

A Leader's Perseverance

Nehemiah 4-5 - NCBC, July 17, 2016

Main Point: **Spiritual leaders overcome opposition by continuing to advance.**

- **Advancing against External Enemies**
 - Overcoming Talk ... (4:1-3)
 - Overcoming Threats ... (4:7-8, 11)

...With the right action: **Finish the work!**

- Watch and Pray (4:4-5, 9, 13-14a)
- Battle to Build (4:6, 16-18)
- Listen for the Rally call (4:19-20)

- **Advancing against Internal Enemies**

- Overcoming Doubt ... (4:10; 5:1)
- Overcoming Division... (4:12; 5:1-5)

...With the right attitude: **Fear our God!**

- Remember the Lord as you fight for your own (4:14)
- Refuse to justify self-interest and repent (5:6-15)
- Model sacrificial generosity and love (5:16-19)

Application: **Rally to Christ as He leads us in triumph.**

Opening Announcements:

Hospitality – reminders. // Thanksgiving for Pastor Scott

<<Your Name>>



Thank you worship team. The Name of Jesus is a strong tower – the righteous run into it and are safe!¹

Please now prepare for the public reading of God's Word from Nehemiah chapter 4.

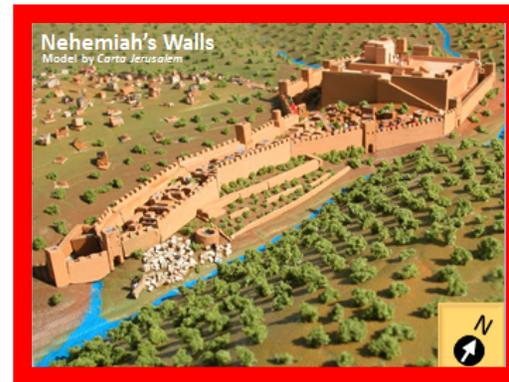


If you do not have a Bible with you today, our ushers are coming now to give you a Bible. Please catch their

¹ Proverbs 18:10

attention as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

Today we continue our study of Ezra-Nehemiah from chapters 4-5 of Nehemiah's diaries.



Ezra + Nehemiah GOD RESTORES			
Ez. 1-6	Ez. 7-10	Neh. 1-7	Neh. 8-13
Restoring the Temple	Restoring the People	Restoring the Wall	Restoring Worship
Zerubbabel	Ezra	Nehemiah & Ezra	
Haggai & Zechariah	-	Malachi	
First Return 538 BC	Second Return 457 BC	Third Return 444 BC	

58 Year Gap: Esther (between Ez. 6 and Ez. 7)
13 Year Gap (between Neh. 7 and Neh. 8)

God is able to do a great and mighty work in your life. Just as God restored the walls around Jerusalem in just 52 short days with all the people working together to accomplish their goal – so likewise God desires to restore your life in supernatural ways as well. No matter what opposition you may currently be facing.

By now Nehemiah has returned to Jerusalem and begun restoring the city wall. God was doing amazing work through Nehemiah's spiritual leadership, and there's many lessons we can learn from his example.

But in chapters 4-5 today, Nehemiah meets strong opposition from multiple sources. Can you relate to this?

God starts a great work in your life... you are encouraged and excited about how He is working... and then all the sudden you come under attack. If you can relate to the temptation to give up living for God, and just go back to a life of sin... then this message is for you this morning.



Please stand with me in honor of God's Word as I read selected verses from **Nehemiah chapter 4**. Our text is found on page **400** of the Bibles we've handed out.

Starting in **verse 1 of Nehemiah 4**, reading from the English Standard translation:

Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews.

Skip on down to verse 6:

So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. ⁷ But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. ⁸ And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. ⁹ And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. ¹⁰ In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." ¹¹ And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work." ¹² At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us." ¹³ So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. ¹⁴ And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

So reads God's inspired word. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

When you are a pastor's kid, there are lots of obstacles that stand in the way of trying to get home from a church gathering in good time. And of course the greatest opposition that you have to overcome to get to the lunch table at home is dad talking to people.

This weekend my daughter Abby wanted to come with me to help get the visitation set up on Friday afternoon. So once we had completed our responsibilities, she took me by the hand and started leading me towards the doors to leave. But you can guess what happened... I'd see someone I wanted to talk with, and before you knew it, Abby would be standing by patiently waiting for me to stop talking so we could leave.

