

Nehemiah 4,5

Day 1

The Workers are Ridiculed. Read Nehemiah 4:1-9

1. List the words that describe Sanballat's response to the wall being built? 4:1

2. How is animosity building and becoming more dangerous?
 - 2:10 *displeased*
 - 2:19
 - 4:2a

3. How would you describe in your own words the insult or nature of the discouragement contained in each of the taunts in 4:2?
 - *What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves?*
 - *Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day?*
 - *Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?"*

FYI: "**Will they sacrifice** has the idea of, 'Will they seek God through sacrifice and expect Him to miraculously build the walls? Will they pray the walls up?'

Will they complete it in a day has the idea of 'Do they have any idea what they are taking on? This isn't an easy project.'

Like most attacks of discouragement, there is a trace of truth in the words of the enemy. As builders, the Jews were **feeble**. They would not **complete it in a day**. They didn't have the best materials to work with. A lying, discouraging attack will often have *some* truth in it, but it will neglect the great truth: *God was with them and has promised to see them through.*"
- David Guzik

"The reference to **reviving the stones** came from the fact that the stones of the former wall had been burned. When limestone is subjected to intense heat, it becomes unsuitable for building." - The Nelson Study Bible (790)

4. How did Tobiah insult them? 4:3 How do you picture the tone of these remarks?

Food for Thought: [Ridicule] " is a common and potent form of attack that is often more devastating than we realize. We like to think that we have physical courage and that we would be willing to risk our lives for God and for other people - yet we often find ourselves intimidated and deterred from doing God's will out of fear of people laughing at us, mocking us, or attacking our reputations."
- Ray Stedman (84)

5. How did Nehemiah respond? 4:4a Compare Hebrews 12:2,3

FYI: Hear, O our God, for we are despised: "Nehemiah faced no attack of any type without prayer. As soon as a sense of need, inadequacy, weakness, incapacity, or any other problem presented itself, Nehemiah's recourse to prayer seems to have been as natural to him as breathing."
- Roland Wickes (5)

6. Shockingly, for what did Nehemiah pray? 4:4b,5

Digging Deeper

Compare how David prayed in Psalm 123; Psalm 74:19-23.

FYI: Do not forgive their iniquity: "Nehemiah was acknowledging that his enemies were attacking God rather than him. It was the Lord whom they despised, and Nehemiah was calling on Him to defend His glory before the world. Nehemiah recognized that forgiveness is granted not to those who oppose the will of God but to those who eagerly submit to His will."
- John MacArthur (102)

"The Christian, while he has been shown a better answer to evil [See Luke 6:27-28; Romans 12:19-21], can learn from Nehemiah to look to God, not to himself, for vindication (he was silent under the taunts), and not for a moment to accept the world's low estimate of his calling."
- Derek Kidner (91)

"Nehemiah did not pray as an individual who had been personally insulted. He prayed as the governor of the province of Judah...The first task of government is not mercy but justice...This prayer was Governor Nehemiah's plea for justice."
- Ray Stedman (88)

7. How did the people respond? 4:6 Where do you think this desire/determination came from? (Cp. Philippians 2:13)

FYI: Mind/heart OT:3820 *leb*; the heart; also used (figuratively) very widely for the feelings, the will and even the intellect

"This is exactly what Satan wants to destroy with his attacks – the **mind to work**. He wants to make us feel defeated, or passive, or self-focused, or discouraged... Nehemiah's prayer asked God to take care of his enemies, and God answered by taking care of His people."
- David Guzik

"Critics demoralize. Leaders encourage. When the critics spoke, the workmen heard them and were demoralized. But when the capable leader stepped up and said, 'Let's look at it God's way, stay at the job,' the crew members were back in there."
- Charles Swindoll (77)

8. Who joined the group of enemies against the people? 4:7 Why were they angry?

FYI: "The Ashdodites (or Philistines) were west of Jerusalem, the Arabians were on the south, the Ammonites were on the east, with Governor Sanballat and the Samaritans on the north. Thus Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies, but God Himself was in their midst, and that was enough."
- Henry Morris

"Ironically, these groups would not have cooperated under normal circumstances - what drew them into this alliance was a mutual hatred of God and His people."
- John MacArthur (103)

9. How did the animosity escalate even further in 4:8? How serious would you say the threats were becoming?

Digging Deeper

What animosity do believers face?
John 15:18-21;16:33

10. In what two ways did the people respond to intimidation? 4:9
(Compare Matthew 26:41)

How should we stand guard? Ephesians 6:13,18

- How do you think the enemy was feeling at this point?

