



## II. CONFLICT SURROUNDING THE WALL (Nehemiah 4:1—Nehemiah 6:14)

## A. Conflict from Without (Nehemiah 4:1-23)

1. Opposition to the work (Nehemiah 4:1-11)
  - a. In the beginning of the work (Nehemiah 4:1-6)
    - (1) The nature of the opposition (Nehemiah 4:1-3)
      - a) The timing of the opposition (Nehemiah 4:1)
        - i) The identification of the time—“it came to pass...when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall”
        - ii) The explanation of the time—This first act of opposition was likely early in the rebuilding of the wall. After all, Sanballat responded to new information about the wall being built and it was only half-way finished in Nehemiah 4:6.
      - b) The leaders of the opposition (Nehemiah 4:1)
        - i) Sanballat the Horonite (Nehemiah 4:1)
        - ii) Tobiah the Ammonite (Nehemiah 4:3)
      - c) The motivation of the opposition (Nehemiah 4:1; see also Nehemiah 2:10)
        - i) Sanballat learned the wall was being built.
          - (a) Nehemiah 2:10 introduced Sanballat and Tobiah as the leading enemies of the Jews during the time of rebuilding the wall.
          - (b) The hatred of these two men was already stirred by the fact the Nehemiah was come to Jerusalem seeking the welfare of Israel and it was exacerbated when they “*heard that we builded the wall*” (Nehemiah 4:1).
          - (c) Sanballat kept tabs on the Jews. In this, he is much like our enemy, the Devil.
        - ii) Sanballat was wrath.
          - (a) At Sanballat’s and Tobiah’s introduction, we learned that they possessed deep hatred for the Jews, because it is said “*it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel*” (Nehemiah 2:10). It is possible the hatred simply stemmed from the Jews being God’s people (see Matthew 10:22, Matthew 24:9, Luke 21:17, 1 John 3:13).
          - (b) Whatever the case, they went from grieving to being wrath. Note: Scripturally speaking, when a man became *wroth* it had dire consequences (i.e., Cain killing Abel (Genesis 4:5-8); Simeon and Levi killing Hamor and Shechem (Genesis 34:7-27); Saul desiring to kill David (1 Samuel 18:8-11)).
        - iii) Sanballat took great indignation.



- d) The actions of the opposition (Nehemiah 4:1-3)
  - i) The generality of opposition stated—“he...mocked the Jews” (Nehemiah 4:1)
  - ii) The specifics of opposition stated (Nehemiah 4:2-3)
    - (a) The mockery of Sanballat (Nehemiah 4:2)
      - (i) The audience of his mockery—“he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria”; Note: Sanballat’s addressing of the army of Samaria leads us to wonder if he held a prominent position that gave him audience with the army. Regardless, it is obvious that he was doing his best to rouse others to join him in his hatred of the Jews and of the work they were doing. The old say, *misery loves company* rings true with Sanballat.
      - (ii) The questions of his mockery—“**What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?**”
    - (b) The mockery of Tobiah (Nehemiah 4:3)
      - (i) He was by Sanballat suggesting that he had the same audience.
      - (ii) He mocked the Jews saying “*Even that which they build, if a fox up, he shall even break down their stone wall*” (Nehemiah 4:3).
  - iii) The hearing of the opposition—Nehemiah is not mentioned as being in the audience when Sanballat and Tobiah spoke, but the prayer that follows makes it obvious that he was, at least, aware of the speeches made by these men. While this mockery may seem insignificant to us, verbal opposition can do much to detract people when they are in the midst of a great labour and are weary of the work.
- (2) The response to the opposition (Nehemiah 4:4-6)
  - a) Nehemiah prayed (Nehemiah 4:4-5)
    - i) Note: Nehemiah refused to exchange words with Sanballat and took it to God in prayer (see Proverbs 26:4, 1 Peter 5:7). Exchanging blows with our foes often only serves to harm our testimony and lessen our opportunity to witness.
    - ii) The addressee of his prayer—“Hear, O our God” (Nehemiah 4:4)
    - iii) The concern in his prayer—“for we are despised” (Nehemiah 4:4); Note: God already knew of Sanballat’s words; yet, Nehemiah told God anyway.



