

Nehemiah Chapters 3-4 John Karmelich

1. Does God care about all individuals who make an effort for Him? Chapter 3 is essentially a list of names of those who helped to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. What I pondered as I read all those names was, "Why does God want us to know all these details? Will there be a quiz in heaven for us to take on such details? Will He say to us, name some or all of the people who worked on this wall?" Don't think that's the point for having all that text. I think it's simply a way of saying God cares who's using their lives to make a difference for Him. To list the everyday "Joe Blow's" who worked on building the wall around Jerusalem is God's way of saying He cares about those who want to use their lives to make a difference for Him.
 - a) OK John, I'm already using my life to make a difference for Jesus. I don't seek publicity, I just do my part and let it go at that! Then think of Chapter 3 as a biblical validation that it is being noticed by God. If it's important enough to list all the people working on building the walls around Jerusalem (which were torn down and rebuilt since then), then realize it is also important to God whatever you and I are doing to make a difference for Him.
 - b) Let's be honest building a wall isn't as "sexy" as leading people to Christ or using our lives to teach people His word or even singing on stage at a church. Again, it is our willingness to use our lives for His glory and "chip in" even if it's not what we're crazy about doing at that particular moment. Let's be honest, all of these names would barely qualify to be on a "bible trivia contest", yet they get a whole chapter in the bible.
 - c) If we don't have to memorize these names, why should we study the details here? What's in it for us? To contemplate how ordinary people were willing to give some of their time for God's use. It is to realize, if they can do it, so can I. Were these people experts on how to build a wall or gates for the walls? Doubt it. Given that these people are listed as being perfumers, priests, and other professions, these were not professional builders. Let it was a time for people to pitch in for a project that needed to be done. I doubt any of them had a spiritual gift of building. They just did it as it needed to be done, so they volunteered of their time and got it done. If you see that, you see a model for how God wants us use our lives to make a difference for Him. For that thought alone Chapter 3 is worth studying.
2. With any good project, there comes problems. That's Chapter 4 in one thought. There were some people in the area who didn't want this wall built. The reason is simply that there were people in the area who were non-religious Jews who don't want them using their lives for God's glory. The fact that they opposed the wall building was symbolic of the fact some people resent the idea of a person or group using their lives for God. Why? Because physical signs of God's existence makes us remember that we're all accountable to Him. It's not enough that they "let us be". They need to oppose God's work because any physical sign of His working in the world is a reminder to them of their guilt before Him.
 - a) To put it another way, God created us with a built in desire to worship Him and seek Him as God. We can suppress that desire as we go through our lives. Seeing people using their lives to glorify God gives others a sense of guilt and thus opposition arises. That's the key issue that goes on in Chapter 4.
 - b) The Chapter opens with some protests and complaining. We get reintroduced to those in power in that area who oppose the project. We get insults of people working the wall and we get threats against the workers.
 - c) The Israelites building the walls didn't stop just because there was opposition. We read of them "sticking on task". Yes we get prayers to stop the opposition, which is the first thing we should do when a work of God gets into problems. In this case, the opposition could organize physical fighting against the builders. Therefore before one gets into taking that fight to the next level, first the situation needs to be taken to God so pray about how they are to deal with it. That comes clear in Chapter 4.

3. Chapter 4 is an interesting study in making a difference for God and dealing with opposition for a task like that. The chapter starts off with insults, prayers to God to stop the enemies, more insults, and then we read of the Israelites taking up weapons to defend themselves in case the opponents decide to get physical. There is no physical battle in this chapter. I suspect between the orders by the king to build it plus the Israelites taking up defense weapons as they worked was enough for them to get it done.
- a) All of this leads to some interesting questions: If we're using our lives to make a difference for Him and we get opposition to our work, is it ok to take up weapons? Are we winning any converts by our willingness to fight for what's right? In fact, the prayers stated in this chapter by the Israelites pretty much call for God to "pay them back" for the insults they're heaping at the Israelites. So my question in effect is what's acceptable behavior as we use our lives for His kingdom? Some thoughts;
 - i) First let me quote two lines from the Psalms: "The Lord tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence" (Psalm 11:5) and "You who love the Lord, hate evil!" (Psalm 97:10).
 - ii) It sounds strange that God tells us to hate those who love violence yet in Chapter 4 we read of the Israelites with weapons in their hands to combat the violence.
