

**February 16, 2025**

**Nehemiah 4:15-23 ESV**

*15* When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. *16* From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, *17* who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. *18* And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. *19* 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. *20* In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” *21* So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. *22* I also said to the people at that time, “Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.” *23* So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

Scriptures for further study:

Ephesians 6:12

Matthew 28:18-20

2 Timothy 1:13-14

“These enemies, especially Sanballat and Tobiah, knew that Nehemiah had credentials from the king. Thus, they tried to stop the work by disheartening the people who were building. They used ridicule as their tool.”

-Mervin Breneman

“The combat for which we are to be prepared is not against ordinary human enemies, not barely against men compounded of flesh and blood, nor against our own corrupt natures singly considered, but against the several ranks of devils, who have a government which they exercise in this world.”

-Matthew Henry



### **The Hand of God in Our Calling Nehemiah 4:15-23**

**BIG IDEA:** If our battle in life is primarily spiritual, may God’s all-sufficient presence be at our right hand as we pursue His calling at home and in the world.

#### **OUTLINE**

##### **1. Our Battle**

##### **2. God’s Presence**

##### **3. God’s Calling**

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. What pictures does the word “battle” bring to mind? Do you see daily challenges as “battles”?
2. Refer to Nehemiah 4:15. What battle was Nehemiah and his people facing? Read Ephesians 6:12 and the quotation by John Calvin. Calvin says that to wrestle against flesh and blood is futile and even “pernicious.” To fight a supernatural battle with hand-to-hand or face-to-face combat is like attempting to fight cancer with Tylenol. What “weapons” can you use to fight the supernatural battle on the battlefield of daily challenges of life?
3. Read verses 17-20. What supernatural “weapon” gave Nehemiah and his people the confidence to continue to build? Read Psalm 84:3, Matthew 28:20, Luke 12:6-7, Matthew 6:31-34, and the quotation by Thomas Brooks. These truths refer to the sufficiency of God. How can God’s sufficiency encourage you today?
4. Read verse 21. The story of rebuilding the wall applies to the Church today. As we build the Church (Matthew 28:18-20), we guard (2 Timothy 1:13-14) ourselves. What can you do to build the church by making disciples?

“Let us remember this when the injurious treatment of others provokes us to revenge. Our natural disposition would lead us to direct all our exertions against the men themselves, but this foolish desire will be restrained by the consideration that the men who annoy us are nothing more than darts thrown by the hand of Satan. While we are employed in destroying those darts, we lay ourselves open to be wounded on all sides. To wrestle with flesh and blood will not only be useless but highly pernicious. We must go straight to the enemy, who attacks and wounds us from his concealment — who slays before he appears.”

-John Calvin

“Nehemiah had a deep trust in God; but at the same time, he was careful to take all of the precautions the situation required... those who carried material could carry a weapon in one hand, but those who were building needed both hands free, so they carried a sword at their side.”

-Mervin Brenneman

“Fear is conquered by reflecting on the sufficiency of God.”

-Raymond Brown

“God hath in Himself all power to defend you, all wisdom to direct you, all mercy to pardon you, all grace to enrich you, all righteousness to clothe you, all goodness to supply you, and all happiness to crown you.”

-Thomas Brooks

“It is one of the defining marks of our times that God is now weightless. I do not mean that he is ethereal, but rather that he has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost his saliency for human life. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God’s existence may nonetheless consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, his judgment no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and his truth less compelling than the advertisers’ sweet fog of flattery and lies. That is weightlessness.”

-David Wells

***Praise to Jesus.*** Praise God for the sufficiency of His presence in your life and battles. Praise Jesus through His blood, life, death, and resurrection; the Holy Spirit dwells in you. Praise God for Christ’s promise to be with you always, closer than a sword strapped to your leg or a watchman standing behind you; His presence is far more powerful than ten thousand nuclear weapons.

***Repentance through Jesus.*** Spend time reflecting on recent battles in your life. Confess the times that you lost sight of the supernatural aspect of daily battles. Instead of praying and relying on God’s sufficiency, you reacted with misplaced blame, damaging anger, and destructive fear.

***Consecration for Jesus.*** Our battle in life is primarily spiritual; may God’s all-sufficient presence be at our right hand as we pursue His calling to build and to guard.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Heart transformation continues as Nehemiah and the workers build the wall. In Nehemiah 4:1-3 & 7-8, the enemies heard of an advance in the wall-building project. They responded with anger and further action. Now, they respond with silence. As the walls go up, the former threats come tumbling down. Enemies, once able to “frustrate (the) purpose” of God’s people in rebuilding, can do so no longer. God blesses Nehemiah’s strategy and “frustrate(s) their plan, for a time silencing the derision of Sanballat and Tobiah, as Nehemiah had prayed. The work continues.

