



## Nehemiah 6-7

### Satan Never Quits: How to Handle Personal Attacks

Have you been personally assaulted lately? Have you been intimidated? Do you feel like Satan never gives up on you?

There is nothing like intrigue in the office place, or in the life of a leader in an organization.

Nehemiah overcame opposition to the building of the wall in Jerusalem by focused faith in God who gave him courage, wisdom and discernment. He faced outward and internal opposition until the wall was completed, and then at a critical moment when the only thing that remained to be done was the setting of the doors in the gates there was a surprise personal attack. Ridicule, threat of violence, internal bickering and selfish greed were all overcome by a man with great leadership skills.

How will Nehemiah handle a personal assault?

In fifty-two days the wall was completed to its full height and the only thing that remained was setting the gates in place. It was a moment in the project that the enemies of God set their focus on Nehemiah. They employed intrigue, innuendo and intimidation in one last attempt to stop the completion of the wall. Probably the enemies realized the wall was a sure thing, therefore they wanted to limit Nehemiah's future leadership as governor of Judah. The future of Judah was now a real threat to her neighbor's successes. It was now time for a personal attack on the leader.

On the surface, each new encounter with Nehemiah seemed to be sincere and wholesome counsel for him. However, in reality, they would try to humiliate him and destroy his integrity.

#### **SUBTLE INTRIGUE (6:1-2)**

The enemies to the wall-building project appear to accept defeat on the surface and invite Nehemiah to a peace summit in the luscious green valley of Ono just a few miles away from Jerusalem.

"Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and that no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates,

remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, then Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono. But they were planning to harm me" (Nehemiah 6:1-2, NASB 1995).

On the surface the proposal would seem to be a good idea. The wall was built and the project was almost finished. Let's accept the fact and work out our differences. Let's find a neutral location and talk things out.

Surface or presenting problems are seldom ever the true problems.

## **The Response of Nehemiah (v. 3)**

Nehemiah had keen insight into his enemies. He was able to read between the lines and see the intent of their hearts.

God gave him discernment, and the ability to say, "No." Not only did he say "no" once, but four times (v. 4).

"So 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?' They sent messages to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way" (vv. 3-4).

Nehemiah's response was brief and to the point. I am doing a great work and if I leave it will stop. I am involved in something that will still be worthwhile a million years from now. It will last for eternity. I must keep my focus. He said no in a polite way and stuck to it.

We must do likewise. There are many distractions that call for our attention and we must keep our focus. There are times when there is an evil intent in the invitation and we must discern the ulterior motives and be firm in our commitment.

Nehemiah saw through the issues clearly and took a firm stand, which kept him from being deceived by his enemies. His enemies did not intimidate him.

## **SANBALLAT'S INNUENDOS (6:5-7)**

Nehemiah's enemies did not stop with simple requests. They moved on to hardball dirty politics. Sanballat sent an open letter to Nehemiah (v. 5). The messenger opened the letter for everyone to read.

"Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand. In it was written, 'It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports. You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'A king is in Judah! And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together'" (vv. 5-7).

That would be like getting an open letter from the IRS. You know if the postman arrives with an open letter he is not the only one who has read it. The intent was we are going to expose you. We will make you a public example of the kind of leader we do not want. We'll spread the rumors on you and force you to concede.

The damage of the innuendo was already done long before Nehemiah read the letter. Everyone else in Judah

The damage of the innuendo was already done long before Nehemiah read the letter. Everyone else in Judah was already aware of its contents and wild distortions by the time it arrived. The intent of the open letter was to spread rumors about Nehemiah and misrepresent his motives. They were attributing to Nehemiah low, unworthy, treacherous motives. The lies were that Nehemiah was guilty of insurrection and was going to set himself up as king.

Gossip, rumors and innuendos are designed to provoke pain and suffering. They are not messages of hope, peace and loving kindness. Have you ever heard any good gossip on a leader? No, they are designed to destroy the character, integrity, morale, etc. of the subject of the gossip.

Be prepared to become the target of people's tongues when you seek the will of God, and to glorify His name. They will plan your downfall if you get too serious with God.

