

**PP**

**Nehemiah: When Attacks Get Personal!**

Text Nehemiah 6:1-14

Part 21, 12/8-9, 2012

Illus “*Mental confusion, contradiction of feeling, indecisiveness, panic; these are our weapons.*” Adolph Hitler

Over several weeks we have been studying the schemes of our spiritual enemies as they try to prevent God’s people from successfully building God’s kingdom

The book of Nehemiah reveals these strategies to us, “*so that we would not be outwitted by*

**PP** *Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*” 2 Corinthians 2:11

Satan thinks, he strategizes and he has a multitude of tactics he uses against us

**PP** “*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*” 1 Peter 5:8

**PP** We saw in chapter 4, the strategy of criticism and when that didn’t work, they tried to stir up a conspiracy getting others on their side

That also didn’t work so they next tried to confuse the Jews

But the enemies ramped it up and soon came Discouragement, Dread as well as Distraction

Yet still, the work of God continued and the walls of Jerusalem were built

But the opposition shifted from external to internal, and we saw the greed in the hearts of the wealthy Jews causing division and resentment in God’s people

And suddenly, for the first time, the work on the wall *came to a halt*

But again Nehemiah led his people well, bringing the Word of God to bear and leading them into brokenness and repentance

Today, in chapter 6, we will see three more strategies of our enemies, but now they turn personal

Every Christian, and more so, every Christian leader, has that target on his or her chest

Whether you are building spiritual walls at home or work or at school, you will often experience intense and personal attacks

In fact, we often warn our incoming board members to expect an increase in spiritual opposition and difficulty as they come on the board

When Satan cannot stop the building God’s kingdom, he will go after those who are in positions of influence, and we are about to see this unfold in three new, now personal attacks

*“Now 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), Sanballat 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.” 1-2*

**PP 1- Intrigue**

The word intrigue means *secret schemes* and this is what we see from the enemies of God

Here again we see the main three enemies of the Jews during Nehemiah’s life: ‘*Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem*’ 6:1

They are still around today though they go by different names

*Sanballat*, their ringleader depicts our *greatest enemy*...Satan

*Tobiah*, who had intertwined himself among the people of God, reveals the insidious power of the flesh, that part of us that resists the will of God  
And *Geshem*, that wealthy Arab ruler, who represents this God-opposing world  
Then you add in the ***‘rest of our enemies’*** and we see that the Jews were completely surrounded  
Sanballat and Geshem invite Nehemiah to meet with them, but note that Tobiah is absent  
We’ll learn in a few minutes that he is working another plot, teaching us that our enemies are smart and often carry out more than one scheme at a time

Nehemiah is invited to a peace summit to ***‘Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono’***, a scenic village in a fertile valley, 20-30 miles Northwest of Jerusalem  
The name ***‘Ono’*** means *his strength* and we see in it the invitation for Nehemiah to leave the safety of almost-completed walls into the strength of Sanballat  
This is such a common ploy of Satan as he uses Geshem the world to lure us out of fellowship within the Jerusalem of our church into the world  
*Abandon the spiritual wall of your salvation, and pursue the treasures of the world*  
A new job that prevents us from worshipping together; a new hobby that happens to take place the same time as our worship services  
Over and over, even now, we have people in our church who have succumbed to that dangerous invitation, and elders, pastors as well as Christian brothers and sisters are pursuing them  
I sit on the watchtower on the walls, and I can see the whispered promises of the enemy and the seductive draw of God’s people as they go to the plain of Ono

Nehemiah knows the enemies of God have never sought peace, ***‘they intended to do us harm’*** ***‘us’***, not just *me*, because to bring down the leader and you bring harm to the people

### **How should we respond?**

**PP a)** ***Maintain the right priorities-“And 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?” 6:3***

I cannot come down carries an implication that anything other than doing what God has asked of him would be going ***‘down’*** to a lesser activity

Whatever pulls us away from God’s priorities, even good things, will aid the plot of our enemies

The wall was built but it was imperative that the gates were completed

God promised to Abraham that Israel ***‘shall possess the gate of his enemies’*** **Genesis 22:17**

To possess the gates of a city was to conquer it, and it was there armies attacked

The priority of Nehemiah was to set the doors to the gates and it reminds us to do the same

Friends, are you clearly aware of the low places, open spaces and unfinished gates in your life?

