

NOON BIBLE STUDY: NEHEMIAH 6

SUMMARY:

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH RECORDS THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF NEHEMIAH OVERSEEING THE REBUILDING OF THE PHYSICAL WALL OF THE CITY OF JERUSALEM. HOWEVER, AS WE ARE DISCOVERING WITH EVERY CHAPTER NEHEMIAH IS ALSO A STORY ABOUT SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND INSIGHT INTO THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE. NEHEMIAH 1-2 RECORDED THE CALL UPON NEHEMIAH'S LIFE TO OVERSEE THE REBUILDING OF THE WALL WHILE HE WAS A CUPBEARER IN PERSIA. IT WAS CLEARLY GOD'S CALL THAT ACTIVATED THIS ACTION IN NEHEMIAH. HE ARRIVES IN JERUSALEM, INSPECTS THE WALL AND CALLS FOR THE ENTIRE NATION TO JOIN TOGETHER FOR THIS WORK. NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 3-4 RECORDED THE ATTEMPTS OF OUTSIDE ENEMIES TO DEMORALIZE THE PEOPLE, THUS MAKING THEM INEFFECTIVE IN THE WORK GOD HAS CALLED THEM TO DO. YET NEHEMIAH LEADS WELL AND GOD FIGHTS FOR HIS PEOPLE AND THE EVIL ONE'S PLAN IS FOILED. NEHEMIAH 5 RECORDS THE ATTEMPT OF THE EVIL ONE TO INSPIRE IN-HOUSE CONFLICT AND STRIFE AMONGST THE PEOPLE - SPECIFICALLY IN THIS CASE REGARDING MONEY AND PHYSICAL NEEDS. WE SAW THE PRINCIPLE THAT IF THE EVIL ONE CAN'T GET YOU TO STOP LIVING FOR GOD DUE TO OUTSIDE ATTACKS, HE WILL TRY AND ATTACK YOU WITHIN. YET AGAIN NEHEMIAH LEADS WELL AND THE INTERNAL THREAT IS NEUTRALIZED. NOW WE MOVE TO CHAPTER 6 WHICH SHOWS US ANOTHER STAGE OF THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE. WE'VE SEEN OUTSIDE ATTACK, INTERNAL ATTACK AND NOW WE WILL SEE A SPECIFIC ATTACK ON NEHEMIAH HIMSELF, THE LEADER OF GOD'S PEOPLE AND GOD'S WORK. THE ADVERSARY (AND ADVERSARIES) OF GOD SEEMS TO BE RELENTLESS, NOW AIMING FOR NEHEMIAH PERSONALLY. AND WITH THIS IN MIND WE READ ON.

NEHEMIAH 6:1-4 - THE ENEMIES AIM FOR NEHEMIAH

THERE IS DEFINITE PROGRESS BEING MADE ON THE WALL, DESPITE THE OPPOSITION (V. 1). IN LIGHT OF THIS THE ADVERSARIES OF NEHEMIAH AND THE NATION ATTEMPT A NEW STRATEGY.

AS OUR SUMMARY INDICATED ABOVE, THE ENEMIES OF GOD'S PEOPLE (LED BY SANBALLAT, TOBIAH & GESHEM IN THIS CASE) ARE NOW DIRECTLY ATTACKING NEHEMIAH. THEY HAVE ALREADY TRIED TO DISCOURAGE THE ENTIRE NATION AND NOW THEY SET THEIR SIGHTS SPECIFICALLY ON HIM. THEY SEEMINGLY HARMLESSLY REQUEST A SUMMIT OF SORTS IN A PLACE CALLED "CHEPHIRIM IN THE PLAIN OF ONO" (THE FACT THAT IT'S NAMED "ONO" SHOULD BE A HINT!). NEHEMIAH SAYS EACH TIME THAT HE IS UNABLE TO STOP THE WORK AND MEET THEM.

