

# Building and Battling

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*Nehemiah 4*

## HISTORY

### History leading up to Nehemiah

- Jewish exile – 70 years
- Cyrus issues a decree in 537 BC to allow the temple of God to be rebuilt.
- Joshua and Zerubbabel lead the charge with 42,000 returning Jews – not by might nor by power but by my spirit says the Lord. Zechariah 4:6
- The temple work gets paused as the children of Israel build their own houses.
- God sends Ezra the scribe to revive the work and complete the temple.
- Haggai the prophet records this.
- The walls still lie in ruins, so the Jew, Nehemiah, receives a burden for his home when he hears of its state from Hanani.
- It's obvious to the king who favors Nehemiah, and the door is open for his request. He asks the king for everything and gets it. It's what is called, "The Good Hand of God." He arrives in Jerusalem, assesses the state of the city and the people, encourages and united the people together, and the building process begins.

## REVIEW

The book of Nehemiah is about God's work, being done by God's people, with God's resources, and God's protection, in God's way and God's time.

In every work of God, in every place, and at any time, there will be opposition from the enemy. Our adversary the devil roams about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Anyone who decides in their heart that they are going to obey the Lord, step out in faith and accomplish His work will experience the exact things that Nehemiah and the people of Israel experienced rebuilding the wall.

Nehemiah's job was so much greater than simply building the walls of a city. It's what those walls signified that was more essential. Those walls signified that God was sending His people back into the land that He promised them, not merely to establish a city, but to bring His presence, light, and righteousness into the land.

The enemies of Israel that had spread throughout that territory during the 70-year captivity had their own plans for the land that didn't include the people of God. They were very content to see Jerusalem in ruins because it meant that they could proceed with their own agendas. When those walls started going up, and people started showing up, the enemies of Israel began to see a threat to their agenda. They said, "This will be our land, and we will do what we want with it." God said, "I don't think so. I'm going put my people

back there, give them a mind to build, divinely protect them and enable them, and establish my house and my city in the midst of this land.”

Of course, the enemies of Israel were not going to take this lying down, so they come against Israel with several tactics that we will look at today, to try and hamper, hinder, and even destroy the work of rebuilding.

#### APPLICATION

Can I just mention that I see some parallels today?

- The enemy, the prince of the air, and his demonic minions have an agenda for this nation. Wicked men, driven by their lusts for power and control have been seeded in political realms and have intentions of erasing the memory of God, not only from our history but from our future,
- But what we are currently seeing in pockets all over the US is God saying, “I don’t think so.”
- Right now, before our very eyes, we are seeing thousands of prayers over countless years being answered. God is gathering His church into places that are positioned to rebuild the broken and weekend walls of the spiritual fabric of this nation. He is giving those people a mind to build, a united heart, divine protection and supernatural resources to establish his righteousness and propagate His gospel of hope and forgiveness once again throughout this nation and the world.

And guess what... You know it. The enemy, whose kingdom of darkness is threatened by spirit-filled, empowered, courageous Christians, will utilize every weapon within his grasp and arsenal to try and disrupt, discourage, dismantle, and discredit the work that God is doing.

The great news is that we are not unaware of his devices because he has been using them from the beginning of time, and we have this book that gives us his game plan in times like these. When we have a God who is for us, leaders who are willing to take the risk to stand on the side of truth, and people who are willing to give themselves entirely to the work, the Bible is perfectly clear: The Lord will not fail.

- It will be hard.
- There will be sacrifice and persecution.
- There will be moments that feel like defeat.
- There will be people who fall by the wayside.
- But in the end, the walls will be rebuilt, and those who stand with the Lord will have the final, victorious battle cry!

#### QUOTE

***You cannot separate building from battles or worship from warfare.***

#### QUOTE

***“As soon as God starts to bless, the enemy starts to battle”***

Warren Wiersbe,

#### APPLICATION

It ESSENTIAL for us to know and understand the methods that our enemy uses against us in attempting to destroy or at least bring to a halt a work of God.

## BIBLE VERSE

*2 Corinthians 2:11 – ...lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

## APPLICATION

This morning I want to look at three specific tactics of the enemy reflected in the attacks that Israel's enemies used to try and halt the work that God was doing through Nehemiah.

# 1. The Intimidation of the Enemy

## BIBLE VERSE

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.

