THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH
"Mocking Jewish Builders"
Nehemiah 4:1-7

1. The building of the walls was a work of God which was earnestly prayed for (1:11). The hearts of the people were moved by God of heaven to "rise and build" (2:17-20). What a gracious touch from the Lord to a people in "distress" (2:17).

2. The work was done on the walls by His help in just 52 days (6:15). It was accomplished with great unity as clearly stated in this chapter. Consider such verses as "build, sanctify, set up, repair, lay beams, and fortify." Moreover, rulers helped (cf. vv. 9, 12, 14, 15, 17) and professionals (vv. 8, 32). Also there were men from famous cities who helped (vv 2, 5, 7, 13). Blessed be God for what was accomplished!

3. There are details in this chapter which absolutely defy human origin (cf. vv. 20, 21). It is really wonderful and thrilling to read the total accuracy of the Word of God. If one starts at the Sheep Gate (3:1) this chapter traces a tour of the gates clockwise from west to north to east and back again south to the Sheep Gate (3:32).

4. Now, the magnificent work of the Spirit of God among the people has been demonstrated (3:1-32). Nevertheless, before the work was completed, opposition to the project surfaced. This was not new (cf. 2:10, 19), but now it is exacerbated. Mark this, the enemy not only seeks to stop the work of God, but will try to hinder its successful completion. The enemy never gives up! So study:

1. The OPPOSITION of the Enemy vv 1–2 (Hebrew text 3:33ff)
   a. It was Wrathful v. 1
      When Sanballat heard about the wall building, Scripture says he responded: 1) With anger. The verb signifies to burn, be inflamed, kindled. This is no small emotion. 2) With indignation. The adjective great adds to the meaning of the verb to be indignant, vexed, be ill. Put it succinctly, the enemy was downright upset at the building. The situation has not changed today (cf. Jn 16:33).
   b. It was Scornful v. 1
      This is evidenced by the verb "mocked" which means to stammer, speak unintelligibly, mock, deride. Hence, to use vile language. What a powerful emotion heaped upon "the Jews."
   c. It was Questionable vv. 2, 3
      Five contemptible questions are raised and leveled against the Jews:
      1) About their strength! What do these feeble Jews? "Feeble" means "languid" or drooping plants. This concerns the people of God.
      2) About their permission. The verb "fortify" connotes – will the Jews be allowed by us to build? This concerns the will of God.
      3) About their sacrifice. This concerns the worship of God as instructed.
      4) About their intentions. This impugns the hopes of the Jews to complete their building in a day. Therefore the plan of God was a question.
      5) About their resourcefulness. It denotes the ability of God through His people to see through the rebuilding process.

Note: Questions of this nature are designed mockery loaded with contempt. Tobiah actually states that a burrowing fox would demolish the stone walls being built. This was a seed of doubt intended to discourage God's people.

d. It was Powerful vv. 1, 3, 7
   Line them up and you have an awesome number of figures: Sanballat, Tobiah, Arabians, Ammonites, Ashdodites, and the Samaritans. One Arabian has been named (Geshem, 2:19). This is a formidable crowd! True, too often the enemy is looked at rather than the Lord (cf. Num. 13:33) and we must keep our eyes on the Lord (cf. Mt. 14:29, 30). It stands true that "since (first class condition) God is for us, who can be against us" (Ro. 8:31)?

2. The DEDICATION of the Nation vv. 4-6
   a. Through Supplication vv. 4, 5
      In response to the threat and continual outbursts and outrages against Nehemiah and the Jews, God's servant prayed. The most appropriate activity in the face of opposition is not retaliation, but a commitment of the matter to the Lord (2 Kgs 19:14; Ps 37:5). Nehemiah admits the Jews are despised (i.e. trodden underfoot, held in contempt). With that in mind, he prayed to God with four requests:
      1) Turn. The reproach and scorn being meted out to the Jews, is the prayer, should be thrown right back on the heads of the enemy (cf. 2:17 for same word).
      2) Give. This prayer is that the enemy be as prey, booty, or spoil in the land of captivity. What a bold request suggesting the turning of the tables on them.
      3) Cover. Here is a negative report. Do not (imperative) cover the iniquity of the enemy. What is done by them is considered a sin, crime, wrong action.
      4) Leave The negative here is not to blot out or wipe away the sin of the enemy from the very face of God.

Note: This imprecatory (to invoke, as evil) prayer is unquestionably the cry to God from a devout man (cf. 1:5-11). What he prayed is taken in a good sense because he was certain the enemy opposed God, not just the Jewish people. This view is suggested by the statement that the enemy had provoked the Lord ("thee in italics, but attracted from "before thee") at the expense of the builders. Insults were hurled at them.

   b. Through Concentration v. 6
      Whereas prayer (vv. 4, 5) demonstrates that Nehemiah and the people believed their cause belonged to God, they knew also that they had a personal responsibility to perform. Look what they did: 1) They built the wall. 2) They joined the entire wall together, but left the top portion. 3) They put their hearts to do the work. This is synergism, not monergism. This is an O.T. expression for a N.T. teaching (1 Cor. 3:8, 9). In the light of this revelation, it is right to say that all the prayer in the world is useless unless the "mind" (heart) is in it. Much of God's work suffers even today because men "pray" but their "heart" is not with it. Careful observation of those who worked on the walls shows they wanted to do something unto the Lord (2:17-20; 3:1-32). There is but one exception (3:5). Committed believers will prosper.

Conclusion God's work done in God's way will never lack God's provision. This is no insurance against opposition (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 1 Thess. 2:13-18; 2 Tim. 3:12). The point is this: God's way is perfect (Job 23:10; Psa. 18:30; 119:67, 71). There is pure delight doing His will. Amen.