not only asked him for permission to go, but also asked the king to finance the project.

Read 2:8 [“and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.’ And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.”](#)

(I can’t help but wonder did Nehemiah really know what lay ahead? The struggle? The lies, the gossip, the physical danger...? Would he have still gone had he known?) I believe I can answer that with a huge YES!!!

Ridicule  
is the  
weapon  
of those  
who have  
no other!  
(Wiersbe,  
p. 34)

VS 9 [“Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king’s letters.”](#)

Nehemiah wastes no time whatsoever in moving on his plan (vision) once he is given permission. Amen! Amen! Amen! For men and women of God who waste absolutely

no time in moving the kingdom forward once the vision is clear! At this time in history, the Persians ruled the vast empire by setting up satrapies (governments). Various governors were appointed over the satrapies (governments). Each large territory or country was required to pay taxes each year. Each satrapy was given to a high Persian as the governor. Each individual satrapy could call upon garrison and occupational troops. The individual countries (conquered territories) enjoyed some personal and religious freedoms. It was an efficient form of government, though it had its problems (The Bible Knowledge Commentary).

I shared these details because God's up to something huge on the international scene.

- Because the Persian Empire had already united a vast amount of land (went as far east as the Arabian Sea and as far west as Libya Africa – massive) – it was not very difficult for Alexander the Great in 356 B.C. to march in within 100 years of the story of Nehemiah and conquer the known civilized world for Greece and Macedonia – then for some 300 years to pass and the Roman Empire to rule the world. Making the swift spread of Christianity possible! Isn't it amazing how God is still at work in the world governments and the affairs of state to forward His kingdom? (side) I personally believe that the Muslim nations that we are at war with now will in time be opened for Christian evangelism – God will use this war ...

**Major point > Your personal vision ties distinctly and directly into what God is up to on the world-wide scene!**

Let look closely at what Nehemiah's vision must have appeared to look like to his contemporaries = Nehemiah was given a vision by God to rebuild a wall in a relatively small city in a seemingly insignificant location in the western part of the Persian Empire! What if he had not pursued it?

>Is God not up to something equally as huge today? In the life of this church? The universal church?

VS 9 cont. "Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen."

Why was Nehemiah given an armed escort?

1. He's a close personal friend of the king's.
2. This was a dangerous mission to be on. (There was an Egyptian revolt in 460 B.C. – just 15 years earlier and there had been uprisings further West [modern day Turkey] before that.)

Nehemiah is continually putting his neck on the line! – Vision requires much more than a single

act of courage – it requires continuous acts of courage until the vision is completed and has

come to its fruition!

- We are about to see just how dangerous this project is. Now keep in mind, the Temple had begun to be rebuild in 536 B.C. Ever since that moment – ALMOST 100 years earlier - no one and I mean no one had been able to complete the

rebuilding of the city including the walls – even though several attempts had been made.

VS 10

“But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.”

The name “Sanballat” literally translates “Sin (the moon-god) gives life.” According to outside documents (the Elephantine papyri written in 407 B.C.) he is the governor of Samaria. “Honorite” is an uncertain term; it may mean that he was from **Horonaim (this would have made him an Edomite)** (a city southeast of the Dead Sea). It also might mean that he was from Beth-horon, **(this would have made him a Moabite)** five miles north of Jerusalem. But he named his children YAHWISTIC names – Two Sons –

1. Delaiah – Literally “Freed by Jehovah”
2. Shelemiah – Literally “Jehovah repays” (“Anchor Bible Dictionary”)

☆ I share this to prove to you that he was not a Jew but he is masquerading as one religiously!!!

☆ Personal – the most dangerous enemy is the one who masquerades as a friend – of the church (eg. Judas)

Sanballat was the dominate partner in this unholy alliance between himself and Tobiah. He probably was opposed to the rebuilding of the wall because there was a tremendous amount of trade between Samaria and Jerusalem and if the wall was rebuilt – it would cease.

“Tobiah the Ammonite” → he’s no Jew either... - he’s an Ammonite with a Jewish name himself. Tobiah means “Yahweh is good.” He possibly could have been governor of the province across the Jordan where the Ammonites once lived.