## **Nehemiah's Response to Gossip (vv. 8-9)**

Nehemiah gets to the point quickly.

"Then I sent a message to him saying, Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind. For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking, They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands" (vv. 8-9).

Nehemiah called upon God in prayer. It was another of his one-liners.

Nehemiah sent a short, simple to the point response to Sanballat. He did not wait and see if the problem would go away. These kinds of problems never do. Gossip never goes away before it does its damage. He nipped it in the bud as soon as he was aware of it. "I sent a message to him . . . The message was sent to the source of the open letter, Sanballat.

The trouble with most gossip is you never know the true source. The leader is usually too busy and focused to even be aware of the rumors and gossip flying around behind his back.

Another characteristic of gossip is its use of exaggeration. The vocabulary is well chosen to promote exaggerated ideas. The information is not accurate. Of course, that is the reason for using gossip. The goal is to hurt and cause disinformation.

However, one of the best responses if you are connected to the grape vine is, May I quote you? Another good response is, Really? I did not know that. Let's stop and call so and so and ask him if it is true. Believe me, you will be immediately disconnected from the sour grape vine and your name removed from the email list.

If you are the subject of the gossip and innuendos, keep your heart tender toward God. That is what Nehemiah did. "But now, O God, strengthen my hand" (v. 9). The Lord is the one who knows everything about the situation. Tell Him your hurt feelings and share with Him your pain. Draw inner strength from Him who indwells you to cope with the threat.

Gossip and rumors threaten the leader at the very core of his inner being. It threatens your self-esteem. Now is a good time to remind yourself of your relationship with God and how He has chosen to meet your inner needs through His everlasting love, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You are secure, significant and sufficient in the sustaining grace of God. It really is true: God + me = a

You are secure, significant and sufficient in the sustaining grace of God. It really is true: God + me = a whole person. ”

Gossip attacks our sense of sufficiency because it says you are hopeless, you cannot do anything right. The Holy Spirit is our competence to live the Christian life. He is in sovereign control of our circumstances that He allows us to experience. He makes us triumph over the most difficult circumstances in life. The Holy Spirit makes us sufficient to accomplish all that pleases God.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:30-32 to guard our hearts. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (v. 30). How do we grieve Him? Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander will do it every time. That is exactly what the enemies of Nehemiah were trying to do. If they can pull you down to their level by causing you to lose the joy of your salvation and defeat you spiritually they have accomplished much. But on the other hand if you will be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you, you have won the battle and are on the way to victory.

Don't let yourself fall into Satan's trap. Our enemy works night and day to discredit us in the eyes of others and our Lord.

Chuck Swindoll is no doubt right when he says, I'm personally convinced that the number one enemy of Christian unity is the tongue. ”

As soon as Nehemiah heard the gossip he responded, Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind (v. 9). The inventors of gossip have an over active imagination and too much time on their hands.

What was the goal of the gossip? "For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking, They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands" (v. 9).

You may not think it is worth getting involved, or want to waste your time, but if it is about you or your organization, you have to respond immediately. The best way to handle rumors, gossips, and innuendos is to deny it immediately and emphatically.

Ultimately all you can do is trust it to the Lord. It is His kingdom and His work and He has promised us that what He has begun He will finish. The only thing that matters is that we make Him look good. He will take care of us because we belong to Him. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. ”

**O, God, strengthen my hands. ”**

How does God strengthen the leader's hands?

We have the Word of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Nehemiah relied upon the invisible hand of God, and upon the strength he received from the Law. As believers of Jesus Christ we have the Bible, God's holy Word, and that is where we get our guidance, strength and wisdom from God. We also have the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

## **SHEMAIAH'S INTIMIDATION**

The opposition gets down right dirty once again when the prophets are called upon to deliver an urgent message.

message.

We are not told exactly why Nehemiah went to the house of Shemaiah who was confined at home, but he tried to give the appearance that he was gravely concerned for the welfare of Nehemiah. He told Nehemiah, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the Temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night" (v. 10).

