

Nehemiah 4 – Bible Study

4 But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—stones that are burned?”

3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.”

4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! 5 Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders.

6 So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

The opponents:

Sanballat: from Beth Horon. See Nehemiah 13:28 : related to Eliashib the High Priest. He probably saw Nehemiah as a threat to his career (later he became governor).

Tobiah: A Jew, but serving in a high position among the Ammonites. Married to a Jewish woman from an influential family. See Nehemiah 6:17-19 and 13:28: connections with Eliashib the High Priest.

Opposition also from other people: Ammonites, Arabs, people of Ashdod.

All in Jerusalem knew Sanballat and Tobiah, and several of the nobles of the Jews were on Tobiah’s side.

They are the ones that take the lead in ridiculing God’s people.

Many among the Jews feel still uncertain, especially under ridicule. Constant encouragement needed!

Nehemiah’s reaction:

He prayed and left the answer to their mockery to God. Vs. 4-5.,

The enemies were enemies of God. God would deal with it.

And they continued to work: with all their heart: they had a mind to work, vs. 6.

The enemies' tactic did not work.

The people knew they were doing the work of God.

7 Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, 8 and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

10 Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."

11 And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease."

12 So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us."

13 Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

15 And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. 16 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. 17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. 18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

Satan's next step

Ridicule is only the beginning. Now Satan will try to attack with other weapons.

Verse 7 peoples conspire together to stop the work by using violence.

Again Nehemiah in verse 9, prayed to God, and took action and set a guard.

The enemies knew that an attack would provoke the anger of king Artaxerxes.

So they would attack in the night, secretly, unexpected. They use the strategy of terrorists.

Nehemiah posted guards, so that the element of surprise is gone.

When the enemies heard it, they gave up their plan and the Jews could return to the wall, each to his own work.

The People Discouraged

Jews living around Jerusalem: verse 12: they came from all directions and told us ten times.

Cowards. Only wanted to live in peace, not anger their enemies. But their attitude discouraged the people.

So the rebuilding of the wall

- i.) is opposed by people on high positions: who are Jews themselves, or at least closely related to the Jews, Sanballat, Tobiah: they chose their own high position instead of the wellbeing of God's people and the honour of God.
- ii.) The Jews around Jerusalem lost their courage and tried to stop the work, because of the result it would have for them: what they would have to endure from the peoples around.
- iii.) This resistance and the huge task discouraged the workers in Jerusalem. But Nehemiah continued and encouraged the people in Jerusalem: it is God's work!

19 Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

21 So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. 22 At the same time I also said to the people, "Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day." 23 So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.

Nehemiah 4: hopeless situation. people were discouraged.

The enemies were much more than the people of God.

The work was extensive and spread out, and they were widely separated.

But: 'Our God will fight for us!'

Remember the Lord: that is what makes God's people strong.

And they worked hard. The good hand of the LORD was upon them and they were blessed.

Questions:

1. We can say that the church has her worst enemies, not so much among the people from whom you expect it, the unbelievers, but especially from important people, who consider themselves Christians, or are considered by others as Christians, but who in fact in their deeds show contempt for the real Christians and ridicule them. Being ridiculed and opposed by such people can hurt the church much more than fierce opposition from outsiders. It can discourage many people in the church. Can you see examples of that in our own time?

2. Vs. 4: turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! For us, often, there is a difficulty when we read this: Can we pray for that? Can we pray God to pour out His wrath upon the enemies?

The Lord Jesus tells us to love even our enemies and to pray for them.

But in Revelation 6:10 we hear the souls under the altar call out. They pray: 'O Sovereign

Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'

Lord's Day 19 says that Christ 'will cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation.'

How should we explain this verse, and all other parts in the Bible where God is asked to destroy or punish the enemies? Is that what we also should pray for?

3. Vs. 12-15: Here we see that the communion of saints is very important! If you don't stand alone, but encourage each other to stand firm, then it makes it much easier not to be influenced by others who mock or threaten you!

In what ways can we as communion of saints encourage and support each other to remain faithful and not to fear the threats from this world? And how much do you make use of this?