

Nehemiah 4

Verses 1- 6

Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry, and he mocked the Jews. ² And he spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy people of Samaria and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore *the temple* for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish *it* in a day? Can they revive the stones from the heaps of rubble, even the burned ones?” ³ Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him, and he said, “Even what they are building—if a fox were to jump *on it*, it would break their stone wall down!” ⁴ Hear, O our God, how we are *an object of contempt*! Return their taunting on their own heads, and turn them into plunder in a land of captivity. ⁵ Do not forgive their guilt and do not let their sin be wiped out before you, for they have demoralized the builders. ⁶ So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work.

Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry, and he mocked the Jews. ² And he spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy people of Samaria and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore *the temple* for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish *it* in a day? Can they revive the stones from the heaps of rubble, even the burned ones?”

The wooden gates and homes that were burned would have damaged parts of the stone but the walls built to protect the city were very thick and they could be trimmed of imperfections or reshaped and used again. The rest of their arguments were weak at best and didn't amount to much more than competitive trash talk.

⁴ Hear, O our God, how we are *an object of contempt*! Return their taunting on their own heads, and turn them into plunder in a land of captivity. ⁵ Do not forgive their guilt and do not let their sin be wiped out before you, for they have demoralized the builders.

It seems a bit odd that these weak insults could demoralize the builders but the text says it did. Even Nehemiah seems to have been quite bothered by their comments and he asked God not to forgive their guilt.

Perhaps Nehemiah and the workers should have said to them, **"I'm rubber, you're glue, whatever you say bounces off of me and sticks to you."**

On the other hand, there had been a long history of conflict between them and that can definitely amplify the feelings of animosity between the two groups.

⁶ So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work.

The entire wall was built to half of its desired height which was quite a feat for this small group of people.

Verses 7 - 10

⁷ Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, *and* that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. ⁸ So all of them conspired together to come to fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

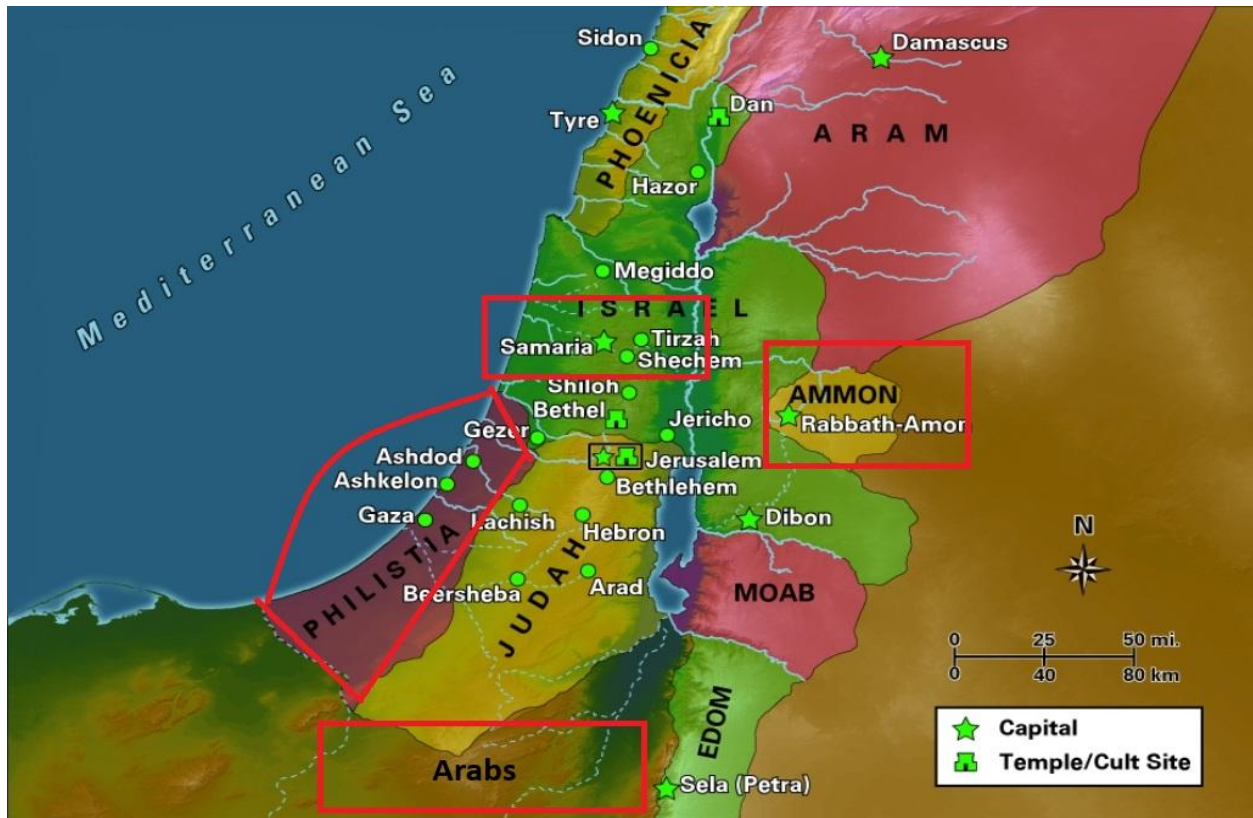
⁹ But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night. ¹⁰ And so in Judah it was said:

