

P A T I E N T E N D U R A N C E

Hand me another brick.

(4) "Under Attack; Don't be Distracted; Keep the First Thing the First Thing" HIGHLIGHT: Nehemiah 4 and 6 NLT

H

Below are excerpts from the overall passage for use with the APPLICATION and RESPOND. It will be beneficial for the group to read the whole passage to understand the entire context.

Nehemiah 4 (NLT)

vv. 1-23

1 Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuilding the wall. He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews, **2** saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers, "What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they're doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a single day by just offering a few sacrifices? Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?"

3 Tobiah the Ammonite, who was standing beside him, remarked, "That stone wall would collapse if even a fox walked along the top of it!"

4 Then I prayed, "Hear us, our God, for we are being mocked. May their scoffing fall back on their own heads, and may they themselves become captives in a foreign land! **5** Do not ignore their guilt. Do not blot out their sins, for they have provoked you to anger here in front of the builders."

6 At last the wall was completed to half its height around the entire city, for the people had worked with enthusiasm.

7 But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the work was going ahead and that the gaps in the wall of Jerusalem were being repaired, they were furious. **8** They all made plans to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw us into confusion. **9** But we prayed to our God and guarded the city day and night to protect ourselves.

10 Then the people of Judah began to complain, "The workers are getting tired, and there is so much rubble to be moved. We will never be able to build the wall by ourselves."

11 Meanwhile, our enemies were saying, "Before they know what's happening, we will swoop down on them and kill them and end their work."

12 The Jews who lived near the enemy came and told us again and again, "They will come from all directions and attack us!" **13** So I placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas. I stationed the people to stand guard by families, armed with swords, spears, and bows.

14 Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the nobles and the rest of the people and said to them, "Don't be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes!"

15 When our enemies heard that we knew of their plans and that God had frustrated them, we all returned to our work on the wall. **16** But from then on, only half my men worked while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. The leaders stationed themselves behind the people of Judah **17** who

were building the wall. The laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon. **18** All the builders had a sword belted to their side. The trumpeter stayed with me to sound the alarm.

19 Then I explained to the nobles and officials and all the people, “The work is very spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. **20** When you hear the blast of the trumpet, rush to wherever it is sounding. Then our God will fight for us!”

21 We worked early and late, from sunrise to sunset. And half the men were always on guard. **22** I also told everyone living outside the walls to stay in Jerusalem. That way they and their servants could help with guard duty at night and work during the day. **23** During this time, none of us—not I, nor my relatives, nor my servants, nor the guards who were with me—ever took off our clothes. We carried our weapons with us at all times, even when we went for water.

Nehemiah 6 (NLT)

vv. 1-19

1 Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies found out that I had finished rebuilding the wall and that no gaps remained—though we had not yet set up the doors in the gates. **2** So Sanballat and Geshem sent a message asking me to meet them at one of the villages in the plain of Ono.

But I realized they were plotting to harm me, **3** so I replied by sending this message to them: “I am engaged in a great work, so I can’t come. Why should I stop working to come and meet with you?”

4 Four times they sent the same message, and each time I gave the same reply. **5** The fifth time, Sanballat’s servant came with an open letter in his hand, **6** and this is what it said:

“There is a rumor among the surrounding nations, and Geshem tells me it is true, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel and that is why you are building the wall. According to his reports, you plan to be their king. **7** He also reports that you have appointed prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim about you, ‘Look! There is a king in Judah!’

“You can be very sure that this report will get back to the king, so I suggest that you come and talk it over with me.”

8 I replied, “There is no truth in any part of your story. You are making up the whole thing.”

9 They were just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us and stop the work. So I continued the work with even greater determination.

10 Later I went to visit Shemaiah son of Delaiah and grandson of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home. He said, “Let us meet together inside the Temple of God and bolt the doors shut. Your enemies are coming to kill you tonight.”

11 But I replied, “Should someone in my position run from danger? Should someone in my position enter the Temple to save his life? No, I won’t do it!” **12** I realized that God had not spoken to him, but that he had uttered this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. **13** They were hoping to intimidate me and make me sin. Then they would be able to accuse and discredit me.

14 Remember, O my God, all the evil things that Tobiah and Sanballat have done. And remember Noadiah the prophet and all the prophets like her who have tried to intimidate me.

15 So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. **16** When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God.

