Rebuilding the Wall and Resisting Opposition

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Introduction and Retrospective on Ezra and Nehemiah

So we should also this evening be welcoming Shirley Chen and Caddy from the land far away, and we're glad that they're here with us as well. So Nehemiah chapter 4, we got down through the first four verses last week.

Yeah, I wonder if I could make some comments on chapter 3.

Very good. That's right. You remember that Eric was not with us last week. He has some thoughts for us from chapter 3 and probably the introductory verses of chapter 4 as well. So, Eric, you go ahead, please.

Thank you. Yes, I'm sorry I wasn't able to be with you last week, and I'll try to make up for it tonight.

So we're going back to chapter 3. Well, it's an interesting thing. Sometimes we can look at all the details and we can sometimes overlook some of the larger pictures and the lessons that flow from the larger picture. What I have particularly thought about during not this last week, but the previous week, was the fact that we have two men, Ezra and Nehemiah—two books that are named after these two individuals. But in the original Hebrew Bible, this was one book, and they treated it as one book.

Ezra, as we pointed out previously, came earlier with the purpose of teaching the word of God to the exiles who were in Judea, who had come back—the captives that had come back. And he had purposed in his heart to learn the word of God, to do the word of God, and also to teach the word of God. Now, twelve years have passed, and in the meantime, Ezra's ministry continues. And then Nehemiah comes twelve years later.

We find that Ezra has been there for twelve years. Nehemiah comes and he finds the walls all broken down and the people in reproach. And so it's he that actually begins the work of rebuilding. He's the great motivator, the mover, whereas Ezra, in a sense, prepared the way for Nehemiah's work of rebuilding the wall. The two are necessary. There are two different

kinds of men, different types of ministry, but they were both necessary to accomplish the work.

Ezra, as you recall, when he came, he was not a man of action. He was not a man who motivated people to action; he was a man that motivated people's conscience. We see that when he first came, he learned that the children of Judea had been marrying pagan wives and taking pagan wives for their children. And he broke down, and he wept, and he fasted, and he prayed, and he confessed. And what happened there is he awakened the conscience of the people of God, so that they all began to weep, and they began to fast and to pray. But he took no action.

There was a man called Shechaniah, we read in Ezra chapter 10. And we read in verse 1:

> [Ezra 10:1 NKJV] Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly.

He had awakened the conscience of the people to what they had done, but he took no action. He was a man that waited on the Lord; he was an intensely spiritual man. And we find in verse 2:

> [Ezra 10:2 NKJV] And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, "We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this.

Under Shechaniah's advice now, the people moved. Shechaniah was a man, you might say, of foresight. He saw what they had to do, and he advised and encouraged Ezra, because Ezra had been given authority from the king to actually act. But it was Shechaniah that bolstered his courage to make the act of separation of these pagan wives from their families. So we see in Ezra, though, he was the conscience of the nation itself.

Well, Nehemiah now was a man of action. And God uses both kinds of men; both are necessary. Very, very seldom in history do you have men like Moses or Samuel that can do both. They were men that could lead the children of Israel and also be their conscience and be their leader at the same time. So God uses these two men, Ezra and Nehemiah. Nehemiah spurred the people to action, and he was diligent in his work. So not only did he start the

work, but Nehemiah was a man that completed the work. We'll see as we continue to study the book of Nehemiah how he continued not only the work of rebuilding the walls, but actually rebuilding the nation itself in his work as governor.

So just that one thought, comparing the two. Later on in Nehemiah, we run into Ezra again, where Ezra is put into the position of teaching again. Nehemiah takes a step back. He is the organizer, he is the administrator, he is the leader of the nation, but he leaves that particular gift of teaching to Ezra. We'll see that later on as we come to the portion where he stands up and teaches the people of God. Now, Ezra then is alongside Nehemiah during this time, and no doubt providing private and spiritual help to the work. Nothing is mentioned about Ezra, but knowing the man, we would expect that he spent a great deal of his time on his knees.

Surveying and Organizing the Work (Nehemiah 3)

Now coming to chapter 3, where we have the building of the wall itself, I'd like to make a few comments concerning the building of the wall itself. First of all, Nehemiah's role: God had already put the plan into his heart. We read that in Nehemiah chapter 2 and verse 12:

> [Nehemiah 2:12 NKJV] Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode.

And there, first of all, he takes a survey of the walls, the condition of them, at night in quiet. Then he begins to formulate a plan. He's going to need all the people; he's going to need everyone working in order to accomplish this momentous task that they had before them.

