

The Wall - Week 3  
Dealing with Opposition:  
Nehemiah 4, 6

One of the most popular themes you find in literature and movies deals with the good guy (hero) and the plot against that hero. You have the protagonist, and the antagonist.

You have great stories of intrigue where Indiana Jones comes up against the Nazi's, Dorothy vs. the wicked witch, Batman and Joker, Willy Coyote vs. Road Runner, Luke Skywalker vs. Darth Vader, Lex Luther vs. Superman, John Wayne vs. anyone. This theme of good vs. evil is found at the beginning of time. Light vs. Dark. God vs. Satan.

Nehemiah in many ways follows this same theme. The protagonist is Nehemiah, doing God's work, fixing what is broken, restoring the crushed.

So far in this series as we have been looking at how Nehemiah rebuilt the wall, our focus has been primarily on the protagonist of the story as Nehemiah. We have looked at how God has called him, and used him to lead the work of rebuilding the wall.

Today we are going to get a glimpse of the antagonist of the story. Nehemiah's biggest rival is a man named Sanballat. Sanballat has others who stoke the fire with him, and try to cause trouble, but Sanballat's name will come up again and again as he tries to oppose Nehemiah and his building the wall.

The way that Nehemiah handles the situation can help provide a guideline that will be useful when we incur opposition as we follow God's call in rebuilding what is broken.

So who is Sanballat, and why does he oppose Nehemiah? We do not have a whole lot of information about him, but we do have some clues that give us some insight.

**A. He was governor of Samaria.**

Being a Horonite means he was probably from a town in Northern Israel called Horon. His ancestry would have identified him in the lineage of Ephraim. Would have become a leader of part of the remnant of Israelite who had intermarried with other cultures. This shows that he would have had a lot of influence within the different people groups around the time.

**B. He had military influence**

He mocked the initial rebuilding of the wall in front of the Samaritan army. Because he had this opportunity meant that he would have had some influence to use military might. He would not have used it against Nehemiah because of his influence with King Artaxerxes, but the influence would have given him military strength before Nehemiah shows up.

**C. He had Biblical understanding**

Later in the book, he is going to try and trick Nehemiah into entering the temple so that God would have to kill Nehemiah because he was not a priest. He knew Scripture, and he knew the commands of God. He also wrote to Nehemiah in Hebrew instead of the more common trade language of Aramaic showing that he had a grasp of the Hebrew language.

**D. A restored Jerusalem would have impacted his power.**

Some scholars believe that he could have been one of the greater influences of the continual invasion and plundering of Jerusalem to fund his army and his people.

So that is who Nehemiah is going against, and we will see three different times of opposition, that Nehemiah has to deal with. Sanballat is directly involved with two of them, and the other is some internal struggles that could have derailed the work. So how did Nehemiah respond, and what can we learn?

### 1. **You pray and you guard** (4:7-9)

Opposition comes in different ways and different levels. When we first hear of Sanballat he was displeased to hear that Nehemiah had come to Jerusalem. Now then as Nehemiah continues to serve as God has called him, and the people begin the work, Sanballat becomes angry. (4:1) And Once the work becomes noticeable. The wall is only about 1/2 high, but it is being closed in all around, Sanballat becomes very angry.

Most of the time when you are doing what God has called you too, there will be opposition that shows up. In fact, Jesus tells us as much. In John 17:14-15 Jesus prays for his disciples in us that we would remain faithful even though the world hates us because it hated Christ first.

So Nehemiah directed the people to pray. Praying in the midst of opposition reminds us that the focus is not physical but spiritual. That we are connected to the one who has called us, and that nothing on this world can have an impact that keeps from accomplishing what we are called to do.

But he did not call them to simply pray, he also understood that the opposition would continue to Nehemiah crafted a plan to arm the people for the fight that could be coming. He set armed guards at the weak spots in the wall. He had the people attach swords to them so that if they were needed they were ready to fight. He had the men that were able continue to work while holding on to their weapons. (Stones in one hand, swords in the other).

Please hear me! I am not saying that when you go to work tomorrow you should show up with a sword in your hand just in case. In fact, that would cause you a whole lot more trouble involving bosses, teachers, police, FBI, all kinds of issues.

