

Nehemiah Part 3 – Study Notes

Introduction

Over the next two weeks we are looking at dealing with opposition. When we are doing something worthwhile and are being opposed, it is because we are achieving something. This is something we should be encouraged by. We see this in the very first verse of the chapter. Nehemiah 4:1 *When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed.* The reason Sanballat was angry was that he was threatened by Nehemiah's success. No would have paid attention to Nehemiah if he had failed.

Why do people oppose success? Why aren't they happy to see someone else succeed? Here are some reasons:

Some people are threatened by another person's success. They oppose because they stand to lose position, power, prestige, in one if three areas: politically, socially or religiously. This was the case with Sanballat and Tobiah, Nehemiah 2:10 *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.*

Sanballat was from a town called **Beth Horen**, which is about eight miles northwest of Jerusalem. He was the governor of the fortified city of Samaria to the north and he wanted the jurisdiction of Jerusalem. Sanballat and Tobiah both knew that if Jerusalem was rebuilt that much of the valuable trade from the trade routes would return to Jerusalem and their own provinces would suffer and be diminished.

Others are jealous. Sometimes opposition arises simply because of jealousy. This was a major factor in the attacks of Sanballat and Tobiah. They despised the Jews and were jealous of any attempts to improve their prospects.

Some oppose others because they have a different agenda. Today Christianity is opposed by the secular world; they have a different spiritual agenda to us. Some people are on a mission now to remove any visible signs of Christianity from our nation. In an increasingly secular culture we must expect this to increase in both volume and intensity.

Some feel excluded. There are many people who feel excluded from one thing or another. And even though the church is not a social club it **should** above all other organizations go out of its way to include all types of people. Oasis Christian Centre should be the most embracing people rather than an exclusive institution of society.

People suspect the motivations of those they oppose. Sanballat and Tobiah accused the Jews for fortifying Jerusalem because they wanted to rebel against Persia. Nehemiah 2:19 *What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?* Sanballat knew the Jews were **not** doing this but it was a very convenient and damaging accusation to make.

Opposition comes from traditionalists. There are always people who prefer the way things have been done in the past and do not want change. This has become common in church where religion promises much and asks little. In a church where nobody is expected to witness or serve or reach out to others, a program to transform this attitude and release the churches potential will be rejected by some as undesirable.

Opposition from Satan. It is easy to blame Satan for all our difficulties but we need to put things in perspective. Satan usually does not need to invent problems, he merely exploits and exacerbates existing ones. Satan will do whatever he can to destroy spiritual growth. He will quite often use people who already try to oppose a move of God. We will always have opposition by others and need to be prepared for it. The next two weeks we are looking at opposition that came to Nehemiah and how he successfully contended with many different forms of opposition and overcame it.

The easiest way to oppose something you do not like is to **ridicule** it, and this is the first thing Sanballat and Tobiah did. Nehemiah 4:2-3 *And he spoke before the brethren and the army of Samaria and said what are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps or rubbish – stones that are burnt. Now Tobiah was beside him, and he said, whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.*

The reason people ridicule those they oppose, is that it is demoralizing and frequently effective. It is effective because it strikes at hidden insecurity or weakness that everyone has. Look at the rhetorical questions:

⊕ *What are these feeble Jews doing?* This was directly to the point. The Jews **were** feeble and **they knew it.**

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- ⊕ *Will they fortify themselves?* How could they restore this wall up to two miles long? How could they even hope to reassemble the huge stones?
- ⊕ *Will they offer sacrifices?* This was an attack on their Jewish faith. They meant are they going to pray the walls up? It's their only hope. We can find it difficult when someone ridicules our faith. They say something like **do you think God's going to help you!**
- ⊕ *Will they complete it in day?* Didn't they realize what an enormous task they were taking on? The Jews **knew exactly** what they were taking on.
- ⊕ *Will they revive the stones from the heaps or rubbish – stones that are burnt.* This was an exaggeration. The gates had been burned but not the stones.

These were all very effective points **but** the only reason they were being said was because the enemy knew this was likely to succeed. They were afraid this might come to pass.

Notice that Nehemiah did not retaliate. Sometimes the first thing that we do when we are ridiculed is to retaliate. If he had he would have lowered himself to their level. But he refused to do this.

So Nehemiah prayed. He turned to God as he always did and he poured out his feelings to God. He admitted that he was hurt and angry. Nehemiah 4:4-5 *Hear o our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity. Do not cover up their iniquity and do not let their sin be blotted out from before you.* Nehemiah put the situation into God's hands. **His prayer diffused his anger.** Anger is seldom productive and a hindrance to good work. He knew the best thing that they could do was press on with the task. Nehemiah got on with the work. Nehemiah 4:6 *So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half it's height, for the people had a mind to work.*

The second half of this chapter contains the **threat of violence** when people plotted together to fight against Jerusalem. When it came there was still half the wall to build and the people were tired. Nehemiah 4:10 *The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.* The opposition seemed to be increasing. The enemy surrounded Jerusalem. Sanballat was to the north, Tobiah to the east, the Arabs to the south and the people of Ashdod to the west. The enemies said in Nehemiah 4:11 *They will neither know nor see anything until we come into their midst to kill them and destroy their work.*

If it hadn't been for Nehemiah the people may have abandoned their work. Nehemiah **knew** that God was on his side. Nehemiah turned Jerusalem into an armed camp. He posted a guard day and night, he armed the people and he arranged the people in family groups at the most exposed places along the wall. Nehemiah knew that the people would fight most fiercely when the lives of their own families were in jeopardy. He divided the people into two groups, one that would fight and one that would work, he devised a plan should they be attacked and he accelerated the building work from dawn till dusk.

Most importantly he boosted morale by reminding everyone that God would fight for them. Nehemiah 4:14 *Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord great and awesome and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses.*

Nehemiah 4:20 *Our God will fight for us.* He stood with the people through it all. He was a great leader but what made him really great was his faith in God.

OCC we need to remember this that our God fights for us. Romans 8:31 says *If God is for us then who can be against us.*

Philippians 1:6 says *Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* We too know that we will be able to carry on the work here to its completion.