

Nehemiah 4:13-23 – Study Leader’s Questions

1. *What arrangements did Nehemiah make for the defence of the people (Nehemiah 4:13)?*
2. *What did Nehemiah say to urge the people to courage (Nehemiah 4:14)? How would these principles apply to us today?*
3. *How did God answer Nehemiah’s prayer (Nehemiah 4:15)? What happened when the enemies learned of Nehemiah’s preparations?*
4. *How did Nehemiah’s servants work afterwards (Nehemiah 4:16)?*
5. *How did the workers protect themselves (Nehemiah 4:16-18, 21)?*
6. *How would the people be warned to come to the defence when the enemy attacked (Nehemiah 4:19-20)? How can this principle help us today?*
7. *Many people have claimed that God is our God and that he will fight for us (Nehemiah 4:20). How can we really claim that to be true of us today?*
8. *Where did the people spend the nights (Nehemiah 4:22)? Why was this important?*
9. *How was the diligence of Nehemiah and his servants described (Nehemiah 4:23)?*
10. *In what ways can we combat feelings of discouragement and helplessness?*
11. *Why is it important for believers to model perseverance?*

Nehemiah 4:13-23 – Answers to Questions

See Dr Ruckman's commentary *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* pp 230-236 for detailed comments.

1. What arrangements did Nehemiah make for the defence of the people (Nehemiah 4:13)?

Nehemiah identified what were clearly V. Ps, Vulnerable Points and, sensibly, set the families who had and were working together to stand guard together, armed with long and short range weapons. V. P. duty in wartime is a serious business. See this excerpt from *The 59th Division, Its War Story* by Peter Knight, p 7, about the 59th Staffordshire Division in WW2.

“In November, 1939 176 Brigade took over from 55 Division the responsibility of guarding the docks and other V.Ps in the Liverpool-Birkenhead area...All units were employed in this most necessary if rather frustrating job, as everyone was keen to get on with training; guarding docks and other V.Ps, however essential for the overall war effort, seemed to be a very poor method of fitting units and formations to take their place in the Expeditionary Force, which was the aim of everyone. However, 6 North Staffs taught persons trying to enter or leave the Docks that when the Army said “Halt or I’ll Fire” it meant just that. It rained most of the time.”

Nehemiah's standing orders to the V.P. guards would have most likely been the same for any unauthorized person or persons approaching the wall, *“Halt or be **“thrust through with a dart”*** Hebrews 12:20.”

The lesson is that while churches should be visible in a community, which is one good reason for having a church building, visibility is vulnerability so each church ‘family’ should be fully conversant with wielding *“the weapons of our warfare”* 2 Corinthians 10:4, Ephesians 6:10-18 to ensure its continued witness. This may come down to apparently mundane issues like health and safety for churches and places of worship, www.churchsafety.org.uk/, but like guarding docks and other V.Ps, such issues are undeniably *“essential for the overall war effort.”*

2. What did Nehemiah say to urge the people to courage (Nehemiah 4:14)? How would these principles apply to us today?

Nehemiah in effect gave an early version of the poem *Oliver's Advice* by Colonel Valentine Blacker 1778-1826, which first appeared in 1834. See *Appendix*.

The poem is a surreal exhortation by Oliver Cromwell from the grave to Irish Protestants to resist further Catholic subversion and rebellion that followed in the wake of the 1798 Irish Rebellion led by the infamous Fr. John Murphy of Co. Wexford.

The last stanza of the poem has a particular resonance with respect to Nehemiah's exhortation of Nehemiah 4:14 and the need for Bible-believing churches to stand firm in the promise of 1 Corinthians 15:58, even if the work is apparently mundane like the issues of health and safety for churches and places of worship.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

The last stanza of *Oliver's Advice* therefore has good practical application for today, this writer's underlining, with respect to sustaining home and church by means of *“taking the shield of faith...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* Ephesians 6:16, 17.

