

Opposed From Without

Lesson Scope: [Nehemiah Chapters 4 to 6](#)

Lesson Focus

From the very beginning of Nehemiah's stay in Jerusalem, he faced opposition. Before any building began on the wall, the enemy had challenged the Jews' motives and belittled their efforts.

The hand of the Lord was evident in the work thus far. The authorization from the king, the willingness of the people, and the leadership of Nehemiah had each contributed to a successful beginning.

But from the very beginning, the workers met challenges. The enemies were "grieved ... exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel" (Nehemiah 2:10). They were likely upset that the Jews now had the approval and support from the king to begin this work. They could hardly appeal to the king without a compelling reason.

The enemies tried various methods to stop the work. They threatened the Jews with military force. They attempted to provoke responses that would merit accusation before the king. They slandered Nehemiah in an effort to destroy his reputation. But Nehemiah did not allow any of these to sidetrack him from building.

The enemy has always been intent upon destroying God's work. Armed with the power of God, faithful men can thwart those evil efforts.

Nehemiah faced enemies who relentlessly tried several different approaches. First they mocked; then they threatened open attack. Later they tried to lure him away and to slander his character. In all of this, Nehemiah remained faithful and kept a clear vision of what God called him to do.

It might be helpful to see the emphasises on several thoughts in this lesson such as Nehemiah's effectual prayer, his perception of his enemies' malicious intent in trying to get him to leave Jerusalem, and his faith that God would judge his enemies in the end.

Lesson Aim: To consider the enemy's assault upon God's work.

Theme Verses: [Ephesians 6:10-11](#). Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Lesson Text

Mockery

[Nehemiah 4:1-3](#) 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. 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? 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.

Threatening

[Nehemiah 4:7-8](#) ⁷ But it came to pass, *that* when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, *and* that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, ⁸ And conspired all of them together to come *and* to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

Slander

[Nehemiah 6:1-9](#) ¹ Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and *that* there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) ² That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in *some one* of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. ³ And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? ⁴ Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner. ⁵ Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; ⁶ Wherein *was* written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith *it, that* thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these

words. ⁷ And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, *There is a king in Judah*: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together. ⁸ Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart. ⁹ For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, *O God*, strengthen my hands.

Intimidation

Nehemiah 6:10-13 ¹⁰ Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who *was* shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. ¹¹ And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who *is there*, that, *being* as I *am*, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. ¹² And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ Therefore *was* he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and *that* they might have *matter* for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

Questions for Study

Mockery

1. What motivated Sanballat and Tobiah in their mockery?
2. Why are the enemies of God's people angry?

Threatening

3. Why did Sanballat's first attack on the Jews fail?
4. What are some necessary actions we must take to gain the victory?

Slander

5. How did the methods of Nehemiah's enemies change as time progressed?
6. What are some applications we can make from Nehemiah's prudent actions?

Intimidation

7. Why was Nehemiah able to elude the snares laid for him?
8. What should be our attitude toward opposition?

Analyzing the Passage

Sanballat was a man of authority in Samaria (Nehemiah 4:2). His mockery was probably spoken within earshot of the builders; Nehemiah knew about it (Nehemiah 4:4). Tobiah, an Ammonite also called "the servant," was possibly a freed slave who had some position of authority. These two were allied with Geshem, the Arabian, (Nehemiah 6:1) and may have been governors in neighboring areas or rulers of mixed nations in Palestine.

Ashdodites (Nehemiah 4:7) were inhabitants of Ashdod, a city of Philistia. To "set a watch" (Nehemiah 4:9) was to appoint guards to warn of danger.

The "open letter" (Nehemiah 6:5) was intended to spread its message to others. It was an attempt to shape public opinion against the Jews, to discourage those involved in the work, and to sow discord against Nehemiah. Gashmu (Nehemiah 6:6) is another form of Geshem. This Arabian confederate of Sanballat was the accuser.

Shemaiah (Nehemiah 6:10) may have professed to be a prophet. It appears that Nehemiah went to him for counsel. His advice was so contrary to Nehemiah's convictions that he rejected it. To take refuge in the temple may have assured Nehemiah's safety temporarily, but it would have shown that he was fearful. Such an action would have left the people without his leadership and put a stain upon his honor.

Principles and Applications

Mockery

1. The enemy is enraged by strength and growth among God's people (Nehemiah 4:1, 7). The rising walls of Jerusalem gave visible evidence of the growing strength of God's people. Sanballat and his friends intensified their efforts against the progress Nehemiah and his people were making. Satan intensifies his efforts against visible signs of growth among God's people today. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" is both a Biblical command for us to obey and a promise for us to claim in faith.

2. The enemy uses mockery to intimidate and ridicule (Nehemiah 4:1-3). We must expect that the world will not understand or appreciate our motives. In current society, Christians are often portrayed as ignorant,

prejudiced, and foolish. These charges are nothing new and do not change the facts. We must continue walking by faith in the path God's Word outlines for us.

3. The enemy belittles the idea of divine aid (Nehemiah 4:2). The world does not understand the Christian's willingness to sacrifice and suffer for the cause of Christ. It does not see the Lord as almighty and able to assist His children. The foe would like us to think that we are helpless in the face of his attacks. But God's providence protected Nehemiah and will also protect us in our spiritual warfare.

Threatening

4. The enemy is defeated by dependence on God and diligent watchfulness (Nehemiah 4:9). Nehemiah used the resources at hand. He made supplication to the Most High and set a watch around the workers. God calls us to be alert to the influences around us. The morally depraved conditions of society should move us to fervent prayer for the spiritual welfare of our families. God blesses the combination of watchfulness and dependence on Him. We must be willing to endure hardness as good soldiers.

Slander

5. The enemy is persistent and resourceful (Nehemiah 6:1-2). When the threat of battle was not effective, Nehemiah's enemies sought dialogue and compromise. Humanism, as an "angel of light," questions Biblical methods of child training. Is such rigid discipline necessary? Godly parents must resist such challenges and stand firm on the Bible way.

6. The enemy desires to break down the separation between God's people and the world (Nehemiah 6:2). The distinctive attire of God's people often becomes the first target. The enemy invites us to a compromise that would smooth friction and that seems harmless. But we cannot negotiate away Bible commands; a middle road is unacceptable. The Lord calls us to a separated lifestyle, wholly dedicated unto Him.

7. The enemy attempts to halt the work by slander and by the threat of official censure (Nehemiah 6:6, 9). Nehemiah faced an enemy who skillfully used public opinion to intimidate him and the other builders. Nehemiah overcame these threats by direct denial, steadfast perseverance, and prayer to the God of heaven. He focused on the fact of God's providence rather than on the slander of his enemies.

Intimidation

8. The enemy will use the fear of men to hinder the work (Nehemiah 6:10-15).

Had Nehemiah heeded the contrary advice of the prophet to hide in the temple, fear would have been evident. The man of faith does not need to cower in fear of his enemies; his omnipotent God promises protection.

9. The enemy desires to induce men to sin, to thereby cause them to lose their testimony and effectiveness (Nehemiah 6:13). Nehemiah's effectiveness was aided by his ability to resist sin and compromise. Satan especially targets men of influence. Sin destroys the good they have done and leads many others astray. To be effective, leaders like Nehemiah must lead pure and holy lives.

Important Teachings

1. The enemy is enraged by strength and growth among God's people (Nehemiah 4:1, 7).

2. The enemy uses mockery to intimidate and ridicule (Nehemiah 4:1-3).

3. The enemy belittles the idea of divine aid (Nehemiah 4:2).

4. The enemy is defeated by dependence on God and diligent watchfulness (Nehemiah 4:9).

5. The enemy is persistent and resourceful (Nehemiah 6:1-2).

6. The enemy desires to break down the separation between God's people and the world (Nehemiah 6:2).

7. The enemy attempts to halt the work by slander and by the threat of official censure (Nehemiah 6:6, 9).

8. The enemy will use the fear of men to hinder the work (Nehemiah 6:10-11).

9. The enemy desires to induce men to sin, to thereby cause them to lose their testimony and effectiveness (Nehemiah 6:13).

Answers to Questions

1. What motivated Sanballat and Tobiah in their mockery?

Sanballat and Tobiah addressed their confederates in a propaganda effort to solidify sentiment against the Jews. As was likely intended, some Jews heard the mockery and told others about it. Their natural response would have been discouragement.

2. Why are the enemies of God's people angry?

The rising walls of Jerusalem were a visible token of Israel's growing strength because of God's blessing. The conflict between the Lord and Satan is visible on this earth. In his followers, the devil inspires hatred for God's people. Wherever Christians are prospering, Satan is present to hinder.

3. Why did Sanballat's first attack on the Jews fail?

Nehemiah set a watch and guarded the workers. He also prayed to the Lord to protect them as they worked. When the enemies saw that Nehemiah was prepared, they did not attack openly.

4. What are some necessary actions we must take to gain the victory?

Nehemiah interceded to the Lord of heaven and also set a watch. This combination of dependence on God and diligent human effort works today. As a brotherhood, we worship and pray together and encourage each other to walk closely with the Lord. We relate in a disciplined atmosphere of mutual accountability.

5. How did the methods of Nehemiah's enemies change as time progressed?

First they mocked the Jews; then they conspired to attack openly. They sent messengers to propose a meeting with Nehemiah, but they actually sought to do him mischief. Later they sent a letter with false accusations.

6. What are some applications we can make from Nehemiah's prudent actions?

Like Nehemiah, we should stay focused on building the kingdom. At the same time, we must perceive the threats to our work and deal with them adequately. The proper response to false accusation is to humbly speak the truth and allow God to vindicate the truth. This helps us to overcome fear. We must persevere until we reach the goal.

7. Why was Nehemiah able to elude the snares laid for him?

Nehemiah understood his enemies' motives. Because he was humble and obedient, the Lord gave him special perception and courage. Nehemiah walked by faith.

8. What should be our attitude toward opposition?

We must understand that opposition is a normal outgrowth of Satan's rebellion against God. Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

We should expect opposition, but we need not fear, because victory is assured. Jesus set us a good example in His response to those who hated Him.

Summarizing the Lesson

The enemy is relentless. When one approach fails, he tries another. We may never sit back and relax. Our enemy does not take vacation! "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:24-25).

Research Guide

1. Read the complete lesson scope.
2. Read the entry under "Nehemiah" in Halley's Bible Handbook.