

## Nehemiah Lesson 04

Nehemiah Chapter 4

*Distributed by: KJV Bible Studies*

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Memory verses for this week: *Psa 12:7 Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.*

**Introduction:** In last week's lesson, we covered the rebuilding of the wall and the names of all the people who took part in the restoration of the wall. Many people came out and put their hands to the work to allow the wall to totally be rebuilt.

**Overview of Nehemiah 4:** There immediately arose opposition from without. The enemies of God's people threatened them to such a degree that the work was done with weapons at their side to defend themselves. Moreover, there comes trouble from within. The work is extremely difficult and there soon came weariness and discouragement. Subdivisions of the chapter are: (1) the opposition of Sanballat and others in verses 1-6; (2) the conspiracy of the adversaries in verses 7-15; and (3) Nehemiah's precautions in verses 16-23.

### I. Opposition by Sanballat and the Others

*Neh 4:1 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.*

*Neh 4:2 And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, 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?*

*Neh 4:3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.*

As is often so typical of Satan, opposition quickly arose to God's work. It began from without. Though not expressly noted, Sanballat evidently was a Samaritan official or a man of great influence. As he heard of the commencement of the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem, "he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews." He not only was angry that Jerusalem (the historic rival of Samaria) was being fortified, he retaliated immediately with mockery of the project.

A comparable modern example might be a politician publicly ridiculing a project he opposes. Moreover, he conferred not only with his cohorts (his brethren), but also of the army of Samaria. Evidently, the Persian government had allowed Samaria a small standing army for local defense. He sarcastically and derisively spoke publicly against the wall project. He mocked the Jews calling them feeble.

By his rhetorical questions, he implied, they would never get the job done. They would never be able to rebuild the wall from the accumulated decades of rubbish and burned debris. He no doubt sought to dishearten his Jewish adversaries by publicly predicting they would fail. In verse 3, Tobiah the Ammonite (from neighboring Ammon— modern Jordan), evidently an ally of Sanballat and the Samaritans, joined in condemning the project.

He too ridiculed it publicly. The implication was the workmanship of the Jews was so inferior that even the weight of a small animal would knock it over.

*Neh 4:4 Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity:*

*Neh 4:5 And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.*

The public ridicule and opposition from established local governmental officials was not unnoticed by Nehemiah. Though they evidently had not actually physically intervened, their public ridicule and opposition had an effect. It certainly brought discouragement and anxiety. To that degree, the verbal attack of the adversaries was successful. Nehemiah likely had not anticipated such opposition in planning and embarking on his mission. Therefore, he turned to the only resource he had— the Lord. He prayed and asked God to take note of their peril. Moreover, he asked God to deal with them, that is, make them captive even as we have been a captive people.

The simple lesson is to take our problems to the Lord and ask Him to deal with them.

*Mark 14:38 Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.*

*1 Th 5:17 Pray without ceasing.*

*1 Th 5:18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

*Neh 4:6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.*

Despite the opposition and negative words, the work went ahead nevertheless.

In the face of much opposition, they did what God had called them to do. “So we built the wall!” Nehemiah gives the simple reason: “for the people had a mind to work.” They had, almost to a man, joined the work with great enthusiasm, notwithstanding the prevailing opposition.

## **II. The Conspiracy of the Adversaries**

*Neh 4:7 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Shoddiness, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, Neh 4:8 And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. Neh 4:9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.*

As the various traditional enemies of God's people in the region (the Samaritans, the Ammonites, the Arabians, and Philistines {Ashdodites}) received word that the wall of Jerusalem was underway and its breaches being rebuilt, there was great anger. These historic enemies of Israel therefore "conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it."

In verse 9, the bible records that Nehemiah did the two things he could do.

(1) He prayed and asked for God's providential protection. God quite evidently answered his prayer. For though their enemies did huff and puff, threatening the work, they did not in fact attack.

(2) At the time, not knowing exactly what would happen, Nehemiah therefore "set a watch day and night, because of them."

*Neh 4:10 And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. Neh 4:11 And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. Neh 4:12 And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.*

In addition to the opposition from without came trouble from within the ranks. As the project continued, the workers became worn out. The undertaking was immense. Just clearing the accumulated debris from the destruction of the Babylonians years earlier, plus all the assorted other rubble of the years became more than they anticipated. The workmen were therefore tired and discouraged.

In verse 11, the external adversaries continued their "psychological operations" against the Jews. They schemed how they would slip in undetected, attack the workmen, and force the project to a halt. Apparently even some Jews living in outlying areas were used (whether wittingly or not is unclear) to influence the work in Jerusalem. On ten separate occasions, Jews who lived near the enemy came with propaganda.

