

**Introduction:** One of the great truths about God is that His greatest desire is to be in a covenant relationship with all people. Those who willingly choose to surrender to Him and His will come under the ‘shadow of His wings’ (Psalm 36:7; 57:1, c.f. Deuteronomy 32:11; Matthew 23:37) and experience His presence (Psalm 23:4). In other words, God will protect people doing His will. \*\*\* The biggest question God’s people ask is: ‘what is God’s will for us?’ – both as a local church and as part of His universal church. And, within a local church, each person has a task to do according to God’s will so that as all His people work together under His guidance, His Kingdom on earth grows. \*\*\* Our chapter in Nehemiah this morning illustrates all of the above. Nehemiah guided and directed the remnant of God’s people living in Jerusalem and its ‘suburbs’ to complete the rebuilding of the wall that had been in ruins for over ninety years. There were ten gates in the wall (chapter 3). Its circumference was about one and a half miles. Its shape was as an oval with the widest width about three-eighths of a mile and the greatest north-south length about five-eighths of a mile. Finally in the Hebrew Bible our passage was all of chapter four. In the Greek translation, carried over to the English Bible, the end of chapter three was put at the beginning of chapter four. \*\*\* We will discover Nehemiah’s skill as a leader who organizes people to do different tasks and encourages all God’s people to trust in the God who always does what He says. In our portion of Mark’s Gospel we will see the power of God’s Son over one of the most fearsome events of creation, raging to the harm of people. Let’s examine the details.

**I. Their enemies threaten the Jews working on the Jerusalem wall, then the Jews pray in their weakness, then Nehemiah conscripts every Jew and encourages them to trust Adonai. (Nehemiah 4:7-14)**

A. Because the Jews are making progress on the wall their enemies threaten them, but they pray to God and set up guards after confessing their in-ability. (Verses 7-10)

1. When enemies of the Jews heard of the restoration of the walls, that what was broken down was being re-built, their anger was great; then, they conspired to fight Jerusalem, to disturb. (Verses 7-8)

**Restoration:** Restoration is translated healed for people. Perhaps the Holy Spirit wanted God’s people to know that now the walls are restored to protect them, their hearts will be healed.

**Enemies:** Arabs were from the East. Tobiah was an Ammonite and Sanballat (a Moabite) were descended from Lot (Genesis 19:37-38). Ashdod was one of five Philistine cities (1 Samuel 5:1).

2. We prayed to our God, then we set a guard against them, twenty four hours before them. (Verse 9)

**Prayer:** The community prayed to God together, then acted to protect themselves. The Latin *ora et labora*, pray and work, describes their belief it is God’s will to answer their prayer to rebuild the walls.

**God protects people who do His will**

3. In a poem-prayer the Jews say that in their own strength they are powerless to succeed. (Verse 10)

**Self-awareness:** When they consider the accumulation of rubbish fine as dust from the previous walls they feel insufficient in themselves, therefore they need God to whom they have just prayed.

B. The Jews are afraid, Nehemiah conscripts every one and encourages them all that the fearsome Lord will fight for them. (Verses 11-14)

1. Then our enemies said, ‘They will not know and will not see until we will come in the midst of them to kill the, and make the work cease’; then the Jews came living near them, then they said to us, ‘Ten times, from all the places which you all will return, [they are] upon us’. (Verses 11-12)

**Enemy threat:** The enemies of the Jews spoke of a surprise attack on the Jews to kill them so the rebuilding of the wall will not be completed.

**Jews outside city:** The Jews living among the enemies outside Jerusalem tell the wall rebuilders in the city of the threat.

2. Then I (Nehemiah) made to stand, in the low places behind the wall, the people to their families with their swords, spears and bows; then I looked and rose and said to the nobles, rulers and the rest of the people, ‘You all will not be afraid of them, Adonai, great and to be feared, you all must remember; and, you all must fight for your brothers, sons, daughters, wives and homes’. (Verses 13-14)

**Encouragement:** Nehemiah directs all the people to stand where they will be seen so their enemies see that all the men, women and children are fully armed. By this action the people feel empowered.

**Words:** His words command all people to remember Adonai as great and causing all to fear Him, so they will not fear the enemies, but rather fight by faith that He will protect them as they do His will.

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**II. God delivers the Jews working under Nehemiah, and Jesus calms a storm in response to His disciples’ panic. (Nehemiah 4:15-23; Mark 4:35-41)**

A. God frustrates the enemies of the Jews and Nehemiah creates three groups of workers telling them God will fight for them, then they defend Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 4:15-23)

1. When our enemies heard that it was made known to us, and then God had frustrated their plan, then we all returned to the wall, each to his own work. (Verse 15)

**God:** Their prayer is now fully answered as even the enemies of the Jews know their God has protected them by spoiling their plan of a surprise attack. Knowing this, they can now fully devote themselves to doing God’s will to complete the wall (Nehemiah 6:15-16).