Those ruins had been there for over 100 years—130 years those walls had been fallen down. The gates were burnt, and there was just rubble all around, with a few houses built in the rubble and so on. But it was a terrible situation. They were the laughingstock of the nations. They were in great reproach. People mocked them because they didn't have any protection whatsoever. They were exposed to every outside influence. Even though the temple was built and the ministry was going on, still they were in great reproach by their pagan neighbors.

So this is a big task to undertake, and it took a lot of thought and organization. As I said, Nehemiah inspired the people to rise up and build, and they were willing to. And I believe it's partly because of the ministry of Ezra among them. He had prepared the people as he prepared his own heart to learn the word of God, to do it, and to teach it. So his influence

was there, that Nehemiah could use those who had been moved by the Spirit of God to take up that great work that had not been started for 130 years.

Knowing a little bit about construction, what would be the first thing you'd have to do? The first thing is you get your surveyors out there. They started to build the walls and go around the walls and build all the gates. First of all, the surveyors will have to mark out where the new wall is going to go. If there weren't foundations there or if it was obscured, they'd have to find out and dig, and they'd have to make a line and clear the rubble in order for the workers to be able to begin to build the wall in the right place. So it needed the surveyors, and the surveyors had to find out exactly where the gates were and the dimensions. All that was laid out, no doubt, to begin with.

The other observation that I make on this is that there were all kinds of people that were building. There were goldsmiths and perfumers and priests and Levites and leaders and ordinary people, some from inside the city, some from outside the city. But you know, there's a couple of classes of people that are not mentioned at all, and they're the ones, probably, most important of all: they were the masons and the carpenters and the blacksmiths. There's no mention of them!

So I began to think, where are the masons? Where are the carpenters? To build a gate is no ordinary task for a perfumer or a priest or a Levite; they don't have the tools to begin with. You need blacksmiths in order to make the bars and the hinges and the nails and the sheeting that would go on the outside of these doors, these gates. Where are the masons to make sure that those stones are laid in such a manner that they won't fall down? You remember what Tobiah or Sanballat said: "Oh man, if a fox runs up, that wall is going to fall over. They don't know anything about building."

Well, I'll tell you where the masons were, and where the carpenters were, and where the smiths were: they were under the direction of none other than Nehemiah, who sent them to superintend the work that was being carried on. I'm sure that in every area there was a mason going around and saying, "No, that block belongs over here." Or the carpenter that says, "Look, we're going to set up a central shop here, and we're going to build the gates, and then we'll transport them and erect them later," as we find out they weren't all put in at the beginning. And then of course, the blacksmiths and carpenters would have to work together on this. All this was under the direction of Nehemiah. He was an amazing man; there's no doubt about it. Not only was he wise in being able to mobilize people, but he also was very wise in the work and how it would progress.

Each of those forty-two sections of the wall were the responsibility of certain people, and of course they would be the ones that were responsible to ask questions of the masons or

others that they would need. But they were the ones that were actually responsible for the work that was carried on there. They probably had lots of other helpers as well. The ones that are named here are the ones that were responsible for those sections of the wall.

The Significance of the Gates

Another thought concerning the construction of the wall itself: there are ten gates that are mentioned in here. We have the Sheep Gate, the Fish Gate, the Old Gate, the Valley Gate, the Refuse Gate, the Civic Gate, the Fountain Gate, the Water Gate, the Horse Gate, the East Gate, and the Inspection Gate—ten gates. But we find that in the New Jerusalem, in Revelation chapter 21, there are twelve gates:

> [Revelation 21:12-13 NKJV] 12 Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

Twelve gates—three gates each. But here we find ten, though there probably were twelve because there's a couple of other gates that are mentioned. There was, for example, in chapter 8, verse 16:

> [Nehemiah 8:16 NKJV] Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim.

We read that there was the Gate of Ephraim, and it was close to the Water Gate. And then in chapter 12, verse 39, there's another gate mentioned:

> [Nehemiah 12:39 NKJV] and above the Gate of Ephraim, above the Old Gate, above the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped by the Gate of the Prison.

Yes, the Gate of the Prison, which was in the vicinity of the Sheep Gate. So there were twelve gates in all that were set up there in Jerusalem, the same as the New Jerusalem—just a point of interest.

Now, as to the workers there, I'm not sure... probably Harold had gone over some of the details concerning the workers themselves.

Not all of them.

