

Finer Grounds

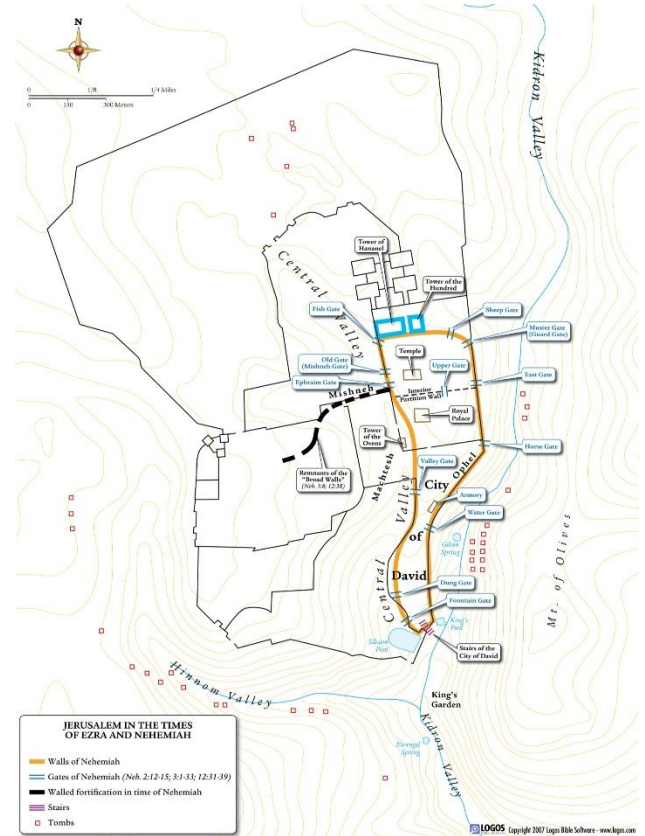
Nehemiah

Lesson 4: Nehemiah 3-4

After his inspiring call to action at the end of chapter two, we now see Nehemiah putting God's people to work as they begin reconstruction on the wall. Sometimes, half the effort of completing an important work involves getting everyone motivated and organized.

Read Nehemiah Chapter 3

This entire chapter can be a little tedious because it really just sounds like a completed checklist of who worked on which parts of the wall. Each section of the chapter is divided by the construction of the various gates within the city wall. It's interesting to note that Nehemiah describes the construction of the wall in a counterclockwise pattern of the wall (see map). It may be helpful for you to underline every gate and tower listed in chapter three in order to see the flow of the construction project. There is much genealogical data and architectural details recorded. We could get really bogged down trying to dissect the construction, but unless you find ancient architecture interesting there isn't too much modern application in this chapter for us. I will say that one application we can make comes from the efficiency in which the wall is built. Nehemiah shows great leadership and delegation skills. There is a team of men (divided up either by family, occupation or home region) responsible for only their section of wall or gate. The process was conducted in a very orderly fashion with full cooperation from all the participants.



How well do we work when we are assigned tasks for God's kingdom? Do we only pick tasks that we like or think we are good at? Or do we roll up our sleeves regardless of our experience when a job needs done?

Read Nehemiah 4:1-6

Now Sanballat and the other regional leaders are really mad. In chapter two, the rumors of possible reconstruction had simply irritated Sanballat and Tobiah, but now the construction



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has actually started. The construction of the wall seemed to threaten the power and control that these leaders had so in verses 1-3 we see them begin to make more serious verbal threats and criticisms against God’s people. Feeling threatened, Sanballat insults and mocks the Jews, portraying them as a small, weak nation without the mobilization or manpower to complete this task. These verbal attacks are meant to intimidate the Jews so that they won’t completing the task.

God’s people feel the pressure from the surrounding regions and reach out to God in a plea for help (vv. 4-5). As one of their spiritual leaders, Nehemiah immediately directs the people in prayer to God, asking Him to intervene on their behalf. Every time Nehemiah prays he always acknowledges that God is in control, no matter how difficult the circumstances may be. Today, Christians in America are still face verbal persecution, insults and mockery. With the changing social climate, tensions are greater now between Christians and the world.

When faced with direct verbal assault or mockery, how do you respond? What about indirect verbal insults you may receive through various social media outlets? Do you try to hide? Do you engage in ‘keyboard warfare’? Or do you immediately reach out to God for strength to press forward?

An important part of Nehemiah’s prayer is where he expresses to God that their enemies have “demoralized the builders” (v. 5).

Why is it significant that he describes the builders as “demoralized”?

You know that old playground saying, “Sticks and stones can break your bones but words can never hurt you,”? Well, it’s a total lie. Words do hurt, and they can have a tremendous effect on us. At the end of chapter two, God’s people were all excited and inspired to bring His holy city back to its intended glory. Now however, a few insults and discouraging jokes directed their way and the work of God is in a potential crisis. Will God’s people believe what the world’s telling them and just give up, or will they find strength in Him? There is so much in our world to discourage us from accomplishing what God wants. It’s crucial that we, like Nehemiah, are there for each other in the church to strengthen each other’s hearts.

Despite all of the verbal attacks from Sanballat, we see God’s people persevere. The insults act as fuel and motivation for the builders to repair the breaches in the wall. They could have stopped construction. It certainly would have made relations easier with the surrounding peoples. Although stopping construction not only meant bending to the pressure of their enemies, but it meant a defeat for the restoration of their faith. As we talked about in lesson one, the wall was more than just security and defense from invaders. It also acted as a barrier against pagan religions and other worldly influences. In order for restoration to occur, they needed to complete the wall. By this time the wall has been completed up to half the necessary height. I want you to notice the phrase “the people had a mind to



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work,” (v. 6). The word “mind” is literally the word for “heart” (BDB, 524). God’s people were not derailed by the verbal attacks, no matter how demoralizing they were. They were determined to work together to complete God’s work.

