

Refresh Part V:
“Countering the Crisis of Discouragement”
February 5, 2012

Nehemiah 4:1-23

Introduction

We’re into our 5th week in Nehemiah – the book I believe to be the very best book on leadership in all of Scripture! The series has been entitled “Refresh” because Jerusalem’s walls were down and had been for some 140 +/- years. Morale was down for the citizens that had returned to what was left of their once great city, Jerusalem, and she needed some refreshment after the most devastating experience of her existence. She needed encouragement like never before in her 500 years of being a city, populated by God’s chosen people, the people of Judah.

Every time I preach on this, someone inevitably will ask, “Are we getting ready to build?” In fact, the last two times I preached from Nehemiah (over the last 10 years), I was indeed leading a building program – a major building program (\$6.8 million). I’m pleased to report to you today, that there are no plans to build any new facilities at this time – **HOWEVER**, we do have plans underway to “**Refresh**” our current facilities.

We have a substantial amount of finances that are designated for capital improvements – from a previous building program that God had other plans for. Ron, our Worship Pastor, is in the process of forming a team (“The Refresh Team”) that will be leading the charge in making our facilities the very best that they can be! We will continue to update everyone as we progress. Isn’t this exciting? (Progress lights my fire...) Anything that we can do to help move the Kingdom forward here at RBC is progress. Anything that we can do to better “Glorify God by loving Him, loving others, and laboring to see all people become devoted followers of Christ” will strengthen this church...

As we progress into Nehemiah keep Ron and his team in your prayers and this project of “Refreshment” in your prayers as well.

-Pray for Ron & Team & RBC as we move the Kingdom forward for your glory, Lord! Amen

(Leadership Takes the Day)

(Everything’s in the middle of construction in this chapter!)

In Chapter 3, as we discussed last week, the walls and the gates are being rebuilt and restored. The work has begun! The vision is no longer just a vision, an elusive ideal picture of the future—but now, it is becoming a reality! **Just when the work begins and really starts to get going—literally, all hell breaks loose upon Nehemiah and the workers!** It is interesting that the Bible tells us to love our neighbors (Leviticus 19:18) and our enemies (Matthew 5:44) because oftentimes they are one and the same. Such is the case in Nehemiah 4.

VS 1 “Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged and he jeered at the Jews.” (“Sin” the moon god “gives life”). The governor of Samaria reacts more severely when the actual rebuilding of the walls begins than he did at the end of Chapter 2. All he and his compatriots did then was mock and ridicule the Jews (see verse 19) and accused them of rebelling against the king! But here, he becomes outright furious. **Hear me—fury (or extreme anger) indicates the start of desperation on his part that Nehemiah may, after all, succeed.** (H.G.M. Williamson, “Word Biblical Commentary”, p.216) **When God Himself gives His child a vision to do something (a “wall to build”) and that child acts in obedience, braces himself for battle, and then diligently gets to work on the task, then the enemy of God (or enemies) will react with fury every time! Why? Because it’s the beginning of the end of their**

control over the situation. It's highly possible that Sanballat, in the absence of a governor for Jerusalem, was given control of the city by Artaxerxes the 1st until Nehemiah was appointed governor (temporary governor) by the Persian monarch. **Sanballat is losing control and he's incensed about it! Someone else has taken "his" territory!** Notice with me that in this verse he "ridiculed" the Jews. This is the 1st of at least 9 different tactics that he and his buddies will use between Chapters 4 – 6:

#2 – Plots of war (vs. 7-9)

#3 – Discouragement (vs. 10)

#4 – Fear – (vs. 11-23)

#5 – Selfishness (5:1-19)

#6 – Compromise (6:1-6)

#7 - Slander 6:5-9)

#8 – Threats (6:10-14)

#9 – Intrigue (6:17-19)

"Sin gives life" to all these!

II Corinthians 2:11 Tells us "...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs."

Ephesians 6:11 says "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

What are Satan's schemes? The very same as Sanballat used in Chapters 4-6! These are some terrific passages of Scripture that we can claim and personalize to fight each of these attacks in our lives. Today we'll just deal with the first 4!

VS 2 "And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, 1 "What are these feeble Jews doing? 2 Will they restore it for themselves? 3 Will they sacrifice? 4 Will they finish up in a day? 5 Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?"