Well, I'm not going to do that either. I know that you mentioned the Sheep Gate and Eliashib the high priest, but there were others as well. There was someone like Meremoth in verse 4:

> [Nehemiah 3:4 NKJV] And next to them Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, made repairs. Next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs. Next to them Zadok the son of Baana made repairs.

He shared the work with another one, but then decided that he could take another section of the wall. In verse 21, we read:

> [Nehemiah 3:21 NKJV] After him Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, repaired another section, from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib.

So some are mentioned that they did extra work. Having shared the work with one, and maybe having finished that one as much as he felt that he could do, he took another section. And that's to be encouraged. I think some people are just so willing to work that they can do an extra bit—we think of a double share.

We think of some, in verse 7 for example:

> [Nehemiah 3:7 NKJV] And next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, repaired the residence of the governor of the region beyond the River.

They weren't even residents of the city of Jerusalem! They had no property there, but they came and they worked. So that's something also to commend them for.

Also, in verse 10, we read:

> [Nehemiah 3:10 NKJV] Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs in front of his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabniah made repairs.

I think we get a lesson there: that was close to his home. I would imagine that this good man would make an extra effort to strengthen and make sure that that part of the wall next to his home was extra strong; he'd want to make sure. And it's a good thing, I think, for someone to build close to home first. That's a good principle: that we take care of the things at home first.

And there were rulers there. They didn't think of themselves as being above doing the work, because the work would involve a lot of moving of debris. We'll read about that in a little while, that there was a lot of refuse and debris there, and it would be dusty, tiring work to do. There was a lot of it there that would have to be hauled out and put away. But the rulers themselves, they rolled up their sleeves and they went to work.

We find women also working there. In verse 12:

> [Nehemiah 3:12 NKJV] And next to him was Shallum the son of Hallohesh, leader of half the district of Jerusalem; he and his daughters made repairs.

The women too! There is certainly a place for women alongside the men working, and work will be done when they both work together.

And then we read about this man Baruch in verse 20:

> [Nehemiah 3:20 NKJV] After him Baruch the son of Zabbai carefully repaired the other section, from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest.

He carefully repaired. Now, it's a break in pattern. Usually the other mentions of the people repairing simply say they repaired, but he carefully repaired. He set an example, no doubt. Now, it's Nehemiah who wrote this, we believe; he writes it in the first person. So we believe that Nehemiah is the one that set the pen down. He recognized that that man, Baruch, had really worked carefully, and no doubt pointed it out to other people, saying, "This is an

example of how we ought to complete the work. Look at Baruch's work if you want to find out how it should be done." He earnestly, carefully repaired that.

As to the gates themselves, they have typical meanings as well. I'll just point out a couple as we pass by them. Already, as Harold has mentioned, the Sheep Gate is the place of sacrifice. It all begins with sacrifice. That's why I believe that the Sheep Gate is mentioned first: because the foundation of the whole nation was based upon sacrifice, the Passover lamb. It was there that God redeemed His people out of Egypt, and it's there at the altar where the sacrifices were made that the people were allowed to approach God through the blood sacrifice. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin; there's no approach to God except through the blood.

Of course, today we approach the holy throne through the blood of Jesus. And we can come boldly because that sacrifice was complete and it was accepted by God. So we can come boldly into His presence, knowing that there is nothing against us. So that speaks of the Sheep Gate.

Next, we read about the Fish Gate in verse 3:

> [Nehemiah 3:3 NKJV] Also the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars.

That's where the fishmongers, the fish sellers, would bring the salted fish up from the Lake of Galilee or from the Mediterranean. There they would bring their carts up from the coast or down from Galilee, and they would enter into the fish market. No doubt it was inside the Fish Gate; that's why it got its name. Well, didn't the Lord Jesus take fishermen, and He said to them:

> [Matthew 4:19 NKJV] Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

It speaks of evangelism. So after the sacrifice, we see evangelism—telling others about the great sacrifice that has been made, that they too can enter into the promises of God.

And then the Old Gate—that's an interesting one. Why was it called the Old Gate? Well, it was probably a gate that had been there from ancient times, maybe from the city of David before it was expanded. The walls were expanded by Solomon, later by Hezekiah, and so on.

It was an ancient gate whereby from old times people had entered in. That's the old ways. People are always looking for new ways of doing things, modern ways; they want innovation, they want something different. But the prophet says:

> [Jeremiah 6:16 NKJV] Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'

Walk in the old ways, the old landmarks; they were sure. The people of old kept the law of God and were blessed. Those that wander from the old ways find themselves outside of the place of blessing, and so the Old Gate reminds us of that.

