Secure the Base

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[0:00] Welcome to Built on God's Word, the preaching and teaching ministry of Highland Park Baptist Church in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.! Jeremy Norton teaches on Nehemiah 6, verse 15 through chapter 7, verse 4.

We are continuing our study in Nehemiah this morning, so please open your Bibles to Nehemiah chapter 6. This week we're going to begin the transition from rebuilding of the walls to reforming of the people.
So I want to quickly take stock of where we have been. Nehemiah's journey began with some very bad news delivered by his brother Hanani and some other men that came from Judah to Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire.
Nehemiah was there in exile serving as cupbearer to the king of Persia. He receives the news that the walls of Jerusalem are broken down and the gates are burned with fire, and the people are a reproach to the nations around them.
This news drives Nehemiah to his knees before God, praying for multiple months. While he is pleading with the Lord, Nehemiah begins planning for what is needed to restore Jerusalem.
[1:09] He gets an opportunity to raise his request with the king, and because the good hand of his God was upon him, the king grants everything he asked for and more. He receives a leave of absence, letters from the king directing the work, materials and a protection detail.

With what appears to be everything he needs to accomplish the task, Nehemiah makes the journey to Jerusalem. Upon arriving, he doesn't immediately engage in the work, but he takes time to assess the situation himself.
He provides his assessment to the people, and they respond favorably. Nehemiah 2, 17-18 reads, Everything sounds great.
The people are on board, and Nehemiah has a plan and supplies to accomplish the task. Verse 19 of chapter 2 begins with, But. Anytime we see a but in Scripture, we need to pay attention to the contrast that is about to occur.
While everything appears to be going well, the resistance agents are identified in this verse. Beginning here and through last week, we have observed the building of the wall in the face of various tactics used by Samballot, Tobiah, and Geshem to oppose and undermine the rebuilding efforts.
[2:42] They began with verbal taunting. When that didn't work, they resorted to threats of physical violence. Nehemiah responded with prayer and confidence in the Lord while setting up protective measures to ensure the work could continue.

Chapter 5 focuses on the internal conflict that arose because of how the rich were treating the poor. Nehemiah dealt with this situation in a godly way and kept the work moving forward.
Last week, the gang of three returned. Since their broad-based attacks against the people had not worked, they attempted to go after Nehemiah directly. They invite him to a summit, but he discerns they are seeking to kill him, so he declines the invitation and reminds them that he is focused on the work that he was called to do.
They then try to discredit him by making false accusations about what he is doing in Jerusalem, claiming he is planning a rebellion and to make himself king. Their defamatory statements are refuted by the truth.
The final effort we saw last week was deception. Shemaiah was a false prophet, hired by Tobiah and Samballot, in an attempt to get Nehemiah to hide in the temple, which would have impugned his character and offered them an opportunity to bring him down.

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[3:56] Nehemiah describes it this way in 6.13. He, Shemaiah, was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly in sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me.

Because Nehemiah walks closely with God in prayer, he is able to fend off these attacks and continue the work that God had put in his heart to do. This is where we're going to pick up today as we transition from the rebuilding of the wall to the reforming of his people.
Our first discussion question there on the back of your handout, I want you to consider a time when you completed a task or project. Reflect on how you felt when it was done and what you did after it was completed.
Discuss at your tables. I'll take a few responses. So consider a time when you completed a task or a project.
Reflect on how you felt afterward and what you did next. How do we typically feel when we complete a project? Accomplished.
[5:02] It wasn't bad until after you were done with the wall. Relief. Yeah, relief that the project's done. Excited to start something new.

Excited to start something new? The next thing, yeah? Okay, so that's how we feel. What do we do next? Get on to the next thing?
Somebody mentioned that? Or potentially to never do it again. Or potentially never do it again. That was great. Really accomplished. Never do it again. Completed the project and we're done.
Never want to do that again. Or maybe you need a nap. Maybe you need a nap. There you go. Maybe you need to rest. Yeah. Yeah. So oftentimes when we complete a project, we celebrate that we've completed a great task.
Right? We congratulate the people who worked hard to help push it over the finish line. This is all good. Then we transition to the next thing. And depending on the project, how we make this transition to the next thing can dictate whether or not the completed project has staying power.
[6:05] When I say staying power, is it going to hold in place or are we going to have to go back and do it again? Okay? The military uses a principle called secure the base to describe how you advance a military front.

