

Rebuilding And Completion Of The Wall

Nehemiah 4:1-7:3

MEMORY VERSE

NEHEMIAH 4:20

“...Our God will fight for us.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Small prizes (pencils, stickers, etc.)

Legos or cardboard bricks.

Graham crackers (enough for 5 graham crackers for each student in your class), a few tubes of cake frosting and butcher paper.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

“Secret Agents”

Find two or three “actors” in your class to help you. Before class, talk to them secretly. Their job will be to irritate the class and those sitting around them while you try to get everyone ready for the lesson. Explain to your actors that their distractions must be appropriate and under control at all times. Some examples might be to throw paper wads towards someone without being seen, hiding their neighbor’s pencil, making faces at someone, laughing and pointing at others as they walk by.

Allow your actors to do this for a couple of minutes as you prepare to get everyone situated for your lesson. When you see that enough of the class has been irritated, explain what they are doing. Ask the children how it felt to have a few of the children acting that way. How was it a distraction to doing what the teacher wanted them to do? Explain that this is kind of like what happened to Nehemiah and the people of Israel in our story today. When there are people working against us, it is hard to keep focused on the work that God wants us to do. The enemy will work hard to keep

us from God's work. We must remember it is God's project. He will be our help! **Let us turn to God with our problems.**

Have the "actors" give small prizes to the rest of the class to make up for being not so nice.

LESSON TIME!

God gave Nehemiah a special task—to rebuild the wall around the city of Jerusalem. To rebuild the wall was an enormous project, but Nehemiah had more to deal with than just overseeing a building project. He encountered difficult people and difficult circumstances. He faced problems without, and even some problems within. To start with, remember Sanballat?

NEHEMIAH 4:1-3

But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews.

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?"

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."

Sanballat and Tobiah opposed the rebuilding of the wall. As you may remember from our last lesson, they opposed anything that was for the good of the people of Israel. With the walls down, they probably assumed they could exercise more control over God's people. Through ridicule and sarcasm, they sought to discourage Nehemiah and the people building the wall.

Tobiah and Sanballat made the mistake of not recognizing the real project supervisor; for it was the Lord God who had directed the work. Mockery is often a tool used by the enemy used to discourage a person in the work of God. When people make fun of us or challenge us because we walk with God, be encouraged and pray. Nothing or no one can stand against God. God will take care of His project! **Let us turn to God with our problems.**

NEHEMIAH 4:4-9

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!

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.

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.

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,

and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

Consider Nehemiah's response to this attack. He did not answer them on their level. He did not say mean things back to them. His response was to humbly *pray* to the Lord and ask God to help them. Romans 12:19-21 tells us, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore, if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on this head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." It is easy to take things into our own hands when someone is laughing at us. How much better to trust God and pray as did Nehemiah.

After praying, God's people took up their tools and worked. The Bible tells us that the people had a "mind to work." The work was completed quickly. May we be single-minded, like Nehemiah and the people, with a heart to see God's purposes accomplished.

Unfortunately, the threat against God's people continued to grow. It escalated from making fun of them to threatening to attack them--to ambush them in hope of stopping the work. Note, Nehemiah's two-fold response: "Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night." First, they prayed--the Bible says, "...Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." Second, they set a watch.

Have you set a watch against the enemy? We are to be alert and careful; for our enemy will seek ways to attack. (See 1 Peter 5:8 and Ephesians 6:10-18). Let us put on the armor of God.

NEHEMIAH 4:10-15

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."

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 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."

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.

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."

Despite Nehemiah's leadership, the workers began to get discouraged both with the enormity of the task before them and the continual threats of their enemies. Discouragement is another big tool of the enemy. Judah was beginning to listen to the enemy--beginning to feel that, perhaps, they were feeble and weak.

Nehemiah took action by posting guards. He did not listen to the voice of those who were discouraged. He reminded the people to not be afraid, but to *remember* whom they were fighting for and under—God, great and awesome. It was God who would go before them. Nehemiah encouraged them to fight for their brethren,

sons, daughters, wives and houses. Nehemiah was not easily swayed, nor was he double-minded. He was a leader whose captain was Almighty God; his dependence was upon Him.

