

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Nehemiah: Pattern For Solutions In Spiritually Hard Times

E. Wisely Handling Humanly Overwhelming Threats

(Nehemiah 4:7-23)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

From the perspective of even the secular world itself, we face humanly overwhelming threats to our welfare:

(1) We face it in many secular realms. The editorial, "Opportunism in the Capitol" (Republican-American, April 24, 2021, p. 8A) asserted, ". . . (T)he union" is "teetering on all sorts of potentially violent brinks over racial divides, policing, street crime, gun control, climate, voting rights, COVID-19, taxes, federal debt, infrastructure decay, the economy and ambitious Asian adversaries . . ."

(2) However, we also face humanly overwhelming threats to our religious liberty: (a) Ken Starr, special counsel in the former President Bill Clinton impeachment case, recently "warned that 'in many quarters,' religion is viewed as 'a negative influence on society' and accused 'in broad terms' as serving a 'mask from discrimination' that inflicts harm on others.'" (Ryan Foley, "'Religious Liberty in Crisis': Ken Starr says new challenges are undermining America's first freedom," April 21, 2021; christianpost.com) "Starr cited the Equality Act, a sweeping piece of legislation marketed by Democrats as a necessary measure to enshrine nondiscrimination protections for LGBT individuals into law as one of the gravest threats to religious liberty," Ibid.

(b) The Democrats don't have the votes to defeat the filibuster in the Senate so as to make the Equality Act law, so the Democratic majority in the "House of Representatives approved a bill to make the nation's capital," the District of Columbia, a Democratic stronghold, "the 51st state." This would add "one representative and two senators" to give the Democrats the 52-50 Senate majority they need to defeat the filibuster and make the Equality Act law! ("DC statehood approved by House as Senate fight looms," Ibid., Republican-American, April 23, 2021, p. 9B)

Some reputable legal experts argue that it would require a constitutional amendment to make the District of Columbia a state, not just a legislative act by a Democrat-controlled Congress, but the threat still stands of seeing Congress force churches and pastors to change their stands on homosexuality and Biblical marriage or be punished!

Need: *So, we ask, "How does God direct that we wisely handle the humanly overwhelming threats we face?!"*

- I. Nehemiah and those who built Jerusalem's wall faced humanly overwhelming threats, Neh. 4:7-8, 10-12:**
 - A. They faced humanly overwhelming military opposition to their work, Nehemiah 4:7-8:
 1. "Joining Sanballat and the Samaritans from the north, Tobiah and the Ammonites from the east, Geshem (cf. 2:19) and the Arabs from the south, were men from Ashdod, a Philistine city, from the west," who all irately opposed the Hebrews' effort to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, Neh. 4:7; Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 682.
 2. Accordingly, these rulers with their military forces conspired to come and fight against the Hebrew builders and to stir up trouble in Jerusalem in order to stop the reconstruction effort, Nehemiah 4:8.
 - B. The Hebrews faced physical and mental exhaustion and the work seemed endless, Nehemiah 4:10; Ibid.
 - C. The workers faced the "threat of a secret attack" (Nehemiah 4:11), what was confirmed by Hebrews living outside Jerusalem and who reported this news ten times to the workers on the wall, Nehemiah 4:12; Ibid.
- II. Nehemiah wisely responded to these threats by asking God in prayer to address them, Nehemiah 4:9a.**
- III. Nevertheless, Nehemiah ALSO took WISE, BIBLICAL ACTION to HANDLE these threats (as follows):**
 - A. Nehemiah's actions recorded in Nehemiah 4:9b, 13-23 reflect lessons from Proverbs 30:24-28 that teach how God has programmed four especially weak animals to gain success or triumph regardless of their weaknesses.
 - B. We view those four instructions in conjunction with Nehemiah's actions in Nehemiah 4:9b, 13-23 (as follows):
 1. **The Ant's Triumph By Relentless Work**, Proverbs 30:24, 25:
 - a. Ants need the few warm summer months when food grows to be able to move fast enough to gather in its year-long food supply, but they can carry only a tiny bit each trip, so they work relentlessly all summer.
 - b. Similarly, Nehemiah put half his armed men and rulers along the wall to guard it, he armed the workers so they could do some work and they worked relentlessly, from dawn to dusk, Nehemiah 4:16-18a, 21, 23.
 2. **The Coney's Triumph By Reliance On Stronger Support**, Proverbs 30:24, 26:
 - a. Coneys are fragile animals, but they live in rock caves for insurance against stronger predators.
 - b. Similarly, Nehemiah put workers with their families at the exposed parts of the wall to insure they would fight more fiercely than their stronger foes to guard their families, what kept attackers away, Neh. 4:13-15.
 3. **The Locust's Triumph By Organization**, Proverbs 30:24, 27:

