

BE Purposeful

Nehemiah 4:9-14

Dr. Paul Cannings

A. In Spite of... (vs. 9-10):

1. Pray - Prayer is a pattern in the Book of Nehemiah (1:6,11; 11:17).
 - a) Their enemies' conspiracy was overcome by their prayer and preparedness (4:9). Their despair was overcome by Nehemiah's encouragement (4:13-14) and their preparedness for attack (4:17). In summary, the opposition was overcome by faith, "our God will fight for us" (4:20), hard work, "guard duty at night, as well as work during the day" (4:22). Even when washing or drinking, the workers were prepared to fight (4:23).^[1]
 - b) They view God as "Our God." Nehemiah originally said He is "my God" (2:18) so, it is "we and us" (2:17,19) rebuilding the walls, But by chapter 4, it is now "Our God" for Nehemiah and the workers.
2. Pray - The people intensely interceded with God for His powerful assistance.
3. To our God – Like Nehemiah who viewed God as "my God" (2:18) the people viewed God as covenantal connected to them as compared to their enemy.
4. To our God – The people used God in respect that He is sovereign, all power and supreme; the only God.
5. We set up; Stood - They absolutely had no desire to ever stop officially establishing themselves on the walls in response to the threats of the enemy.
6. Guard; Watch - Common, non-military people because of concern for their families, placed themselves on military watch because of their enemies.
7. Thus in Judah it was said – The people in the city of Judah repeatedly kept saying how tired they were because of all the rubble they had to manage.
8. Strength of the burden bearers - The burden bearers had to deal with so much rubbish that their ability to keep working was beginning to wane. This was constantly being discussed as they became more and more overwhelmed.
 - a) The combination of discouragement from overwork and fear of invasion plots were almost too much for God's people.^[2]
9. We ourselves are unable - They came to the point where they continuously lacked the physical ability to prevail with this much rubble to remove.
 - a) The picture is of a worker staggering under the weight of his load

and ready to fall at any step.

B. Despite the Power of the Opposition (vs. 11-12):

1. Our enemies said - Their adversaries who were creating much distress and anguish continuously kept speaking to them non-stop.
 - a) They were physically and psychologically exhausted and the work seemed endless (v. 10). Furthermore, they faced the threat of a secret attack (v. 11) which Nehemiah knew was not idle talk (v. 12).^[3]
2. They will not know – Their enemies plans were to make sure that the builders were completely surprised and remained that way concerning every move they made. They could not even sense the time or day of their attack.
3. Or see until we come – The builders will continuously not be able to intelligently gain a complete understanding of the enemy’s strategy or when they will attack until the enemy is right on top of them.
4. Kill them - The enemies’ intent was to violently, ruthlessly slaughter the builders.
5. Put a stop to the work – The intent of the enemy was to completely put an end to all skilled wall builder labor force so that they can continuously run their spice trade through Jerusalem and come and take their crop from them causing the people of Israel to starve through the winter.
6. The Jews who lived near - The Jews who took up permanent residence near where the enemy was stationed.
 - a) “The Jews who lived near them” must refer to those who lived in villages that bordered on the territories of the enemies. What they told the workers may be rendered literally, “From all the places where you turn against us.” The difficulties of this text have led to several different translations, some involving emendation. Apparently, the enemies were spreading rumors of attacks to dishearten the people (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 11.175). “Ten times over” would suggest that these enemies constantly reiterated the rumors so the people in the villages would pass them on to their friends in Jerusalem.^[4]
 - b) Satan is a roaring lion - he makes a lot of noise.
7. Came and told – Those who lived near the enemy arrived to the builders with the specific purpose of continuously communicating what they knew about the plans of the enemy.
8. Turn – The Jews reported that the enemy planned to attack at every turn the builders could continuously seek or sought to pursue.