 - iii) Keep in mind that when Jesus went to the Mount of Olives for the final time, recall He said to His disciples that "two swords is enough". While nothing good came in the use of those swords, my simple point is Jesus does condone violence when it is to defend ourselves. Being a Christian is not about being a "pansy" and letting the opposition walk all over us so to speak. Grant it, peaceful solutions are always the best and yes we must show love to people to win them to Christ.
 - iv) My simple point is the bible does condone violence as a form of defense when that situation calls for it, that's all.
 - v) That leads to the second Psalm reference (97:10): To love God is to hate evil. I'd say it's safe to say that God wanted Jerusalem rebuilt. It's where He desires His people to gather to worship Him. God's "arms around us" is symbolic of His protection as we live to make a difference for Him. Therefore, taking up arms to stop those who want to stop God's plans is a biblical concept that has to be applied at times.
 - vi) So are we being a good witness for Jesus, if we're trying to harm those who desire to hurt us? Yes, (if necessary of course) as we're showing we're willing to stand up for what we believe is the Gospel truth and even defend that to the death!
 - b) Let me modernize it. Suppose we're doing some project as Christians to spread the Gospel or some sort of building project as a Christian body. What if government officials say that is illegal. Do we continue? Wisdom is needed. I have known of Christian missionaries in places where to preach the Gospel is illegal, but they went anyway. Sometimes if caught it is necessary to back off and other times we may have to fight for our own survival. All we can do is pray for wisdom. I'm just saying defending ourselves is an option and if taking a stand for God may require such an action in defensive situations.
4. Well, that I just went off on a strange tangent! Chapter 4 deals with having to stand up for what we believe is right. Even when other Israelites (like we'll read in this chapter) tell people building to stop as it's life threatening. These Israelites chose to continue working, fully armed as the continued to do the work God called them to do. Yes it's a tough topic and there is no perfect answer for every situation. I'm just stating all of this to understand our options.
5. Oh, I never gave my title, "Doing a good work for God and understanding what that entails" is as good as I can get as I think about these chapters. Yes it's tough stuff and yes, even boring as we'll a bunch of names of people long dead. As I like to state, I believe the issue isn't to memorize a bunch of names as to learn who were the people building the wall. It's the principals for Christian living that God cares about and we get a lot here about helping out in a needed project as well as a willingness to fight for what is right. OK then, onto the verse-by-verse commentary.

6. Chapter 3, Verse 1: Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. ² The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them.
- a) As I stated in the introduction, Chapter 3 is essentially a list of names and what they did to rebuild the wall. Some of the names included where they lived or what town they are from. Some list their profession. In summary it's a big collection of "nobodies" who made an effort to make a difference for God.
 - b) Guess who's name is missing in this Chapter? Notice Nehemiah doesn't say, I got busy as I lead the procession to build the wall. Don't get me wrong. I suspect Nehemiah did pray as it was being built or went from area to area to check on supplies, see the progress. Yes I believe Nehemiah was very much a part of this project, yet his name isn't listed as those who worked on the thing. I see it as an act of humility. Ezra, who I believe wrote this is a man who loves to give credit where credit is due. If you recall, the last chapter of the book of Ezra ended with a bunch of names of men who married foreign wives. That chapter is a list of those men who repented and turned from wives who could potentially lead them to worship other deities, so in effect that book ended in repentance.
 - c) Now here are these everyday people who lived in and near Jerusalem working together to build the city wall.
 - d) With that said, I'll give a few details about the construction, but truly I don't think that's as important as simply the fact these men listed were willing to work to make a difference in that community for God.
 - e) Time to share a personal story that fits in here. When I was a young, not long after I gave my life to Jesus, my church at that time was involved in a building church as they moved from a place they were renting to a place they bought. The first step required a bunch of volunteers to help tear down the old building. I knew nothing about construction. I came from a father who wasn't handy around the house! Still I showed up. I remember telling the head pastor there, I don't know anything about construction. Just give me something I can do and I'll help out. He at that moment singled me out in front of that whole group just to say, "That's the kind of attitude we're looking for around here!" I barely remember what I did, but my ego was riding high for that compliment. I did not bring up that story to brag, but to show the kind of attitude I see on this project. These were not professional builders but those who wanted to help glorify God and got involved in that project.
