

Giants or Grasshoppers?

Nehemiah 4:10-12

Nehemiah 4:10-12 - *“Then Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.”* ¹¹ *And our adversaries said, “They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.”* ¹² *So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, “From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us.”*

Background Notes

“Operation Wall” began when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem from Persia in about 445BC. Before this time Nehemiah had been employed in the Persian government, but as a godly Jew he was vitally concerned with the welfare of his people, and of Jerusalem, the city of God’s Temple. The protective wall around the city of Jerusalem had been in ruins for many years, and this was a great concern to him. He knew that God wanted Jerusalem to be a city with strong walls, so it could withstand attack, not easily conquered. So Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and motivated the people to start rebuilding the wall. Under his able leadership the wall was going up.

It seemed that nothing could stop the Jews from completing the rebuilding project. The enemies surrounding Judah had tried everything to stop the work. They tried scorn and ridicule, but that didn’t work. They tried open threats, but that didn’t work. They tried to cause disruption and confusion, but that didn’t stop the repairs.

When we come to Nehemiah 4, the wall was halfway built. But now a new and different problem arose. Discouragement. The people became discouraged, and they began to doubt their ability to finish the job. Verse 10 is really in the form of a Hebrew poem - a lament or dirge that the workers began to sing as they labored on the wall. *“The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.”* This defeatist attitude continued, and it only increased as details of the enemy’s plan of attack became known. The people were afraid, and this further added to the snowballing problem of defeatism.

The people were scared, and it seemed that the rebuilding of the wall might come to a complete halt. It was at this point that Nehemiah took action to turn the situation around. Once again Nehemiah, great leader that he was, took action - and made the difference!

Doctrinal Points

Discouragement and doubt are part of Satan's strategy to defeat us.

As we've mentioned in our previous Talks from Nehemiah, the opposition to the rebuilding of the wall is an illustration of the opposition believers experience in spiritual wall building. God wants us to be strong and stable Christians who are not easily defeated by the attacks of the enemy, and that's what spiritual wall building is all about. A mature Christian has well-built spiritual walls.

But building walls not easy. It's hard work, and there will be opposition. If Satan can't stop us with scorn or ridicule or threat, he'll try to get his foot in the door in any way he can. And promoting discouragement and doubt is one of the ways he tries to defeat us.

We see that illustrated right here. The workers were discouraged, and the reason is given in verse 10: *"The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."* They began to doubt their ability to complete the wall. They began to doubt God's ability to help them rebuild. They were exhausted, and there was still a long way to go. The wall was only half up, and they were almost at a standstill because so much rubbish needed to be carted away!

Do you see what God's Word is teaching us here? Spiritual wall building is not easy. It's easy to become discouraged and taper off, especially when we realize how much more work needs to be done. When we think of the work of studying Scripture, the labor of prayer, the work involved in serving others - it's hard work. And there's the hard work of all that rubbish that needs to be cleaned out of our lives - too many selfish pursuits, too much time spent on media, too many possessions that need to be maintained, too much fun and games and entertainment and partying.

So it's hard work to build a strong spiritual wall. There's a lot of rubbish to be cleared out of our lives, and it's hard to clear away rubbish. It's not easy to find time to study Scripture, or for prayer, or for serving others. Although clearing away rubbish and learning more of God's Word is certainly rewarding, it's hard work. Many Christians get discouraged when they see how much rubbish is there, and how much effort is involved.

In addition, fear was a factor that contributed to discouragement and a defeatist attitude. Look at verse 11: *"And our adversaries said, 'They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.'" The details of the planned enemy attack were spreading among the people, and they were afraid.*

The Jews who lived outside the walls, who were closer to the enemy, especially spread the fear. *"So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, 'From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us'" (v12.* Maybe those Jews should have been living inside the walls! Perhaps there's a spiritual lesson here. The closer we are to the enemy camp, the harder it is to live courageously by faith, and the easier it is for fear to creep in and cause us to doubt.

