

NEHEMIAH - A LESSON IN PROBLEMS

“And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, and said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the Elohim of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me (the queen also sitting by him), For how long shall thy journey be? And when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the River, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; and a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my Elohim upon me” (**Nehemiah 2:1-8**).

Introduction:

1. Context Of Nehemiah's Role And Mission:

- a. Historical background: After the Babylonian conquest in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was left in ruins, and many Jews were exiled. The Persian Empire later conquered Babylon, and King Cyrus issued a decree allowing Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple (**Ezra 1:1-4**). However, the city's walls remained broken, leaving it vulnerable and its inhabitants in disgrace.
- b. Nehemiah's position: Nehemiah served as the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I of Persia, a trusted position of influence. The role involved not only serving wine but also ensuring it was not poisoned, symbolizing the king's trust in Nehemiah.
- c. Desire to rebuild: In the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign (around 445 B.C.), Nehemiah learned of Jerusalem's dire state from his brother Hanani and other men from Judah (**Nehemiah 1:2-4**). His response was one of deep mourning and fasting, showing his profound connection to his ancestral homeland.
- d. Petition to the king: After months of prayer, Nehemiah boldly requested permission from Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. His approach to the king was cautious and respectful, recognizing the potential risks involved (**Nehemiah 2:1-5**). Artaxerxes not only granted his request but also provided letters of safe passage and resources for the project (**Nehemiah 2:6-8**).



2. Purpose Of Study:

- a. Learning from Nehemiah: By examining Nehemiah's responses to various challenges, we can glean practical lessons on addressing and overcoming the problems we face in our own lives. His story serves as a guide for maintaining faith and perseverance in the face of adversity.
- b. Understanding leadership and initiative: Nehemiah's actions exemplify proactive leadership and initiative. His ability to identify problems, seek solutions, and mobilize resources provides a model for effective leadership. Studying his methods can inspire us to take initiative in our own contexts, whether in personal, professional, or community settings.
- c. Demonstrating faith in action: Nehemiah's journey is a powerful testament to the impact of faith coupled with action. His reliance on prayer, coupled with practical steps to address issues, shows how faith can drive tangible results. This teaches us that genuine faith is active and operational, manifesting in real-world solutions and perseverance through trials.

3. Relevance To Contemporary Life:

- a. Timeless principles: Nehemiah's experiences provide timeless principles that are applicable to modern-day challenges. His story highlights themes such as resilience, strategic planning, and community building, which are relevant to personal growth, organizational leadership, and societal development today.
- b. Encouragement for modern believers: The narrative of Nehemiah offers encouragement to modern believers facing their own "walls" that need rebuilding. It shows that with faith, determination, and God's guidance, we can overcome obstacles and achieve significant goals, no matter how insurmountable they may seem.

1. Critics And Derision.

In the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, Nehemiah and the Jews faced severe criticism and ridicule from their adversaries, notably Sanballat and Tobiah. These opponents aimed to demoralize the Jews and halt their progress through mockery and scorn, questioning their ability and resolve to complete the task.

- a. Opposition from Sanballat and Tobiah: Mockery and Ridicule: Sanballat, Tobiah, and their allies openly mocked the efforts of the Jews to rebuild the wall, questioning their capability and resolve (**Nehemiah 4:1-3**). Their derision aimed to demoralize and halt the progress of the rebuilding efforts.
- b. Nehemiah's response:
 - 1) Turning to prayer: Nehemiah's immediate response was to pray, asking God to hear the mockery and deal with the mockers (**Nehemiah 4:4-5**). This demonstrates his reliance on divine intervention and his belief in God's justice.
 - 2) Persistence in work: Despite the ridicule, Nehemiah and the people remained steadfast, driven by a unified determination to complete the task. The phrase "the people had a mind to work" (**Nehemiah 4:6**) underscores their collective resilience and commitment.
- c. Application for Christians:
 - 1) Facing criticism: Early Christians encountered similar opposition and found strength in communal prayer and support (**Acts 4:23-31**). They did not let external criticism deter their mission.
 - 2) Endurance in adversity: Modern Christians are encouraged to persevere despite criticisms and ridicule. Scriptures remind us of the blessings in enduring persecution (**Matthew 5:10-12**), the importance of not growing weary in doing good (**Galatians 6:9**), and the inevitability of suffering for godliness (**2 Timothy 3:12**).

