

“We Are Despised”

Nehemiah 4:1-6

A point to be made – verses one through six of what is chapter four in the English Bibles is actually part of chapter three in the Hebrew text. That’s not critically important and doesn’t really have a bearing on the interpretation of the text, but it does join it in a more specific way to the beginnings of the building project.

The original title of this message was, “How Opposition Comes.” The reason for that original title was simple – there is going to be opposition anytime we do anything for the Lord. There has been opposition to God’s work since Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, and there still is. The Devil is called our “adversary” in First Peter 5:8. The word for “adversary” in that text is a legal term and is used for an opponent in a lawsuit. He is constantly opposing us on every hand. God’s work does not perform without people opposing it, and all too often it’s those that claim to be working for the Lord that are the greatest opponents.

1 Peter 5:8

⁸ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

It seems true that those living a godly, holy life for the Lord are those that have the most opposition. The Devil doesn’t want anyone to do anything for God, and the more we do, the more he will oppose. This doesn’t mean that our life, as a godly believer, will be one always full of trouble – it simply means that there will be opposition that we need to be aware of at all times, and be ready to defend against

that opposition.

Here, in this text, we can see some things that will lead to our opposition – the basic steps that are most often taken by those that oppose the work of the Lord.

I. THE WORLD MUST “HEAR” WHAT GOD’S PEOPLE ARE DOING – VS. 1A

Nehemiah 4:1

¹ But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall...

A. It wasn't until Sanballat heard that Nehemiah was doing something that he started his opposition. He would have been fine with Nehemiah coming to Jerusalem and working with the Israelites as long as he didn't "rock the boat" that Sanballat and his friends had built.

1. The same is true for us today. The Devil won't much care about what we do – he doesn't care if we go to church, or read our Bible, or do the other “religious” things that people do, as long as we don't change our behavior for the good and start praying and seeking God and telling others about Him.
2. He doesn't much care about a church that isn't doing much for the Lord, or that isn't standing for the truth of the Word of God. He'll let them be, for the most part, and they will be successful – as long as they don't “rock the boat” that he has built.

B. It was when he "heard that we builded the wall" that he began to oppose. Word of what we do for the Lord spreads – with or without our approval, or even knowledge. People know when we start to change, and when we strive to serve the Lord the way the Bible teaches.

II. THE WORLD WILL BECOME "WROTH" – VS. 1B

[Nehemiah 4:1](#)

...he was wroth...

A. The reaction taken by Sanballat and his group of friends was one all-to-often taken by the enemies of Christ and His servants – intense anger.

B. "Wroth" – this is more than being angry. This is a word that means to burn, to be furious. When Sanballat heard Nehemiah was doing something, it made him so angry he "boiled with rage."

The enemies of the Lord, and the work of the believer still does this today. People will get so angry with us that they won't even be able to think straight, so to speak. This isn't just true of a church, it is equally true of the believer in their everyday life – at home, at work, etc.

III. THE WORLD WILL THEN "TAKE ACTION" AGAINST US IN THEIR FIERCE ANGER – VS. 1C-3

A. The first action taken, as given in this text, and something that precipitates outward action taken against the believer by the enemy today, is one that

is done in the mind of the enemy. In Sanballat's case, he was so infuriated with Nehemiah and the Jews that the first thing he did in his anger is to decide to act upon his "great indignation" – his great fury.

1. וַיִּכְעַס הַרְבֵּה – the second of the Hebrew words is the first in the English and is a verb used as an infinitive to show anger that is directed toward an action – in this case, the righteous act of rebuilding the walls.

The first Hebrew word (second in English) is another word pointing to the issue of being provoked to anger. The action he, and his friends, took, was done so out of pure hatred for God and His work.

2. Sanballat, as a representation, or type, of the enemies of the work of Christians today as they strive to serve the Lord, did all he could to stop the good work that was being done.

[Acts 5:17–18](#)

¹⁷ Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,

¹⁸ And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

B. Another action they will take is to mock us – vs. 1c – "and mocked the Jews."

1. This is quite often the way it works. And, don't discount the effectiveness of "words." We may have been taught,

“sticks and stones can break your bones, but names will never hurt you,” but that is just not the case. The mental stress and anguish that mocking can have on anyone, including Christians, is something that needs to be kept in mind. This is a very clear form of persecution and has been for many ages.

2. The numerous references to this type of persecution throughout Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, shows how important it is that we recognize it for what it is, as well as realize that we need to stay faithful in our walk with the Lord in spite of the mocking and ridicule.

Matthew 27:29

29 And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

Hebrews 11:32-40

32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:

33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

35 Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might

obtain a better resurrection:

³⁶ And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

³⁸ (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

³⁹ And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

⁴⁰ God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

C. The world will then tell others about us to try and enlist their help – vs. 2-3.

1. "There is strength in numbers" is a truth established in many areas of society since Adam and Eve left the Garden, and it is especially true of the work of enemies. It is rarely just one person that rises up against the work of the Lord, and if it is, one of the first things they will do is find others with common interests and common ground of agreement to enlist in their battle with the good and the right.
2. We will study verse two in the next message on Nehemiah so I will not comment on it here.
3. Verse three finds Tobiah joining with

Sanballat in his ridicule. It seems a bit petty, and even pathetic, how he mocked Nehemiah and the Jews, but any believer that has taken a stand against sin and for the Lord has been mocked in similar manner. The same is true of churches that take a stand against the Devil and his forces, and, unfortunately, often times the attack by the enemy is from within.

Acts 20:29–30

²⁹ For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Philippians 3:17–19

¹⁷ Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

¹⁸ (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

¹⁹ Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

2 Peter 2:1

¹ But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

IV. THE WORLD, THE OPPRESSORS, CAN ALWAYS BE OVERCOME – THROUGH TESTIMONY AND

PRAYER – VS. 4-6

A. Nehemiah maintained his testimony through all this ridicule and mocking. He didn't respond in anger to them directly, but he did respond in prayer to the Lord, asking that God deal with them as He saw fit. In this prayer, Nehemiah did demonstrate his take on the matter:

1. "Turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity"
 - a) The "reproach" they were calling for upon the Jews was what Nehemiah was referring to – he asked the Lord to turn it back on them – the principle of sowing and reaping. Although this seems contradictory to the New Testament believer, in light of what Jesus taught about loving our enemies, this was in line with what is seen in the Old Testament in God's defense of Israel.

That said, the principle we're to follow today is, "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..." (Matt. 5:44).

Too often, preachers today will use the Old Testament texts (like this one) to justify their actions of apparent hatred for their enemies, taking out of context what is said and done. When a New Testament text teaches something that clearly changes the Old, the New is the text to follow today – which is what Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount.

- b) "The land of captivity" – carried away captive as Jerusalem was some 150 years of so prior.
2. Verse five gives a glimpse into Nehemiah's thoughts here, when, in his prayer, he pointed out, "for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders" – he recognized that it was God they were angry with, and Nehemiah just happened to be the one they could see.
 3. Even though there is a context-specific interpretation of these two verses, it teaches us today the importance of taking our trials and persecutions to the Lord and asking Him to deal with the enemies as He sees fit. The power of prayer is very, very important in this part of the believer's life, and it's a part of prayer we are very weak on in the church today. The primary way to defend ourselves against the enemy and to deal with the mocking persecution that will come is through prayer.

Ephesians 6:18

¹⁸ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

Conclusion: We can be rest assured opposition will come. It's how we react that counts. Nehemiah prayed and enlisted God's help. He didn't try to do it on his own – nor should we.

John 16:33

³³ 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.