 - f) Anyway, the writer started with the high priest. He got his "hands dirty" and worked on the "Sheep Gate". The Old City of Jerusalem had a number of gates to enter the city each with a different name. The "Sheep gate" is where the sheep were brought in to the Temple to be slaughtered for sacrifices. It was appropriate the head priest worked on that one.
 - g) If you care, we're going to go counter clockwise around the city. We're going to mention a bunch of gates and sections by name. Again, I'm not going to quiz you on all this stuff. It's more important to see the big picture of everyday people using their lives to glorify God. If you see that the rest is trivial in comparison.
 - h) Anyway, the high priests along with his fellow priests not only rebuilt the gate itself, but a good section of the wall from location "a" (OK, the Tower of the Hundred) to location "b", (The Tower of Hananel).
 - i) Next to them (again going counter clockwise) men from the city of Jericho built. That city was 16 miles away via a winding hillside road, so they get some credit for volunteering as they traveled there to help.
 - j) Next to him a man named Zaccur was singled out for working next to him. The chapter is going to follow this pattern as we work our way clockwise around the city. I'll try to keep my facts brief and try to discuss the interesting things that may be relevant to us using the time we have for His glory. OK, let's continue:

7. Verse 3: The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. ⁴ Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs. ⁵ The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.
- a) The next gate mentioned is the "fish gate". It faces was toward the direction of the Sea of Galilee. The idea is fish were sold at this gate that were brought there. Anyway the sons of a man were mentioned for rebuilding the gate itself. Then were have a few more who were named for repairing the walls. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem over 150 years earlier, I doubt every section of the wall was burned to the ground. There were parts of the old walls standing and that's what the repairs referred to.
 - b) Verse 5 should give us a chuckle. It mentions those who worked on repairing another part of the wall and the "nobility" who thought they were above that! Imagine if you had your name in the bible as one who refused to work. Assuming they made it to heaven, that is a good example of how one can lose eternal rewards. My guess is the nobility "sweep up" in heaven while the workers get a great reward. The obvious lesson is to never be "above" a job God calls us to do.
8. Verse 6: The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. ⁷ Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah--Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meronoth--places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. ⁸ Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. ⁹ Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section. ¹⁰ Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him. ¹¹ Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. ¹² Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.
- a) The Jeshanah Gate is also known as the "old city" gate as it lead to an older part of the city of Jerusalem. Verse 6 gives the names of those who worked on it.
 - b) Verse 7 mentioned men from Gibeon. Way back in the book of Joshua, there was a group of men called the Gibeonites. They lived in Israel and lied to the Israelites as to where they lived. Because Joshua didn't "check it out" he gave his word to protect them. Here we are many hundreds of years later and the town of Gibeon still stood. Don't know if they were Israelites and this was the "town name" or Gibeonites, but after all those years they cared about the Israelites and God's temple and wanted it rebuilt.
 - c) The application for you and me is we don't have to be Christians for "x number of years" before we can be of service to God. Even if we're associated with "liars" and we make the type of commitment God desires, we can be used for his service.
 - d) In Verse 10, we get men building walls next to their homes. It shows that some came from a good distance away (Jericho) and some worked next to where they lived.
 - e) Verse 11 mentions men who repaired another section and another tower. I suspect it was called the "tower of ovens" as there were stoves in or near that tower. More trivia!
 - f) Just to show that not all the leaders were "above" getting their hands dirty, Verse 12 states that the ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem helped out with a section.
 - g) Yes I'm painfully aware this is getting boring, and we're only a third of the way through it but all of this has a purpose. It's not just to learn names or learn the names of places in the old city of Jerusalem. It's to show that people from different backgrounds, different cities, and even different professions were willing to work together to make a difference for God on a project that many of us might think is beneath us or "we do not know anything about construction, so let's leave this to the professionals to do!

9. Verse 13: The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. They also repaired five hundred yards of the wall as far as the Dung Gate.¹⁴ The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Recab, ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem. He rebuilt it and put its doors and bolts and bars in place.
- a) If you didn't know Jerusalem is essentially up on top of a hill and is surrounded by a few valleys. One of the gates toward the southwest leads out to one of the valleys. Another of the gates was called the "Dung" gate. Yes the sewer equivalent ran there and the trash was taken there. Can you imagine bragging about "I worked on the sewer gate"? Talk about a low man on the totem pole job! Yet his eternal rewards are as equal to someone working on the "Sheep" gate or any other section. It simply shows that whatever job God calls us to do, it's for Him, so do it well and let Him "lift you up" to a higher responsibility. Do all we can for Him no matter what we're called to do!
