

## The Taunting of Tobiah and Sanballat #8

Nehemiah 4: 1-6

Tonight we find that Nehemiah and the others have begun their noble work repairing the walls of the city. They are committed and sincere in their efforts, but it doesn't take long for the opposition to show up. We first met Sanballat and Tobiah in [Chp.2](#) and it was quickly evident they were opposed to the work that Nehemiah and the others sought to accomplish. [Neh.2:10 – When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. \[19\] But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?](#)

Sanballat was the governor of Samaria. His name literally means “*strength*.” Often the opposition we face while serving the Lord is strong and difficult to overcome. He was closely associated with Tobiah, the servant and an Ammonite. Some scholars believe that Tobiah may have been governor of Ammon, those who were descendent from Lot's incestuous relations. Ironically his name means “*Jehovah is good*.” There is great truth in his name, but it also presents a reminder that all is not always as it appears. Many who come in the name of the Lord do not have His ways at heart. Many seek to be perceived as holy and committed to the work of the Lord, but hidden beneath the façade of righteousness is an agenda of deception and rebellion.

This passage reveals great truth in our struggle to maintain righteousness and a godly foundation in our society. Many of the struggles Nehemiah faced are still present in our day as well. I want to consider some of the [difficulties](#) Nehemiah faced and dealt with as we think on: [The Taunting of Tobiah and Sanballat](#).

### I. The Presence of Adversity (1-3)

**A. Their Anger (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.](#) Clearly Sanballat was not pleased with the efforts of Nehemiah and the others. He was *hot, furious, and enraged with anger*. His anger brought about mockery, as he belittled the Jews and their efforts.

➤ Sanballat was the governor of Samaria and he feared the Jews gaining power, possibly diminishing his power and influence. He simply did not want the Jews in Jerusalem and he certainly didn't want them to prosper.

➤ We are far removed from the days of Nehemiah, but the same issues remain in our day. There are those who oppose the Lord, His church, and anything related to the Lord. They would rather that the church didn't exist, and if it must, then they clearly don't want us to prosper. They don't want us to influence society or seek to promote the cause of Christ within the community. I can assure you, if you take a stand for the Lord against the ways of this world, you will find opposition and anger.

**B. Their Accusations** (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?* Sanballat wanted to convince himself that they would never succeed in rebuilding Jerusalem. He accused the Jews of being:

**1. Feeble** – *What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves?* Sanballat claimed that they lacked the strength and ability to be productive. He saw them as *feeble*, “*frail, miserable, powerless, withered, and weak.*” Judah had been in captivity for 70 years. They were few in number in Jerusalem. They had no economic or military might. From all appearances these were a “ragtag” group with little hope of achieving anything.

➤ The Jews may have been weak; they had endured a season of judgment, but their God had not lost His power. He may have chastised them for their sin, but He remained in control of their lives. The Jews' strength was not within themselves, but in the Lord.

**2. Foolish** – *will they sacrifice?* Now Sanballat taunted their God and the relationship they had with Him. Will they continue to serve the Lord and depend on Him to build their city? Sanballat suggested that it would take more than the God of Israel to rebuild the city.

➤ Are we not viewed in much the same way today? The world sees no benefit in serving the Lord. They wonder why we continue to worship and serve One whom we have never seen. Those who deny God's existence refuse to believe that He is a God of power and compassion. The world sees us as weak, frail, and foolish for believing in our Lord.

**3. Failures** – *will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?* Sanballat viewed it as a hopeless cause. He believed they were foolish to believe that the city would ever be rebuilt. Could they possibly restore the city from such ruin? In his mind these miserable Jews were just failures without enough sense to know the difference.

➤ This world views the modern Christian the same way. They refuse to believe that there is anything to our faith. They refuse to believe in the Word of God or His promises to His

people. They deny the existence of heaven and hell. They refuse to embrace life beyond the grave. “Why do we spend our lives serving the Lord? If God is real then why is the world and society in the condition it currently is?” The world views a life lived for Jesus a waste.

**C. Their Assumption (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.* They assumed that all of the efforts of the Jews were in vain. They refused to believe that the work or wall would last.

➤ There were scoffers in Nehemiah’s day. There were doubters in the days of the early church. The naysayers remain today. They assume that this is all a fairy tale. They see no value in accepting Christ and living for Him. One day our faith will end in sight. The work and will of God will endure!

## **I. The Presence of Adversity (1-3)**

**II. The Prayer During Adversity (4-5)** – Even though the enemy was present and making a lot of noise, Nehemiah refused to focus on the opposition. He sought the Lord instead of abandoning the work he was called to do. Let’s take a moment to consider his prayer.

**A. The Distress (4a)** – *Hear, O our God; for we are despised:* That is a plea for help in a distressing situation. Nehemiah knew the influence these men had. He knew the potential existed for difficulty, but he chose to lean upon the Lord. He cried unto the Lord for help in his moment of distress.

