

Nehemiah 4:1-12 – Study Leader’s Questions

Opposition: Ridicule, mockery and sarcasm, Nehemiah 4:1-3

1. *How did Sanballat react to the work on the wall (Nehemiah 4:1)?*
2. *What did the enemies attempt in order to discourage the work? What did Sanballat and Tobiah say (Nehemiah 4:2-3)?*
3. *What are some things people say to discourage God’s people today?*

Opposition: Plots, threats and danger, Nehemiah 4:4-9

4. *How did Nehemiah respond to this ridicule? What did he say (Nehemiah 4:4-5)?*
5. *How do we express our anger/frustration in prayer to God?*
6. *What did the Jews do? What was the result (Nehemiah 4:6)? What can we learn?*
7. *How did the enemies react when they saw the work continuing? What did they plan next (Nehemiah 4:7-8)?*
8. *How did Nehemiah respond to this problem (Nehemiah 4:9)?*

Discouraged People – a war of nerves, Nehemiah 4:10-12

9. *How did the Jews themselves express discouragement (Nehemiah 4:10)?*
10. *What did the enemies say to increase the fears of the Jews (Nehemiah 4:11-12)?*
11. *What do you think gave the Jews the strength to carry on, despite the persecution and danger?*

Nehemiah 4:1-12 – Answers to Questions

See Dr Ruckman's commentary *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* pp 220-230 and the *Ruckman Reference Bible* pp 698-699 for detailed comments.

Opposition: Ridicule, mockery and sarcasm Nehemiah 4:1-3

1. How did Sanballat react to the work on the wall (Nehemiah 4:1)?

He **“was wroth”** i.e. angry enough to kill according to Nehemiah 4:11. In that respect, Sanballat was like Pharaoh, Genesis 40:2*, 22, 41:10*, 13, the Lord Himself, Deuteronomy 1:34*, 35, 9:19, 2 Chronicles 28:9*, Psalm 78:21*, 31, 59*, 62*, 63, 64, the avenging king, Matthew 22:7* and the Devil, Revelation 12:17*. The expression **“was wroth”** is found in the 9 verses marked with an asterisk *.

Sanballat's **“great indignation”** would therefore match the Devil's **“great wrath”** Revelation 12:12 when he comes down in the End Times to persecute Israel, Revelation 12:13-17.

The above verses help to explain the Lord's sombre warning about unreasoning anger in Matthew 5:21-22.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

Mockery, it should be noted, is associated with killing in scripture, 1 Kings 18:27*, 40, 19:10, 2 Chronicles 36:16*, Proverbs 1:26*, 27, 31, 32, Matthew 20:19*, 27:31*, Mark 10:34*, 15:20*, Luke 18:32*, 33, 23:35, 36*, 46. The words **“mocked”** or **“mock”** are found in the 9 verses marked with an asterisk *.

2. What did the enemies attempt in order to discourage the work? What did Sanballat and Tobiah say (Nehemiah 4:2-3)?

They first brought up a ‘majority opinion’ i.e. **“his brethren and the army of Samaria,”** like the majority that Joshua and Caleb faced, Numbers 13:30-32, 14:6-10, that Elijah faced, 1 Kings 18:21, 22, that Micaiah faced, 1 Kings 22:6-28, 2 Chronicles 18:5-27. The Lord's followers can expect majority opposition as the Lord warns in John 15:19 **“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”**

However, the Lord Jesus Christ gives encouragement to His world-beleaguered saints in John 16:33. See also 1 John 5:4, 5.

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

They then raise doubts by means of a battery of questions, five in all, about the Jews' ability to finish the job and maintain worship, thereby casting doubt on the promises of God, Nehemiah 2:18, 20. Casting doubt on what God has promised, or said, is a basic satanic strategy.

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” Genesis 3:1.

Their chief spokesman then gives his considered opinion that the project is doomed to failure anyway. The aim clearly is to spread alarm and despondency in order to bring about defeat by giving up without a fight.

It was the same when the Assyrians invaded Judah, as their chief spokesman taunted the inhabitants of Jerusalem at that time.

“Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews’ language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria: Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand: Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria” 2 Kings 18:28-30. See also Isaiah 36:13-15.

That is why Paul gives the exhortation in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.

“For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;”

3. *What are some things people say to discourage God’s people today?*

That *“Thou art mad”* Acts 12:15 *“But she constantly affirmed that it was even so”* and her witness was true.

That we *“run not with them to the same excess of riot”* i.e. we’re weird and intolerant (we are certainly *“a peculiar people”* Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 2:9) but they *“shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead”* 1 Peter 4:4, 5.

Believers are to apply Romans 12:2 *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”*

The Devil wants conformity to this world. That is why the early Christians were persecuted. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, they were judged to be guilty of *odio humani generis* i.e. hatred of the human race, a hate crime, then as now.

“Accordingly in order to dissipate the rumor, [that Nero had started the fire to burn down the city of Rome so that he could rebuild it on a grander scale] he [Nero] put forward as guilty (subdidit reos) and inflicted the most cruel punishments on those who were hated for their abominations (flagitia) and called Christians by the populace. The originator of that name, Christus, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilatus in the reign of Tiberius, and the baneful superstition (exitiabilis superstitio) put down for the time being broke out again, not only throughout Judea, the home of this evil, but also in the City (Rome) where all atrocious and shameful (atrociosa aut pudenda) things converge and are welcomed. Those therefore who confessed (i.e. to being Christians) were first arrested, and then by the information gained from them a large number (multitudo ingens) were implicated (coniuncti is the manuscript reading, not conuicti), not so much on the charge of incendiarism [burning down Rome] as for hatred of mankind (odio humani generis). The victims perished amid mockery (text here uncertain); some clothed in the skins of wild beasts were torn to pieces by dogs; others impaled on crosses in order to be set on fire to afford light by night after daylight had died. Whence (after these cruelties) commiseration began to be felt for them, though guilty and deserving the severest penalties (quamquam adversus sontes et novissima exempla meritos), for men felt their destruction was not from considerations of public welfare but to gratify the cruelty of one person (Nero).”

See:

www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/roman-empire-and-christianity-2.html?p=6.

See the Ruckman Reference Bible p 1503 and Dr Ruckman’s commentary *The Book of Romans* pp 406-409.

Hate crime strategy is in use today against the Lord's people, as the Christian Institute noted on July 19th 2010.

Christians unfairly targeted for hate crime prosecutions.

Christians in Britain are being unfairly targeted for hate crime prosecutions, according to a new report by the Civitas think-tank.

The report, entitled A New Inquisition: Religious Persecution in Britain Today, also warns that existing hate crime legislation poses a danger to freedom of speech.

Jon Gower Davies, the report's author, said: "Some police forces and the CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] seem to be interpreting statutes in favour of ethnic and religious minorities and in a spirit hostile to members of the majority population, defined as 'White' or 'Christian'..."

See:

www.christian.org.uk/news/christians-unfairly-targeted-for-hate-crime-prosecutions/.

As Solomon rightly observed in Ecclesiastes 1:9:

"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."

That we "***followed cunningly devised fables***" 2 Peter 1:16 but "***we have not.***"

That the Lord Jesus Christ, "***which is our hope***" 1 Timothy 1:1 is not coming back but we were warned in advance of the denial of the Lord's Return, "***Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation***" 2 Peter 3:3, 4.

However, the Lord is coming back, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words" 1 Thessalonians 4:18.

Opposition: Plots, threats and danger, Nehemiah 4:4-9

4. *How did Nehemiah respond to this ridicule? What did he say (Nehemiah 4:4-5)?*

Nehemiah responded like David, who "***encouraged himself in the LORD his God***" 1 Samuel 30:6. Observe in 1 Samuel 30:7, 8, David turned to prayer as Nehemiah did.

Nehemiah invokes what is known as an imprecatory prayer as in Psalm 109:1-19. See Psalm 109:20 for the summation of the prayer.

"Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the LORD, and of them that speak evil against my soul."

See the *Ruckman Reference Bible* p 845.

5. *How do we express our anger/frustration in prayer to God?*

The way Paul did:

"Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words" 2 Timothy 4:14-15.