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2. Then Nehemiah assigned half his men to construction and half to armed service as fully armed soldiers, with the full support of the rulers; among the builders, those carrying materials did so with one hand and the other held a weapon, but those doing the building worked with two hands and their sword in a sheath; and Nehemiah's trumpeter was beside him. (Verses 16-18)

**Masterful management:** He made half of the men a full time line of defense against attack, and the other half to work on the wall. Among the wall-builders, half carried materials and were ready to ward off attack, while the other half did the construction with two hands, their swords ready to be drawn.

**Nehemiah watches:** Nehemiah watched it all with his trumpeter ready to signal all the men with the appropriate message to whatever might happen (Numbers 10:1-10).

3. Then I (Nehemiah) said to the nobles, rulers and rest of the people, 'The work great and wide, and we are being separated on the wall, far one from another; in the place where you all hear the sound of trumpet, there you all will be gathered to us: our God will fight for us'. (Verses 19-20)

**Extensive work:** With the great circumference and the height and width of the city more or less nine hundred yards, they could not all see or hear if an attack occurred.

**Trumpet call:** But, the trumpet would sound so they could all gather at the place of attack. But, most importantly, their God would do the ultimate fighting they needed. He would do everything to make sure they completed the work He gave them according to His will.

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4. So we labored, half fully armed from before sunrise to after sunset, and also at that time I said all the people will spend the night in Jerusalem to be for us guards at night and workers in the day; neither I, nor my brothers, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us taking off our clothes, each (had his) weapon (going to) water. (Verses 21-23)

**Soldiers continue:** The soldiers guarded more than twelve hours: From the grey sky before the sun breaks the horizon, until the sky got dark enough after sunset for the stars to show.

**No more 'commuting':** Many of the workers came from houses outside the city walls, but during the 'home stretch' Nehemiah did not allow them to leave the city in order for them to be more productive.

**Sleep clothed and armed:** They slept fully clothed (even in armor) and took their weapons for their water breaks.

**Bottom line:** As we do God's will in our lives, let us be willing to go the extra mile to serve Him in the best way possible to give Him all He desires from us.

- B. Jesus tells His disciples to cross the sea, but as a great storm comes He sleeps; then, the disciples panic; so, He calms the sea, questions their faith and they fear Him. (Mark 4:35-41)

1. He (Jesus) is saying to them (disciples – verse 34) that day, having become late, 'Let us pass over to the other side'; having sent the crowd away, they are taking Him, even as He was being in the ship, but also little ships with Him. (Verses 35-36)

**Go to other side:** Above all the many details, Jesus made it clear they were going to the other side!

2. And it happened: Great storm of wind, and the waves were beating against the ship so now the ship to be filled (with water); and He was being in the stern sleeping, and they are awakening Him and saying to Him, 'Teacher! Not of concern to Thee that we are perishing?' (Verses 37-38)

**Great storm of wind:** This was more than the usual heavy storm on the Sea of Galilee.

**Ship fills while Jesus sleeps:** While Jesus is sleeping from exhaustion, the excessively high waves are filling the ship enough that it looks like it will sink.

**They rouse Him:** The disciples rouse Him from His sleep. The severity of the squall was more than they had experienced and they were afraid they would die.

3. Having been awakened, He rebuked the wind and He said to the sea, 'Thou must be quiet, thou must be put to silence'; and, the wind ceased, and (the sea) became calm great. (Verse 39)

**Two words:** Many English words translate the two words with which Jesus commanded the sea.

**Sea calm:** But, these two words from the Creator of the sea were powerful!

### **Jesus cares for His disciples, even in storms**

4. And He said to them, 'Why cowardly you all are being; not yet, you all are having faith?' (Verse 40)

**Rebuke:** He double rebukes them: their fear made them cowards, and they did not believe His earlier statement about crossing the sea to the other side.

5. And they were made afraid: fear great! And they were saying to one another 'What thus this One is being that even the wind and the sea are listening to Him?' (Verse 41)

**Triple fear:** Their triple fear of Jesus is the basis of genuine faith in the awesome God who loves people and sent His Son so they could be reconciled to Him. Jesus is Adonai in the flesh, whom Nehemiah said is great and to be feared because He will fight for His people. God is all we need, even in a storm. Don't forget this!

**Storms obey:** The wind and sea in a severe storm heard Jesus so they submitted to Him in obedience.

**Conclusion:** When their enemies saw the success of the Jews in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem they threatened them with death. But they prayed to God in their weakness as Nehemiah conscripts every Jew and encourages them to trust Adonai. They trust Him and God delivers them to complete His work. Then they followed Nehemiah in his diligence and vigilance. Five hundred years later Jesus cared for His panicked disciples by calming a storm; but, then He chastised them for lack of faith so they greatly feared Him.

### **God protects people who do His will**