

I. Introduction:

- A. The Book of Nehemiah is a very practical and useful book.
 - 1. For example, thus far in our 15 lessons we've had a couple of messages on **prayer**.
 - 2. There have been two lessons on the common maladies of **sadness** and **depression**.
 - 3. We've looked at the **responsibility** of the **church**, and a couple of times we've studied **sinful society**.
 - 4. There have been messages on **patriotism**, **sin** and the **sovereignty of God**.
- B. And there is **Nehemiah** himself.
 - 1. I remind you once again, that Nehemiah was more like us than many other important Bible characters.
 - 2. He was a man *"subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly..."*
 - 3. He was not a professional priest, but he could carry out some priestly duties just as we are supposed to do.
 - 4. He was not a politician, but the Holy Spirit thrust upon him a position of leadership.
 - 5. Many of us can identify with him – if not completely – at least in some parts of his life.
- C. He is now in the city which he loved, and he's rallying its citizens to rebuild its wall as a first step toward the restoration of Jerusalem's former glory.
 - 1. This ultimately means the glory of God.
 - 2. There is no other city in the world which is so closely tied to the name and glory of Jehovah.
 - 3. There are some of God's enemies who realize this – like today's Palestinians, Syrians and Arabs.
 - 4. But sadly, there seem to be few Christians who really grasp this fact.
 - 5. Satan hates that city almost as much as he hates the Lord.
 - 6. And this is why there is such anger at the Trump administration for placing America's embassy there.
- D. Jerusalem has always had its enemies and detractors, and she still does.
 - 1. So it is no surprise that Nehemiah had his Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem.
 - 2. What can we learn about God's enemy from a brief study of this chapter?
 - 3. Can we learn anything about a proper response to opposition?

II. Let's consider Nehemiah's enemy.

- A. We have here two of Nehemiah's enemies named, and in **chapter 2** there is a third.
 - 1. Who were these men?
 - 2. I suppose that the details aren't important after nearly 25 centuries, but sometimes details can be fun.
- B. Over and over again Nehemiah tells us that **Sanballat** was a **Horonite**.
 - 1. That means Sanballat was from Horonaim, a city of Moab; it is mentioned in both **Isaiah** and **Jeremiah**.
 - 2. So Sanballat was a Moabite. Moab has had an unhealthy relationship with Israel from day one.
 - 3. It was one of the nations to which Israel asked assistance during their forty year migration to the land.
 - a. But God's people were rebuffed.
 - b. That was something which the Lord never forgot – a ridiculous statement – but I hope you understand.
 - c. Listen to the first words of **Nehemiah 13** – *"On that day (particular) they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the **Ammonite** and the **Moabite** should not come into the congregation of God **FOR EVER**.*
 - d. Why? *Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing."*
 - 4. And do you recall Bro. Fulton's lesson in regard to David and Moab?
 - a. David's great-great-grandmother was Ruth, a refugee from Moab – a woman of beauty and faith.
 - b. Do you remember that David sent his elderly parents to Moab asking for protection from Saul?
 - c. Do you remember that later David attacked and destroyed Moab, probably because of that people's treatment of Jesse and his wife?
 - 5. Other than Ruth, the Moabites were among the perpetual enemies of Israel, and they were quite happy in that role.

