



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

Lesson 4

Last week we read how Israel joined together in unity to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. They were enthusiastic, committed, and faithful workers. Nehemiah strategically led the team and encouraged them to work together, thus fulfilling their role as a privileged child of God. The entire chapter focused on cooperation and the importance of teamwork to succeed. They certainly got off to a grand start! But as God's people join together in unity and fellowship, the enemy gets mad. There is nothing the enemy enjoys more than seeing disunity and dissension in the body, because it can damage the Gospel message and the cause of Christ. Chapter 4 begins with the word "but," warning us of the attacks to come. Satan is not happy, and neither are the enemies of Israel. Let's see how Nehemiah handles this opposition.

First Day

1. Read Chapter 4:1-23. List the facts you find. Are there any repeated words or phrases?
2. What is the main thought of this chapter? What would you say is the key verse?
3. Who are the main characters?

4. Why were these men so upset that the Jews were making progress?
5. What type of leadership qualities do you see in Nehemiah in the way he handles the opposition?
6. Have you ever felt opposition when you were trying to do the Lord's work? How did you, (or do you), handle it?
7. What type of criticism is the hardest for you to handle: when it comes from other believers, non-believers, or family members? Why?
8. John MacArthur said, "When God's people attempt to do God's work in God's way, there will be opposition." Write your thoughts on his statement.
9. Okay; here's one to chew on. When you face opposition, how do you know when it's from the enemy, a "natural" consequence of your actions, or from God Himself?

That's enough thinking for today! I know that we all can learn a great deal from Nehemiah on how to handle the opposition that we will surely face. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the Heavenly places."

Memory Verse of the Week: "So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work."
Nehemiah 4:6

Second Day

Review your memory verse.

1. Read Nehemiah 4:1-23 again, focusing on verses 1-6. Who came against Nehemiah and the Israelites? Why do you think they were so angry?
2. Sanballat began his criticism with ridicule. This is said to be one of the enemy's oldest weapons. Thomas Carlyle called ridicule "the language of the devil." Why?
3. He gathered others around him as he came against the Israelites. Why do bullies always look for allies?

We need to remember that Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, the region north of Judea where Jerusalem was located. Perhaps Sanballat wanted to be governor of Judea as well someday, and Nehemiah's plans were getting in the way. He obviously felt threatened. The Life Application Bible explains Samaritans like this: "Almost 300 years before Nehemiah's time, the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered, and most of the people were carried away captive (722 B.C.). Sargon of Assyria repopulated Israel with captives from other lands. These captives eventually intermarried with the few Israelites who remained in the land to form a mixed race of people who became known as Samaritans. The Jews who returned to Jerusalem and the southern region of Judea during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah would have nothing to do with Samaritans, whom they considered to be racially impure. Relations between both group grew progressively worse. 400 years later, the Jews and the Samaritans hated each other (John 4:9)."

Because of this history, Sanballat knew he would have no problem getting the armies of Samaria to oppose the Jews' work. They had a common hate for the Israelites.

4. What kinds of verbal attacks were made? What did he call them?

The word "feeble" means "withered, or miserable." First, Sanballat attacks them personally.

5. After he attacked the people, he attacked their work in verse 2. What did he say?
6. So often, the enemy tries to get us to look at the "rubbish" around us, instead of the good work that the Lord is doing. Are you discouraged by looking at the "rubbish" around you? What should you be focusing on?
7. Sanballat's buddy Tobiath jumps in and begins to taunt them as well. Using your own words, what does he say in verse 3?

The enemy is mocking them, trying to get others to laugh at their work. Let's look at two other men in Scripture that were ridiculed by their enemies.

8. Read 1 Samuel 17:41-47. Who was being ridiculed? By whom? How did he handle it?
9. Read Luke 22:63-65 and 23:34-37. How was Jesus ridiculed? How did He handle it? (Give verses for your answer.)

10. How did Nehemiah handle the ridicule in 4-6?

This is the third time we see Nehemiah pray to the Lord (1:4-11, 2:4). Nehemiah, David, and Jesus Himself didn't trade ridicule for ridicule. They didn't begin to hurl insults back at their enemies. When others laugh at you or make fun of your attempts to do God's work, it's so easy to fight back using weapons of the flesh. We need to learn from Nehemiah's example and run right to the Lord, asking Him to handle it.

