

**Let Us Arise and Build
Studies in the Book of Nehemiah
“In the Crosshairs”—Protecting leaders (Neh. 6:1-19)**

Intro: In an earlier lesson we learned that whenever and wherever God’s people agree to work together to accomplish good, Satan will also be seeking to oppose it. And we can learn a lot about how Satan seeks to prevent God’s work from being done! In that lesson we looked at three weapons Satan uses against God’s people, namely, doubt, fear, and discouragement. In addition, he can incite God’s people against one another and in that way bring God’s work to a halt.

But in Nehemiah six we can see that Satan has one other weapon in his arsenal, attacking the leaders of God’s people. It makes sense. Satan realizes the influence of leaders upon God’s people; so we are not surprised that he singles them out for “special treatment.” If he can stop the leaders of the Lord’s people, he can stop the work of the Lord’s people.

If you as a leader have felt at times you were wearing a “bull’s eye,” don’t be surprised, Nehemiah did too! This lesson is intended to help us all understand the ways Satan may attack leaders, how they should respond, and how we may protect them!

Satan used a number of tactics against Nehemiah to bring God’s work to a halt.

He attempted to inflict personal harm.

“Now it came about 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, that 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. 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?” And they sent messages to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way.” (Nehemiah 6:1–4)

Notice how Satan attacked when success was imminent. It was as if he felt he had one last opportunity to bring things to a halt before the work was finished.

The enemies of Israel sought to lure Nehemiah from Jerusalem with the intention of harming him. They tried it repeatedly.

But Nehemiah saw through their scheme and responded by refusing to leave the work of God to meet with them.

He used intimidation and threats.

“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. “And 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.” 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.” (Nehemiah 6:5–9)

Sanballat appears with an open letter in hand full of false charges against Nehemiah. They included:

That Nehemiah was leading an effort to rebuild the wall in order to rebel against Artaxerxes

That Nehemiah intended to be exalted as king over the people

The purpose of the charges was to intimidate and threaten Nehemiah into “consulting” with the enemy. Cf. v. 9

And notice that all these criticisms came out of the rumor mill!

I.e. the source is never given. “It is said...”

Beware of any report that begins, “People are saying...” “I’ve heard or I’ve been told...” “A lot of people think...”

Unfair criticism is a very discouraging thing. It leaves you feeling weak and powerless.

Notice how Nehemiah responded.

He answered the charges by denying the truth of the charges made against him and revealing that they originated with the enemy, and not with him.

He saw in them what they really were, an attempt to stop God’s work.

He prayed to God for strength to keep going!

He sought to discredit him before his loyal followers.

“And when I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, “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.” 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.” 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. Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me.” (Nehemiah 6:10–14)

A man posing as a prophet called Nehemiah to his home (perhaps intimating that the information was too secret to be revealed by anyone

else, and perhaps to convince Nehemiah that he had his welfare at heart). When Nehemiah arrived, he pretended to give a “revelation” to the effect that Nehemiah’s life was in danger. He urged Nehemiah to join him in fleeing to the temple where there would be safety. (The Jews had a special abhorrence of bloodshed in the temple precincts since it defiled the temple and could even be considered a human sacrifice).

In actuality, Shemaiah was a “hired gun” for the opposition and was trying to get Nehemiah to demonstrate cowardice and violate the Law by going into the temple. (Nehemiah was not a Levite).

The purpose of the plot was to use this act of indiscretion as a weapon to discredit him in front of the people.

It appears that there were a number of such endeavors of various kinds (v. 14).

Again Nehemiah responded the proper way.

He committed no obvious breach of the Law.

He relied upon God to judge the men who were attempting to undermine him.

He sought to erode his security through friendships of brethren with the enemy.

“Also in those days many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah’s letters came to them. 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.” (Nehemiah 6:17–19)

Perhaps the final remarks of Nehemiah reveal one of the most difficult and challenging attacks. Tobiah, the outsider and enemy of Israel, had married into one of the prominent Jewish families. By so doing, he had created an alliance with God’s people. In addition, he had given his daughter in marriage to another Jewish man. He used the natural covenants of friendship and family loyalty to do a number on Nehemiah.

Letters were constantly passing between the nobles of Israel and Tobiah the enemy.

They constantly reported about what a good man Tobiah was. Apparently they were willing to overlook Tobiah’s obvious flaws for the sake of their relationship with him; and that while they would not tolerate mistakes from Nehemiah. Imagine how discouraging the double standard must have been to Nehemiah!

Shared things Nehemiah had said to those who wanted to hurt him.

Such activities would have a powerful eroding effect on Nehemiah's own sense of security.

Again, Nehemiah did the right thing. Even though it must have been painful to see and experience all these things, he made no efforts to hurt anyone. He did not lose his cool.

In spite of all these efforts, Nehemiah kept doing what he came to do. And his courage and determination paid off.

Practical lessons for us from this chapter

Wherever God's leaders lead Satan will be there to discourage them.

Like Nehemiah, we must remain committed to the work without fear or compromise.

The steady hand of good leadership and the faithful support of good followers will bring success.

In spite of all the opposition, the work continued and the wall was completed:

“So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. And it came about 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.” (Nehemiah 6:15–16)

Three things intrigue me about this statement:

First we see the power of unified effort. That wall had lain in ruins for over 142 years! It was put back up in 52 days!

Second we see the effect of courageous building on the enemy.

Nothing will cause the discourager to become discouraged from his opposition to cause more than the success of God's people.

Third, we see the power of God's presence and help.