



Time to Reflect

- Can you think of an occasion when you experienced opposition? What brought it about and how did you respond?
- In (v4-5) we see how Nehemiah responded to ridicule by turning to God in prayer. What impacts you the most about his prayer?

Last week we focused on some details relating to the rebuilding process. We saw how Nehemiah faced a great challenge but he was faithful to the call of God and he also partnered with various people and groups, all of whom demonstrated incredible dedication. This week we discover that opposition emerged, rather quickly, to the rebuilding project. We will reflect on the nature of that opposition and we will see how Nehemiah dealt with it.

“When things are going well, get ready for trouble, because the Enemy doesn’t want to see the work of the Lord make progress. As long as the people in Jerusalem were content with their sad lot, the Enemy left them alone, but when the Jews began to serve the Lord and bring glory to God’s name, the Enemy became active.”

(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah*, p59)

Specifics

- In chapter two we saw how Nehemiah’s arrival in Jerusalem was perceived to be a threat to Sanballat and his associates (2:10).
- Sanballat (Governor of Samaria) wanted to keep Jerusalem weak and he was afraid that the rebuilding project would endanger the balance of power in the wider area, and it would affect his own influence and wealth.
- Greed, anger, insecurity and fear were the root causes of Sanballat’s opposition. Cyril Barber reflects on this more fully. He writes, **“One of the main highways linking the Tigris-Euphrates river valley to the north with Egypt in the south and Philistia in the west, passes through Jerusalem. With Jerusalem once more a well-protected city, its very location will attract trade; and gone will be Samaria’s economic supremacy.¹”**
- (v1) tells us that Sanballat was angry and greatly incensed. He quickly started to oppose Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls. In chapters 4-6 we will see various tactics that were used to stop the work on the walls.
- Yet, in the face of this opposition, Nehemiah stood firm. Warren Wiersbe helpfully reflects, **“Nehemiah was ‘steadfast and unmovable’ and led his people to finish the work in fifty-two days!²”**
- As he so often does, Wiersbe also offers a profound point of application. He observes, **“If you start building, you will soon be battling; so, be prepared.³”**

¹ Cyril Barber, *Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1976), pp59-60.

² Warren Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah* (David. C. Cook, 1992), p60.

³ Ibid, p60.

- As we look at the nature of Sanballat's opposition to Nehemiah, as recorded in our passage, we see two main expressions of that opposition.

1. Ridicule (v1-6)

- In the Bible there are many examples of God's servants being mocked and ridiculed. For example, Goliath mocked David for standing before him with only a sling in his hand (1 Sam. 17:41-47).
- Jesus was mocked by the soldiers during his trial (Luke 22:63-65) and in Hebrews 11:36 we are told that some of the heroes of the faith "...faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment."
- Sanballat ridiculed the Jews even before the work on the walls had properly started (v1b) and he did so in front of an audience (v2).
- Note the series of pointed questions that Sanballat used as he ridiculed those who were working on the walls of Jerusalem (v2). He referred to them as feeble – implying the task they faced was beyond them.
- As he reflects on the workers on the walls, Wiersbe suggests "They had no human resources that people could see, but the enemy could not see their great spiritual resources. The people of the world don't understand that God delights in using feeble instruments to get His work accomplished (1 Cor. 1:18-31). The world glories in its wealth and power, but God's people glory in their poverty and weakness. When we are weak, then we are strong (2 Cor. 12:1-10)."⁴
- Sanballat's ridicule also focused on the work itself (v2). In asking three questions he sought to suggest that the work was impossible, that it would take more than prayer and worship to complete the task, and that the workers hadn't properly assessed the project they had taken on.
- Note how Tobiah also joined in with the ridicule (v3). Nehemiah responded to all of this by turning to God in prayer (v4). He didn't get distracted and the work continued (v6). Nehemiah trusted God.
- Wiersbe writes, "If we spend time pondering the Enemy's words, we will give Satan a foothold from which he can launch another attack closer to home. The best thing to do is to pray and commit the whole thing to the Lord, and then get back to your work! Anything that keeps you from doing what God has called you to do will only help the Enemy."⁵

2. Intimidating Plots (v7-9)

- Four different groups are mentioned in (v7) and they were united in their anger against the rebuilding of the walls. The city was surrounded by opponents. "To the north were Sanballat and the Samaritans; to the east, Tobiah and the Ammonites; to the south, Geshem and the Arabs; and to the west, the Ashdodites."⁶
- (v8) tells us that these groups plotted together against Jerusalem. Nehemiah was fully aware of this and guards were posted (day and night) to meet the threat. But note, once again, the centrality of prayer in standing against the intimidating plots (v9).
- Stan Evers concludes, "There was prayer and perspiration! Prayer without work is presumption, and work without prayer is self-confidence. We must pray because we accomplish nothing without God's power, but at the same time we are to labour for God as if everything depends on our efforts."⁷
- Nehemiah was sure of his calling and he trusted God. Even in the face of opposition he remained resolute and faithful. His example is a reminder for all of us to keep focused on the work that God has called us to. Where God calls, He also equips. We need to trust Him and pray to Him with honesty, openness and faithfulness.

⁴ Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah*, p61.

⁵ *Ibid*, p63.

⁶ *Ibid*, p63.

⁷ Stan Evers, *Doing A Great Work: Ezra And Nehemiah Simply Explained* (EP Books, 2015), p143.