

I. Introduction:

- A. As Bible-based Baptists we believe **Romans 15:4** – *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written – for our **LEARNING** – that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*
1. When studying through a book as we are doing, one of my responsibilities is to determine – what is the Lord’s lesson for us?
 2. I am to try to explain, as best I can, what the scripture says, and then I am to make a proper application.
 3. I don’t know what you see when **you** read **this** chapter, but there **is** a **theme** which jumps out at **me**.
 4. I see groups of people doing their best to **discourage** Nehemiah and the work of rebuilding the city walls.
- B. With this as at least one theme, the next challenge is to make an application to ourselves.
1. To that regard, as I’ve said in earlier messages, I think we can use Jerusalem and its walls as an analogy.
 2. We can look at Jerusalem as a picture of our local church and its various responsibilities under the Lord.
 3. We are to **glorify** God, **defend** the truth, **evangelize** the lost, **strengthen** our own hearts and so on.
 4. We all know our Christ’s commission to us – *“All power is given unto me in Heaven and in earth,*
 - a. *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*
 - b. *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*
 5. The world, the flesh and the devil have a great many tools they use to discourage us in this and every other God-commissioned ministry.
- C. I think we can apply what we see in the work of discouragement towards Nehemiah – to us as a church.
1. But there is room to make **personal applications** as well.
 2. We all have a spiritual enemy who does not want us to grow in Christ.
 3. And the world wants us to drop our eyes from looking Heavenward to staring at all that **it** has to offer.
 4. The devil loves to encourage disobedience and inactivity in Christians – and to even cause fear.
 5. Is there any fear in Christendom today? There shouldn’t be, but sadly, there is.
- D. See if you recognize that application as we read the chapter expositively, before getting to a brief sermonic outline.

II. Exposition.

- A. **Verse 1** – *“Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief.”*
1. The plain of Ono was just to the north, in the tribe of Benjamin, between Jerusalem and Samaria.
 2. Did Sanballat and Tobiah tell Nehemiah what the **pretended** purpose of the meeting was?
 3. They probably said something, but their **intended** victim knew better – they actually intended mischief.
 4. At the very least, those men wanted to slow or stop the finishing of the walls.
 5. Those walls might have been used to keep them out of the city and away from their lucrative contacts.
 6. So they tried to cut off the leader, the head; they thought to do Nehemiah some personal mischief.
 7. **“Mischief”** – twenty times more often, that word **“mischief”** is translated **“evil”** or **“wickedness.”**
 8. If they got Nehemiah alone, away from his body-guards they were not above murdering him.
 9. Is it possible that Satan would ever think you were a sufficient treat to him that he’d want you dead?
- B. *“And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner.”*
1. The word **“great”** means, among other things, **“important.”**

2. Nehemiah was serving the Lord, and that was important. True God-glorifying service is always important.
3. Some Christian servants are easily diverted from the Lord's work, but not Nehemiah.
4. He is not saying that the work would cease entirely, but at the very least his part and those of his personal servants would stop. And generally speaking, the workers on the wall needed his constant encouragement
5. But notice how persistent the enemy is. What if we were as persistent in God's work as the devil is in his?

- C. *"Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand;*
1. *Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words.*
 - a. *And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words.*
 - b. *Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together."*
 2. This time Sanballat changes his tactics.
 - a. It needs to be remembered that God's enemy is amoral – he has no scruples, limits or bounds.
 - b. Slander, lies and gossip are among his wiles – the tools on his work-belt.
 3. This is like that phone call which tells you the IRS is upset with you, and tomorrow your bank account will be seized unless you call the number they give you – it's a scam.
 4. Sanballat suggests that they meet in order to prepare a defense to present to King Artaxerxes.
 5. But the whole thing was manufactured in the imagination of **the BAD Samaritan**.
 6. *"Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart."*
- D. What was the purpose of the lie? Its purpose was fear and the disruption which results from fear.
1. *"For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done."*
 2. Elsewhere we read, *"The fear of man bringeth a snare: BUT whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe."*
 3. Nehemiah's trust was in the Lord, *"Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands."*
 4. Fear has been moved to the top of Sanballat's list of tools, and he has tried to use it in several ways.
 - a. He threatened to send his army. He forced the workers to carry weapons along with their tools.
 - b. He puffed himself up like some animal to make himself look bigger than God.
 - c. His threats and bluffing were nothing, but that didn't keep some people from fearfully staying home from the work.
 - d. Both the slothful man and the fearful man say *"There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets."*
- E. **Verse 10** – *"Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee."*
1. I cannot adequately explain how it was that Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem had so many friends among the Jews, but they did.
 - a. I **do** know that their families had inter-married several times, so wives and children were involved.
 - b. And it is highly likely there were financial ties between some of the wealthy inside and outside the walls.
 - c. Some of those **Jews were paid** to harass Nehemiah, and others were **probably serving** the heathen based upon **promises of reward**.
 2. This Shemaiah was *"shut up,"* but why?
 - a. Some say that he was a religious man who had sequestered himself religious reasons – vows.
 - b. He had locked himself in his house lest the virus get him.
 - c. Others think that he was pretending to be overcome with the virus of fear, and was purposely trying to infect Nehemiah.
 3. The point is, don't be surprised then Satan uses religious and ostensibly spiritual men to draw you away from your service of the Lord. Stay focused. Remember who your Master is.

