

## Introduction

### Where we are

Good morning; my name is Jeff Hollis, and I'm one of the pastors on staff here at Grace Auburn.

If this is your first time here, I'd like to welcome you to Grace Auburn Church.

At the beginning of this year, we are going through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

In the first two weeks, Matt took us through Ezra, and last week, we began Nehemiah, where we will be until Easter.

In Nehemiah 1 we saw Nehemiah's heart for God's word and the knowledge of it that he possessed. Through this, he was broken and prayed to God in lament for what had become of Jerusalem.

We also saw that he was a man in close proximity to the Persian king. In Chapter 2, we read that through this relationship, God uses Nehemiah to affect King Artaxerxes and involve the King in the restoration of Jerusalem. We then see Artaxerxes approve and send Nehemiah to Jerusalem, and Nehemiah arrives and surveys the destruction of the walls and gates of the city. This would have been a scene of rubble and destruction. I imagine piles of stones and splintered timbers lying all around.

We ended last week with the account of Nehemiah standing amidst the destruction, rallying the people who were still in the city to do the work of rebuilding. We also heard of the opposition from others as well.

Nehemiah answers the opposition with a powerful claim "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem." (Neh 2:20)

### Where we are going

This experience outlines the two chapters we will study today. In Chapter 3, we will see the people of God answer the call of their leader Nehemiah, and begin rebuilding the walls of the city of Jerusalem, and then right away in Chapter 4, we will see opposition from those near the city that seek to serve themselves rather than God.

I want us to keep the first half of verse 20 in mind as we work through these passages today. Nehemiah's confidence in the Lord is the same confidence we have today and even more so as we have seen what God has done for his people through his Son Jesus the Messiah. So let us too take up with confidence "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build." As we read of Nehemiah and God's people working forward to what was to come while we rest on the foundation of what God has done.

### Nehemiah 3 - People/Project

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. 2 And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. 3 The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. 4 And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired. 5 And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord. 6 Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Gate of Yeshanah. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. 7 And next to them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men

of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. 8 Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. 9 Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. 10 Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired. 11 Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. 12 Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters. 13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate. 14 Malchijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. 15 And Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it and covered it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the city of David. 16 After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool, and as far as the house of the mighty men. 17 After him the Levites repaired: Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district. 18 After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah. 19 Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress. 20 After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21 After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. 22 After him the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired. 23 After them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah repaired beside his own house. 24 After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress and to the corner. 25 Palal the son of Uzai repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh 26 and the temple servants living on Ophel repaired to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the projecting tower. 27 After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel. 28 Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. 29 After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired. 30 After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired opposite his chamber. 31 After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate, and to the upper chamber of the corner. 32 And between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired. (Neh 3:1-32)

What an amazing list of God's people working. This may seem burdensome and tedious, but the list has a purpose, like many other lists in scripture. I want us to remember Paul's words to Timothy.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3:16-17)

We do well to remind ourselves of this verse. God has given us his word and All of it. Every list of names, every list of laws, every list of plans, every sad story, every joyful praise, every scandal, every death, and every life-giving truth is GOOD for us. We just have to pay attention, slow down, and think: what am I seeing in this passage?

So, let us think about the verses we just read and all that was in them.

We see over 40 different groups of people

These 40 groups are from different stations and hold different titles from Nobility to servants and even a father and his DAUGHTERS. This would have been very strange for the day as women were not involved in construction during that day. There were rulers, sons, and priests!

They are all united with a common goal of rebuilding the walls because of their common faith in the God of Heaven and their desire to follow him and do his will.

They are relying on God and his truths to drive them to rebuild the walls of his holy city at this particular point in God's history of redemption.

What do we think of when we see the people of God coming together, no matter what their title or station, in order to serve their Lord and build his kingdom here on earth?

THE CHURCH!! They were building the walls around the Temple of God at that time, and the New Testament church is still hundreds of years away, but we can learn so much from this passage that directly relates to what we are doing today.