*For “happy homes,” for “altars free,” we grasp the ready sword,
For freedom, truth, and for our God's unmutilated word.
These, these the war-cry of our march, our hope the Lord on high;
Then put your trust in God my boys, and keep your powder dry.*

3. *How did God answer Nehemiah's prayer (Nehemiah 4:15)? What happened when the enemies learned of Nehemiah's preparations?*

"God had brought their counsel to nought." Not wishing to be **"thrust through with a dart"** Hebrews 12:20, the enemies called off their projected frontal assault on the city and in the words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow allspirit.co.uk/longfellow.html *The Day is Done*, did **"fold their tents, like the Arabs, And as silently steal away."**

However, like the Devil they had **"departed...for a season"** Luke 4:13 only.

Like The Terminator, they would be back. See Nehemiah 6.

See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%27ll_be_back *I'll be back*.

4. *How did Nehemiah's servants work afterwards (Nehemiah 4:16)?*

They worked securely, because, above all, they trusted in God, according to Psalm 127:1.

"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

They worked **"without distraction"** 1 Corinthians 7:35 because they had posted a guard, of whom it could be said **"They were a wall unto us both by night and day"** 1 Samuel 25:26.

They worked steadfastly, because **"the people had a mind to work"** Nehemiah 4:6, in spite of fatigue and setbacks, Nehemiah 4:7.

They worked circumspectly, warily, because **"everyone...with the other hand held a weapon"** Nehemiah 4:17.

Note how Paul exhorts the Ephesians in Ephesians 5:15.

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

Nehemiah and his co-workers made the best possible use of the time they had and through diligence and vigilance, they accomplished their task in less than two months.

"So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days."

Diligence and vigilance, working and watching, are two qualities that believers today should aim to cultivate, especially for innovations in witnessing, e.g. distribution of King James Bible-based calendars to interested individuals, such as have been made available through *Time for Truth*, www.timefortruth.co.uk/ or enclosing a tract in formal correspondence e.g. making a gift to charitable organisations in that **"a man's gift maketh room for him..."** Proverbs 18:16.

This is how Paul exhorted Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5.

"But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

5. *How did the workers protect themselves (Nehemiah 4:16-18, 21)?*

See *Question 4*. They also had an early warning system, in the form of Nehemiah's personal servant and bugler i.e. trumpeter, Nehemiah 4:18.

"In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us."

6. *How would the people be warned to come to the defence when the enemy attacked (Nehemiah 4:19-20)? How can this principle help us today?*

See *Question 5*. A unique opportunity for mutual support exists today for Christians over and above the conventional method of circulating prayer letters by normal post via the internet and email, with regular updates on issues of concern from groups such as *Barnabas Fund*, www.barnabasfund.org, *Christian Concern for our Nation*, www.christianconcern.com and *The Christian Institute*, www.christian.org.uk.

Those facilities, to name a few, facilitate fulfilment of Ephesians 6:18 as never before in church history.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”

7. *Many people have claimed that God is our God and that he will fight for us (Nehemiah 4:20). How can we really claim that to be true of us today?*

The claim is mainly dependent on the individual’s attitude to the Lord’s word and his reaction to what it says about him.

“For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” Isaiah 66:2.

“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” James 1:25.

8. *Where did the people spend the nights (Nehemiah 4:22)? Why was this important?*

They lodged within the walls in order to avoid being picked off individually, as Psalm 10 warns.

“He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor” Psalm 10:8.

Psalm 10 is a study on the final antichrist, ***“that man of sin...the son of perdition”*** 2 Thessalonians 2:3 who will persecute Israel and all Tribulations saints during the End Times, Revelation 13:6, 7 just as the enemies of the Jews sought to persecute them during Nehemiah’s time. See the *Ruckman Reference Bible* pp 778-779 and Dr Ruckman’s commentary *Volume I of the Book of Psalms* Psalm 10.

Nehemiah and his co-workers would also remember the tactics of Israel’s enemy Amalek during the Exodus.

“Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God” Deuteronomy 25:17-18.

The lesson is to apply Hebrews 10:24-25.

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

9. *How was the diligence of Nehemiah and his servants described (Nehemiah 4:23)?*

It was described as thorough and hygienic, as would be expected for Jews trusting in God, Nehemiah 4:20, who would have observed the Levitical rules for hygiene. Note that the expression **“he shall wash”** occurs 11 times in scripture, 9 of which are with respect to the clothes and/or the person, 8 of them in the Book of Leviticus; Leviticus 13:6, 34, 14:9 twice, 15:8, 11, 16, 16:24, Deuteronomy 23:11.

