

NEHEMIAH

pray plan build



Daily Worship Booklet

Week 5

God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law, day after day and the people of God were filled with joy!

Friday – Nehemiah 4:1-5 – Ridicule.

Sanballat is surrounded by those he knows will join in the laugh he will create as he launches his verbal tirade of mockery and ridicule. The world always hunts in packs.

He begins by attacking the people, addressing them as ‘feeble,’ meaning withered and miserable. He sees the people as fading cut flowers that are useless, virtually on the verge of death. The world has no comprehension that God deliberately chooses the weak things of this world to accomplish His task because then His glory will be more clearly manifest (1 Corinthians 1:18-31), (2 Corinthians 12:1-10).

Sanballat then ridicules the level and scope of their work: “Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice?” In other words, ‘will they sacrifice and pray this wall into re-existence?’

Then he cast aspirations on the length of time it will take them to complete the reconstruction: “Will they finish up in a day?” It is as though he looks around at those laughing at his quips and says, ‘We all know they have been at this on and off for decades, and look where it has got them.’

The point about the material is almost said as an afterthought. Even if they were fit for the task, where would they get the needed resources? He is leaving and, excuse the pun, ‘no stone unturned.’

Not to be outdone, Tobiah chips in with his snide comment. Sanballat’s remarks have been about the project never getting off the ground or, if it does, not lasting long enough to amount to anything. Tobiah seeks to get a laugh out of the fact that, even if the Jews can rebuild the walls, what would the end product be like – something that a fox would break if it were to climb on it!

It is not unusual for the enemy to insult the servants of God. In his day, Goliath had insulted the army of Israel and then David (1 Samuel 17:41-47) in the valley of Elah, although, as we know, it did not turn out well for him. The soldiers mocked and blasphemed the Lord during his trial (Luke 22:63-65) and while he was on the cross (Luke 23:37). As did the crowd taunting him with the words – “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” (Luke 23:35-37). Remember, though, what God has said – “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury, saying, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” (Psalm 2:4-6).

Q1. Who and what did Sanballat and Tobiah attack?

Q2. What must we always remember?

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**The book of Nehemiah focuses on the work involved in labouring to see
Christ build his church.**

Thursday – Nehemiah 4:1-5 – The opposition is real.

As the walls are being built, the opposition that reared its ugly head in chapter two is in full-on mode. Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, and Tobiah, the Ammonite, were united in their determination, along with their Arab allies, to ensure that the balance of power in the region did not swing in favour of those living in Jerusalem. If that were to happen, then these men would be robbed, as they saw it, of their considerable influence and wealth. A rejuvenated Jerusalem would place it in a very influential position because of its location on the main North-South trade route linking the northern Tigris-Euphrates River valley with Egypt in the South.

The attacks recorded in this chapter and the next two vary in form, and we will consider each in turn. However, in summary, for now, first, they attacked the people with ridicule and threats of war to discourage them, drive fear into their hearts and generate division among them. When those campaigns failed, they then turned their attention to Nehemiah, inviting him to compromise; on seeing that was not going to work, they slandered him; and when that failed, they threatened him; and when unsuccessful in that, they tried to throw a web of intrigue over him. Multiple attempts were made both against the people and against Nehemiah, but the goal was always the same – do whatever it takes to stop the work.

The world will never let the church be at her work without registering its opposition in multiple ways. In doing so, it will always be driven by the same goal – to stop that which will glorify God. It is a fact. We must be conscious of and alert to the threat. Too often, we are naive about what could be waiting around the corner for us, and that does not mean we should live in fear. However, we must be about the affairs of the Bride with our eyes wide open to what is happening within and beyond the church, especially if we take seriously the phenomenal task of labouring under Christ to see Him build His Bride in Canada.

The first line of attack is ridicule.

While we will discuss this further tomorrow, let us at least note for today that Sanballat's initial ridicule-laden swipe is driven by anger and fueled by rage. Competent and sophisticated, Sanballat knew that if he could stop what was happening in Jerusalem through ridicule, he could save himself and his allies a lot of time and effort. Moreover, it was a ploy worth adopting, given the Jews' apparent inability to get the walls rebuilt over the preceding decades. It is still one employed aggressively by the world today.

Q1. Why did the opposition come?

Q2. What was the first line of attack?

Monday – Nehemiah 3:1-12 - A coordinated plan.

There are several expressions that Nehemiah keeps using in this chapter, and it is important not to gloss over them because of what they teach us:

- 'Next to him' - 3:2,8,10,12,17,19
- 'Next to them' - 3:2,4 (twice), 5,7,8,9,10

Then, there are statements that speak of the specific sections of repair work that individuals and families do, whether 'opposite' or 'beside' their home.

This information conveys one thing: the coordinated and focused approach to this not-inconsiderable task. The rebuilding of these walls was not a case of folk going off and doing their own thing, when and where they wanted, as and when it suited them, without any actual reference to what others were doing. People knew what they were asked to do and engaged accordingly.

The benefits of such an approach are obvious:

- It reduced the time wasted in pre-planning, as individuals and families discussed and debated who would do which section based on personal preference.

- It meant the entire wall would be repaired; no sections were left in ruins because nobody wanted to touch particular sections.