At one point, she had got me out into the hallway, only to turn around and find me back in the middle of the Family Center talking to someone else! When I finished that conversation, she asked me, How did you get back in here? And she took me by the hand again and started walking out towards the door again.

In this way, my daughter reminds me of our main point from Nehemiah 4 and 5 this morning:

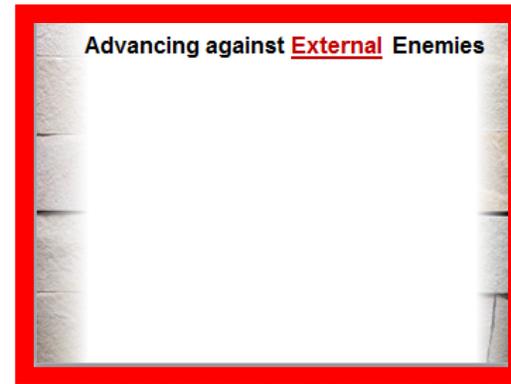


Spiritual leaders overcome opposition by continuing to advance.

In this sweet illustration – the “opposition” is just friendly conversation...but in our real spiritual battles... the opposition can at times be fierce against our soul, isn't it? But spiritual leaders like Nehemiah understand that the best defense is a good offense. And they are constantly working to overcome opposition by continuing to advance. Keeping their main objective front and center, and progressing forward one step at a time...refusing to get distracted or discouraged by the onslaught of the enemy attack.

The two chapters before us this morning could generally be divided into two different kinds of opposition – opposition from external enemies, and opposition from internal enemies.

So let's first consider how spiritual leaders overcome opposition by:

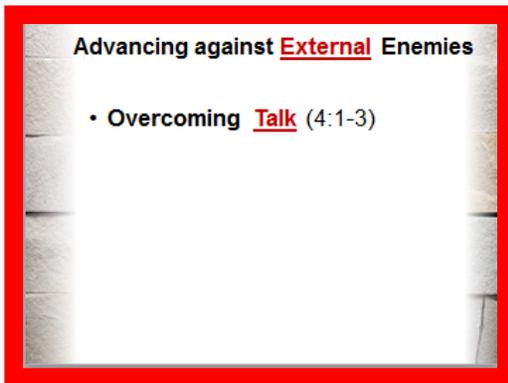


Advancing against External Enemies

Look at chapter 4 verse 1:

Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. ² And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” ³ Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!”

If you are going to persevere as a spiritual leader in your home and community, you're going to need God's help in



Overcoming the Talk of your enemies... (4:1-3)

You don't have to be a Christ-follower very long, before you will encounter the angry scorn of our Enemy and his followers. And whoever said, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" was a liar, right?

Loved ones – they mocked Christ too. So when you feel your cheeks burning as others laugh at you, or call you names, or spew out all kinds of wicked hatred against you... remember they are angry at God before they were ever angry at you.

You must overcome such talk from external enemies. Satan would love nothing more than to silence Christ's church and her work by the laughter of the world. But spiritual leaders persevere – in overcoming the enemies' talk and



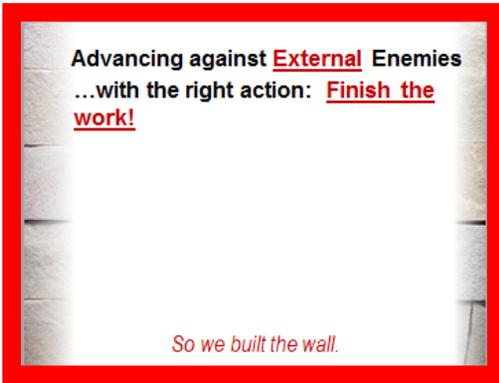
Overcoming the enemies' Threats ... (4:7-8, 11)

Look at verses 7-8. When God's enemies saw that their mocking ridicule did not stop God's people from doing God's work – they became very angry and verse 8 says,

And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

This was a serious military threat. Armies were coming against God's people and threatening to kill the people in verse 11. God's enemy is cruel. And he desires to use whatever pressure he can to stop the advance of God's gospel progress in our church and community. Satan hates any Gospel building that you are part of in your family. And his fury will use any force against you.

