

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/29/10

Series: "Facing the Past, Moving Ahead for God's Honor: Nehemiah"

Current study: Nehemiah 4 "Dealing with Obstacles"

I'm enjoying our walk through the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is so "where we live." It's a book that shows us God in the real world, a world where there's brokenness and opposition and disappointment and challenges.

Obviously, it's great to see things happen. It's great when God mobilizes His people for a project, the people respond with willingness, and take action in obedience.

But be assured of this. When you seek to do something for God and in obedience to God and His Word, there will be obstacles.

Discuss: Can you think of any examples in your life?

That's what happened in the 5th century B.C. with the Jews under Nehemiah.

Review: The Book of Nehemiah

--The walls were in shambles around Jerusalem.

--Nehemiah prayed about the problem (ch 1) and then took action (ch 2).

--The people began rebuilding the wall. Chapter 3 records their names and the sections of the building project.

But no sooner had Nehemiah and the people begun the project than they faced *obstacles*, as we'll see in chapter 4.

I. We see the obstacles to the project (1-15).

The obstacles came in three forms...

A. Obstacle #1: Threats (1-9)

The threats came in two waves...

1. There was verbal intimidation (1-3).

READ verses 1-3

Q: Verse 1 says that Sanballat was angry when he saw the wall being rebuilt. Why?

Q: How did Sanballat respond? He ridiculed the Jews. To whom? To his associates and to the army of Samaria (1-2)

Q: What did he say? He asks five cutting, sarcastic questions...

Q: Another critic joined the conversation in verse 3, Tobiah. What did he say and why did he say it? He's trying to intimidate the Jews so they'll lose heart and stop building.

Q: How did Nehemiah respond to the verbal intimidation? See verses 4-6

⇒In response, they prayed (4-5)

Note how the text turns vertical, as Nehemiah records what he prayed to the Lord. What strikes you about his prayer?

But they did more than pray...

⇒In response, they kept building (6).

Q: What was the key to their success?

2. *There was physical intimidation (7-8).*

Q: Who was involved this time (note how the opposition increases)?

Q: What did the antagonists do this time?

Note how Nehemiah and the people responded. They did two things...

⇒ In response, they prayed (9a).

⇒ In response, they posted a guard (9b).

There's a beautiful balance here. Pray and post. Not simply *pray*, and not simply *post*. But pray *and* post.

Discuss: What's the significance of this action?

B. Obstacle #2: Discouragement (10)

Q: Who spoke in verse 10?

Q: What did they say? We're getting tired, and the job is too big.

Namely, there's so much rubble to remove that we can't even build the wall!

C. Obstacle #3: Fear (11-12)

1. *The enemy made more threats (11).*

Q: What kind of threats?

2. *Nehemiah's own people became hysterical (12).*

Q: Who spoke in verse 12?

Q: What does the phrase "ten times over" indicate? It's one thing to see a problem. It's another thing to be captivated by a problem. Yes, the Jews were facing a problem, but they were consumed by the problem to the point of exaggeration and hysteria.

What can you do to help people who are paralyzed by such fear?

Note what Nehemiah did...

⇒ In response, Nehemiah protected exposed portions of the wall (13).

He didn't have enough manpower to defend *all* the wall, so he picked the most vulnerable spots.

⇒ Then Nehemiah exhorted his people to remember the Lord (14).

READ verse 14

Q: What did Nehemiah do to deal with the problem of fear? Several things are mentioned in verse 14. He "looked things over." He gave a motivational talk to the leaders and people, and confronted their fear head-on, "Don't be afraid of them!"

Q: How does Nehemiah describe God to the people?

⇒ Then Nehemiah told his people to be ready to fight (14b).

Again notice how God's sovereignty and human responsibility go hand in hand—"Remember the Lord" and "Fight."

⇒ Then they returned to work (15).

Notice again how Nehemiah mentions the Lord's involvement. Who frustrated the enemy's plot? *God* did.

II. We see the strategy for finishing the project (16-23).

It's a fascinating strategy...

A. Here's what the workers did (16-18).

1. *Half of the people worked, while the rest stood guard (16).*
2. *The workers kept their weapons while they worked (17-18a).*

Q: And what did one man do according to the end of verse 18?

B. Here's what Nehemiah did (18b-20).

1. *He devised a plan for self-defense.*

Q: What was the plan?

2. *He put the focus on God (20b).*

Here we see it again, the divine-human cooperation. Nehemiah told the people God would fight for them. He also told them if they heard the trumpet, come ready to fight!

Does God fight for His people? Yes. And how, often, does He do it? By asking us to take action in faith, depending upon Him.

C. Here's how the project progressed (21-23).

1. *They worked long hours (21).*

Q: How long?

2. *They stayed in Jerusalem at night (22).*

Q: Why?

3. *They remained alert at all times (23).*

Q: What does that indicate about Nehemiah and his people?

Implications: We learn some lessons...

Discuss: What does chapter 4 teach us about God? About living for God?

1. *God never said it would be easy.*

2. *When obstacles come, the first thing we must do is to look up.*
Pray. Call on God for help.

3. *The next thing we must do is to keep doing what He told us to do.*

Prayer mustn't lead to passivity nor inactivity. Trust *and* obey, for there's no other way.

4. *Obstacles are merely opportunities for God to bring honor to Himself.*

Discuss: How does Nehemiah 4 point us to Christ?