

Response to Ridicule

Nehemiah 4:1-6

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Introduction: We left off last week in Nehemiah 2:1-6 with Nehemiah's prayer, ending with him asking for & receiving permission to return to Jerusalem & begin rebuilding the walls (& gates) of the city. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem & goes to inspect the walls, then challenges the people to get to work. In 2:18 we read: *"Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up & build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work."* The work begins in chapter 3, but brings a response recounted in chapter 4. As the enemies of God see the work of rebuilding the walls progressing, they go into action. Consider this evening that "opposition is not only an evidence that God is blessing, but it is also an opportunity for us to grow" (Wiersbe). Note with me in these opening verses of chapter 4 the nature of opposition in the form of ridicule. Here we learn of the response of Nehemiah & the people to such ridicule.

I. The **ridicule** by interrogation (4:1-3)

A. The opposition of **animosity**:

1. *"Sanballat... was wrath, & took great indignation..."*
2. This indicates that he was angry & greatly enraged.

B. The opposition by **mockery**:

1. Mockery of the workers > *"What do these feeble Jews?"*
2. Mockery of the working >
 - a. *"Will they fortify themselves?"*
 - b. *"Will they sacrifice"*(implies, "It will take more than prayer & worship to rebuild the city!" [Wiersbe]).
 - c. *"Will they make an end in a day?"*
3. Mockery of work (materials & workmanship) >
 - a. *"Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?"*
 - b. *"Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall."*

II. The **response** of intercession (4:4-6)

A. The **presenting** of the enemys' sarcastic questions.

B. The **petition** for God's listening ear (*"Hear, O our God"*):

1. *"Turn their reproach upon their own head" –*
 - a. They are despised by their enemies.
 - b. They are blaspheming Israel's God.
2. *"Give them for a prey in the land of captivity" –*
 - a. He asks for his enemies to suffer captivity like they had experienced.
 - b. "Nehemiah simply prayed that what these adversaries had tried to do to the Israelites might come instead on themselves" (Luck).
3. *"Cover not their iniquity, & let not their sin be blotted out from before Thee..." –*
 - a. "Doubtless Nehemiah had reason to think that the hearts of those sinners were desperately hardened, so that they would never repent of it, else he would not have prayed that it might *never be blotted out*" (Henry).

b. The enemies had publicly spoken against the Lord, in the ears of the workers.

C. The **principles** for God's people (Imprecatory psalms):

1. Examples > Psalms 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137, 139, & 140.

2. Explanation >

a. They are uttered by a servant of the Lord for the glory of the Lord, yet not mere personal vengeance, but seeking official vindication from the Lord.

b. "They contain prayers for the overthrow & defeat of the wicked" (Custer).

c. "These psalms invoke judgments or curses on one's enemies...the purposes of these imprecations are:

(1) to demonstrate God's just & righteous judgments toward the wicked (Ps. 58:11);

(2) to show the authority of God over the wicked (58:13);

(3) to lead the wicked to seek the Lord (83:16);

(4) to cause the righteous to praise God (7:17).

"Therefore out of zeal for God & abhorrence of sin, the psalmist calls on God to punish the wicked & to vindicate His righteousness" (Ryrie).

d. "We should be angry at the malice of persecutors, not because it is abusive to us, but because it is offensive to God; & on that we may ground an expectation that God will appear against it, Ps. 74:18, 22" (Henry).

Illustration: Should we pray such prayers today? Consider Dr. Bob Jones, Jr., Ian Paisley & the U.S. State Department?

Conclusion: Note the determination of the workers in 4:6, "*So built we the wall; & all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.*" "Observe that the reason such rapid progress was made was because '*the people had a mind to work.*' Such a spirit is sorely needed among God's people today, as there is much work to be done" (Luck). We read in the *Pulpit Commentary* that "a mind to work springs from such things as a sense of duty, a sense of necessity concerning tasks which must be accomplished, from gratitude & love to God the Father & Christ our Redeemer, from benevolence toward others, from hope of accomplishing good & obtaining good, & from the encouragement of faithful leaders such as Nehemiah. A mind to work displays itself in the very laboring which will be prompt, hearty, happy, abundant, steady & persevering despite difficulties. A mind to work produces freedom from unhealthy thoughts & actions, growth in true Christian life, & success." Nehemiah's prayer was for the Lord to fight the enemy for him. Wiersbe concludes: "The best thing to do is to pray & commit the whole thing to the Lord; & then *get back to your work!* Anything that keeps you from doing what God has called you to do will only help the enemy." What will be your response to ridicule?