

Harvesters, Perimeter Church

“Nehemiah: Faithfulness in the face of opposition, part 2”

March 3, 2024

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President

Where are we going?

- February 4, 2024 - Introduction Nehemiah 1:1-13 “Nehemiah: Faithfulness amid the Fragments”
- February 11, 2024 - “Nehemiah: Faithfulness to one’s call” (Nehemiah 1:1-2:8)
- February 18, 2024 - “Nehemiah: Faithfulness in one’s calling” (Nehemiah 2:1-3:32)
- February 25, 2024 - “Nehemiah: Faithfulness in the face of opposition, part 1” (Nehemiah 4:1-7:72)
- March 3, 2024 - “Nehemiah: Faithfulness in the face of opposition, part 2” (Nehemiah 4:1-7:72)
- March 10, 2024 - “Nehemiah: Faithfulness rooted in the Word” (Nehemiah 7:73-10:39)
- March 17, 2024 - “Nehemiah: Faithfulness leading to urban renewal” (Nehemiah 11:1-12:47)
- March 24, 2024 - “Nehemiah: Faithfulness for the long haul” (Nehemiah 13) Wrap-up

Review

539 BC – First Return

1. Led by Zerubbabel
2. King - Cyrus
3. Goal - rebuild the temple

458 BC – Second Return

1. Led by Ezra
2. King - Artaxerxes
3. Goal – retrain God's people

445 BC – Third Return

1. Led by Nehemiah
2. King - Artaxerxes
3. Goal - rebuild the walls

Nehemiah 4:1-6

¹ Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. ² And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” ³ Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!” ⁴ Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. ⁵ Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

⁶ So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

Observations

Remember Sanballat and Tobiah?

¹⁰ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?”

Observations

Sanballat

1. From Beth-Horon – 18 miles from Jerusalem
2. Governor of Samaria in the north

Tobiah

1. Name means “Yahweh is good”
2. Becomes Governor of Ammon, east of the Jordan

Observations

How does Nehemiah respond to external opposition?

1. Responds with prayer
2. Responds with practical obedience

What do we make of the prayer?

1. Imprecatory prayer

Nehemiah 4:7-12

⁷ But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. ⁸ And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. ⁹ And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.

¹⁰ In Judah it was said, “The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.” ¹¹ And our enemies said, “They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.” ¹² At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.”

Types of Opposition in the text

1. Psychological
2. Physical
3. Personal

“The source of strength is the knowledge of God, recalled, reviewed, refocused, thought through, and applied to the matters in hand.”
- J.I. Packer

Observations

“The opposition was not going away just because Nehemiah had prayed about it...To realize the full force of this threat, we need to visualize it geographically. Samaria was to the north. Ammon was to the east. The Arabs were to the south. The people of Ashdod (or Philistia) were to the west. In other words, the opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah was now a coalition of those who together entirely surrounded Jerusalem.”

- James Boice, p. 56.

Observations

“As it was in the days of Nehemiah, so it continues...few...churches lack friends...who feel it is their special ministry to impart negative assurances...and who never doubt that their doomsaying is the most helpful contribution they can make. The factual information they bring may...be useful; but the oracular gloom they spread is unbelief masquerading as wisdom and needs to be nipped in the bud.”

- J.I. Packer, p. 105

Nehemiah 4:13-17

¹³ So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. ¹⁴ And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

¹⁵ When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. ¹⁶ From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, ¹⁷ who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other.

Nehemiah 4:18-23

¹⁸ And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. ¹⁹ And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. ²⁰ In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” ²¹ So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. ²² I also said to the people at that time, “Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.” ²³ So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

Nehemiah 5:1-6

¹ Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. ² For there were those who said, “With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive.” ³ There were also those who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.” ⁴ And there were those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. ⁵ Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards.”

⁶ I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

Types of Opposition in chapter 5 & 6

1. Incrimination

2. Intrigue

3. Innuendo

3. Intimidation

“God tests us to bring forth excellence in discipleship...Satan, by contrast, tests us with a veiw to our ruin and destruction.

- J.I. Packer

Nehemiah 5:7-11

⁷ I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, “You are exacting interest, each from his brother.” And I held a great assembly against them ⁸ and said to them, “We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!” They were silent and could not find a word to say. ⁹ So I said, “The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies? ¹⁰ Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest. ¹¹ Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.”

Nehemiah 5:12-14

¹² Then they said, “We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say.” And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised. ¹³ I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, “So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said “Amen” and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.

¹⁴ Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor.

Nehemiah 5:15-19

¹⁵ The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. ¹⁶ I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. ¹⁷ Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. ¹⁸ Now what was prepared at my expense^[d] for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people. ¹⁹ Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

Observations

“Real leaders accept responsibility for the welfare of those they lead, and no leader worth the name ever turns a blind eye to victimization.”

- J.I. Packer, p. 120

“Nehemiah...did not take the perquisites that might rightly have come to him because of his office; taxes and the good life. On the contrary, he lived out of his own means and used his personal abundance to feed those who were less fortunate...It was a magnificent example of servant leadership, and it was because Nehemiah feared God.”

- James Boice p. 66

Nehemiah 6:1-5

¹Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), ²Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm. ³And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” ⁴And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. ⁵In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.

Nehemiah 6:6-9

⁶ In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. ⁷ And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together.” ⁸ Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.”⁹ For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

Nehemiah 6:10-14

¹⁰ Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night.” ¹¹ But I said, “Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in.”

¹² And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. ¹⁴ Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

Nehemiah 6:15-19

¹⁵ So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

¹⁷ Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. ¹⁸ For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife. ¹⁹ Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.

Psalm 27

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold^[a] of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

² When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet^[b] I will be confident.

⁴ One thing have I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to inquire^[c] in his temple.

¹¹ Teach me your way, O Lord,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.

¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take
courage;
wait for the Lord!

Reflections for the week

1. How can you tell the difference between legitimate rebuke and ungodly opposition?
2. In what ways can you be supportive of the leaders over you?
3. In what ways is money a potentially divisive issue for us at Perimeter?

Meditate on Nehemiah's words in Neh 4:14, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome."