



“Open Church – Open Bible”

Clabon Bogan Jr. – Interim Pastor



Sunday Church School

July 18, 2021

“Nehemiah Combats Derision and Dander”-- Neh. 4:1-9

Golden Text: Neh. 4:9

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Neh. 4:1-9

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.

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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.

TODAY’S AIM

Facts: to realize that those who speak up for the Lord will be ridiculed by others.

Principle: to show that God will bless and empower those who absorb the ridicule of the enemy.

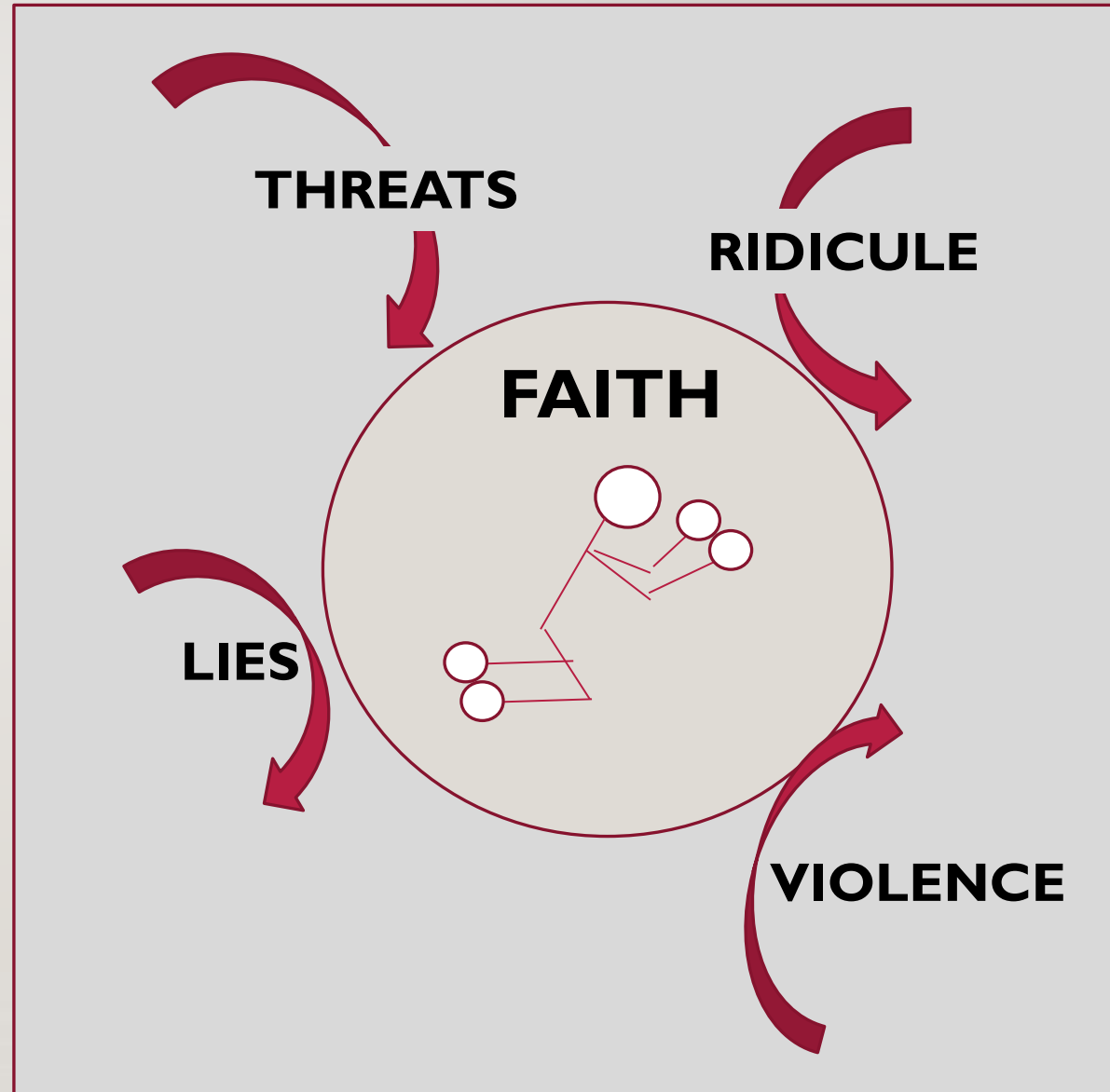
Application: to determine to seek the applause of heaven rather than the accolades of man.

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Our lesson will surely help us see a familiar tactic of the enemy when the people of God are engaged in Kingdom building activities.

- That’s the time people of God trust Him and call on Him more than ever.
- No matter what attacks us, we believe God more than what we see
- And we are protected by the “shield of faith.”