Likewise, the expression **“bathe himself”** occurs 11 times in scripture; Leviticus 15:5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 21, 22, 27, 17:15, Numbers 19:19 and the expression **“bathe his flesh”** occurs 6 times; Leviticus 15:13, 16:26, 28, 17:16, Numbers 19:7, 8.

This gives a total of 26 references in the Old Testament to bathing or washing of the person and/or clothes. This writer is therefore unable to believe that Bible-believing Jews would have limited bathing and washing solely to ceremonial aspects of cleansing, particularly when the priests were equipped in Solomon’s time with capacity for **“two thousand baths”** 1 Kings 7:26. Exodus 19:6 strongly indicates that the priests were meant to be an example for the whole nation of Israel, even, this writer believes, with respect to personal cleanliness.

Note that Exodus 19:6 is the first mention of priests with respect to the nation of Israel and as such, they and their nation should be, or should have been, inseparable from holiness and cleanliness.

“And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.”

Moreover, lack of personal cleanliness was indicative of God’s judgement on Israel.

“I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD”
Amos 4:10.

Jewish communities, it should be noted, largely avoided the devastating black plague of the 14th century by following the Levitical laws of hygiene. See *Dispensational Truth* by Clarence Larkin, Rev Clarence Larkin Est., 1920, available from the Bible Baptist Bookstore, P.O. Box 7135, Pensacola, Florida 32534, www.kjv1611.org, p 61 and Dr Ruckman’s commentary *The Book of Revelation* p 334.

The Lord Jesus Christ, it should further be noted, clearly spoke of washing as though it was regular custom and practice among the Jews of His time.

“Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all” John 13:10.

The diligence was also disciplined. Nehemiah 4:23 indicates that individuals remained at or near their posts while washing.

“So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing” Nehemiah 4:23.

Observe that Nehemiah and his co-workers would have had water brought to them by those from among **“the men of Gibeon”** and **“the Nethinims,”** Nehemiah 3:7, 26, 31, which possibly explains why **“the Nethinims,”** in particular, are not said to be doing any repairing, though some of **“the men of Gibeon”** obviously did. As part of their duties, those from among **“the men of Gibeon”** and **“the Nethinims”** would have kept the workers supplied with essentials e.g. fuel, water and rations. Note this extract from the study *Nehemiah 3 Part 2, Question 6*.

It also appears that among “the men of Gibeon” were the Hivites in perpetual servitude to Israel as “hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation...for the house of my

God...and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day” Joshua 9:21, 23, 27. *God required that the king himself had to honour the terms of that servitude, 2 Samuel 21:1-9.*

Note that **“the Nethinims”** of Nehemiah 3:31 were evidently descended from these Hivites. See the study *Nehemiah 3 Part 1* and Dr Ruckman’s commentary *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* p 219.

The 1984 NIV, 2005 TNIV, 2011 NIV, however, read differently and thereby miss the practical points summarised above.

“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” Nehemiah 4:23.

Note that the NIV reading allows individuals to make their own decision about going for water, which is contrary to Nehemiah’s disciplined leadership that is evident throughout Nehemiah 4. See remarks above with respect to those from among **“the men of Gibeon”** and **“the Nethinims,”** who constituted the logistic ‘tail’ keeping the workers supplied with essentials.

The NIV reading implies that the Jews of their own volition never washed either themselves or their clothes for nearly two months while restoration of the wall was in progress i.e. **“fifty and two days”** Nehemiah 6:15, which would not have been the case given the Jews’ willing observance of the Levitical laws. See remarks above. The NIV reading for Nehemiah 4:23 would certainly have resulted in Amos 4:10 applying detrimentally in Nehemiah’s time.

The pre-1611 Bibles essentially agree with the AV1611:

Wycliffe (*“ech man was maad nakid oneli to waischyng (each man was made naked only to washing)”*)

Coverdale (*“so so moch as to washe oure selues”*)

Matthew (*“so muche as to washe oure selues”*)

Great (*“saue onely because of the water”*)

Bishops’ (*“saue onely because of the wasshing”*)

Geneva (*“saue euery one put them off for washing”*)

The Douay-Rheims Challoner’s Revision 1749-1752 and the NKJV also agree with the AV1611.