- It meant greater efficiency; people were not wasting time crossing each other's paths to get to the section they wanted to do. They did what was local to them. It also meant that since they were near home, it was easier for them to be fed.

- There was also the benefit that people were incentivized since they were working near their homes, in their locality. They would have to look at the work they did every day for the rest of their lives, and it would reflect directly on them.

Of course, this required everyone to buy in completely, which happened for the most part; as we shall see tomorrow, some did not engage. However, setting that aside for now, rapid progress happened because the men and women in Jerusalem were willing to own the plan and get on with it. It is the same in the Church today. For progress to be made, people must know the plan for the church (and it is the leadership's responsibility to spell that out clearly), and then they must buy into it. God's work can take huge strides when that happens, assuming it is of the Lord.

Q1. What terms appear frequently in this chapter?

Q2. What two things must happen for the church to progress?

Tuesday - Nehemiah 3:13-27 - When leaders work, God's people follow.

Chapter three opens with the statement that Eliashib, the high priest, rose up with his brothers, the priests, built the Sheep Gate, and 'set up its doors.' Since the various sacrifices for worship entered the city through this Gate, it is unsurprising that the priests were either assigned or chose this one. Men can hold an office of leadership in the church and give directions to others, but one of the determining factors in whether his leadership will accomplish much comes down to how much he gets his own hands dirty. That does not mean he must do everything, but people see more than they hear. When godly ministers, elders and deacons show that they are 'all in,' not just when it suits or is convenient for them and that they are willing to do what it takes to get a task done, then the people of God will follow.

The sad thing about Eliashib, as we shall find out in due course (Nehemiah 13:4-9), is his subsequent alliance with those opposed to Nehemiah. This probably arose because Eliashib's grandson married a daughter of Sanballat (Nehemiah 13:28). It is remarkable how family relationships can create all sorts of issues in the life of the church. How many leaders have abdicated their responsibility because they have prioritized keeping a family member happy? How many poor or bad decisions have been made in the church because a minister, an elder, or a deacon has allowed their decision-making process to be critically influenced by someone in their family or a friend that they do not want to offend? It is a serious issue and has caused untold harm to the Bride through the centuries.

All sorts of people were involved in the reconstruction process. As we have noted, we have the priests (3:1), the rulers (3:12-19), the goldsmiths, professional craftsmen who leave their intricate work and turn their hand to stone masonry (3:8,31,32), perfumers (3:8), Levites (3:17), temple servants (3:26), and men and women (3:12). Then there were the locations they were drawn from, not everyone who worked was from the city itself: there were men from Jericho (3:2), Tekoa (3:5), Gibeon and Mizpah (3:7,15,19), Zanoah, (3:13), Beth-haccherem, (3:14), Beth-zur, (3:16), and Keilah (3:17,18). The only requirement for working on the walls and gates was to be one of the people of God. Those who were not, had "no had portion, or right or claim in Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 2:20). There is a place for everyone to work in the Church of Christ in the challenges ahead of us in Canada.

Q1. What must leaders do?

Q2. How will God's people respond?

Wednesday - Nehemiah 3:28-32 – Different attitudes to work.

Some people will work more than others. - It is encouraging for everyone involved when people give themselves to the God-given opportunities to serve in the church. It is an added joy when some demonstrate an appetite for a greater share of the work than first assigned, and Nehemiah is quick to acknowledge this (3:11,19,21,24,27,30).

Each of us must ask ourselves, 'What governs my appetite for work in the Bride?' Are the physical realities of life at present determining that we cannot do more? That is totally understandable and wholly acceptable. However, it may be that when you ask yourself the question, you come up with a different answer. In fact, you may never have thought to ask yourself the question – could I be doing more in the life of the Church? Am I coasting too much in spectator mode? If, having thought about it, you come up with a different answer than 'I am honestly doing all I can given my current life circumstances,' is it an answer that you are happy with, or on more reflection, does it speak to something as simple as laziness, a lack of interest, or an over-engagement in seeking to fulfil yourself out of basic self-interest? If that is the case, is it worth having a rethink? If you get stuck when you do so, please speak with me, and I will chat with you about it. God could have prepared a work for you in the life of the church, and you are currently missing out on His blessing for you by not taking it up.

Some people will not work. - Tekoa was a town about eleven miles from Jerusalem, and some who made that journey regularly travelled to Jerusalem to help rebuild the walls. In fact, it is recorded that they had a role in rebuilding two sections of the walls (3:5 and 27). However, not all Tekoites participated; Nehemiah tells us that "their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord." (3:5). So, these men saw it as below them to get their hands dirty.

The sad reality is that you do not have to be a 'nobleman' or 'noblewoman' (someone who holds office in a community) to be paralyzed by the plague of pride. Pride can and does afflict anyone. It is a grotesque thing, and the excuses and smiles that often accompany it only add to the grotesqueness. Beware of those who talk about what they or a close family member is doing, especially when little or nothing is actually being done. It speaks to an attention-seeking character that is neither healthy nor productive. Stick, like Nehemiah, to acknowledging those who are quietly working, and take to heart Solomon's words, "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips." (Proverbs 27:2)

Q1. What question should we ask ourselves?

Q2. What are the words of Solomon that we should take to heart?