➤ Difficulties will come; that is certain, but we do not have to succumb to their advances. We serve One who is mindful of us; He has called us to perform a work for Him and He will not abandon us in that work. We must look to Him and seek His strength and provision when we are facing difficulty and opposition. *Psalm 121:1-2 – I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. [2] My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.*

**B. The Desire (4b-5a)** – As Nehemiah prayed unto the Lord he mentioned several things that he desired of the Lord. He had specific needs and he prayed a specific prayer. He desired:

**1. Their Reaping (4b)** – *turn their reproach upon their own head.* The enemy sought to defeat and hinder the work; they sought to make Nehemiah and the others a reproach before the people. The truth was that Sanballat and Tobiah were the reproach before the Lord and Nehemiah prayed that they would reap that which they had sown.

➤ Our Lord has a way of “turning the tables” on the opposition. They may seek to make us the reproach, humiliating us before others, but God can bring their own reproach upon them.

**2. Their Restraint (4b)** – [and give them for a prey in the land of captivity](#). Nehemiah knew what it was to endure the righteous judgment of God in a land of captivity. He prayed that God would render that same judgment upon those who opposed His work. Nehemiah was praying that God would bind the opposition, by whatever means necessary, so that they would no longer be able to hinder their progress.

➤ We too face a determined adversary who will stop at nothing to hinder and defeat us. We are no match for him, but our Lord is. He is more than able to bind the devil and those who serve him. He can set us free from bondage and deliver those who hinder to bondage. [Is.43:13 –Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?](#)

**3. Their Revelation (5a)** – [And cover not their iniquity](#). Nehemiah prayed that God would expose their wickedness before men. He prayed that God would reveal to all who they truly were. He wanted those who labored alongside him to see Sanballat and Tobiah's true colors.

➤ Honesty and truth are never wrong and they always prevail. Men may seek to hide their real agenda and their ungodly motives, but eventually they will be exposed. We face much opposition today that is masked by so called good intentions. We need to pray that God will reveal the truth concerning our opposition and expose it for what it really is!

**4. Their Retribution (5a)** – [and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee](#). Nehemiah pleaded with the Lord not to forget the wickedness and sin of the enemy. He genuinely desired that God would deal with them according to their ways. This is known as imprecatory prayer. In the Psalms we find David praying many of these.

➤ Jesus taught us to pray for our enemies rather than seeking their judgment. [Mat. 5:44 – But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;](#) It is hard to show compassion for those who oppose and hurt us, but if we are to be what the Lord desires, we must be willing to seek mercy rather than wrath. It is not our responsibility to seek judgment. God is keeping a record and He will reward that which is due.

**C. The Discernment (5b)** – [for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders](#). Nehemiah knew that God was not pleased with the actions of Sanballat and Tobiah. He knew that God had called him to perform this work and He would see to it that it was completed.

➤ As we face the difficulties often associated with serving the Lord, we must keep a proper perspective. We are engaged in the work He has called us to. We are serving the Lord according to His ways. Adversity will come, but we will prevail. God is not pleased with the opposition and He will provide what we need to overcome. That doesn't guarantee a road of ease, but we can labor in full confidence of completing that which we're called to perform.

## **I. The Presence of Adversity** (1-3)

## **II. The Prayer During Adversity** (4-5)

**III. The Progress in Adversity** (6) – Nehemiah and the others were not deterred. They were committed to completing the work that had engaged in. Notice:

**A. Their Activity** (6a) – *So built we the wall*. Opposition was present, Nehemiah had prayed, and the people continued their work. They were aware of the opposition. They knew the enemy wasn't happy with their labor, but they continued anyway.

➤ There is no place to sit down or quit; we must continue to labor for the Lord. Difficulties and obstacles will come, but there is a work to do!

**B. Their Accomplishment** (6b) – *So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof*: In the face of adversity the people were productive. They continued to work and accomplished much. Very soon after their encounter with Sanballat and Tobiah, half the wall was joined together.

➤ Many among the modern church would have given up or succumbed to the pressure, but this stands as a great testimony to what can be accomplished even when our work is opposed. We fail to realize that we have the Lord on our side. He is there to provide for us and strengthen us in the work. We can accomplish our objectives by the help of the Lord.

**C. Their Attitude** (6c) – *for the people had a mind to work*. This is the key to their success. The people were determined to finish what they had started. They had a mind to work. Their hearts were in the task at hand. This was their focus and their desire. They were consumed with the work before them and committed to fulfilling their task.

➤ We need that attitude today! We need a mind to work in regard to the things of God. We find the time to do whatever else we desire and yet there is little interest for the work of the Lord. I pray that God would give us a good "attitude adjustment" so that we would sense the needs of our day and commit to the task at hand!

This was not the first time Nehemiah faced opposition and it wouldn't be the last, but they chose to persevere and continue in the work. They overcame the opposition by the help of the Lord.

We too have, and will face opposition, but we cannot allow it to hinder us from the task at hand. There is too much at stake. We must continue to do what we have been called to do. We need to seek the Lord and trust Him to provide for us as we labor together.