The way the National Anthem does in verse 2:

*O Lord our God arise,
Scatter her enemies,
And make them fall:
Confound their politics;
Frustrate their knavish tricks;
On thee our hopes we fix; God save us all.*

See www.englishdemocraticparty.org.uk/public_html/bulletin74.html.

The way men of God of England's past did:

This is from a letter addressed to the martyrologist, John Foxe, as cited in *The Defeat of the Spanish Armada – God's Hand in History* by D.C. Relf.

*"To my very loving friend John Foxe...continue a faithful remembrance of us in your prayers that our present service may take that good effect as God may be glorified, His Church, our Queen and country preserved and the enemy of truth [**"thy word is truth"** John 17:17] utterly vanquished, that we may have continued peace in Israel* - our enemies are many, but our Protector commandeth the whole world, let us pray continually, and our Lord Jesus will help in good time mercifully - Francis Drake" *England.*

Drake wrote to Foxe in about 1587, not long before Foxe died.

The great victory over Spain - and Rome - was achieved the following year, when 'God blew with His winds and they were scattered.' The prayers of John Foxe and Francis Drake were stunningly answered. See *Our Protestant Throne and Constitution* by J.A. Kensit, p 13.

With faithfulness to **"the sword of the Spirit"** Ephesians 6:17, the King's word, prepared by the King's men at the King's behest, and the weapon of **"all prayer"** Ephesians 6:18, such prayers can be answered again, for ourselves, our church and nation.

Proverbs 28:9 should be kept in mind, though.

"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."

Make sure that the right **"book of the law of the LORD"** 2 Chronicles 17:9, 34:14, Nehemiah 9:3 is followed.

6. *What did the Jews do? What was the result (Nehemiah 4:6)? What can we learn?*

They ignored the opposition, didn't argue with their enemies, kept working and made progress such that the wall was half completed.

The truth of Proverbs 14:23 emerged.

"In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury."

"Penury" is defined in Luke 21:4 as the opposite of **"abundance"** i.e. scarcity.

Spiritually, Nehemiah 4:6 affords a good illustration of 1 Corinthians 7:35, insofar as Nehemiah and his co-workers were not deterred by distractions.

"And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction."

7. *How did the enemies react when they saw the work continuing? What did they plan next (Nehemiah 4:7-8)?*

They went from being “**wroth**” in Nehemiah 4:1 to being “**very wroth**” in Nehemiah 4:7. A state of being “**very wroth**” led to numerous deaths in scripture, that of Abel, Genesis 4:5*, 8, all the Hivite males, Genesis 34:7*, 25, “**all the men that appertained unto Korah**” Numbers 16:15*, 32 and many in Israel during the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, Lamentations 2:3, 21, 5:22*. The expression “**very wroth**” occurs in the verses marked with an asterisk *.

As Nehemiah 4:11 shows, therefore, the enemies of Israel were even more intent on murder. Then as now, they created their own “*Palestinian Administration*” ultimately intent on genocide of the Jewish nation, in accordance with Psalm 83:4, which prophetically applies to the End Times but is foreshadowed historically in Nehemiah 4:8, 11.

“They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.”

See the *Ruckman Reference Bible* p 826 and Dr Ruckman’s commentary *Volume II of the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 83.

8. *How did Nehemiah respond to this problem (Nehemiah 4:9)?*

Nehemiah and his co-workers kept up their prayer, just as King Jehoshaphat led his people in prayer at a time of great national crisis, when *humanly speaking*, the nation seemed helpless against the foe – see the last two clauses of Jehoshaphat’s prayer. Although they could make certain preparations, see below, Nehemiah and his co-workers knew not for certain how the foe could be vanquished and they and their city delivered apart from God’s intervention.

“O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee” 2 Chronicles 20:12.

Being in a static position, effectively under siege, Nehemiah and his co-workers remained alert 24/7, kept their weapons to hand while they built and set up an alarm and sentry system, Nehemiah 4:16-23, according to the principle of Proverbs 21:31.

“The horse is prepared against the day of battle; but safety is of the LORD.”