## CONTEXT

We are introduced to two main bullies... Sanballat and Tobia

- Do you know who these two guys remind me of? I'll know your age by whether or not you know **who these guys are.**

*Verse 1 – But – Never a good word unless God comes after it.*

- Here they are, the walls and gates are coming together, and all the people are working with one heart and mind, then all the sudden there is a "but."
- Sanballat – From Chapter 2. He was a horonite.
  - Horon was a local deity.
- Tobiah – ammonite. Bitter enemies of Israel descendant from Lots daughter.
- As we are about to discover, Israel was surrounded, north, south, east and west, by enemies who desired their destruction.
  - There are some things that haven't changed in the past several thousand years.

## CUSTOM BLOCK

### MOCKING:

- The first thing the enemy does to distract the work is try to embarrass the people out of the work.
- Satan is the king of all trash talkers.

## QUOTE

*Birds of a feather mock together.*

## APPLICATION

In other words, critics always like to find other critics who will assist them in criticizing God's work and God's workers.

- Critics love to find other people who agree with them because they feel justified.
- There is a time and place for godly and righteous criticism. There are times that sin has to be confronted and exposed.

- But when that is done, it should be done in a biblical way with a spirit of love and gentleness, not with selfishness and pride.
- Here we see mocking being used as a tool and tactic to intimidate and discourage God's people.

#### QUOTE

“Some people who can stand bravely when they are shot at will collapse when they are laughed at.”

#### BIBLE VERSE

**Nehemiah 4:2 NKJV** – And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria (*When you really want to humiliate and discourage someone, you do it on a public forum like Instagram or Twitter where all their friends can see it*), 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?”

#### APPLICATION

In this verse, we find six things that the enemy tries to mock in order to intimidate and discourage the workers.

#### 1 - HE ATTACKS THEIR LACK OF STRENGTH

##### Feeble Jews:

- In many ways, this was a true statement. They didn't have the best materials or tools to work with. They had been there a long time and had not accomplished much in that time.
- Many times this is what you will experience when trying to do something for the Lord.
- The enemy will put all the doubts in our mind.
- Who are you anyway? You don't have the skills or resources to do that! Have you looked at what you're trying to accomplish? That's impossible. Do you know how stupid you look right now?

The good news in Christ is that we can admit we are feeble and in that place find the strength of the Lord!

#### BIBLE VERSE

**[2 Corinthians 12:9 NKJV] 9** And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

#### 2 - HE ATTACKS THEIR DEFENSES

##### *Will they fortify themselves?*

The people who returned from exile weren't skilled artisans and craftsmen.

- Solomon had thousands of carpenters, stone workers, and skilled workers to build his city, Nehemiah had a ragtag group of builders. These weren't people skilled in construction. These were perfumers, women and children, and common folk. How would they be able to build a fortified structure that could withstand an attack from a mighty enemy army?

The enemy loves to ridicule our methods of defense. He wants to mock our spiritual weapons, the armor of God, and our spiritual warfare.

The enemy always wants to make us think that the work of resisting him and fortifying yourself is pointless and too difficult.

- If you've ever sinned or failed, then you know this voice. The voice that says, "Just give up! Don't try to overcome this, you'll never be able to do it. You'll always fail! You can't fortify yourself."
- Battle that lie by reading Ephesians 6 and putting on the whole armor of God in order to withstand the enemy.

### **3-HE ATTACKS THEIR MOTIVATIONS**

*Will they restore it for themselves? (ESV, NASB)*

Sanballat wanted to make it look like the Jews were rebuilding their city to rebel against the Persian empire. He wanted to make it out that the Jews weren't concerned with the glory of God, but just wanted to build the city for themselves.

Satan often attacks the servant of the Lord in this way.

Oh you're just in the ministry for your own glory. You just want people to hear your voice and see your face and give you praise. YOU'RE IN IT FOR YOURSELF!

- Now, that can be a real possibility. We are all prone to selfishness and ambition which we must guard against.
- But if you know your heart is right before the Lord, you go for it! Find new and creative ways to spread the gospel. Use your gifts and talents to their fullest for the glory of God.
- Don't hold back because Satan is accusing you of doing it only for yourself. He would love for you to cease the work and sit in your own insecurities and guilt so that nothing gets done.

### **4-HE ATTACKS THEIR WORSHIP**

*Will they offer sacrifices?*

Attacks their worship and sacrifices

The enemy attacks the sacrifice of Jesus. He also attacks our worship as being ineffective. He will attack our private devotion as well as our public praise.

