

A Story of New Beginnings: 1. Nothing is Impossible with God

Nehemiah 1:1-4a, 11b-2:5

July 3, 2022

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My father served proudly for over 25 years in the United States Public Health Service as a physical therapist. In his outpatient clinic in downtown San Diego, he treated enlisted and retired military personnel as well as their family members. I remember one day when I was in high school, him telling me a story about a patient he had treated that day who was a commander of a nuclear submarine. My dad asked him how long the submarine can stay underwater. The commander replied only 60-90 days. My dad asked, why do you come up? Do you run out of water? No, we have plenty of water. Do you run out of food? No, we have plenty of food. Does your oxygen run out? No, we make our own oxygen. That's not a problem. So, why do you have to come up? In this submarine, if we set course and are just a fraction of a degree off and then travel 2,000 to 3,000 miles, you can imagine how far off target we'd be. But because of the magnetic pull of the earth, we have to come up and recalibrate all of our instruments every 60-90 days. The only way to keep the submarine in line, is to come up, lock in on the north star, and then we triangulate with all of our satellites to make sure our instruments are calibrated and that we are exactly where we think we are. What he was saying was that even an advanced nuclear submarine, with all of its state of the art technology, still has to come to the surface once in a while and lock in on something outside itself that is known to be secure and true. You can't get where you're going if you don't know where you are.

And as I have been thinking, planning, and praying about this new season of ministry for Messiah Church, this story of the submarine coming to the surface and recalibrating its instruments keeps coming to mind. With all the challenges that have been a part of life over the past two years including COVID 19, the changes that are before our denomination, the growing political divisiveness in the country, inflation, the war in Ukraine, racial injustices, not to mention the retirement of our long-time, beloved pastor, I think it's time for us to come to the surface and do some recalibrations before we set off into this new season of ministry.

And what is the best way for this community of faith, to recalibrate? I believe it is for us to lock in on that thing outside of ourselves that we know to be secure and steadfast in turbulent times. And that is the Word of God. As we begin this new season and sermon series turn to the Old Testament story of Nehemiah to see how a mere mortal, just like you and me, was called by God to do something really big and his secret to success.

So, here's what's going on. About 722 years before Jesus' lifetime, the Jewish people were living in ten tribes in the Holy Land when this group of invaders called the Assyrians came in and took the 8 northern tribes, the Kingdom of Israel, and exiled them to Assyria around 900 miles away. Then about 114 years later, another group called the Babylonians came in and took the two remaining southern tribes, the Kingdom of Judah, and carted them off as well. The Jewish people were uprooted, enslaved and taken away to foreign lands. They were exiled far away from their way of worship, their way of life, their government, and their community. Everything they knew had been taken from them. As our story begins today, they had been displaced for a couple of hundred years.

This is when Nehemiah, a promising civil servant in the king of Persia's court, had God place on his heart a very unexpected and specific call, the rebuilding the walls around the city of Jerusalem. Now, Nehemiah would not be the first to lead exiles back to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, a prince, led the first wave of people and they worked on rebuilding the temple. And then Ezra, a priest, led the next wave and he focused on the spiritual health and well-being of the people's

hearts. What was unique about Nehemiah was that he was not a prince or a priest; he was a servant and a layman who worked as the king's personal cupbearer and a member of the king's inner circle. He was educated, cultured, and a trusted advisor to the king. And his job? It was to taste the wine and food before it was served to the king. I've always thought that would be a really great job until that one time it wasn't.

The story picks up as one of his brothers had returned from a trip to the Holy Land and reported that things were bad, really bad.

Hanani, one of my brothers, came with some other men from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had escaped and survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

They told me, "Those in the province who survived the captivity are in great trouble and shame! The wall around Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire!"

In other words, it's just a matter of time before others would come through and attack Jerusalem once again. This sets in motion the call that God placed on Nehemiah's heart to do something about it.

