

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH 4

This chapter relates, how the Jews, while building, were mocked by their enemies, to which no answer was returned but by prayer to God, and they went on notwithstanding in their work, (~~1601~~ Nehemiah 4:1-6) and how that their enemies conspired against them, to hinder them by force of arms, (~~1607~~ Nehemiah 4:7-12) to oppose which, both spiritual and temporal weapons were made use of, so that the work was still carried on, (~~1613~~ Nehemiah 4:13-23).

Ver. 1. *But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall,* etc.] Or were building it; for as yet it was not finished, (see ~~1616~~ Nehemiah 4:6),

he was wroth, and took great indignation; inwardly, though outwardly he pretended to treat the work with contempt, as if it never would be accomplished, which yet he feared:

and mocked the Jews; as a set of foolish builders, and unable to finish what they had begun.

Ver. 2. *And he spake before his brethren,* etc.] Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, and perhaps some other governors of the king of Persia in those parts:

and before the army of Samaria: which, and the inhabitants of it, were implacable enemies of the Jews:

and said, what do these feeble Jews? what do they pretend to do, or what can they do?

will they fortify themselves? by building a wall about their city; can they think they shall ever be able to do this, or that it will be allowed?

will they sacrifice? meaning not their daily sacrifice, as Jarchi, that they had done a long time, but for the dedication of their building, as Aben Ezra:

will they make an end in a day? they seem to be in as great a hurry and haste as if they meant it; and indeed, unless they can do it very quickly, they never will: they will soon be stopped:

will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burnt? where will they find materials? do they imagine that they can make burnt stones firm and strong again, or harden the dust and rubbish into stones, or make that, which is as if dead, alive? to do this is the same as to revive a dead man, and they may as well think of doing the one as the other; burnt stones being reckoned as dead, as Eben Ezra observes.

Ver. 3. *Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him,* etc.] Who was one of his brethren he spake before, (^{401E}Nehemiah 4:2),

and he said; in the like contemptuous and scoffing manner;

even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall; signifying not only that it was so low that a fox could easily get up to it, or leap over it; but that the materials were so bad, and the work so poorly done, that the weight of a fox would break it down; of which creatures many were thereabout, since Jerusalem was desolate, (see Lam 5:18).

Ver. 4. *Hear, O our God, for we are despised,* etc.] Here begins the prayer of Nehemiah, who had been informed of what these men said in contempt of him, and his builders, and to whom he sent no answer, but applied to God:

and turn their reproach upon their own head; as they have despised and reproached us, let them be despised and reproached by their neighbours:

give them for a prey in the land of captivity; let them be carried captive, as we have been, and become a prey and booty to their enemies.

Ver. 5. *And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee,* etc.] Let it not go unpunished, and even let it not be pardoned; which is spoken, not from a private spirit of revenge, but from a public spirit for the glory of God, and his justice; and not as a mere imprecation, but as a prophecy of what would be the case, in like manner as many of David's petitions in the Psalms; and for this there was a good foundation, since God had threatened the Moabites and Ammonites with utter destruction:

for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders; by despising his people, and mocking at the work the Lord had called them to; and this they did publicly, and on purpose to discourage the workmen.

Ver. 6. *So built we the wall*, etc.] Went on in building it, notwithstanding their scoffs and threats:

and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof; it was carried all round the city to half the height of it:

for the people had a mind to work; their heart was in it, they had a good will to it, and they made haste to finish it.

Ver. 7. *And it came to pass that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians*, etc.] Who were under and influenced by Geshem the Arabian:

and the Ammonites; over whom Tobiah was governor:

and the Ashdodites; who were of Ashdod or Azotus, one of the principalities of the Philistines, who were always enemies to the Jews:

heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up; or “the length of them went up”^{f27}; that is, the height of them; that they rose up high apace, and were got up to, or almost to their proper height:

and that the breaches began to be stopped; for the walls were not all thrown down by the Chaldeans, but breaches made here and there, which were now repaired:

then they were very wrath; and could not avoid showing it; before they mocked them, as attempting what they could not go through with; but now, perceiving the work went on with great success, they were enraged.

