



**Nehemiah. 4:1-23**  
**The Sword and the Trowel**

**Nehemiah 4:1** But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews.

**2** And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish -- stones that are burned?"

**3** Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall."

**4** Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity!

**5** Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders.

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

**7** Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry,

**8** and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

**9** Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

**10** Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."

**11** And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease."

**12** So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us."

**13** Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

**14** And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

**15** And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work.

**16 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah.**

**17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon.**

**18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me.**

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

**20 "Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."**

**21 So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared.**

**22 At the same time I also said to the people, "Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day."**

**23 So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.**

[Will Read all of it, but this week the Focus will be on 1-16]

Last week we read the encouraging story of how the inhabitants of Jerusalem, encouraged and directed by their governor Nehemiah, had all pitched in to rebuild the walls of their city. Perfumers and goldsmiths had set aside their delicate work and had started heaving heavy stones into place. It seems like everything is going to go perfectly, a little heavy labor, some elbow grease and a lot of prayer and before you know it. Jerusalem will be proud, walled city again.

But then we come to chapter 4 and we read how Sanballat the governor of Samaria, became furious and determined to stop their work. So he began to stir up the people surrounding Jerusalem to oppose the rebuilding. He gathers his army together and addresses them as their general. This is intended to be a pep-talk to encourage them when it came time to attack. First he mocks them. ***They're feeble, so what are they going to do, offer sacrifices until God builds the wall for them, perhaps they're so stupid they don't know the extent of the destruction and thought they could just take a day off and fix everything. What do they have to work with anyway? Garbage. They're going to build a wall of garbage.***

Then his visiting friend Tobiah, pipes up, ***"Yeah, whatever they build will be so feeble it won't even support the weight of a fox without collapsing."***

At that point, the writer Nehemiah, remembering their mockery later on records his prayer, an imprecation asking that their curses be turned on them. And there he emphasizes the union between God and His people in verse 5. In mocking the people of God, they were mocking God. That's something that should encourage us as well, in the OT, the Lord calls his people "the Apple of His Eye" and Zecariah assured them, "he who touches you touches the **apple of His eye.**"

*In Acts 9: 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"*

*5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."*

But as it turns out God blessed the work of the Jews of Jerusalem, and contrary to their mockery, Sanballat and his allies, the people of Ammon, the Arabs, and the Ashdodites. Ashdod was a former Philistine city to the West of Jerusalem, but they most likely were not full-blooded Philistines, since the Philistine kingdom had been wiped out by the Assyrians and Babylonians and the area had been resettled. But that didn't change the fact that now Jerusalem was surrounded. Samaritans to the North, Arabs to the South, Ammonites to the East, Ashdodites to the West. And all of them FURIOUS. So they form an alliance to attack Jerusalem and end the work for good.

Now at this point I want to pause and ask, what would the inhabitants of Jerusalem have had to do in order to get along with these surrounding people? The answer is simple: NOTHING AT ALL. Remember, they'd been living in their midst for years. Sanballat and his crew had never threatened to attack them before or formed an alliance. Why were they attacking them now?? Because they'd started the work of rebuilding and God was blessing it.

You see the world has no beef with the church as long as they aren't actually doing anything. If they look and act exactly like the surrounding people and gradually sink into and are assimilated by the culture, then society is content to ignore them. Why stir them up with persecution? For instance in the years that he was studying law and carousing with his friends, the world couldn't have cared less about Martin Luther. Had he gone on like that, the world would have been quite content to leave him in peace. And you and I wouldn't know his name. But when Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenberg and called the church to reformation, and then began leading people in actually doing that. The Emperor and the Pope took notice, and he too was mocked, surrounded, and attacked.