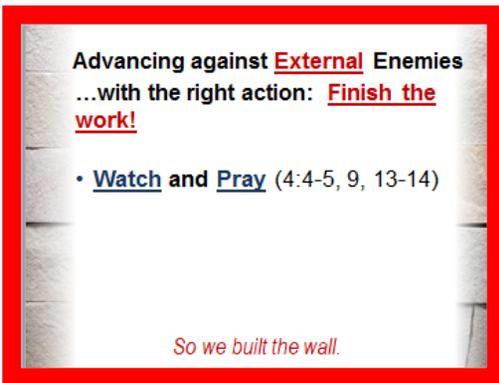
So what are you to do? The pain of such attacks is real. And the opposition is always strong against any demonstration of the power of God's Spirit in your life. But don't be surprised. Don't lose heart church. Rather, advance against these external enemies



...with the right action: Finish the work!

That's right. Finish the work! Don't stop the work that God is calling you to do... that's exactly Satan's ploy. He is seeking to distract and divide us from working together for God's greater glory. So keep working.

Verse 9 testifies to the first work that we must continue, as we



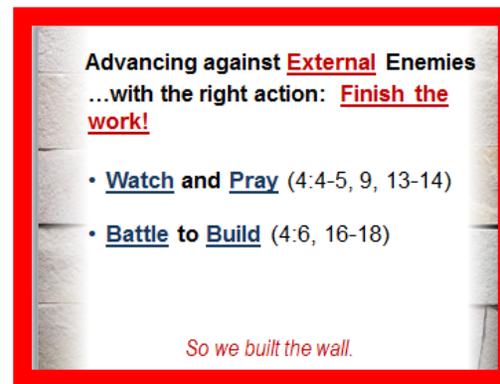
• Watch and Pray (4:4-5, 9, 13-14)

Verse 9 tells how Nehemiah recounts the people's response to the external attacks of their enemies,

And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.

They were alert – knowing that they were soldiers in the middle of a spiritual war – living with an eye to watch and a heart to pray.

Church – don't ever forget that praying is working. Some of the greatest work of the church is done through the humble dependence of prayer. God is the only One who can change the hearts of people – so when faced with strong opposition – fight against it with prayer first – staying alert as you continue to



• Battle to Build (4:6, 16-18)

Don't you love Nehemiah's response to the opposition in verse 6?

So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

Learn from this. While the enemies taunted and mocked, the people just continued to build. And while the

enemies' anger and mocking only increased – they were now doing so from outside the wall, as the people worked together – battling ... to build.

Church – remember...Jesus promised in Matthew 16 to build His church, and that the gates of hell could not prevail against Him. In other words, Jesus is on the offense. Not the defense. Jesus is building His church by His Spirit through His people.

O for sure it can feel like the church is on the defense today...but that's exactly what Satan wants. God's enemies want God's people to take up defensive postures – to just focus our energies on not losing any ground... living with a fear-oriented value of protection, security, and safety. But that's exactly how our Enemy wins.

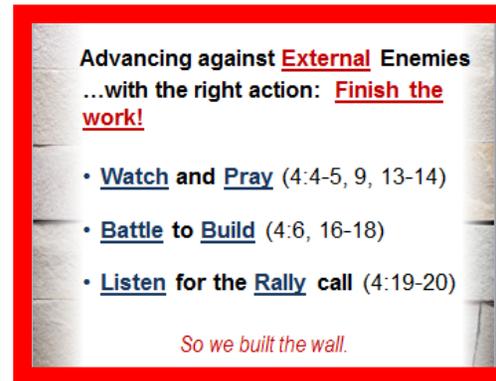
All Christ-followers are definitely in a spiritual war today – we are like the builders in verses 16-18 – we hold our Gospel weapons in one hand while we continue to build for God's glory with our others. But the point of our battle is always for building a greater reputation for God and His grace in our city. May we be a people who are always known more for what we are for, rather than for what we are against!

Is this how you fight, when you fight? You can't assassinate the character of your enemy and give others a better reputation of God. You don't witness by winning arguments. You witness by clearly proclaiming the goodness of God in your words and your works... and

watching God answer your prayers through greater worship of His goodness.

Church – I desire to encourage you this morning. For certainly the battle is raging around us in these last times. All of us must face the Enemy in some way or another.

But as you trust God's grace to finish His work in and through you, make sure you



Listen for the Rally Call (4:19-20)

Look how Nehemiah said it in verses 19-20,

And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. ²⁰In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

Now don't miss how Nehemiah foreshadows Christ for us in this narrative.