As Christians, we must avoid fear and discouragement by listening to God everyday and not the enemy. God's Word will help us "remember the Lord, great and awesome" and keep us from being deceived by the lies of the enemy. The task before you does not look so enormous when you consider the enormity of the God you serve--His power, ability, and willingness to help. Difficult situations are nothing to God. **Let us turn to God with our problems.**

NEHEMIAH 4:16-23

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

"Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared.

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."

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.

When the enemies found out that Nehemiah knew of their plans, the plans quickly diffused—for, "God had brought their plot to nothing."

Once more encouraged, the people went back to work. Nehemiah set up a strategy of "watch and work." While half of the people worked, the other half were holding spears, shields, and bows. Those working on the walls carried their own weapons in one hand and worked with the other hand. They became a team, working together—their hearts, encouraged and renewed. They worked from sun up to sun down, staying focused on the task!

Let us remember, we cannot accomplish the purposes of God on our own. We need each other—our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. We, too, are meant to labor together as a team.

Brick Walls

For this game you will need Legos or cardboard bricks. You will need the same amount for two teams. Split your class into two teams. Give each team the same amount of Legos or cardboard bricks. Give each team two minutes to build a wall. You may want to have the teams sit in a circle or gather around a table to work together.

Encourage the children to work together and see which team can make the tallest square wall. Allow the children to try it a couple of times. Ask the children if they felt like they could do a quicker and better job by themselves or as a team. We can often accomplish things faster and better when we do it as a team.

NEHEMIAH 5:1-13

And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.

For there were those who said, "We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live."

There were also some who said, "We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine."

There were also those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards.

"Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards."

And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." So I called a great assembly against them.

And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing to say.

Then I said, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?"

"I also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury!

"Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them."

So they said, "We will restore it, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say." Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise.

Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.

Nehemiah had just dealt with defending the wall against outside enemies. Now, he is forced to deal with some problems among his own people. The people were living in hard conditions, money was very tight, and they were very weary.

The people had become angry for four reasons. They had large families--there was not enough food to feed them. Many had mortgaged (taken out loans against) their fields and vineyards and houses to buy grain to feed their families. They had borrowed all they could to pay the king's taxes and could not mortgage their possessions to buy corn. They had to sell their own dearly loved children as slaves in order to live.

The saddest part was that the men who were lending the money and buying the children as slaves were fellow Jews. These men had hardened their hearts, perhaps hoping to control all the land. The enemy tried to use this to stop the construction and ultimately hinder God's plan by defeating and hurting the people. If Satan cannot attack God's people from without, he will attempt to destroy God's people from within.

Nehemiah's reaction was strong: "I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words." In Leviticus 25:42, we are told, "For they are My servants, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves." Nehemiah spoke with the rulers and the nobles and told them, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?" He told them to restore the

things they had taken and to not take any more. The Jews agreed to restore all they had taken and to take no more, and they did all they promised and praised God.

NEHEMIAH 5:14-19

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions.

But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work.

And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us.

Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people.

Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Nehemiah had been appointed governor in the land of Judah. His behavior as governor is an example to all of us. He did not oppress the people, hurt them in any way, or put demands upon them. He lived on that which he had received from the king of Persia's court and his own estate in Judah. He took nothing from the people, for he desired not to add to their burden. He was willing to sacrifice his rights to do God's work. Let us look at our lives and ask the question, "Are we willing to sacrifice all for God's work?"

NEHEMIAH 6:1-9

Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates),

that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm.

So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"

But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.

Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand.

In it was written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king.

And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, 'There is a king in Judah!' Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together.

Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart."

For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.

The wall had no breaks left in it and the doors were ready to be hung. The open gateways were the enemy's last hope for regaining the upper hand. At this point, Sanballat and Geshem contacted Nehemiah and wanted him to meet them at the plain of Ono. The plain of Ono was neutral territory, yet it was 19 miles away and offered Nehemiah no protection against attack.

Nehemiah was wise, for Sanballat and Geshem's motives were to stop the work of the rebuilding and probably to kill Nehemiah. Nehemiah responded, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease while I come down to you?"

The enemy did not give up easily. Four times they attempted to wear him down with the same message, and then a fifth time with an open letter, a public announcement. The letter accused Nehemiah of planning to make himself king. They claimed he was rebuilding the wall in order to rebel against the king of Persia and break away from his rule. Nehemiah was wise. He knew his enemies were now using deception to lure him into danger. He perceived their motive was to weaken their hands from the work.