And then the Valley Gate: it was down probably in the Tyropoeon Valley or one of the valleys. It was the lowest gate; it was the humble gate. We think of humility, entering in in humility.

And all the other ones: the Refuse Gate, where all the refuse was taken out and dumped into the Valley of Hinnom. There's a lot of garbage that we need to haul out of our lives, is there not, and put away the works of the flesh. The Fountain Gate speaks of refreshment, doesn't it—the Holy Spirit refreshing us.

And then there are those other gates as well. I only just sketch them, but there are typical meanings that we can use as examples, as sort of signposts for our Christian walk, because don't forget that these gates were in the walls. There was the outside and there was the inside. Inside was seclusion; it was separation from all the pollution that's outside. The reasons and purposes for which we enter into the gates, we can see typified here in the names that were given to them from ancient times.

Opposition, Ridicule, and Prayer (Nehemiah 4:1–6)

It only took them fifty-two days, but now we're going to talk about the troubles that they encountered. They encounter a lot of troubles in building the walls. As soon as Satan sees Christians being separated from the world, he's going to come in and attack them and try to discourage them from that. Satan cannot touch a believer—he cannot do that—just as Sanballat and Tobiah cannot touch the temple. But as soon as the people began to try and separate themselves from the world, then there's opposition.

Satan doesn't mind as long as you're worldly. A worldly Christian, he'll leave alone; it's God the Father who will bring discipline. But Satan won't attack a worldly Christian—he's got him

where he wants him; he's ineffective. He can't touch God's work, but he can hinder the fruit in the lives of those who believe. And so what the wall represents is separation from the world, where inside is blessing and peace, outside is the world. Inside is worship and quietness; outside is conflict and the world's way of things. The walls are very important. So as soon as they begin to build the walls, you can count on the fact that the enemy is going to try to stop it and hinder it in any way at all.

So you ended on the first four verses, is that right?

I did, yeah.

Well, I'll make just a couple of comments then on that phase of their reproach, which was ridiculed.

> [Nehemiah 4:1 NKJV] But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews.

Why was he so angry? Well, they could lord it over the Jews before. They had no protection; they had the run of Jerusalem; they could do what they wanted. And so they were furious now to be left out, that God was actually going to do something and exclude them. They thought that they were the bosses, that they had the run of the place. And they mocked the Jews:

> [Nehemiah 4:2-3 NKJV] 2 And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish--stones that are burned?" 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall."

So they were ridiculing what these Jews were going to attempt.

But then here's Nehemiah. Again, he is a man of prayer. The enemy scorns, but he goes to the Lord in prayer first of all:

> [Nehemiah 4:4-5 NKJV] [4] Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! [5] Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders.

Remember when Nehemiah was there in Shushan the capital, and his brother Hanani came and told Nehemiah that they were in reproach? In other words, every day they mocked the Jews. They were second-class citizens; they were belittled; they were laughed at and mocked and ridiculed. The world does that to us too, doesn't it? The world would ridicule a worldly Christian. A worldly Christian is in reproach; they can't answer back. What would those Jews answer Tobiah and Sanballat? How would they answer them? Would they say, "Oh, our God is all-powerful"? "Yeah, look at your city! The walls are broken down. What are you talking about?" They were the laughingstock. They couldn't even raise up their hands; they were in reproach.

And that's the same word that we find in chapter 1. Turn their reproach onto them. In other words, they couldn't say, "Our God is a powerful God; our God is the everlasting One." How could they give testimony to their God that allowed their city to be broken down, with the walls in rubble, the burnt stones, and the gates that were all burned up? They couldn't give testimony.

So Nehemiah goes a step further. He says, "Not only turn their reproach on them, Lord—in other words, help us to build so that when they see it, they're going to see our God can do it." That's exactly what he wants: "Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You, for they have provoked You to anger before the builders." Notice now: it wasn't just the Jews' reproach, it was a reproach on God Himself, because the people bore the name of the living God. And so if the people reproached the people of God, it reflected on God Himself.

You just got down to verse 4?

Yeah, we really only got down to verse 3.

So you're half an inch ahead of us!

Okay, well, I'll let you take over then, because I don't want to interrupt your studies here.

No problem. All right, well, I'm just going to reiterate the points that Eric has finished with, and that is this: that when the people of God were attacked by the enemy, the response of Nehemiah was, number one, prayer; number two, to remind himself and the Lord that the

real battle was not against him or against the people, it was against the Lord. And so you get that at the end of verse 5: they have provoked the Lord to anger.