10. Verse 15: The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun son of Col-Hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah. He rebuilt it, roofing it over and putting its doors and bolts and bars in place. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam, by the King's Garden, as far as the steps going down from the City of David.¹⁶ Beyond him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of a half-district of Beth Zur, made repairs up to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool and the House of the Heroes.
- a) We're about half way around the city, so hang in there. Next we get a bunch of places that have references to water (a fountain gate, the Pool of Siloam). I could tell bible stories that tie to these places, but that gets away from the construction purpose going on here.
 - b) In Verse 16 we get a reference to Nehemiah "son of Azbuk". Chapter 1, Verse 1 tells us the Nehemiah who's still the main character of this book is "Nehemiah son of Hacaliah". I just wanted to point out it's not the same guy. This guy was a local ruler and he did repairs by a cemetery for some of the descendants and family members of King David.
 - c) OK, let's keep plowing through.
11. Verse 17: Next to him, the repairs were made by the Levites under Rehum son of Bani. Beside him, Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district.¹⁸ Next to him, the repairs were made by their countrymen under Binnui son of Henadad, ruler of the other half-district of Keilah.¹⁹ Next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section, from a point facing the ascent to the armory as far as the angle.²⁰ Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the high priest.²¹ Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the entrance of Eliashib's house to the end of it.
- a) For those who've never heard the "Levi's versus priest" story, I'll make this really fast. The Israelites were divided into 12 tribes based being the 12 sons of one man. One of those 12 was called "Levi". God requires all the Levites to be the priests to the other tribes. Among the Levites were a subgroup who were the families and descendants of the high priest". I think of "Plain Levites" as the assistants to the priests and had assigned duties. It does not mean God thought any less of them, they just had different duties.
 - i) Anyway some of the Levites also got their hands dirty and worked on repairing a section or so of the walls. Specific markers were mentioned included the house of the high priest and angles in the wall. Bottom line is these men who just like most of the workers were not trained for this type of construction, but asked in effect, "I want to help, show me how to do this" and plugged away.
12. Verse 22: The repairs next to him were made by the priests from the surrounding region.²³ Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house.²⁴ Next to him, Binnui son of Henadad repaired another section, from Azariah's house to the angle and the corner,²⁵ and Palal son of Uzai worked opposite the angle and the tower projecting from the upper palace near the court of the guard. Next to him, Pedaiiah son of Parosh.

- a) An interesting little point here is the priests were not just the ones who lived in Jerusalem. This verse mentioned priests who came from different places to help out with this project. If nothing else, it shows that Israelites from all over were interested in working as to make a difference for God. Each of them could just have continued in their duties where they're living and wouldn't be thought of any less. Yet, they wanted to also show that they're able to work where God's people gathered as well as their "home community". If nothing else, it's a model of sending out missionaries to help in other communities even if there already are Christians in that community. OK, almost making it around the circle.
13. Verse 26: and the temple servants living on the hill of Ophel made repairs up to a point opposite the Water Gate toward the east and the projecting tower.²⁷ Next to them, the men of Tekoa repaired another section, from the great projecting tower to the wall of Ophel.
- a) If you recall, we started at the north end and are working counterclockwise. Now we are at the east side of the city. The east side is where the Messiah is supposed to enter the city of Jerusalem one day. You may find it funny, but in the middle ages, when Muslims were in control of Jerusalem they placed a cemetery just outside the blocked up east gate as the Jewish law prevents them from walking on graves. They think that would stop Jesus from entering the city from that gate. I always found that to be funny.
- b) Anyway, two millennium earlier, workers fixed walls and towers on the east side.
- c) Final section:
14. Verse 28: Above the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house.²⁹ Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house. Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the guard at the East Gate, made repairs.³⁰ Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs opposite his living quarters.³¹ Next to him, Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate, and as far as the room above the corner;³² and between the room above the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and merchants made repairs.
- a) We're now on the last quarter of this "circle". If you saw a map of the old city, it was much larger than a pure circle, but one gets the general idea.
- b) Again, we get people making repairs by their own houses as well as specific tradesmen as workers. We get goldsmiths and perfumers listed. I thought about the fact we do not see for example, bakers listed, as they probably round around providing food for everyone. I don't see potmakers listed as they made devices to carry things. Yet goldsmiths and those in the perfume business are listed as those who cared about working on this project.