God's people were spread all around and often separated from one another. There was a huge amount of work to do. But the commander walked among God's people encouraging them, praying for them, and strengthening their hearts and minds for their ministry. And the end of verse 18 says that this commander had a trumpeter alongside him... so that when the enemy attack came, he could blow the rally call and all of God's people could gather together at the sound of the trumpet to watch as God delivered His people from the enemy's attack.

Doesn't that sound a lot like God's Spirit of Christ among us today? Christ is our commander – and His Spirit is walking among us – and at the hour before Satan's final attack upon the world... the trumpet will sound and **1 Thessalonians 4** tells us how all of God's people will be gathered together in the rapture to forever be with our Commander and King.

No wonder spiritual leaders persevere against opposition by continuing to advance and finish the work.

But unfortunately, our opposition doesn't just come from external enemies. Today we also learn how to overcome opposition by



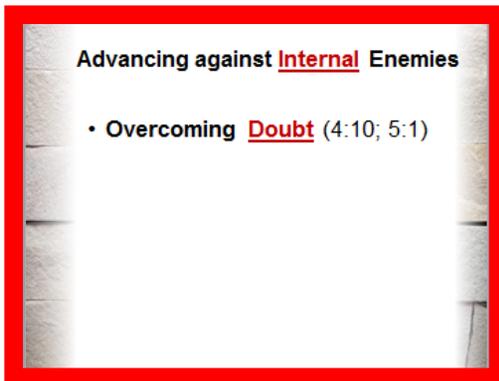
Advancing against Internal Enemies

In my life – I know the shame of being bullied for my faith in Christ as a teenager in high school. I know the scorn of worldly employers who delighted to relieve their own guilt by attacking my integrity. This is all opposition from external enemies.

But by far the most painful and devastating opposition I have faced in my 25 years as a Christ-follower has come from other professing believers – from the “Friendly fire” of internal enemies.

Friendly fire packs a punch in our lives, doesn't it? We expect God's people to speak grace and truth into our lives. We expect God's soldiers to have our backs.

That's why our homes and churches need leaders who remain prayerfully committed to continuing to advance against internal enemies in the right ways. First, by



Overcoming Doubt ... (4:10, 5:1)

Verse 10 of chapter 4 is an interesting verse isn't it. Let me read the verse in the New Living Translation:

Then the people of Judah began to complain, "The workers are getting tired, and there is so much rubble to be moved. We will never be able to build the wall by ourselves."

This is the cancerous poison of negative nellys among God's people. These were the people of Judah – complaining, disheartened, and discouraged Jews. In chapter 5, we see this same complaining doubt among God's people for different reasons – they were being taken advantage of by some of their brothers and sisters.

And so doubt attacks from within, and seeks to discourage and stop the work of God's Spirit among His people.

Have you ever gotten so overwhelmed and discouraged that you wanted to stop giving so much of your energies to following Christ and making disciples? Every church has the negative voices that will try to give you 101

reasons why you shouldn't trust God with such a big calling. Why you shouldn't pursue that missions or ministry assignment.

Spiritual leaders have only one response for the giant of fear and his "doubting Thomases"... continuing to advance and follow God's call.

Allow me to get personal for a moment. This weekend one of our siblings are in another state 10 hours away candidating for pastoral position. For our family – we realize how difficult it is to follow God's call away from family and friends...and we will certainly miss them in huge ways and suffer loss if God calls them to serve this particular church family.

But as we watch we can only agree that God is leading them in this search. And if we tried to convince our loved ones about all the reasons why they should "return to us" like in verse 12... we would be selfishly fighting against the building of God's kingdom.

Church – when God calls our loved ones to step out in faith and do His work... let's be a people who prayerfully, sacrificially, support and encourage them to follow God's call – regardless of how large or overwhelming the ministry might seem to our human abilities.

So spiritual leaders advance against internal enemies by overcoming doubt, and by



Overcoming Division... (4:12, 5:1-5)

The first 5 verses of chapter 5 paint a pretty ugly picture for Nehemiah and his comrades.

God's people were suffering a great food crisis. People couldn't afford the higher cost of living. They couldn't afford their mortgages. And their taxes were too high.

Does any of this sound familiar to anyone?