Ver. 8. *And conspired all of them together*, etc.] All the above men and people entered into a confederacy and combination:

to come and to fight against Jerusalem; to bring an army with them, and by force cause the Jews to desist; the Jews^{f28} pretend they came to war, and brought with them an army of 180,000 men, which is not probable:

and to hinder it; the building of the walls of it; or “to make a wandering for him”^{f29}; for Nehemiah, or the people, or both, to, cause them to stray from their work, to frighten them from it, that they might become like men at their wits end, not knowing what to do, where to turn themselves, or what

course to steer, but to wander about as persons out of their senses; so Aben Ezra. De Dieu joins this clause to the next verse, to cause everyone of them to wander, we prayed, etc.

Ver. 9. *Nevertheless, we made our prayer unto our God*, etc.] Spread their case before him in prayer, entreating direction and help from him:

and set a watch against them day and night, because of them; to give notice of their approach, that they might prepare to defend themselves; though they prayed to God, and trusted in him for deliverance, they did not neglect the use of means.

Ver. 10. *And Judah said*, etc.] Several of the men of Judah:

the strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed; through much labour, in carrying heavy loads of stone and timber to the builders, and yet more through fear of the enemy:

and there is much rubbish; which ought to be removed, but that the labourers were so weak that they could not do it:

so that we are not able to build the wall; to finish it before the enemy comes to attack us.

Ver. 11. *And our adversaries said, they shall not know*, etc.] Our designs upon them:

neither see; or perceive what we are about to do:

till we come in the midst of them; with an army suddenly, at an unawares, and unexpected:

and slay them; they being unarmed, and not prepared to defend themselves:

and cause the work to cease; as it must in course, the builders being slain.

Ver. 12 *And it came to pass, when the Jews that dwelt by them*, etc.] Near Samaria, Arabia, and Ashdod, and had intelligence of their designs:

came, they said to us ten times; that is, they came to them at Jerusalem, and often told them, as this phrase “ten times” signifies, (see Gill on ^{“-03107”}Genesis 31:7”),

from all places whence ye shall return unto us: they will be upon you, come which way you will, so that ye are in the utmost danger: or “from all places”; where you are repairing and rebuilding:

return to us; that ye may enjoy peace and prosperity with us under Sanballat, etc. and escape the wrath and fury you are now exposed to; or “from all places we come, that ye may return to us”; so De Dieu; these Jews, though they pretended to be friends, to their brethren, yet seemed to be in friendship with their enemies, and sought to discourage them, and weaken their minds, and cause them to cease building.

Ver. 13. *Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall,* etc.] Where the wall was lowest, and the enemy could more easily break it down, or get over it:

and on the higher places; where the wall was higher; or rather on the towers upon the walls, as the word signifies the tops of rocks, which are dry and smooth, (see ~~311~~ Ezekiel 24:2,8).

I even set the people after their families; according to their rank, number, strength, and valour:

with their swords, their spears, and their bows; with weapons they could use both near, and at a distance.

Ver. 14. *And I looked,* etc.] Took a view of the people, and observed that they were in their proper place, and sufficiently armed, and also whether the enemy was coming:

and rose up and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people; who were under their nobles and rulers, as their captains and commanders:

be not ye afraid of them; of their enemies, their numbers, and their threats:

remember the Lord, which is great and terrible; who is greater than they, and is to be feared and trusted in by his people, and is terrible even to the kings of the earth:

and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses; intimating, that they were in danger of losing all that was near and dear, valuable and precious to them, if they did not fight for them; and therefore it became them to quit themselves like men, and be strong.

Ver. 15. *And it came to pass, when our enemies heard it was known unto us,* etc.] What they intended, as might be reported to them from the preparations made by the Jews to receive them, and defend themselves:

and God had brought their counsel to naught; which was to come upon them secretly and unawares; but being discovered, they dropped their design, and their scheme came to nothing:

so that we returned all of us to the wall, every man to his work; to that part of it where he wrought, in order to finish it.