☆(Both of these men were in positions of power and influence; both were leaders.) You see, Artaxerxes I probably placed Jerusalem under Sanballat’s temporary control with no governor of Jerusalem in place until now (Nehemiah) and Tobiah could have been city caretaker/administrator under Sanballat.

**MAJOR POINTS:**

Nixon’s hatchet man  
Chuck Calson  
“I would have run over my grandmother with a pick up truck for more power...”

1. When following your God-given vision, you will encounter opposition – (if not are you really following God?) Because others will believe they have something to lose – and, indeed, others will have something to lose. For Sanballat and Tobiah, it was money, power, influence...
2. Your worst enemies will be those who are closest to you – on the inside. Those who are masquerading as something that they’re not – truly religious. Sandallat and Tobiah both were Jews by religion only - Not True Jews.

Romans 2:29 “But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”

VS 11 “So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days.”

(Nehemiah has already encountered opposition before he even arrives in Jerusalem.)

Nehemiah rests and prays and asks questions for three days. He had to be exhausted from the journey which would have taken anywhere from two months to four or five months.

- The trip to Jerusalem took longer than rebuilding the wall (wall = 52 days – Nehemiah 6:15)

Nehemiah has opposition before they even know who he is! And it's from two people who share his same religion. (That's why leaders of Christ's church should never take personally even the personal attacks and opposition to the vision God has given them [It's not personal > it's spiritual!])

(diligence takes the day) > A STICKY SITUATION WITH LOTS OF OBSTACLES<

(NO WONDER NO ONE HAD BEEN ABLE TO PULL IT OFF IN ALMOST 100 YEARS)

VS 12 "Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode."

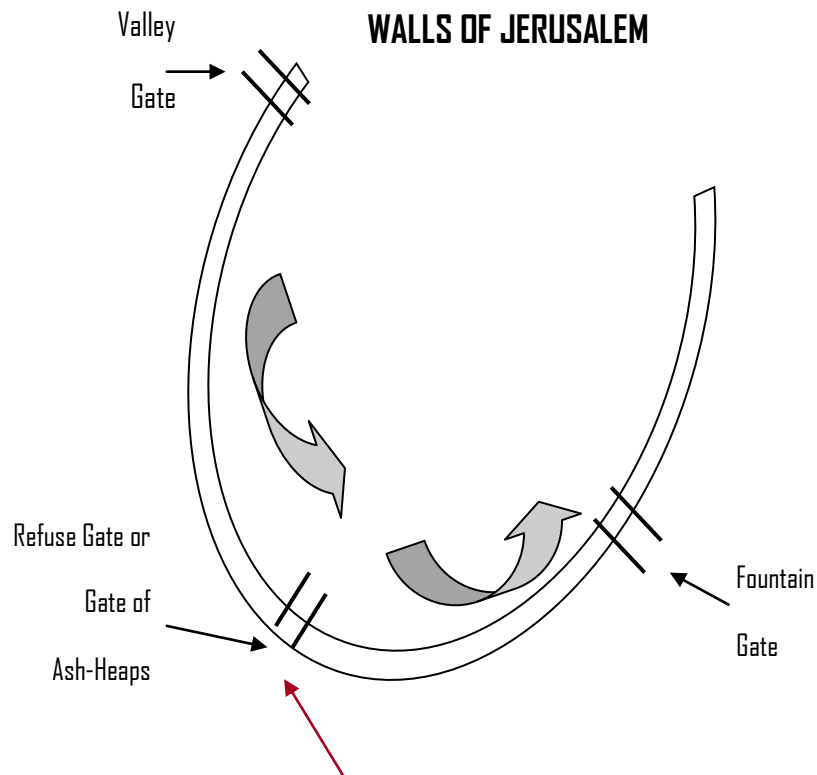
(3 times night is used in the next three verses)

\*It's significant that he went out at night! Leadership/diligence requires a greater effort than followership. As a leader you and I will be working while others are sleeping/resting/playing.\*

He was secretive and he only had a few men with him at this point. JUST A HANDFUL OF MEN

THAT ARE “WITH HIM” AS TRUSTED CONFIDANTS! He’s only got a few and he has not shared with them the details of the vision yet!

VS 13 “I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.”



(the gate to the Valley of Hinnon Gehenna [New Testament] = hell)

VS 14 “Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King’s Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass.” (literally “the animal under me”)

VS 15 “Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned.”