Maybe it is your discipline in God’s Word, or struggle with a particular sin

Perhaps your marriage is vulnerable, or a root of bitterness has sprung up in your heart

I talked with a friend recently who has been working, with commute, 90 hour weeks

These are a few of many possible vulnerable areas in our spiritual walls

**PP b)** ***Never relax your guard-“And they sent to me four times in this way,” 6:4a***

Over and over they sent this invitation

Christian brother and sister, we can never relax our guard to the enemy...never!  
Serving God and building His kingdom is a **'great work'** and our enemy will always try to tempt us out of it

I spend a lot of time encouraging discouraged people to not stop serving God...do not give up!  
I've known people who have said to me that they were taking a break from church  
Little do they know, that unlike Nehemiah, they are unwittingly heading to Ono  
I have a good friend whose marriage is crumbling, and he will not return phone calls, he is avoiding fellowship with Christian brothers  
It is not a new struggle, he was just worn down, and he took hold of the ticket to travel to Ono

**PP c) Learn to say 'No' to Ono**  
***"and I answered them in the same manner."* 6:4b**

Pulpits all over the world are filled with people who are people pleasers, who find it nearly impossible to say the word 'No'  
I've had to learn to say no to wedding requests, or counseling requests, or speaking requests  
It is hard!  
And when anything tries to pull us away from our priorities, and harm will be the result, we must say 'No'  
But our enemies never give up, and again, they adjust their strategy: ***"In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand."* 6:5a**

## **PP 2-Implication**

Official letters were rolled up and sealed, and illegal to open but by the intended recipient  
An **'open letter'** was an unsealed letter, a common way to intentionally leak information  
***"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. 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."* 6-7**

False reports to the Persian King was what earlier caused the rebuilding of Jerusalem to stop  
Again Sanballat and Geshem show us that this is a common tactic of Satan and the world  
It is the old strategy of the rumor mill powered by gossip  
Someone once said that *gossip* is news you have to hurry and tell somebody else before you find out it isn't true!

**How should we respond** to false implications that roll through the rumor mill?  
***"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."* 6:8**

Listen to Spurgeon instruct us in dealing with false accusations: *"Falsehoods usually carry their own [contradictions] somewhere about them, and sting themselves to death...Your blameless life will be your best defense, and those who have seen it will not allow you to be condemned so readily as your slanderers expect...Yet there are exceptions to this general rule. When distinct, definite, public charges are made against a man he is bound*

*to answer them, and answer them in the clearest and most open manner... the general public ordinarily regard a refusal to reply as a proof of guilt. ”<sup>1</sup>*

It was likely for that reason that Nehemiah sent a letter back to Sanballat denying the charges. But the key for us is noticing that Nehemiah knew what his enemies’ goal was: ***“they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.’”*** 6:9

In verse 2, Nehemiah knew they wanted to do him harm, but now their strategy is uncovered more deeply: dispose of the leader and the work will stop!

This was, once again, not about Nehemiah, it was about the work of God that our enemies fear! Friends, when we are on the receiving end of these schemes, remember, our enemies are trying to stop our faithful and effective service to God. Turn to God in prayer and let Him strengthen your hands for service.

Have you taken notice that all during this time, Tobiah seems to be missing in action? He is working with the ever-present Sanballat on a different strategy...called infiltration.

***“Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Me-hetabel, 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.’”*** 6:10

### **PP 3-Infiltration**

I’ve observed that much of Satan’s work is done within the church, through those among us

**PP** An unlikely partner of Satan in Job’s life was his own wife: ***“Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.”*** Job 2:9

Satan used one of the 12 disciples, Judas, to betray Jesus.

The Moabites used a worldly prophet of God, Balaam, to try and curse the Israelites.

Working within God’s people to harm God’s people has been a timeless strategy of Satan.

A look ahead reveals that there was more than one prophet that was scheming to discredit him.

***“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.”*** 14

Shemaiah, likely their spokesman, brought Nehemiah a supposed ‘word from the Lord’.

Have you ever had someone give you a word from the Lord?

When I receive these, I try and discern if it is in accord with the character of God and the Word of God and when it isn’t, I reject it.

Shemaiah advised him to flee into the Most Holy Place to escape the assassination attempt.

**PP** Yet this contradicted the commands in Scripture: ***“any outsider who comes near [the House of God] shall be put to death.”*** Numbers 18:7

Nehemiah was outside the priesthood, forbidden from going past the court of Israel.

Nehemiah then understood ***“that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy***

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<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon, *The Blind Eye and the Deaf Ear*

*against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 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.” 11-12*

### **How should we respond?**

Again, understand the scheme of the motive, which here was to *‘give me a bad name in order to taunt me.’*

Nehemiah refused to listen to this false prophecy, this bad advice because he knew the scriptures  
One expert said the easiest way to detect counterfeit money was to be thoroughly familiar with the real thing

He refused to listen, and friends, he refused to respond, instead, he gave them over to God  
***“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 left the matter with God

How remarkable, since as governor he had authority over these false prophets, and the scriptures were clear what to do...stone them

Instead, Nehemiah gave them over to the God Who loves him...***“O my God”***

This was a man who knew thoroughly knew the scriptures, and intimately knew His God

He left it with God, and listen, went back to work!

**PP** He knew the Scriptures, knew His God, and he knew his calling...rebuild the wall!

Friends, our enemies are at work against this church, against our leaders, and against each of us  
Are you building a spiritual wall in your life; your home; your workplace; your neighborhood or school?

**PP** ***“Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad -- because these trials will make you partners with Christ in His suffering, and afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing His glory when it is displayed to all the world.” 1 Peter 4:12-13***

Pray