

The Joy of the Lord

A Study in the Book of Nehemiah

#5 Dealing with Opposition (Neh. 4:1-23)

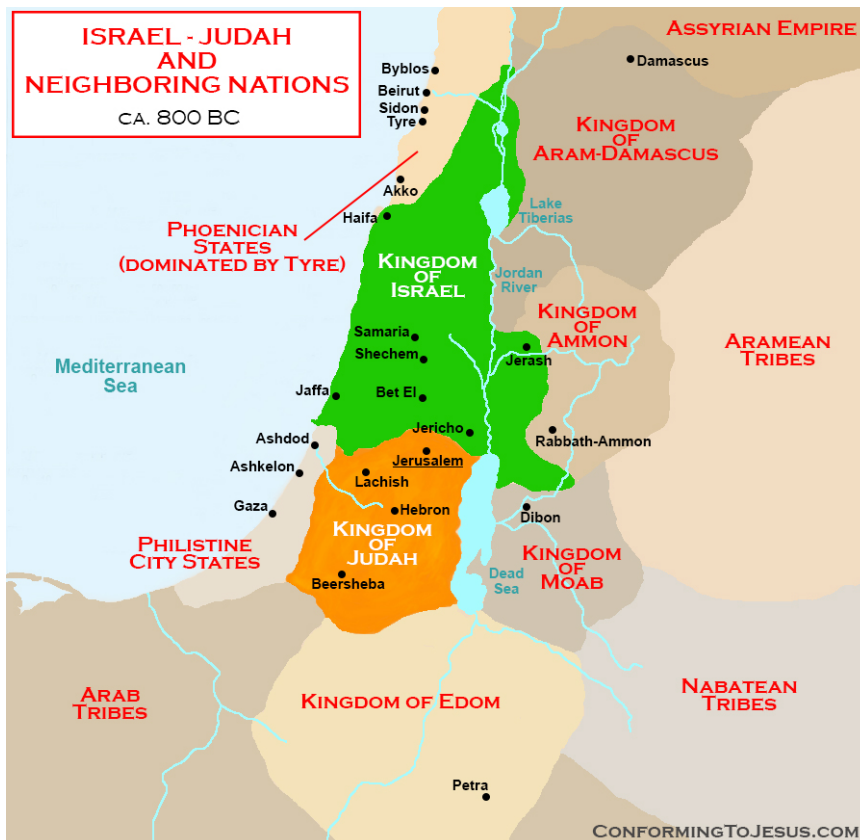
Introduction

Characteristics displayed by Nehemiah:

Persistency, courage, prayerfulness, passion, trustworthiness, organized

An Outline of the Chapter:

- Vs. 1-2 Sanballat is irritated, starts mocking Nehemiah and the workers
- Vs. 3 Tobiah chimes in with a mocking tone
- Vs 4-5 Nehemiah's prayer and a report
- Vs. 7-8 The crowd gives angry threats and forms a conspiracy
- Vs. 9 Nehemiah's response
- Vs. 10-12 Now the workers are afraid and discouraged
- Vs. 13-23 The people return to their work and Nehemiah reacts to the opposition



The Opposition:

Sanballat, the Horonite

He had a position in Samaria (modern day West Bank of Israel). He was a very successful businessman. A secure and independent Jerusalem would threaten his hold on the area. He had very profitable trade route (from Jerusalem to Lydda) that ran to the sea. He taunted Nehemiah bitterly.

Tobiah, the Ammonite

He lived in Ammon (present day Jordan). He is half Jewish. At one time, he was a slave (see 2:19). But now he has power over a province. He loved to ridicule the goals of the exiles who returned. Later in Nehemiah, he will connive with a priest named Eliashib and make quarters for himself in the temple (Neh. 13:4).

Geshem, the Arab

His name means “bulky or “stout.” He was an idle “mouth” from Samaria who loved to insinuate things. We know that the Assyrian King, Sargon the II resettled Arabs in Samaria in 715 BC. Arabs enjoyed favor under Persian rule.

The Arabians, the Ammonites, the Ashdodites (along the Gaza strip) all opposed Nehemiah and the workers.

The root cause: the conflict that arises out of violating Deut. 7:3-4.

The Ways the Enemies Opposed the Work of God:

1. Anger (burning mad)
2. Mockery, sarcasm
(Use of rhetorical questions: “Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it”?)
3. Threats and intimidation
4. Discouragement and exhaustion (they lost their initial zeal)
5. Negativism (“ten times” means “over and over”)
Consider the report given in Num. 13:28-29, 31-33
6. Incited Fear

The Response of Nehemiah and the People of God

Note that there wasn’t a debate. They formed no committees to study the issue and they made no direct attack back at the opposition.

1. Instead, they went to prayer. (vs. 4-5)
It sounds like a very harsh, mean-spirited prayer, but it wasn't a personal attack. It was not a prayer for personal vengeance. It was a prayer that the most holy God, the righteous Judge would establish His kingdom and make things right.

The "tough" prayers in Ps. 58:6 and 69:25 are examples of prayers seeking the overthrow of evil and the establishment of righteousness. God's people long for Jesus to sit on the throne and rule!

2. They displayed an amazing work ethic- "they worked with all their heart" (vs. 6).
3. They kept their eyes on the enemies. They had a trowel in one hand and a spear in the other (vs. 16-18).
4. They kept their minds focused on the Lord (vs. 14). See Col. 3:2.
5. They kept their ears tuned for the cries of their friends (vs. 19-20). They worked as a team. They knew the Lord would fight for them.
6. They arranged their priorities around the job at hand (vs. 21-23). They didn't even change clothes.

So What?

There is a time to fight for what matters! (vs. 14)

- a. Don't be afraid
- b. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome
- c. Fight for your families

There is a time to let the Lord fight for Us! (vs. 20)

II Cor. 4:8-9 "We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed."

Tobiah mocked THEIR stone wall...NOPE. It was GOD'S WALL.

Discussion Questions

1. Is Nehemiah the kind of leader you would want to follow? Why or why not?
2. Are there any ways that Deut. 7:3-4 applies to our lives today? How?
3. When THE ENEMY rounds up enemies to discourage you, what does use in your life?
4. Nehemiah and his workers utilized six “steps” to respond to criticism and discouragement. Do those same responses work for you? Which one do you tend to neglect?
5. How do you fight for your family? Which things do you leave for the Lord to fight on your behalf?

Personal Reflections

1. Use five or six words to describe your “character.” How does your list match up with Nehemiah’s?
2. What is Satan’s favorite ploy that he uses in your life? How can you Biblically address his attacks?
3. Do you see yourself in the descriptions of the men who opposed God’s work? Are the words of your mouth acceptable to the Lord? (See Ps. 19:14)
4. Draw a list down the middle of the page. Label the first column: Things I should fight for my family. Label the second column: Things I need to let God fight on our behalf. Make your lists...take them to the Lord in prayer.