

Nehemiah 4

DEALING WITH OUTSIDE OPPOSITION

You cannot tell from appearances how things will go. Sometimes imagination makes things out worse than they are.... Those people who are imaginative see many more dangers than perhaps exist; certainly many more than will happen.... But for everyone, surely, this is the lesson: Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never, in nothing, great or small, large or petty. Never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.
—Winston Churchill (Oct. 29, 1941)

The task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (~2 ½ miles long, 20 ft. thick, 25 ft. high) began sometime in the summer of 444 BC. The people were organized and motivated. Everyone was involved in the great work. But trouble was brewing.

Threatened by the rebuilding of Jerusalem, Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, and Tobiah, a leader of the Ammonites, were determined to stop it through any means necessary.

DEALING WITH ANGER FROM THE TAUNTS OF THE ENEMY (4:1-6)

Sanballat begins to burn with anger (Hebrew, *chara*) and becomes deeply disturbed by the rebuilding project. He speaks in mockery of the Jews and their attempts to rebuild.

“What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they’re doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a single day by just offering a few sacrifices? Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?” (4:2, NLT)

Tobiah adds to the mockery:

“Indeed, even if a fox climbed up what they are building, he would break down their stone wall!” (4:3, CSB)

How does Nehemiah respond to their taunting?

- He _____ to God (4:4-5).
- He gives his _____ over to Him (cf. Rom. 12:17-21).
- He gets everyone back to _____ (4:6).

The opposition of the Samaritans was motivated not primarily by religious differences but by political considerations. The appearance of a vigorous governor of Judah threatened the authority of the governor of Samaria.
—Edwin Yamauchi

Ancient papyri (from 4th century BC) have identified Sanballat as the governor of Samaria and have identified Tobiah with an aristocratic family with power in the region. Silver vessels from the 5th century BC have also identified Geshem the Arab as a powerful leader in the Negev of Israel and in northern Arabia.

God’s people should always regard prayer not as a last resort but as our primary weapon against opposition.

—Mervin Breneman

God had already pronounced judgment on Israel’s enemies, so Nehemiah was praying according to God’s will that He would deliver Jerusalem from her enemies [cf. Gen. 12:1-3]. Finally, Nehemiah was asking God to take vengeance, which is His work, not the work of Nehemiah or other believers (cf. Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19).

—Thomas Constable

DEALING WITH FEAR AND DISCOURAGEMENT FROM THE THREATS OF THE ENEMY (4:7-23)

Sanballat's verbal warfare failed so next he turned to a conspiracy with other enemies to attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

Feeling surrounded by enemies and fearing an imminent attack, the Jews began to grow discouraged.

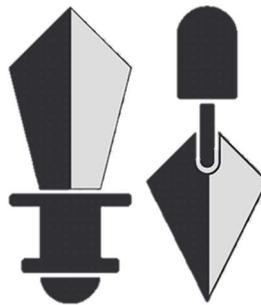
*So much rubble for us to haul!
Worn out and weary, will we ever finish this wall? (4:10, CEV)*

Meanwhile, other Jews not involved in the rebuilding kept coming and repeating over and over:

Wherever you turn, they will attack us. (4:12, NIV)

How does Nehemiah lead the people to respond to the threats?

- They _____ to God (4:9).
- They established an armed _____ (4:9, 13, 16).
- They were encouraged not to _____ but to keep their focus on God and to be ready to fight for their families (4:14).
- They were equipped both to _____ (the sword) and to _____ (the trowel) (4:17-18).
- They stayed alert _____ (4:19-21; cf. 1 Peter 5:8-9)!



You cannot constantly hear negativism without having some of it rub off on you. If you are prone to discouragement, you can't run the risk of spending a lot of your time with people who traffic in discouraging information. —Charles Swindoll

The best way to dispel fear is to remember the Lord who alone is to be feared. —Edwin Yamauchi

For every idealistic peacemaker willing to renounce his self-defense in favor of a weapons-free world, there is at least one warmaker anxious to exploit the other's good intentions. —Margaret Thatcher

Nehemiah 4:16 mentions "my men," probably a reference to the professional Persian troops the king sent with Nehemiah when he made the trip from Persia. —J. Daniel Hays

Taunts had been met by prayer and concentrated work; plots by prayer and guard-duty; stronger threats by a general call to arms and the charge to "keep your minds on the Lord...and fight." ...The famous sword-and-trowel exercise was well thought out. Builders, needing both hands free, had swords at their belts; carriers, ranging further and risking more, needed weapons at the ready. —Derek Kidner

It was a sign that their heart was upon their work when they could not find time to dress and undress, but resolved they would be at all times ready for service. Good work is likely to go on successfully when those that labor in it thus make a business of it. —Matthew Henry