Nehemiah's prayer sounds a bit unusual. Upon first reading, it appears that he is seeking personal revenge for what's been done to them. But he's not at all. Nehemiah was angry about the ridicule and insults and prayed honestly before the Lord. He prayed passionately because he had been attacked personally, but worse than that, the enemies had opposed God's work and ridiculed God Himself. He saw their insults as a serious offense against God, doubting it was He who had inspired and planned it. Wiersbe said, "Nehemiah's prayer resembles the "imprecatory psalms" such as Psalm 69, 79, and 139:19-22. We must remember that Nehemiah was praying as a servant of God concerned for the glory of God. He was not requesting personal vengeance but official vindication for God's people."

11. When you are taunted or ridiculed by the enemy, do you take it immediately to the Lord, or do you respond with insults of your own? How does Nehemiah's example challenge you?

It has been said that "Anything that keeps you from doing what God has called you to do will only help the enemy." Let's see what Nehemiah does.

12. Did they stop working, according to verse 6? How did the people respond?

When you are faced with opposition, do as Nehemiah did. Take it right to God and keep on working. Don't let the enemy discourage you or cause you to quit. Persevere, push through, and "keep building the wall."

13. Is there a wall that you are trying to build, but the opposition is making you grow weary? Stop right now, put down the hammer, and ask the Lord to fill you with His Spirit and strengthen your body and soul. Don't give up, my friend!

Third Day

Work on your verse for the week. Keep building the wall!

1. Read Nehemiah 4:1-23, focusing on verses 7-9. As the surrounding enemies saw the Jews were having success, what happened?
2. Again, what did Nehemiah and the Israelites do?

The Ashdodites are a new group listed as one of their enemies. These people are the dwellers of Ashdod, one of the former Philistine cities to the west of Jerusalem. The enemies united and planned to overthrow the work. Sanballat from the north, Tobiah and the Ammonites from the east, the Arabs from the south, and the Ashdodites from the west. This meant that Jerusalem was literally surrounded by hostile enemies.

The Jews showed their dependence on the Lord in verse 9. Even though they were being threatened, they knew that God was their protector. They still prayed to the Lord, but set a "watch" by night. This shows a great combination of faith and action. "We made our prayer... we set a watch."

3. What about your life? Do you know the balance between faith and action? Do you know how to "make a prayer... but set a watch?" Give a practical example of this.

Have you ever felt "surrounded" by the enemy? I have. It can make me want to stay in my house and pull the covers over my head. But we don't see Nehemiah doing this. We don't see him giving up either. So far they have faced opposition through ridicule and opposition through the threat of attack. Now it's time for the enemy to use a new trick.

4. Read verses 10-14. Where did the discouragement come from?

Why did men from the royal tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8-12) try to discourage the people? We see in Nehemiah 6:17-19 and 13:15-22 that some of them were secretly cooperating with the enemy. Their ties of marriage were stronger than their devotion to the Lord. Many of them were interested in making money instead of serving the Lord. According to verse 11, it seems that as they spread the doubts that God would finish the work because of the attacks, others around them began to fear as well. Discouragement spread throughout the camp like wildfire.

5. How does doubt and discouragement cause disunity and defeat?

Why does opposition inside the camp sometimes take us by surprise?

6. Are you an "encourager" or a "discourager"?

It seems that part of the enemy's strategy was to scare the Jews and make them think the armies were going to make a surprise attack. They hoped fear would cripple them. But even that didn't work. Nehemiah didn't really pay a whole lot of attention to the grumblers or the rumors of attack. Instead, he prayed and attacked the problem. He didn't want fear to handicap God's people and hinder God's work. Fear is catchy and paralyzing.

7. Explain this statement: "Nothing is to be feared more than fear."

What does fear do to our faith? (Matthew 8:26, 2 Timothy 1:7)

8. Are there any fears in you that are hindering your faith? What can you learn here from Nehemiah?

Nehemiah could have been really discouraged himself. According to verse 10, there seemed to be a loss of strength, a loss of vision, a loss of confidence, and a loss of security. If I were him, I probably would have thrown in the towel. I would be focusing on the "rubbish" instead of the rewards. But he doesn't give up. Instead, he rolls up his sleeves and gets to work.

9. What did Nehemiah do first in verse 13? What was his strategy?

Nehemiah posted guards at all the vulnerable and visible places on the wall. Again, he posted men by their families so they would take ownership and want to fight to protect their homes for their families. He made sure that the enemies could see that Israel was ready to fight!

