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The Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem Nehemiah 4: 16-23

The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem DIG: What happened when the Israelites returned to work? How was the plot of the enemy foiled? How does Nehemiah show his level of involvement in this building effort? How does he show his dependence upon God? Upon a strategic use of human resources? Upon his own diligence?

REFLECT: Do you usually do things one at a time (or “one-handed”)? Or do you like to juggle two or more things (“weapon and water in hand”)? Which of the juggling acts Nehemiah’s men were doing would you find the toughest to do (4:17 or 23)? Which do you tend to do “with all your heart” - Work? Play? Plan? Pray? Worry? What is one area of your life where there seems to be “so much rubble?” In what ways are you cooperating with others and trusting God to build something out of that rubble?

445 BC During the ministry of Nehemiah (to see link click [Bt](#) - The Third Return).

Compiled by: The Chronicler from the Ezra and Nehemiah Memoirs (see [Ac](#) - Ezra-Nehemiah From a Jewish Perspective: The Nehemiah Memoirs).

The Jews who lived in the outlying villages (**Nehemiah 3:2-13**) kept bringing a report to **the City** that the enemy was planning a surprise attack. **Nehemiah** knew **he** couldn’t interrupt the work on **the wall** every time **he** heard a new rumor. Therefore, **he** set up a defense plan that solved the problem: **From that day on, half of my men were doing the work, while half of them took hold of the spears, shields, bows and breastplates, not the normal armor worn by soldiers, but a padded jacket made of tough leather that protected the body as far as the knees, and the leaders were behind the entire house of Judah (Nehemiah 4:16).** Notice that half of these weapons were offensive (**spears** and **bows**) and half were defensive (**shields** and **breastplates**). Paul would later use such military weaponry to describe the life of believers, including

the shield of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:14-17).



Those building the wall and those bearing heavy burdens, removing the broken parts of the wall that had fallen to the ground to prepare for the foundations, kept one hand on the work and the other holding a weapon (Nehemiah 4:17). Those who carried materials could carry a weapon in one hand, but those who were building need both hands free, so they carried a sword at their side. **So each of the builders had his sword strapped to his side while they were building, and the shofar blower was beside me wherever he went.** Besides **Nehemiah's shofar blower**, there seems to have been **others** stationed at different places along **the wall**. **The order to blow the shofar would only be given by Nehemiah if he felt it was essential (Nehemiah 4:18). The workers were scattered all over a wide area, and many couldn't hear the sound of a human voice.**

Then I said to the nobles, the rulers and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from one another on the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the shofar, join us there. We may have to contend with a superior force, but do not let your hearts be troubled, our God, will fight for us (Nehemiah 4:19-20)! This did not mean to be taken as a sign that there was nothing for them to do, that they need not worry at all about the threat against them because **God** would take care of them without their having to lift a finger! Sovereignty doesn't work like that! The promise of **God's** activity is never a signal for inactivity on our part. In the providence of **God, He** has **His** part do to do, and we have our part to do. **Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For the One working in you is**

God - both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).

So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from dawn until the stars came out (Nehemiah 4:21). In rabbinic literature, until the stars come out was a phrase used to designate a specific time in the evening. The implication is that the half holding spears would change over at intervals with the half engaged in building. Nehemiah was a great leader. **He** stayed with **his men**. **He** did not remove **himself** to a safer location, arguing that **his** expertise was too valuable to be elsewhere.

Also at that time I said to the people, “Let every man capable of bearing arms, and his helper lodge inside Jerusalem, so they can be guards for us by night and workers by day” (Nehemiah 4:22). Each builder needed to have one helper. They were not allowed to leave Jerusalem for their homes at night if these were outside. They would then be available for military service if necessary should a night attack occur. So neither I, nor my brothers, nor my workers, nor the guards who were with me took off our clothes; each man even had his weapon at the water (Nehemiah 4:23). The effect of the threats, however, was to cut the workforce in **half**, and even **those** who worked carried weapons in case of attack.

The Jews faced a number of threats and opposition from **their** enemies as **they** were rebuilding **the wall**. **They** were openly mocked and derided, falsely accused of evil motives and rebellious plans, subtly infiltrated by men who sought to discourage **them** and hinder **their** work, and even threatened with murder. However, in every instance under **Nehemiah’s** leadership, we see **God’s people** turning to **the LORD** in prayer and expecting to find **their** safety and security in **Him**.

This is an excellent example that believers would do well to follow. Most of us instinctively try to resolve problems on our own, either by trying to devise our own solutions, or by simply running away. However, notice how **Nehemiah** responded to those who were mocking **him** and slandering **his** reputation. **He** did not defend **himself**, nor did **he** retaliate with sarcasm or verbal abuse. When those same enemies planned to attack **the Jews** violently, **Nehemiah** didn’t strike out with **his** sword. In both cases **the righteous of the TaNaKh** turned to **Him** in prayer.

Turning to **God** in prayer is not the same thing as abdicating responsibility. We still need to fulfill our responsibilities, and one of those responsibilities is to use common



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sense while not giving in to fear and discouragement. But in the big picture, the battle belongs to **the Lord**, and we are wise to turn the fighting over to **Him**.²⁴⁴