

RESTORING THE BROKEN

A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

Read Nehemiah 4.

1. We have met Sanballat and Tobiah before.
 - a. What have we heard about them? (2:10, 19)

 - b. What are they doing now? (vv. 1b-3)

 - c. What do you think they hope to achieve by doing this?

2. What does Nehemiah do in response? (vv. 4-5)

3. What does Nehemiah *not* do in response?

4. What do the people do, and with what attitude do they do it? (v. 6)

5. How does the opposition to the rebuilding of the wall escalate in verses 7-8 and 11?

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

Nehemiah's prayer in verses 4-5 is perhaps surprising. It resembles certain Psalms, as well as passages like Jeremiah 18:21-23, in which the speaker raises up "appeals to the heavenly Judge for judicial redress."¹ The curses in such passages "are expressions of moral indignation, not of personal vengeance"; they convey the sense that "it is unbearably wrong that those who persecute the faithful and turn people away from God should get away with it, and even seem to prosper."² Like the Psalmist and Jeremiah, "Nehemiah did not personally take action against his opponents but called down the vengeance of God. [Commentator Peter R.] Ackroyd... remarked, 'To understand such violent language, we need to appreciate fully the sense of the divine purpose at work, so that opposition is not seen in human terms but as opposition to God himself.'" ³

6. Not only does the level of opposition rise, but the list of enemies also grows: Sanballat, the governor of Samaria; Tobiah and the Ammonites; the Arabs; and “the people of Ashdod” (v. 7). Locate these people groups on the map. Why would their combined threat potentially be intimidating to the people of Judah?



Bible History Online

<https://www.bible-history.com/biblemaps/ezras-journey-to-restore-jerusalem/>

7. How are the people feeling about the work they have to do and the threats of their adversaries?
v. 10

v. 12

8. How do Nehemiah and the people meet these difficulties? Break down the verses below to see both their “vertical” response (in relationship to God) and their “horizontal” response (in relationship to others).

| | VERTICAL | HORIZONTAL |
|-------|----------|------------|
| v. 9 | | |
| v. 13 | | |
| v. 14 | | |

What wisdom can we glean from this two-pronged response?

9. Deuteronomy 7 seems to have been a favorite passage of Nehemiah’s. Compare the following pairs of verses. What similar language do you hear?

Deut. 7:9; Neh. 1:5

Deut. 7:17-18; Neh. 4:14

Deut. 7:21; Neh. 1:5; 4:14

10. Though Nehemiah and the people took action, to whom does Nehemiah give the credit for stopping their enemies? (v. 15)

11. This particular plot has been foiled, but the Israelites do not let down their guard. Skim through verses 16–23 and write down some of the ongoing precautions they take.

12. Do you think these precautions show a lack of trust in God? (📖* You might like to compare Ezra 8:21–23, 31–32.)

Why or why not?

13. We face opposition, too, even if it looks different from the opposition the Jews faced in Nehemiah's time. Though our opposition sometimes has a human face, where does our greatest opposition come from? (Eph. 6:11–12; 1 Pet. 5:8)

14. Review verses 4, 9, 14, and 20 to see how determined Nehemiah is to trust God, and how he exhorts the people to be similarly determined. What are some practices you find helpful for trusting in God when you are tempted to fear in the face of hardships or spiritual battles or both? (If you need suggestions, look at the broader context of the verses in question 13: Ephesians 6:10-18 and 1 Peter 5:8-10.)

This study has been adapted and expanded with permission from a study of the same name by Bridge Community Church, Phila., PA.

¹ "Psalms: Introduction," *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 781.

² "Introduction to the Psalms," *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane T. Dennis (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 938.

³ Edwin Yamauchi, "Ezra, Nehemiah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: 1 Kings–Job*, ed. Frank E. Gaebel, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 702.