**“The strength of the burden bearers is failing,
Yet there is much rubble;
And we ourselves are unable
To rebuild the wall.”**

Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, *and* that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. ⁸ So all of them conspired together to come to fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

Israel was literally surrounded by hostile neighbors. Sanballat in Samaria on the north, Tobiah and the Ammonites on the east, The Arabs to the south and The Ashdodites (Philistines) to the west

See Map 405



⁹ But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.

The enemies of Israel planned some kind of attack hoping to distract the Jews from their work of building the wall but Nehemiah prayed about the problem and then took action to prepare against an attack.

Verses 11 – 14

¹¹ And our enemies said, “They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them, and put a stop to the work.” ¹² When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, “They will come up against us from every place where you may turn,” ¹³ then I stationed *men* in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears, and bows. ¹⁴ When I saw *their fear*, I stood and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people: “Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”

¹¹ And our enemies said, “They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them, and put a stop to the work.”

Their enemies were speaking as if they were ready for battle but there was another reality at work here. Any severe skirmish would attract the attention of the local authorities and Sanballat was wise enough not to cross that line because Nehemiah had the blessing of the king.

¹² When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, “They will come up against us from every place where you may turn,” ¹³ then I stationed *men* in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears, and bows.

The Jews from the surrounding area were intimidated by the bluster of their enemies so Nehemiah did three things to nullify this:

1. He brought in Jews with their families from the outlying areas and armed them and kept them overnight in the city.
2. He set armed men at the lowest parts of the wall, the most likely place for an attack.
3. Nehemiah told them not to be afraid and reminded them that God was on their side.

Verses 15 - 20

¹⁵ Now when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work.

¹⁶ And from that day *on*, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them kept hold of the spears, the shields, the bows, and the coats of mail; and the captains *were* behind all the house of Judah. ¹⁷ Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens carried with one hand doing the work, and the other keeping hold of a weapon. ¹⁸ As for the builders, each *wore* his sword strapped to his waist as he built, while the trumpeter *stood* near me. ¹⁹ And I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. ²⁰ At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, assemble to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

¹⁵ Now when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work.

The strategy of Nehemiah worked because when their enemies heard that the Jews were ready to fight they backed down.

¹⁶ And from that day *on*, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them kept hold of the spears, the shields, the bows, and the coats of mail; and the captains *were* behind all the house of Judah.

Coats of mail were thin leaves of bronze sewed on leather and overlapping one another to protect the wearer from sharp objects such as spears and arrows.

See pic 410



¹⁷ Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens carried with one hand doing the work, and the other keeping hold of a weapon. ¹⁸ As for the builders, each wore his sword strapped to his waist as he built, while the trumpeter *stood* near me.

The immediate danger seemed to be over but was better to be prepared than be caught off guard so all of the workers were armed and remained ready for battle.

¹⁹ And I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. ²⁰ At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, assemble to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

Nehemiah didn't leave anything to chance. Their enemies may have given up at that time but things can change quickly, so he planned for future attacks.

Verses 21 - 23

²¹ So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared. ²² At that time I also said to the people, “Each man with his servant shall spend the night within Jerusalem, so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day.” ²³ So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me—none of us removed our clothes; each *took* his weapon *even* to the water.

²¹ So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared.

Half of the guards worked in the daytime and the other half stood guard at night.

²³ So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me—none of us removed our clothes; each *took* his weapon *even* to the water.

They were prepared for battle day and night. Even when they were bathing, their weapons were nearby.