The translation of the end of verse 12 may be a subtle invitation to join in alliance with the allied adversaries and they would leave them alone. Or, it may have been continued

threats.

Matthew Henry had some excellent comments about verse 12.

There were *Jews that dwelt by them*, in the country, who, though they had not zeal enough to bring them to Jerusalem to help their brethren in building the wall, yet, having by their situation opportunity to discover the enemies' motions, had so much honesty and affection to the cause as to give intelligence of them; nay, that their intelligence might be the more credited, they came themselves to give it, and they said it ten times, repeating it as men in earnest, and under a concern, and the report was confirmed by many witnesses. The intelligence they gave is expressed abruptly, and finds work for the critics to make out the sense of it, which perhaps is designed to intimate that they gave this intelligence as men out of breath and in confusion, whose very looks would make up the deficiencies of their words.

I think it may be read, without supplying any thing: "*Whatever place you turn to, they are against us*, so that you have need to be upon your guard on all sides," Note, God has many ways of bringing to light, and so bringing to nought, the devices and designs of his and his church's enemies. Even the cold and feeble Jews that contentedly dwell by them shall be made to serve as spies upon them; nay, rather than fail, *a bird of the air shall carry their voice*.

*Neh 4:13 Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.*

*Neh 4:14 And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.*

*Neh 4:15 And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.*

When Nehemiah heard of the plans of the enemy, he took further precautions. He assigned added forces behind the lower, unfinished portions of the wall which were most vulnerable. It was a citizen's militia. Families were assigned to guard duty with their weapons. Moreover, he sought to encourage the leadership of the people reminding them how the Lord is "great and terrible." The word translated as terrible (ary yawray) has the sense of 'awesome.'

In other words, he reminded them that God was on their side and He is awesome. He urged them to fight, if need be, for their heritage. In verse 15, we find as word leaked back to the enemies that the Jews would fight to protect themselves, they backed off. The work therefore continued. If we are going to accomplish anything for God, we must not waiver but continue on having faith that God will fight our battles.

*Prov 25:19 Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.*

### **III. Nehemiah's Precautions**

*Neh 4:16 And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.*

*Neh 4:17 They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.*

*Neh 4:18 For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.*

The Jews were forewarned and thus forearmed. The work continued. However, now the workmen did so with their weapons at their sides ready to pick them up at a moments notice. Others (up to half) were on guard duty while the rest worked on the wall. Threats did not keep the Jews from accomplishing the work that they had set out to do.

*Neh 4:19 And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.*

*Neh 4:20 In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.*

As the work progressed and the wall rose, it became evident from a military perspective that the defenders were thinly spread. Nehemiah implemented a signal system.

If trouble should appear at one side of the city, trumpets would sound signals. Forces could then rush to that side of the wall. Moreover, he encouraged his people with the truth, "Our God shall fight for us." To this day, as God's people do God's work, though the opposition be fierce, God will protect and help His people.

God promised He would go to battle for His people back in the book of Deuteronomy.

*Deu 20:2 And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people,*

*Deu 20:3 And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them;*

*Deu 20:4 For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.*

J. Vernon McGee related to having the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other in

his commentary.

I love this. Each builder had a trowel in one hand with which to build, and in the other hand he carried a sword with which to defend himself. These two weapons or instruments should be in the hands of believers today. The trowel represents the fact that believers should build themselves up in the most holy faith. That is for the inside.

New converts need to be trained to be effective in a ministry. They first need to learn from experience that Jesus saves and keeps and satisfies. It is wonderful to hear that So-and-So was saved yesterday, or last week; but let us hear from him in a year or two years from today to see if he has been built up in the faith. You see, we need to be built up. The trowel needs to be in our hand. Also we need to hold the sword of the Spirit. That is also important. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God with which we defend ourselves. We need the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other.

Spurgeon put out a magazine years ago called *The Sword and the Trowel*—I think it is still in existence. I was in Spurgeon's church some time ago and stood in his pulpit. What a great man of God he was, and an example of one who believed that you ought to hold the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other.

*Neh 4:21 So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.*

*Neh 4:22 Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day.*

*Neh 4:23 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.*

The intensity of the activity is noted in how they worked from dawn to dark. All workers and their servants were ordered not to leave the city for their homes at night. Nehemiah and his associates did not even take their clothes off to sleep.

He notes that they in fact did not change clothes during the project except for occasional laundering. The atmosphere was so tense, their only goal was to finish the wall.

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*Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

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