

The Threat from Outside

Nehemiah 4

Small Group Study, week commencing 27th September 2021.

For Starters

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Do you agree?

Read

Nehemiah 4.

Context

The work of rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls is well underway, but not everyone is happy about it. We met Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite, along with Geshem the Arab, in Nehemiah 2:10,19. They were regional governors serving under the king of Persia, governing regions to the south and east of Judah, disturbed that someone had come to ‘promote the welfare of the Israelites’. Seeing the progress on the wall, they start to act to bring a stop to it.

Study

Verses 1-6

1. What form did the threat from Sanballat and Tobiah initially take? How did Nehemiah (4-5) and the people generally (6) respond?

Nehemiah’s prayer is problematic, and is probably not a model prayer for us today! However, we should understand it as Nehemiah’s plea for justice (Romans 12:19-20). Although it falls short of New Testament grace, Nehemiah doesn’t take matters into his own hands – he leaves it in God’s hands.

Verses 7-9

2. The tension escalates from mockery to plans for violence. What new response to the threat from outside do the Jews form?

3. Consider the threefold approach to opposition described so far: (1) prayer, (2) carrying-on, (3) practical defensive action. What are your default strategies in the face of opposition?

Verses 10-23

4. The momentum that Nehemiah had established is now seriously under threat. In addition to the external threats, tiredness is kicking in, the scale of the task is looming large, and fear is taking a grip (verse 10-12). Do you recognise any of these complicating factors to threats you have faced in the past or are facing now?

5. Consider the importance of momentum. The work didn’t stop. Instead, Nehemiah organised the people such that they could keep working *and* face the threat from the outside. Why is momentum so important in the face of opposition to a difficult task?

6. In verses 19-20 Nehemiah addresses the fact that the people are spread thinly. How would Nehemiah’s instructions be received by those (a) in vulnerable areas and (b) in stronger areas? What lesson is there here for church life?

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7. Are there any other lessons from Nehemiah 4 about opposition from outside and how to deal with it that haven't been mentioned? What are they?

Prayer

Are you (individually), others, or we (as a church) facing any threats from outside at the moment? Pray for strength, grace, wisdom and courage in the face of those threats.

Resources

In addition to the Blog posts, all small group studies can also be located in chichesterbaptist.org/smallgroupresources. The Blog posts will continue to be posted on the Sunday preceding the message, but the studies may be available sooner from this page.