What good is worship going to do when you have practical things that have to be done? Why waste time worshipping, praying and fasting when you should be building and managing, and planning?

We must never fall in the trap of mis-prioritizing our ministry to the lord, confusing it with our ministry for the Lord.

Before we can do things for God, we must minister to God.

## 5-HE ATTACKS THEIR PROGRESS (SPEED)

*Will they build it in a day?*

The walls actually took only 52 supernatural days to build, but still at the beginning, it must have been daunting to the people to think of how long it would take them. The enemy capitalizes on that discouragement and fear. He's saying, "This job will take you forever, why waste your time?"

Sometimes I become discouraged with how long it takes to see fruit in the ministry. The task of saving souls, feeding sheep, and making disciples sometimes seems as though it will never be accomplished.

How long will that person keep falling into the same sin? How long will that married couple continue their fighting? How long until we can see our church building improved? How long will it take to see our Hindu neighbors come to Christ? How long until servants come to my church who want to help the ministry?

The enemy will throw time in your face and say it's not worth it. But the Bible says that God makes all things beautiful in His time. Faithful is he who called you, He will also do it.

Take Jesus' advice: *"Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow has enough worries of its own."* Do what God puts before you today, and trust in his timing.

## 6 - HE ATTACKS THEIR RESOURCES

*Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—stones that are burned?"*

Most of our tools are spiritual: love, compassion, truth, service, generosity. From the world's perspective, these can seem like ineffective tools. On top of that, many times the physical resources we have to work within the church pale in comparison to what they have in the secular world. We don't have as much money, we don't have as much talent, we don't have to same facilities and resources.

Satan will mock us: all you have is a Bible? All you have is faith? You don't have enough!

But what do we learn with God? Whatever you have in your hand, if you offer it to God, He will supernaturally use it beyond its natural capacity.

Moses had a rod, David had a sling, Gideon had only 300 men, the young boy only had a few fish and a couple of loaves of bread, Jesus only had twelve men... But when God got ahold of those small resources, he used them to do great things!

## QUOTE

*The enemy wants you to focus on the state of your worldly resources rather than accessing the resources of God by faith.*

## APPLICATION

Satan is really good at creating doubt whereas God is really good at creating faith.

- Even when you are in the middle of a work that is bearing fruit and God is obviously working, you can easily become discouraged.
- The danger is to look at all the things that can't be accomplished rather than looking at all the things that have already been accomplished to remind yourself that God is in this and He is for me.

#### BIBLE VERSE

**Nehemiah 4:3 NKJV – 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.”**

#### APPLICATION

Tobiah is the little sidekick punk who hides behind Sandballat.

A fox isn't a very fearsome animal. They are small and light. I mean a bear, ok. A lion, maybe, but a fox? That's just an insult.

**This was to incite fear:** if your wall can't even stand up to a little fox who is just aimlessly walking around, how will it stand against an enemy army that is intent on destroying it?

*So how do Nehemiah and the people of God respond to these threats?*

*Instead of panicking in fear, they pray in faith.*

#### QUOTE

***“The Christian army is the only army that marches on their knees.”***

#### BIBLE VERSE

**Nehemiah 4:4 NKJV – 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!**

**Nehemiah 4:5 NKJV – 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.**

#### APPLICATION

*When you and I are attacked, the minute we lower ourselves to getting involved in the pettiness of the enemy's tactics, we have lost the high ground in the battle.*

- *Instead of taking attacks personally, we have to take them prayerfully.*
- 8 times in this book we see Nehemiah taking things to God in prayer.
  - This is also what the New Testament church did when they were threatened in Acts 4. When they were persecuted, they prayed, “**Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your Word with great boldness.**”
- Even Paul the apostle, when being falsely accused and attacked prayed:
- ***2 Timothy 4:14 NKJV – Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works.***

I think it's ok, to have “KING DAVID” prayers. ***Lord save them, but if they can't be saved wipe them out.***

- *We are to never pray that way out of hate for a person, but out of a love for righteousness and a fervency against all that would attack it.*

#### BIBLE VERSE

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.

#### APPLICATION

Half the wall – things are going well. The people have overcome the intimidation of the enemy and half the wall is built. But here's the thing about the enemy: when he sees progress, he doesn't give up, he just approaches things from a different angle.