-ESV Expository Commentary

## FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. According to verse 15, who got the credit for frustrating the plans of the opposition? (God did. We see another example of how the hand of God is guiding this entire story.)
2. How did the Israelites adjust their plan to rebuild the wall due to the continued opposition? (In verse 16, they split the men between those working and those guarding against the opposition. Those guarding had “spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail (or armor).” In verse 17, we read that those who were working on the wall also carried weapons in one hand and built with the other hand.”)
3. In verse 20, Nehemiah reminds the Israelites, "Our God will fight for us!" Yet Nehemiah and the Israelites don't respond with inaction; they respond with renewed strength to protect themselves while they build. How do we respond in our lives to the wonderful truth that God is always with us and fights our battles? (We never should think that God's Almighty power allows us not to respond. Instead, we are to follow and obey the Lord in our actions. God's Almighty power frees us to enter into these spiritual battles, knowing that we do so not in our own power but in His power.)
4. What are the weapons that we are to use in our spiritual battles? (The Holy Spirit, prayer, the Bible, God's promises, and our worship. Do you or your children think of other spiritual weapons?)

Scriptures for further study:

Psalms 127

Ephesians 2:8-10

Ephesians 6:10-20

Romans 8:31-32

## FOR STUDENTS

Scriptures for further study:

Ephesians 6:10-20

Exodus 14:10-14

Psalm 46:2

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Mark 10:35-45

1. In verse 15, who was responsible for stopping the enemy's plans, and what does this teach us about God's role in our challenges?
2. How did the Israelites adjust their approach to rebuilding the wall in response to opposition? What does this show us about balancing trust in God with taking action?
3. In verse 20, Nehemiah says, "Our God will fight for us." How does knowing that God fights for us impact the way we face spiritual battles in our lives? What does God fighting for us not mean – whose purposes is God fighting for?
4. The Israelites carried both tools for building and weapons for defense. Read Ephesians 6:10-20—what spiritual weapons do we have as Christians, and how do we use them in our daily lives?
5. Nehemiah led by working alongside the people, staying with them, and encouraging them. How can you be a godly leader in your own life, whether at home, school, or church?
6. The Israelites were each responsible for rebuilding the section of the wall near their own homes. What areas of your own life—whether personal, spiritual, or relationships—might God be calling you to "repair and rebuild"?

## FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. For the most part, each worker was building or repairing the section of the wall that was directly connected to their own house and family.

Question: As God leads you, what are some areas in your own personal life and situation, or in your family, that you may need to address? Are you praying and asking God to show you what parts of your life he needs to repair and renew?

2. Once again, in this passage, we see that Nehemiah fully trusts in the sovereignty of God (“Our God will fight for us.”-v.20), but he never understands the sovereignty of God to be an excuse for the Israelites to be negligent or passive about their work.

Question: How can we, as Christians, learn to trust God without being passive, but also work hard and be obedient to God without trusting in ourselves?

3. While the events described here are real, they also provide a powerful picture for us of spiritual realities. That is, just as the Israelites faced opposition from their enemies, so also do we as Christians face opposition from the flesh, the world, and the devil. If we are truly serious about being more holy, then the Christian life will inevitably produce hardship as we learn to say “no” to our indwelling sin and as we face opposition from the world and from Satan himself.

Question: If you are just getting started on your spiritual journey, be fair warned. If you have already started your journey, what forms of opposition have you already experienced thus far?

4. The Israelites armed themselves with “spears, shields, bows, and armor” (v.16). Take a moment to read Ephesians 6:10-20 and notice how it mentions spiritual armor.

Question: Who does it say we as Christians are fighting, and what are the pieces of spiritual armor that are necessary for us to utilize?

5. Nehemiah is a case study in model godly leadership. He plans, he delegates, he motivates, he organizes, he encourages, he prays, he perseveres, and he even sleeps next to the very brothers he is trying to lead (v.23). A true leader comes alongside others and even works, fights, and suffers with them.

Question: In what ways could you exercise more intentional leadership in your home or workplace? How might God use you to more effectively advance his purposes in your family or vocational spaces?

Scriptures for further study:

Ephesians 6:10-20

## The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



*The Ancient of Days*, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork and artist.

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Blake's poem "Europe", depicts a world filled with suffering based on the political climate of Europe and politics in England in the 1790s. It is appropriate in light of the suffering of God's people described in Ezra and Nehemiah. The artwork by Blake serves to remind and encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances. William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to connecting the prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible with the events in his country; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)



## Introduction to Nehemiah

From January to May 2024, we heard sermons from the Book of Ezra. The introduction to Ezra, recorded sermons, and discipleship resources can be found on our church website at this address: <https://www.fpcrome.org/pdd-ezra/>

Ezra and Nehemiah were, for centuries, received as one book narrating the return of God's exiled people to their land, as under Persian rule they were allowed to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem. These two books cover three different waves of returning exiles, from 538 to 433 BC. But they tell one story: the restoration of God's covenant people according to his Word—which they are now called afresh to obey.

This restoration required, first of all, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of ceremonial worship. The first leader, Zerubbabel, led the initial wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to accomplish this goal (Ezra 1–6). The second wave came more than half a century later, led by Ezra, who rebuilt not the temple but the people, teaching them—and calling them to obey—the law of Moses (Ezra 7–10).

Thirteen years after Ezra arrived, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He first led the people to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1–6). Then, along with Ezra, he sought to restore the people (Nehemiah 7–13) as God's holy nation, followers of his Word.

The restoration was not complete, however. These books picture God's people regathered but struggling; they are poor subjects of a foreign king; their city is devastated; enemies oppress from without; sin threatens from within. We see the faithful hand of God mercifully preserving his people according to his promises. We also see the dire need for the perfect fulfillment of God's promises in the salvation accomplished by his Son. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible.)