Nehemiah goes on, *"When I heard this news, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven."* What was Nehemiah's first reaction to this bad news? He mourned, fasted and he prayed! In fact, prayer is the overriding theme of this book and the secret to Nehemiah's success. In this short book made up of just 13 chapters, Nehemiah prays 12 different prayers. His first prayer, he prayed for 4 months, from the month of Kislev (December) when he first got the bad news about Jerusalem, to the month of Nisan (April). He didn't rush but took time to be with God and clarify his vision. The format of his prayer in verses 5-11 was simple. He followed ACTS prayer, a form of prayer that covers the 4 types of prayer and is still used today. Adoration. Confession. Thanksgiving and Supplication. This is the model that I use when I write my pastoral prayers for worship each week. If you ever want to pray and don't know where to start, you might want to consider this form.

Then after praying for 4 months, the king noticed a difference in his cupbearer's demeanor and asked about it. Did you notice Nehemiah's response? Verse 2:2 says that he was very much afraid! Someone told me once that if God's plans don't make you at least a little afraid, a little sick to your stomach, maybe those are not actually God's plans. But Nehemiah didn't allow his fear to paralyze him. He realized this was the opportunity to end his waiting period and begin acting on what God had placed on his heart. As so he **BOLDLY** asked for permission to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. And the king granted him his request.

Nehemiah led the third wave of exiles to return to Jerusalem. Although the rebuilding of the temple had been completed in 516, the city walls remained in shambles for the next 70 years. These walls represented the power and protection of Jerusalem. They were needed to fend off an attack and assure the continuance of the worship of God. We might ask, why didn't they just call in a work crew and get this project started? Didn't they believe that the God who brought them back home again had a plan for their future? It's easy for us to look back and say, "they should have done this or done that" but how many of us have difficulties today seeing a way out of our problems, especially those long-standing problems? We wonder, "Can God do anything about this? It's been going on for so long." And so instead, we learn to cope and to live among the shattered walls of our lives. The walls that Nehemiah was concerned about were made of bricks and mortar, but today walls can represent important things in our lives that have been shattered, things like family relationships, finances, health concerns, jobs that have deteriorated, or self-destructive habits that, like the exiled Jews, force us to give up on our hopes and dreams for a better future. So I ask you, what dreams have you given up on? You might be saying, "I

prayed a long time for that, and nothing happened,” or, “I’m too old now. I can’t do anything about this problem, so I just must learn to live with it.”

I have this bracelet that was given to me by my former congregation that has one of my life verses engraved on it. *“For I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope.”* This comes from the book of Jeremiah, written 140 years before Nehemiah. God was saying to these Jews who were being held captive “I’m going to take care of you. I’ve got a plan for you. Yes, you’re away from your homeland now but a time will come when I will bring you back to the land of your forefathers.” Well, Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah were the ones that God used to fulfill this promise. God said, I promised, and I always keep my promises. I am going to bring you back to the homeland, the temple, the city, the community, and the place I’ve made for you. *“For I know the plans I have in mind for you... to give you a future filled with hope.”*

God promises over and over again in the Bible to never leave us. Now God doesn’t promise that life is going to be easy but He does promise to walk with us during hard times, turbulent times, through life’s dark valleys, and yes, even in the ending of a season of life, God promises to lead us and never abandon us.

In December of 2020, when Pastor Steve shared with our leadership team that he would be retiring in July of 2022, I couldn’t help but begin wondering what this meant for me. I *knew* that I had been called to Messiah Church six years earlier to serve as your executive Pastor but now ...was I now being called to stay at Messiah Church (and in what role) or would there be a new opportunity in which for me to serve God. What I did know for sure was that God has been preparing my entire life to share the Word of God so to bring hope and healing to a hurting world and I was still fully committed to that call.

So in March of 2021, I went up north to a hermitage for a week of personal discernment and reflection. To be honest, when I set out on Sunday afternoon, I had no idea how I was going to fill my time. But what I found over the next few days was the space to be still, to listen, to read my Bible, to journal, to pray and to take long walks in the woods, as I sought to understand what it was that God was calling me to next. And what God placed on my heart, over and over again that week, was that I was prepared to lead Messiah Church *for such a time as this*. And over and over again, I was reminded of God’s promise to always be with me with the Holy Spirit as a guide and a comfort.

