

How To Get Up When You Are Down

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
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Let's Begin

As we saw last week, the work in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was moving along quite well for Nehemiah and the children of Israel. But that changes in Nehemiah 4. The chapter begins with, "But it came to pass ..." (4:1). It doesn't take long before the children of Israel realize their great opportunity to rebuild their city's walls is going to be met with great opposition. It is the same thing for us today. When we commit to live for the Lord and to build our families and churches on His Word, we can be sure the devil is going to do his best to discourage and defeat us.

The devil actually has a variety of tools in his arsenal which he uses to try to hinder the Lord's work. He uses devices or schemes (2 Cor. 2:11), wiles or tricks (Eph. 6:11), and snares or traps (1 Tim. 3:7). He can come as a

roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:7) or as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). And most of the time he uses other people to accomplish his work. Using the outline below, let's look at the strategies the devil uses as he tries to discourage Nehemiah and the children of Israel in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. To be aware of the devil's tactics can help us as we live for the Lord today. And to see how Nehemiah and the people respond to his tactics can show us how to get up when we are down.

I. The Strategy of Contempt (vv. 1-6)

II. The Strategy of Conspiracy (vv. 7-9)

III. The Strategy of Continuance (vv. 10-23)

I. The Strategy of Contempt (vv. 1-6)

We first met Sanballat, along with his friend Tobiah, in Nehemiah 2. Sanballat was the governor of Samaria. Tobiah was an Ammonite, one of Israel's oldest enemies. They were very unhappy to hear about Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem, especially when they learned he had come to help the Jews (2:10). Now when Sanballat hears how the Jews have actually started rebuilding their city wall, he goes into a rage (v. 1). His anger

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leads him to mock or ridicule the Jews by asking Tobiah and the Samaritan army officers, who were there with him, a series of questions (v. 2). First, he asks, "... What do these feeble Jews?" He was basically saying, "Who do these Jews think they are and what do they think they are doing?" Then he asks, "... will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice?" His words are dripping with contempt. He accuses them of being religious just to get their



wall built. Sanballat continues with, "... will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" He was implying that they didn't know anything about building. They didn't understand how big the project was. There was no way they could finish the work anytime soon.

Sanballat's colleague Tobiah continues the ridicule in verse 3. It seems he was a "me too" character. Whatever Sanballat did, Tobiah was going to say "me too." He accuses the Jerusalem wall of being so flimsy that if a fox walked on top of it, it would fall down. He was saying the Jews were doing a pitiful job in rebuilding the wall.

Contempt and ridicule are two of the most effective tools the devil uses against God's people. Even in the Bible, men of faith were objects of ridicule. David is one example. When he went out to fight Goliath, Goliath made fun of him (1 Sam. 17:41-44). But David didn't let the ridicule discourage him. He told Goliath, "... I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied" (1 Sam. 17:45). And, we know the rest of the story. The Lord gave him the great victory over Goliath (1 Sam. 17:48-50).

When we are faced with ridicule and contempt, the temptation can be to retaliate or to give up and quit. That is exactly what the devil wants us to do. But that is not what Nehemiah

does. Instead, he responds by going to the Lord in prayer (vv. 4-5). His prayer is not one of those sweet little church prayers either. It is in the category of the imprecatory psalms of the Old Testament. Imprecatory simply means to pray for God's wrath and judgment on those who are against Him. Nehemiah's prayer

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is not a personal prayer, but it is a national prayer.

Nehemiah understands that Sanballat and Tobiah's ridicule is really contempt against Israel's God. We see this clearly in verse 5 when he says they have provoked the Lord to anger in the presence of the builders. Nehemiah shows godly wisdom when he doesn't take revenge himself, but he asks the Lord to handle the situation. As he is praying, he no doubt is also reminding the builders they do not need to be intimidated by

their enemies. Their enemies were attacking God's work, which meant they had God with whom to deal.

After Nehemiah's prayer, he and the builders go right back to building the wall (v. 6). They just keep on doing what they had been called of God to do. The last part of the verse tells us why, "... for the people had a mind to work."

Verse 6 also lets us know the Jews were at the halfway point in rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. The halfway point can be a very dangerous place. This is because when we first begin a project, we usually begin with a lot of enthusiasm and excitement. But as we begin to move on into the project and begin to encounter difficulties, it is easy for the work to slow down or even stop. We may get so discouraged that we want to just quit and walk away from it all. We need to understand that how we handle the halfway marks in our Christian lives is very important. We need to learn to follow the Jews' example and have a mind to work. Then, no matter the adversity or difficulty, we will know to commit the situation to God in prayer. And we will return to the work.

Reflection Connection

What does Nehemiah's response in verses 4-5 as well as Jesus' example in 1 Peter 2:23 teach us about responding to those who criticize or ridicule us?



II. The Strategy of Conspiracy (vv. 7-9)

The devil will stop at nothing to hinder the work of God. The ridicule didn't work, so he chooses a new strategy. Just as Nehemiah was God's man for the hour, it seems Sanballat is the devil's man. When he first came on the scene, it was just Sanballat with his sidekick Tobiah. By Nehemiah 2:19, he had an additional cohort, Geshem, an Arab. But now in verse 7, he has a whole crowd: Tobiah, the Arabians, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, as well as the Samaritan army. Sanballat has successfully stirred up all of the enemies of the Jews. They are infuriated to hear about the progress the Jews were making. Their anger reminds us there are no shortages of helpers for the devil when he tries to hinder the work of God.

