



**Nehemiah: Rebuilding Life
As If Things Weren't
Bad Enough**

This week's Scripture passage
Nehemiah 4:1-3, 6-17

This Week's Message
May 31, 2020

*Nehemiah: Rebuilding Life
As If Things Weren't
Bad Enough*

*Those who carried materials did their
work with one hand and held a
weapon in the other.*

Nehemiah 4:17
(New International Version)

¹When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews,

²and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?"

³Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!"

⁶So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

⁷But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry.

⁸They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.

⁹But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

¹⁰Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."

¹¹Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."

¹²Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

¹³Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows.

¹⁴After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

¹⁵When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work.

¹⁶From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah

¹⁷who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other.

Sunday is our 12th week out of worship. Never in my lifetime could I have imagined the situation in which we are now living, with life turned upside down in so many ways. The pandemic of Covid-19 has transformed everyday life in so many ways and will, no doubt, continue to have an impact upon us for quite some time.

As we have made our way through this time, I have tried my best to find Biblical texts that speak to this very unique time in our history. Beginning with the story of the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt, as they journeyed through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, I have continued on to the story of Nehemiah. Nehemiah's story of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem comes centuries after that of the Exodus, but it was a time in the history of God's people that shaped them in ways that continued to have an impact upon them for many centuries. Both of those stories, I believe, resonate strongly today, as our experience of pandemic has reshaped our world in ways that will remain for generations.

Last week we studied from chapter 2 of Nehemiah, as he led the people to begin the

Questions to Consider –

* In what ways did you find a connection to the story of the Hebrew people wandering through the wilderness?

* In what ways do you find a connection to the story of the people as they rebuild the city of Jerusalem?

* Have you had an experience in life when you told yourself, *things could not get any worse*, and then they did? How did you cope with the challenge?

* What challenges do you see to the rebuilding of your life when this time of difficulty has passed? What challenges do you see to our church? To our community? To our nation? To our world?

* The Samaritans believed that the people who lived in exile in Babylon had allowed the Jewish religion to be corrupted by combining elements of Babylonian religion. The reality, however, is that the people in exile worked hard to maintain their religious heritage and unique practices. They might have, however, adapted to some of the cultural expressions, which is common to any age. Do you think we make any such adaptations?

work of rebuilding. This week, we move to chapter 4, where we find that the challenges facing Nehemiah and the people continue to grow. After initial success in the rebuilding effort, some of the neighbors began to take note of what has happening in Jerusalem, and those neighbors did not like what they saw. Fearing a resurgent kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem, they began to rattle their swords and threaten the returned exiles and their rebuilding efforts.

Verse 6 of chapter 4 tells us that *the people worked with all their heart*, and their hard work had begun to pay off. They had reached the point of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem to half its previous height, which was no small feat, considering their difficult circumstances. Reaching that height attracted opposition from some neighboring leaders, chief among them Sanballat, who was the governor of the Samaritan people. The gospels reveal to us that there was a good deal of enmity between the Jewish people and the Samaritans, and much of that enmity can be traced to the time of Nehemiah. The Samaritans claim ancestry to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, tribes named after two of the sons of Joseph. The Samaritans believed they represented the true form of Judaism, and that the returning exiles practiced a form of Judaism that had been corrupted by combining elements of Babylonian religion. To the Samaritans, the returning exiles were guilty of syncretism (syncretism is the blending together of two or more religions to form either a new religion, or, to cause an indelible compromise of the original religion). That syncretism, in the view of the Samaritans, had led to the corruption of the pure form of Judaism. In the view of the Samaritans, the returning exiles were a threat in a number of ways, but especially theologically and politically. They were a threat theologically because they were believed to practice an aberrant form of Judaism and politically because they were working to rebuild the southern kingdom. The nation of Israel had, after the time of Solomon, divided into two kingdoms – Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The Samaritans, who were part of the northern kingdom, saw the rebuilding effort as a political threat primarily because of the city of Jerusalem, which had always been the political and spiritual heart of the nation.

As always, I hope you and your family are doing well.