Their vigilance is a good illustration of Ephesians 6:18, which should be applied consistently.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”

By combining prayer and watchfulness, Nehemiah and his co-workers showed that they knew the truth of Psalm 127:1, which spiritually should also be applied.

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

Discouraged People – a war of nerves, Nehemiah 4:10-12

9. *How did the Jews themselves express discouragement (Nehemiah 4:10)?*

They were overwhelmed with chronic fatigue from constant labour. Dr Ruckman states in his commentary *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* p 230 that the builders were having to work up to double shifts owing to the shortage of labour and were exhausted from sawing and dressing logs, gathering and breaking stones and lifting the beams and boulders up inclines and improvised ladders. It was hard, physical labour that certainly a fair proportion of the workers were unaccustomed to e.g. the goldsmiths, apothecaries, administrators, priests, merchants and even young women, Nehemiah 3:8, 9, 12, 15, 16, 19, 22, 28, 31, 32.

Unremitting tension from the threat of a merciless surprise attack made the situation much worse with apparently no end in sight.

With chronic fatigue, demoralization sets in in spades, as Job found.

“So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me”
Job 7:3.

The hardships experienced during the rebuilding of the wall bring to mind the testimony of John Hunter, of Maghera, who served as a common soldier throughout the siege of Londonderry April 18th to July 28th 1689, where the loyal Protestants were besieged by the Catholic Irish allies of James II.

See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Derry.

See www.libraryireland.com/Derry1689/IV-21.php *Hardships of the Garrison at Derry*.

“The famine was so great that many a man, woman, and child died from want of food. I myself was so weak from hunger, that I fell under my musket one morning as I was going to the walls; yet God gave me strength to continue all night at my post there, and enabled me to act the part of a soldier as if I had been as strong as ever I was; yet my face was blackened with hunger. I was so hard put to it, by reason of the want of food, that I had hardly any heart to speak or walk; and yet when the enemy was coming, as many a time they did, to storm the walls, then I found as if my former strength returned to me. I am sure it was the Lord kept the city [Psalm 127:1], and none else; for there were many of us that could hardly stand on our feet before the enemy attacked the walls, who, when they were assaulting the out-trenches, ran out against them most nimbly and with great courage. Indeed, it was never the poor, starved men that were in Derry that kept it out, but the mighty God of Jacob, to whom be praise for ever and ever.”

Though blessed with sufficient sustenance to stave off starvation and carry on with their work, Nehemiah 5:16-19, Nehemiah’s garrison ideally needed a system of rotation, as practiced in modern military campaigns, though it would have been difficult at the time.

However, Nehemiah 8:10 expresses the principle and reveals the means of reinvigorating strength.

“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

Note again therefore 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.

“For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;”

10. What did the enemies say to increase the fears of the Jews (Nehemiah 4:11-12)?

“You won’t know what hit you.”

The enemies’ mindset is set out as follows.

“He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages; in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor” Psalm 10:8.

“For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart” Psalm 11:2.

“They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them?” Psalm 64:5.

11. What do you think gave the Jews the strength to carry on, despite the persecution and danger?

Some at least had a determination to finish the job, ***“for the people had a mind to work”*** Nehemiah 4:6. It appears that they knew Proverbs 13:19 ***“The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul...”***

Note that even in the midst of the grinding, unending toil, one individual was outstanding in that ***“Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired”*** Nehemiah 3:20, see Dr Ruckman’s commentary *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* p 216. He may have been a source of encouragement to those around him according to Proverbs 27:17.

“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.”

Those, like Nehemiah, must have kept up their perseverance in prayer.

“For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands” Nehemiah 6:9.

Most of all, they would have depended upon ***“our God”*** and ***“the good hand of our God”*** Ezra 8:18 to sustain them for what was His work, the expression ***“our God”*** occurring 19 times in the Book of Nehemiah. They also had in mind dependence on God for the protection of their families and homes.

“And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses” Nehemiah 4:14.

Nehemiah 6:16, then, is a testimony to the vindication of their dependence upon ***“our God”*** and it is likewise an admonition and exhortation to today’s believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.”