I think the beginning of a work of God is often the most dangerous because it's easy to be driven by the excitement of what God is doing and start to think that it will only get easier from here. But what about when progress is being made, but the battle is getting more difficult, discouragement is setting in, factions begin to form, lies and fear begin to spread?

Always beware of the halfway point, the point where you feel like your gaining traction and having a victory. Don't assume the battle is over or that the enemy has surrendered.

#### BIBLE VERSE

Nehemiah 4:7 NKJV – 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,

Nehemiah 4:8 NKJV – and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

## 2. The Infiltration of the Enemy

#### APPLICATION

The number of enemies is now increasing. First, it was Sanballat and Tobiah, now:

- *Samaritans – North*
- *Ammonites – East*
- *Arabs – South*
- *Ashdodites – West*

So they have continued the work despite the threats... this is the time when things start getting easy right? Wrong! Things get harder.

- The method to do this was to *“conspire and confuse”*
- There is a reason that Paul told us, “1 Corinthians 14:33 NKJV – For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”



- It is Satan who desires the church to be a place of confusion. Because confusion leads to speculation, speculation leads to assumptions, and assumptions can lead to division.
- Did you hear what happened over there? Did you see what he did or she did? Whisper in this ear whisper in that and sooner or later you have confused people turning on one another.

If Satan can't intimidate from the outside, he will try to infiltrate from the inside.

- That's why we want to be people who *encourage* instead of *gossip*, who promote faith rather than a culture of fear, who worship rather than complain, and who test all things and hold fast to what is good.
- When we act in the flesh, we can become tools of the enemy to try and distort or derail the work God is doing around us.

#### BIBLE VERSE

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.

#### APPLICATION

Did they react by running away? Giving up? Throwing in the towel? No, they prayed. But notice what is attached to their prayer... ACTION. They prayed AND they set a watch. They watched and the prayed. It's no coincidence that Jesus told His disciples (and us) to watch and pray.

- *Matthew 26:41 NKJV – “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

#### Nehemiah's response:

- He prays and he sets a watch.
- It is not unspiritual to add action to your prayer.

#### QUOTE

***We must NEVER act APART from prayer, but we must ALWAYS be ready to act UPON prayer.***

Frequency: Day and night:

- They realized that they didn't have the luxury of putting their guard down against the enemy.
- Our enemy does not tire and he is patient. He will wait until we become unaware of his presence and begin to spiritually relax and expose our armor.

#### BIBLE VERSE

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.”

**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.”**

**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.”**

#### **APPLICATION**

The enemies tactics are starting to work. And it all started when the tribe of Judah starting believing the lies of the enemy and spreading their fear and doubt like cancer through the ranks.

- If the enemy can't discourage you from the work, he will try to scare you out of it.
  - Fear: False Evidence Appearing Real.
  - They were never prepared to actually go kill off of them, it was a scare tactic to make God's people paranoid and sleepless.
  - The enemies were so effective, that even the other Jews begin repeating the propaganda... 10 times! In other words, they were persistently planting fear in the mind of the builders. You're always in danger! They're going to get you! Better stop, run, and hide now!

Many times it's easier for us to give in to our fears rather than trust the fact that God said that He is behind us and in control.

***Within the body of Christ, doubt can be contagious, and fear spreads like wildfire. When one person starts to grumble and complain, it doesn't take long for other people who were just fine to start complaining as well.***

- With this tactic, the enemies of Israel don't have to say anything, because they figured out a way for the tribes of Israel to say it to each other.

#### **APPLICATION**

Pretty soon, the government and news media won't have to say anything about the church because all the pastors and their congregations will be destroying one another. Christians will be busy judging each other about facemasks and social distancing while the enemy laughs as souls are lost, true needs are overlooked, and powerless ministry continues to prevail.

- The church is founded upon this truth: The gates of Hell shall not prevail. It is grounded in this reality: the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. It's grounded upon this promise: I will never leave you nor forsake you.
- We don't need people propagating fear by simply being the echo chambers of a godless and hopeless culture. If you're going to open your mouth in the church, then open it and speak of Christ's victory, or keeping our eyes on eternity, of obeying Christ regardless of the cost, of our hope in heaven. Let's not be those who have lost hope in the power of the Holy Spirit simply because we live in frightening times!