So he's combined the two here. He's praying to the Lord and he's saying, "Lord, this is not so much a problem that we have; this is a problem that You have." Putting it into our situation today: what if there were, and there are, attacks against the work of God at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel? What are we going to do about it? Well, we're going to remind the Lord that the attack is coming, and then we're going to remind the Lord that 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel is not really our work—it's His work! The Lord said:

> [Matthew 16:18 NKJV] And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

And so we respond and say, "Lord, the world, the evil one, the enemy are attacking Your work." And Nehemiah builds these two together continually.

But then he goes one step further, and that is, he says, "Now, Lord, we are going to do something about this." And more about that as we go along; we'll see what he's going to do. But I think those are three lovely responses: remember, when a problem arises, number one, pray; number two, remind the Lord He's got a problem; number three, do something!

You remember the story, don't you, about the man who had a car? He took his car and he said, "Lord, this is not my car, this is Your car. And I want this car to be used for the glory of God." Many of us have done that when we got a car: we'll pull over to the side of the road and we say, "Now, Lord, this isn't my car, this is Your car. You use this car, please, for Your glory." And so you'll remember the man who got into an accident, and he said, "Lord, I just want to remind You, there's a big smash in Your car!" That's good to remember: our work is His work. Nehemiah understood that.

Interestingly, he says they provoked You to anger before the builders. It wasn't just that Nehemiah realized they had a problem; what they did was they directed their reproach in such a way as to discourage the builders. That's the key along here.

Then verse 6:

> [Nehemiah 4:6 NKJV] 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.

So what did he do after he prayed and told the Lord He had a problem? They went to work! Good for them. And the delightful phrase at the end of verse 6 is, for the people had a mind to work. Has that got a parallel for today? The answer is that some of us were here in the chapel when we put in an elevator and basically renovated this lower floor, and there was a lot of work to be done. One of our brethren, I think it was Harold Buck, decided that there was work to be done, and so he took this little box and he decorated it. This was a suggestion box, I believe, and a devotion box, but he put on the top of it these words: For the people had a mind to work.

Okay, we had to rebuild this building in part, and there were a lot of things that had to be done. And so somebody said, "I've got an idea of what I could do; I think somebody should do this." And they put their ideas in here, but they did it all—and you can't see it back there, but it says: For the people had a mind to work, Nehemiah 4, verse 6. We were motivated on the basis of the book of Nehemiah, but in particular on the basis of this particular line. And we said, by the grace of God, we're going to renovate this building, and by the grace of God, it can be used for God when it is renovated. And praise the Lord, that's what happened.

Increasing Conspiracy and Internal Discouragement (Nehemiah 4:7–12)

So again, verse 6: we built the wall; the people had a mind to work; we got to work. Now, verses 7 and 8:

> [Nehemiah 4:7-8 NKJV] 7 Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, 8 and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

So what have these people done? The very first time we read about it, back in chapter 2, verse 10:

> [Nehemiah 2:10 NKJV] When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

They were grieved. And then they went from there to lots of talk, and in various ways they talked. They laughed, as Eric has pointed out; they mocked; they ridiculed. And now they're talking again, and they're conspiring, all of them together, to come and fight against Jerusalem and to hinder it.

It's interesting: their talk gets stronger and stronger, their anger gets fiercer and fiercer. Now, who was this man, Sanballat? Well, the answer is here in verse 7: he's working with Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites. When we first read about it, it's Sanballat and Tobiah. Then later we read about Geshem the Arab added to it. Now we've got Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, but the Ammonites and the Ashdodites have been added. So the further you go, the stronger the opposition, the more involved in the opposition.

We find in verse 2 that Sanballat spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria. So Sanballat was not alone in this: he had the army of Samaria with him; he had the Ammonites, the Arabs, the Ashdodites. That's a lot of people! How many did Nehemiah have actively building the wall? I think Eric said forty-two, didn't you, Eric?

That's right—forty-two stations at least that were worked.

Forty-two stations, and some of them had multiple workers, it's true. But that's not terribly many. So who do you think was outnumbered in this particular possible war? Do you think it would have been the Israelites, or do you think it might have been Sanballat and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites? So I sit back and I say now, what good is it going to be to fight against that potential army? If there had been a war, who would have won? The numbers game would say, obviously the enemy would win.

There was a man by the name of Gideon; he went to war. Did he win or lose? He had 300 men, and they won the battle. Hallelujah! So what's Nehemiah doing? He's basically saying, "Lord, I can't win this war. We can't build the wall if they attack. What are we going to do? We are going to build the wall. Maybe the Lord will be behind us—probably behind us, because He's already moved the heart of the king, and He's already moved the heart of the men of Jerusalem, and there's all these men building, and the people had a mind to work." Do you think the Lord, having done all that, is going to allow these wicked men to win a battle against us? And so the few with Nehemiah and under Nehemiah went to work, recognizing that the threat of war was coming from Sanballat and his confederates.

What would happen if the Canadian government were to wage war against the Christians, as happens in so many countries? What would happen? Would they win or lose? Well, they probably are going to shut a lot of people down; they might put a lot of people in prison; they might even kill a lot of people. But what is the Christian going to do? He's going to keep

talking! He's going to keep talking. I've told you many times that they shut John Bunyan down, and they said, "John Bunyan, you don't have a license. You can't preach in England; you don't have a license. So we'll throw you in prison again." And they threw him in prison again. And when he got there, he said, "What can I do in prison?" And the Lord said, "Well, why don't you write a little book?" So he wrote The Pilgrim's Progress, and it was mightily used of God.

Don't let the words of the enemy shut you down! Keep talking. Keep talking; keep telling the people about the Savior. Sanballat kept talking, and the men of Nehemiah kept on working. Hallelujah! I just think it's marvelous.

What does Nehemiah do in verse 9?

> [Nehemiah 4:9 NKJV] Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

Interesting: nevertheless. We made our prayer unto God and set a watch. Many were praying with him. We made our prayer unto God and set a watch against them by day and night because of them. Do you think the watch would have really done a whole lot of good? Well, possibly, but probably not if they were determined to slaughter the city.

Verse 10:

> [Nehemiah 4:10 NKJV] Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."

It's interesting now: in this verse implied, and in the verses that follow amplified, these men of Judah were listening to what's going on, and they kept on reminding Nehemiah that they were in deep trouble. The enemy could come on us, and the result was that the strength of the bearers of burdens was failing. And basically, the men of Judah were going to Nehemiah and saying, "Listen, we're fighting a losing battle. The people on the wall, they're upset, and the builders are upset. We've got a big problem."

Verse 11:

> [Nehemiah 4:11 NKJV] And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease."

So the men of Judah are reporting to Nehemiah what Sanballat and his men are supposedly planning to do. Sanballat and his men keep talking; the men of Judah keep listening. Sanballat and his men talk, and the men of Judah pick it up and they start complaining. Almost sounds like what was going on when the children of Israel left Egypt and went to Israel. It's true that Pharaoh was chasing them, but a lot of the problems arose, you remember, because the people who were being delivered were complaining. And these men of Judah were basically complaining.

Verse 12:

> [Nehemiah 4:12 NKJV] So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us."

How did Sanballat get his message to Nehemiah? Through the Jews! How often did that message come to Nehemiah? Ten times! Over and over and over and over—ten times the Jews came to Nehemiah and said, "Nehemiah, we've got a huge problem. Do you know what Sanballat and his compatriots are going to do?"

And so I wrote down a little note in my Bible, and it says this: "Harold, this reminds you of the ten spies." Remember the ten spies who went into the land of Canaan? They saw the wonderful land, they saw three giants—the three sons of Anak—and they came back and said, "We can't do it. We can't conquer them. We've got a problem; we can't do it." And these men of Judah ten times repeated the same threat that Sanballat and his people were making.

Have you ever noticed that in the work of God, not everybody is in agreement? Sometimes they say, "It'll never work." And sometimes it does work. Eric and I had a little visit yesterday morning. Can you remember their names? Anyway, there were two—a man and his wife from the assembly in Ladner. It's the man and wife that spoke to us when we were having breakfast. The wife was here in our Bible study many years ago, and her husband, who wasn't her husband then, was in the Bible study. He wasn't from 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel; he was a zealous Christian. He used to come faithfully on Wednesday night, I think.

And so he said to me one day, "Harold, you should start a Bible study on Tuesday afternoons at one o'clock, finish precisely at two-thirty. And if you do that, some people will come." I said

to him, "That's not going to work. It's the middle of the day; you can't have a Bible study at one o'clock in the afternoon and expect people to come." He says, "These people are parents, most of them, and their children are at school. You let them out by two o'clock so they can go pick their children up; they'll come." I said, "It'll never work." He said, "Try it." I said, "All right, I will." Well, within two weeks we had fourteen people coming. On Tuesday last, I don't know how many we had—twenty-five or thirty?