17 During those fifty-two days, many letters went back and forth between Tobiah and the nobles of Judah.

18 For many in Judah had sworn allegiance to him because his father-in-law was Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. **19** They kept telling me about Tobiah’s good deeds, and then they told him everything I said. And Tobiah kept sending threatening letters to intimidate me.

EXPLAIN

The purpose of this section is to deepen everyone's understanding of the Word.

The key verse of chapters 4 and 6 is 6:9—"They were just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us and stop the work. So I continued the work with even greater determination." Every work of God will find opposing forces threatening to destroy it (see *1 Peter 5:8-9; Ephesians 6:10-12; 1 Corinthians 15:58*). It was so from the beginning (*Genesis 3:1-7*). Perhaps the rage of Satan against God has never been demonstrated as at the Birth of Jesus (see *Matthew 2*).

Nehemiah 4

vv.1-5 Nehemiah has joined his heart to God, Who desires His glory to be restored by rebuilding Jerusalem. It is a difficult task made even more difficult by the opposition of **Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and Samaritan army officers**. This opposition is not just a matter of preference, it is a political move *against* Israel.

vv.6-14 Nehemiah recognizes the toll this is having on his people and he **prays** as he has done from the beginning of the project. The intensity of the attacks don't let up. Then there's the added fatigue and constant threat of physical injury—but **the wall is built to half its height**. And Nehemiah constantly encourages his people by strategic planning and directing his people to **remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes**. Don't get distracted! Keep the main thing the main thing.

vv.15-23 Nehemiah knew his enemies were relentless. Trusting God would help hold back his fear, but it would take measured strategy to defeat the enemy. **Half the men worked while half the men stood guard**. *Laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon. The builders had a sword belted to their side.* Nehemiah and his workers didn't go looking for a fight, but they were "wise as serpents" in carrying out the project.

Nehemiah 6

vv.1-9 The walls had been built—though the gates and doors were not completed. The threats of Nehemiah's enemies were turning personal and vicious. Nehemiah always "slept with one eye open." He realized **Sanballat and Geshem were plotting to harm [him]**. But he would not give in to their intimidation. He was living by the power of purpose: **I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come. Why should I stop working to come and meet with you** (v.3)? The power of purpose to lift you above the everyday frustrations of life. The power of purpose to lift you above the Enemy of your soul. The power of purpose to create **an even greater determination** when you are facing hostilities. *I am doing a great work and I cannot come down! I WILL NOT come down!* Have you allowed God to engage you in a work so noble and powerful that nothing can bring you down? The most excited people in any project are those who are on the front lines—the ones with sweat in their eyes, blisters on their hands, and mortar on their clothes. They are the ones who will never come down to the low road, but are always on the wall yelling, "Hand me another brick!" Have you allowed God to give you a purpose that is so noble that all you can say is, "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down to you, o my enemy"?

vv.10-19 The wall around Jerusalem was **finished in 52 days!** God was making sure His name would be glorified again in Israel. But He had a man of such character in Nehemiah that the people rallied behind him. **Should someone in my position run from danger** (v.11)? Nehemiah was not boasting about himself. This whole project was based on prayer: his dependence on God to get the job done from first to last. Maybe Nehemiah had heard about those brave young men in Babylon before him: Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego. With the threat of death they cried out to Nebuchadnezzar, "We do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if He doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up" (*Daniel 3:16-18*). God's people never run from danger because He is the God above all gods!

APPLY

A

Be comfortable with some silence as people think back to the sermon or reread the text. Answer honestly. You don't have to answer every question.

1. What stuck out to you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. In what way(s) do people oppose God's work today, like they did in Nehemiah's day?
3. What can we learn from Nehemiah and his responses to this opposition?
4. What was the result of the people's faithfulness to God and the work that needed to be done? How did God respond and what does that say about God's power and character?

RESPOND

R

The purpose of this section is to take action with the truths you're learning. Answer honestly. Find someone who will hold you accountable to living out your response to Scripture.

1. Meditate on the commitment Nehemiah and the people had to God's work. What is God's work for his people today? Journal about your own focus on God's work.

Are you easily distracted by the things of this world? Easily detracted by opposition?

2. The work of the wall being built was accomplished, both due to the people's faithfulness and with the help of the Lord. Take a moment to reflect on God's glory and power. How has God helped you?

Write out a prayer of thankfulness to God for the ways you have seen him work. If you are having a hard time finding a place to start, reflect upon your salvation.