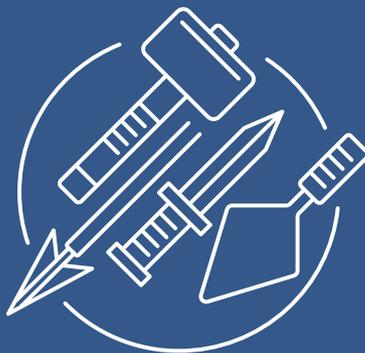


# Through External Opposition: Watchfulness

Nehemiah 4:7–23



Week Six

## inTro



Read This Week's Passage:  
Nehemiah 4:7–23

### COURAGE BY CONFLICT

Nehemiah 4–6 can be taken as a narrative that compiles the schemes of the opposition. The first chapter of this section recounts forms of direct external opposition. Chapter 5 reframes opposition from an internal perspective, where issues arise from the people within. The last chapter revisits external opposition but now from an indirect, hidden angle. Three whole chapters dedicated to opposition, indicating that friction and resistance should not discourage godly leaders. Whenever God moves, there will always be a reaction from the devil. We should, in fact, be encouraged when there is friction. For when there is friction, we can rest assured that there is movement.

These opposition chapters advise us on the recourse we can take when faced with opposition. There is nothing new under the sun, and today's attacks still fall into these categories. As the study of these chapters will reveal, the opposition is not the challenge. The real challenge is to consistently, persistently, insistently, and faithfully turn to God at each point of conflict. Last week's study identified the main weapon for biblical leadership as prayer. This week, we will look at the second weapon against external opposition.



**inScribe**

Write out Nehemiah 4:7–23 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Nehemiah 4:9, 13–17. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, outline it, or mind map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

**Circle** repeated words/phrases/ideas

**Underline** words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases



Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help memorization.

How do you deal with discouragement? How can you help others overcome discouragement in their lives?



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**MORALE COMBAT**

Nehemiah 4:1–6 recounted the enemy’s usage of ridicule. The remaining section of the chapter shows two more tactics: violent threats and discouragement. Verse 8 describes the intent of the attack; verse 11, the propaganda of the threat; and verse 12, the effect of the threat. So worried were the Jews by the threats from the international coalition of powers that surrounded Jerusalem from the north, south, east, and west, that they repeated their report “ten times.”

On the one hand, leadership is about logistics, plans, vision, and objectives. When morale is high, things seem to take care of themselves, and people work things out. But when morale is low, the enthusiastic mutate into the anxious, and supporters morph into naysayers. The propaganda of Sanballat and Tobiah proved effective—Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is falling, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall” (Nehemiah 4:10, NKJV). Apparently, they imbibed some of the accusations from verse 2!

If this morale were to continue, it would have dire consequences for the leadership of Nehemiah. This indeed was a true test of his calling and faith. We find prayer to be his first answer and watchfulness his second in this chapter as seen in verse 9, “Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night” (NKJV).

Prayer and watchfulness work together. Though he is busy with the work and stressed with the impending threat, Nehemiah sets a watch against his enemies day and night and finds time to pray. Two groups were organized, one to build and one to guard. The builders themselves had a sword in one hand and a tool in the other (verse 17). Nehemiah also had a trumpeter next to him to sound the alarm whenever needed. Readiness was a characteristic that marked the leadership of Nehemiah. He resolved to get the work done at all costs and to prevent disaster by simply being watchful.

We are to stand our ground for the cause of truth even when all those around us are not with us. Enemies are not only those who have anger, contempt, and cruelty but also indolence, inconsistency, and lukewarmness as well as those who betray friends and helpers. Those who love pleasure-seeking and the world are just as much enemies to the work as those who outright hate us. Morale affects people in more ways than one.

The secret to success was remembering that strength is from the Lord and that all were in this together: brothers, sons, daughters, wives, and whole families (verse 14). In the middle of building, when they are most vulnerable, Nehemiah is at his strongest because God is with Him. In the end, trust was placed upon God to turn their weak morale into God’s victory.

## THE POWER OF FOCUS

The details of God's victory are not delineated in Scripture. You would think Nehemiah would have recorded the juiciest part of the story—how God vindicated him, the suffering of his opponents, and how they reveled in the Lord's victory. On the contrary, Nehemiah was so focused on the work that he did not give descriptions of how the coalition failed or how the morale of the people was restored. The only line that is recorded is, "God had brought their plot to nothing" (Nehemiah 4:15). That's all he has to say about it! The rest of the chapter describes how the people returned to the wall and more about the work the people did.

This lack of details illustrates the power of focus and its importance in biblical leadership. In our multitasking and distracted world, we often fail to understand the need for concentration. With focus comes the ability to establish priorities and reorder these priorities in the midst of crisis and chaos.

Though the rumors returned "ten times" (verse 12), Nehemiah withstood these rumblings with fortitude. Rumors have the ability to instill fear, stir the imagination, and conjure thoughts of hypothetical scenarios, often resulting in the prospect of the direst scenario. Whereas many give in after the third or fourth cycle of rumors, Nehemiah's focus endures to the tenth!

In verse 14, Nehemiah preaches, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight!" He used the power of the spoken word to encourage and embolden the people. He invoked an emotional resolve to protect their families, children, and households. More than boardroom tactics, populist propaganda, and abstract theoretical reasoning, Nehemiah used the gift of speech to preach plainly what needed to be done. He neither retaliated nor was phlegmatic through the situation. Nehemiah simply pointed the people's focus back to God.