Nehemiah's response to criticism provides a powerful lesson for Christians today. Through prayer and unwavering commitment to their mission, Nehemiah and the Jews demonstrated that faith and perseverance can overcome opposition. Christians today are similarly encouraged to face criticism with resilience, finding strength in prayer and steadfastly continuing their good work despite adversities.

2. Physical Intimidation.

As Nehemiah and the Jews made significant progress on rebuilding Jerusalem's walls, their adversaries intensified their efforts to halt the project through physical intimidation and threats of attack. These conspiracies aimed to create fear and disrupt the construction, hoping to thwart the revival of Jerusalem.

- a. Threats of war against Jerusalem: Conspiracy to attack: Upon learning of the Jews' progress, their enemies conspired to physically intimidate and attack them, hoping to prevent the completion of the wall (**Nehemiah 4:7-12**).
- b. Nehemiah's response:
 - 1) Encouragement and preparation: Nehemiah encouraged the people, reminding them of God's power and their duty to defend their homes and families (**Nehemiah 4:13-14**). This bolstered their morale and united them against the common threat.
 - 2) Continuing the work: With weapons in one hand and tools in the other, the Jews continued their work, embodying vigilance and dedication (**Nehemiah 4:15-21**). Nehemiah's strategic planning ensured both protection and progress (**Nehemiah 4:22-23**).

- c. Application for Christians: Spiritual preparedness: Christians are called to be spiritually prepared for battles against evil forces. This involves putting on the full armor of God (**Ephesians 6:10-18**), fighting the good fight of faith (**1 Timothy 6:12**), and contending earnestly for the faith (**Jude 1:3**).

Nehemiah's response to physical intimidation underscores the importance of courage, strategic planning, and unwavering faith. By encouraging the people, preparing for defense, and maintaining their work, Nehemiah ensured that progress continued despite threats. For Christians today, this narrative highlights the necessity of spiritual preparedness and resilience in the face of adversity, reminding believers to equip themselves with God's armor and persist in their mission with faith and determination.

3. Trouble From Within.

While rebuilding Jerusalem's walls, Nehemiah faced significant internal challenges as wealthier Jews exploited their poorer brethren through usury and unjust practices. This economic oppression threatened to create severe distress and division within the community, undermining the unity and morale needed for the project.

- a. Internal exploitation among the Jews: Economic oppression: Some wealthier Jews were exploiting their poorer brethren through usury and unjust practices, leading to severe economic distress and division within the community (**Nehemiah 5:1-5**).
- b. Nehemiah's response: Confrontation and reform: Nehemiah did not shy away from addressing the issue. He confronted the offenders, calling for an end to their unjust practices and a restoration of what had been taken (**Nehemiah 5:6-12**). His leadership ensured that justice and compassion prevailed.
- c. Application for Christians:
 - 1) Handling internal conflicts: Christians must address conflicts within the church with a spirit of reconciliation and justice. The process outlined in **Matthew 18:15-17** emphasizes direct, private confrontation, followed by involving witnesses, and, if necessary, bringing the matter before the church.
 - 2) Avoiding destructive behavior: Believers are warned against biting and devouring one another, which can lead to mutual destruction (**Galatians 5:15**). Instead, they should seek to build each other up in love.

Nehemiah's decisive action in confronting and reforming internal exploitation illustrates the necessity of addressing injustices within a community. For Christians, this serves as a powerful reminder to handle internal conflicts with reconciliation and justice, striving to avoid destructive behaviors. By following biblical principles for conflict resolution and fostering a spirit of love and support, believers can ensure a healthy and united community.

4. Efforts To Compromise.

As their direct opposition failed, Sanballat, Tobiah, and their allies attempted to derail Nehemiah's efforts through deceptive invitations aimed at luring him into a compromising situation. These efforts were intended to distract and potentially harm Nehemiah, thereby halting the progress of rebuilding the wall.