How this works is once you capture a location, you establish security, consolidate the people and then reorganize before moving on to the next thing. Napoleon famously failed to do this when he advanced on Russia in 1812.
Rather than moving the line and ensuring he had proper logistics in place to supply his troops, he kept pushing, costing him a third of his army by the time he reached Moscow. Nehemiah, in contrast this week, is going to secure the base, so to speak, as he sets up for the transition from building the walls to building the people.
As we turn to the text, our main idea is God works through faithful leaders to glorify him and raise up faithful followers to do the same. God works through faithful leaders to glorify him and raise up faithful followers to do the same.
Looking at Nehemiah 6, 15 and 16. So the wall was completed on the 25th of the month of Elul in 52 days. When all our enemies heard of it and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence, for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.
[7:29] The first point in your outline is a wall rebuilt. A wall rebuilt. In these two short verses, we found out the wall was completed in 52 days.

All this activity, beginning at the end of chapter 2 until this point, happened in a matter of a couple months. Think about all the events that Nehemiah had to deal with in that short time span. He had opposition from outside, conflict within, direct attacks on his character.
This is typical of leaders that are trying to accomplish great tasks. Nehemiah 6, 15 and 17. The objective is never achieved in a vacuum. There are always a bunch of other things that come up as you are trying to get the one thing done that you set out to do.
Nehemiah is not distracted by any of these things that happen. We see him overcome each hurdle through prayerful reliance on God and remaining faithful to the task that God had placed in his heart throughout as he leads the people in rebuilding the wall.
What do we notice in verse 16? It was God who didn't help them. Yeah, God gets the glory, right? Even the nations around that were attacking the Jews realized that it was God.

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[8:42] All the surrounding nations and the enemies that had worked against the Jews lose their confidence. This seems like a direct rebuke of the confidence they displayed or displayed by Sambalat and Tobiah at the beginning of chapter 4.

Remembering back in verse 2 of chapter 4, Sambalat is saying, what are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble, even the burned ones?
Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near, and he said, even what they are building, if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down. God laughs in the face of opposition.
Psalm 2, 2-4. The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us.
He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord scoffs at them. God has a plan, and men who place their confidence in themselves will always be put to shame. Nehemiah records their confidence fell, and they knew that it was from our God that this work had been accomplished.
[9:50] The reproach that the Jews were under when Nehemiah got the news about the walls has been removed. The nations surrounding Jerusalem have received a physical testimony of the power of the God of the Hebrews.

The walls have been rebuilt, and the nations have acknowledged that God worked through the people to accomplish the task. But the local leaders aren't going to let go of their power that easily. Look at verses 17-19 with me.
Also in those days, many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shekaniah, the son of Ere, and his son Johanan had married the daughter of Meshulam, the son of Barakiah.
Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. Then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me. The second point in your outline is a resistance continued. A continued resistance. Despite all the great things the Lord had done through the people and Nehemiah's leadership, there was still internal resistance influenced by outside forces.
[11:08] Tobiah was a well-connected man in Jerusalem, and he starts a campaign against Nehemiah to cash in on his influence. Notice it starts with letters from the nobles to Tobiah. These may have been the same people Nehemiah was dealing with in chapter 5, when he made them give all their money and land back.

If it is, it's likely they are looking for another leader to complain to that may be sympathetic to their own personal agendas. This is like when one of your kids comes to you and gets instructions, but then goes to the other parent to see if they can get instructions they like better.
It's very likely these nobles had prior business arrangements with Tobiah, so they're wanting to maintain that relationship. The letter writing goes back and forth, much like a whisper campaign where gossip is spread about that may or may not be true.
Tobiah was a smooth operator in the region. Notice how it continues. He was the son-in-law of Shekeniah, which means he was married to a Jewish woman.
We will also find out in chapter 13 that he was related to Eliashib, the high priest. His children also had Jewish names and married Jewish women as well. His son, Johannan, had married the daughter of Meshulam, the son of Berechiah.
[12:24] Meshulam is mentioned twice back in chapter 3 when we talked about the different places people were working on the wall. He is described as making repairs next to the fish gate in verse 4 and in front of his house in verse 30.