Q - WHY DO YOU THINK THEY TAKE UP THIS STRATEGY? WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NEHEMIAH'S ROLE THAT MAKES HIM WORTHY OF DIRECT ATTACK?

NEHEMIAH 6:5-9 - RELENTLESS ENEMIES WITH A FALSE REPORT

NONE OF WHAT SANBALLAT'S SERVANT SAID WAS TRUE. WHEN "FALSE REPORTS" ARE MADE ABOUT YOU, SOME OF US HAVE A EASY TIME "SHAKING IT OFF" AND IGNORING THE IGNORANCE OF THE MESSENGER. HOWEVER, SOMETIMES "FALSE REPORTS" AND LIES ARE TEMPTATIONS FOR US TO BE PROVOKED. THIS IS WHAT NEHEMIAH LIKELY HAD TO BATTLE.

THE JEWS WERE NOT LOOKING TO REBEL AND NEHEMIAH WAS NOT LOOKING TO BE THEIR KING - NEHEMIAH RECOGNIZED THE THREAT AND DID NOT TAKE THE BAIT. HE ALSO DIDN'T GET TRICKED INTO THINKING THAT THERE WAS A LARGE CONSPIRACY AGAINST THE JEWS BELIEVING THESE LIES AND BECOME AFRAID ABOUT A LARGE THREAT.

INSTEAD NEHEMIAH CONFRONTED THE FALSEHOODS DIRECTLY (V. 8) AND DID NOT ALLOW THESE MESSAGES TO DETER HIM FROM HIS JOB (V. 9) IN ADDITION, HE PUT HIS LIFE AND THIS MATTER IN GOD'S HANDS. (V. 9)

Q - WHEN YOU HEAR FALSEHOOD SPOKEN ABOUT YOU OR AGAINST YOU, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE TEMPTATIONS YOU ARE PRESENTED WITH? WHAT POTENTIALLY COULD HAVE HAPPENED IF NEHEMIAH HAD ENGAGED THESE ENEMIES?

NEHEMIAH 6:10 - PLOTS AND LIES CONTINUE

NEHEMIAH VISITS A JEWISH CITIZEN NAMED SHEMAIAH IN HIS HOME. UPON ARRIVAL SHEMAIAH SUGGESTS THAT NEHEMIAH FLEE TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOR SAFETY BECAUSE OF A THREAT FROM SANBALLAT & CO AGAINST NEHEMIAH'S LIFE. HE SUGGESTS THAT NEHEMIAH WILL BE HIDDEN THERE AND SAFE. SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD IDEA ON THE SURFACE, BUT SOMETHING ELSE IS GOING ON.

NEHEMIAH 6:11-14 - NEHEMIAH IS NOT RUNNING ANYWHERE BUT TO THE LORD

NEHEMIAH RESPONDS TO SHEMAIAH WITH COURAGE AND CONVICTION. NEHEMIAH IS NOT GOING TO RUN AND HIDE FROM THE ENEMIES. NEHEMIAH PERCEIVES THAT SHEMAIAH IS ACTUALLY A DOUBLE AGENT! GOD GIVES NEHEMIAH INSIGHT INTO WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON. LOOK AT WHAT THE TEXT TELLS US WAS ACTUALLY HAPPENING:

NEHEMIAH 6:12-13 (NLT) - I REALIZED THAT GOD HAD NOT SPOKEN TO HIM, BUT THAT HE HAD UTTERED THIS PROPHECY AGAINST ME BECAUSE TOBIAH AND SANBALLAT HAD HIRED HIM. 13 THEY WERE HOPING TO INTIMIDATE ME AND MAKE ME SIN. THEN THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO ACCUSE AND DISCREDIT ME.

