

NEHEMIAH: PATTERN FOR LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE IN HARD TIMES

Part III: Godly Leadership's Dependence On God To Offset Persecution Mockery

(Nehemiah 3:5; 4:1-6)

I. Introduction

- A. One of the more mentally difficult challenges to face in living for Christ is the mockery of godless opponents to our lives and ministries! Outright physical persecution might almost be easier to handle as overt physical persecution engenders sympathy from onlookers! Mockery, on the other hand, can cause onlookers to assume that the one mocked is foolish as he might believe the mocker!
- B. Nehemiah faced mockery from Gentile opponents in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. How he handled it is a real lesson for us!

II. Godly Leadership's Dependence On God To Offset Persecution Mockery, Nehemiah 3:5; 4:1-6.

- A. In the list of those helping Nehemiah start the work on the wall, the nobles of Tekoa refused to work! According to Ryrie, they refused to work "perhaps fearing reprisals from Sanballat," a Gentile ruler and opponent of Nehemiah's plan to rebuild the wall, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, ftn. to Neh. 3:5.
- B. This intimidation is reinforced by the actual mockery of Sanballat and Tobiah in Chapter 4:
 1. Sanballat was not happy about hearing of Nehemiah's effort to start reconstruction, Neh. 4:1a,b.
 2. Accordingly, he expressed his anger in mocking the effort in order to intimidate Nehemiah's followers from helping him anymore, Neh. 4:1c.
 3. This mockery was done in the hearing of **forces** that could be a **threat** to the exiles, in front of his brothers and the armed forces of Samaria, Neh. 4:2a.
 4. In this mockery, Sanballat attacked several categories of the effort, Neh. 4:2b,c,d,e,f:
 - a. Sanballat mocked the ability and resources of the **people** doing the work, Neh. 4:2b.
 - b. He mocked the **effectiveness** of their effort, implying that the wall would not be useful as a defensive weapon for which walls were built around cities, Neh. 4:2c.
 - c. He mocked the sense of **achievement** in their building the wall, saying that they would not sacrifice of thanksgiving to God as a result of its construction, Neh. 4:2d.
 - d. He mocked the **ignorance** of the builders in undertaking such an immense project, implying that they were not aware that it would take longer than a day to finish, Neh. 4:2e.
 - e. Sanballat mocked the **resources** used; he wondered how the Jews could rebuild an effective wall out of charred ruins, Neh. 4:2f.
 5. Sanballat's mockery **influenced another opponent**, Tobiah the Ammonite, to mock the whole effort by saying that if a small fox were to walk on the wall, it would fall down, Neh. 4:3!
- C. Nehemiah's response to this intimidation mockery instructs us as follows:
 1. Nehemiah prayed a model prayer for those facing unjust ministry mockery, Neh. 4:4-5:
 - a. Nehemiah brought up the enemy's taunts to God, letting Him deal with the words that were said, 4a.
 - b. Nehemiah asked God to return the efforts of his taunters upon themselves in judgment, 4b.
 - c. He asked God to view these taunts as being against **God**, for the strife transcended a mere conflict between Sanballat and Nehemiah to include Sanballat opposing **God's will** for Nehemiah, Neh. 4:5.
 2. As a result, the people kept working until the wall was half done, Neh. 4:6a. God countered Sanballat's mockery aimed at intimidating Nehemiah's helpers by giving his helpers a mind to work, 4:6b.

Lesson: When facing mockery designed to intimidate and hinder the godly from supporters, the godly should respond by (1) praying that (a) God would listen to the actual taunts, (b) that God would return these taunts to frustrate the mockers, (c) and that God might view the taunts as attacks on his purposes for the one mocked. (2) Next, the godly need to keep on ministering in the will of God and (3) let God control the attitudes of supporters who are exposed to the intimidation politics of mocking.

Application: Since mockery is a cruel political mind tactic played by verbally abusive people, we can pray about it to a God Who hears all and Who still motivates one's supporters in spite of unjust verbal intimidations by mockers! (Rev. 3:14)