The post-1611 HCSB partly agrees with the AV1611 with *“Each carried his weapon, even when washing.”*

The following post-1611 versions agree with the 1984 NIV, 2005 TNIV, 2011 NIV against the AV1611: RV 1885, ASV 1901, NASV, NLT, NCV.

The following post-1611 versions agree with the 1984 NIV, 2005 TNIV, 2011 NIV against the AV1611 except for the omission of *“even when he went for water”*: JB, NJB, NWT, RSV, NRSV, CEV, ESV. Those versions may have been influenced by the Septuagint, LXX, which reads *“And I was there, and the watchmen behind me, and there was not a man of us that put off his garments.”*

Green’s Hebrew-English Interlinear has *“And none, I and my brothers, and my servants and none of the men of the guard who followed me, stripping off our clothes, (each) (had) his vessel of water”* i.e. Green is against the AV1611.

As is often the case, the pro and anti-AV1611 readings are a pre and post-1611 standoff respectively, although the post-1611 versions are further divided over the inclusion or exclusion of the phrase *“even when he went for water.”*

As usual, the post-1611 versions are unscriptural in their departure from the AV1611 – and in this case **“Unclean, unclean”** Leviticus 13:45.

10. *In what ways can we combat feelings of discouragement and helplessness?*

Apply, rest in, and **“by the grace of God”** 1 Corinthians 15:10 minister by means of Philippians 4:6-7, which should be memorized. That is basic.

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

11. *Why is it important for believers to model perseverance?*

It is important in the light of Hebrews 10:36 with respect to doing God’s will. Hebrews 10:36 should be memorized.

“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”

That includes **“the promise of his coming”** 2 Peter 3:4. The scoffers should be disdained, just as they were in Nehemiah’s day.

Appendix – Oliver’s Advice

Colonel Valentine Blacker 1778-1826

See en.wikisource.org/wiki/Oliver%27s_Advice

See digital.nls.uk/english-ballads/pageturner.cfm?id=74895229&mode=transcription

See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust_in_God_and_keep_your_powder_dry

The poem *Oliver’s Advice* by Colonel Valentine Blacker 1778-1826 evidently first appeared in 1834, eight years after Blacker’s death. According to Wikipedia, it is a dramatic representation of Oliver Cromwell addressing his army on the eve of the invasion of Ireland in 1649 but the poem is surreal because it contains references to the battle of the Boyne in 1690 during the Williamite War in Ireland and the Irish Catholic rebellion of 1798 led by the infamous Fr. John Murphy of Co. Wexford. (Note how the Wiki article tends to play down the role of the Catholic Church in the 1798 rebellion.)

The poem may therefore be referring in part to post-1798 Catholic uprisings in Ireland that occurred before Blacker’s death in 1826 e.g. the 1803 uprising led by Robert Emmet. Its lines may therefore be couched in terms that the writer could have envisaged as guidance Cromwell would have given from the grave, as a stirring exhortation to all Protestant Irishmen loyal (ironically, as Cromwell led the regicide of Charles 1st) to the British Crown.

See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Williamite_War_in_Ireland

See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Rebellion_of_1798

See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Murphy_%28priest%29

See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Emmet

Oliver’s Advice is nevertheless useful as a devotional illustration of defending kith and kin, hearth and home as in Nehemiah’s day and even in the present day with respect to sustaining the witness and growth of the church according to the principle of Acts 9:31.

“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”



OLIVER'S ADVICE.

BY COLONEL BLACKER.

The night is gathering gloomily the day is closing fast,
The tempest flaps his raven wings, in loud and angry blast ;
The thunder clouds are driving arthwart the lurid sky,
But but your trust in God my boys, and keep your powder dry.

There was a day when loyalty was hailed with honour due,
Our banner then protecaion wav'd to all the good and true ;
And gallant hearts beneath its folds were linked in honour's tie,
We put our trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry.

When treason bare'd h r bloody arm and madden'd round the land,
For king and laws and order fair, we drew the ready brand ;
Our gathering spell was William's name—our was do or die,
And still we put our trust in God and kept our powder dry.

But now alas ! a wondrous change has come the nation o'er,
And worth and gallant services remembered are no more ;
And crush'd beneath oppression weight in chains of grief we lie,
And put your trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry.