Last December, when the Cabinet asked for letters of interest from anyone interested in serving as your next lead pastor, I was ready. Today, I want to share with you my closing paragraph of that letter: *As the writer of the book of Esther might say, why do I believe I am the one for a time such as this? Messiah Church is at an important crossroads. It has had an amazing history and highly effective ministry during Steve’s leadership. That foundation will serve Messiah Church well. Looking ahead, it is critically important that there be a lead pastor who understands and articulates the current church culture especially at this moment (becoming hybrid church, facing a denomination split, and a renewed focus on being fully inclusive). I believe I have earned the trust of the congregation to cast the vision and lead into Messiah’s next generation.* Messiah Church, I truly believe we have a “future filled with hope” and endless opportunities to live into our mission of loving God, loving each other, and loving the world. But I also believe we are at a crossroads, a new season of life that must be bathed in prayer. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, a church also at a crossroads, said this: *“Don’t be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.”*

“For I know the plans I have in mind for you... to give you a future filled with hope.”

As we step into this new season of ministry at Messiah Church, I invite you join me in a renewed season of prayer. Like Nehemiah, let's make prayer the first thing we do. For those of you here in the sanctuary, as you leave worship today, you will be given this card with a Prayer for New Beginnings. (For those of you worshipping with us online, if you'd like to receive one of these prayer cards, just contact the church office and we will mail one to you.) Will you put this card in a place where you will see it every day, maybe on your refrigerator, or nightstand, or kitchen table and make a commitment to join me in praying this prayer with me every day? Let us lean into the example set by Nehemiah as we recalibrate our mission, putting first things first, locking into the Word of God, wrap this season in prayer and invite the Holy Spirit to guide us as we take a deep dive into this *new season* of ministry.

In closing today, I invite you to join me in praying this prayer for new beginnings: God of Love, we give you thanks and praise for your steadfast mercy, love and grace. Through faith, we trust that you are with us in all of life's transitions and change. We trust in your goodness and know that with each ending comes new beginnings. So, come, Holy Spirit, come. Guide, strengthen, and encourage us on the journey that lies before our Messiah Church family. It's the assurance of your unfailing love which enables us to trust you in every season of life. May your Word dwell in us richly, your peace rule in us powerfully, and may your glory be our main passion and greatest delight. In the powerful and precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 3, 2022

Weekly Prayer

God of Love, we give you thanks and praise for your steadfast mercy, love and grace. Through faith, we trust that you are with us in all of life's transitions and change. We trust in your goodness and know that with each ending comes new beginnings. So, come, Holy Spirit, come. Guide, strengthen, and encourage us on the journey that lies before our Messiah Church family. It's the assurance of your unfailing love which enables us to trust you in every season of life. May your Word dwell in us richly, your peace rule in us powerfully, and may your glory be our main passion and greatest delight. In the powerful and precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Monday, July 4

Scripture: Romans 14:1-23

Welcome the person who is weak in faith—but not in order to argue about differences of opinion. One person believes in eating everything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Those who eat must not look down on the ones who don't, and the ones who don't eat must not judge the ones who do, because God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else's servants? They stand or fall before their own Lord (and they will stand, because the Lord has the power to make them stand). One person considers some days to be more sacred than others, while another person considers all days to be the same. Each person must have their own convictions. Someone who thinks that a day is sacred, thinks that way for the Lord. Those who eat, eat for the Lord, because they thank God. And those who don't eat, don't eat for the Lord, and they thank the Lord too. We don't live for ourselves and we don't die for ourselves. If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to God. This is why Christ died and lived: so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. But why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you look down on your brother or sister? We all will stand in front of the judgment seat of God. Because it is written,

*As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me,
and every tongue will give praise to God.*

So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. So stop judging each other. Instead, this is what you should decide: never put a stumbling block or obstacle in the way of your brother or sister. I know and I'm convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is wrong to eat in itself. But if someone thinks something is wrong to eat, it becomes wrong for that person. If your brother or sister is upset by your food, you are no longer walking in love. Don't let your food destroy someone for whom Christ died. And don't let something you consider to be good be criticized as wrong. God's kingdom isn't about eating food and drinking but about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever serves Christ this way pleases God and gets human approval. So let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up. Don't destroy what God has done because of food. All food is acceptable, but it's a bad thing if it trips someone else. It's a good thing not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything that trips your brother or sister. Keep the belief that you have to yourself—it's between you and God. People are blessed who don't convict themselves by the things they approve. But those who have doubts are convicted if they go ahead and eat, because they aren't acting on the basis of faith. Everything that isn't based on faith is sin.