- a. Attempts to distract and compromise: Sanballat and Tobiah, realizing their direct opposition was failing, attempted to lure Nehemiah into a compromising situation through deceptive invitations (**Nehemiah 6:1-7**).
- b. Nehemiah's response:
 - 1) Firm Rejection: Nehemiah recognized the deceit and firmly refused to engage, stating he was doing a great work and could not come down (**Nehemiah 6:3-4**). His discernment and steadfastness kept the project on track.
 - 2) Completion of the wall: Despite continued plots, the wall was completed in a remarkable 52 days, a testament to Nehemiah's leadership and the people's determination (**Nehemiah 6:15**).
- c. Application for Christians: Rejecting compromise: Christians must remain vigilant against compromising their faith and values. They are to adhere to sound doctrine (**Titus 1:13-14**), avoid teachings and practices that lead away from the truth (**Matthew 15:9**), and stand firm in their liberty in Christ (**Galatians 2:4-5**).

Nehemiah's firm rejection of deceitful compromises and his unwavering focus on the task at hand exemplify the importance of discernment and steadfastness. For Christians, this narrative serves as a vital lesson in remaining vigilant against any attempts to compromise their faith and values. By adhering to sound doctrine and standing firm in their convictions, believers can resist distractions and continue their work with integrity and purpose.

Conclusion:

1. Summary of Nehemiah's challenges: Nehemiah faced numerous obstacles, including external opposition, internal strife, and attempts to compromise his mission. His responses - prayer, preparation, direct confrontation, and steadfastness - offer valuable lessons.
2. Lessons for modern Christians: By following Nehemiah's example, we can learn to rely on God, maintain our commitment to our goals, and address problems with wisdom and courage. His story is a powerful reminder of the importance of faith, leadership, and perseverance in overcoming challenges.
3. Encouragement: Like Nehemiah, we should seek God's guidance, remain dedicated to our mission, and trust in His provision and protection. By doing so, we can overcome the problems we face and fulfill the purposes God has for us.

Applications:

1. **Facing Criticism With Faith And Persistence (Acts 4:23-31):** Just as Nehemiah faced mockery and ridicule from Sanballat and Tobiah, Christians today may encounter criticism and derision for their faith. By turning to prayer and maintaining a steadfast commitment to their mission, believers can find strength and perseverance. Early Christians relied on communal prayer and support to overcome opposition, demonstrating the power of unity and faith in the face of adversity.
2. **Maintaining Vigilance Against Compromise (Galatians 2:4-5):** Nehemiah's refusal to be distracted by deceptive invitations teaches Christians the importance of discerning and rejecting any attempts to compromise their values. In a world filled with temptations and false teachings, Christians must adhere to sound doctrine and stand firm in their faith. By remaining vigilant and focused on their spiritual goals, they can complete their "walls" without falling into compromise.
3. **Promoting Justice And Compassion Within The Community (Matthew 18:15-17):** Nehemiah's handling of internal exploitation among the Jews highlights the importance of addressing injustices within the community. Christians are called to confront issues of injustice and exploitation with a spirit of reconciliation and justice. By following biblical principles for conflict resolution and fostering a spirit of love and support, believers can maintain a healthy and united community, ensuring that justice and compassion prevail.
4. **Addressing Personal Struggles With Godly Principles (James 1:2-4):** The various challenges Nehemiah faced, from external threats to internal exploitation, mirror the personal struggles Christians encounter in their own lives. By applying the principles of prayer, strategic action, and unwavering faith demonstrated by Nehemiah, believers can tackle their problems effectively. Whether facing criticism, intimidation, or internal conflicts, the lessons from Nehemiah provide a blueprint for overcoming obstacles through reliance on God and perseverance in faith.

Questions:

1. What was the historical background that set the stage for Nehemiah's mission?
2. What role did Nehemiah hold in the Persian court, and how did this position help him in his mission?
3. How did Nehemiah respond to the news about Jerusalem's condition, and what did he request from King Artaxerxes?
4. Who were Sanballat and Tobiah, and what tactics did they use to oppose Nehemiah's efforts?
5. What was Nehemiah's immediate response to the ridicule from Sanballat and Tobiah, and how did he encourage the people to continue their work?
6. How did Nehemiah handle the internal economic oppression among the Jews, and what reforms did he implement?
7. How did Nehemiah react to the deceptive invitations from Sanballat and Tobiah, and what was the outcome of his steadfastness?