Raise your hand if you've ever met a bully. -tell a good bully story here-

Notice "in the presence of his brothers" – (NIV translation is "associates") – The first thing Sanballat does is start to "grandstand." Sanballat is a blowhard! He is a bully! Bullies always run their mouths in front of others and try to make you think that they are an invincible force! Here, he brings his associates and troops just outside the wall and taunts Nehemiah and the workers.

--"the army of Samaria"—We are not sure whether this was an official Persian garrison under the control of Sanballat, the governor, or a local militia group. At any rate it's certain that he had troops under his command. (see also Ezra 4:23)

1 – attacks the workers

--Sanballat's first question accuses the Jews of being "feeble." This word occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible ("Word," p.216). It means "to be weak, languish" through failure of the normal strength giving agencies." In other words—the Jews will never be strong enough to complete the task!

2, 3, 4 – attack the work itself!

--Sanballat's second question – 2 Will they restore their wall?"

and the third question – ③ “Will they offer sacrifices?”

and the fourth question – ④ “Will they finish in a day?”

All attack the work itself!

- “sacrifices” – this question implies that it will take more than prayer and worship to rebuild the city!

☆ This is blasphemy against Jehovah God! ☆

5 – attacks, ridicules the materials!

Their God is not strong enough to make it happen!

“Our God reigns!”

- “Can they bring stones back to life...” It’s true that limestone is softened by fire, but there were still plenty of good materials for the builders to use!

VS 3 “Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, ‘Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!’”

☆ Hear this—much of what Sanballat and Tobiah said was true from a human point of view. ☆

But those two and their troops did not know that they were out-numbered by the army of heaven. Daniel 4:35 (KJV) says “...and he doeth according to His will in the army of heaven.”

The NIV reads “with the powers of heaven...” --What does Nehemiah do?

He prays!

VS 4 “Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives.”

This had to be difficult for Nehemiah, as a man of incessant action, to simply turn inward for a little while and pray! I know he wanted to jump off that wall and fight! Look at what he says—“Get them, GOD!” This style of prayer is also used in Psalm 44; 69; 74; 79; and 139: 19-22; known as the imprecatory Psalms. (imprecate—to invoke a curse [Webster’s]). “Lord, I’m up here on this wall.” “We’re up here on this wall, there’s an army right there in front of us—take care of them!” Notice that he asks God to do to Sanballat, Tobiah and their Samaritan army/troops exactly what had been done to Judah some 140 years before “give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives.”

VS 5 “Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.”

Nehemiah now makes his own imprecatory prayer of Jeremiah 18:23.

- “in the presence of the builders”- This little phrase proves that the whole grandstanding has taken place just outside the walls—within ear shot of the workers.

PRAYER THEN ACTION

Is Nehemiah’s pattern!

VS 6 “So we” – looked at how many workers, supplies and materials, weapons, and then looked at the work we had already done and then looked at Sanballat, Tobiah and the Samaritan army and quit!!! If they had been looking at the whole project, taking everything physical into consideration, then that’s what they would/should have done. But, praise God...

-OMINOUS- Half-way Point

“built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.”

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! For leadership and workers that do not tuck their tails and run but **STAY ON THE WALL!** They just stay at it! Nehemiah's the BALBOA of the Old Testament. He never quits! NEVER!

(Rocky VII in the making - not really!)

(what an encouragement!)

-jackalope- There had only been a few people that held back from involvement according to Chapter 3:5

"...and next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord."

The work is still moving forward with great progress and enthusiasm and evidently, Sandy, Toby and the boys went back home...RIDICULE DOES NOT WORK.

VS 7 "But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry."



God's people sometimes have difficulty working together, but the people of the world have no problem uniting in opposition to the work of the Lord (Psalm 2:1-2, Acts 4:23-30, Luke 23:12)



(Warren Wiersbe).

Now, the renewed opposition comes from all sides!!! – Sanballat represents Samaria to the north of Jerusalem, Tobiah and the Ammonites to the east of Jerusalem, and the Ashdodites were to the west of the City...Geshem and the Arabs to the South.

- "repairing of the walls" – is literally translated "the healing of the walls" (NASB). This is like the healing of a wound. The expression is found also in II Chronicles 24:13 in regards to the temple being rebuilt.



(Nehemiah has an intense concern for the health and well-being of the city.)



Sanballat was so enraged (vs. 1) that his grandstanding trick did not work, that he goes and recruits another group of people—the Ashdodites--to rise against them!