No tactic used by Satan can tear down the wall of faith that surrounds those who trust the Lord (Isa. 54:17).



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Nehemiah left his royal position as the **king’s cupbearer in Persia** to go to Jerusalem when he heard that the walls around the city had been broken down and lay in ruins.

When he arrived in Jerusalem, however, he immediately met with opposition from those who did not want to see Jerusalem rebuilt and refortified.

- His enemies tried to stop construction of the wall by deriding those who were working, starting with Nehemiah.
- Their efforts were futile, however, because Nehemiah knew whom he was working for, and he stayed focused on the task at hand.
- The Jews, led by Nehemiah, refused to buckle under the pressure of Sanballat and Tobiah’s vicious attacks; they completed the wall in only **fifty-two days** (Neh. 6:15).
- The key to their accomplishment was that they were doing it for the Lord and trusting Him completely to help them finish what they had started.

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The LESSON OUTLINE:

I. ENEMY MOCKERY —Neh. 4:1-3

II. PRAYER AND PERSEVERANCE —Neh. 4:4-6

III. ENEMY THREATS AND MORE PRAYER —Neh. 4:7-9

I. ENEMY MOCKERY—Neh. 4:1-3

- With this lesson we jump ahead several hundred years and land in the period that followed Judah’s seventy-year Exile in Babylon.
- In fact, we find ourselves at a point nearly a century after the first group of returnees from Babylon arrived back in Jerusalem in 536 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel.
- After a rough start, the Jews managed to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3:1—6:15) and much of the city; but Jerusalem’s walls, however, still lay largely in ruins.
- It was this sad fact that greatly distressed Nehemiah when it came to his attention during a visit by a delegation from Jerusalem (Neh. 1:1-4).
- Thus, he obtained permission from the Persian king Artaxerxes to lead a fully authorized support mission to the Judean capital.

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Nehemiah’s aim was to rebuild the city’s broken-down wall and repair its defenses and prestige (2:1-7).

Three days after Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he conducted a secret nighttime reconnaissance mission to get an accurate sense of the situation (V. 11-15).

Where others saw insurmountable rubble, he saw restoration under God’s leading and power. But there was a problem –ridicule from an opponent to his efforts.

British author Thomas Carlyle called ridicule “the language of the devil” and Shakespeare called it “paper bullets of the brain.”

- It is not unusual for the enemy to insult the servants of God.
 - a) Goliath ridiculed David when the shepherd boy met the giant with only a sling in his hand (1 Sam. 17:41–47).
 - b) Jesus was mocked by the soldiers during His trial (Luke 22:63–65) and by the rabble while He was hanging on the cross (23:35–37)
 - c) And some of the heroes of the faith had to endure mocking (Heb. 11:36).

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- *When the enemy laughs at what God’s people are doing, it is usually a sign that God is going to bless His people in a wonderful way.*
- **When the enemy rages on earth, God laughs in heaven (Psl. 2:4).**

Sanballat and his friends had begun to ridicule the Jews even before the work on the wall had begun.

- Neh. 2:19 “They laughed us to scorn and despised us”
- By making his initial speech before the army, Sanballat intensified the power of his ridicule as he made some important people laugh at the Jews.
 - a) 1st, Sanballat ridiculed *the workers by calling them “feeble Jews” (4:2).*
 - ❑ The word feeble means “withered, miserable.” The people were like cut flowers that were fading away.
 - ❑ They had no **mighty human resources** that people could see, but worldly people don’t understand that God delights in using feeble instruments to get His work accomplished (1 Cor. 1:18–31).

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- Then Sanballat ridiculed the work itself by asking **three taunting questions**:
 - 1) **“Will they fortify themselves?”** How could a remnant of feeble Jews hope to build a wall strong enough to protect the city from the army?
 - 2) **“Will they sacrifice?”** implies, “It will take more than prayer and worship to rebuild the city!” – a blasphemous assertion against Jehovah God, for Sanballat was denying that God would help His people.
 - 3) **“Will they finish in a day?”** suggests that the Jews didn’t know how difficult the task was and would soon call it quits.
 - In his final question, Sanballat ridiculed the materials they were using.
 - The stones were taken out of the rubbish heaps and probably were so old and damaged that they would never last when set into the wall.
 - While it is true that limestone is softened by fire, it is also true that the walls were “broken down,” while the gates were “consumed with fire” (Neh. 2:13).
 - In spite of what Sanballat said, there was still plenty of good material for the builders to use.

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In our lesson today, Tobiah the Ammonite was one of the visiting dignitaries at the Samaritan army inspection; and when it was his turn to make a speech, he ridiculed the finished product (4:3).