8. What principles from Nehemiah's leadership can modern Christians apply when facing external opposition and internal conflicts?
9. How can Christians prepare spiritually for battles against evil forces, according to the lesson?
10. In what ways does Nehemiah's story encourage believers to tackle their personal struggles and problems?

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Questions & Answers

1. What was the historical background that set the stage for Nehemiah's mission?

Answer: After the Babylonian conquest in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was left in ruins, and many Jews were exiled. Later, the Persian Empire conquered Babylon, and King Cyrus issued a decree allowing Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple. But the city's walls remained broken, leaving it vulnerable and its inhabitants in disgrace.

2. What role did Nehemiah hold in the Persian court, and how did this position help him in his mission?

Answer: Nehemiah served as the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I of Persia, a trusted position of influence. This role involved ensuring the king's wine was not poisoned, symbolizing the king's trust in Nehemiah. His position gave him access to the king, enabling him to request permission and resources to rebuild Jerusalem's walls.

3. How did Nehemiah respond hearing about Jerusalem's condition, and what did he request from King Artaxerxes?

Answer: Upon hearing of Jerusalem's dire state, Nehemiah mourned, fasted, and prayed. He then boldly requested permission from King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. He also asked for letters of safe passage and resources for the project, which the king granted.

4. Who were Sanballat and Tobiah, and what tactics did they use to oppose Nehemiah's efforts?

Answer: Sanballat and Tobiah were adversaries who mocked and ridiculed the Jews' efforts to rebuild the wall, aiming to demoralize them and halt the progress. Later, they conspired to physically intimidate and attack the Jews, and when that failed, they attempted to lure Nehemiah into a compromising situation through deceptive invitations.

5. What was Nehemiah's immediate response to the ridicule from Sanballat and Tobiah, and how did he encourage the people to continue their work?

Answer: Nehemiah's immediate response was to pray, asking God to deal with the mockers. He encouraged the people by reminding them of God's power and their duty to defend their homes and families, bolstering their morale and uniting them against the common threat. Despite the ridicule, the people remained steadfast in their work.

6. How did Nehemiah handle the internal economic oppression among the Jews, and what reforms did he implement?

Answer: Nehemiah confronted the wealthier Jews who were exploiting their poorer brethren through usury and unjust practices. He called for an end to these practices and a restoration of what had been taken. His leadership ensured that justice and compassion prevailed within the community.

7. How did Nehemiah react to the deceptive invitations from Sanballat and Tobiah, and what was the outcome of his steadfastness?

Answer: Nehemiah recognized the deceit in the invitations and firmly refused to engage, stating he was doing a great work and could not come down. His discernment and steadfastness kept the project on track, and despite continued plots, the wall was completed in a remarkable 52 days.

8. What principles from Nehemiah's leadership can we apply when facing external opposition and internal conflicts?

Answer: Modern Christians can apply the principles of prayer, strategic planning, and unwavering faith. By turning to God in prayer, addressing injustices with direct confrontation and reform, and remaining focused on their mission, believers can overcome both external opposition and internal conflicts.

9. How can Christians prepare spiritually for battles against evil forces, according to the lesson?

Answer: Christians are called to be spiritually prepared by putting on the full armor of God (**Ephesians 6:10-18**), fighting the good fight of faith (**1 Timothy 6:12**), and contending earnestly for the faith (**Jude 1:3**). This involves maintaining vigilance, relying on God's strength, and persevering in faith.

10. In what ways does Nehemiah's story encourage believers to tackle their personal struggles and problems?

Answer: Nehemiah's story encourages us to tackle personal struggles by relying on God through prayer, taking strategic and proactive steps to address issues, and persevering in their efforts. His example shows that with faith, determination, and God's guidance, we can overcome obstacles and achieve significant goals despite challenges.