

A TEACHING FROM THE BRANCH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Sanballat and Tobiah

On the Opposition That Meets Every Builder of Lives

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Introduction

Anyone mandated to build the kingdom of God through the lives of people will, sooner or later, meet the same two names. Not always literally — but always in substance. Scripture calls them Sanballat and Tobiah, and centuries after the wall they opposed was finally rebuilt, the pattern they represent has never gone out of use.

This is not a teaching about ancient politics. It is a field guide to what opposition against real, God-mandated building work actually looks like — because it rarely looks like a lion at the door. It usually looks like laughter, a reasonable invitation, an open letter, or a familiar voice claiming to speak for God.

The Anchor Text

NEHEMIAH 4:1–3 (KJV)

“But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake... What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.”

Notice what the mockery targets. Not doctrine. Not character. *Scale and durability*. Feeble Jews. A day’s work. A wall so flimsy a fox could break it. Sanballat and Tobiah never argue that the work is wrong. They argue that it is small, fragile, and not worth taking seriously — which is usually the first and most common face this spirit wears.

Four Faces of the Same Spirit

Mockery — making the work look small

This face rarely engages the actual vision. It simply repeats, in different tones, that what you are building does not matter enough to resist. A leadership assignment over people’s lives will meet this early: the quiet suggestion that the ground you are laboring over is too ordinary, too small, or too far gone to be worth the cost you are paying for it.

Distraction — “Come, let us meet together”

NEHEMIAH 6:2–3 (KJV)

“Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?”

This invitation was sent four times, worded almost reasonably each time (Nehemiah 6:4). That is what makes distraction more dangerous than mockery: it rarely asks you to abandon the work outright. It only asks you to come down for a moment, to a neutral-sounding meeting, on someone else's ground. The wall is never attacked directly. The builder is simply invited off it.

Fear — the open letter

When the invitation failed four times, Sanballat sent an *open* letter — unsealed, meant to be read by anyone — accusing Nehemiah of building the wall to make himself king (Nehemiah 6:5–7). Its power was never in its truth. It was in its publicity: manufacturing public doubt about motive, so that others would pressure the builder to explain himself instead of building.

NEHEMIAH 6:9 (KJV)

“For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.”

Manipulation from within — the hired prophet

The final face is the most dangerous, because it speaks the right vocabulary. Tobiah and Sanballat hired Shemaiah, who urged Nehemiah to hide in the temple for his own safety — counsel dressed as spiritual concern (Nehemiah 6:10–13). Scripture is blunt about the goal: “that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.” Nehemiah's discernment is the whole defense: “And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him” (6:12).

A Working Definition

Put the four faces together and the text hands us its own definition, almost word for word: “their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done” (6:9). On that reading:

The spirit of Sanballat and Tobiah is any influence, internal or external, that targets not the theology of a kingdom-building work but its momentum — making it look small, pulling its builder off the wall, manufacturing fear around it, or dressing manipulation in spiritual language, all

aimed at the same outcome: weakened hands, and a work that quietly stops.

Nehemiah's Answer

Scripture does not just record the opposition. It records exactly how Nehemiah carried it, and the pattern is worth naming plainly.

Prayer first, always. Before strategy, before a public response, Nehemiah prays — short, immediate turns to God woven through the whole account (4:4–5, 4:9, 6:9, 6:14). Not long theological essays. Reflexes.

The sword and the trowel. “They which builded on the wall... every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon” (4:17). Vigilance without abandoning the work; readiness without paranoia.

The line that needed no repeating. “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down” — the same answer, four times, without escalation or elaborate defense.

Discernment over every voice. “I perceived that God had not sent him” — a willingness to test even prophetic-sounding counsel against the actual mandate, rather than receiving every spiritual-sounding word as spiritual.

Finishing anyway. “So the wall was finished... in fifty and two days” (6:15). The opposition was real and constant. The work still got done.

What Opposition Ends Up Proving

NEHEMIAH 6:16 (KJV)

“And it came to pass... when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.”

This is the reframe worth carrying. Opposition, rightly carried, does not merely fail to stop a God-mandated work — it becomes involuntary testimony to where the work actually came from. The presence of a Sanballat is not evidence you have wandered from your assignment. For work that matters, it is closer to confirmation.

A Caution: It Rarely Fully Ends

Even after the wall stood finished, Tobiah kept sending letters — because he had married into Judah's own nobility, and had relatives inside the very community Nehemiah led (6:17–19). The spirit of Sanballat and Tobiah does not only knock from outside. It can already have kinship, access, and a seat at the table on the inside, quietly, long after the walls are standing. Finishing the work is not the same as the correspondence stopping. Discernment is not a season. It is a practice.

For Reflection

1. Which of the four faces — mockery, distraction, fear, or manipulation — has most often found its way to you in your own assignment?
 2. Is there an “Ono” right now — a reasonable-sounding invitation quietly trying to pull you off the actual wall you are building?
 3. When fear-shaped counsel arrives labeled as caution, or even as a word from God, what is your practice for testing whether it was actually sent by Him?
 4. Where, this season, do you need to pray “Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands” rather than simply trying to push through in your own strength?
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A Closing Word

Sanballat and Tobiah never needed to win an argument. They only needed the builders to come down. Anyone mandated to build the kingdom of God through people's lives will meet the same four faces, in one disguise or another — and the same answer will still be enough.

“For they perceived that this work was wrought of our God” (Nehemiah 6:16).

Stay on the wall until the opposition itself becomes the testimony.