Ver. 16. *And it came to pass from that time forth,* etc.] That they were thus alarmed of danger from their enemies:

that the half of my servants wrought in the work; of building the wall; his domestic servants, his guards, or mighty men, as Jarchi, men of war, the soldiers:

and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows; some offensive, others defensive weapons; some to fight with at a distance, others near at hand:

and the habergeons; coats of mail, which they took and clothed themselves with:

and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah; the Jews that were working at the wall, to animate and encourage them, protect and defend them.

Ver. 17 *They which builded on the wall,* etc.] That laid the mortar and stones upon it, and timber where it was necessary:

and they that bore burdens; that carried the mortar, stones, and timber to the builders, and served them:

with those that laded; which prepared the above for them, and laid them on their shoulders:

everyone with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon; which is not to be understood strictly and literally, for without both hands they could not well perform either of the above works; but proverbially, signifying that they were intent on both working and fighting, and were ready and prepared to do the latter, as well as the

former, having weapons lying by them, or girt about them, as is explained in the following verse.

Ver. 18. *For the builders had everyone his sword girded by his side, and so builded*, etc.] Thus accoutred he wrought, and was prepared for either service:

and he that sounded the trumpet was by me; to give the alarm of war, that everyone might lay aside his work, and prepare for the battle: this officer stood by Nehemiah, that when he found it necessary, might give him orders to sound his trumpet, for the men to gather to him.

Ver. 19. *And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people*, etc.] (See Gill on “^{<4014>}Nehemiah 4:14”),

the work is great and large; the building of the wall all around the city of Jerusalem:

and we are separated upon the wall one far from another; some at work on one part of it, and some at another, so that the distance between one another, at least in the further part, was very considerable.

Ver. 20. *In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet*, etc.] Be it what part of the wall soever they were at work, even the most distant:

resort ye thither to us; to Nehemiah, and the half of his servants armed, where the trumpet was blown; that was to be the place of rendezvous:

our God shall fight for us; and give us victory over our enemies; none have any reason to be intimidated, when they shall hear the sound of the trumpet.

Ver. 21. *So we laboured in the work*, etc.] Of building the wall: and half of them held the spears; and other weapons before mentioned, (^{<4016>}Nehemiah 4:16)

from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared; that is, from morning to evening, the space of time the builders and labourers worked.

Ver. 22. *Likewise at the same time said I unto the people*, etc.] That were at work upon the wall:

let everyone with his servant lodge within Jerusalem; every builder had a servant, or a lad, as the word signifies, to wait upon him, to bring mortar

or stone, or what he wanted; and some of these builders, with their lads, came out of the country towns and villages in the morning, and returned at night; now Nehemiah proposed, for the safety of the city and its walls, that for the present they would lodge in Jerusalem:

that in the night they may be a guard unto us, and labour on the day; might help to protect them in the night, should they be surprised with the enemy, and be ready for their work in the daytime.

Ver. 23. *So neither I, nor my brethren,* etc.] The nobles and rulers:

nor my servants; his domestic servants that waited upon him:

nor the men of the guard which followed me; his bodyguard, which attended him as a commissioner of the king of Persia for state and grandeur:

none of us put off our clothes; at night when they laid themselves down to sleep, but laid in, them, that they might be ready upon an alarm made:

saving that everyone put them off for washing; not for common washing, because dirty, but for washing on account of ceremonial uncleanness, which required washing both of bodies and garments, (see ^{<OR&B>}Leviticus 15:5-10), etc. and the Vulgate Latin version expresses it by baptism, as the apostle calls such ceremonial ablutions in (^{<S&A>}Hebrews 6:2 9:10). It is in the margin of our Bibles, “everyone went with his weapon for water”; when he went to Siloam, or any other place, for water, he took a weapon with him to defend himself upon occasion; which is no bad sense of the words. Noldius ^{f30} renders the words, “everyone with his weapon (and) water”; both were at his bolster, ready, if wanted, (see ^{<OR&I>}1 Samuel 26:11,12).