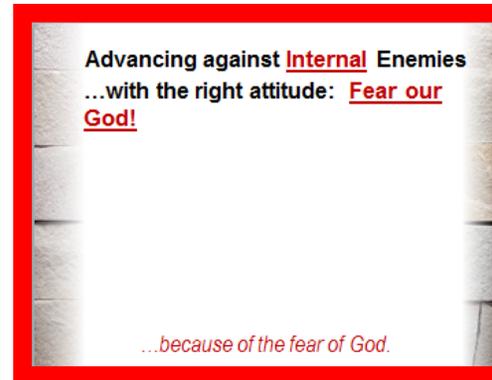
Yep. But how did God's people respond to these pressures... well the rich Jews got greedy and took advantage of the situation by putting their poor brethren into such debt and bondage that their children were being forced into slavery under their heavy debt loads.

Talk about division among God's family? This army of God was supposed to be united in its Gospel progress, but instead God's people were full of suspicion, distrust, and divisive self-interest.

Sound familiar?

Church – God's people are going to sin against you. There's no excuse for it...but if you're a Christ-follower for any length of time you should expect it.

But spiritual leaders are constantly advancing against internal enemies,



...with the right attitude: Fearing our God!

In verse 9 and 15 of chapter 5, Nehemiah references the fear of God as the proper motivation behind his perseverance.

The fear of the Lord is a constant awareness of God's power and presence that motives us to trust and obey God. So church – if we are going to persevere as God's people today with the right attitude, we must



Remember the Lord as we fight for our own (4:14)

Look back at **verse 14 in chapter 4**. What did Nehemiah tell the people to do in response to the negative nellys?

“Do not be afraid ... Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

There's someone here this morning that should underline verse 14 in your Bible. You can keep fighting for your loved ones because of who God is, and what God has done. God is great and awesome! We are more than conquerors in His love! Don't give up now. Your home is on the line. Keep preaching the Gospel. Keep making disciples. Keep praying. The lives of your siblings, your children, your spouses, and your church family depends on it!

In other words, if we are to learn from Nehemiah's example in chapter 5, each of us this morning needs to



Refuse to justify self-interest and repent (5:6-15)

Where are we taking advantage of others, just because it seems right to us? Is there any way we are inflicting heart-ache on others within the body of Christ because of our words, our negativity, our self-concern, or our self-promotion?

When God's ministry crosses our own comfort and convenience... do we lash out against those who are actually just seeking to follow God's call on their life?

Remember the Lord – He is great and awesome. Translation – you can trust Jesus. You can always trust Jesus! So repent anytime you think you know better than God. And then

Advancing against **Internal** Enemies
 ...with the right attitude: **Fear our God!**

- **Remember** the Lord as you **fight** for your own (4:14)
- **Refuse** to justify self-interest and **repent** (5:6-15)
- Model **sacrificial** generosity and **love** (5:16-19)

...because of the fear of God.

Model sacrificial generosity and love (5:16-19)

Just like Nehemiah. In verse 15 of chapter 5, Nehemiah explains why he did not live according to the common self-serving tradition of other governors...because of his fear of God. He didn't evaluate what he could do for himself based on other people's opinions...he refused to justify any self-interest

In verses 16-19 Nehemiah goes on to explain how he persevered in the work on the wall. He worked hard and became an example to follow. Out of his fear for God, Nehemiah continued living a lifestyle of sacrificial generosity for the common good of everyone around him – both Jews and Persian officials together.

The last verse of chapter 5 sums up Nehemiah's heartbeat – as their leader, he was seeking to do good to all of God's people in the broken city of Jerusalem. His action was to finish the work. And his attitude was to fear God above all.

So what about you this morning?

Today we've learned that

Main Point

Spiritual leaders overcome opposition by continuing to advance.



Godly leaders like Nehemiah overcome all kinds of opposition by continuing to advance. By continuing to labor more and more in the grace that God supplies.

So this morning, are you weakening under the mounting pressure of opposition? Are enemies surrounding you with their talk and threats or divisions and doubts?

Then let me offer you some final encouragement from the text this morning:

Application

Rally to Christ as He leads us in triumph.



Rally to Christ as He leads us in triumph.

Jesus has already won the war. Yes we are still engaged in a battle...but Christ is our commander and He has promised to lead us in eternal triumph! Listen to the apostle Paul's response to some opposition in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17,

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

O church – you have been commissioned by God's Spirit to speak of Christ and so build His kingdom in our community this week. Christ has paid for your sins at the cross and rose from the dead to guarantee your inheritance forever. There is no therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Go therefore, and make disciples. And rally to Christ who is fully sufficient to lead us unto the completion of the building of His church together in His final triumph.



Let's pray.

<<On Christ the Solid Rock>>

Benediction

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
Hebrews 13:20-21