Nehemiah starts off at the “Valley Gate” and proceeds to inspect the southern part of the wall of Jerusalem! Why? Jerusalem was always attacked where she was most vulnerable from the North → so there was probably nothing left of the north wall. So Nehemiah probably wanted ☆ to see if there was anything left of the wall in the south – there was something there! So he goes all the way to the Fountain Gate and the King’s Pool, then turns around and retraces his steps back to the “Valley Gate.”

VS 16 “And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.”

**MAJOR POINT:** Nehemiah did his homework – he surveyed the whole thing (we must do our homework before we even attempt to cast a vision to others.) He was diligent! (He was doing exactly what Luke 14:28 said, “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?”)

The exact words of 1:3 – the words that had so impacted his life.

VS 17 “Then I said to them, You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. [Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” ]

\*Nehemiah saw more in the dark than the people who lived there saw during the day!!! He saw the potential as well as the problems.\* The “brutal facts” are discussed openly with the

leaders first – mentioned in vs. 16 – the Jews (the leading citizens of the city of Jerusalem); the priests (the religious leaders); the nobles (local politicians); the officials...he tells them about the predicament that they were in.

It took an outsider to point out to the leading men of the city and what was left of the once flourishing nation of their situation.

**MAJOR POINT:** They had gotten used to the walls being down!

pound

The tiny number of leaders were too afraid to admit and do anything about the situation. (They were reluctant and it took an outsider – Nehemiah to make it clear. And the vision was cast!

(He has to continue to articulate the vision God has given him – it's not a one time event/thing.)

VS 18 “And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me...”

Nehemiah tells them what happened to him back in Susa, what his position was, how he had made the “Great Ask” to Artaxerx and how the king said yes and had given him an armed escort and papers for a safe passage and had even financed some of the project (provided timber from his own forest.)

How do the people, the priests, the nobles, the officials, some of the workmen, respond?

“And they said, ‘Let us rise up and build.’ So they strengthened their hands for the good work.”-

-Hallelujah! They –notice “they” said (not Nehemiah at this point) Let’s do it. It’s to the credit of the priests, nobles, the officials, and the people that they accepted God’s vision through Nehemiah and jumped in behind him! BUY IN! Diligence pays off!

“So they strengthened their hands for the good work.” AMEN!

Will you? Will you? Will you? **Let’s get after it...**

**Watch the timing on this...**

VS 19 “But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and **Geshem the**

**Arab** heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, ‘What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?’”

Just as soon as the vision is cast and received and embraced, the heat gets turned up. “Geshem the Arab” – Geshem means “stout” or “bulky.” Arabs became dominant in the Transjordan area (around the river) during the Persian Empire. The Arabs enjoyed a favored status under the Persians. Geshem was the governor of Dedan. He was in charge of a powerful North Arabian confederacy of tribes that controlled vast areas from northeast Egypt to Northern Arabia to Southern Palestine. **He was a seemingly invincible force, the most powerful man for hundreds of miles. Way more powerful than either Sanballat or Tobiah combined. And now he has joined the opposition and the lies begin!!! Ultimately from the Father of Lies himself – Satan.**

Ephesians 6:12 “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood...”

-All of the forces of darkness are poised and ready – WE must be ready. So how do we get ready?

Repeat it – OUT LOUD

VS 20 “Then I replied to them, ‘The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.’”

Brave answer – the right answer – let’s arise and build!

VS 1 “Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate.”

Because Nehemiah had been diligent (careful in work; done with careful and steady effort; see

I Corinthians 15:58 KJV “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

He is able to not only get permission from the king for the project, but also to get the king to give him an armed escort and papers granting him safe passage to Judah/Jerusalem; he gets the king to “foot the bill” of the project by donating timber for the rebuilding of the walls, the fortress guarding the temple (later the Antonia Fortress), and the rebuilding of a private residence for him to stay in while he’s there!

-Then, after he arrives in the city, he assesses the damage at night and then casts the vision to the people/leaders there and they get behind him and then they say [“Let us rise up and build”](#) (vs 18).

Then Nehemiah stands up to the unholy trinity – Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem and put them in their place (as God’s Warrior) by telling them [“but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.”](#)

Now, the vision/the rebuilding begins.....