You know something stinks when the devil comes saying let's get together and pray. Satan comes as an angel of light and can sound so pious. Here he tries to seduce Nehemiah into taking an illegal step, and giving his enemies occasion for speaking evil of him.

He does not reveal his source, nor who they are who are coming to kill Nehemiah. That is why they say "are the biggest liars in the world."

We do not know where he got his information about the plot, but he seems to have an inside source. In fact, he is in on the plot!

## **Nehemiah's Response to the False Prophet**

"But I said, Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in" (v. 11).

God gave Nehemiah discernment. "Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered his prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me" (vv. 12-13).

Literally Nehemiah said, "Then I recognized, and behold, it was not God who had sent him. The problem was false prophecy. Nehemiah could not wait around to see if it was fulfilled (Deut. 18:18-22). God gave him insight into the false prophet. Shemaiah's hypocrisy came to light, but his prophecy did not come true."

Nehemiah was being asked by Shemaiah to go into the Holy Place, not just the temple enclosure. Nehemiah was not a priest. He was forbidden to go into that room and he knew it. It was obvious Shemaiah was speaking as a false prophet.

To enter and to shut himself within the holy place would have been a grave desecration of the house of God, writes Keil and Delitzsch.

What he was suggesting to Nehemiah was against the Old Testament teaching. Therefore, he was not from God. God never contradicts Himself. Let's make sure that the spiritual leaders we follow are true to God's Word.

Can you imagine the consequences if Nehemiah had joined this hireling in the temple? He would have desecrated it. Remember what happened to Uzziah, one of the most righteous kings of Judah who had faithfully served the LORD God until the day he got impatient? "But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the Lord his God, for he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense" (2 Chronicles 26:16). A great ministry of over fifty years was shamed in one foolish act. And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death (v. 21).

Perhaps that historical event flashed through Nehemiah's mind. Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him . . . Like Nehemiah, we too need the gift of discernment. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world " (1 John 4:1).

Shemaiah was hired, Nehemiah says, that I might be afraid, and if I had sinned (by entering the holy place) it (my sin) would have been to them for an evil report, that they might defame me (Keil and Delitzsch).

Nehemiah's influence depended greatly on the weight of his moral character. One false step, and he would have been lost, his influence would have been gone; and the work on which his heart was set would have come to naught, writes George Rawlinson.

Nehemiah escaped assignation and a sure death from the wrath of God by being obedient to God's Word.

You would think that the enemies would concede defeat and move on, but the truth is they hang around until the last chapter. The wall was completed in fifty-two days (v. 15). Although the enemies saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that their work had been accomplished with the help of our God (v. 16). Then they began another letter writing campaign among the nobles in Jerusalem (vv. 17-19).

### **LET S'TRY INTIMIDATION AGAIN (6:17-19)**

"Also in those days many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them" (v. 17). The nobles were with the opposition all along.

Tobiah hated the things of God. He was Nehemiah's arch enemy.

Family ties became the next means of intrigue. Members of Tobiah's family had married into the families of the Jewish nobles. Rumors were flying everywhere through the family lines of communication. These influential families were intimate with the enemy. Every church had its fifth column. It is tragic when the world and the world system's tactics come into the church.

"For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. Then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me" (vv. 18-19).

There was no break from the evil work of the enemies of Nehemiah. No doubt these nobles were planning and waiting for the day when they would be in control of Jerusalem and Judah once again.

The picture of leadership presented in Nehemiah is one of a godly man who sought only the will of God. He is seen as faithful to Him with his eyes focused on the Lord and His glory. He is committed to completing the task God has assigned him as a strong leader. He is a man of vision, determined and focused faith.

Verse sixteen needs to be imprinted on the heart of every godly leader. "When all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God." Human pretensions are put into perspective by God's overwhelming sovereignty. God is exalted even in the eyes of Nehemiah's enemies. What appears to man to be strong is in reality weak. What appears to us so often to be frail is in God's hands strong. When I am weak, He is strong (2 Cor. 12:10).

(2 Cor. 12:10).