“Threats of War”

on screen

VS 8 “And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.”

They are plotting a WAR! Things have just gone from intense to unspeakable. This is a deteriorating situation.

PRAYER THEN ACTION (Leadership, Leadership, Leadership)

VS 9 “And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.”

Nehemiah makes a decision to pull out what weapons he has! He utilizes what troops he brought with him (though out-numbered)!

Faith + Works = Life, “faith without works is dead” James 2:20 (ESV --“Faith apart from works is useless.”)

VS 10 “In Judah it was said, The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.”

Potential Discouragement for RBC’s growth (health) [NOT THE REFRESH PROJECT]

1. “We’re in a transitional community” – different races, people groups, etc ... “Conyers isn’t what it used to be.”

- Was Jerusalem not a transitional community in 445 B.C.?

Different people groups from all over the Babylonian/Persian Empire have been brought to Samaria and the districts around Jerusalem.

- Atlanta is set to be the largest city in the U.S. by 2040 – bigger than New York City!
The whole world is coming – what an opportunity! We have the potential of reaching the world without ever leaving Metro Atlanta!

2. “We used to have over 1,000 people coming to this church.”

- Could Nehemiah & Jerusalem not have said “We used to have way more than twice as many people in this city – Jerusalem!” (They probably had 10 times more before this current 40,000+ residents before the Babylonian captivity.)
- DOES THIS MEAN WE CAN’T REACH PEOPLE?
- DOES THIS MEAN WE CAN’T BE GREAT?
- DOES THIS MEAN OUR BEST DAYS WERE BACK THEN/THERE?

For Jerusalem, Jesus, Messiah, had not come yet → The city’s best days lie ahead.

→ Why not RBC?

- We cannot obsess on who used to come & what we used to look like...

We need to obsess on who’s here and who is yet to come!!!

Who could be here!

It’s a new day here at Rockdale - Jesus is right here – in the middle of us –

You’re right here

I’m right here & the Kingdom is marching forward. →

While ridicule and plots of war/threats did not even slow the progress of the work down, → this next tactic of the devil himself will STOP THE WHOLE PROJECT! This one tactic is the single most powerful weapon that Satan has (in my opinion)!!! **DISCOURAGEMENT** Please say with me "ALL DISCOURAGEMENT IS OF THE DEVIL!" (3X at least—maybe 7X).

>campout<

Traditional date of the Exodus is 1446 B.C.- exactly 1,000 years earlier...

Let me give you a strong Biblical example. It was discouragement that kept Israel from entering the Promised Land at Kadish-Barnea (Numbers 13). Verses 31-32 of that chapter read "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. **And they spread** among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored." And you know what happened? That entire generation never entered the Promised Land because they believed the bad report and got discouraged.

NIV translation

How could this discouragement have come to the people of Judah? (Or the tribe of Judah, see "Potential Discouragement" Nehemiah Genesis 49:8-12). The answer lies in Nehemiah 6:17-19.

Nehemiah 6: **17** "Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. **18** For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife. **19** Also they spoke of his **good deeds in my presence** and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid."

Discouragement is contagious -- so is encouragement & faith & worship...

Some people in the tribe of Judah were cooperating with the enemy!!! (Internal stuff...)

Nehemiah 13:15-22 tells us that some of the people were more interested in making money than obeying God (by selling and buying on the Sabbath). The combination of marriage and

money divided their loyalties, and they became the cause of discouragement. Nehemiah is surrounded by enemies and also has traitors on the inside, too. In some 23 years of ministry (called to preach at 19), I have learned that discouragers are doubters and compromisers. There is something terribly wrong in their spiritual walk! These people show patterns of a lack of faith in God's Word and they are primarily interested in their own plans and pursuits. "A double-minded person is unbelieving and unstable" (James 1:5-8) and hinders the work of the Lord.

Though the work has stopped, Nehemiah just keeps on going! He knew that all discouragement is of the devil and he kept it in perspective and began working toward a solution. (He was not surprised!)

*None of the other

8 worked*

RIDICULE DOES NOT WORK, THREAT OF WAR/INTIMIDATING PLOTS DO NOT WORK, BUT DISCOURAGEMENT STOPS THE WALL—BUT DOES NOT STOP NEHEMIAH!



VS 11 "And our enemies said, 'They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.'"

VS 12 "At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, 'You must return to us.'"

The next tactic of Satan is **FEAR!**

At least
189 X
"fear not"
Up 365 X

As we know from Chapter 3, many of the out-lying villages and towns of Judah had no representative groups of workers to assist the rebuilding of the wall. Just where the enemy coalition was mustering, we do not know, but wherever it was, it was impressive. (Word, p.226)
"You must return to us" can be translated "they will attack us" (NIV). The enemies of Judah had

made it perfectly clear that the only people who were going to be killed would be those working on the wall.

FEAR

For our senior adults—visit www.longtolive.com and you can calculate how long you have on this planet, to the second—if you want to know. (For 50+ people) (Ed Young, Jr. “Know Fear”, p. 133)

“ten times over” – simply means over and over and over...

The wall work has ceased and now the people are terrorized (their enemies really were terrorist).

So, is Nehemiah paralyzed by the fear? (He could have been if his faith had not won out!)

VS 13 “So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.”

Nehemiah immediately stationed people at strategic places on the wall—the places that could easily be penetrated by the enemy. ACTION is a great enemy of fear! Don't worry and fear—ACT in whatever way you know how –leadership, leadership, leadership.

-AWESOME SPEECH-

VS 14 “And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, ‘Do not be afraid of them. Remember the (1) Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your (2) brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.’”

I picture Nehemiah doing this at the most visible place on the wall that he could—so his enemies would hear it and see it. He motivates the people by reminding them why they are doing the work and for whom they are working. GOD should be first! Then your family second in

importance in life! -Why do we want to continue to build a great church? For God – to glorify God, first! Then for our families—our children, grandchildren, etc...

“Swords, spears and bows” (vs. 13) were not much for a group of untrained civilians (for the most part) to defend themselves and their city with, but the speech is priceless!

VS 15 “When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work.”

Hallelujah! Though **discouragement** from ridicule and plans of attack/threats of war from enemies without and traitors from within had stopped the work of the rebuilding of the wall temporarily, Nehemiah **LEAD** right through those murky waters of uncertainty and now the work began again! Leadership! Leadership! Leadership! He is very careful to give all the glory to God in this verse! (vs. 10-14 – the project had ceased.)

VS 16 “From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah,”

The “men” were close confidants to Nehemiah—more than just mere servants—who were totally loyal to him (THE MAN)! They were better equipped than the people’s militia of vs. 13.

VS 17 “...who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other.”

VS 18 “And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.”

They were really working under great/tremendous pressure

VS 19 “And I said to the nobles, and to the officials, and to the rest of the people, ‘The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another.’”

- Remember, the wall of the entire city was 2 – 2 ½ miles around and about 10+ feet thick (3 meters).

VS 20 “In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

The men/soldiers needed to be summoned quickly, if attacked, so the signal was a trumpet blast. (This is the language of the traditional “holy war” see Exodus 14:14; Deuteronomy 1:30; 3:22; Joshua 10:14)

VS 21 “So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out.”

(13 to 15 hours a day, approximately – late springtime to early summer.)

VS 22 “I also said to the people at that time, ‘Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.’”

No one left the city for the remainder of the work.

VS 23 “So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.”

The cost of leadership—they were pretty much half the way done (see vs. 6). The wall took 52 days to complete (see Chapter 6:15). So, for approximately 26 days—about 1 month—none of the workers went home! Nehemiah and his closest companions: his brothers, men and guards, never even changed their clothes. They took **NO** baths. They never let their guard down for one single minute! **WOW!**

In conclusion, vs. 6 speaks on an ominous note that the work was “half its height.” It was half completed! In all major undertakings, half way is often a critical point. Initial enthusiasm has worn thin and the end is not yet sufficiently in sight to encourage final effort. Nehemiah’s leadership faced a crisis of discouragement. Enemies on every side from without and traitors from within were taking the day. The work stopped!

-Ridicule -Threats of War -Discouragement -Fear

However, Nehemiah apportioned no blame, but confronted each cause of discontent head on. He was prepared and did interrupt the work to brace for attack and then posted guards and had all workers hold weapons which slowed the pace of the work.

Secondly, he responded to the people’s unsettled nervousness with an appeal to tradition. He instilled confidence in the people by getting them to remember the past faithfulness of the Lord.

Thirdly, he led by example which is expressed in vs. 23.

Leadership takes the day! (“Word”, p.230).

What wall has God called you to build around your life/family/community/church?

☆ Prayer

☆ Invitation