

Building for God: Oppositions

Goldstone Church – 18-Oct-15 10:30am

Nehemiah 4:1-23

Introduction

Continuing our series looking at book of Nehemiah. We're using Nehemiah as an analogy; learning how God wants us to be involved in building His kingdom. How does God want me to be involved in building His kingdom here at Goldstone church?

Murphy's Law says that, if you try to fix anything, it will take longer than you thought, cost more than you thought, will break down before you've paid for it, and someone won't like it when it's finished! That's a summary of Murphy's Law.

Nehemiah 4 describes the severe and even violent opposition that Nehemiah faced while rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem.

In previous the chapters we saw how Nehemiah's foundation was to *prayerfully* respond to the news that the walls and gates of his homeland capital city were in ruins. And how Nehemiah's prayer is a challenge to *our* prayer lives.

In Chapter 2, we saw Nehemiah's patient, planned, then quick response to the opportunity to rebuilding – and how we should similarly (i) Wait on God, (ii) Work with People and (iii) Wrestle with Problems.

In Chapter 3, we saw how Nehemiah carefully organised and shared out this huge building project. And how the names of the 10 gates helps us to identify the areas of our spiritual lives that may need to be rebuilt.

But here, in Nehemiah 4, Murphy's Law strikes with a vengeance. In response to seeing the people drive ahead with rebuilding the walls and gates, the Opposition take the gloves off, and a battle begins.

A few weeks ago, we also looked at who headed up the Opposition. You may remember that Nehemiah's three main opponents were:

1. **Sanballat the Horonite**, the governor of Samaria, and a *political* opponent in the north of the country.
2. **Tobiah the Ammonite**, with his network of family and social contacts, and an opponent in the *community*, with influence within the city walls.
3. **Geshem the Arab**, probably a spice trader, and a *business* opponent, covering the south of the country.

On their own, these would be tough opponents, but together they are a nasty piece of work.

Having identified the Opponents, look at the types of Opposition that they initiated. Afterwards, we'll look at how Nehemiah responds to these challenges. And as we go through these types of Opposition, note how relevant these techniques are to our lives today.

1. Anger & Fury

(Neh 4:1, 7)

“When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed.” (Neh 4:1a)

The English language doesn't do this reaction justice. This is an explosion of emotion; word 'Anger' = "Burning mad". This outburst is full of hatred and anger.

Furthermore, v.7 suggests that this anger was infectious, until all Opponents are "very angry", lit. 'burning with anger'. They were furious!

This type of vicious attack doesn't seem to happen in our community. But watch the news on the TV. It's closer than we think.

2. Mockery & Sarcasm

(Neh 4:2)

“What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall?” (Neh 4:2:b)

This is a verbal attack. They are using ironic, acidic, insensitive words. Notice how at the end v.1, it says that Sanballat *“ridiculed the Jews”*.

There's an old saying starts: 'Sticks & stones may break my bones....'

But the reality of life is that the saying should end:

'... but name calling & mocking & sarcasm hurts more'.

This is a contemporary form of opposition.

3. Threats & Intimidation

(Neh 4:8, 11)

This is physical aggression, and often seems to follow on from verbal abuses.

“They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.” (Neh 4:8)

Note that these are now planned threats. No longer is this one random person; this is a concerted group activity. If the action was political, news reporters might even call this: Terrorist activity.

This is a coordinated response against God's people. They are physically threatening and intimidating God's people from doing what God wants them to do.

4. Discouragement & Exhaustion

(Neh 4:10)

This type of opposition is very effective. We need to remember that everyone's *human* energy levels have been consumed. They have been doing, both the building work itself *and* rebuffing the attacks from the Opposition.

The project has been under way for a while, so is the most effective time to strike, with words of disquiet, depression, and discouragement.

“The strength of the labourers is giving out, and there is so much rubble...” (Neh 4:10)

We’ve all experienced this type of attack at some time or another.