- You wouldn't need an army to knock down the wall; a solitary fox could do it!
- Of course, much that Sanballat and Tobiah said was true from a human point of view; for the Jewish remnant was weak and poor, and the work was too great for them.
- But they had great faith in a great God, and that's what made the difference

II. PRAYER AND PERSEVERANCE —Neh. 4:4-6

- How did Nehemiah respond to this ridicule? He prayed and asked God to fight the enemy for him.
- This is the third time you find Nehemiah praying (1:4-11; 2:4), and it will not be the last time.
- Nehemiah didn't allow himself to get detoured from his work by taking time to reply to their words.

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- The Lord had heard the sneering taunts of Sanballat and Tobiah, and He would deal with them in His own way and His own time.
- Nehemiah’s prayer resembles the “imprecatory psalms,” such as Psalms 69; 79; and 139:19–22.
- We must remember that Nehemiah was praying as a **servant of God** concerned for the **glory of God**.
- He was not requesting personal vengeance but **official vindication** for God’s people.
- The enemy had blasphemously provoked God before the builders, and this was a terrible sin.
- The opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah against the Jews was in reality **opposition against God**.
- The things people say may **hurt us**, but they can never **harm us**, unless we let them get into our system and poison us.

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- If we spend time pondering the enemy’s words, we will give Satan a foothold from which he can launch another attack closer to home.
- The best thing to do is to pray and commit the whole thing to the Lord; and then get back to your work!
- Anything that keeps us from doing what God has called us to do will only help the enemy.

III. ENEMY THREATS AND MORE PRAYER —Neh. 4:7-9

- A common enemy and a common cause brought four different groups together to stop the work on the walls of Jerusalem.
- The city was now completely surrounded by enemies -- To the **North** were Sanballat and the Samaritans; to the **East**, Tobiah and the Ammonites; to the **South**, Geshem and the Arabs; and to the **West**, the Ashdodites.
- Ashdod was perhaps the most important city in Philistia at that time, and the Philistines did not want to see a strong community in Jerusalem.

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- God’s people sometimes have difficulty working together, but the people of the world have no problem uniting in opposition to the work of the Lord (Psl. 2:1–2; Acts 4:23–30; Luke 23:12).
- As the enemy saw the work progressing, they became angry and decided to plan a secret attack against Jerusalem.
- Satan hates the Jews and has used one nation after another to try to destroy them (Psl. 85 and Rev. 12).
- God chose the Jews to be His vehicle for giving the world the knowledge of the true God, the Scriptures, and the Savior (Rom. 9:1–5).
- “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22), and Satan wanted to prevent the Savior from coming into the world.
- If he could destroy the nation, he would frustrate God’s plan.
- Nehemiah suspected that his enemies would launch an attack, so he posted a guard and encouraged the people to pray.

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- The workers held both tools and weapons (Neh. 4:17) and were prepared to fight when the signal was given.
- The 24 hour watch not only provided protection but also served a PS physical reminder that would bolster the morale and confidence of the workers
- **“Watch and pray”** combines faith and works and is a good example for us to follow in our work and our warfare (Mark 13:33; 14:38; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2–4).
- The Christian’s battle is not against flesh and blood, but against Satan and his demonic forces that use flesh and blood to oppose the Lord’s work.
- If we hope to win the war and finish the work, we must use the spiritual equipment God has provided (Eph. 6:10–18; 2 Cor. 10:1–6).
- If we focus on the **visible enemy** alone and forget the **invisible enemy**, we are sure to start trusting our own resources; and this will lead to defeat.



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“ADVANCE YOUR KNOWLEDGE”



1. What three leaders allied against Nehemiah? What made Sanballat react in anger?
2. What sarcastic opinion did Tobiah voice about Jerusalem's wall? What did Nehemiah do when he heard of the mockery?
3. What did Nehemiah want God to do with the enemies' taunts? What did he not want God to do?
4. How was Nehemiah's prayer answered?
5. How did the enemies react to the continued progress in rebuilding? How did Nehemiah and his people react to the new threat?
6. What additional step did they take after praying?



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“DEVELOPING THE LESSON”



1. **Praying through ridicule** (Neh. 4:1-5). News that Nehemiah was in Jerusalem to rebuild the walls was openly opposed by Sanballat, an important political figure who would later serve as governor. He began by accusing Nehemiah of rebelling against the king (2:19). Discuss ways of surveilling and exposing opposition.
2. **Working through ridicule** (Neh. 4:6-9). Nehemiah and his people were undeterred and continued to build the wall. Soon they had the wall built to half its height because “the people had a mind to work.” Discuss what can be accomplished while working through discouragement.
3. **The motivation behind hostility and opposition.** Could there be people who wanted Jerusalem to remain vulnerable; viewing a rebuilt Jerusalem as a threat to their political power. Discuss Nehemiah’s response to the relentless attack from the enemy by turning to the Lord in continual prayer.



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FACILITATORS

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PROVERBS 27:17

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