

“Remember the Lord”

Nehemiah 4:7-23

The text for this title comes from verse fourteen, where the greater clause reads in English, “Remember the Lord, which is great and terrible...” The word order in Hebrew is slightly different, and although that is not uncommon between languages, it is somewhat unique here. In Hebrew, it reads:

את-אֲדֹנָי הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא, זְכֹר

Literally translated, “The Lord, great and terrible (word meaning to be feared, to be afraid of), remember.” The emphasis is on the greatness and authority of Adonai (literally, “my Lord,” not just “the Lord” – this name for God that makes Him personal to us).

The title I gave to this text many years ago was, “The Signs of a Tired Christian.” As we read these verses, we see that the people got discouraged and they really were growing very weary, very tired, of all that they had to deal with in trying to do the right thing, trying to do what the Lord wanted them to do. The same is true for us today – both as individual Christians trying to stay right and holy in the midst of a very wicked world, as well as the church doing the same.

The problem wasn’t that they were tired, the problem was that they didn’t want to go on – they didn’t care to fight any longer. Nehemiah, once again, if found motivating the people to go on – something he does throughout the text of this book. We do need to rest from the battle at times, but we need to make sure we get back to work – don’t become so defeated that there’s no more fight in us. (Easier said than done, I’m afraid.)

There are several things outlined in this portion of the book that will give us the understanding and help we will need to stay focused in the trouble of life. It's not enough just to hear all the platitudes and positive things – we need to have an understanding of what causes the trouble we are in, or get in, in order to be able to apply the principles that will help us get out. It's similar to a math problem (higher math) – there are some that can see the answer, that know the answer, but can't tell you how they got to the answer, and the getting to the answer, in many cases, is absolutely necessary to applying the answer. We may know the answer to someone's problems, but without them knowing how they got there will often cause them to continually repeat the actions that resulted in the problem they need help with. All too often, we are simply treating the problem without getting to the cause. This text does both, in some form.

I. RECOGNIZE WHO THE ENEMY IS – VS. 7-9

A. It's is vitally important that we know who the enemy is. Not just Satan, but the forces he uses to stop us – and they will be varied and many.

B. Verse seven lists the enemies that we have seen before, with two additions – the Ammonites and the Ashdodites. The Ammonites were a familiar enemy, seemingly always at odds with the Israelites. The Ashdodites were a Philistine people from the city of Ashdod on the Mediterranean coast, halfway between Joppa and Gaza. They were quite a distance from Jerusalem but they knew if the Jews rebuilt the walls and

reestablished themselves in a stronghold that they would interfere with the strength of these various peoples – interfere with their way of life and their money.

C. Vs. 8 – history is rife with examples of people groups that were once enemies with each other banding together to fight a more widespread threat. Even though these people may have not liked each other, they liked the Israelites even less, and they knew they had to band together to stop them or they way of life would be over.

This same principle applies in the spiritual realm, as well. People that may not have liked each other in the past will often band together to bring attack against us as individual believers, and against us as a church. This was seen even in the life of Jesus while He ministered on earth.

D. Verse nine is an important verse – both then and now. It shows that prayer and work go together.

1. “Nevertheless we made our prayer unto God” – they didn’t sit back and hope God took care of the problem. They prepared themselves with both prayer and work in order to combat the enemy.
 - a) The stem (tense in English) of the Hebrew is hithpael – used to demonstrate intense action taken by someone upon themselves (or, in this case for themselves and others).

- b) This is more than just a normal prayer – there is an urgency seen here that Nehemiah, and the leadership of the people took on behalf of the people.
 - c) The root of the word is one that often means to judge, and used for prayer it is used in the sense of supplicating, interceding (as a judge would do) on the behalf of others.
2. “And set a watch” – they took action to defend against the enemy. They relied on the Lord for the wisdom they needed to know how to defend themselves and they trusted in His direction. Too often we pray and then sit back and wait, using prayer as a magic wand, so to speak, hoping that the problem goes away. That’s not what prayer is. That’s what many preachers and teachers have said about prayer but that is not the general use, as found in Scripture.