15. Bottom line, we get people from all sorts of professions, all sorts of backgrounds, "high and low" who were willing to work to make a difference building the wall. As we'll discover later in this book they're not done yet. Here we just get names of the workers as if to say these people gave of their time to make a difference for God.
- a) As most of us know, life is never that easy. There are always problems on any project that we do in life, let alone for God. Chapter 4 is essentially problems that arose and lessons on how to deal with such problems. If you made it this far, you could surely make it through the rest of the lesson, so let's keep plugging away.
16. Chapter 4, Verse 1: When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews,² and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble--burned as they are?"
- a) For those who don't know, the chapter breaks weren't added until roughly when printing press times began around the 12th Century AD if memory is correct. My simple point is it is a good place for a chapter break as Chapter 3 focused on the workers who built the wall while Chapter 4 switches focus to the problems that arose.

- b) OK first question here, who is Sanballat and why is he so ticked off? Apparently he's a top guy in Samaria or the head guy. Time for a quick Samaria lecture. The Israelites first three kings were Saul, David then Solomon. During Solomon's son reign of the kingdom split it two kingdoms. The North one had 10 Israel tribes. Eventually the capital became the city of Samaria. About two hundred years later they were conquered and scattered by a large empire called the Assyrians. Eventually another empire called the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians as well as the Southern Israel Kingdom. At this point in history the Persians conquered Babylon and let the "religious Israelites" return to Jerusalem and surrounding cities to start afresh. In the meantime, the area of "North Israel" was now a mixture of half Israelites (so to speak) mixed with other people. Because the city of Samaria still stood, it's the "capital" of that territory. Yes they became rivals to the Israelites and that lasted all the way to the time of Jesus and all the way until the Romans destroyed Israel in 70AD. They still exist in much smaller groups after that and even to this day!
- i) This leads to the question, why the hatred of the Israelites by the Samaritans. They saw the Israelites as a threat to their way of life and as rivals. I'll just say over the next 400 years there were battles between the two groups. Not to mention all the wars the Northern and Southern Israelite kingdoms fought before "North" did get wiped out. Let's just say centuries of rivalry and non-trust were built up here.
- ii) Therefore for those who returned from "Persia" to rebuild the temple, Samaritans saw this as a threat to their existence as now "Persia" was favoring Jerusalem as it allowed the city to be rebuilt.
- c) Bottom line, the Samaritans were ticked off. Verse 2 mentions an "army". That had to be a local group that was in charge of protecting their area of the Persian Empire. That tells us they had the means to physically attack Jerusalem and start a war! However to do that might bring the Persian national army down on them, so it's still a "stalemate".
- d) Gee John, this is all interesting ancient history. Other than the fact we grasp a little better why the Israelites considered calling Jesus a "Samaritan" was such an insult, why is all of this relevant to our lives? The issue has to do with doing any project for God, it never will cease to amaze me how "problems and opposition" come. As I always preach, if you try to use your life to make a difference for God, you can "count" on problems and opposition as it comes up. Paul said that all Christians will be persecuted (2nd Timothy 3:12.) We don't have to panic, because as the Israelites in this story understand the God we serve is much bigger than the opposition.
- i) So why does God allow Satan and his forces to harass us? After all, if we are using our lives to make a difference why not let it go smoothly? Part of the answer is for us to understand how God will win in spite of opposition. Part of it is to test us to see if we still trust Him in spite of problems that occur. Yes fighting evil often will cost lives but in the end, God always wins.
- e) Enough of the big picture, back to the specifics. The Samaritans were firing off insults like the Israelites were unable to complete such a project. The old wall was burnt down when the Babylonians destroyed it. Therefore, the Israelites were using rubble and burnt bricks to rebuild what was there. The Samaritans are saying they're wasting their time!
17. Verse 3: Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building--if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!"
- a) Apparently the opposition wasn't just to the North. It was also to the East. Ammon was a separate territory also conquered by Babylon. It was just east of Israel and is part of what's Jordan today. Ammon also has had long term war relations with the Israelites so they did not want a strong Israel to stand as well.
- b) The joke they cracked was in effect, "the wall is so bad that even if a fox jumped on it, that wall would fall down". (A fox in that area was the size of a common house cat!) Anyway, they wanted the Israelites to fail too, and thus the public statement.

