



"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 6

The battle rages on as Nehemiah continues to build the wall. The enemy has tried just about every which way to stop the work that was being done. Nehemiah keeps right on pushing through, laying brick after brick, trusting in the God of Heaven to protect and equip them for the work they had been called to do. Just when we think the enemy has run out of tricks, he pulls a few more from his sleeve. He couldn't get the building project to stop, so now he goes for the jugular. The attacks become quite personal against Nehemiah as a leader. We've dealt with fear, greed, and selfishness. Now we'll read about rumors, gossip, and slander. Any of that sound familiar? Nehemiah is a great example of how to handle such painful issues. To use a popular quote by Yogi Berra, the famous baseball player, "It's not over 'till it's over." Nehemiah had the same attitude. May we learn both how to handle the attacks when they come our way and how to keep our tongues silent to prevent launching attacks on others.

First Day

1. Read Nehemiah 6:1-19. List the facts you find. What's going on? Who is involved? When is it happening? Why is it happening?

2. Who are the main characters in this chapter? Are there any new characters introduced?

Memory Verse of the Week: "So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul, in fifty-two days." Nehemiah 6:15

Second Day

What's your memory verse? Why is this so cool?

1. Read Nehemiah 6:1-19. Take another look at verses 1-4. What caused the enemies to be upset?

2. What was requested of Nehemiah in the first letter?

3. What reason did he give for not agreeing to meet?

It seems that his enemies finally realized that not only was Nehemiah going to rebuild the city and the walls, he was planning on restoring the community and securing the city. They needed to destroy him! And quickly!

The plains of Ono were located south of Joppa on the western extremity of Judah along the seacoast. This was halfway between Samaria and Jerusalem. Raymond Brown writes, "This would have lured the governor into the borders of the hostile territories of Ashdod and Samaria. It would have taken him a full day to get there and, allowing a further day for the discussion and another for the return meant that, at this crucial stage, he would be away from his work for half a week. It was neither the right time nor place for a regional consultation, especially when Nehemiah knew they were up to no good. The invitation appeared innocent but was a thinly disguised death sentence. The governor was discerning and inflexible."

The word "together" in verse 2 doesn't seem to sit well with Nehemiah. "Together" is certainly not a word he would use to describe their relationship thus far. They had already been told that "they had no share in Jerusalem or any claims to it" (2:20). The enemy was proposing a "compromise."

4. How do you think he knew what they were up to?
5. Why is it important to cooperate, or work with, the right people? What can happen if we join hands with the enemy? (Who are the "right" people?)
6. Have you ever compromised with the wrong people in a situation? What happened? What did you learn?
7. Do you see any significance in the fact that this attack came right before they finished the work?
8. How many times did they invite him in the same manner? (vs 4)

In his book Hand Me Another Brick, (which is an amazing book, by the way) Charles Swindoll brings up an interesting point. He wrote, "This attack on Nehemiah was very significant because it happened at a crucial juncture in his life. It hit when he was nearly finished with the greatest task that Jerusalem's citizens had seen in their generation. Not very long before they were ready to cut the ribbon and have a jubilant celebration, the enemy attacked. Not only does the enemy attack right after a mountaintop experience, he attacks when we may be approaching completion of a tremendous work."

9. Have you ever been really attacked right before a great work God was doing in your life or your ministry? How? How about after? Why does the enemy use this tactic? Sadly, why is it so effective?

Nehemiah was a man who wouldn't be manipulated. His enemies were persistent, but he stuck to his guns. (☺) Actually, he was sensitive to God's guidance and promptings in his life. Because he was a man of prayer and trusted in his God, he was able to discern the truth from a lie. Discernment is crucial in leadership, as well as in simply living our Christian life.

10. How would you define discernment?

11. Read 1 King 3:5-15. What great thing did Solomon ask for in verse 9? Why is it so vital that a leader prays for and exercises discernment?

12. What did the Psalmist pray for in Psalm 119:18? What does John say is necessary in 1 John 4:1-6?

13. Do you pray for discernment every time you face a situation, make a decision, or give counsel? If not, start now! If so, keep on asking for the Lord to give you a discerning spirit to help lead, guide, and equip you.

That's all for today. Another great example from our man Nehemiah: Don't be distracted by the enemy, and don't yoke yourself with the enemy! See you tomorrow!

Third Day

Memorize your verse. It's an easy one! It reveals to us that the work was successful and Nehemiah finished his task.

1. Read Nehemiah 6:1-19, focusing on 5-9. It wasn't working, so Sanballat changed his approach. Now what kind of letter did he bring? What were they trying to cause?

2. What does he accuse Nehemiah of? Why were the accusations so dangerous?

The open or "unsealed" letter was public property; anybody the messenger came in contact with could read it. Usually, official letters were rolled up and sealed with an official seal by the sender.

3. A nice word for what's happening is "rumors." How many falsehoods, or accusations, can you find in verses 6-7?

4. Define the word "rumor." What's the difference between "rumor" and "slander"?

5. What does *God's Word* say about rumors and slander? Look up the following verses and write the main point.

A. Proverbs 6:16-19

B. Titus 2:3

C. Psalm 101:5

D. Proverbs 25:18

E. Proverbs 19:5

F. Proverbs 11:13

6. Have you ever had a rumor spread about you? How did it feel? How did you deal with it?

7. Have you been guilty of spreading a rumor, either on purpose or inadvertently? What can (or did) you do to make it right?

8. How did Nehemiah respond, according to verses 8-9?

9. What did Jesus do when He was falsely accused of wrongdoing? Read Matthew 27:11-14.

10. Why do people enjoy spreading rumors? Why are we quick to believe what we hear about people before we check out the facts?

Raymond Brown wrote something so profound. He said, "It's not easy to handle unjust accusations. The problem is as old as time itself, and Scripture offers some helpful insights. If some damaging smear has been made on our character and we are assaulted by slander, we must realize that, although painful, the experience can be educative, teaching us something about ourselves, about Scripture, and about God."

First, perhaps there is something we can learn about ourselves, even from unkind words about us. We need to honestly examine our hearts to see if there is any truth in the accusation. It may be ill-intended, but that doesn't mean there may not be a grain of truth in the cruel thing that has been said. We need to pray Psalm 7:3-4 and 139:23-24.

Secondly, there is something we can learn from Scripture. The Bible offers clear guidelines about our response to unkind and untruthful things which may be said against us. God's Word forbids retaliation, which only multiplies sin, and we must not attempt to take any kind of revenge. We are to intercede for those who "falsely say all kinds of evil" against us. We are also to pray for ourselves,

especially for patience, to absorb falsehoods either in silence (like Jesus did) or with temperate speech, knowing that a gentle answer turns away wrath. If our conscience is clear, it is best not to justify ourselves. Given time and patience, many of the worst accusations are often seen for what they are and discredit those who have perpetrated them (Romans 12:17-21; Mark 14:61; Proverbs 15:1, 16:32).

Thirdly, however sad the circumstances, there is always something we can learn about God. Psalm 7 tells us that when David was troubled about allegations made against him by a Benjamite named Cush, he discovered in his emotional pain that God was his refuge (1-2), judge (3-9), and shield (10-17). In the light of these great truths, he determined to take shelter (1-2), search (3), trust (11), and praise (17), knowing that God alone can bring good out of evil. David proves that the trouble caused by a slanderer recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head (16). Those who trust God leave Him to do His own work and ask Him for the strength, patience, and love to cope with such a highly unpleasant form of adversity.

11. If you are being slandered or falsely accused right now, what have you learned:
 - A. About yourself? Is there any truth in it?
 - B. About Scripture? How would God want you to respond?
 - C. About God? How has He revealed Himself to you through this?

Nehemiah didn't stop working. He prayed and left it all in God's capable hands, trusting Him to take care of it. He knew the enemy was trying to weaken his hands, so he prayed that God would strengthen them!

12. I wonder if Nehemiah was reminded of the words of Isaiah when he prayed that prayer. Read Isaiah 35:3-4. What does it say?

I was very convicted by this section. How many times have I slandered someone? How many times have I been quick to believe something I've heard, then pass it on? And how many times have I responded badly when I am being falsely accused? Oh, Lord, forgive me. And thank You for Your cleansing blood.
(1 John 1:9)

Fourth Day

Work on your verse!

Sanballat and his crew had tried to be pretty tricky. They tried to accuse Nehemiah of plotting to set himself up as king. They knew that if King Artaxerxes of Persia heard these things, Nehemiah would be doomed! That would have violated the king's trust, to say the least. They wanted everyone to believe these false accusations against him, but even that didn't distract Nehemiah from his work.

1. Today let's begin by reading Nehemiah 6:1-19, noting verses 10-14. Who do we meet? What was he referred to as in verse 10?

Shemamiah, one of the prophet's of Jerusalem, was the son of a priest who was an intimate friend of Nehemiah (Ezra 2:60). Many commentators believe that he had confined himself to his house to pretend that he was also afraid of Nehemiah's enemies or to symbolize that his own life was in danger. They think he did this in an attempt to identify with Nehemiah's plight and gain his trust. He also could have been ill and confined to his house, unable to join them in their work on the wall.

2. Where does he suggest they go? For what reason?

3. What was Nehemiah's response? Why did he believe that Shemamiah did this?

God showed Nehemiah this was another trick. God never goes against His Word, and what Shemamiah was asking him to do was contrary to Scripture. A layman could not go beyond the altar of burnt offerings at the temple (Numbers 18:7). Only priests were allowed access to holy places. If he could get Nehemiah to come into a place reserved for priests only, he could then accuse him of violating holiness rules. He would be guilty of desecrating the house of God. If they couldn't accuse him of being a political rebel, they would try to make him a religious transgressor.

4. According to verse 14, what does Nehemiah realize?

5. Also in verse 14, what do we find Nehemiah doing, again?

Nehemiah's character was being tested and brought to trial. They were trying to defame him and disgrace his name. They were trying intimidation as well, trying to scare him. Perhaps it was working. But whether or not he was afraid, intimidated, or angry, Nehemiah still clung to the God he loved, praying, trusting His Word, determined to obey the Lord. Remember, he was using the "twins" of prayer and action!

6. We can be tempted daily to venture into sin that would bring a reproach to our Lord's name. Have you been guilty of some form of compromise or other behavior not fitting for a child of His? Ask the Spirit to examine your heart, life, motives, and attitudes. Repent and ask forgiveness for anything He shows you.

7. Is intimidation still a tool the enemy uses in our lives? How? And how can intimidation cause us to fall into sin?

In verse 14, Nehemiah calls upon the Lord to do the right thing and then leave the outcome to Him. He believes God is just, righteous, and all-knowing, so He knows God will handle those who came against him. It is now a problem between God and the enemies!

8. Is there someone in your life that has wronged you? Are you having trouble forgiving them? Have you prayed the way Nehemiah prayed in verse 14, leaving them at the foot of the cross? Or do you keep taking it back?

9. According to verse 15, what was the result? How long did this project take?

Nehemiah perceived that this man was not from God! Thank God, again, for discernment. Nehemiah prayed and continued his work. So what was the result of all this work? The wall was finished in fifty-two days. What was the lesson? "The faithful God of Heaven and earth rewards the diligence and faithfulness of His servants." (John MacArthur)

Daniel was one of the first captives to be taken from Jerusalem to Babylon, in 605 B.C. Daniel predicted the rebuilding of the city (Daniel 9:25). His prophecy came true in this verse!

Tomorrow we'll wrap up chapter 6. I pray that you are reading and studying like a detective, digging into the text to find all that God has for you.

Fifth Day

Write your verse from memory. It should be an easy one!

1. Read Nehemiah 6:1-19. Read 15-19 again. How did the surrounding nations respond to the completion of the wall? Why?

2. How did their attitudes change from what we saw in 2:19 and 4:1?

3. Seems like Nehemiah added a footnote in verses 17-19. Although from the outside things looked great, what was happening on the inside?

4. Why do you think Tobiah wrote them letters? What was he hoping to do?

The nobles were cooperating with the enemy. They were intermarrying, which was forbidden by the Mosaic Law. Tobiah had family ties with the priestly house of Eliashib and also may have been benefiting from Tobiah's trading projects. Tobiah certainly made sure he had connections on the "inside." Brown writes, "Tobiah made sure that he had strong links with Israel's nobility through the most intimate of all human relationships." It seemed like the nobles were trying to play both sides, giving reports to Tobiah and to Nehemiah. They were disobeying God and ruining their own future.

5. What are the dangers of linking arms with the enemy?

6. When the wall was complete, did Tobiah leave Nehemiah alone? (vs 19)

It is said that there are two main lessons in this chapter: the enemy's subtlety and the Lord's sufficiency. This chapter has many warnings that are applicable for us today.

6. Review some of the enemy's subtle tactics. How did they progress? Were some of the same tactics used against our Lord? (Read Luke 4:1-13)

7. How does this chapter reveal God's sufficiency?

8. What warnings do you find for yourself personally?

See you next week, ladies!