Forth starts the spawn of treason the scaped of ninty eight,
To bask in country favour to seiz the helm of state ;
E'en the whose hands are reeking with murder's crimson die,
But put your trust in God my boys, and keep you powder dry.

They come, whose deeds inardn'd the Slaney's silver wave,
The come who to the foreign foe, the hail of welcome gave,
He comes the open repel fierce he comes the Jesuit sly,
But put your trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry.

They come whose conicls warp the land in foul rebellious flame,
Their hearts unchastned by remorse their cheeks unting'd by shame,
Be still be still indignant hearts be tearless to each eye
And but your trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry.

The power that led his chosen by pillar cloud and flame,
Through parched sea and desert waste the power is still the same,
He fails not—He the loyal hearts that firm on him rely,
So put your trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry,

The power that nerved the stalwart arm, of G.deous chosen few,
The power that led great William Boyne's reddening torrent thro'
In his protecting aid confide and every foe defy,
Then put your trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry,

Already see the star of hope emits its orient blaze,
The cheering bacon of its glimmers through the haze ;
It tells of better days to come it tells of succour nigh,
Then put your trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry.

See along the hills of Down its rising glories spread,
But brightest beams its radiauce from Donard's lofty head,
Clanbrassal's vales are kindling wide and Roden is the cry,
Then put your trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry.

Then cheer ye hearts of loyalty nor sink in dark despair,
Their banner shall again unfold its glories in the air,
The storm that raves the wildest, the soonest passes by,
Then put your trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry.

For happy homes and alters free, we grasp the ready sword,
For freedom truth and for our God's unmulated word,
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1840

Oliver's Advice

Colonel Valentine Blacker

*The night is gathering gloomily, the day is closing fast —
The tempest flaps his raven wings in loud and angry blast;
The thunder clouds are driving athwart the lurid sky —
But, "put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry."*

*There **was** a day when loyalty was hail'd with honour due,
Out banner the protection wav'd to all the good and true—
And gallant hearts beneath its folds were link'd in honour's tie,
We put our trust in God, my boys, and we kept our powder dry.*

*When Treason bar'd her bloody arm, and madden'd round the land,
For king, and laws, and order fair, we drew the ready brand;
Our gathering spell was William's name — our word was, "do or die,"
And still we put our trust in God, and kept our powder dry.*

*But now, alas! a wondrous change has come the nation o'er,
And worth and gallant services remember'd are no more,
And, crush'd beneath oppression's weight, in chains of grief we lie —
But put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry.*

*Forth starts the spawn of Treason, the 'scap'd of ninety-eight,
To bask in courtly favour, and seize the help of state* —
E'en **they** whose hands are reeking yet with murder's crimson dye —
But put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry.*

*The Wikipedia article on Robert Emmet states that "Robert Emmet came from a wealthy Protestant family who sympathised with Irish Catholics, namely their lack of fair representation in Parliament."

*They come, whose deeds incarnadin'd the Slaney's silver wave —
They come, who to the foreign foe the hail of welcome gave;
He comes, the open rebel fierce—he comes the Jesuit sly;
But put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry.*

*They come, whose counsels wrapp'd the land in foul rebellious flame,
Their hearts unchastened by remorse, their cheeks unting'd by shame.
Be still, be still, indignant heart — be tearless, too, each eye,
And put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry.*

*The Pow'r that led his chosen, by pillar'd cloud and flame,
Through parted sea and desert waste, that Pow'r is still the same.
He fails not — He, the loyal hearts that firm on him rely —
So put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry.*

*The Pow'r that nerv'd the stalwart arms of Gideon's chosen few,
The Pow'r that led the great William, Boyne's reddening torrent through —
In his protecting aid confide, and every foe defy —
Then put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry.*

*Already see the star of hope emits its orient blaze,
The cheering beacon of relief it glimmers thro' the haze.
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*See, see along the hills of Down its rising glories spread,
But brightest beams its radiance from Donards lofty head.*

Clanbrassil's vales are kindling wide, and "Roden" is the cry —
Then put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry.*

*Evidently a reference to the Earl of Roden, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_of_Roden

*Then cheer ye hearts of loyalty, nor sink in dark despair
Our banner shall again unfold its glories to the air.
The storm that raves the wildest, the soonest passes by;
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