We can see servant leaders - High priests are among those listed as rebuilding the walls and gates. Here, we see true leadership that ultimately would be modeled perfectly by Jesus as he, the great high priest, washed the disciples' feet.

Jesus says in Luke 22:17 - "I am among you as the one who serves." This is an example for us as we seek to build the church both physically and spiritually here in Auburn. We are called to imitate Christ as members of his church. We are called to serve one another and the Lord.

We see a unified people - As we heard earlier, everyone was working to rebuild the walls. It was not a few hard workers, but each of the people of God in that area was involved in the work that was taking place. Each had different gifts and abilities, but everyone's work was and is equally important and valuable.<sup>1</sup>

**Christopher Wright states, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for His church in the world, as that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God's mission."<sup>2</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> Wallace Benn, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther: Restoring the Church*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021), 90-91.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 62.

We see in God's people in this place an example of selflessness and a desire for God's kingdom to come, not their own best interests. We see a people on mission to bring about God's plans.

Their goals were the same as ours today. We seek to serve our God and glorify his name. We seek to be different than those around us, and we seek, most of all, to do God's will.

Let us remember Jesus' words from John 4:34,

“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). We are satisfied and satiated when we do the will of God. In this instance, we see the local family of God working together to bring about God's purposes. May we also be satisfied as we serve the Lord here and now.

Now, what can we expect when we begin to follow God's call upon our lives and join in with our brothers and sisters as members of his local church? When we look different, act different, and value different things than the world around us?

### **Opposition!**

“Whenever believers get serious about obeying God's call on their lives, they can count on opposition.”<sup>3</sup> -TJ Betts

The enemy has no problem with you when you are ignorant or in opposition to God's will, but when we align our will with his, the enemy takes notice.

This is illustrated perfectly in Chapter Four. Let's read.

### **Nehemiah 4**

Now, when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. <sup>2</sup> 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?” <sup>3</sup> 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!”

Some of the hate of these jeers may be lost on us today. Let's look at it differently.

What are these feeble Jews doing - See what pitiful people they are

Will they restore their wall - Yeah, right! Like they can rebuild that wall

Will they sacrifice - Ha, let's see if their silly worship helps them

Will they finish in a day - Do they think that they can actually accomplish this in time that will matter

Will they revive stones out of heaps of rubbish and burned ones at that - Are they really going to rebuild anything out of the pile of trash they have to build with

---

<sup>3</sup>Terry J. Betts, *Nehemiah: A Pastoral & Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

I'm reminded of the villain and his cronies in every superhero cartoon. He's standing there saying big words in the presence of his friends, and they are cheering him on. Yeah, who do they think they are? We know who is behind the people of Israel, though, and if Sanballat did too, I don't think he would be laughing.

This is not the first time we've seen God's plans mocked. Let's look to Jesus again in the New Testament. In Luke chapter 8 we read of Jairus' daughter. She was thought to be dead, and Jesus told them not to weep, for she wasn't dead but sleeping.

Luke 8:53 reads, "And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. <sup>54</sup>But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise." <sup>55</sup>And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. Lk 8:53–55.

Who was laughing after the child got up?

### **Back to Nehemiah -**

Nehemiah could have run in fear and doubted but he had the word of God in his heart.

Nehemiah says:

4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. 5 Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

Nehemiah cried out to his God and relied upon him and his promises rather than his strength and abilities. How does he do this?

- He prays an Imprecatory prayer against those who are against God and God's plans.
- Psalm 139:21-22 - DO I not hate those who hate you O Lord? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. Nehemiah is not praying against a personal attack but an attack on God's plans and His people.<sup>4</sup>
- Through these words, I am reminded of Psalm 51 and David's repentance after his incident with Bathsheba.
- David prays:

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin! - Ps 51:1–2.

---

<sup>4</sup> Derek Thomas, *Ezra & Nehemiah* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2016).

David prayed this from a position of repentance and sorrow after being confronted by Nathan. We see no such sorrow or repentance from Sanballat, and Nehemiah's prayer is asking that God give Sanballat what he deserves rather than allowing him to prosper in opposition to God. Nehemiah is praying God's word back to him and trusting the Lord.