FYI: "The Jews recognized their protection was from God alone, yet that did not exempt them from carrying out their basic human responsibilities. It would have been negligent not to establish watchmen to guard the wall (and their houses) at night. The Lord wants His children to trust Him for their security, but He also expects them to be responsible."
- John MacArthur (103)

"Nehemiah responded both spiritually and pragmatically...He was a role model of prayer - and preparedness. His perfect balance of a spiritual response with a practical response is a picture of how we, as believers, should face threats and opposition that come our way."
- Ray Stedman (89)

Applying the Word: *What is something you have worked at with "all your heart"?
What compelled you? or
Can you think of a time when you had to overcome discouragement or intimidation?
What helped you?*

Day 2

Overcoming Discouragement. Read Nehemiah 4:10-15

11. What began to happen? How was construction made more difficult? 4:10

- Why is it often easy to get discouraged at the half-way point in a project?

FYI: The destroyed parts of the wall and the accumulated rubbish had to be cleared away so the walls could be rebuilt upon their foundations. If they didn't do this, the walls wouldn't stand at all."
- David Guzik

12. How did the animosity continue to rise? How do you think this scare tactic affected the people? 4:11

FYI: The attacks we suffer from spiritual forces of darkness are just as strategically timed. Our spiritual enemies know when we are discouraged, tired, angry, or proud in self-confidence."
- David Guzik (See Ephesians 6:12)

13. How did the Jews who lived nearby exaggerate the fear? 4:12 What effect do you think this had on these “weary wall-builders”?

FYI: “The talk of verse 11 sounds as if it was meant for overhearing and passing on; but whether the neighboring Jews acted as unwitting carriers of propaganda or as useful informants is difficult to say.” - Derek Kidner (92)

14. How did Nehemiah respond? 4:13 What would this do to the threat of surprise attacks?

- How advantage would “posting by families” have?

FYI: “Discouragement is such a powerful weapon because it is somewhat the opposite of faith. Where faith believes God and His love and promises, discouragement looks for and believes the worst – and tends to pretty much forget about who God is and what He has promised to do.”
- David Guzik

15. How did Nehemiah strengthen the people’s hearts and resolve? 4:14

FYI: fight for your brethren. “The Jews at this time had no standing army, nor could they hire mercenaries. Thus they all must be ready to fight for their own families and for their Jewish brethren.”
- Henry Morris

Digging Deeper
What guidance did Paul give Timothy?
2 Timothy 2:8-10

16. What did the enemy realize? How did the people respond? 4:15

17. What additional changes in divisions did Nehemiah make? 4:16 What would that do to the workforce? What does this say about how seriously he regarded the threats?

- How did the carriers and builders arm themselves? 4:17,18a

18. What other safeguard did Nehemiah add? 4:18b-20
(Note: In spite of all these precautions, in whom did Nehemiah, once again, put his confidence? 4:20b)

- How long did they work each day? 4:21

Digging Deeper
See the confidence of these men in facing a battle:

- David: 1 Samuel 17:47
- King Asa: 2 Chronicles 14:11
- Moses: Exodus 14:13-14

19. How did Nehemiah increase the guard force? 4:22 (What would you say about his ability to respond and adapt to opposition?)

- What example did Nehemiah set? 4:23

FYI: "As the opposition changed, so did Nehemiah's response. At first, he relied on prayer and work, then on prayer and a guard, and finally on prayer and weapons and fighters." - Africa Bible Commentary (549)

"If people were allowed to return to the neighboring villages for the night, they could easily be captured by the enemy. Also, movement in and out of the city might well provide opportunity for enemy infiltration."