Here we have a man who worked to repair the wall and his daughter was married to the son of Tobiah who was working against the effort to rebuild the wall. Talk about family drama. Imagine your dad is out there working to rebuild the wall and your father-in-law is one of the primary leaders opposing it.
She would have been in a tough spot. Verse 19 wraps up this section. Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. Then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.
The nobles were trying to convince Nehemiah of Tobiah's good deeds and that he wasn't such a bad guy. Then they were reporting back to Tobiah everything Nehemiah was saying and Tobiah in

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turn would write letters to try to intimidate Nehemiah.
This has all the makings of a political intrigue story. You have a local official, Tobiah, who is very well connected. Even to the point of being married into the families of the local nobles.
[13:35] Nehemiah shows up with authority from the king and an objective from God to rebuild the walls. What's this local official going to do? He and his buddies have tried about everything they can think of from mockery to physical intimidation to direct personal attacks on Nehemiah's character to undermine the rebuilding effort.

None of these have worked. So now he's leveraging his business, personal, and political connections and trying to get the leadership class just below Nehemiah to turn on.
He isn't going to be successful this time, but I want you to remember Tobiah. He's going to resurface when Nehemiah leaves. Like any manipulative, man-fearing politician, he works the people and bides his time.
From an application standpoint, we need to be mindful of how we speak to one another. These letters going back and forth may have started innocuously enough, but eventually evolved into a gossip campaign to undermine the leader that God had appointed for this time and effort.
When you speak to your fellow believers, are you encouraging one another and not focused on complaining or talking about others? Or do your conversations go more like, Jim has done this to me and I need your help? Or pray for Jim, he and his wife are having a tough time.
[14:50] Gossip doesn't have to be false. Gossip is any speaking that you are doing about other people when they aren't part of the conversation. Most of us have been around long enough to see gossip, true or not, ruin someone's reputation.

We should be seeking to let the Word of Christ dwell richly within us and encourage one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. That's Colossians 3, 16 and 17. Moving to our last point, we get a contrast of the man-fearing nobles that are undermining Nehemiah's leadership to the God-fearing men he will appoint to reorganize the city government.
That last point is a city government reorganized. A city government reorganized. Nehemiah is going to set up the administrative structure for the city of Jerusalem.
Let's read Nehemiah 7, 1-4. Now when the wall was rebuilt, and I had set up the doors and the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed, then I put Hanani, my brother, and Hananiah, the commander of the fortress, in charge of Jerusalem, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.
Then I said to them, Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot, and while they are standing guard, let them shut and bolt the doors. Also appoint guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each at his post, and each in front of his own house.
[16:13] Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not built. Our second discussion there, on the back of your handout, is we're going to use this metaphor of secure the base to flesh out these verses.

So as you look at those verses, work through and identify, capture the location, establish security, consolidate people, reorganize. So we're going to identify the steps Nehemiah takes in these verses to secure the base.
Capture the location. Where do we see that in those verses? Yeah, now it happened when the walls rebuilt and I had set up the doors to stand. The task of establishing the location of Jerusalem had been completed by the rebuilding of the walls.
God had provided this place for his people all the way back in his promise to Abraham. Joshua led the people in conquering it, and David Solomon had led the nation in establishing it as a place that people would gather and worship the one true God.
Through the sins of the people, they were exiled for a time. But now they have returned. Nehemiah has led the wall rebuilding effort, and they have reestablished Jerusalem in the eyes of the surrounding nations.
[17:27] How about established security? Yeah, absolutely. Yep. Nehemiah provides specific instruction. The gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites were appointed, and then he provides specific instructions.

Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot, and while they are standing guard. Let them shut and bolt the doors. Also appoint guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each at his post and each in front of his own house.

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Nehemiah gets the people in the places they need to be to secure the work they had accomplished. He then provides instructions for when the gates are to be opened and closed. Notice he tells them to appoint guards in front of his own house.
This has a similar effect to the building in front of your own house. You have a natural incentive to guard it well, and it's convenient. Consolidate the people.
I'm not going to spend a bunch of time here this week because it's more the focus of the verses that follow. We get a taste of it here in verse 4. Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built.
[18:31] They had rebuilt the walls, but there weren't enough people living in the city to keep it going. Nehemiah will have to work to bring the people back, which is why he's taking these preceding steps to set up for the next objective.

Finally, reorganized. What do we see him do from an organizational perspective? Yeah. In verse 2, he establishes the next leaders.
Then I put Hanani, my brother, and Hananiah, the commander of the fortress, in charge of Jerusalem, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many. Up to this point, Nehemiah has shouldered the majority of the leadership burden himself.
But now that the walls are rebuilt, it's time to appoint leaders of the city. Remember, he was the governor of the region. So he's establishing local leadership. He's adding this layer of needed leadership at the local level.
We see this play out in organizations today, whether that be a business, a church, or another charitable organization. Oftentimes, when something is new or a large effort is underway, the primary leader makes all the decision and is very hands-on.
[19:34] As time progress and things settle in and tasks are accomplished, he's able to appoint trusted leaders to help ensure that things don't get overlooked. Teddy Roosevelt provides a helpful comment on how good leaders select other leaders.

The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it. In Nehemiah's case, he needed people in place that he trusted to deal with the behind-the-scenes Tobiah campaign.
The nobles that were in place were working against him. So he needed men that were on his side, so to speak, and followed the Lord. Notice how it describes the two men here.
One was his brother, who brought the news of the condition of the city that launched the effort to rebuild. He could be accused of nepotism here, but he needed a right-hand man that wasn't captured by Tobiah.
Hanani could be seen as the civic leader in verse 2. The other man, Hananiah, he is described as the commander of the fortress. So we can think of him as the military leader or maybe the chief of police would be another way to think about him.
[20:46] What two character traits does it provide for Hananiah? Faithful and God-fearing. Faithful and God-fearing, absolutely.

Character is primary when selecting our leaders. In today's political environment, we can clearly see that isn't the case. We have traded a character quality test for a what-will-you-do-for-me attitude. A utilitarian attitude to selecting leaders is antithetical to how Scripture describes the qualifications.
When we review the qualifications for an elder in 1 Timothy and Titus, they are all character traits with the exception of the ability to teach. Deacon qualifications are also character-driven.
A leader with character will lead well because he cares for the people entrusted to his charge to the point that he is willing to sacrifice his own agenda to do what is best for others. We have Christ as our perfect example of self-sacrificing love of a leader.
Philippians 2, 5-11 reads, Through Christ's perfect example of humble sacrifice, we can be saved by faith in him.
[22:32] And then seek to follow his example in the power of the Holy Spirit as we lead others. A few quick points of application to consider there.

Have you recently experienced a spiritual victory? Praise the Lord and secure the base for the next battle to come. 2. Tobiah used gossip to hamper Nehemiah's leadership.
Consider if there are areas where you may be participating in gossip or grumbling that undermines people in positions of leadership. Finally, pray that God will continue to strengthen the men in

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leadership at Highland Park and raise up men who are faithful and God-fearing to continue to lead this local expression of the church.
Close us in prayer. Heavenly Father, thank you for our time this morning. Thank you that we were able to gather and study your word and see the example of Nehemiah leading.
Lord, we pray that we will follow that example as a church. That we will use character as a test for the men that are raised up as leaders in our congregation.
[23:52] We're thankful for the leaders you have given us. And pray that you will continue to strengthen them, Lord, in all that they do. Please be with Mike this morning as he brings the sermon. Help our hearts and minds.

To be prepared to receive it and apply it in our lives this week. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. To learn more, visit us in person or see the website at highlandparkbaptist.net.

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