"TO BE AFRAID WOULD BE IN THIS CASE THE OPPOSITE OF HAVING FAITH, AND HENCE SIN. THIS SORT OF UNBELIEF WOULD ENABLE HIS ENEMIES TO TAUNT NEHEMIAH AND THUS UNDERMINE HIS AUTHORITY." (ESV STUDY BIBLE, NEHEMIAH 6:13)

NOTICE THE NEW TACTIC OF THE ENEMIES TO ATTACK THE LEADER DIRECTLY. IF THEY CAN DISCOURAGE OR INTIMIDATE NEHEMIAH, THE TRICKLE DOWN EFFECT IT WILL HAVE ON THE NATION WILL BE DEVASTATING. NEHEMIAH MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO FEAR, BUT HE TRUSTS THE LORD. HE'S ALREADY ASKED GOD TO STRENGTHEN HIM (V. 9) AND NOW HE ASKS THE LORD TO TAKE NOTE OF THEIR EVIL (V. 14).

SO MUCH HAS TRANSPIRED SINCE NEHEMIAH ARRIVED IN JERUSALEM IN CHAPTER 2. SPECIFICALLY THE OPPOSITION TO THE WALL REBUILT BY SANBALLAT, TOBIAH AND THE OTHERS. REMEMBER, THE PEOPLE STARTED OUT ENCOURAGED WORKING HARD ON THEIR PORTION OF THE WALL BUT THEN NEED TO WORK WITH A TOOL IN ONE HAND AND WEAPON IN ANOTHER. THEN WE HAVE A FULL CHAPTER (NEH 5) OF CONFLICT INSIDE THE NATION DUE TO A FAMINE AND FINANCIAL DISTRESS. AND NOW WE HAVE SEEN THE RELENTLESS ATTACKS ON NEHEMIAH HIMSELF.

THE MORALE OF THE PEOPLE AND THE PROJECT HAVE BEEN THREATENED SINCE THE FIRST BRICK WAS LAID. BUT NEHEMIAH HAS BEEN RIGHT THERE LEADING AND ACTING AND INITIALING EVERY STEP OF THE WAY. HE HAS SAFE GUARDED THE PROJECT AND EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY

THE PEOPLE. WE READ IN CHAPTER 4 THAT "THE PEOPLE HAD A MIND TO WORK" (4:6)...AND SO WE COME TO A RATHER SURPRISING VERSE IN LIGHT OF THE CONFLICTS, TRIALS AND BURDENS.

NEHEMIAH 6:15 - THE WALL COMPLETED

WOW!!! THE WALL OF JERUSALEM COMPLETED IN FIFTY-TWO DAYS! IS THIS SURPRISING? CLEARLY GOD WAS WORKING WITH THE PEOPLE AND THEIR HEART (LED BY NEHEMIAH) TO WORK HEARTILY UNTO THE LORD WAS NOT IN VAIN! SO WHAT DO THE BUSYBODY ENEMIES HAVE TO SAY?

NEHEMIAH 6:16-19 - BACKING THE ENEMY DOWN THROUGH FAITHFULNESS

THE ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE SHOCKED WHEN THEY HEAR OF HOW QUICKLY THE JEWS REBUILD JERUSALEM'S WALLS. THEY CONCLUDE THAT IF THE PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO WORK UNTIED WITH SUCH SPEED AND RESOLVE, WHAT ELSE MIGHT THEY BE ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH WITH YAHWEH ON THEIR SIDE!

WE LEARN THROUGH THE FINAL VERSE OF NEHEMIAH 6 THAT THERE WAS A LOT UP AGAINST NEHEMIAH AND GOD'S PEOPLE - THE OUTSIDE ENEMIES HAD EVEN INFILTRATED LEADERS IN THE LAND OF JUDAH (THROUGH MARRIAGE ALLIANCES AND OATHS). BUT NEHEMIAH AND THE FAITHFUL MEN AND WOMEN OF GOD DID NOT FEAR WHAT THEY COULD SEE AND WHAT THEY HEARD - FOR THEY HAD FAITH IN THE MIGHTY ONE OF ISRAEL.