- a. Locusts have no lead locust to guide them, but they compensate for this lack of effective leadership by moving in united, organized ranks, creating a huge force.
 - b. Similarly, Nehemiah organized his forces, keeping the trumpeter with him that he might rapidly move widely scattered groups of his men by the trumpet call to any point of enemy attack, Nehemiah 4:18b-20.
4. **The Lizard's Triumph By Opportunism**, Proverbs 30:24, 28 ESV:
- a. Lizards are so weak that a person can hold one of them in his hand, but they are bold and opportunistic so that they are found even in king's palaces [in the Ancient Near East].
 - b. Similarly, Nehemiah opportunistically kept commuters at the work site to boost manpower and he directed that no man put off his clothes, but be always combat-ready for even surprise attacks, Nehemiah 4:22-23.

Lesson: *In facing the threat of humanly overwhelming conflict, physical and mental exhaustion and the threat of a secret attack, Nehemiah prayed for God's help and took wise, practical steps aligned with how Scripture reveals vulnerable, weak little animals triumph by wise actions that God has programmed them to perform.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-11. (2) In facing overwhelming threats, may we (a) pray for God's help and (b) take wise actions as Nehemiah did and God shows in His programming of the Proverbs 30:24-28 weak animals.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We apply the example of Nehemiah and the lessons of the weak animals God has wisely programmed for triumph regardless of their weaknesses to address issues of concern raised in our sermon introduction (as follows):

(1) Re: the lesson of the ant that can work only in the warm summer relentlessly to gather its food in tiny bits and of Nehemiah's organizing his men to be half-armed and half-working, but to work relentlessly dawn to dusk, may we address ideological threats by relentlessly using Scripture to counter errant viewpoints and relentlessly relying on the Holy Spirit Who is greater than Satan who is behind the ideological threats. (2 Timothy 3:13-17 with 1 John 4:4)

Applied to the actual issues in our introduction, racial divides, policing, street crime and gun control are all solved by everyone involved being justified by faith in Christ and relying on the Holy Spirit for behavior control (John 3:16; Tit. 3:3-7; Gal. 5:16-23). Climate-change ideology is countered by Genesis 8:22, COVID-19 is countered by home remedies and preserving the immune system (1 Tim. 5:23), problems with taxes, federal debt, infrastructure decay and the economy are solved by independent, personal work (1 Thess. 4:11-12) and ambitious Asian adversaries and threats to our religious liberty are handled by relying on God (Psalm 127:1) and by praying for His work in our rulers to give us a peaceable life in all godliness that our discipling work for Christ might progress (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

(2) Re: the lesson of the conies that live in rock homes for protection from predators and of Nehemiah's putting workers with their families at the vulnerable parts of the wall to fight fiercely and thwart attackers, may we view Scripture as our rock home of security to guard against today's false ideologies, and keep our minds immersed in that Word. In particular, Scripture at Psalm 1:1-6 reveals that believers who constantly immerse their minds and hearts in Scripture resist errant ideologies and retain their inner vitality amid even destructively hard times for others.

Some key lessons in Scripture are (a) God's provision for His people regardless what evil men might try to do to them (Hebrews 13:5-6), (b) His guidance via Scripture one-step-at-a-time in a world of spiritual darkness (Psalm 119:105) and (c) reliance on the Holy Spirit to turn mountains of duties into attainable tasks (Zechariah 4:6-7).

(3) Re: the lesson of the locusts that have no king, but who make up for that lack by moving in organized ranks, and of Nehemiah's directing that the trumpeter be with him that he might quickly deploy his widely scattered forces to any point of attack, may we organize our finances (budgeting, saving, investing, cash flow, credit protection, etc.), our time, our work duties, our recreation, our work breaks, etc., to offset stress, defeat and failure while also nurturing our inner man. Organization is essential toward minimizing stress and maximizing productivity.

(4) Re: the lesson of the lizard who is so weak that one can hold it in his hand, but that is also so opportunistic that it is found in king's palaces, and of Nehemiah's keeping commuters in Jerusalem to maximize his manpower for conflict, and directing his men not to change their clothes so they could always be combat-ready, may we be aware that in our era of crises with big, quick changes in laws, in taxes, in the job market, in stock market swings and in the availability of goods and services, we need to be ready either to be very defensive so as to alleviate stress when sudden hardships arise or be ready to take advantage of huge opportunities that can just as suddenly come our way.

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. In facing humanly overwhelming threats, may we then pray for God's help and take wise actions exemplified by Nehemiah and that God has taught us in the weak animals of the ant, coney, locust and lizard.