Observation

This is the 246th anniversary of the United States of America. Rather than united, our American politics seems to tear our nation apart. Early Christians struggled with intense disagreements about certain matters of faith: whether a Gentile convert had to be circumcised; whether Christians were bound by the Law, or free to live under grace; whether meat sold in the markets throughout the Empire, which had been slaughtered according to pagan practices, dedicated to the gods and goddesses, could be purchased and eaten by Christians; and a whole host of other issues. In our passage today Paul teaches Christians how to disagree on these issues.

Application

In the midst of great acrimony that develops during political campaigns, how can you as a Christian be a bridge builder and maintain the "unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace"?

Prayer

God of us all, help me to keep you foremost in my life. Help me to always consider the most loving response before speaking or acting. Give me a heart that will love even those with whom I disagree so that I might listen and learn. Amen.

Tuesday, July 5

Scripture: Nehemiah 1:1-4

These are the words of Nehemiah, Hachaliah's son. In the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in the fortress city of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came with some other men from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had escaped and survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They told me, "Those in the province who survived the captivity are in great trouble and shame! The wall around Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire!"

When I heard this news, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

For the next few weeks, we will read through the Old Testament book of Nehemiah.

Observation

Nehemiah was a loyal Jew, serving the imperial courts in Susa (Persian Empire). When he hears about the sad state of the community in Judah (Ezra had returned to Jerusalem 13 years earlier to begin reconstruction), Nehemiah determines to do something. When he gets to Jerusalem, he also takes action to deal with social and economic problems caused by poor harvests and the demands of imperial taxation.

Application

Nehemiah's heart was broken by what he heard. But before acting and before deciding that he would return to Jerusalem, verse 4 tells us what he did. "I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven." When has your heart been broken by what is happening in our community, our nation, our world, you thought, "Someone should do something." What if you devoted the next few days to prayer and fasting – seeking God's direction about what you should do?

Prayer

Almighty God, when I hear news of what's happening in the world and in the lives of friends and family, let my heart break in such a way that I turn to you, not for solace or an escape from the news, but to align my heart with yours. Use me, God, as you see fit to bring help and healing to others. Amen.

Wednesday, July 6

Scripture: Nehemiah 1:5-11a

I said: "LORD God of heaven, great and awesome God, you are the one who keeps covenant and is truly faithful to those who love you and keep your commandments. Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant, which I now pray before you night and day for your servants, the people of Israel. "I confess the sins of the people of Israel, which we have committed against you. Both I and my family have sinned. We have wronged you greatly. We haven't kept the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses. "Remember the word that you gave to your servant Moses when you said, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. But if you return to me and keep my commandments by really doing them, then, even though your outcasts live under distant skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place that I have chosen as a dwelling for my name.' They are your servants and your people. They are the ones whom you have redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. "LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in honoring your name. Please give success to your servant today and grant him favor in the presence of this man!"

Observation

This is the prayer of Nehemiah. He prays as someone who is committed to what he prays about, and he prays urgently to get God to take the action that only God can take. He also recognizes the failure of the people on whose behalf he prays.

Application

Nehemiah knows that the people for whom he prays have not been faithful to God. In other words, their actions may have contributed to the problems that they face. And Nehemiah also acknowledges that he, too, is part of the problem. But Nehemiah is prepared to say, "I am willing to do whatever you ask." When have you been ready to serve in response to a need? What would it take for you to say, "I am willing to do whatever you ask?"

Prayer

Gracious and all-powerful God, you are always faithful. I can always rely on your constant presence and unconditional love. May your love for me move me and empower me to live responsibly for your purposes. Let me seek this day to serve rather than to be served. Amen.

Thursday, July 7

Scripture: Nehemiah 1:11b - 2:10

“LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in honoring your name. Please give success to your servant today and grant him favor in the presence of this man!”

