



# Opposition from the Outside

Nehemiah 4

## Forms of Opposition

- After Nehemiah presented his proposal to his fellow Jews (2:17-18a), they responded, “Let us start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work” (2:18b). However, they soon faced opposition from Sanballat<sup>1</sup> and others. Read Nehemiah 4.
  1. What forms of opposition did Nehemiah and the Jews face? (4:1-3, 8) What were their enemies trying to accomplish by using these forms of opposition?<sup>2</sup>
  
  2. What was Nehemiah’s immediate response to these forms of opposition? (4:4-5, 9)<sup>3</sup>
  
- Regardless of being ridiculed (4:1-3), the Jews “rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart” (4:6). But the opposition grew more intense, and the Jews were surrounded by opposition (4:7).<sup>4</sup>

## Effects of Opposition

- The seriousness of the opposition progressed from ridicule (4:1) to physical threat (4:8).
  3. How did this opposition affect some of the Jews? (4:10-12)

## Response to Opposition

- In response to the opposition, Nehemiah and the Jews prayed to God (4:4, 9) and took precautions<sup>5</sup> to meet the threat (4:9).
  4. Based on verses 13-14, what measures (actions) did Nehemiah take to meet the threat?



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<sup>1</sup> Sanballat – probably the governor of Samaria.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, their enemies’ main goal was to stop the work, but they used different methods to pursue this goal. Sanballat ridiculed the Jews ‘in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria’ (4:2). He not only wanted to discourage the Jews, he wanted to gather the support of his associates. He wanted the Jews’ to doubt their ability to build the wall, even for the sake of their God. Tobiah cast doubt on the stability of whatever they were able to build (4:3). Both Sanballat and Tobiah wanted them to feel the project was hopeless. When the Jews were not deterred, their enemies threatened them with physical violence, hoping to cause fear and discouragement (4:8).

<sup>3</sup> In 4:4-5, Nehemiah is not praying for revenge but for God’s justice to be carried out, for the sake of God’s honor.

<sup>4</sup> The names mentioned in verse 7 represent the surrounding opposition: Sanballat and Samaria (north), the Arabs under Gessem (south), the Ammonites (east), and Ashdod (west).

<sup>5</sup> ‘precaution’ – a measure or action taken beforehand to prevent harm.

- ❑ Nehemiah's response was effective. God "frustrated" their enemies' plot, and the workers returned to rebuilding the wall (4:15). From that day on (until the wall was completed), Nehemiah took various measures to keep the work moving forward (4:16-23).
  - Some worked on the wall, while others watched out and guarded (4:16, 21).
  - Even while working, everyone stayed watchful and ready (4:17-18).
  - A trumpet was used to call everyone together if needed (4:18-20).
  - They diligently worked and watched throughout the day (4:21).
  - They stuck together, with no one leaving Jerusalem at night (4:22).
  - Nehemiah and his associates were an example of constant readiness (4:23).
- 5. In response to opposition, Nehemiah prayed (4:4-5, 9) and encouraged the Jews to trust in the great and awesome God (4:14, 20), but he also took specific actions to guard the work and keep it moving forward. What can we learn from Nehemiah's example?

## Opposition & Us

- ❑ As Christians seeking to do things for God, we too will face opposition from the outside.
  6. What forms of "opposition from the outside" may we face?<sup>6</sup>

- ❑ We may not build city walls or guard God's work with spears, shields, bows, armor or swords; but we build, guard and fight in other ways.<sup>7</sup>



7. As we seek to do God's work, how can we apply Nehemiah's example to our lives?

## Reflection/Application

- In our world today, many people are involved in God's work while many others oppose it. Where do you stand? Do you need to start serving God? Do you need to receive Jesus as Lord and become part of God's team? If you have doubts or questions, ask and seek!
- As a believer, in what ways are you involved in God's work? Are you discouraged by opposition? Reflect on this lesson, talk with a mature brother or sister, pray to God and take the needed actions to move forward (4:9).

<sup>6</sup> Like Nehemiah and his fellow Jews, we may face the opposition of other people, including ridicule, criticism, obstruction, intimidation, threats, etc. But our opposition is ultimately spiritual. As Peter said, 'Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour' (1 Peter 5:8, NIV).

<sup>7</sup> Paul wrote, 'The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world' (2 Corinthians 10:4a). Our 'weapons' include the truth of the gospel (Romans 1:16), the 'sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' (Ephesians 6:17), and prayer (6:18). In Christ we put on the 'armor of God' and take up the 'shield of faith' (see Ephesians 6:10-18). Through fellowship with one another, we watch together, stand strong together (Philippians 1:27-28), and encourage one another to persevere (Hebrews 10:24-25).