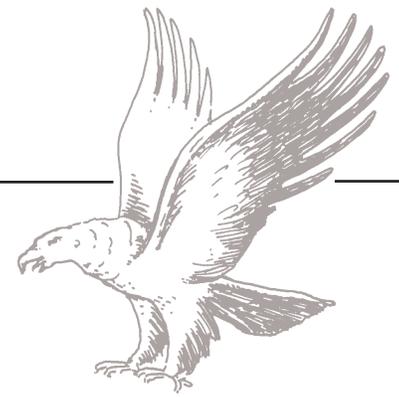


# Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



November 23, 2014

## When Our Enemies Attack

When God's people set their hands to do His work, they will inevitably draw fire from critics.

Nehemiah teaches us the most effective way to respond to their attacks, while staying on task.

*“When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel. . . . they laughed at us and despised us” (Neh. 2:10, 19).*

*“When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, . . . he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews” (Neh. 4:1).*



When Nehemiah set out to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, he took on a tough job. The physical labor required to accomplish this feat would be staggering, especially for people who had little training in this sort of work. But the greater challenge would come from their hostile neighbors. These enemies preferred that Jerusalem remain weak and defenseless, so when Nehemiah started his building project, they were “deeply disturbed . . . furious and very indignant.” They did not have the resources (nor the legal authority under Persian law) to physically attack the Jews. But they did not need to *destroy* the Jews; they just needed to *frighten* them into

submission. So they launched a campaign of harassment, intimidation, and ridicule against the Jews. They mocked the workers (4:3, 19), spread rumors about Nehemiah's political ambitions (6:5-9), and devised a clever entrapment scheme to catch Nehemiah in hypocrisy (6:10-13). In time, surely the Jews would become demoralized and give up.

So what started out as a construction project turned into a virtual siege. The physical work was hard enough, but trying to do it in this hostile climate was unbearable. How could Nehemiah deflect the attacks of the enemies, while keeping his team on task with their work? He knew that if he allowed himself to get drawn into a running battle with his critics, the primary mission would be derailed. So his response was simple: *take reasonable precautions, and ignore the attacks.*

The story of how Nehemiah dealt with his enemies offers guidance on how we should handle a similar challenge facing us today. Our primary task is to influence society for good, through our teaching and example. But as our culture

moves farther away from God, our work will draw the attention of critics who employ tactics very similar to those used against Nehemiah's workers. Some of those attacks will be personal and vicious: lies, smears, mockery, name-calling, even physical intimidation—nothing will be held back. And it will all be aimed directly at us, precisely because of the nature of our work.

There are two facts we must keep in mind when we encounter that kind of opposition:

First, when the storm hits, we must remind ourselves that the flak is always heaviest when you're over the target. The attacks mean that we're doing our job. That's a good thing.

But we must remember that our job is *not to defend ourselves*, but to *change the culture*. Those are two different objectives. If we let ourselves get bogged down in debates with critics who have no interest in truth or fairness anyway, then our primary mission suffers and the critics win. The better alternative is to follow Nehemiah: *take reasonable precautions, and ignore the attacks.*

– David King