Read Nehemiah 4:7-23

Now their enemies have had it, and their anger has escalated. Sanballat has allowed his emotions to get the best of him and he rallies Tobiah and other surrounding peoples to rise up against the Jews. If you stop and think about it, God’ people did not mean to harm anyone else. Sanballat’s anger was founded on an assumption that rebuilding this wall was a display of power. To him, power of any kind was a threat. Sanballat really didn’t understand what Nehemiah was trying to achieve. He just knew he didn’t like it. All too often today, we are misrepresented in our faith simply because others do not understand that we are merely trying to accomplish God’s will.

In verses 9-15 the threats from Sanballat go from being verbal insults to the threat of an actual physical attack. Nehemiah’s first reaction is to pray to God. Always appealing to God before acting, Nehemiah continues this pattern of behavior throughout the book. I’d like you to reflect on yourself for a moment.

Like Nehemiah, is your first reaction in a time of trouble to seek God in prayer? When you are stressed about co-workers, have an injured family member or are worried about losing a job do you go to God first?

What do we usually do instead of going to God in times of trouble?

Why is it so important to spend time with God in prayer before taking a course of action?

Even though Nehemiah goes to God first, fear still spreads throughout Jerusalem. In verse 10, Nehemiah learns of a common saying that had spread throughout Judah because of Sanballat’s threats. Discouragement can be like a contagious disease. Once it takes root in the hearts of a few, it can quickly spread to the rest of God’s people if not addressed. Nehemiah receives further reports from Jews who lived outside of Jerusalem. It seems that their enemies are planning an ambush. Like a true leader, Nehemiah springs into action and delegates guards among the builders (v. 12-13).

Even with this added precaution God’s people are still afraid, so Nehemiah gives them another “pep-talk.” He reminds the people that the Lord is on their side (v. 14a). It is a wonder that God’s people forgot so quickly that He was supporting them. It’s a good thing for them that Nehemiah’s thoughts remained on God’s faithfulness even during this fearful time. Just like those Jews, we have to be reminded regularly of God’s love and faithfulness toward us.



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Fear, threats and lies creep into our lives just like it did for God’s people in Nehemiah’s time. What are some specific ways we can regularly to remind each other of His faithfulness?

Should this only be the responsibility of our leaders or do we have any accountability in this area?

In addition to reminding them about the great Lord they serve, Nehemiah also motivates the people to stand strong in the face of danger because the lives of their families are at stake (v. 14b). As God’s women, we should feel the same obligation to stand firm for the sake of our families today in the face of impending threats to their wellbeing. Is there anything more important to you than the physical and spiritual wellbeing of your spouse, your children or others who are very dear to you? Is there anything you wouldn’t do in order to protect and encourage their relationship with God? If God has work to be done (and the beneficiary is our spouse, sibling, or child), that’s the time to pour out all our efforts in order to serve. Sometimes this means going without eating or sleeping for a short period. However, it is amazing what kind of strength we can draw from in order to accomplish something for a family member in need.

The Lord’s church is our family too! Are you willing to stand up and fight on behalf of your brethren the same way you would for your biological family?

Fortunately, all of Nehemiah’s encouragement worked, and we see in verse 15 that word of their preparedness reached Sanballat. The verse says that “God had frustrated their plan.”

In context, what had God specifically done to “frustrate” Sanballat’s plan?

Did God accomplish this supernaturally, or was it more providential?

What lessons can we learn from the way God chose to act on behalf of His people?

Since Sanballat, Tobiah, and the other foreign leaders have been thwarted, God’s people are able to get back to work. Specifically, Nehemiah says, “each one to his work” (v. 15). As I alluded to earlier, most likely every abled bodied person was helping in the rebuilding of the wall. It’s not as though we have a bunch of professionally trained construction workers and professional soldiers doing all the work (vv. 16-17). If the people



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weren't tasked with building, they were guarding, or carrying supplies to the builders. It was a very large scale, united effort to complete a very large task in a short amount of time. You've probably heard the saying "many hands make light work." If you have ever witnessed or participated in a church construction project, you can certainly relate to this undertaking.

It's very likely that many of these Jews did not have all the necessary skills for such a grand construction project. However, with an imminent threat from their enemies, the need to finish the wall was certainly dire. Regardless of an individual's desires or skill set, everyone was involved in the work at all hours of the day (vv. 17-23).

There are so many ministries that need our help today. Whether it is visiting shut-ins, sending cards, cleaning the building after services, teaching children, teaching women or greeting newcomers, there is so much to do in the church. Do we only volunteer to serve God's church in areas we believe we are particularly qualified in already?

What are some specific examples of times we need to step up and serve simply because the need is there, regardless of our skill set?

It's often said (and sadly it's often true) that 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work. Can you imagine what it would be like in your congregation if everyone participated in the work Christ has given His church? Important tasks would get done more quickly and large burdens wouldn't fall on individual's shoulders. If

you are burdened with heavy tasks, try to delegate like Nehemiah. If you think you are lacking in a specific skill set, try to expand your comfort zone and serve God in a way that you're not familiar with. There is always plenty of work to be done in the Lord's church. Nehemiah chapters three and four serve as a great example of how to stay motivated and active in God's work despite all the discouragement we may receive from outside forces.

Works Cited

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Logos Maps