

NEHEMIAH

pray | plan | build

The action described in the book of Nehemiah begins in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes of Persia (445 BC). The main focus of the book surrounds the rebuilding of the city wall around Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by foreign enemies and leading to the time period known as the Babylonian Captivity. After 70 years of destruction and exile for many of the Israelites, Nehemiah's generation is the remnant of Israel and is tasked with rebuilding the wall before more enemies come. The spiritual condition of the people had declined. Nehemiah had to begin the restoration of Israel almost from scratch. Chapter 4 tells us about the opposition that occurred while the workers were doing their work.

How did you feel when the earthquake hit last week? It happened so fast and was completely out of our hands. What can you do other than pray and make sure you're somewhere safe. It's a lot like this pandemic that came on like a storm and we're restricting our loved ones to areas of safety. We can't control it. We're just waiting to see what falls on us, waiting to hear a phone call from out of town with news of a diagnosis. In today's study we'll see what God's people do in the face of trouble like this.

Nehemiah 4:9-22

They faced emanate danger. Everything seemed to be in the enemies' favor. They were surrounded by enemies on all sides. The enemies must have assumed that the attack on the unfinished walls would be easy, and likely many of the Israelites assumed the same. But no matter how daunting the threat they faced, Nehemiah never considered letting the people give up or get lazy. They were standing behind an unfinished wall. The limestones rocks still showed the cracks and the charring from the last time the city had been over-run. Everyone behind that wall knew an attack was coming. They'd been working like crazy to try and finish this wall, but then word came that the enemies were coming to kill them. The defenders of the city were arranged by family, so a man would look to his right and see his brother, then look to his left and see his cousin. Behind them were their wives, little children, and everything they held dear.

1) What two motivations did Nehemiah use to help the people overcome their fear? (verse 14)

He said, "Don't be afraid. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome. Fight. Fight for your families, your sons and daughters, your wives and your homes." Nehemiah aroused their courage by reminding them that they had a great and awesome God on their side. He also reminded them that the lives of their families were at stake so they must continue to work and fight with all their strength.

We, too, a living in a changed society as we fight this pandemic, and those words of Nehemiah are words for us too. We can learn from Nehemiah what it means for God's people to fight for ourselves and for our families against an enemy that's coming from outside the city walls or from people carrying a virus. God's people right now are facing uncertainty. We're facing the question of what do we do. All they had to protect themselves was a half-built wall. Do you feel like that's all we have too?

2) Nehemiah followed a policy of “work and pray” (verse 9). How can Christians apply this principle to our lives right now? How can we apply it to our work as a congregation?

Nehemiah’s plan was “we prayed and we posted a guard.” God calls on us to give prayer and precaution. We pray because we know all our strength and all our blessing comes from God. But we take precautions because God gave us our brains and wants us to use them too. Posting a guard didn’t mean that Nehemiah didn’t trust God. We entrust every undertaking to the Lord in prayer. But then we follow through on those prayers and use the means the Lord has placed at our disposal, such as medicine and doctors. As a congregation right now, we do the best we know how to do, and we pray the Lord uses our efforts to accomplish a powerful reach.

3) Which one should you be doing more often—prayer or precaution?

Pray and post a guard. Pray to God for safety, deliverance, health. But then use your brain too and follow the guidelines that the government and medical professionals give us. Pray and take precautions.

Again, there they were looking at enemies over the unfinished wall. They were arranged by family and clan. Fear gripped the hearts of many. Weariness took its toll. And then Nehemiah cried out, “Don’t be afraid. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome!”

4) What is the greatest thing Nehemiah has to teach us in his battle cry? (verse 14)

The greatest thing Nehemiah teaches us here is to remember the promises of God. He preaches the gospel in that battle cry. “Remember the Lord.” Remembering the Lord means remembering everything he has promised and everything he has done to save you. “Remember the Lord.” Your battle cry is “remember the Lord.” You know why? Because he took all those sins of yours and he put them on his Son. That’s what enables us to pray and what motivates to take precautions and fight for our families. Remember the Lord, who is always ready to fight for his family.

So, here we are. Day whatever of our isolation guidelines. We’re in the middle of a fight in this country that hit us as fast as an earthquake. And there are more tough days ahead. So, what do we do? As Christians, as God’s people, we face this pandemic with godly trust and earthly wisdom. Let’s pray and let’s post a guard. Nehemiah took a number of security precautions. Half the workforce was put on guard duty. Other workers carried weapons as they worked. A trumpeter was to sound the alarm in case there was an attack. Those who commuted to Jerusalem for the work were now on lockdown in the city to provide a greater force against night attacks. This would cut down on traffic and risk. With these precautions, God granted that the Jews were able to beat this enemy. So don’t be afraid. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome. Hear his battle cry. Trust his promise. Wait for his victory. That’s what the Lord called the men of Nehemiah’s army to do and that’s what he’s calling you to do too. God grant it, brothers.