

NEHEMIAH 4: 1 But when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.

Sanballat and Tobiah mock the Jews, and endeavor to prevent the completing of the wall, Neh 4:1-3. Nehemiah prays against them, and the people complete one half of the wall, Neh 4:4-6. The Arabians, Ammonites, and Ashdodites, conspire together, and come to fight against the Jews, Neh 4:7, Neh 4:8. The Jews commend themselves to God, and determine to fight for their lives and liberties; on hearing of which their enemies are disheartened, Neh 4:9-16. The Jews divide themselves into two bands; one half working, and the other standing ready armed to meet their enemies. Even the workmen are obliged to arm themselves, while employed in building, for fear of their enemies, Neh 4:17, Neh 4:18. Nehemiah uses all precautions to prevent a surprise; and all labor with great fervor in the work, Neh 4:19-22.

NEHEMIAH 4: 2 He spoke before his brothers and the army of Samaria, and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, since they are burned?"

Verse 2

The army of Samaria - As he was governor, he had the command of the army, and he wished to excite the soldiers to second his views against Nehemiah and his men.

What do these feeble Jews? - We may remark here, in general, that the enemies of God's work endeavor by all means to discredit and destroy it, and those who are employed in it.

1. They despise the workmen: What do these feeble Jews?
 2. They endeavor to turn all into ridicule: Will they fortify themselves?
 3. They have recourse to lying: If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.
 4. They sometimes use fair but deceitful speeches; see Neh 6:2, etc.
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NEHEMIAH 4: 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, "What they are building, if a fox climbed up it, he would break down their stone wall."

NEHEMIAH 4: 4 "Hear, our God; for we are despised; and turn back their reproach on their own head, give them up for a plunder in a land of captivity;

Verse 4

Turn their reproach upon their own head - A prayer of this kind, understood literally, is not lawful for any Christian. Jesus, our great master, has said, "Love your enemies; do good to them that hate

you; and pray for them that despitefully use you." Such sayings as the above are excusable in the mouth of a Jew, under severe irritation. See the next verse, Neh 4:5 (note).

NEHEMIAH 4: 5 don't cover their iniquity, and don't let their sin be blotted out from before you; for they have insulted the builders."

Verse 5

Let not their sin be blotted out - These are the most terrible imprecations; but probably we should understand them as declaratory, for the same form of the verb, in the Hebrew, is used as precative and imperative. Turn their reproach - Their reproach shall be turned. Give them for a prey - They shall be given for a prey. Cover not their iniquity - Their iniquity shall not be covered. Let not their sin be blotted out - Their sin shall not be blotted out. All who know the genius of the Hebrew language, know that the future tense is used to express all these senses. Besides, we may rest assured that Nehemiah's curses, or declaration of God's judgments, had respect only to their bodies, and to their life: not to their souls and the world to come. And then they amount to no more than this: What a man soweth that he shall reap.

NEHEMIAH 4: 6 So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together to half its height: for the people had a mind to work.

Verse 6

For the people had a mind to work - The original is very emphatic: ויהי לב לעשות vayehi leb leam laasoth, "For the people had a heart to work." Their hearts were engaged in it; and where the heart is engaged, the work of God goes on well. The whole of this 6th verse is omitted by the Septuagint.

NEHEMIAH 4: 7 But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabians, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward, and that the breaches began to be filled, then they were very angry;

Verse 7

The walls of Jerusalem were made up - That is, they were made up to the half height of the wall; for the preceding verse seems to intimate that the whole wall was thus far built; not half of the wall completed, but the whole wall built to half its height.

NEHEMIAH 4: 8 and they conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to cause confusion therein.

NEHEMIAH 4: 9 But we made our prayer to our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

 Verse 9

We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch - The strongest confidence in the protection and favor of God does not preclude the use of all or any of the means of self-preservation and defense which his providence has put in our power. While God works in us to will and to do, we should proceed to willing, through the power he has given us to will; and we should proceed to action, through the power he has given us to act. We cannot will, but through God's power; we cannot act, but through God's strength. The power, and the use of it, are two distinct things. We may have the power to will, and not will; and we may have the power to do, and not act: therefore, says the apostle, seeing God has wrought in you these powers, see that You Work Out Your Own salvation, with fear and trembling.

NEHEMIAH 4: 10 Judah said, "The strength of the bearers of burdens is fading, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall."

 Verse 10

The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed - They worked both day and night, scarcely ever putting off their clothes, except for the purpose of being washed, Neh 4:21, Neh 4:23.

Much rubbish - The ruins they were obliged to clear away, before they could dig the foundation for a new wall: and in this labor they were nearly exhausted; see Neh 5:15.

NEHEMIAH 4: 11 Our adversaries said, "They shall not know, neither see, until we come into their midst, and kill them, and cause the work to cease."

NEHEMIAH 4: 12 When the Jews who lived by them came, they said to us ten times from all places, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

 Verse 12

From all places whence ye shall return unto us - This verse is extremely difficult. Our translators have supplied the words, they will be upon you, which have nothing correspondent in the Hebrew. The Septuagint have given a good sense, Αναβαινουσιν εκ παν τ ω ν των τοπων εφ' ἡμας, They come up from all places against us. The sense appears to be this: the Jews which dwelt among the Samaritans, etc., came often to Nehemiah from all quarters, where they sojourned, and told him the designs of his enemies against him: therefore, he set people with their swords, spears, and bows, to defend the walls. It is probable that instead of ושובו tashubu, "ye shall return," we should read ושבו chashebu, "they designed or meditated." This word is very similar to the other, and makes the sense very clear. "The Jews who dwelt among them told us frequently, from all places, what they designed against us." For this reading Houbigant, Michaelis and Dath contend. But this various reading is not found in any MS., and is not countenanced by any of the versions. See Neh 4:15.