- The Woman's Study Bible (763)

Applying the Word: *What are some fearful unknowns that you struggle with? How do you try to "protect" yourself? What do you learn from Nehemiah's example?*

Day 3

Internal Conflict. Read Nehemiah 5:1-13

20. What groups were contending with each other in 5:1? See Galatians 5:15

FYI: a great outcry "For a long time, while the city's walls and buildings were deteriorating, there had been a growing disparity between the prosperous and the poor among the Jewish exiles. This had been further aggravated by the two-month period of concentrating on the city's wall repair and defense." - Henry Morris

21. What problems were the people dealing with?

- 5:2
- 5:3
- 5:4,5 (Note: Who is taking advantage of them? See 5:7)

22. How did Nehemiah react? 5:6

- Whom did Nehemiah confront/rebuke? 5:7 What was the charge?

23. Why do you think Nehemiah chose to address the matter publicly? 5:7b How do you think an enemy from within compares to an enemy from without?

FYI: "The Hebrew phrase here for *rebuke* implies a strong contention, even taking legal action against someone. Nehemiah did not overreact, but he did not gloss over the nobles' and rulers' sin either." - John MacArthur (114)

Usury Strong's OT:5383 *nashah*; to lend or (by reciprocity) borrow on security or interest: KJV - creditor, exact, extortioner, lend, usurer, lend on (taker on).

24. What laws had been given the Israelites about lending money? Exodus 22:25

- What laws had been given about an Israelite who needed to sell himself for service? Leviticus 25:39-43
- What law had been give about buying or selling land? Numbers 36:7

FYI: "The lending of money, etc., at interest is not regarded in the Bible as wrong in itself (Deut 23:19-20; Matt 25:27), but it was forbidden as between one Israelite and another (Ex 22:25), since the money was borrowed for the relief of distress and not for the development of trade." - The Wycliffe Bible Commentary

"Even the indentured servanthood was limited to seven years, after which the entire debt was to be canceled and the servants returned to their homes and families. (There was also a special Year of Jubilee every fifty years in which all debts were automatically canceled.) Neglecting this was one of the sins that had brought on the exile, and the Jews had already returned to it." [See Ezekiel 22:12-15] - John MacArthur (113)

25. What had Nehemiah and some other fellow Jews done for each other? 5:8a

- How were the nobles and officials treating their fellow Jews? 5:8b *How would you explain how they could exploit their own countrymen, especially so soon after the nation had experienced captivity?*
- How convicting were Nehemiah's words? 5:8c

FYI: "Nehemiah noted that when Judah was conquered, many Jews were sold as slaves to foreigners and many of them had been bought out of slavery by other Jews." David Guzik

"Nehemiah contrasts his own example with that of the rich Jews. He had spent money in redeeming some countrymen in servitude among the pagan; they were causing others to be sold into slavery among the Jews." - Barnes' Notes

"sell your brethren? Although the law allowed family members sold into bondage to be redeemed, their families had become too poor to do this, because of the usurious practices of the rich, as well as the heavy taxes imposed on the people by their rulers." - Henry Morris

"They were silenced: Nehemiah's rebuke was unanswerable because he had grounded it on two things: God's Word and his own personal example. The fact that he had obeyed the Lord at cost to himself in a similar matter left no room for his opponents to argue back." - John MacArthur (114)

26. What phrase did Nehemiah use to describe their actions? 5:9a

- What primary focus and motivation did he say should govern their actions? 5:9b (See Isaiah 58:6-8)
- When Israel stopped honoring and obeying God, what happened to their witness? See Romans 2:23,24

FYI: "it is not good/right" The meaning is, that it was very bad; it is a 'meiosis', by which more is intended than is expressed." - <https://biblehub.com>

"Once again, Nehemiah's paramount concern was the glory of God before the rest of the world. The actions of these nobles and rulers had placed their fellow Jews in danger, but it was far worse that they had slandered God's name before their pagan neighbors." - John MacArthur (114)