Sanballat and the other enemies begin conspiring against the Jews (v. 8). Their plan is to attack Jerusalem in order to stop the Jews from building. They had to feel quite confident about their

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plan because they pretty well had Jerusalem surrounded. The Arabians were to the south of Jerusalem, and the Ammonites were to the east. The Ashdodites, who were Philistines, were to the

west, and the Samaritans were to the north.

How would Nehemiah handle this situation? This time it was more than just words being hurled against him and his people. Verse 9 tells us, "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them." Nehemiah again goes to God in prayer. He knew, whether it was ridicule or the threat of war, prayer was the first line of action. He also has men guard the city day and night. We might say he leads the Jews to watch and pray.

Reflection Connection

Discuss why prayer should always be our first response when we deal with any and all opposition in our Christian lives.

III. The Strategy of Continuance (vv. 10-23)

The enemies' ridicule and conspiracy were not able to deter the Jews, but what comes next lets us know the devil is continually persistent. He never lets up as he tries to hinder the work of God. This time he uses discouragement. Verse 10 tells us, "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." Judah was the largest tribe in Israel. We could say they were Nehemiah's right-hand men, the best he had. But now they are filled with discouragement.

Three words summarize the remaining verses of the chapter, including Judah's discouragement. The first word is "rubbish" in verse 10. The men of Judah were overwhelmed. They had been working, but they could not see much in the way of progress. They were



still seeing all the rubbish. Sanballat had talked about the rubbish in verse 2 when he said, “Are you going to revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish?” Whether his propaganda was intentional or not, it had worked. This lets us know that if something is said enough, sooner or later some folks will start believing it. The men of Judah had started believing what the enemy believed.

The men of Judah were also tired. Rebuilding the wall was hard work. Sometimes the most spiritual thing we as Christians can do is to rest. Jesus told His disciples to come apart and rest a while (cp. Mark. 6:31). Vance Havner, a preacher from years ago, said, “If you don’t come apart; you will come apart.” That’s true. When we get tired, we are susceptible to discouragement. Sometimes when we are feeling a little down in the dumps spiritually, it may be because we are simply worn out. We need to rest.

The second word is “rumor.” The Jews’ enemies start spreading rumors (v. 11). They were planning a surprise attack on Jerusalem. The Jews who live outside Jerusalem hear about their plans and tell Nehemiah. They don’t come to offer their support, but ten times they come to Nehemiah and the Jews who are working

on the wall to tell them to stop the work and retreat (v. 12). Why were these Jews so discouraging? They “dwelt by them,” meaning they lived near the enemies. They were discouraging because they were living too close to the enemy.

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Christians who live too close to this world don’t have anything but a discouraging word for those who are living and working for the Lord. They are not involved in the work of the Lord because they are too involved in listening to the rumors and propaganda of the devil. They actually become tools of the devil in discouraging the work of the Lord.

The third word we see is “relief.” In verse 13 and following Nehemiah gathers and organizes the people so they are ready in case their

enemies attack. Everyone is armed and given his post. Next, Nehemiah encourages the people. In verse 14 he says, “Be not ye afraid of them.” That was the bedrock problem right there. They were scared. They were surrounded, and their lives were being threatened.

Nehemiah next tells them, “... remember the Lord ...” (v. 14). He reminds them that God is on their side. And he reminds them of two of God’s attributes: His greatness and His awesomeness. Whenever we get down, we need to remind ourselves, “... if God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). Then Nehemiah restores their vision. He tells them to fight for their families and homes. He gets them involved emotionally in the situation. They needed to remember why they were building the wall in the first place. Our families—our children and grandchildren—should make us redouble our efforts for Jesus Christ. Because of them we should want to live for and work for the Lord more than we ever have.

It doesn’t take long before Sanballat and the other enemies realize God has brought their “counsel to nought” (v. 15). Nehemiah and the Jews realize it too, and they return to working on the wall. But this time, knowing



there may be future trouble, Nehemiah takes additional steps to ensure their readiness to fight their enemies (vv. 16-20). He divides the workers so that, while half are working on the wall, the other half are on watch. They are looking out for their enemies. Even those who are building have their swords by their sides in case a fight breaks out. Nehemiah also has a man with a trumpet by him so he can communicate with all the

workers. If they are attacked, he will blow the trumpet to let everyone know.

Verses 21-23 summarize the work. Nehemiah says they “laboured in the work.” They worked from early in the morning until late at night. Those who lived outside of Jerusalem even moved inside the city walls so they could help with the work, including guarding the city. Nehemiah, with his relatives and servants,

led in the work. They never took time to even change their clothes, indicating they kept their weapons with them at all times.

Reflection Connection

Discuss why after preparing the people to work and fight, Nehemiah tells them “our God shall fight for us” in verse 20.

Wrap Up

Sometimes when opposition and difficulties come into our lives as we live for the Lord, it is easy to get discouraged. We may even want to give up. Instead, we need to remember that opposition is many times a sign of progress. It means we are doing a work for the Lord, and the devil is not happy with what we are doing. He is the one trying to discourage us and defeat us. Just as he did with the children of Israel, he will have others ridicule and conspire against us. And the devil can be persistent.

What can we do when we face the devil's opposition, especially when he is able to get us down? First, we need to have a heart to pray. We serve a great God, and He will fight for us. Next, we need to have a mind to work. We need to remember not to “be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). That will get us up when we are down!