The opposition to the wall was that they were planning on physically attacking the people, so guarding themselves involved the same.

For us, as we face opposition, as we pray, we ask God to help us understand the root issues and altercations that will arise, then we prepare for them.

This is the heart behind apologetics. Defending what you believe and what you are called to. It may take extra work. It will probably stretch you in ways that you are not used to, but that is ok. We need to be stretched. We need to get out of our comfort zone.

We have often equated God's favor with comfort. Meaning that if I am comfortable, if everything is going well for me, then God must be giving favor to me.

The reality is that when we are serving God faithfully, there will be opposition, there will be difficult days and times.

So sometimes the opposition comes from outside sources that we have to guard ourselves against, but sometimes they come from internal sources that can deteriorate the community that we have around us. When that happens we need to make sure we continue to care for those in need.

### 2. **Continue to care for those in need** (5)

In chapter 5, there is an outcry by some of the people who are rebuilding the wall because they are poor and hungry and being charged interest by the wealthy. The nobles are using the circumstances of the famine, to ensure that after the famine they would not only continue to thrive, but to create great gains at the expense of their own people.

This could have caused the building of the wall to stop, but more importantly than that, this could have created deep divisions among the people that even after the wall was built would have had massive ramifications.

Nehemiah cared about everyone, not only the influential people. So he does a couple of things to stop the opposition and show how much he cared about people.

*1. He stood alongside the oppressed. (6)*

Nehemiah was angry when he heard their outcry. He was willing to put his credentials up for the good of those who were being oppressed. We have a great opportunity to stand with those around us who do not have a voice, or whose voice is often drowned out by society.

*2. He facilitated a plan that everyone could agree on. (11-12)*

*He was not telling the land owners that they should not be compensated, but he was showing them that you do not cause family to go into dire situations for greed. There were people who were losing their jobs, their livelihoods, their children were being forced into work, they were starving. Nehemiah comes in and shows them that causing such great strife among family is bad for the entire family.*

*3. He did more than was expected of him (14-19)*

Nehemiah gave everything and asked for nothing in return.

When you show people you care, your influence and impact on their life will expand in ways you could not imagine.

Jesus reminds us of this when he says to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.”

When we face adversity or opposition it becomes very easy for us to stop focusing on people that we can have a positive, life-changing impact on.

**4. You don't allow it to distract you from God's purpose (6:2-3)**

Sanballat wanted Nehemiah to stop what he was doing and meet with him. Nehemiah understood it was a distraction, but notice that Nehemiah responded through confirming what God had called him to do.

*For us, opposition may come from different definitions. They may be. Skeptics, Schemers, Critics, Cynics, Complainers, Contrarians, Grumblers, Grippers, Argumentative, Aggravates, Minimalists, Malcontents, Irritants, Defeatists, Discouragers, Distractors, Doubters, Toxics, Troublemakers, Naysayers, Negativists, Tribalisms, Turfism, Siloism, Power Seekers, Position Hungry-*

When we are facing opposition we need to remain steadfast in our focus:

We maintain focus on ministry and mission, and not division.

We maintain focus on gaining and growing, and not grumbling and griping

We maintain focus on finding joy, and not focusing on jealousy

We maintain focus on seeing lives transformed by the Gospel, and not strife from others

We maintain focus on ministering and not simply maintaining the status quo

When opposition comes against you and tries to get you off your mission, you remind yourself that your God is not weak, inept, or unconcerned. That God has called you to the mission he has set before you therefore you are not powerless or defeated. And no, you may not be perfect, but you are an ambassador of the one who is. You have the power and promise of Christ who is propelling you do to the work that God has called you to.

Therefore, do not allow opposition to rob you of that focus and take you off your wall. Do not give into the lies of the evil one that will attempt to use ever tool in his belt to change your focus. You maintain the work that God has given you, and the mission that he desires for you to complete.

Don't settle for lesser things, even if they seem good.

Churches are full of people who have devoted their lives to lesser things and missed opportunities for eternal impacts. You stay on the wall.