F. Be like Nehemiah.

1. *"I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in."*
2. If you will remember, built into the outer walls surrounding the temple were rooms and apartments.
3. Some of them were use to store equipment and even the wealth of God and the former kings.
4. And the priests who served in temple for several weeks at a time, stayed in these apartments.
5. Apparently Shemaiah had access to some of these rooms, and he encouraged Nehemiah to join him.
6. They would be protected from outsiders, **but** they would also have been kept from the work on the wall.

G. *"And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him."*

1. *Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me."*
2. How was Nehemiah able to discern between his true friends and those who were not?
3. How could he spot the lies?
4. It is reasonable to assume, from many places in this book, that Nehemiah was a man of prayer.
5. It is reasonable to assume that the Holy Spirit led him, giving him discernment.
6. And time proved the true nature of these people.

H. **Verse 14** is an example of Nehemiah's incessant attitude of prayer.

1. *"My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear."*
2. The words *"think thou"* are the same that Nehemiah used at the end of previous chapter.
3. *"Think upon me, my God for good" – "remember me."*
4. Remember the evil deeds of Tobiah and Sanballat on the outside and people like Noadiah on the inside.

I. *"So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days."*

1. *And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God."*
2. What a crushing revelation to the wicked that Elohim is truly God.
3. We are reminded: you who have not yet humbled yourselves before Him will have to do so at some point.
4. May it not be too late.
5. But the sad fact is illustrated in these heathen men – that despite knowing Jehovah is God; they didn't yet humble themselves before Him.
6. They will – you will. At the time of judgment – *"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

J. **Verse 17** – *"Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear."*

1. How many people worked on the wall reluctantly, hiding their true allegiance?
2. How many worked on the wall because it was the thing to do, when in reality their hearts were with the enemy?
3. How many Christians go through the motions of serving the Lord in His churches, whose hearts are really firmly planted in the world?

4. How many current church members, after having gone 3 or 4 months without meeting in the house of God, will not return to church when the doors swing wide?
5. Wicked Sanballat and Tobiah had many allies **within** the castle of Jerusalem.
6. Remember, Satan can raise up enemies against you who are currently standing next to you in church.

III. With that as our introduction let's quickly consider a 5 point outline on the business of discouragement.

A. Discouragement can be **intentional** or **unintentional**.

1. Obviously, it was the intention of Sanballat to slow, stop or destroy the rebuilding of the wall.
 - a. When he heard the work was nearly finished he pushed even harder to get Nehemiah out of the way.
 - b. Invitations were sent, gossip was devised and spread, and diversions were created.
2. In our lives **intentional** discouragement **sometimes arises**.
3. I have seen in within families, when one member declares that he is going to be more diligent in serving the Lord and others try to dissuade him.
4. I have even seen in it churches when someone suggests a different, but still Biblical way, of serving and glorifying our King.

B. But far more often, discouragement comes **unintentionally** or **incidentally**.

1. You have befriended a lost person in hopes of bringing him to the Lord, but another person says, based on his experience, that you are wasting your time.
2. He doesn't try to stop you, but he casts a discouraging cloud over your intended service.
3. Maybe someone tells you politely not to sing so loud, because your voice doesn't blend well with the congregation.
4. Or you are working on a project for the glory of the Lord, and someone points to some of its flaws.
5. These people aren't deliberately trying to cool your heart, but they do so nevertheless.

