

Let Us Arise and Build
Operation Intimidation—Overcoming opposition
Nehemiah 4

Intro: Wherever great leaders arise and great followers follow, you can expect Satan to appear to bring to an end to efforts intended to glorify God. And so it was when Nehemiah and his fellow-Jews began the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Satan sought to lead a counter-campaign against the great work God had inspired through Nehemiah. He found a few men he could use to marshal opposition to the cause of God. He might have called it “Operation Intimidation.” Let’s see what the enemies of Israel did and how Nehemiah responded.

“Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. And 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?” 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!” 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. Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before Thee, for they have demoralized the builders. So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. Now it came about 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. And all of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night. 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.” And our enemies said, “They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them, and put a stop to the work.” And it came about 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,” 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. 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.” And it happened 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. And it came about from that day on, that 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. 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. As for the builders, each wore

his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me. And 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. "At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared. 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." 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." (Nehemiah 4:1–23)

We can learn a lot from a study of this chapter about opposition; because whenever and wherever God's people agree to work together to accomplish good, Satan will also be there seeking to stop it. And we can learn a lot about how Satan seeks to prevent God's work from being done!

Satan, through the provincial rulers, marshaled three powerful forces against the people of God in Nehemiah's day!

Doubt

NOW it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. And 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?" 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! (Nehemiah 4:1–3)

We are not surprised to read about the efforts of Sanballat and Tobiah.

Earlier Nehemiah had written:

"And when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel." (Nehemiah 2:10)

They had already tried to intimidate Nehemiah with the suggestion that his actions were disloyal to the Persian government:

But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" (Nehemiah 2:19)

But now they angrily step up their opposition and their primary weapon was doubt.

They cast doubt on the strength of the people! *"What are these feeble Jews doing?"*

They cast doubt on their motivations! “*Are they going to restore it for themselves?*”

They cast doubt on their ability to fulfill their purposes! “*Can they offer sacrifices?*”

They cast doubt on their commitment! “*Can they finish in a day?*”

They even cast doubt on the quality of the materials used! “*Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?*” (Burned limestone becomes unstable and unusable).

And Tobiah chimed in with his own sarcastic words of doubt as he questioned the competence of their work! “*Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on it, he would break their wall down.*”

No doubt all those around him chuckled at his ridicule and mockery. All of these comments were intended to break down the faith of Nehemiah and his followers.

And notice a couple of things about sideline critics and enemies of the cause of God.

They are cowards who love to criticize among sympathetic hearers and not to the faces of those they criticize!

“He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria.” (Neh. 4:2)

Tobiah was “*near him*” (Neh. 4:3)

They love for the word to get passed through someone else!

They knew that their criticisms behind the scenes would make their way to the right people; and they wouldn’t have to say a word directly to anybody!

But when they couldn’t stop the word through casting doubt, they attempted to stop it through fear.

And so today we may face similar challenges.

We may look around and see large, wealthy churches that seem to be able to do whatever they want, attract the large crowds by carnal means and we may begin to doubt whether we can succeed in doing God’s work.

We can begin to be filled with self-doubt. We are small. We don’t have much money. Our efforts are not as sophisticated in appearance. But we must not allow self-doubt to prevail.

Fear

Now it came about 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. And all of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. (Nehemiah 4:7–8)

When the enemies could not succeed through verbal intimidation, they threatened physical action. (Whether they would have followed

through is uncertain, since they would have been in defiance of Artaxerxes' orders). So, perhaps they were hoping to simply instill fear through bluffing.

And they continued the propaganda campaign again through the Jews themselves:

And it came about 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... (Nehemiah 4:12)

Let me emphasize here an important lesson in passing: Don't let yourself become a carrier of a spiritual propagandist. Some of the Jews allowed themselves to be used as carriers for the devil's messages! And when we allow ourselves to become the handler of someone else's criticisms or a juicy bit of gossip, we are playing into Satan's hands as well.

In it all, there is no doubt what Satan has hoped to achieve—scare God's people into inactivity. Paralyze them with fear!

And that continues to be in Satan's bag of tricks. He wants to scare God's people into submission. The NT frequently warns of this problem:

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)

And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:28–31)

But, there was one more powerful force that came from within the hearts of the people themselves.

Discouragement

"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." (Nehemiah 4:10)

This verse is in the form of a song or poem. People started singing the "discouragement song." It has three verses!

Were getting tired: "We're running out of strength..."

The job is too big: "There is much rubbish" All of a sudden the people could not see bricks or what had already been done (half already built). They could only see garbage, too much to move.

We can't do it: "We ourselves are unable to rebuild the wall."

Ironically, the people had already built the wall to half its height. They were already half-way there! Yet, they became convinced that couldn't continue to do what they had already been doing.

When God's people are discouraged they lose four things:

Vision
Confidence
Strength
Security

Discouragement continues to be a perennial problem of the people of God. The NT frequently addresses it:

"And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary." (Galatians 6:9, NASB)

"For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:3, NASB)

Satan uses these three powerful weapons again and again against the people of God! Doubt and fear assail our faith and our focus is shifted to ourselves and we want to quit! But Nehemiah provided for the people, with God's help, five powerful counter-measures against Satan's weapons. Tonight we'll look at what he did to help God's people face opposition.

Conclusion: God's people can always overcome Satan's attacks! But we must use the weapons at our disposal and engage in spiritual warfare with him. Do you have doubts, fears, discouragement?