- iv) The request in his prayer—“*turn their reproach upon their own head...give them for a prey...cover not their iniquity*” (Nehemiah 4:4-5)
  - (a) Nehemiah was specific and exact with what he requested God to do to their enemies.
  - (b) Nehemiah had no qualms in asking God to not be merciful unto their enemies.
  - (c) Note: God also wants Christians to make their specific requests known to Him (Philippians 4:6).
- v) The understanding in his prayer—“*for they have provoked thee to anger*” (Nehemiah 4:5)
  - (a) The Jews were doing the “*work of their Lord*” (Nehemiah 3:5) which was for the glory and honour of God.
  - (b) By mocking the Jews, Sanballat and Tobiah, were ultimately mocking God and Nehemiah understood how that angered God. Note: This is true in other ages as well. Persecuting the church was equal to persecuting Christ (Acts 9:5). Blessing the Jews in Daniel’s seventieth week will be equal to blessing Christ (Matthew 25:40).
- b) Nehemiah built—“*So we built the wall*” (Nehemiah 4:6)
  - i) Nehemiah brought the problem to the Lord and left it in God’s capable hands.
  - ii) Praying was all that Nehemiah needed to do to handle the opposition and, apparently, praying settled the people for they simply returned to working with “*a mind to work*” (Nehemiah 4:6).
  - iii) They worked and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof.
- b. In the midst of the work (Nehemiah 4:7-11)
  - (1) The nature of the opposition (Nehemiah 4:7-8)
    - a) The timing of the opposition—They “heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped” (Nehemiah 4:7).
    - b) The leaders of the opposition (Nehemiah 4:7)
      - i) Individuals
        - (a) Sanballat
        - (b) Tobiah
      - ii) People groups
        - (a) The Arabians
        - (b) The Ammonites
        - (c) The Ashdodites
      - iii) Note: Sanballat’s plan appears to have worked because the opposition increased.
    - c) The motivation of the opposition—“they were VERY wroth” (Nehemiah 4:7)



- d) The actions of the opposition (Nehemiah 4:8)
  - i) The conspiracy
    - (a) It is probable that the peoples mentioned at times found themselves as foes; however, a common enemy (the Jews) would now bring them together.
    - (b) They now discussed how to work together to destroy the Jews.
  - ii) The plan—"fight against Jerusalem, and hinder it"
- (2) The response to the opposition (Nehemiah 4:9-11)
  - a) The people's prayer—"we made our prayer unto our God" (Nehemiah 4:9)
  - b) The people's plan—"we...set a watch against them day and night" (Nehemiah 4:9)
  - c) The people's despondency (Nehemiah 4:10)
    - i) The expression of the despondency—"The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed."
    - ii) The cause of the despondency—"there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall"
      - (a) The Jews had been working on the wall and had accomplished much, but their zeal waned.
      - (b) The rubbish left from the destruction of the wall may have been a hindrance, but the greater problem was that they had lost their focus.
      - (c) Note: This should remind us of the importance and difficulty involved in finishing a work for God (Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7).
  - d) The foes' expectation (Nehemiah 4:11)
    - i) The enemies saw that the Jews had become discouraged in the work.
    - ii) This distraction was so strong that the enemies felt confident they would be able to slip right in among them before the Jews even realized they were there.
- 2. Vigilance in the work (Nehemiah 4:12-23)
  - a. The response to the initial threat (Nehemiah 4:12-15)
    - (1) The warning given (Nehemiah 4:12)
      - a) Those giving the warning—"the Jews which dwelt by"
      - b) The seriousness of the warning—"they said unto us ten times"
      - c) The message of the warning—"From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you"
        - i) They were warned of an impending attack.
        - ii) They were told that the enemy was large and ready to follow them back to all the nearby towns and destroy them there.
    - (2) The response (Nehemiah 4:13-15)
      - a) The preparations made (Nehemiah 4:13); Nehemiah set them strategically with their swords, theirs spears, and their bows.



- b) The people encouraged (Nehemiah 4:14)
  - i) Nehemiah said to the people “Be not ye afraid of them.” He further admonished to “remember the Lord, which is great and terrible.” Remembering God was on their side was the reason they were to not be afraid.
  - ii) He reminded them of their loved ones—“fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”
- c) The mission accomplished (Nehemiah 4:15)
  - i) The enemies heard of the Jews defense.
    - (a) The enemies had eyes and ears on the Jerusalem for they “heard” that the Jews set up a defense.
    - (b) Thus, they knew that their conspiracy “was known” unto the Jews and that they no longer had the element of surprise on their side.
    - (c) Nehemiah had just admonished the Jews to remember the Lord and God “brought their counsel to nought.”
  - ii) The Jews returned to the work.
    - (a) The Jews were encouraged by the Lord’s protection and thus they were revived to continue rebuilding the wall.
    - (b) They all returned:
      - (i) All of us to the wall
      - (ii) Every one unto his work
- b. The plan going forward (Nehemiah 4:16-23)
  - (1) Builders and defenders (Nehemiah 4:16-18)
    - a) Half the people were to build the wall—“half of my servants wrought in the work” (Nehemiah 4:16).
    - b) Half the people were to defend the people—“the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons” (Nehemiah 4:16). Even those that were building “had his sword girded by his side” (Nehemiah 4:18).
  - (2) Plans for being attacked (Nehemiah 4:19-23)
    - a) The problem presented (Nehemiah 4:19)
      - i) “The work is great and large.”
      - ii) “We are separated upon the wall, one far from another.”
    - b) The plan in case of attack (Nehemiah 4:20-22)
      - i) In case of attack, the trumpet would blow and everyone was to “resort ye hither unto us” (Nehemiah 4:20).
      - ii) Also, everyone was to “lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us” (Nehemiah 4:22).
    - c) The seriousness of the work and defense (Nehemiah 4:23);  
Note: Everyone remained fully clothed for to be able to work and defend at all times.