C. Christian, you should fear becoming a tool in Satan's work of discouragement.

1. Your negative attitude can have a wicked effect on someone else.
2. You've had an argument with your spouse and you bring that in to God's worship service, hindering the work of the Holy Spirit that day.
3. Even a facial expression can silence the effort of a young Christian in his serve of the Lord.

D. Discouragement can come from an **external source** or it might develop **internally**.

1. In this case, these attacks upon Nehemiah came from Samaria and other sources.
2. But isn't it true that the seeds of dissuasion and discouragement already lay dormant in our hearts?
3. The flesh is no friend of grace to help us on to God. It doesn't take much to chill our hearts.
4. When we get **weary and tired**, it doesn't take much to get us off track.
5. And no matter how strong our **faith** in the Lord was yesterday, it may vanish overnight.

E. Discouragement can arise **externally**, **internally** or even **adjacently**.

1. Nehemiah was anticipating trouble from the Samaritan and Arabian, but perhaps not from his neighbors.
2. There was Shemaiah, who may have been a priest and with access to the temple.
3. And **"moreover in those days the nobles of Judah"** were in fellowship with Tobiah and Sanballat.
4. Just knowing that some of the professed saints were not who they professed to be was potentially disheartening to the man of God.

F. Discouragement can be of a **short duration**, or it can be **long term**.

1. I suppose that anyone can loose heart or loose their enthusiasm for the work of the Lord.
2. But it is our job to make sure if that does raise its ugly head we lop it off quickly before it does more permanent damage.
3. This current environment of virus-fear is going to have long term effects, if we don't stop it within us.

- G. Discouragement can be **defamatory** in character and even **degrading**.
1. *"It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together."*
 2. Gossip is a powerful Satanic weapon. It is often used against the people of God.
 3. Paul speaks of it frequently enough to tell us that it is not uncommon.
 4. And unfortunately there is no need for the gossipy stories to be even close to the truth.
 - a. Look at Ziba's lies about Mephibosheth.
 5. The enemy may create false stories, with the intention of disabling the work of God in a person's life.
- H. But learn from Nehemiah's response the Gashmu's lie.
1. Or was even **that** a lie of Sanballat, and Gashmu was innocent?
 2. Learn from Mephibosheth who refused to be affected by the lies of Ziba.
 3. In Nehemiah's case, he chose not to address it.
 - a. Sometimes trying to quash wicked gossip does more harm than good.
 - b. Right or wrong, as Shakespeare said, *"The lady doth protest too much, me thinks."*
 4. Sadly sometimes, Christians leave the door open to potential gossip.
 - a. We need to be transparent. Our yea, must be yea and our nay, nay.
 - b. When you don't need to be alone with another person's spouse, don't be alone, lest the unbridled tongues begin to wag.
- I. Discouragement might be designed to **directly stop you**, or it might be simply **diversional**.
1. When the work first began, Sanballat's attacks were direct; his threats were sharply pointed.
 2. But when Nehemiah couldn't be deterred with those, the enemy turned to diversion.
 - a. *"Why don't you take a day off and come to Ono for a cup of coffee?"*
 - b. *"You are working too hard Nehemiah, you deserve a break, a little vacation, even if the job isn't finished."*
 3. Christian, if the job isn't finished, and it could be easily concluded, then keep on working.
 4. There is time for coffee later. There is an eternity for resting and rejoicing.
- J. Most of us have lots of responsibilities, some of which are more important than others.
1. How low, or high, on the list are your spiritual responsibilities?
 2. Sanballat says, *"You have far too much to do today to spend any time in Bible reading and prayer."*
 3. *"Isn't your lawn getting a little long and ragged. Stay home from the preaching service tonight and get a little of this house work done."*
- K. As I have said, Satan is amoral, which means he has no rules, no code, no admission of evil.
1. When he fights, it is without limits. It is dirty.
 2. And as Bro. Austin said this morning, he never quits.
 3. Furthermore, the devil has been around opposing God's saints for a very long time.
 4. He can spot our weaknesses more quickly than a hawk can see a mouse on an empty the four-lane.
 5. And he knows how prone we are to discouragement.
- L. Don't give him an edge.
1. He can have no access when we are in fellowship with the Lord.
 2. Nehemiah said, *"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."*
 3. He said, *"Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands."*
 4. The work of the Lord – combined with the fellowship of the Lord – will defeat Satan every time.