#### **BIBLE VERSE**

**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.**

## APPLICATION

They have prayed, now it's time for action. Nehemiah is not willing to accept this traveling lie that the enemy is stronger and that they should live in constant fear. Instead, he is going to set up his defenses and trust the Lord. Notice he fortifies two places: Foundations and openings.

## QUOTE

***Foundations – what you believe***

***Openings – what you receive***

## CUSTOM BLOCK

***If Satan can get you to believe the wrong things and receive the wrong things, he can disable the soldier of Christ.***

- That is when the enemy tries to shake up what we believe, we come at him with the sword of the spirit, the Word of God.
- When the enemy tries to get in the door through temptation or doubt, we hold up the shield of faith and put on our helmet of salvation.

## BIBLE VERSE

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.”

## QUOTE

***One of the most effective weapons against fear is remembrance.***

## APPLICATION

When we are facing a life circumstance that causes us to be gripped by fear, the best thing we can do is remember the Lord. Remember all the great and mighty works he has done throughout history and throughout our lives,

Fight for your families! – ***Not fight WITH.***

- ***When we engage in spiritual warfare as Christians, we want to do it alongside one another, not against each other.***
- The people you are sitting next to are worth fight for. Your church, the gospel, your family, righteousness... these are all things worth fighting for. Don't ever let the enemy tell you that working and fighting for the Lord isn't worth it. There's too much at stake to give in or surrender.

## BIBLE VERSE

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.

**Nehemiah 4:16 NKJV – So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah.**

**Nehemiah 4:17 NKJV – Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon.**

#### **APPLICATION**

They were ready to build and also ready to battle!

- The two things you need for effective Christian ministry is a **sword and a shovel**.
- There are many Christians, who are great builders, but when conflict arises or battles rage, they back out of the fight. There are others who are always just looking for someone to fight. But in the process, they end up tearing down the work of God because they are not willing to put down their sword and pick up a shovel.

The cool thing is, the Bible is both our sword and our shovel. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit that we use to be ready to attack and defeat the enemy, but it is also our tool that we use to build our lives and build the ministry. We dig deep into God's word to create strong foundations.

## **3. The Isolation of the Enemy**

#### **BIBLE VERSE**

**Nehemiah 4:18 NKJV – Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me.**

**Nehemiah 4:19 NKJV – Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, “The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall.**

**Nehemiah 4:20 NKJV – “Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”**

#### **APPLICATION**

This is the last potential area that the enemy could take advantage of: the distance between the workers.

- Nehemiah realized that damage could be done if the workers at the separate sections of the wall could not communicate with one another.
- This is important. If we are going to build and fight together, we must do it together! If everyone's out there doing their own thing for the Lord, they will end up confusing and stepping all over each other.

#### **APPLICATION**

**The bugle – Open line of communication.** The bugle called all the people together around a certain need or certain battle.

- This is why we need fellowship. We need ways to gather together around needs and around battles.
- One of the scariest things as a believer is when you fall under ambush and you're all alone.
- That temptation calls, that difficulty comes, that need arises and you reach out for someone, but you have no bugle to blow.

## QUOTE

***Communication helps protect us from isolation.***

## BIBLE VERSE

**Nehemiah 4:21 NKJV – So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared.**

## APPLICATION

The last thing we see is perseverance from God's people.

They labored in the work:

- Ministry is hard work. It requires labor and sacrifice.
- Ministry can be tiresome.
- “We frequently get tired in the work, but never get tired of the work.”

## BIBLE VERSE

**Nehemiah 4:22 NKJV – At the same time I also said to the people, “Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day.”**

**Nehemiah 4:23 NKJV – So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.**

## APPLICATION

***And the point here... as your working really hard remember to take a bath every once in a while... it's hard to work with people that stink.***

- But seriously. As we work, we do need to take time to clean off. Sometimes we get so busy that we weave the Lord right out of our schedule.
- It's so easy to pick up sin, even as we are working for the Lord. So ever now and then, we need to stop our work so that we can spend some time washing in the Word, and being refreshed by the Lord.
- WE need to, as it were, allow Jesus to continue to wash our feet from the filth we pick up in this world.

## CLOSING

This really leads to a final question, and that is, “Are your spiritual garments clean before God?”

- The Bible makes it clear that we all have sinned, and stand guilty and filthy before God.
- God sent His son into the world that through his sacrifice for sin on the cross, you and I could be made clean through faith in Him.
- Do you know HIM TODAY?