NEHEMIAH 4: 13 Therefore set I in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in the open places, I set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

NEHEMIAH 4: 14 I looked, and rose up, and said to the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them! Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

Verse 14

Be not ye afraid of them - Are they more terrible or stronger than God?

Fight for your brethren - Your own countrymen, who worship the same God, and are come from the same stock; your sons, whom they wish to slay or lead into captivity; your daughters and wives, whom they wish to deflower and defile; and your houses, which they wish to seize and occupy as their own. They had every thing at stake; and therefore they must fight pro aris et focis, for their religion, their lives, and their property. A people thus interested, who once take up the sword, can never be conquered.

There is an address made to the Greeks by their leader in Aeschylus, Pers. ver. 402, similar to this, to excite them against the Persians: - - Ω Παιδες Ἑλληνων, ιτε, Ελευθερουτε πατριδ,ελευθερουτε δε Παιδας, γυνιακας, θεων ρε πατρων ἐδη, Θηκας τε προγονω γ · νυν ὑπερ παντων αγων. " - Sons of the Greeks, go on!

Free now your country, and your children free;

Your wives, the temples of your fathers' gods,

And dear abodes of farthest ancestors: -

Now strike the blow for all!"

J. B. B. C.

NEHEMIAH 4: 15 When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and God had brought their counsel to nothing, all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work.

Verse 15

Their counsel to naught - The word counsel used here countenances the emendation in the 12th verse.

NEHEMIAH 4: 16 From that time forth, half of my servants worked in the work, and half of them held the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the coats of mail; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.

Verse 16

Half - wrought in the work - This is no unusual thing, even in the present day, in Palestine: people sowing their seed are often attended by an armed man, to prevent the Arabs from robbing them of their seed, which they will not fail to do if not protected.

Habergeons - In the Franco-Gallic, *hautbergon* signifies a coat of mail; but as in Teutonic *hais* signifies the neck, and *bergen*, to cover or defend; it may be considered rather as signifying a breastplate, or armor for the breast.

NEHEMIAH 4: 17 They all built the wall and those who bore burdens loaded themselves; everyone with one of his hands worked in the work, and with the other held his weapon;

Verse 17

With one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon - That is, he had his arms at hand, and was as fully prepared to fight as to work. So Ovid, *Epist. xi., Canace Macario*, ver. 1: -

Si qua tamen caecis errabunt scripta lituris,

Oblitus a dominae caede libellus erit:

Dextra tenet calamum; strictum tenet altera ferrum:

Et jacet in gremio charta soluta meo.

If streaming blood my fatal letter stain,

Imagine, ere you read, the writer slain.

One hand the sword, and one the pen employs,

And in my lap the ready paper lies.

Dryden.

By this mode of speech Canace does not intimate to her brother Macarius, that she actually held the sword in one hand while she held the pen in the other, but that she had it ready to slay herself as soon as she had written the epistle.

NEHEMIAH 4: 18 and the builders, everyone wore his sword at his side, and so built. He who sounded the trumpet was by me.

NEHEMIAH 4: 19 I said to the nobles, and to the rulers and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and large, and we are separated on the wall, one far from another.

NEHEMIAH 4: 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally there to us. Our God will fight for us."

Verse 20

Ye hear the sound of the trumpet - As the walls were very extensive, and the workmen consequently much scattered, their enemies might easily attack and destroy them successively, he therefore ordered them all to work as near to each other as they could; and himself, who was everywhere surveying the work, kept a trumpeter always with him, who was to sound when the enemy approached; and all were instantly to run to the place where they heard the sound.

NEHEMIAH 4: 21 So we worked in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning until the stars appeared.

NEHEMIAH 4: 22 Likewise at the same time said I to the people, "Let everyone with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and may labour in the day."

Verse 22

Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem - The country people were accustomed, after their day's labor, to return to their families; now being so formidably threatened, he obliged them all to sleep in Jerusalem, that they might be ready, in case of attack, to help their brethren. All this man's arrangements were wise and judicious.

NEHEMIAH 4: 23 So neither I, nor my brothers, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes. Everyone took his weapon to the water.

Verse 23

None of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing - The Hebrew for all this is only *אין אנחנו פשטים בגדינו איש שלחו המים* *ein anachnu poshetim begadeynu ish shilcho hammayim*; which Montanus translates, *Non nos exuentes vestes nostras, vir missile suum aquas*; "We, not putting off our garments, a man his dart to the waters." Of this latter clause what sense can be made? Let us hear what the ancient versions say.

The Vulgate, *Unusquisque tantum nudabatur ad baptismum*, "Every one stripped himself for the bath."

The Septuagint omit the latter part of this clause, *And there was none of us who put off his garments.*

The Syriac, "None of us put off his clothes for a month each in his turn.

The Arabic, "Nor did we put off our clothes, but with our arms, at the end of a month."

There is a remarkable reading in one of De Rossi's MSS. *אין אנחנו משלחה העל המים*. We did not lay aside our garments, but in order to send them to the washing. This is most likely the sense of the place.

It is curious to see how our old versions translate the place.

Coverdale: We put never of our clothes, so much as to wash ourselves. - 1535.

Becke: We put never of our clothes, so much as to wash ourselves. - 1549.

Cardmarden: We put never of our clothes no more than the other did they harness, save only because of the water. - 1566.

This shows how all interpreters have been puzzled with this vexatious clause.

The reading from De Rossi's MS., given above, is the most likely to be the true one, because it gives a good sense, which cannot be found in the Hebrew text as it now stands. The general meaning is sufficiently evident; they worked nearly day and night, only had their hours by turns for repose; this did not permit them time sufficient to undress themselves in order to take regular sleep, therefore they only put off their clothes when they were obliged to get them washed.