C. Live by Faith Not by Sight (vs. 14-16; 2 Corinthians 5:7):

1. When I saw fear – Nehemiah, by careful observation, came to a full understanding of how terrified the builders had become. So, the load was unbearable, and the enemy had also terrified them.
2. I arose; to establish and spoke – Nehemiah asserted himself by continuously finding a way to get in front of all the people while endlessly seeking to communicate with them.
3. Do not be afraid – Nehemiah instructed the people to not continuously allow themselves to remain terrified of being harmed.
 - a) Nehemiah's response was clear: prayer and precaution, trust and good management. He trusted God, but he also was aware of the dangers and took the necessary precautions. To be sure, the dangers were real. As the following verses indicate, the enemies could attack at any moment.^[5]
4. Remember the Lord – Nehemiah commanded them to mediate and recollect that the Lord has all authority and power. The Lord has a relationship with them, not their enemies and is an army for them.
5. Who is great – The Lord is not only their army, but He is also great.
6. Awesome – Nehemiah reminds them that the Lord is to be feared because He has the power to institute harm on their enemies.
7. And fight - Because of their relationship with the Lord, who is Adonai, the great warrior who is mighty and powerful and fights for Israel, Nehemiah commands them to fight for their brothers, sons, daughters, and wives.
 - a) Not only was the trumpet blast the signal for action in earlier times too (cf. Judges 3:27; 6:34; 7:18; 1 Sam 13:3), but Nehemiah's concluding words of encouragement, "our God will fight for us," exactly echo the stereotyped formula of previous accounts; cf. Exod 14:14; Deut 1:30; 3:22; 20:4; Josh 10:14, 42; 23:10. Kinder aptly draws attention to Ps 127:1b: "Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."^[6]
8. When our enemies heard – The enemy gave their undivided attention to what was being said and had intellectually come to a complete understanding of the plans of Israel.
9. Known to us – The enemy came to a complete understanding that the Israelites clearly understood what they were planning to do.
10. Frustrate their plans (counsel) - God continuously kept breaking up all the strategies their advisers had deliberated and organized to execute. This was done after Nehemiah demonstrated complete trust and confidence in His power and might.

a) When the enemies realized they could not surprise the Jews, their plot withered away because “God had frustrated it.” Again, Nehemiah gave God the credit. God used Nehemiah’s faith and leadership, but it was God who brought success (Phil 2:13). So, they “all returned to the wall.” It was necessary to sacrifice some time and effort to confront the crisis, but Nehemiah never took his eyes off the goal.^[7]

11. Then all of us returned to the wall – The builders, upon seeing how the Lord responded to the leadership Nehemiah provided, continuously went back to building the wall despite how tired they had become because of the amount of rubbish they had to manage.

12. Half of the servants carried on - All those who were attending the work of rebuilding the wall became even more obligated to faithfully laboring with much energy in completing what they had started.

a) Nehemiah had a deep trust in God; but at the same time, he was careful to take all of the precautions the situation required. “My men” is literally “my youth” or “my servants” (cf. NRSV). The term must refer to a special group of helpers or a bodyguard (cf. 5:10, 16; 13:19). These helpers apparently had more armor than the average worker. “The officers” posted behind the builders may have represented Nehemiah’s armed men or another defense force. Blenkinsopp thinks it was “the other half” who were “posted” there, and that the term translated “the officers” was accidentally added to the text.^[8]

13. Work – Those who labored at the wall were skilled in their occupation and were committed to this specific task of completing the wall.

^[1] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 176). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^[2] Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament* (Ne 4:10). Chicago: Moody Press.

^[3] Getz, G. A. (1985). Nehemiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 682). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^[4] Breneman, M. (1993). Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther (electronic ed., Vol. 10, p. 197). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^[5] Breneman, M. (1993). *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (electronic ed., Vol. 10, p. 196). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^[6] Williamson, H. G. M. (1998). *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Vol. 16, p. 228). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

^[7] Breneman, M. (1993). Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther (electronic ed., Vol. 10, p. 198). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^[8] Breneman, M. (1993). Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther (electronic ed., Vol. 10, pp. 198–199). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.