- C. Sanballat was in the unfortunate position of being a Moabite.
1. But he was also a politician who happened to be governor over Samaria, just to the north of Jerusalem.
 2. Not only does this chapter make the suggestion, but there are secular documents which refer to it.
 3. Since the Judean governor was rather weak, Sanballat thought it was his responsibility to rule over Jerusalem.
 4. Plus he had created a second unholy relationship to Judah.
 5. For years, the Jews had been intermarrying with Canaanites and others – like the Ammonites & Moabites.
 - a. That was not always sin – when the foreigners were believers, as was Ruth.
 - b. But under no circumstances were **God's priests** to marry anyone but the women of Levi, not even women from other tribes of Israel, let alone foreigners.
 6. **Nehemiah 13:28** tells us that one of the grandsons of Eliashib, the high priest, had married the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite. This same Sanballat was related by marriage to the high priest.
 7. There was an unholy, unlawful alliance between Sanballat and the religious leadership of Israel.
 8. Sanballat believed that he owned Jerusalem through his political and marital relations.
- D. When Nehemiah arrived in town he encouraged Ezra and other godly men to implement the old laws of Israel.
1. Those laws directly attacked the economics and power base of the house of Sanballat.
 2. This Moabite saw his influence in decline, and he hated it – he hated Nehemiah for his obedience to God.
 3. He encouraged the former slave, Tobiah, and his friend Geshem, the Arabian, to stand with him.
 4. In **verse 8** – they *“conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem and to hinder”* the reconstruction.
 5. *“He spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria and said, What do these feeble Jews.”*
- E. Consider just a couple of general things about this enemy, and ask yourself, *“Why are they so angry?”*
1. When Nehemiah arrived in town he had done nothing to provoke Sanballat.
 2. He had not threatened the Moabite's income; he had not barred the gates against the man – there were no gates; he knew probably nothing about the relationship with the backslidden high priest.
 3. Sanballat chose to become Nehemiah's enemy simply because of Who and what he represented.
 4. Nehemiah was there as a representative of king Artaxerxes and also of Jehovah – the King of kings.
 5. Just by the very fact of Nehemiah's godly principles, Sanballat saw him as an enemy.
 6. Christians should expect to be hated by non-Christians
 7. They hated our Saviour and when we stand with Christ, we should expect to be hated – whether or not we have done anything to personally offend the man who hates us.
- F. As I said not too many months ago – a Christian shouldn't consider anyone to be his enemy.
1. That will not stop others from calling **us** *“the enemy,”* but the accusations should be one sided.
 2. I saw a quote the other day, it's accuracy unconfirmed, but **C.H. Spurgeon** purportedly said, *“No Christian has a right to hate anyone,”* and generally speaking I agree.
 3. We are going to see Nehemiah really angry at some people and grieved at others, but he didn't hate any.
 4. It was Sanballat's decision to become Nehemiah's enemy, because he knew they could not co-exist.
 5. One was fire and one was water; one was a child of hell and the other was a friend of the Water of Life.
- G. And yes, Sanballat conspired to bring an illegal army against the reconstructionists.
1. But his **first weapon** was mockery and name calling.
 2. *“He spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?”*
 - a. Will they rebuild the walls and lock out us who have been coming and going here for years?
 - b. Will they reestablish the Mosaic sacrifices and will they offer sacrifices dedicating the walls themselves?
 - c. They are in such a hurry, will they try to get this work done over night?
 - d. And what construction materials will they use?
 - e. They have nothing but stones which have been over-heated in the past and rendered weak.

3. Tobiah added with a laugh, *“even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.”*
4. At this point all God’s enemy had was saber-rattling and jawing.

- H. I can’t tell you that the United States government is not going to turn on you for your Christianity some day.
1. I can’t tell you that the homosexuals may not try to burn this building down some day.
 2. My brother-in-law, Grant Price, had his car shot up by unknown assailants a few night ago. Why?
 - a. Was it because he’s running for office? Because he is a highly vocal gun-rights advocate?
 - b. Or was it because he is a Christian? No one knows for sure at this point.
 3. The way things are going you, and I might be targeted for physical violence by any number of terrorists.
 4. But for the most part, right now, all the enemy has are empty words.
 5. Let them shout, and let them spout.
 6. It’s our job to study Nehemiah’s example and look to the Lord for help.

III. How did Nehemiah respond to the threats of this chapter?

- A. As is characteristic of the man, his first response was prayer.
1. *“Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity:*
 2. *And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.”*
 3. That last phrase reminds us that high in Nehemiah’s thoughts was God’s glory –
 4. *“Lord, the heathen are trying to bring your name down before the builders.”*
 5. Yes, we are despised and rejected, but more importantly so is our Saviour.
- B. In the midst of our sufferings – of whatever kind they might be – we can be sure of God’s awareness.
1. He knows when we are despised by others; He knows their slander and gossip and abuse.
 2. And the prayer of Nehemiah notwithstanding, the Lord will not cover or blot out their iniquity, until there is true repentance before His throne.
- C. Nehemiah prays that the sins of the enemy be turned upon them.
1. They will fall into the pit they have dug to trap God’s people.
 2. He prays **Galatians 6:7** – *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”*
- D. I have to admit to a bit of disappointment in this prayer, but I think that I can understand.
1. He prays, **“Cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee.”**
 2. Sharon Richardson called me the other day & one of her questions involved David’s *“imprecatory Psalms.”*
 - a. How can David pray for the wrathful destruction of the wicked, when the Lord Jesus teaches us to love our enemy?
 - b. Without a doubt David offers some difficult statements; nearly impossible to explain in human terms.
 3. But my attempted explanation is that we should understand David to be a type of Christ in those situations.
 4. God has every right to curse the wicked, and He does just that.
 5. I don’t believe that you and I have that right to curse our enemies, but, of course, the Lord does.
 6. In one sense Nehemiah **should** have **prayed** for God to **COVER their iniquity** and **BLOT OUT their sins**.
 7. With the New Testament as our background, we should pray for the salvation of sinners like Sanballat.
 8. But I think Nehemiah’s point is that **God must not overlook these sins**; some kind of **punishment** or **atonement** must take place.
- E. In the midst of this Nehemiah uses an interesting word – *“captivity.”*
1. Just as Jehovah had promised, Judah was in the slow process of being delivered from her captivity.
 2. These people are no longer in Babylon or Persia, they are back in the land God had given to them.

