

NEHEMIAH 4

BUILDING DESPITE OPPOSITION

This chapter opens by telling us of the spiteful, scornful reflections which Sanballat and Tobiah – enemies of the Jews – cast upon them for their attempt to build the wall around Jerusalem. They were very angry at this undertaking. Sanballat spoke with proud and haughty scorn of the workmen's efforts: "These feeble Jews – will they revive the stones out of the rubbish?" he asked. And Tobiah spoke with no less scorn of the work itself. "Sorry work this is likely to be," said he. "If even a fox went up on their stone wall, his very weight would break it down!" But when Nehemiah heard of these reflections, he humbly and devoutly addressed the Lord. He did not answer these fools according to their folly; rather, he prayed to his God and begged Him to avenge their cause.

Notwithstanding all of the enemies' malice, the wall-builders built with vigor. The people set their minds to work; and they made such good speed that in a short time, they had raised the wall to half its height. But the Jews' enemies then resorted to laying a plot against them; they planned to stop the building by slaying the builders. The conspirators were not only Sanballat and Tobiah, but also other neighboring people whom they had drawn into the plot. They had flattered themselves with an imagination that the work would soon stand still on its own accord; but when they heard that it went on and prospered, they were angry at the Jews for being so hasty to push the work forward, and they were also angry at themselves for being so slow in opposing it. At the same time, discouragements began to plague the builders themselves. When the adversaries said, "Let us cause the work to cease"; the builders began to grow weary and said, "We are not able to go forward with this work!" The laborers were tired; and so they thought it was advisable to desist for the present. Perhaps we've experienced this in our own spiritual life; we've tried to serve God, but we simply grow tired. Yet Christ is there for us! If we rely on our own power, we will certainly fail; but in His strength, we can do all things!

Information was brought to Nehemiah of the enemies' intentions; some Jews who lived in the countryside gave intelligence of their evil plans. Therefore, he took pious and prudent measures to baffle those plans, and to secure his work and his workmen. He began by praying to God, thereby putting himself and his cause under Divine protection. All his cares, griefs, and fears, he spread before God; and by doing so, he put himself at ease. Having prayed, he then set a watch against the enemies and posted guards. The instructions which Christ has given us in our spiritual warfare agree with this example: "Watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41). He also animated and encouraged the people, endeavoring to si-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The building work continues, despite the enemies' ridicule – verses 1-6
- ❖ Nehemiah prays and posts guards against a sudden attack – verses 7-15
- ❖ The work is carried on, with necessary precautions being taken – verses 16-23

lence their fears. “Be not afraid of them,” said he; “behave yourselves valiantly!” He urged them to consider that they could not have a better Captain to fight under. Herein we see an example of one great advantage of the saints gathering together every week on the Lord’s Day. When we assemble together, our focus is (or should be) re-oriented upwards, as we encourage one another that our God will fight for us! We are not alone. The Lord is the One Who can save our children, our families, our churches, our communities, and our nation!

When the enemies learned that their plot was discovered, and that the Jews were on their guard; they concluded that it was useless to attempt anything, for God had brought their plans to nothing. Hereupon, the Jews returned to their own work with cheerfulness, because they saw plainly that God acknowledged them and was blessing their labors. But although the builders had reason to think that they were safe to return to their work, they were not so secure as to lay down their weapons; for they knew how restless and unwearied their enemies were in their attempts. If one plot failed, they would surely be hatching another.



Similarly, we must always watch against our spiritual enemies, and not expect that our warfare will be finished until our work on this earth is over.

Nehemiah took measures to make sure that the people were perpetually ready in case the enemy endeavored to make a surprise attack. He kept a trumpeter always by him, who could sound an alarm upon the first hint of danger. And while one-half of the men were at work, the other half were holding armor and weapons – not only for themselves, but also for the laborers, so that they could immediately quit their work and strap on their weapons upon the first alarm. It is probable that they exchanged shifts at certain times, which would relieve the fatigue of both groups. By thus dividing their time between the trowels and the spears, they are said to work with one hand and hold their weapons with the other (verse 17); they were equally employed in both. But every builder still had a sword by his side, which he could carry without hindering his labor. In our spiritual warfare, we must always have the Word of God – the Sword of the Spirit – close at hand.

So intent was Nehemiah upon his work, and so closely did he hold his servants to it, that as long this business lasted, neither he nor his attendants took time in the evenings to prepare themselves for bed. Every night, they slept in their clothes; they only changed them now and then for the sake of cleanliness. And so they showed their resolution to be ready for service at all times.

Lord, we praise You as our Protector and Defender, and as our only source of un-failing strength – by which, all the plots and plans of the enemies of our souls may be brought to nothingness! Amen.