10. In verse 14, what did Nehemiah do next? What type of leadership qualities does this reveal?

11. There is an interesting word in verse 14 that reveals a lot about Nehemiah. It's "looked." This is translated as "looked things over." What does that tell us about him? Was he hasty in his decision-making?

12. Before you make a decision, do you "look around"? Do you assess the situation and ask God for His wisdom before you make a move?

We'll take another look at Nehemiah's encouragement to the people tomorrow. But for now, may you become a woman that is characterized by prayer and the power of encouragement.

Fourth Day

What's your memory verse?

1. Read Nehemiah 4:14-23. Explain these verses in your own words. What plan did Nehemiah come up with?

2. In his book, Hand Me Another Brick, author Charles Swindoll finds five techniques that Nehemiah used to deal with discouragement from these verses. Let's take a look.
 - A. **Unify your efforts toward one goal.** (vs 13) How did Nehemiah do this? What was the goal?

 - B. **Direct your attention to the Lord.** (vs 14) How did he do this? How does remembering what God has done dispel discouragement?

 - C. **Maintain a balance in your thoughts and actions.** (vs 14-17) How did Nehemiah balance faith and action?

 - D. **Determine a rallying point.** (vs 19-20) What was the rallying point? What's the danger of trying to fight alone? Are you trying to?

 - E. **Develop a "serving others" ministry.** (vs 21-22) Nehemiah was saying, "We need help! We can't do this alone. It can't be about "I" anymore. How does serving others help get rid of discouragement? How does investing in people's lives helps us not be so wrapped up in our own?"

3. We are all leaders in some capacity. Which one of the above techniques do you need to cultivate in your leadership role or style?

4. How much are you investing in people's lives? Is the majority of your time spent on serving others or serving yourself?

The key to being miserable, discouraged, and depressed is to live for yourself, turning all your love inward. **C.S. Lewis** wrote, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully 'round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket -- safe, dark, motionless, airless -- it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable ... The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love ... is hell."

When the enemies knew that the Jews were on to their plan, they backed off. God allowed the Israelites to hear about what was happening to allow them to form a battle plan and get prepared. We see God's sovereignty even in that. They worked as a team and became stronger. Even in what appeared to be bad, God used it for good.

5. Is there opposition in your life right now that appears to be "bad"? Can you trust that God can, and will, use it for good? How can you learn from Nehemiah?

Tomorrow we'll wrap up this great chapter. I love the whole principle of faith and action together. I love being reminded that while I pray, I work. And while I work, I pray. May the enemy never find us "sleeping" on the job!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

1. Read Nehemiah 4:1-23 again.

Nehemiah reminded the Jewish people about God and His mighty power in verse 14. I think it's interesting that Paul reminds Timothy (2 Timothy 2:8) to "Remember that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead." Paul didn't really think that the young pastor could forget about Jesus and His mighty strength, did he? Raymond Brown wrote, "When trouble comes, Scripture's great realities can be temporarily displaced by anxious thoughts. Believers often need a timely reminder."

2. Do you need a reminder today about Scripture's great realities? Are you facing something in your life that's caused you to forget to "remember" who God is? Don't be afraid. Don't forget how awesome He is. Take some time and allow the Lord to remind you of who He is and what He can do.
3. All the people worked together and worked hard. They knew if there was trouble they would hear the trumpet sound. They were diligent and lived in perpetual readiness. Did Nehemiah work alongside them? What does that tell us, again, about his leadership style?
4. Do you live in "perpetual readiness" as you wait for the return of Jesus Christ? Are you keeping an ear open for the trumpet? (1 Thessalonians 4:16) Are you "walking carefully" and "redeeming the time"? (Ephesians 5:15-16)

5. Nehemiah encouraged the people to be alert at all times! The enemy most certainly attacks when we let our guard down. How do we live in an "alert" state all the time? How do we do this without getting burned out and tired?

6. How is your prayer life? Do you, like Nehemiah, constantly turn to prayer, knowing that the Lord is truly the only real source of strength; or is prayer the last alternative?

Alan Redpath once explained why the Jews were able to get their work done and ward off the enemy. He said, "It's because the people had a mind to work (vs 6), a heart to pray (vs 9), an eye to watch (vs 9), and an ear to hear (vs 20). This gave them the victory.

7. Do you have all of the above? A good work ethic? A trusting heart? A discerning and attentive eye? An ear to listen for His voice?

8. What challenged or encouraged you the most from this chapter?

9. Any changes you need to make as a result?

"The saint who advances on his knees never retreats."

Jim Elliot