3. They are no longer captives.
4. It is Nehemiah's prayer that Sanballat and this wicked associates learn what it is to be captives.
5. Might we say "*incarcerated*"? They need to be jailed for their crimes against Israel.
6. "*O God, turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity.*"

F. Nehemiah's first response to the attacks of God's enemy was prayer.

IV. And his second reply was to keep doing the work he was sent to Jerusalem to do.

- A. After his prayer, the very next verse says, "*So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.*"
1. It needs to be kept in mind that not all the chapters of this book are given to us in strict chronological order.
 2. We are told here that the wall was finished, but that is mentioned again later.
 3. And the completion is suggested earlier in **chapter 3**. This is a summary and it is repeated several times.
 4. In chapters to come we are going to be told more about the work and the difficulties in getting it done.
 5. Feel free to read **chapter 3**, but if you don't get a chance, I'll warn you that we are going to return to it on Wednesday and look at it expositively as Bro. Fulton is doing with the life of David.
- B. The people had a mind to work, & there were enough workers that the city was encircled in less than 2 months.
1. The wall was in the same approximate location as it had been in the days of Solomon and the kings.
 2. But most scholars suggest that **verse six** tells us the height of the new wall was perhaps half as high – "*So built we the wall, and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof...*"
 3. At first, the primary concern was the stone wall – while gaps were left for the later building of gates.
 4. But these were eventually completed as well.
- C. This work was done under the constant threat of attack.
1. The enemy "*conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it*" – **v. 8**.
 2. **Verse 11** – "*And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.*"
 3. "*And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.*"
- D. It is sad, but a necessary thing from time to time, for God's people, or the Lord's church, to take the time and energy to stop moving forward in order to defend itself against attack.
1. We are supposed to be evangelistic, implementing the three-fold aspects of the great commission.
 2. But necessity demands that sometimes our time has to be spent answering the slander of the enemy.
 3. And when not doing that, energy must be spent on defending the lambs inside the sheep-fold.
 4. **V. 13** – "*Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.*"
 5. **V. 16** – "*And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.*"
 - a. *They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.*
 - b. *For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.*
 - c. *And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.*
 - d. *In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.*
 - e. *So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.*

- f. *Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day.*
- g. *So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.”*

- E. With the hands of Sanballat and his henchmen on the hilt of their swords, and their eyes glaring at them....
 - 1. While having to constantly look over their backs to see who might be creeping up on them....
 - 2. While working day and night with hardly time to rest, or to bathe, or to wash their clothes....
 - 3. The willing workers of Jerusalem finished their task, proving that....

V. When God’s people do the work to which they are called, God will bless.

- A. **Verse 15** – *“And God ...brought the counsel (of the wicked) to naught... we turned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.”*
 - 1. **Verse 6** – *“So built we the wall, and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof, for the people had a mind to work.”*
 - 2. Some of Satan’s most effective wiles are distortion, divergence and distraction.
 - 3. But with God’s help His workers can stay focused, and they can be successful in their work.
- B. Because the work is not Nehemiah’s or Judah’s; ultimately it is the Lord’s work.
 - 1. Having read this book a dozen times recently, I don’t believe that Nehemiah had any desire for personal glory.
 - 2. He was orchestrating this construction for the glory of God and for the city – the institution which God chose to establish.
 - 3. There was nothing in those workers – there was no reason – for God not to bless.
 - a. The workers weren’t motivated by personal pride or financial profit.
 - b. They were not Nehemiah’s servants or slaves; they considered themselves servants of God.
 - 4. And so bless is what God did.
- C. Of course, we know that Jehovah is omnipotent and sovereign.
 - 1. His will will be done and His glory is guaranteed.
 - 2. And when God’s people choose to sacrifice themselves for that glory, then God’s omnipotence will be there.
 - 3. That is ultimately the greatest lesson that we see in this book.
- D. And that is what we want to see in **our** Jerusalem as well – in Calvary Independent Baptist Church.
 - 1. It seems that Satan keeps hurling his fiery darts at our church – some of them you have seen, and some of them only I have seen.
 - 2. But the closer we get to successfully rebuilding the walls and bringing God’s enemy to repentance, the harder the Devil will labor against us.
 - 3. We need to learn from Nehemiah, and if necessary, pick up both the trowel and the sword, while still relying on our Saviour to provide the victory.
- E. You can be assured, God will be glorified. It is guaranteed.