These attacks of discouragement are especially effective when we are physically at our lowest energy level.

5. Negativism & Pessimism

(Neh 4:12)

“Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, ‘Wherever you turn, they will attack us.’” (Neh 4:12)

In addition to Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, the local residents (who are not involved in the building project) join in as well! This must have been extra-difficult, especially as these would have been fellow-countrymen. These would be people who should have known the importance of Jerusalem being rebuilt – and yet they are siding with the opposition!

Isn’t it often the case that the negative comments from those nearest and dearest to us are often the hardest to endure.

6. Fear & Trepidation

(Neh 4:14)

In v.4 and v.9, Nehemiah has been praying, but Nehemiah’s first direct words to the people working on the walls and gates is: *“Don’t be afraid of them”*. (Neh 4:14)

Fear is a major tool for the Opposition. Fear of failure. Fear of looking stupid. Fear of losing your job. Fear of losing your life.

Fear is the threat of danger, pain or harm. Fear is real and debilitating.

But we mustn’t just focus on the negative side of this chapter. Yes, these attacks had a real and genuine impact on Nehemiah and his fellow builders. And these attacks must have had some element of success or they wouldn’t have been recorded.

But we need to look at how Nehemiah responded to these attacks – and learn from his actions. And note how they can be used in our lives today.

a) Pray to God

(Neh 4:4, 9)

Prayer is an essential part of Nehemiah’s life. Throughout whole book, Nehemiah is seen praying 11 times, twice just in this chapter.

The types of praying here in Nehemiah 4 is very significant. In v.4, it seems that Nehemiah is praying alone, but in v.9 it is corporate prayer, "*We prayed to our God.*" The way to respond to opposition, is through prayer – individual-prayer and also prayer in groups.

When was the last time you attended a group prayer meeting?

b) Keep on Working (Neh 4:6)

Nehemiah's next response may seem obvious, but it still needs to be said. "Keep on, keeping on!" "*So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.*" (Neh 4:6).

Nehemiah's response to the Opposition was to keep going; to keep doing what God had asked them to do.

c) Vigilance Against Enemy (Neh 4:9)

Well-known verse: "*But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.*" (Neh 4:9). Pray to God and post a guard.

200 years ago, Oliver Cromwell is quoted to have said to his troops, "*Trust in God but keep your powder dry.*"

We trust God to protect us through the valley of the shadow of death. But at the same time, God has given us an intellect to be vigilant, wary and prepared for the schemes of the Opposition.

d) Focus on God (Neh 4:14)

The best response: "*Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome*" (Neh 4:14).

Don't be afraid, but remember the Lord instead.

Remember the Lord who is great and awesome.

"Great" = as in vast in number, power and intensity.

"Awesome" = as in to be revered, honoured & respected.

The similarities with Nehemiah's prayer (Nehemiah 1) is deliberate. We remember the Lord who is great and awesome, as God remembers the promises that He has made to His people.

As we focus on deepening our relationship with God, we have a new perspective of the schemes of the Opposition.

Nehemiah's response to the Opposition was to focus on God.

CONCLUSION

As disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, we are to expect Opposition. Jesus faced opposition in his own life, and made it very clear that his followers should expect the same.

We need to be alert to the different types of Opposition, and to be aware of where they are coming from.

1. Anger & Fury
2. Mockery & Sarcasm
3. Threats & Intimidations
4. Discouragement & Exhaustion
5. Negativism & Pessimism
6. Fear & Trepidation

These are all examples of what Ephesians 6 describes as “*the flaming arrows*” of this dark world. They can appear innocently or brutally.

God is calling us to respond – but in specific ways. To:

- a) Pray Continually to Him
- b) Keep on Working
- c) Be Vigilant & wary.
- d) But especially, to keep our Focus on God. To:
“*Remember the Lord who is great and awesome*”.

Let us be ready with our responses – responses that are God-honouring.

Remember, the Lord who is great and awesome!

AMEN