Other elements of focus are demonstrated when he supplied the workers with construction tools as well as weapons (verse 17). First, Nehemiah was not naïve about the real danger of conflict but planned for ancillary scenarios. Second, the people were so determined that they worked "until the stars appeared" (verse 21). While that might sound normal in the twenty-first century, with our modern handheld devices, in that non-electric age, such perseverance revealed a level of unity and sacrifice. Finally, the Jerusalemites bypass the social convention of changing their clothes unless it was necessary for washing (verse 23).

Why is this level of focus so hard to witness today? Is it a cultural or a spiritual issue?



**in**Terpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?



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Through External Opposition: Watchfulness



What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Luke 21:34–36

Eph. 6:18

Phil. 2:13



What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Nehemiah 4:7–23?

Review your memorized verse from Nehemiah 4:7–23.

## HAND IN HAND

One great spiritual insight of this chapter is the divine principle of cooperation. We tend to fluctuate between too much divinity and too much humanity. (We are not talking about the incarnational nature of Christ, by the way—He is 100 percent divine and 100 percent human!) On the one hand, there's a ditch that says that God does everything, so we do not have to do anything—we don't have to look for a job, do our devotions, or try to live a godly life. On the other hand, we might swing over to the other ditch that says we do everything and God does nothing—so we stress out about getting a job, think our salvation depends on our devotional life, and try to live a godly life by our own strength. The solution is a tightrope between these two ditches.

Without a doubt, all power is ascribed to God—He is the One that makes all things happen. But for us to access His power, we must willingly submit to Him. Whether it's asking God for help or turning our hearts to Him in time of need, we have a part to play in accessing heaven's resources. It is not a formula where if you do 0.02 of x, then 4y will pour down from heaven. Rather, it is all based on a solid relationship between us and God—a living, real-time, emotional, rational, social, and spiritual interaction between two parties.

“Herein is revealed the outworking of the divine principle of cooperation, without which no true success can be attained. Human effort avails nothing without divine power; and without human endeavor, divine effort is with many of no avail. To make God's grace our own, we must act our part. His grace is given to work in us to will and to do, but never as a substitute for our effort.” (Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1988), 193.)

“The influence of the Spirit of God is brought to combine with human agencies. The power is all of God but there must be a cooperation. The God of heaven does not work for man without his cooperation. The Spirit of God unites with the human effort. Thus it is that we become laborers together with God.” (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 3*, 1888, 1, 2.)

Won't you reach out by faith and accept the boundless resources heaven offers?



**inVite**

Meditate on Nehemiah 4:7-23 again and look for Jesus in the passage.



How does Jesus fight for us when we are the ones who have the swords in hand?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?



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Through External Opposition: Watchfulness



Review your memory verse.  
How does it apply to your  
life this week?



As you have studied this  
week, what personal  
applications have you been  
convicted of in your life?

What are practical applications  
you must make in your school,  
family, workplace, and church?



Read more inSight from the  
Spirit of Prophecy at  
[www.inverseible.org/neh6-7](http://www.inverseible.org/neh6-7)

**COURAGEOUS PERSEVERANCE**

“The most bitter opposition, the boldest threats of the enemy, seemed only to inspire Nehemiah with firmer determination, and to arouse him to greater watchfulness. . . .

“Beside Nehemiah stood a trumpeter, and on different parts of the wall were stationed priests bearing the sacred trumpets. The people were scattered in their labors; but on the approach of danger at any point, a signal was given for them to repair thither without delay. Then the priests sounded an alarm upon the trumpets as a token that God would fight for them. ‘So we labored in the work,’ says Nehemiah; ‘and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.’ Those who lived in towns and villages outside Jerusalem were required to lodge within the walls, both to guard the work and that they might be ready for duty in the morning. This would prevent unnecessary delay, and, furthermore, would cut off the opportunity, which the enemies would otherwise enjoy, of attacking the workmen as they went to and from their homes, or embittering with prejudice or discouraging by threats.

“Nehemiah and his companions did not shrink from hardships, or excuse themselves from trying service. Neither by night nor by day, not even during the brief time given to slumber, did they put off their clothing, or even lay aside their armor. ‘So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that everyone put them off for washing.’

“Nehemiah was engaged in an important work, one which concerned the prosperity of the cause of God. Every effort previously put forth to accomplish that work had failed because of a lack of true faith and union of effort among the Jews. The Samaritans, disguising their enmity under a pretense of fidelity to the king of Persia, had succeeded in causing a discontinuance of the work. The zealous and true-hearted among the Jews had again and again been disappointed in their purposes. But in the strength of God, Nehemiah determined that the adversaries should not again hinder the work. The despisers of the God of heaven should be disappointed. Their Satanic policy could not succeed if the people of God would bar the doors against the enemy, and work harmoniously to carry out the divine will. The foe could not enter unless the gates were thrown open by traitors within.

“If we are but loyal and true, every attack of the enemy will lead us to a firmer reliance upon God, and to more determined effort to carry forward his work, against all opposing influences.”<sup>1</sup>

1. (Ellen G. White, “Courageous Perseverance,” Southern Watchman, April 26, 1904.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



Describe the last time you were really discouraged. By whom, when, where, how, and why were you discouraged?

How did you get out of discouragement?

What is the individual's responsibility when it comes to the morale of the larger group?

Who is absolved of this responsibility?

What things can leaders do to raise the morale of the church?

Is being distracted a social or a spiritual problem?

How can the level of sacrifice be raised today by the leadership?

How can we watch and pray?

Where does the principle of divine cooperation need to be exercised in your life?