Because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies — They observe all your actions, and will reproach both you for such barbarous usage of your brethren, and religion for your sakes." - <https://biblehub.com>

27. Who were the people making up for their selfishness? 5:10a

Food for Thought: "It isn't unusual for money problems to create strife and completely disrupt what God wants to do. If Nehemiah and his people did not find a way to do what God wanted them to do with their money and money problems, the work of God would be stopped – without a single arrow being fired by the enemies of God." - David Guzik

28. List the measures that Nehemiah told the rulers to take.

- 5:10b
- 5:11 (See Leviticus 6:4)

29. How did the nobles and officials respond? 5:12

- Why do you think Nehemiah required an oath? 5:12b

30. What did Nehemiah do to emphasize the seriousness of their oath? 5:13 (See other examples in Matthew 10:14; Acts 18:6)

- In what 3 ways did the people respond?

Applying the Word: How do you think financial difficulties or moral/ethical problems can affect a church's ability to serve?

Day 4

Nehemiah's Example as Governor. Read Nehemiah 5:14-19

31. What position was Nehemiah given and for how long? 5:14

FYI: "The food allowance (5:14,18), although assigned to him by higher authority, would have been a charge on the local population...That Nehemiah should have shouldered all this himself is proof...that to him the whole enterprise was a labor of love."
- Derek Kidner (98)

32. How had the governors before Nehemiah burdened the people? 5:15

- Why didn't Nehemiah do these things? 5:15c

FYI: "Nehemiah was entitled to collect taxes from the people in Judah because he had been officially appointed as the king's representative. Yet he didn't. He refrained from taxing the Jews in order to serve as an example to them of self-sacrificial love."
- John MacArthur (114)

"The corruption we see today is nothing new. Nehemiah tells us that these same practices were common in his day in the land of Judah. But Nehemiah makes it clear that he did not participate in the greed and corruption of his predecessors."
- Ray Stedman (98)

33. On what did Nehemiah keep his focus? What didn't he pursue? 5:16

- What adjectives would you use to describe Nehemiah's mindset/lifestyle? How would you describe the mindset/lifestyle of the former governors?

Applied myself/continued/devoted myself chazaq OT:2388, "to be strong, strengthen, harden, take hold of".
- Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

"As governor, Nehemiah could easily have acquired real estate and sold it at great profit. But instead of making money for themselves, Nehemiah and his servants worked on the wall of Jerusalem for the protection of the people and the glory of God."
- The Nelson Study Bible (793)

34. What obligations did Nehemiah have as a governor? 5:17

35. What would you say about the cost of this meal? 5:18a

- Again, what didn't Nehemiah do? What additional reason besides reverence for God (5:15b) did he give? 5:18b

Digging Deeper

What do the following say about serving others:

1 John 3:16-18

Matthew 25:34-40

FYI: "Nehemiah's role as governor carried certain social obligations, just as any important political official is expected to entertain influential guests today. The costs were quite high for such obligations...but Nehemiah met his obligations out of his own pocket, refusing to add to the financial burden of his fellow Jews."

- John MacArthur (115)

"Here we see Nehemiah's remarkable compassion and concern for those who had less. . He was entitled by law to receive compensation - but he was constrained by his love of God to give instead." - Ray Stedman (100)

36. What did Nehemiah ask God to do? 5:19 (See Hebrews 11:6)

FYI: "Nehemiah felt deeply his identity with his people. Yet it was some of these people who had now engineered this exploitation. Nehemiah had to dissociate himself from this particular element, and his cry to God...had this in mind...There are times when some expression of past faithfulness is justified. Paul's declaration in Acts 20:33-35 is just such a case, comparable with Nehemiah."

- Roland Wickes (7)

"Nehemiah is recognizing God's gracious promises to care for those who walk with Him. God does not always bless us materially or financially, but He does promise to bless us when we serve Him." - Ray Stedman (100)

Applying the Word: What would you say about Nehemiah's understanding of who he was and who God was, that equipped him for great leadership? When has your faith or beliefs cost you something materially?