

CELL NOTES FOR SUNDAY 25 JULY

NEHEMIAH 6 - FACING DOWN THE OPPOSITION

How did God's Chosen People get into the state faced by Nehemiah? – this simple summary might help.

1. Jacob (aka Israel) sent his 11 sons to Egypt for food during a famine, where they found their brother Joseph.
2. Jacob's sons founded Israelite tribes whilst under slavery in Egypt.
3. The Israelite tribes escaped from Egypt under Moses' leadership and sought the 'Promised Land'.
4. The tribes, except for the Levites (priestly tribe), were allocated land in Canaan which they conquered under Joshua's leadership.
5. Joseph's tribe was split in 2 (Ephraim and Manasseh) so that there were 12 tribal areas, without Levi.
6. The 12 tribes were united under Kings Saul, David and Solomon, but split into 2 kingdoms after that: Judah in the South centred on Jerusalem, consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and Israel in the North (capital Samaria), consisting of the other 10 tribes.
7. The rulers of Israel often came to power through violent coups and the rulers of Judah kept more to the line of David.
8. Israel was less faithful to God than Judah, and was eventually (722 BC) led to defeat under the Assyrian Empire, and its key people deported to other parts of the Empire.
9. Judah hung on till 586 BC, when they were overcome by the Babylonian Empire that had supplanted the Assyrians. The key people of Judah were then also deported.
10. The Persian Empire under Cyrus then supplanted the Babylonians, and he authorised the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem in 538. Then in 445 BC Nehemiah was sent as governor to supervise the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, whilst Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, now a Persian province.

The opposition faced by Nehemiah

In chapter 4, we read how Nehemiah faced ridicule and threats from Sanballat and Tobiah. Sanballat, whose name is Babylonian, was the governor of Samaria, so he saw his position of power threatened by the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Although Tobiah had a Jewish name he had settled into a comfortable situation in Samaria, and had a position of influence with the governor, and contacts with influential people. These two represented the elite in the land, who didn't want their comfortable situation upset.

In Chapter 6 the opposition is seen to move to a higher level:

- a. The temptation to get away from God's work and have a discussion about it on 'enemy territory' (vv 1-4).
- b. The circulation of false rumours designed to get Nehemiah into trouble (vv 5-9).
- c. The suggestion that Nehemiah focus on his own safety by hiding in the temple (vv10-13).
- d. The undermining of the workforce through family pressures (17-19).

Looking at these patterns, share how we as Christians in our own society face different kinds of opposition. How much of this is satanically-inspired 'spiritual' opposition designed to trip us up in our walk with the Lord, and how much is simply the result of siding with the Lord, rather than the 'world'.

Read James 4. 7 and John 16. 33

Share together how we should regard opposition to our walk as Christians and how we should respond to it in its various forms. Try to focus on practical examples. How much should we seek to avoid opposition, or ask God to remove it from us?