Note: Nehemiah felt no need to defend himself. God would be his defense. A man of prayer, he gathered his courage to go on by praying to God: "Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands." **Let us turn to God with our problems.**

NEHEMIAH 6:10-14

Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you."

And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!"

Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

Sanballat and Tobiah, once more plotted. Shemaiah was a secret informer. He tried to convince Nehemiah to go and hide himself in the temple because the enemy would come upon him at night and kill him. The tactic of Sanballat and Tobiah was to strike fear in Nehemiah's heart and create a wrong reaction out of fear. Such an

action on the part of Nehemiah would cause reproach among the people, threatening him as God's appointed leader and, thus, threatening his ability to rebuild the wall.

Nehemiah refused Shemaiah's warnings. Note, Nehemiah's concern: "Should such a man as I flee?" Nehemiah knew he was God's servant—surely, God was able to protect him. "And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" He also realized his responsibility as a leader to honor God in his actions.

God revealed to Nehemiah that the warnings were not sincere. Shemaiah was a false prophet. Fear is another often used tactic of our enemy, Satan. Nehemiah did not yield to fear. He realized God could take care of him whether he was in the temple or out on the wall. Fear and faith are mutually exclusive. Nehemiah, as he encouraged the people before, would remember God—great and awesome! He would not be motivated by fear.

God protected Nehemiah in the face of constant opposition by the enemy. Consider the character of Nehemiah. He was a man of prayer and action. He was unselfish, diligent, compassionate, a good steward and example. He was discerning, honest, determined, dependent on God, and courageous. Let us be praying for these characteristics in our own lives; for we too, face a real battle with a real enemy. **Let us turn to God with our problems.**

NEHEMIAH 6:15-19

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days.

And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.

Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came to them.

For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

Despite the continual opposition of the enemy, the wall was completed in 52 days! Nehemiah's and the people's persistence reaped a good reward. They now had protection from their enemies.

The enemies of Jerusalem were ashamed of their own confidence. They were discouraged and perceived that "this work was done by our God." Indeed, the work was accomplished because it was "done by our God." God fought for Israel. He was their help; and thus, the wall was completed. It seems that Tobiah would not let go of the situation. He wrote threatening letters to Nehemiah trying to instill fear into him, but he could not sway Nehemiah. Nehemiah was not the kind of man who could be brought down by fear.

NEHEMIAH 7:1-3

Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed,

that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the itadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

Nehemiah finished the building project--setting up the gates to further fortify the city and appointing gatekeepers to watch and to open and close the gates. He chose Hanani, who was a faithful man and one who feared God greatly, to take charge of Jerusalem's security.

Nehemiah's instructions to guard the city were specific. He told them to shut the gates and lock them while the guards were still on duty and to open them only well after sunrise. He directed the guards to be residents of Jerusalem, to be on duty at regular times, and that each one who had a home near the wall, must guard the section of the wall next to his own home.

Nehemiah and the people he encouraged prayed, watched, and took action. Let us learn to pray in every difficult situation, remembering God, great and awesome. Let us set watch—being careful and prepared against the attacks of the enemy, and let us be those who take action—not only seeing a need but, as Nehemiah, being ready and willing to do something about it. With God's help, Nehemiah and the people completed an enormous project—building a wall in 52 days! Let us, also, “fight the good fight of faith” and bring glory to our God. **Let us turn to God with our problems.**

Edible Bricks

You will need 5 graham crackers for each child, a few tubes of cake frosting and butcher paper. Lay out on a table or on the floor a large sheet of butcher paper. Give each child 5 graham crackers.

Let each child make a brick with their graham crackers. Have them lay one cracker on the paper then make the two sides of the bricks by placing a strip of cake frosting on each long end of the graham cracker on the paper. Then stand up the two sides and place another strip of cake frosting on the top edge of the two side graham crackers. Next place the top graham cracker on. Finally break the fifth graham cracker in half. Place cake frosting on the outer edges of the “brick” and place the _ pieces of graham crackers on each end. Allow the children to decorate their “brick” with cake frosting. They can write their names or favorite Bible verse on it.

Send the bricks home with them and have the children ask their parents for permission to eat their graham cracker “masterpiece”.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to turn to God with their problems and trust in Him, even in really tough situations. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.