

Nehemiah 4

The real test of a leader is how he or she faces crises and reacts to opposition. This chapter recounts several forms of opposition and how Nehemiah confronted them.¹

How did Sanballat and Tobiah react when they heard the Jews were rebuilding the wall (vv. 1-3)? Sanballat was angry.....and with his associates, and in the presence of Samaritan soldiers, he ridiculed the Jews who were working on the wall. He was joined by his associate Tobiah who likewise ridiculed them.

Why did Sanballat speak to the workers instead of Nehemiah? Workers/followers are typically not as strong as their leader. They are more susceptible to attack.

Because Nehemiah and the workers did in fact have authorization and legal protection from the king (proven by the *letters* mentioned in Nehemiah 2:7), Sanballat and Tobiah had no authority to actually stop the work. All they could do was try to discourage the Jews into stopping by undermining their confidence and faith in Nehemiah.

What was Nehemiah's strategy to battle against potential discouragement (vv. 4-5)? He didn't debate the opposition; he didn't show them the letter from the king; he didn't form an exploratory committee; and he didn't even deal with the two enemies directly by confronting them. Instead, he took it to God in prayer. He recognized the spiritual nature of this battle.

APPLICATION:there is a constant battle going on in our lives – it's largely an invisible battle, but it's a battle for our hearts and minds (Ephesians 6:12). Our struggle is not against the Sanballat's and Tobiah's (flesh and blood) of this world. They are not the enemy. They are pawns of the true enemy. Nehemiah is clearly facing a spiritual battle. Prayer is a primary weapon in this battle. The Word of God is another.

Like some of the imprecatory prayers (angry, pleading for judgment) in which the psalmists invoked God's condemnation on His enemies, Nehemiah's prayer in this instance was severe and condemning. He prayed that Sanballat and his cohorts would be taken captive and that they would be judged for their sins.

How should a Christian interpret this kind of praying, especially in view of what Jesus Christ said about praying for one's enemies (Matthew 5:44)? Several facts need to be noted. First, in opposing the Jews, Sanballat "and company" were actually opposing God. Second, God had already pronounced judgment on Israel's enemies (Zechariah 9-14 and others). So, Nehemiah was praying according to God's will—that God would deliver Jerusalem from her enemies (Joshua 1:5). Third, Nehemiah was praying that God would bring about what He had promised Abraham regarding those who curse His people (Genesis 12:3). Fourth, vengeance belongs to God, not to Nehemiah or other believers (Romans 12:19).²

How did the people respond (v. 6)? With *both* prayer and hard work. After praying, Nehemiah and the Jews continued with the work. Once he committed the problem to the Lord, he trusted God to help them achieve their goal. And while praying and trusting, they rebuilt the wall to half its height. At this juncture their task was half completed. Sanballat and Tobiah's efforts at demoralizing the Jews failed. The Jews rose above their enemies' attempts at discouragement.³

When the enemies of Nehemiah gathered, what did they do (vv. 7-8)? They were very angry because the Jewish workers' rapid progress had naturally increased the threat to them. So, they all plotted together to take more overt and corporate action to attack Jerusalem, apparently from all sides.⁴

How did Nehemiah and his men respond (v. 9)? Again the people (we) prayed for help and then added action to their prayers by posting a guard round the clock to meet this threat. The corporate strategy of Judah's enemies was met by a corporate response from the people.⁵

How did the people react to their state (vv. 10-12)? Not only was there external opposition from the Jews' enemies, but the Jews themselves became discouraged and fearful. The workers became discouraged by their own fatigue, the immensity of their task, and the threats of their enemies.⁶

Discouragement is such a powerful weapon. Satan works so hard to keep us from walking by faith and tries to keep us in discouragement mode and walking by sight.

What was Nehemiah's plan to address the peoples' concerns (vv. 13-14)? Nehemiah established a new strategy to meet the threat of enemy infiltration. He increased security by positioning some of the people by families behind the lowest points of the wall with swords, spears, and bows.

This must have been a difficult decision for Nehemiah. To place *whole* families together—including women and children—must have put tremendous pressure on fathers particularly. In case of outright attack, they would have no choice but to stay and fight *for* and *with* their family members. But Nehemiah knew it was the only decision he could make if they were to survive and succeed in rebuilding the walls.

Obviously fear gripped these people. So, focusing the workers' attention again on God, Nehemiah gathered them together and charged them to face the situation courageously (don't be afraid) and to remember the great and awesome Lord who was on their side, and to fight to save their families.⁷ He reminded them of their duty to protect their families and property.

How did the enemies respond (v. 15)? When their enemies heard that their plot had been discovered, they backed off and did not attack.....and the people resumed their construction work. *This* was the victory. Defending against the attack was not the victory; the people of God would not be at peace and security until the wall was rebuilt. Getting on with the work was the immediate victory.

What then became the Jews new normal daily routine (vv. 16-18a)? From that time on, half the Jews worked at construction, while the other half stood guard. Even the builders carried weapons. Those who came from outside the city were ordered to spend the night in Jerusalem so as to be readily available if needed. Their strategy was to *pray, watch, and work*.⁸

What system did Nehemiah devise next (v. 18b-20)? In addition Nehemiah stationed a trumpeter next to him—a man who would follow Nehemiah everywhere he went as he supervised the work. In case of an attack, the trumpet blast would rally the people who were spread out along the wall to the place of attack. Again Nehemiah encouraged the people, this time stating that their God would fight for them.⁹

How did the work force do their job after the changes Nehemiah made (vv. 21-23)? The people worked diligently, from early morning till nighttime. Those living outside the city did not even return to their homes. Venturing outside Jerusalem at night would have been a dangerous risk. Through each night some workers stood guard, knowing the city was vulnerable to attack even then. They did not even take off their clothes to clean up after work; they kept a diligent watch at all times.¹⁰

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Nehemiah, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 28.

² Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 682.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Nehemiah, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 30.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 485–486.

⁹ I Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 683.

¹⁰ Ibid.