

IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION

“Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked.” —NEHEMIAH 4:17-18

Since the Babylon invasion of Israel, the city of Jerusalem had been left in ruins for 140 years. Nehemiah travelled from Persia to Jerusalem so that the name of God may once again be seen and known in the city. In order to do this, he carries a God-given vision to rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem, but half way through, is faced with intense opposition that threatens their lives. Opposition to the work of God should not take us by surprise. Jesus promised it. The New Testament talks about it. History proves it.

When Nehemiah faced opposition, he did three things. He first prayed to God. Prayer is very simple. It involves relating the situation to God, thanking Him for His presence, and essentially passing the buck to Him. The second thing Nehemiah did was to prevent the enemy from gaining a foothold. “From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor” (Nehemiah 4:16). There is always a two-fold explanation for the work of God. One is divine and the other human. We pray and we work; that’s the human side. Work and warfare, praying and preventing go hand in hand. We can’t quit one for another; they must go together.

The divine side is God initiating, and what He initiates, He empowers. That is seen right through Scripture. We are not here to initiate anything for God, but to discern the initiating mind of God, obey Him, and trust His empowering. God is always looking for those who spend time with

Him and are willing to operate under His authority. Thirdly, Nehemiah and his workers pressed on. They took the enemy seriously and had defenses in place. “So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out at night” (Nehemiah 4:21).

What do we do when faced with opposition? We listen to it, try to understand it, bring it to God in prayer and, if necessary, prepare to defend, but then move on with the bigger and better agenda of God’s work. And so it was with the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. The people worked with all their hearts. They had a mind to pray, an eye to watch and an ear to listen. All the surrounding nations were afraid, because they realized they were up against the great God of Israel. Their plot to destroy the wall and the workers was never acted upon and the task was completed in a mere 52 days. As Oswald J. Smith wrote, “The dogs may bark but the caravan moves on.”

PRAYER: Dear Lord, in the face of opposition to your work, may I always look to You, and trust your empowering. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: How would I respond to intense opposition to the work of God?