

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 7TH - 8TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

REBUILDING THE WALL (NEHEMIAH 3:1-32)

After Nehemiah presented his vision of rebuilding the walls in Jerusalem to the city leaders (2:17-18), the hard work of actually building the wall began.

- In his journal, Nehemiah wrote the names of thirty-eight individuals and forty-two families and groups who gave their time, effort, and lives to this project.
- It was hard work, unglamorous work, and sometimes dangerous work - but together they saw it through to completion.

Chapter 3 is essentially a record of the patterns of work, people who did the work, and the places of the work in Jerusalem.

- In chapter 3, we see that any work of God is only possible when unity happens amongst people of diverse backgrounds, interests and abilities who all join together under a compelling vision.
- Success is achieved not because we're all the same but because our differences are put aside to work for a great goal - to build the Kingdom!

THE NORTHERN WALL (3:1-5)

Nehemiah's list began with those who worked on the north wall and its gates- the Sheep Gate (vs. 1) and the Fish gate (vs. 3-5).

- It's worth noting that the first individuals mentioned are Eliashib the high priest and the other priests - pointing to the fact that this was a holy and noble task that **everyone** was invited to take part in.

THE WESTERN WALL (3:6-14)

As priests and locals from the area worked on the north wall, others built along the western extension and its gates - the Old Gate (vs. 6-12), the Valley Gate (vs. 13), and the Dung Gate (vs. 14).

- The rebuilding of the gates and walls meant protection and security of the people from invasion and plunder.

THE EASTERN WALL (3:15-32)

The last section described was the east wall. This section required more work crews, probably because it was more extensively damaged.

- Nehemiah recorded the work that occurred on the Fountain Gate (vs. 15-27), the Horse Gate (vs. 28), the Muster ("Inspection" or Hammiphkad) Gate (vs. 31) and the Sheep Gate (vs. 32).

1. WE'RE ALL CALLED TO BE BUILDERS, CULTIVATORS, & RESTORERS OF GOD'S KINGDOM.

Your spiritual life, your church, your marriage, your family, your relationships, your character, and your Christian witness will either bring the name of Jesus glory or dishonor.

- You have a **role to play in your home, church, and your community.**

2. GOD USES DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT KINDS OF PLACES.

This chapter mentions rulers and priests (vs. 1, 12-19), men and women (vs. 12), professional craftsmen (vs. 8, 32) and even people from outside the city (vs. 2, 5, 7).

- They all worked in different places to accomplish the same goal!
- As the Church, we're a body with different parts that work together for the same purpose (1 Cor. 12:27).

3. LEADERS LEAD BY EXAMPLE.

It's significant to note that the priests participated in manual labor near the Sheep Gate in the northeast corner of the city (vs. 1).

- Ministry is simply serving the Lord and serving people - according to Jesus; true spiritual leadership isn't measured by the size of the building, budget, or butts in seats, but by a willingness to serve (Matt. 20:26).

4. SOME PEOPLE WILL NOT WORK, AND SOME WILL DO MORE WORK THAN OTHERS.

Verse 5 provides an interesting contrast to the priests mentioned in vs. 1 - the nobles of the town of Tekoa, "would not stoop to serve their Lord".

- But others, like Baruch in vs. 20, "vigorously" did their work.
- The reality is that some people simply will not serve in the work of the Lord - they will talk, give, or offer "feedback" ...but in the end they're too busy or have other priorities - while others will serve "vigorously."

PRACTICAL APPLICATION FROM CHAPTER 3

You have an important job to do of building, restoring and cultivating God's Kingdom and it's been given to you by none other than God Himself - work for His glory with all your might! (Eccl. 9:10).

- Do your part serving in your home, church, or community - you're needed! When you don't do your share, it places a burden on others.

RIDICULE, CRITICISM, & INTIMIDATION (NEHEMIAH 4:1-12)

When the enemy ridicules, attacks, and laughs at what God's people are doing, it usually means that God is working and is about to bless His people.

- As the people of Jerusalem came together to rebuild, Sanballat became "angry and greatly enraged" (vs. 1).
- If Nehemiah succeeded in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem to offer the Jews protection, Sanballat's agenda of using threats and intimidation to control the Jews would be thwarted.

Sanballat gathers a posse and the army of Samaria together for the sole purpose of criticizing and jeering at the Jews as they work (vs. 2).

- He criticizes the workers by calling them "feeble Jews" and criticizes the work and even the building material by asking four taunting questions (vs. 2).
- Criticism can be incredibly disorienting - but if you do anything for the Lord, you can expect it. Then Tobiah the Ammonite chimes in with a very unfunny joke about their wall being so weak a fox could break it down (vs. 3).
- Criticism is disorienting, and ridicule (when people laugh at you) brings shame because its sole purpose is to point out a weakness in you in an effort to humiliate you.
- Our Enemy can attack us through critical, negative, and shaming thoughts, or he can influence others to criticize or ridicule us.

Side-note: not everyone who gives you feedback is a "hater" - sometimes we need accountability and we must have the maturity, wisdom, and the humility to listen to others.

- What do we do when we're ridiculed or criticized? We bring it to the Lord!
- Rather than speak to his critics directly, Nehemiah speaks to God in verses 4-5 about them and then continues to work in vs. 6.

Nehemiah calls upon God to deal with and do justice against the sin of his enemies.

- God's justice against them might very well lead to their repentance!
- The point is, Nehemiah doesn't seek personal vengeance or respond to their criticism or ridicule with more criticism or ridicule - he lets God handle it and he gets back to work (vs. 6).
- How's that going in your life?

But when the initial campaign of criticism and ridicule didn't work, the enemies of God's people became even more angry (vs. 7) and plotted together to come and, "fight" and to, "cause confusion" in the city of God (vs. 8).

- Satan's tactics of intimidation and confusion are the same 2,500 years later!
- But Nehemiah and the people prayed, appointed guards, and kept working (vs. 9).

Unfortunately, some of the people in Judah caved into the pressure and let discouragement overwhelm them (vs. 10).

- They were probably physically exhausted, sick of the threats, the criticism and ridicule, and just overwhelmed by the enormity of the work.
- In their stress and overwhelm, they seemed to forget that the hand of God was upon them ("... by ourselves we will not be able", vs. 10).

Then fear from the threats and the rumors of what the enemy could do to them started crippling the people of God (vs. 11-12).

- Fear is paralyzing for us, but it's contagious and it paralyzes others too.
- The fear got so pronounced that the faith of God's people shrank and some even were convinced that they just need to throw in the towel (vs. 12).
- Your enemy sometimes just wants you to give up.

OUR GOD WILL FIGHT FOR US (NEHEMIAH 4:13-23)

How will the people of God respond to the threats from the enemy? Not by quitting, fleeing, or fretting.

- But also, not by doing nothing!
- Instead, Nehemiah identifies the most vulnerable locations in work, and he strategically places defenders with weapons to guard while the work continues (vs. 13).
- Then he encourages the people to "remember the Lord!" and to "fight" (vs. 14), and through this approach, God frustrated the plans of the enemy (vs. 15).

HOW CAN WE RESPOND TO ATTACKS?

1. Where are you most vulnerable and weak against temptation and attack?
2. What's your defense like? (accountability partners, real friends, prayer support, Life Group, filtering software on your computer/phone, Celebrate Recovery).
3. Are you, "remembering the Lord," and are you willing to fight for your family and your home?

The immediate crisis was diverted (vs. 15), but from that day on, half of Nehemiah's laborers did the work, while the other half were equipped with weapons to defend the work (vs. 16).

- You have an enemy that **does not quit** - if you for one second think that you have the luxury of putting your guard down - you're sorely mistaken.
- We're called to labor with one hand, and hold our weapon with the other (vs. 17-18).

The Christian life isn't all about just doing good works and loving people while completely neglecting holiness, a pure life, and a healthy soul.

- But it's also not all about sin avoidance while not lifting a finger to build the Kingdom - **we work and we watch; we build and we battle.**
- We also surround ourselves with people who can sound the alarm and rush to help us fight when the attacks come (vs. 18b).

Not only were the people armed at ready while they worked, they worked in shifts (vs. 21-22) and they stayed the night in places protected from attack (vs. 22).

- When you're vulnerable to attack, you need to be aware of some places you just don't need to go and other places you need to frequent often.
- Nehemiah himself stayed on the job and was always armed (vs. 23) - a picture of Christ who intercedes for us and never wearies (Rom. 8:34).

You have an Enemy that hates you and will attack you through ridicule, criticism, and discouragement.

- When you're criticized or ridiculed by the enemy's attacks or the words of others, bring it to the Lord, let Him deal with it, and get back to work.
- Fear is paralyzing. Fear is contagious. Fear is a liar. Doubt your doubts; believe your beliefs.

What are you doing to build, cultivate, and restore?

- Have you let discouragement, fear, or criticism keep you from working and building in the way that you know God has called you to work?
- What's your defense like? Do you have brothers and sisters watching your back?