THE GREAT LESSON OF CHAPTER 6 IS THAT NEHEMIAH NEVER QUIT WHEN FACED WITH FEAR OR THREATS OR DIFFICULTY. HE PUT HIS TRUST IN AND GAVE HIS FEARS TO THE LORD AND RESTED IN THAT RELATIONSHIP.

WE'VE LEARNED FROM THE LAST FEW CHAPTERS THAT THE ENEMY OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE WILL TRY AND ATTACK US. WE HAVE LEARNED THAT IF THE ENEMY CAN'T ATTACK US FROM OUTSIDE HE WILL TRY AND SOW DISCORD AND DIVISION ON THE INSIDE. AND NOW WE LEARN THAT HE WILL DIRECTLY ATTACK THE THOSE WHO ARE CALLED TO LEAD (NO MATTER HOW BIG OR SMALL THAT CALLING IS). THESE ATTACKS AT LEADERS MAY COME IN PHYSICAL THREATS, DISTRACTIONS, DISCOURAGEMENT, TIME-WASTERS, AND/OR SECOND RATE BATTLES.

MEN OF GOD - MAN YOUR POST! WOMEN OF GOD - DO NOT GROW WEARY. FATHER & MOTHERS UNITE FOR THE LORD! HUSBANDS RISE UP! PASTOR, LEADERS, AND OVERSEERS - BE ALERT AND AWAKE! CHRISTIANS BE SOBER-MINDED!

IF WE ARE CONNECTED TO THE LORD, HE WILL GIVE US WISDOM AND INSIGHT INTO WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON - JUST AS HE DID WITH NEHEMIAH AND THE ENEMIES HE FACED IN CHAPTER 6. THE ENEMY'S OBJECTIVE IS NOT ONLY TO DESTROY US BUT TO GET US TO COME DOWN FROM OUR POST, WALK AWAY, EVEN IF FOR A MOMENT FROM OUR CALLING. HE WANTS TO STOP THE WORK OF GOD AND SILENCE THE WORD OF GOD - ULTIMATELY FOREVER, BUT HE WILL SETTLE FOR EVEN A FEW HOURS, DAYS, OR WEEKS. OUR ADVERSARY'S GOAL IS THE SAME TODAY AS IT WAS TOWARDS NEHEMIAH:

NEHEMIAH 6:9A (NLT) - THEY WERE JUST TRYING TO INTIMIDATE US, IMAGINING THAT THEY COULD DISCOURAGE US AND STOP THE WORK.

AND SO OUR RESPONSE MUST BE THE SAME TODAY AS IT WAS THEN:

NEHEMIAH 6:9B (NLT) - SO I CONTINUED THE WORK WITH EVEN GREATER DETERMINATION.

NEHEMIAH 6:9B (NASB) - BUT NOW, O GOD, STRENGTHEN MY HAND

AND ONE OF THE GREATEST WEAPONS IN THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE WE FACE TODAY IS TO STAY FAITHFUL TO WHAT GOD HAS CALLED US TO DO. NEHEMIAH KEPT BUILDING THE WALL UNTIL IT WAS DONE - THROUGH MANY DANGERS, TOILS AND SNARES - BUT WHEN HE FINISHED THE JOB, THE ENEMIES BACKED DOWN. THERE WILL BE SOME CASES IN OUR LIVES WHERE THE ENEMY WILL ATTACK US RIGHT UP UNTIL THE WORK GOD HAS CALLED US TO DO IS FINISHED. SO WE CANNOT QUIT BEFORE THE JOB IS DONE! WE WILL HAVE DAYS WHERE WE WILL NEED TO REST AND TIMES WE WILL BE WEARY. WE WILL WORK ALONE SOME DAYS AND HAVE OTHER DAYS WHERE WE WILL RELY ON REINFORCEMENTS - BUT WE CAN'T EVER QUIT.