II. RESTORE ONE’S STRENGTH – VS. 10-12

A. Many times, the battle we are in gets to us and our strength begins to fail. It doesn’t mean we are not faithful to the Lord – it simply demonstrates the frailties of the human body and the limitations of the psyche to cope with overwhelming stress. When that happens, it is time to look to restore both our strength, as well as the strength of those around us that are fighting their battles.

B. As stated earlier relating to the cause of

the problem, knowing the cause of "burn-out" in our life will help us find a way to cope and to see our strength restored.

1. Loss of strength which led to lack of desire to go on – vs. 10a – “And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed...” – “That is to say, the labour is beyond our power, we cannot continue in it” (K&D).
 - a) “And Judah said” – the leadership of the people
 - b) “The strength” – the power, the ability
 - c) “Of the bearers of burdens” – סִבְּלֵי – “persons responsible for transporting or moving construction materials as needed” (Zodhiates).
 - d) “Is decayed” – כָּשַׁל – verb meaning to waver, to stagger, to stumble. They hadn’t given up yet, but they were on the brink of complete collapse. The burden of the sheer magnitude of the task was more than they could bear at that point.
 - e) There’s an illustration in the book of Numbers that serves as a commentary on this point – the episode recorded in Numbers 13:31 and 32:9 of the ten spies who said, “they are stronger than we.” Many today are like those ten spies, or the “bearers of burden” in Nehemiah – they’re tired and look at the opposition instead of at the source of their strength. They take their eyes off the Lord, as Peter did when he was attempting to walk on the water, and

they begin to sink in despair of the sheer task with which they are confronted.

Numbers 13:31

31 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.

Numbers 32:9

9 For when they went up unto the valley of Eshcol, and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which the LORD had given them.

Matthew 14:28-30

28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, **Come**. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

2. Loss of sight on the right thing – vs. 10b – “there is much rubbish...”

- a) “Rubbish” – עִפָּר – common word – of the 110 times is found in the Hebrew Bible, 93 of them it is translated “dust” in the KJV. The only time it is translated “rubbish” is in Nehemiah. One thing this shows is that the piles of debris left after the conquest by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army had laid in the same place for far longer than it should have – long enough to be covered with dirt and dust.

- b) The Israelites had lost sight of what needed done long before, and now, as they approached the task of restoring the walls and rebuilding the gates, they could only see the “rubbish” in the way – they couldn’t see past the problem.
 - c) Many today have done the same – they’ve lost sight of the “prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14) and have fixed their gaze on the problems, and it overwhelms them.
3. Loss of spirit to work and fight – vs. 10c – “we are not able to build the wall”
- a) They lost their confidence in their ability to get the job done amidst the opposition that had arisen against them.
 - b) Hebrews 11:6 says that “without faith it is impossible to please him [God]” – the people of Jerusalem that were doing the work lost faith. Whether faith in themselves, faith in Nehemiah and the leadership of Jerusalem, or faith in God Himself (or all three), the result was they lost their spirit to continue.
- [Hebrews 11:6](#)
- ⁶ But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.
 - c) Confidence to deal with the troubles we face, the spirit to go on, comes from faith in God – without that, we will almost certainly fail.

4. Loss of security because of fear – vs. 11-

- a) The people became afraid of the enemy. This is a result of lack of strength, lack of right sight, and lack of spirit to fight.
- b) When we get tired as a Christian, when we've lost our strength, our sight, our spirit, we will become afraid that Satan will win the battle he is raging against us. We become afraid that we will lose, and we lose hope. But, as the title of this message from verse 14 states, "Remember the Lord" – remember "my Lord" – our personal Lord – He will never leave us nor forsake us. We need not fear!

Hebrews 13:5

⁵ Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Genesis 28:15

¹⁵ And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

Deuteronomy 31:6

⁶ Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Deuteronomy 31:8

⁸ And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.

Joshua 1:5

⁵ There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

III. RESCUE THOSE THAT NEED HELP – VS. 13-14

IV. RESOLVE TO DO WHAT NEEDS DONE – VS. 15-23