In any case, fear of the enemy and fear of the unknown will cause us to doubt God, doubt His promises, and doubt His power. Remember in Numbers 13, when the Israelites doubted God's promise to bring them into the Promised Land? They saw that there were giants in the Land, and they were afraid. Numbers 13:33 says that the people saw themselves as grasshoppers, and that led to doubt and unbelief in God's promises and God's power. They were seeing things from their own perspective, not from God's perspective. When we take the grasshopper perspective, our enemies will look like giants.

Have you ever played football? Why do the opposition's players always look so much bigger and stronger? Why is it that the enemy always looks bigger from our perspective? And that instills fear and doubt.

So here in Nehemiah a combination of exhaustion, fear, and a lot of rubbish all contributed to discouragement and doubt – and almost led to defeat. The people didn't know when or where the enemy was going to attack, and they didn't know what to do next. In the same way, discouragement and doubt are part of Satan's strategy to defeat believers.

But the wall-builders in Nehemiah's day didn't end up defeated because, once again, Nehemiah stepped in to save the day! We'll see that his actions throughout the rest of the chapter are principles of victory that should be used in spiritual warfare today.

Practical Applications

1. Don't be defeated by Satan's "D" darts!

Ephesians 6:16 teaches us that we're to take up the shield of faith in order to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. What are these flaming darts or missiles? Satan has many darts in his quiver, but let's talk about the "D" darts: **doubt** and **discouragement**.

How do we keep from being defeated by Satan's "doubt and discouragement" darts? What does Ephesians 6:16 say? It's our protective "shield of faith" that will quench those flaming darts. In this verse, the "shield of faith" it is not "saving faith." Rather, it is speaking of "living by faith" in God, as Nehemiah did.

There are a lot of ways that this could be applied, but let's apply it to the factors that led Nehemiah's workers to discouragement and doubt. Verse 10 lists fatigue and exhaustion. Burnout! Where does faith apply here? We bring the problem to the Lord. We can be sure that God will always give us the strength we need for whatever job He calls us to do - whether it is building physical walls or spiritual walls. Although the job may seem like an insurmountable task, the Lord can enable us. To avoid discouragement and doubt, we must bring our problem to the Lord, and believe that by faith in His power, the job can be accomplished.

Furthermore, it is by faith that we get our act together and start to clear the rubbish away. The more we live by faith, and the more we believe that only what's done for Christ will really count in the end, the less we'll struggle with clearing out the rubbish of material possessions, or selfish goals, or useless entertainment.

Fear contributed to the defeatist attitude in verse 12. Fear is also overcome by faith. If Nehemiah's workers had had more faith, they would have known that with their all-powerful God on their side, no one could defeat them! In the same way, without faith and trust, we doubt the promises of God - and then we're defeated. With faith we see that the outcome will always be in our favor. Remember - "one + God" is always a majority!

When we look with the eyes of faith, the enemy doesn't look like a giant! When we look with the eyes of faith, we're the giants and the enemies are the grasshoppers! If we walk more by faith, we will not be defeated by the "D" darts of Satan.

2. Remember - the halfway point is critical.

The wall was half way up (v6)! Wouldn't we think the workers would be excited by their progress? How could discouragement and doubt creep in? And yet it happened. It even started with Judah, the most notable tribe, whose emblem was the powerful lion.

Well, don't be surprised if doubt and discouragement creep into your life, too. And the "half way point" can be critical. Have you ever noticed that the halfway point is critical when you're climbing a mountain, or taking a long distance trip - or trying to clean a garage? On the one hand, you can be excited that you're already half done! But on the other hand - you're only half way! Your cleaning job, or your climb, or your trip is only half done, and there's still a long way to go. "Only half way" can be discouraging.

This is also true in spiritual wall building. You're encouraged and motivated to build the spiritual walls in your own life, and in your family life, and in your church - but don't let the "only half way" idea creep in! Don't be discouraged when you feel there is still so much work to do.

The Christian life is hard work, and there's a lot to do - but it's incredibly rewarding! More needs to be done in our lives. Don't let the "only half way" attitude discourage you.

Keep on building!