

# Fresh Encouragement for the Discouraged

By Matthew Black, Pastor

**Text:** Nehemiah 4:1-11

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**Series:** Nehemiah

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**Introduction:** Open your Bible to the book of **Nehemiah 4:1-11**. Tonight we are going to talk about the stuff of life. There are great discouragements in life. We might call them trials or tests, but they are difficult to go through. Often we fear the worst. I'm here tonight to preach a message entitled "Fresh Encouragement for the Discouraged".

We will read just **Nehemiah 4:1-6** by way of introduction: "But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. 4 Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: 5 And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders. 6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work 7 ¶ But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, 8 And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. 10 And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. 11 And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease".

[Prayer for Guidance]

How we deal with adversity says more about our character than most anything else. If you want to know what a person is really like, watch them when things go wrong; when they are done wrong; when they are made to wait; when someone cuts them off in traffic; when they are tired and achy. **Some people whine while other people shine**. Some people **learn** from their situation, while others **burn** with resentment. We can learn a whole lot from Nehemiah about how to deal with discouragement in the work of God. Tonight I want us to consider the **Sources** of discouragement and how we can battle them in God's way.

- I. First there is **Derision**. We find out in **verse 1** that Sanballat "mocked the Jews". "But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews". Ridicule can be effective, though. Some people who will stand bravely when shot at will cower meekly when laughed at, and

that is what we see these enemies of God doing, all within earshot of the workers on the wall

- **Who was Sanballat?** Sanballat was the “leading political official of Samaria...in Ephraim<sup>1</sup> just outside Jerusalem’s gates. Even though Sanballat “was named as the governor of Samaria in 407 B.C.”<sup>2</sup> under Persia, and should have heeded King Artaxerxes orders to allow the Jews to build, Sanballat took matters into his own hands.
- Sanballat knew better, but he used his authority to oppose Nehemiah.

So he used all that he had to discourage Nehemiah with his derision.

- A. He belittled them **personally**. Verse 2, “And he [Sanballat] spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews?”. “What are those feeble Jews doing?” Sanballat was a man of the world. Why would the Jews want to build the walls? Simply to worship? That made no sense to him. But remember, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). The only motives Sanballat knew were pride, pleasure and possessions, i.e. the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.
- B. Sanballat belittled their **work**. He asks in **verse 2**, “will they fortify themselves?”
- C. Sanballat belittled their **faith**. **Verse 2**, “Will they sacrifice?” What he is saying here, most likely, is a taunt that goes something like this: “do they think that they can pray that wall up? Do they believe that their devotion to their God will make the wall magically rise from the rubble?”
- D. Sanballat belittled their **optimism**. **Verse 2**, “will they make an end in a day?” Do they have any idea what they are attempting? Don’t they know that they’ve bit off a whole lot more than they can chew? What unrealistic folly to imagine that they can dig through the rubble and find stones strong enough for the task, and then that they can actually construct a sturdy wall from this mess
- E. Sanballat belittled their **confidence**. **Verse 2**, “will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?” The idea here is that the job is so great they are going to need miraculous power to do the job. And that’s what they had!! **Zechariah 4:6**, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts”.
- F. Then Tobiah tries to further **discourage** them in verse 3, suggesting that even the light footsteps of a fox would be sufficient to knock the wall down. “Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him [Sanballat], and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.”

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<sup>1</sup>Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible*. Map on lining papers. (1898). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House.

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**Explanation:** Sanballat and his cohorts should have supported Nehemiah's effort. Sanballat was appointed by the same man that gave Nehemiah permission to build the walls.

**Application:** Don't be surprised when criticism, derision or harshness come from unexpected places. If we depend on man we will be discouraged. Understand that God uses all things to make you more like Christ. **What should you do if you are derided, criticized, or something false is said about you?**

1. First, you should look in the mirror and see if there is any sin in your life. Make sure you are right with God.
2. Second, you should follow Jesus' example.
  - **1 Peter 2:20-23**, "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. 21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously".
  - **1 Peter 4:19**, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

- II. A second source of discouragement is **Danger**. Look at **Nehemiah 4:7-8**, "But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, 8 And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it." Then look at **verse 11**. Nehemiah records the plan of their enemies—it was a plan to murder the whole lot of Jews there: "And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease".

Sometimes working for God will put you in danger. You may lose your job if you like godly in Christ. You may lose your reputation. In some countries, becoming a Christian means losing your life. Yet this danger is a good thing, because we know that God is on His throne. He works all things after the divine counsels of His own will (**Ephesians 1:11**). He says "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (**Romans 8:28-29**). Some of those things in the "all things" are dangerous, difficult trials and tests. But God only sends them because He loves you and wants to teach you to trust in Him.

**Application:** When you are in danger, remember you are God's child doing God's will. You are "in Christ", an extension of Christ's very Body. Turn over to **Ephesians 5:29-30**, "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones". Christ nourishes and cherishes you as His child. He will not bring you harm for no cause. If it seems you are in danger, remember that it is not any real danger. You will never be condemned. You will never lose your favor with God. You are God's child. You are precious to God. Romans 8:32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

- III. A third source of discouragement is **Disappointment**. People may disappoint you.
- A. Judah. Look at **Nehemiah 4:10**, we hear the words of Judah, one of Nehemiah's peers, "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall." They point out the problems.
- Too little **strength**, "The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed (FAILING)". I.e. "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing".
  - Too much **rubble**, "there is much rubbish".
  - Too large a **task**, "so that we are not able to build the wall". The wall is bigger than the people's desire to build it.
- B. Consider the Jewish people that lived by Sanballat and the others. **verses 11-12**, "And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. 12 And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you." In other words, they said, they were outnumbered.

**Application:** People no matter who they are, will let you down. They will disappoint you. Do not put your trust in man. David wrote in **Psalm 60:11-12**, "Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. 12 Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies."

Look over at **Jeremiah 17:5**, "Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD."

God will never disappoint you! Look at **Psalm 34:8-10**, "O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. 9 O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. 10 The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing."

**Conclusion:** As I said, how we deal with adversity says more about our character than most anything else! Some people whine while others shine! Some get better, others get bitter! If we look to anyone or anything but God we will be discouraged, but if we look to God through Christ, He will never fail, He will never change, and He will never leave you nor forsake you! Next week we are going to look at the solutions for Discouragement.