Continuing in verse 6

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.

Here we go again. Sanballat and his posse are angry again. Let's see how the people react.

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."

The lies and doubts were beginning to get to the people. They began to think they may not be able to do it. They forgot who they were serving, and again, Nehemiah calls them to return to the truth of the Lord and continue their work. He rallied them around their God, and they proceeded to build. I like to think he reminded them of his call in Chapter 2 again. **The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build.**

Can we relate to that? Have you ever begun to doubt in the face of opposition and adversity? We must not grow weary of doing the good that God has called us to. No matter what the opposition may be.

The Work Resumes

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. <sup>20</sup> In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” <sup>21</sup> So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. <sup>22</sup> 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.” <sup>23</sup> 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. (Neh 4:1-23)

They were prepared to follow the Lord and armed themselves for battle under the cry, “Our God will fight for us.” This does not mean that everything was smooth sailing, and they could simply ignore what was going on around the outside of the walls they were raising.

These verses give us an illustration of what we face every day as followers of Jesus. The world, the flesh, and the devil are against us, and do not want the kingdom of God to succeed, so we must trust and be prepared for the battles that come. Nehemiah faced Sanballat and Tobiah, among other leaders and armies of the region, and this represents the worldly opposition.

Then doubt spreads among the workers, illustrating the flesh, and finally, we know the Devil is prowling around, ready to devour any that he can. We must arm ourselves with the Armor of God in order to stand against these foes while trusting God’s promises and looking to the finished work of Jesus and the coming Kingdom. Let us remind ourselves of Ephesians 6:

<sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

Eph 6:14–18.

Faith, Scripture, and, most of all, prayer play prominent roles in this chapter. All of these testified to the Good hand of their God being upon them as they followed his will. They set their hand to the plow and continued to work while being ready and confident if attacks came.

### **Knowing all of this, What about us?**

We are in a unique season in the life of our local church as we come to these passages from Nehemiah. Through the Lord’s providence I want us to look to the teaching of them as we move toward our permanent home.

Matt shared earlier that we now own the building that will house Grace Auburn Church. We have begun metaphorically building the walls of our city, and I want us to look to the unity of the people of Jerusalem under Nehemiah and ultimately under the God of the universe as we take on this next season. I also want us to look at the warning of Chapter 4. Opposition will come. Satan does not like the plans of the Lord to

prevail, and he will use the world, the flesh, and he himself will come against us as we seek to grow God's kingdom.

In light of this we must be ready not only to work but to defend ourselves with God's armor as we follow his plan for our church. But we can look to these Israelites and the unity amongst them as a model for us going forward.

Regardless of their title or station and regardless of the role they were performing, they were unified for the people of God in that place.

I want that same unity for us. In this next season, there will be many decisions to be made and many opinions to be heard.

The enemy is waiting to sow seeds of conflict amongst us as we work for the Kingdom.

We know this will come from within and without, and we must ready ourselves by renewing our minds in scripture and putting on the whole armor of God.

We must ask what can I do to serve my church and the brothers and sisters of my family here at Grace Auburn? How can I put the needs of others before my own? How can I sacrifice for the good of God's kingdom in this season of the life of our church? Can I think of the church and God's kingdom before my preferences or desires?

What does our unity look like?

Thinking the best of each other

Following God together

Putting others first

Praying for leaders and one another

Aligning our hearts with God

What do we do with this unity? As Nehemiah said in 4:21 So we labored at the work.

We labor at the work we are called to. Our God has set in motion a plan that are privileged to be a part of.

He is fighting for us and has already defeated sin and death that in all we do we already know God has won.

The Hand of Our God is Good, and it is incredible to be part of what he is doing. We do not labor for ourselves. We labor for the lord, and we are united in Christ Jesus through the sacrifice he made for us on the cross. That is why we do what we do.

I want to leave us with Paul's words to the Church in Philippi.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

Php 1:27-28.