At that time, I was a cupbearer to the king. In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, the king was about to be served wine. I took the wine and gave it to the king. Since I had never seemed sad in his presence, the king asked me, “Why do you seem sad? Since you aren’t sick, you must have a broken heart!” I was very afraid and replied, “May the king live forever! Why shouldn’t I seem sad when the city, the place of my family’s graves, is in ruins and its gates destroyed by fire?” The king asked, “What is it that you need?” I prayed to the God of heaven and replied, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, please send me to Judah, to the city of my family’s graves so that I may rebuild it.” With the queen sitting beside him, the king asked me, “How long will you be away and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me, and I told him how long I would be gone. I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may letters be given me addressed to the governors of the province Beyond the River to allow me to travel to Judah. May the king also issue a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, directing him to supply me with timber for the beams of the temple fortress gates, for the city wall, and for the house in which I will live.” The king gave me what I asked, for the gracious power of my God was with me.

So I went to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king’s letters. The king had sent officers of the army and cavalry with me. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard this, they were very angry that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

Observation

Nehemiah is a man who prays. That was his first reaction to the bad news from Jerusalem. He knows he must do something, but he doesn’t have the means to address the problem. However, his position as cupbearer to the king (meaning, he tasted wine to be sure it was not poisoned) put him in contact with someone who could.

Application

There is something in the way that Nehemiah serves the King that leads the King to ask, “What is it that you need?” This is not a characteristic response from a king who is served. But, what the blessing that Nehemiah needs from the King will allow him safe passage when confronted by those who did not appreciate what Nehemiah was doing. We learn from Nehemiah the value of serving well and building relationships with those in authority. How does this apply to your life? Are there persons you have overlooked with whom you could build a better relationship?

Prayer

Search my heart, O God, and know my ways. Lead me this day to see the tasks before me as a way of serving you. Draw me closer to the persons in my work, in my family, in my church, and in my neighborhood that you may be present to strengthen my relationships with others. Amen.

Friday, July 8

Scripture: Nehemiah 2:11-3:14

When I reached Jerusalem and had been there for three days, I set out at night, taking only a few people with me. I didn't tell anyone what my God was prompting me to do for Jerusalem, and the only animal I took was the one I rode. I went out by night through the Valley Gate past the Dragon's Spring to the Dung Gate so that I could inspect the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down, as well as its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I went on to the Spring Gate and to the King's Pool. Since there was no room for the animal on which I was riding to pass, I went up by way of the valley by night and inspected the wall. Then I turned back and returned by entering through the Valley Gate.

The officials didn't know where I had gone or what I was doing. I hadn't yet told the Jews, the priests, the officials, the officers, or the rest who were to do the work. So I said to them, "You see the trouble that we're in: Jerusalem is in ruins, and its gates are destroyed by fire! Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we won't continue to be in disgrace." I told them that my God had taken care of me, and also told them what the king had said to me.

"Let's start rebuilding!" they said, and they eagerly began the work. But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and made fun of us. "What are you doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" "The God of heaven will give us success!" I replied. "As God's servants, we will start building. But you will have no share, right, or claim in Jerusalem." Then Eliashib the high priest set to work with his fellow priests and built the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set up its doors, then dedicated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred and as far as the Tower of Hananel. The people of Jericho built next to them, and Zaccur, Imri's son, built next to them. The children of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and set up its doors, bolts, and bars. Next to them Meremoth, Uriah's son and Hakkoz's grandson, made repairs. Meshullam, Berechiah's son and Meshezabel's grandson, made repairs next to them, and Zadok, Baana's son, made repairs next to them. Next to them the people from Tekoa made repairs, but their officials wouldn't help with the work of their supervisors.

Joiada, Paseah's son, and Meshullam, Besodeiah's son, repaired the Mishneh Gate; they laid its beams and set up its doors, bolts, and bars. Next to them repairs were made by Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, and the people of Gibeon and of Mizpah, who were ruled by the governor of the province Beyond the River. Uzziel, Harhaiah's son, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs next to them; and Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs next to him. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. Next to them Rephaiah, Hur's son, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. Next to them Jedaiah, Harumaph's son, made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush, Hashabneiah's son, made repairs next to him. Malchijah, Harim's son, and Hasshub, Pahath-moab's son, repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. Next to them Shallum, Hallohesh's son, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, along with his daughters. Hanun and the people of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate; they built it and set up its doors, bolts, and bars. They also repaired fifteen hundred feet of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate. Malchiah, Rechab's son, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set up its doors, bolts, and bars.