So when the work of reformation really got started in Jerusalem under Nehemiah, Sanballat and company took notice and began doing everything they could to stop it. And even without opposition, the work itself was tough, they began to get tired. It wasn't like building a new wall in a clear space, they had first to clean away all the debris before they could even start building. It's exhausting and often you begin to wonder is it worth it. Reformation is like that. Certainly the reformation that started under Luther was exhausting, they had to clear away the rubbish of over 1000 years of really bad theology, countless ceremonies, holy days, offices, made-up sacraments, all of them had to be done away with before a truly biblical church could rise from the ashes. And often the people said, *haven't we done enough?*

In England for instance, the Reformation was never completed, the worst parts of the garbage were being cleared away, and then Elizabeth, and her successors James and Charles, said ENOUGH! And instead of clearing away the rubbish we are going to build on it! And so instead of building all of the wall on the solid rock of the Word of God, they built a lot of the Church of England on the shifting sand of Human Traditions, and that decision helped to undermine everything they built.

But thankfully in this case, Nehemiah says we made our prayer and set a watch. They trusted in God and kept their powder dry. Which was good because their enemies continued to plot and plan, and tried to undermine their morale. The Jews in the surrounding area also panicked and kept saying to them, ***wherever you turn, they're going to attack you!*** In other words the people of God themselves were trying to get them to stop the work. ***The world is going to attack us if you keep this up. Stop you crazy zealots before we all get killed!***

But Nehemiah wasn't afraid, he set armed men to guard the walls at the weakest points. And he encouraged the people not in their own strength, but in who God is and who they were. GOD is with us, and you are His people. You are fighting for your families! This isn't like some war of foreign conquest, these are our homes! And what happens is that Sanballat and his allies realize that an attack on armed and prepared city is going to be very costly. So they abandon that part of the plan.

But Nehemiah KNOWS they aren't going to give up so he keep arms and armor to hand and makes them work in shifts, half guarding, and the other have working and even those working had weapons nearby.

Both had to happen. Merely By themselves, they would have been useless. If they'd been building but not standing guard they would have been attacked and destroyed, but if they'd been standing guard but not building will also be useless. The enemies of God most likely would have ignored them. And so the work progressed with the Trowel and the Sword. Kids a trowel is a tool with a flat blade with a handle, used for depositing and working mortar, plaster, etc.

That brings me to the first of three applications:

### 1) WE TOO MUST ALWAYS DO THE WORK OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD WITH THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL

We must build the kingdom with the trowel – evangelism

But we must also be ready with the sword of the spirit to counter attacks – polemics, apologetics

If all we do is evangelism, we'll be overcome by the attacks of the world. Spirit of the Mega-Churches, don't fight back when they attack you for your stance on marriage! Don't tell people homosexuality is a sin. The churches that do that are falling over into the world.

So you have to ignore the people who panic – wherever you turn they're going to attack you. So? **Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."**

But we can't just have the sword either, or we will wither and die. The great commission ***Matthew 28:19*** ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,***

***20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.***

We need the TROWEL and the SWORD

Spurgeon started a magazine THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL in 1865 – He wrote in the first edition:  
*“our chief aim will be to arouse believers to action, and to suggest to them plans by which the kingdom of Jesus may be extended. To widen the bounds of Zion and gather together the outcasts of Israel is our heart’s desire. We would sound the trumpet, and lead our comrades to the fight. We would ply the Trowel with untiring hand for the building up of Jerusalem’s dilapidated walls, and wield the Sword with rigor and valor against the enemies of the truth.”*

2) EXPECT PERSECUTION, IT’S A SIGN YOU’RE DOING THE RIGHT THING!

“If you are going to walk with Jesus Christ, you are going to be opposed.... In our days, to be a true Christian is really to become a scandal.” – George Whitefield

It’s actually a blessing!

*Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*

*12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Our master was also persecuted!

*Heb. 12:3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.*

3) DON’T STOP, DON’T COMPROMISE:

We must not be content to be the Laodicean church:

Mainline churches here and in England are dying, they’ve been absorbed into the culture.

*Rev. 3:14 " And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ' These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:*

*15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.*

*16 "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

*17 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked --*

*18 "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*

*19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*