

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN NEHEMIAH

THE STORY OF NEHEMIAH – A JOURNEY IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

PART TWO – OPPOSITION ON THE JOURNEY

It must have been a moment of intense excitement for Nehemiah when the work on rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem finally got started. Listening to God, seeking authority and resources for the task from the king of Persia, travelling to Jerusalem to begin work, exploring the problems on the ground with a small group of future helpers, becoming aware of the extent of opposition and involving almost the whole community, foreshadows how Jesus did the same when He came to earth to build His church. It also pictures the challenges we face and the steps we need to go through to begin the task God has given us in His kingdom.

Very soon it becomes apparent to Nehemiah that it will not be an easy exercise to build the city wall. His enemies have already identified themselves. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem in a fascinating way can represent the three enemies we also face in our Christian lives and calling. (Eph. 2:2,3) Sanballat is clearly the leader and spokesman. The Devil is utterly opposed to all God plans and attacks from the beginning of our ministry as he tempted Jesus as He was about to begin His work. (Matt. 4:1-11) He is cunning and persuasive but always a liar who is out to destroy us. (Jn. 8:44) Tobiah was Sanballat's close ally. His people, the Ammonites, had so often in the past attempted to corrupt God's people with immorality and idolatry. (Num. 25) Tobiah pictures the flesh, the self-centred human nature which listens to the Devil and opposes the work of the Spirit within us. (Rom. 7:14) Geshem does not have much to say but he represents the large population of Arab people who would always follow Sanballat. So often the world of those without Christ seems overwhelming in their influence by sheer weight of numbers.

4. OPPOSITION BECOMES SERIOUS AND HE HANDLES IT WISELY

4:1-3 His enemies conspired to attack – as religious leaders did against Jesus. (Luke 19:47) Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem became more and more antagonistic as the rebuilding of the wall moved from an idea to a reality. In chapter 2:10 they were displeased. In 2:19 their attitude moved to mocking and despising. Now this increases to being furious and angry, and inciting their followers to action.

4:9 He prayed and set a guard. (I Pet. 5:8) Always the first place for us to go with our concern is to God in prayer. The 3 enemies' anger led on to a conspiracy to fight and cause a disturbance. God answers Nehemiah's prayer with instructions to set a guard day and night.

4:12,14 Some were discouraged. (II Tim. 4:10) There will always be those who are nervous of attack and panic. Nehemiah reassured them to trust God and fight for the sake of others not just themselves.

4:13-17 He armed them and work resumed – we have the sword of the Spirit. (Eph. 6:17) They had to learn to work and be on guard and armed against the enemy at the same time.

4:18-20 He established good communication.(Phil.4:6,7) As Christians we need to be alert to each other's needs and dangers as well as our own. No army is effective without clear lines of communication with headquarters and our fellow soldiers.

Question for discussion – How do we face the same opposition they faced? How are we to deal with it? What are the common mistakes we make in failing to deal with the enemy appropriately? What are the consequences of such mistakes?(II Cor.11:1-15)

5. HE DEALS WITH INJUSTICE AND CORRUPTION BY PERSONAL EXAMPLE

5:1-13 He exposed economic injustice.(Exod.21-23) Despite God's wonderful provision for them as a nation through Nehemiah, some of the people of Judea had taken the opportunity in hard economic times to make a profit through loans with interest. The struggles of the poor had been made worse by the greed of their brothers. So often the most damaging attacks of the enemies come from within the church. Nehemiah has the courage to speak out.

5:14-19 He fed them well but took nothing himself.(I Cor.9:15-18; II Cor.12:14) It is appropriate to point out what the Devil is doing among us but Nehemiah's example was all important. Sadly some of the leaders also exploited the needy. Not only had he not made money by giving loans himself, even though he probably had the means to do so, but he had taken the opportunity to feed any who needed it without charge. He hopes God has noticed!

Question for discussion – Do we as Christians have a social responsibility? Why is our own example so important if we are to be listened to?(Eph.5:6-14)

6. THE ENEMIES NEVER GIVE UP BUT THE WORK GOES ON

6:1,2 His enemies planned to kill him.(Lk.22:1,2) Despite the enemies' threats and intimidation, the wall was finished so they changed their tactics. Now the plan was to sidetrack Nehemiah with meetings. They would have used a meeting away from Jerusalem as a chance to kill him.

6:3-14 He realized their plan.(Phil.1:20-25) Nehemiah was wise enough to recognize the motive and to refuse. When the enemies are turned down they do not give up easily so the invitation was repeated 4 times. Again Nehemiah's answer was no. Now the tactic changed. The invitation was repeated in a public way implying that Nehemiah was about to proclaim himself king. Our enemies will resort to any lie to damage our reputation and intimidate us.

6:15 The work was completed in 52 days.(II Tim.4:6-8) A huge task was accomplished in a short time because God's people remained focused on their calling and refused to be sidetracked by their enemies.

6:16-19 His enemies knew they were defeated but did not give up.(Gen.3:15; Jn.16:33) When we resist our enemies it seems that we have been victorious and that they have given up, as the Devil left Jesus after the temptations in the wilderness – until an opportune time.(Lk.4:13) Tobiah, 'the flesh', continued behind the scenes to undermine by his influence on his relatives. He still does.

Question for discussion – Will opposition ever stop God's plan for us?(Rom.8:35-39)