

WCKaiser Notes on Nehemiah: Chapter 4 - Leading When Under Pressure from the Outside.

WCK divides the chapter in three units: To respond to the three pressures, God provides three solutions.

1. 4:1-6 - Divine Retribution in the face of Constant Ridicule
2. 4:7-14 - Divine Assistance in the face of Hostile Alliances
3. 4:15-23 - Divine Overruling in the face of Constant Surveillance

Chapter summary: As the building progresses, Nehemiah must deal with opposition that comes from Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, and the Ammonites. All of these comes as threats. While Nehemiah prepares the people to fight and defend the city against invasion, an actual battle never occurs. But had Nehemiah not equipped the people, the enemies would have capitalized on their vulnerability. We must be “on guard” against the opposition of the evil one. “Most of Christian work goes forward under pressure. If we are engaged in a work to advance the kingdom of Christ, we should expect opposition from the evil one. But the overall lesson of Neh. 4 is that God will direct his leaders to recognize and prepare for the attack - so that they will be prepared to resist it. In fact, God will cause the plans of the evil one to come back and destroy those who initially opposed the work of God.” WCK

The pivot point of the chapter is found at Neh. 4:6 “So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, **for the people worked with all their heart.**” Literally, the people **had a mind to work.** “God’s work, done God’s way, will never lack God’s sufficiency.” WCK

1. 4:1-6 Divine Retribution in the face of Constant Ridicule. In vs. 1-3 we read of the mocking and insults directed against the workers. To mock God’s work is to mock God himself. The leader should recognize that the attack is against God - and not take it personally. See I Cor. 3:16-20 - God will destroy the one who sets out to destroy that work which God is behind. “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” (I Cor. 3:17) So Nehemiah prays, (4:4-5). By so doing, he is turning the problem over to God and leaving God to take care of it. “The secret of overcoming obstacles or criticism flows out of our relationship with God.” WCK We should also learn, as leaders, to be truthful - with the people who are following us, and with God. “Happy is the leader who will tell the straight truth.” WCK

2. 4:7-14 Divine Assistance for Hostile Alliances.

(vs. 7-9) Note vs. 8 should be read “against **me**,” not “against it.” The response of Nehemiah to the threat is to “pray to our God.” And then they posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

Activity follows faith. Faith works. They were trusting in God and they also prepared to fight.

(vs. 10-11) People are becoming discouraged by the external threats. The truth is there is still much rubble. Leaders must motivate the heart - then solve the external problems.

(vs. 12-14) So Nehemiah calls on the people to, “Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”

3. 4:15-23 Divine Overruling for Constant Surveillance.

Vs. 15 reads that “God had frustrated the plans of the enemy.” Thus the people were free to return to the work. But now they will work and watch. Half are equipped with swords and spears, while the other half work. Picture of constant vigilance. “The price of spiritual freedom is constant vigilance.”

WCK. Never can allow the spiritual defenses to let down. Nehemiah also instituted a plan to rally the forces (trumpeter is always with him), should the attack come. If the attack should come, Nehemiah had prepared the people’s faith too, “Our God will fight for us!” (vs. 20) And so (vs. 21-23) the work progresses, but now as the people are fully “on guard” against any attack by the enemy.

MEK. I was struck by the interplay between faith and works. Nehemiah took the threats seriously. He did pray, but that was not all he did. He also prepared for the worst. That was an expression of faith.