18. Verse 4: Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. ⁵ Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.
- a) Apparently the taunts of Israel's enemies reached the ears of those working on the wall. If there is any danger to a Christian, the first thing we always must do is turn that situation over to God in prayer. I don't know if Nehemiah prayed alone or if this was a big effort of a bunch of Israelites.
 - b) Notice the prayer is focused on the fact the Samaritans opposed the work of God. At this point it's obvious God wanted the city rebuilt as it's "His city". My point's the insults here in this prayer aren't to "wipe them out because their bad people". It's more about the fact they are opposing the work of God. The Israelites couldn't drop what they were doing to go fight them, so they wanted to turn the situation over to God.
 - c) Yes there are obviously situations when we need to take matters in our own hands. Then we have situations like this where the Israelites needed to focus on the task at hand and it was up to God to deal with a problem they couldn't focus on. No matter what, taking the issue to God is always the best way to start whether or not we say the right words. What is ideal is simply asking Him to get involved in the situation.
19. Verse 6: So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.
- a) Anyway, once they turned the situation over to God, they got back to work. At this point the wall was about half way finished. The Hebrew text could also be translated "half way done", but "half the height" is the more likely translation.
 - b) What is to be noticed is despite the threats of being attacked by an army, the people there had a mind to work and stuck to it! However, the problem is about to get worse, so let us read on.
20. Verse 7: But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. ⁸ They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. ⁹ But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.
- a) The short version is the threat wasn't just to the north anymore. The Ammonites were to the east of Israel. Then the text mentioned "Ashdod". That's one of the old Philistine cities before the Babylonians conquered them too. Apparently that city was now occupied by a bunch of non-Israelites as well. The "Arabs" is effectively a bunch of people who lived to the south of Israel. Bottom line, the Israelites were surrounded by their enemies. (Gee, it's obvious nothing has changed in history!)
 - b) Somehow all of these enemies organized and plotted together to come fight Jerusalem. It is a problem and yes it drove them to prayer. They also posted guards to watch out for an attack to come in any direction.
 - c) But John, if this was all part of the Persian Empire, and they gave permission to build that wall, couldn't they just appeal to the Emperor? The problem is Nehemiah probably said it was going to be rebuilt so they didn't want to drag the "Nationals" in the picture. Besides they might just wipe out everybody in sight to prevent future uprisings! Anyway it seems like the Israelites are stuck between a "rock and hard place", so they prayed as well as put lookouts. It shows we trust God but still do the "footwork" (the lookouts!).
21. Verse 10: Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."
- a) If the external threat wasn't bad enough, the workers were starting to grumble. My guess is most people who've worked on big projects have seen many a moment where all seems lost. It's common in business as well as projects for God. Sometimes all we can do is keep moving forward, keep trusting God and often things work themselves out.

- b) The specific complain here has to do with "too much rubble". It's a sign of frustration that had to be dealt with. If that threat wasn't bad enough, two more come in the next 2 verses.
22. Verse 11: Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."
- a) Apparently word got out to the workers that external threats to their project existed. They were obviously scared. Yes they prayed. Yes they had lookouts. Still the fear of an army coming to wipe out their work had people nervous. OK, one more problem, Verse 12:
23. Verse 12: Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."
- a) Obviously not all the Israelites worked on the wall. Those who "stayed home" told them a whole bunch of times, "Hey guys, you need to cut this out, or we'll all get wiped out".
- b) OK let's stop to catch our breath here. Many of us have seen situations like this where all seems lost. We get afraid to keep going. We see threats and we think, "To hell with this, I want to live past tomorrow!" Yes we pray and yes we believe it's a God ordained thing to do, but still threats are real. Time for a quick lecture on "faith and fear".
- i) I've been convinced for decades that the opposite of faith is fear. When we let our fears take over, we lose faith. One of my favorite bible studies is to study the books of 1st Samuel. The two main characters are King Saul and David (who became the king in 2nd Samuel essentially). My point is if I were to summarize Saul in 1 word it would be "fear". If I were to summarize David in one word it is "faith". I realize David made mistakes (who doesn't) but he never lost his faith in God. Saul trusted only in his own wits. Saul died in effect by suicide. David went on to be king and lived to an old age despite many mistakes.
- ii) This leads back to the Israelites here. They are obviously facing fears here. What's needed is good leadership to get people's focus back on God and have faith it will work out for His glory. With that said, let's continue:
24. Verse 13: Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. ¹⁴ After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."
- a) We're now back to Nehemiah. He's not listed by name but the "I" in Verse 13 is him. Here he takes the leadership by organizing people by families and then gets the word out not to be afraid that "God fights for us".
- b) So why the family reference? When we're scared of being attacked, our biggest concern is our families. Having them in sight helps a little with the fears.
- c) Then Nehemiah gives the speech to "take courage and keep working". There's nowhere in Jerusalem where one can be heard by all, so my guess is he walked around and made that speech to different groups at different times.
- d) Again we're back to "faith and fear". The way to overcome fear is to focus on our faith. It's the best way to deal with our fears. When our fears overwhelm us, yes we need to pray. I also have learned about "baby steps". It's the idea that say, for the next 10 seconds I'm not going to worry about the problem of the moment. To quote another great truth, "80%-90% of the things we worry about never happen". (In fact the Samaritans et.al., never attack!) I am just saying worrying about what might happen never is a good thing. Getting a focus back on God is a great way to overcoming one's fears. That's how David got through all of his problems and mistakes he got himself in.
25. Verse 15: When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work.
- a) Notice "it worked". When the enemies heard that God "frustrated" their plans to stop the construction, the Israelites got back to work.

- b) So how did God frustrate their plans? The obvious is he got the Israelites to focus on faith and not their fears. Yes there could have been other ways God had worked (e.g., all those enemies never organized an army to attack) but let's just take it at face value. The lesson is about turning our fears over to God, trusting Him and then getting back to the project we were called to do at that moment.
26. Verse 16: From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah¹⁷ who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other,¹⁸ and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.
- a) Just because God frustrated "their plans" doesn't mean the enemy gives us. We read here of the Israelites taking up weapons as they worked. Half of the workers became soldiers, while the other half kept working. The other thing the Israelites did was have people who had "horns" to call an assembly if the enemy attacked. So you know "trumpets" were most likely animal horns that can make a noise when blown.
- b) Think of the situation this way. I'm sure everyone was still nervous about an attack. For a bunch of men to be armed with weapons and have "trumpet blowers" on stand by as to know where an attack might be, that would give reassurance that "things are going to be ok". Of course such precautions wouldn't guarantee victory, but it would make everyone feel a lot better about working. They're families were in sight and people with weapons is all around them.
- c) The lesson is about doing practical things as well as trusting God. Yes they prayed there's no attack, but the Israelites still did the "footwork". As I state a lot, God never does for us, what we can do for ourselves.
27. Verse 19: Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall."²⁰ Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"
- a) Remember that the project is only "Half done" at this point. So you know the enemies are not done yet. Nehemiah has 13 chapters, and we're about to only finish Chapter 4, so yes there's more to this drama than just this chapter! Until then, we only got a few verses left to cover in this chapter.
- b) I give Nehemiah credit for good leadership. He did take it to God. He reassured the fears people had by stationing people with weapons everywhere and having "guards with the ability to warn people". Yes he stated God will fight for us, but that doesn't take away our responsibilities. Yes I believe in God, but I also want a strong army etc. for protection!
28. Verse 21: So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out.²² At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day."²³ Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.
- a) Bottom line, Nehemiah "stunk" as he didn't take off his clothes but hung around there all the time to make sure people are safe! Still, we got to give him credit for taking leadership in organizing the Israelites doing his best to alleviate their fears and let's be honest those who wanted the Israelites to stop building will now "think twice" as the Israelites are now prepared for warfare as well as building projects.
- b) Yes technology makes things different today, but the issues of dealing with fear and faith is just as significant today as it was about 2,500 years ago. If we can lead people to focus on their faith, let alone do practical things to alleviate the situation, we can lead others to make a difference for God and help others to focus on the task at hand, which as always, is about using our lives to make a difference for God. If you get that, you get Chapter 4 in a nutshell. I just double checked my lesson title, and in short, "it worked well".

29. With that said, let's close in prayer: Heavenly Father, You've called us not only separated us so as to live forever, but also to use our lives as a witness for You. Help us in our times of weakness to still have faith. Help us to overcome our fears with faith. Make it obvious to us what are practical things we can do to overcome our fears and still use our lives for Your glory. Guide us as we use our resources and our time to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen