

Sanballat Tries to Hinder Nehemiah (July 31–September 21, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 4

Opposition by Ridicule

1 Now it happened when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, *he* became angry and greatly provoked, and he mocked the Jews.

2 Then he said before his brothers and the army of Samaria, “What are the feeble Jews doing? Will they restore *these things* for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the piles of rubble—even those burned up?”

3 Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him and said, “Their wall of stone that they are building would break down if a fox went on it!”

4 Hear, our God, for we are despised. Turn their scorn on their head and give them over to plunder in the land of captivity.

5 Do not cover their guilt, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before you. They have provoked the builders to anger.

6 So we rebuilt the wall, and all of the wall was joined up to half *its height*. For the people had a heart to do *it*.

Opposition by Plot

7 Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem were going forward and the gaps were being closed, they were very angry.

8 So all of them plotted together to come fight against Jerusalem and to make trouble for it.

9 So we prayed to our God and set up a guard against them day and night.

Internal Opposition: Discouragement and Fear

10 But Judah said, “The strength of the carriers is failing, and there is too much dirt, and we are not able to build at the wall.”

11 Then our enemies said, “They will not know nor see until we come upon them and will kill them and stop the work.”

12 When the Jews who lived beside them came, they said to us ten times, “From all of the places where they live, *they will come up* against us.”

13 I stationed the people behind the deepest part of the wall in the open places according to their families, with their swords, spears, and bows.

14 And I looked, got up, and said to the nobles, prefects, and the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”

15 It happened when our enemies heard that their plan was known to us, that God had frustrated *it*, and we all returned to the wall—each to his work.

Diligence and Readiness in the Work

16 From that day, half of my servants were working on craftsmanship, half were holding spears, small shields, bows, and breastplates. The commanders were behind the whole house of Judah.

17 The ones who were building the wall and the ones who carried the materials were carrying in one hand while doing the task, and with the other hand were grasping a weapon.

18 Each of the builders had his sword tied to his side while building. And the man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

19 I said to the nobles, to the prefects, and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widespread, and we are spread out over the wall far from each other.

20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, come together to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

21 So we labored at the work, and half of them were holding the spears from dawn until the stars came out.

22 At the time I also said to the people, “Let each man and his servant spend the night inside Jerusalem, so that they will be a guard for us in the night and work in the day.”

23 So neither I nor my brothers nor my young men nor the men of the guard who were behind me took off our clothes. Each one *kept* his weapon *even* in the water.

Oppression Within the Remnant (July 31–September 21, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 5

Extortion by the Rich

1 Now there was a great cry of distress of the people and of their wives *against* their Jewish brothers.

2 There were those who were saying, “Our sons and daughters, we are many. We must get grain so that we may eat and live.”

3 There were also those saying, “We have pledged our fields and our vineyards and our houses so that we can get grain in the famine.”

4 And there were those who were saying, “We have borrowed money on our fields and our vineyards for the tax of the king.

5 Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our sons are like their sons. Look, we are subduing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and there are some from our daughters being molested. We are powerless, and our fields and vineyards *belong* to others.”

Nehemiah Rebukes the Creditors

6 I was very angry when I heard their shouts and these words.

7 I thought over this in my heart, and then I quarreled with the nobles and the prefects. I said to them, “You yourselves are taking interest from your own brother!” So I called the great assembly against them,

8 and I said to them: “We ourselves have bought back our brothers the Jews who were sold to the nations as we were able. But now you yourselves have sold your brothers so they may be sold to us!” They were silent and could not find a word *to say*.

9 So I said, “The thing that you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God *to prevent* the disgrace from the nations, our enemies?”

10 Also, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Please stop *taking* this interest.

11 Please restore to them this day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves, their houses, and the interest on the money, the grain, the grape juice, and the olive oil that you have been taking from them.”

The Creditors Heed Nehemiah’s Rebuke

12 So they said, “We will restore it and will not request *anything more*. So we will do as you say.” Then I called the priests and made them take an oath to do this promise.

13 I also shook out my garment and said, “This is how God will shake out everyone from his house who will not keep this promise. So this is how his possessions will be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said, “Amen!” And they praised Yahweh, and the people kept this promise.

Nehemiah’s Unselfish Leadership

14 Moreover, from the appointed day I was made their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes—twelve years. My brothers and I did not eat the food *allowance* of the governor.

15 The former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and they took food and wine from them, besides forty shekels. Also, their servants controlled the people, but I did not do so because of the fear of God.

16 I also devoted myself to the work of this wall, and we did not buy land. All of my servants were gathered for the work.

17 One hundred and fifty men, prefects and Jews, and those who came to us from the nations around us, *were* at my table.

18 Now what was prepared each day for me was one ox, six choice sheep, and birds. And every ten days all *kinds of* wine were made. But for this I did not demand the food *allowance* of the governor because the slavery was too heavy on this people.

19 Remember me for good, my God, all that I have done for this people.

Sanballat’s Final Attempt to Thwart Nehemiah (July 31–September 21, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 6:1–14

Opposition by Trickery

1 Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and to the rest of our enemies that I had built the wall and that no gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not erected doors in the gates—

2 Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together in *one of* the villages in the plain of Ono.” But they planned to do evil to me.

3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I am not able to come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you all?”

4 And they sent a message to me four times like this, and I returned an answer like this to them.

5 And Sanballat sent his servant with an open letter, *another* word like this to me a fifth time, in his hand.

6 In it was written, “It has been reported among the nations, and Gashmu also is saying it, that you and the Jews are considering rebellion. Therefore, truly you are building the wall and you are becoming their king, according to these words.

7 You have also set up prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, saying, ‘*There is a king in Judah.*’ And now it will be proclaimed to the king according to these words. Now, come and we will plan together.”

8 So I sent to him saying, “None of these words you have spoken has happened. You are indeed saying *things* created in your own mind”—

9 for all of them *sought* to frighten us, saying, “their hands will not do the work.” And now, *God*, strengthen my hands.

Opposition by Intimidation

10 Now I went into the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined *at home*, and he said, “Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple; for they are coming to kill you—during the night they are coming to kill you.”

11 But I said, “Should a man like me run away? And would a man like me go into the temple so that he can save his life? I will not go in!”

12 Then I look and realized God had not sent him; rather, he had spoken the prophecy against me *because* Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

13 For this reason he was hired: to frighten *me* so that I would act and sin, so that they would have a bad report so they could taunt me.

14 Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to their works, and also Noadiah the prophetess, and the remainder of the prophets who were frightening me.

Jerusalem's Walls Completed (September 21, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 6:15–19

The Walls Completed

15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days.

16 When our enemies heard of this, all of the nations surrounding us were afraid and lost their confidence. They knew that this work had been done with *the help of our God*.

Opposition Still Continues

17 Also, in those days the nobles of Judah increasingly sent their letters to Tobiah, and *letters* from Tobiah returned to them.

18 For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah. His son Jehohanan took as a wife the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah.

19 They also were speaking of his good deeds in my presence, and they were sending my words out to him. Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

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