

EXILE AND RETURN Lesson 24

FIRST DAY

Read Lesson 23 Notes

SECOND DAY:

Read Nehemiah 4:1-6

Opposition to the Rebuilding

[4:1] 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?”

[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!”

[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.

[6] So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

THIRD Day:

Read Nehemiah 4:7-23

[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.

[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.”

[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.”

[12] Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.”

[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.”

[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.

[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 Judah [17] 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.

[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!”

[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.

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FOURTH DAY

Read Nehemiah 5

Nehemiah Helps the Poor

[5:1] Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. [2] Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.”

[3] Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.”

[4] Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. [5] Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.”

[6] When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. [7] I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them [8] and said: “As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!” They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

[9] So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? [10] I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! [11] Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil.”

[12] “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.”

Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. [13] I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out and emptied!”

At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

[14] Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. [15] But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. [16] Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

[17] Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. [18] Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

[19] Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people.

Question 10b

Proverbs 28:13; [13] He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

Isaiah 55:7; [7] Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

James 4:6-8; [6] But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

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“God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble.”

[7] Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. [8] Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Question 11b

John 13:14-15; [14] Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. [15] I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

1 Corinthians 9:19-22; [19] Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. [20] To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. [21] To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. [22] To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

FIFTH DAY

Read Nehemiah 6:1-14

Further Opposition to the Rebuilding

[6:1] When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates— [2] Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.”

But they were scheming to harm me; [3] so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the

work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” [4] Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

[5] Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter [6] in which was written:

“It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king [7] and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us confer together.”

[8] I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.”

[9] They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.”

[But I prayed,] “Now strengthen my hands.”

[10] One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, “Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you.”

[11] But I said, “Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!” [12] I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. [13] He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.

[14] Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me.

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SIXTH DAY:

Review Nehemiah 4:1-6:14

Nehemiah 4

Opposition to the Rebuilding

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Nehemiah 5

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