A lot of people are going to say it won't work. You might even say yourself it won't work. Well, how would you know for sure? You'd try it, and if you get a really good failure, then you'd say, "Well, I guess it won't work; we should probably go back and try it again." Don't be discouraged by others who say that particular work will fail; God can make it a blessing.

Armed to Build: Defending the Work (Nehemiah 4:13–15)

So anyway, ten times. Therefore, Nehemiah says in verse 13:

> [Nehemiah 4:13 NKJV] Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

He decided, "I was going to start to defend ourselves." Okay? So what are the chances of defending yourself with forty-two stations, each man or woman, whoever they were, with a trowel and some mortar, and you're going to defend the city? But they said, "We're going to do it anyway," and they went to work.

So I put down in my margin this simple note that says: They were prepared to do something. We're not going to stop; we're going to carry on. And even if we can't conquer these people if they attack us, at least we're going to put up some fight, and they're going to be just a little bit afraid because they're going to lose something.

So you give this man Nehemiah great accolades. He said, "We will do something. I came here under the command of the king. I am going to do what I can to finish the job. I'm not going to be silenced; we are not going to stop."

Verse 14:

> [Nehemiah 4:14 NKJV] And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

That sounds like what Eric's been talking about: a leader. That sounds like a good challenge. That's kind of what a general would say, isn't it? Don't run; stand up and fight! Don't be afraid. He said this to the nobles and the rulers and the rest of the people. He told them all: don't be afraid.

Remember the Lord. Again, that's his key point: this is the Lord's battle. All we are is a few foot soldiers on the front line; it's all the Lord's battle. Remember the Lord! Why are you here today? You're here today because you remember the Lord. The Lord says:

> [Luke 22:19 NKJV] And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

So we come and we break bread. The Lord says teach the doctrines, and so we teach the doctrines as the day goes on. What's going to happen? The Lord's going to build His church, that's all. He's going to do a far greater work than us, of course. Is He going to use us for something? Of course! And so He's going to build the church, and we're going to do something. Hallelujah! Why do we do it? Well, we do it for the Lord, but we also do it for our brethren, our sons, our daughters, our wives, our houses.

All right, so Eric, that's as far as I will go, down to the end of verse 14.

Yeah, so I'll pick it up a little bit earlier. When the walls were beginning to get closed up, now the first blocks being laid, the wall is now rising to a point where it could be almost defensible if you were on watch. And that was a critical point now that they had come to. Ridicule had not worked.

When I think of the poor condition of those Jews when they were under such distress and reproach, I couldn't help thinking of the Lord Jesus: that He voluntarily came into the world, a world that was against Him. Now, the condition of the Jews was such that it was their own fault; it was their fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers that had sinned and had brought such judgment upon the city, and those walls had been broken down as a result. But our

Lord, He came—there was no sin in Him. Isaiah, in his famous prophecy in Isaiah chapter 53, says:

> [Isaiah 53:3 NKJV] He is despised and rejected by men,
> A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
> And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
> He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

He was despised and rejected, but He took that upon Himself voluntarily. He was the Lord of glory. He was the Angel of God's presence in the Old Testament, the Angel of the Lord, the Captain of the hosts of the Lord. He was the General of the good angels. Now He steps into our condition as a baby, in a human condition. He grows up in quietness in a backwater part of Israel, a small country, and He is then by His Father brought into a public ministry to glorify the Father as the obedient Man.

And immediately He is met with Satan, who tried his wiles, tempting the Lord Jesus for forty days in the wilderness. He tried to make Him sin, but He could not. We see Satan working here too. When they were despised, first of all, the enemies come and they ridicule them; they try to browbeat them to make them give up. Well, we know that the Lord withstood Satan, and He used the word of God to do so. And here we find the people of God being strengthened by God Himself to continue the work, even when they're in great reproach.

So they continue to build. Now the wall is built up. Now the enemy tries a different tactic. Satan left Jesus after His temptation, but he didn't give up. Now he began to arouse the leaders against Him, and they began to plot to kill Him. So we find here a plot, a conspiracy. It says in verse 7 that they were very angry, and in verse 8: all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. They were actually going to try to attack it, marshaling a ragtag guerrilla army to physically attack the nation.

Because of that, Nehemiah prayed to the Lord again, and then he set a watch to make sure that they could not do that. But the people now had reached a point—I don't know how long they had been working, but no doubt they had been working very, very hard, laying those foundation stones, especially for the wall, clearing rubbish. But there was so much rubbish, and they began to be discouraged by it: the strength of the laborers or burden bearers is failing; there is so much. They were tired; they were exhausted to the point of exhaustion, and they were wondering if they'd ever be able to finish the wall.

And so now, in verse 11, their adversaries are going to take advantage of this just when they're at the weakest point. The adversary says, "They will neither know nor see anything until we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease." It wasn't a full-scale invasion; I don't think that they would attempt to do that against the will of the king, but they could do it like assassins in the middle of the night—come and kill some and stop the work. That's what it looked like they would attempt to do, because the king had given Nehemiah the authority to build the wall. If it was open warfare that they conducted, then they would be going against the king of Persia, and then they'd probably be hung by their necks. So this was going to be kind of a guerrilla action, secret assassins, which some of these people are very, very good at.

The Jews who dwelt near them learned about this conspiracy, and they came and told them. I guess Sanballat and his cohorts had been talking this up for a while, and the Jews that were near there heard what they were talking about—that they were secretly going to come and kill them—so they told Nehemiah.

And so he says in verse 13, he positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall. There again, a good general now: he puts people where the wall is probably lowest; he put more men there. Other places where the wall had been built up higher would require fewer watchmen. And so he fortified the wall with watchmen, and he set the people according to their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. They had all their weapons.

Having done that, he said, "Look, we've got this secure." And he told the leaders in verse 14: "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." There he sets before them the purpose for which they should fight: for their families, for their nation, for their city—and reemphasizing the fact that the Lord is going to fight for them.

Then we read in verse 15:

> [Nehemiah 4:15 NKJV] And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work.

When they prayed, God had shown them what to do and given them the courage to do it. And so he says it was God that had brought their plot, their conspiracy, to nothing. And they all returned to the wall, everyone to his work.

I think that's as far as you went, is it not?

Yeah, more or less. Any other comments from those of you who are out in Zoom land or here at the chapel?

Persistent Faith and Closing

Again, the logic of verse 15 is just a little bit hard to follow. I read it and reread it, and I'm still not sure of all the logic, but let me see if I can explain it to you. It came to pass when the enemies heard that it was known unto us, that God had brought their counsel to nothing. They heard that we knew, and they heard that we did not regard their counsel as being important, and they knew that. Then we returned to work. We said, "We're going to work because you know that we know what you're planning to do, and it hasn't stopped us. We're going to keep going."

That's the way we have to be in the work of God. We know that they know, and they know what we know, and we've said it doesn't matter which way you turn: we are going to carry on doing God's work, God's way. We're going to keep going. Don't stop! I've preached that most of my life; I continue to preach it: don't stop, Harold, keep going! Don't stop; keep going. Get going; keep going! And it doesn't matter who knows what you're doing or what they think, we're going to keep going anyway.

When they know that we're going to keep going, that often means they'll go somewhere else. I guess if the devil is looking for somebody to attack, he's probably more likely to attack somebody who he might be able to stop than somebody who he can't stop. So I say, "Lord, I want the devil to know, by the grace of God, we're going to keep going. And if he's going to fight, then he can fight somebody else, but he doesn't have to fight me because he knows I'm going to keep going anyway."

Now, that requires a great deal of faith; that requires a great deal of perspiration—that's not the word I want, but that's the word that came out! You've got to keep going, and it's not easy to keep going, but that's what God wants and that's what we've got to be committed to. And we've got to tell the enemy that by the grace of God, we are going to keep going.

All right, so that's the end of verse 15, and it's also the end of our time. So we'll come back here next time around, and we'll pick it up as we go.

So again, one of you, if you will, just close off tonight in prayer. Again, thank you all who are on Zoom, thank you all who are here. And by the grace of God, we'll be here next week. Why would we come next week? Well, Nehemiah could keep going; I guess we can keep going! So we'll be here next week, Lord willing.

Lord, we thank You that Your Son, our Lord Jesus, has overcome all the powers of darkness. We have victory in Jesus. All the wiles of the devil, his devices against us, are of no value, no use.

> [1 John 4:4 NKJV] You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

We thank You that we are overcomers through our Lord Jesus Christ, even as Nehemiah and his builders were overcomers because they put their trust in the living and true God. No lie of Satan can stop them; there's no discouragement that can hinder the work if we put our faith in our Lord Jesus.

> [Isaiah 40:31 NKJV] But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

So, Father, we thank You that You are our strength and our shield. We bless and thank You for that in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

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