Every Christian leader needs to stand back and shout, "I saw God do it! When he sees God come to the rescue in an impossible and helpless situation.

## **SUCCESSFUL CONSTRUCTION OF THE WALL (6:15; 7:1-73)**

With the completion of the wall Nehemiah makes key appointments for the preservation of the city, and the building up of its population.

"Now when the wall was rebuilt and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed, then I put Hanani my brother, and Hananiah the commander of the fortress, in charge of Jerusalem, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many" (7:1-2).

With the intrigue still going on by the enemies Nehemiah chose "a faithful man and one who feared God." May God give wisdom to those who lead in order to choose faithful people who fear God. How sad to see much of the work of God destroyed or ineffective because of unfaithful subordinates backstabbing, dragging their feet and bickering.

Nehemiah found the register, i.e. the genealogical registry, of those who came up at first (from Babylon), "notes Keil and Delitzsch.

## **People who serve**

Zerubbabel, Nehemiah and Ezra were chosen of God to rebuild a fallen nation. It never returned to its former heights, but it was the vehicle of God to preserve the lineage of the Messiah until His coming in the fullness of time (Luke 1:31-33).

God provided priests, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants, even horses, mules, camels and donkeys for His service. God was in deed faithful to His people, and He still is to this day.

Nehemiah keeps bringing us back to priorities. That is where our focus should always be. Where is God at work in your life? What is He doing in your church? Where is He touching lives in your community? That is where we should camp. Our eye of faith must be upon Him and His all sufficiency.

The walls were completed. God is faithful! The credit goes to Him.

## **SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Nehemiah saw his work as governor through the eyes of God. The building of the wall was God's work. He spent time with God and went to Him when the enemy threatened the work. Nehemiah's first line of defense was prayer and fellowship with God.

2. Nehemiah kept his focus on the LORD God and the assignment God had given him. There was a sense of the call of God that kept his faith focused. He was God's man in God's place, doing God's work in God's way, for God's glory.

3. Nehemiah relied upon the gift of discernment God had given him. God gave him insight into the intent and schemes of the enemy. We need to be aware of the subtle devices of those who oppose Christianity. Those

schemes of the enemy. We need to be aware of the subtle devices of those who oppose Christianity. Those who seek to defeat the kingdom of God often come in sheep's skins and would deceive even the elect of God. Let's be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit so we can say with Nehemiah, "Ify God put it into my heart to accomplish His will.

4. Nehemiah's ultimate decisions were not based on popular opinion polls, or pleasing certain nobles, but on seeking God's will and doing it with all of his heart.

5. Nehemiah stood his ground in the face of the enemy. "O, God, strengthen my hands. "Should a man like me flee? May the Lord Jesus Christ give us the same resolve to fight the good fight against the enemy of our souls.

The apostle Paul could testify shortly before his death of a good fight. "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:17-18).

Cyril Barber speaks of Nehemiah: "His was the faith that moves mountains. His confidence in God gave him the courage to plod on in spite of the clouds of opposition that gathered around him. He boldly championed the cause of right and scorned the things that would inspire fear. Nehemiah's courage helped him attain new heights of achievement. Armed with this fortitude, he turned obstacles into opportunities, and outward trials into personal triumphs (*Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership*, p. 111).

6. Nehemiah was careful to give glory to the LORD God. This work had been accomplished with the help of our God (v. 16). Even his enemies had to acknowledge the hand of God.

7. Satan's attacks are always well timed. The enemy never ceases his attacks. If he fails at one attempt he will return with other devices, but he never quits. He is constantly scheming for our downfall the moment we become complacent (2 Cor. 10:12).

8. Our adversary Satan is a liar, and he never hesitates to tell lies about the people of God, or to charge them with lying. Nehemiah called Satan's bluff and told his enemies, the henchmen of Satan, that they were liars to their faces.

9. People who use rumor and gossip manifest a lack of intelligence and love.

G. K. Chesterton was right when he said, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it's been found difficult and not tried."

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Series: Nehemiah: A Leader with a Focused Faith

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