RAISING CHILDREN TO LOVE AND FEAR THE LORD IS A LOT OF WORK. STAYING FAITHFUL TO THE MARRIAGE COVENANT WE HAVE MADE TO GOD AND OUR SPOUSE IS A BIG JOB. WORKING HONESTLY AND WITHOUT COMPLAINING IN DIFFICULT WORK ENVIRONMENTS IS A CHALLENGE. STAYING SEXUALLY PURE IN A LUST-CHARGED SOCIETY IS A BATTLE. LEADING A DISCIPLE OR A GROUP OF DISCIPLES TO MATURITY IN CHRIST IS NOT EASY. BUT JUST BECAUSE SOMETHING IS HARD DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN QUIT. WHO TOLD US THAT LIFE WAS GOING TO BE EASY? WHO TOLD US THAT BEING A CHRISTIAN WAS GOING TO BE A LIFE WITHOUT CHALLENGES? WHY ARE WE SURPRISED WHEN THINGS DON'T GO OUR WAY OR WHEN THERE IS OPPOSITION? CERTAINLY NOT THE LORD.

INSTEAD WE ARE CALLED TO LIVE WONDERFULLY HARD, JOY-FILLED, SUFFERING RIDDEN, BLESSING UPON BLESSING IN THE MIDST OF TRIAL UPON TRIAL, PAINFUL YET GRACE-FILLED LIVES. AND THEN JESUS COMES BACK OR WE ARE RESURRECTED TO LIFE IN THE PERFECT PAINLESS AGE TO COME. THAT'S WHAT CHRISTIANITY AND THE BIBLICAL STORY IS ALL ABOUT. RIGHT?

ACTUALLY YES AND NO. YES, THAT IS THE LIFE WE HAVE BEFORE US. BUT NO - BECAUSE WE HAVE NOT YET REMEMBERED THAT THIS DIFFICULT AND CHALLENGING AT TIMES LIFE IS NOT A LIFE LIVED ALONE. WE HAVE A RISEN SAVIOR AND A PRESENT FATHER WHO PROMISES TO NEVER LEAVE US OR FORSAKE US. YOU SEE, NONE OF THESE THINGS WE MENTIONED, NOR NEHEMIAH'S CHALLENGES WERE INDICATIONS OF THE LACK OF GOD'S LOVE OR PRESENCE. IN FACT, IT WAS GOD'S LOVING AND PRESENCE THAT ENABLED AND EMPOWERED NEHEMIAH TO KEEP ON KEEPING ON. AND IT IS THE ONLY SHOT WE HAVE. JESUS IS ALIVE FOREVERMORE AND PROMISED TO BE WITH US ALWAYS, EVEN TILL THE END OF THIS EVIL AGE (MATTHEW 28:20). HE SAID THAT THE COMFORTING SPIRIT OF GOD WOULD BE SENT AFTER HE LEFT AS AN INDICATION THAT WE WOULD NOT BE ORPHANS IN THIS LIFE. AND GOD OUR FATHER LOVES US SO MUCH THAT EVEN THOUGH OUR LIVES MIGHT BE A WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, WE NEED NOT FEAR EVIL OR ANYTHING, FOR HIS PRESENCE AS A LOVING SHEPHERD IS HERE TO COMFORT AND LEAD US HOME.

SO AS LONG AS GOD IS COMMITTED TO US, LET US BE COMMITTED TO HIM. DON'T QUIT. STAY A FAITHFUL FIGHTER UNTIL THE FINAL BREATH. FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, FINISH THE COURSE, KEEP THE FAITH. FOR IN THAT THE PROMISE FOR US REMAINS:

2 TIMOTHY 4:8 - IN THE FUTURE THERE IS LAID UP FOR ME THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH THE LORD, THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE, WILL AWARD TO ME ON THAT DAY; AND NOT ONLY TO ME, BUT ALSO TO ALL WHO HAVE LOVED HIS APPEARING.