Observation

Nehemiah undertakes his survey by night, presumably because he knows Sanballat will be watching and because he wants to establish the dimensions of the project before he starts getting people involved in undertaking it. Everyone has a gift and their greater gift is working together to accomplish the reconstruction of the city wall.

Application

We also see that Nehemiah is not put off by opposition any more than by the magnitude of the task. What Nehemiah is doing threatens their interest in having control. However, Nehemiah's motive is not power and control, but simply honoring God. After all, Jerusalem belongs to God! When have you faced opposition as you were attempting to do the right thing? What can you learn from Nehemiah about moving forward even when facing opposition?

Prayer

Eternal Spirit, move within me so that what I do, today and every day, will honor you. Let that be my motive to serve. To you be all glory and honor and power. Amen.

Saturday, July 9

Scripture: Nehemiah 3:15-4:6

And Shallum, Col-hozeh's son, ruler of the Mizpah district, repaired the Spring Gate. He rebuilt and covered it, and set up its doors, bolts, and bars. He also built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the King's Garden, as far as the stairs that go down from David's City. After him, Nehemiah, Azbuk's son, ruler of half the Beth-zur district, repaired from the point opposite David's tombs as far as the artificial pool and the Warriors' House. After him, the Levites made repairs: Rehum, Bani's son, and next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, made repairs for his district. After him, their relatives made repairs: Binnui, Henadad's son, ruler of half the district of Keilah. Next to him, Ezer, Jeshua's son, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the Angle. After him, Baruch, Zabbai's son, thoroughly repaired another section from the Angle to the door of the house of the high priest Eliashib. After him, Meremoth, Uriah's son and Hakkoz's grandson, repaired another section from the door to the back of Eliashib's house. After him, the priests from the surrounding area made repairs. After them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite their house. After them, Azariah, Maaseiah's son and Ananiah's grandson, repaired beside his house. After him, Binnui, Henadad's son, repaired another section from the house of Azariah to the Angle and to the corner. Palal, Uzai's son, repaired from the point opposite the Angle and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him, Pedaiah, Parosh's son, and the temple servants living on Ophel made repairs up to the point opposite the Water Gate to the east and the projecting tower. After them, the people of Tekoa repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel. From the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each one opposite his own house.

After them, Zadok, Immer's son, made repairs opposite his own house. After him, Shemaiah, Shecaniah's son, the keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. After him, Hananiah, Shelemiah's son, and Hanun, Zalaph's sixth son, repaired another section. After them, Meshullam, Berechiah's son, made repairs opposite his own room. After him, Malchiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Parade Gate, and as far as the upper room at the corner. And between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.

When Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he became angry and raged. He mocked the Jews, saying in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria: "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore things themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the piles of rubble, even though they are burned?" Tobiah the Ammonite, who was beside him, added: "If even a fox climbs on whatever they build, their wall of stones will crumble." Listen, God; we are despised! Turn their insults to us back on their heads and make them like plunder in a captive land. Don't forgive their iniquity or blot out their sins from your sight. They have thrown insults at the builders! We continued to

build the wall. All of it was joined together, and it reached half of its intended height because the people were eager to work.

Observation

It might be a source of pride to point to something you have done and to say, "I did that – or, I built that!" But the list we are given in Nehemiah 2-3 indicates that everyone was involved. Together, they accomplished and in record time because they worked together.

Application

Again, it is Sanballat who scoffs at what Nehemiah is trying to accomplish. Nehemiah's response is a prayer for God's judgment. Is it okay to pray such a prayer? Yet, it is an honest prayer, an expression of the true emotion of being ridiculed. Haven't we all wanted God to judge those who taunt us? Nehemiah 4 does not say what God thought of this prayer, not does Sanballat end up dishonored and Nehemiah honored. But in the end, the wall will remain as God's claim on this place.

Prayer

Gracious God, hear the cries of my heart. When I have been hurt, accept the honest expression of my pain and respond in accordance with your will and not mine. Help me to find my greatest affirmation in your love for me. Amen.