

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

Nehemiah 4

Opposition by Ridicule

1 Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews.

2 He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy *men* of Samaria and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore *it* for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?”

3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* near him and he said, “Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on *it*, he would break their stone wall down!”

4 Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity.

5 Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders.

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

Opposition by Plot

7 Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, *and* that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry.

8 All of them conspired together to come *and* fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it.

9 But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.

Internal Opposition: Discouragement and Fear

10 Thus in Judah it was said,

“The strength of the burden bearers is failing,
Yet there is much rubbish;
And we ourselves are unable
To rebuild the wall.”

11 Our enemies said, “They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work.”

12 When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, “They will come up against us from every place where you may turn,”

13 then I stationed *men* in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows.

14 When I saw *their fear*, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials 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 When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work.

Diligence and Readiness in the Work

16 From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains *were* behind the whole house of Judah.

17 Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took *their* load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon.

18 As for the builders, each *wore* his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter *stood* near me.

19 I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another.

20 At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

21 So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared.

22 At that time I also said to the people, “Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day.”

23 So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each *took* his weapon *even to* the water.

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

Nehemiah 5

Extortion by the Rich

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

2 For there were those who said, “We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live.”

3 There were others who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine.”

4 Also there were those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax *on* our fields and our vineyards.

5 Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage *already*, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others.”

Nehemiah Rebukes the Creditors

6 Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words.

7 I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, “You are exacting usury, each from his brother!” Therefore, I held a great assembly against them.

8 I said to them, “We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?” Then they were silent and could not find a word *to say*.

9 Again I said, “The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?”

10 And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Please, let us leave off this usury.

11 Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth *part* of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them.”

The Creditors Heed Nehemiah’s Rebuke

12 Then they said, “We will give *it* back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say.” So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise.

13 I also shook out the front of my garment and said, “Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said, “Amen!” And they praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.

Nehemiah’s Unselfish Leadership

14 Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, *for* twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor’s food *allowance*.

15 But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God.

16 I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

17 Moreover, *there were* at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us.

18 Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox *and* six choice sheep, also birds were prepared for me; and once in ten days all sorts of wine *were furnished* in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the governor’s food *allowance*, because the servitude was heavy on this people.

19 Remember me, O my God, for good, *according to* 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, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates,

2 then Sanballat and Geshem sent *a message* to me, saying, “Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they were planning to harm me.

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

4 They sent *messages* to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way.

5 Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand.

6 In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports.”

7 You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'A king is in Judah!' And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together."

8 Then I sent *a message* to him saying, "Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind."

9 For all of them were *trying* to frighten us, thinking, "They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done." But now, *O God*, strengthen my hands.

Opposition by Intimidation

10 When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night."

11 But I said, "Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in."

12 Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered *his* prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

13 He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me.

14 Remember, *O my God*, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were *trying* to frighten me.

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

Nehemiah 6:15–19

The Walls Completed

15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of *the month* Elul, in fifty-two days.

16 When all our enemies heard *of it*, and all the nations surrounding us saw *it*, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Opposition Still Continues

17 Also in those days many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah's *letters* came to them.

18 For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

19 Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. Then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

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