

CHAPTER 6

Resist Satan's Schemes

*You will face opposition as a minister of Christ.
Remember, you are like a ship, made to sail against
the current, not with it.*

Saji Lukos

In Chapter 6, the attacks are no longer against the nation, but directed against the visionary leader Nehemiah himself. His enemies were trying their best to distract Nehemiah from his mission with fear and intimidation. But although his leadership in this chapter came under intense fire, Nehemiah the man of God would not be distracted from his God-given mission. Eventually, we see that God granted Nehemiah wisdom and victory over his enemies.

I. Nehemiah Resisted Deception by Focusing on Priorities (1-4)

Verse 1 *When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it --though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates.*

“Geshem,” which means “rain,” was an Arabian, an ally of Sanballat and Tobiah and yet another adversary of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was about to complete the work of rebuilding the walls. All that remained was to set the doors in the gates.

Those enemies included anyone who opposed the wall being restored and the Israelites prospering. Nehemiah's honest statement of the fact that the job was not finished and that he would not leave until he had completed his task given by God, shows us another side of his character. He had nothing to hide from his friends, his followers or his enemies. This was also the last chance for the three enemies who were looking to

snatch victory, since laying a siege around the completed city would not be tolerated by the Eastern king. So they sent Nehemiah a message to distract him from completing the work. Nehemiah's leadership continued under fire, and his adversaries kept turning up the heat!

Verse 2 *Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono but they were scheming to harm me;*

Ono was a town of the Benjamites in Palestine halfway to Samaria and very close to Ashdod. To his face they said, 'Come take a rest from your work.' But they were only trying to get him away from the wall.

Nehemiah's response showed clear discernment [the ability to judge matters according to God's view of them, and not to their outward appearance]. *"For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7). He knew they were scheming to harm him. It was an evil message designed to distract Nehemiah from his mission.

Take away the leader and the workers do not produce (Ezekiel 34:5-6). In Matthew 26:31, when speaking to His disciples just before Peter's denial, Jesus stated, "...strike the shepherd and scatter the sheep."

Verse 3 *so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"*

Nehemiah would not be distracted and was ready with an answer that placed the work as a spiritual priority. He knew well that he was carrying out a great project and could not accept the invitation. God's work always takes precedence over man's. This stance inspired those who were working alongside him.

In our ministries, many traps will be set against us by our enemies. We must address them with discernment and prayer.

Verse 4 *Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.*

Nehemiah's foes were persistent, but he was equally persistent in steadfastly resisting their blandishments.¹ His perseverance was greater than theirs, and he had God on his side.

¹ Expository commentary on Nehemiah P. 712

II. Nehemiah Resisted False Rumors by Courage and Prayer (5-9)

Verse 5 *Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter*

The fifth letter sent to Nehemiah was unsealed, so anyone could read it to fuel rumor, smear his character and frighten Nehemiah and his followers. These conspirators had become desperate to fulfill their plan to stop the completion of the wall and give the Israelites protection from their enemies. During this period, letters were written on papyrus and sealed with a clay *bullā* (seal impression). In this case, the letter was unsealed, intended to be known to the public.

Verses 6-7 ⁶ *in which was written “It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king ⁷ and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together.”*

The main part of the letter was declarative and imperative. What were their accusations?

- a. It is reported among the nations (simply means everywhere, all peoples. This was not true)
- b. Nehemiah and Jews are plotting to revolt (false)
- c. That is the reason for building the wall
- d. You have appointed prophets to make the proclamation
- e. Nehemiah’s declaration is that “There is a king in Judah!” (false)
- f. This report will get back to the king
- g. So, let us meet together.

Jewish kings had hired false prophets to aid in accomplishing their mission (cf. Jeroboam- 1 Kings 11:28-31; Jehu-2 Kings 9:1-3). Kellerman argues that Nehemiah was of Davidic descent and believes there may have been some basis for the accusation “there is a king” (cf. Zech. 6:9-14).²

² Nehemiah Quellin, pp 156-59.

In ministries, false accusations (emails, letters, texts) may be written against you and me by our enemies but do not let them cause you to lose heart in serving the Lord. These are part of the trials in our calling. Just look at the life of our Saviour. He was misunderstood, betrayed, and faced unjust accusations. Yet He completely entrusted all experiences to the all-knowing God His Father, and fully submitted in order to fulfill His mission. We must maintain that perspective and submit to Jesus when we face unjust accusations.

Verse 8 *I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.”*

No big explanation or argument, nothing to waste his time. Nehemiah simply called the report a lie. “Making it up” is from *bada*, which occurs only here and in 1 Kings 12:33.

Nehemiah continued his work no matter what Sanballat said. Envy and hatred produced this insanity. But it may have been what fueled Nehemiah’s determination to press on. Even today, those who persecute others are bent on causing fear in order to cause their enemies to relent and submit to their authority. But those of us who believe in Jesus Christ know who our “King” is and who we are to follow. Lies the enemy puts into the minds of evil men are just as prevalent today as they were in Nehemiah’s time.

To lie to a young woman or girl, to make promises that are untrue, then enslave them to do your bidding, is just one way the enemy thinks he prevails. Or for terrorists to kill and maim their countrymen just because they do not believe the same as they do. Sometimes Christ-followers are persecuted, jailed or killed. We do not need to fight or protest in loud rallies, but quietly, with much prayer, seek solutions to these seemingly never-ending problems.

With the proliferation of social media, the enemy has many more resources to discourage and falsely accuse and attack us. As children of God, we should not respond to every comment or retaliate against people who object to or offend us. We must learn to be patient, peaceful, and godly towards those who oppose us, while recognizing we have freedom to share the truth.

Verse 9 *They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.” But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.”*

“Their hands will get too weak.” The verb is *rapah*, to become slack.

Nehemiah's vision was covered in prayer. What was his prayer? "Now strengthen my hands." The RSV and NKJV insert "O God" to indicate that this is a prayer. His request to God was for strengthening or encouraging his hands to continue the work. The NEB translates it "So I applied myself to it with greater energy" (cf. Ps. 28:7-8; 29:11; 46.1; Isa. 40:31).

Nehemiah refused to be frightened by false accusations, and he trusted God, the source of all power, to help him complete his project. Prayer is the answer to every situation (2 Chron. 20:1-30).

One of Benjamin Franklin's proverbs from *Poor Richard's Almanac* wisely says: "Since I cannot govern my own tongue, tho' within my own teeth, how can I hope to govern the tongues of others?"

"No man can lead a work of God if he allows himself to be governed by what other people think. He is to secure help, fellowship, prayer, advice, and he is foolish not to take it; but if his ultimate decisions are based on popular opinion, he is going to fail." (Redpath)

III. Nehemiah Resisted Intimidation by Boldly Obeying God (10-14)

Verse 10 *One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you."*

The name Shemaiah means "heard by Jehovah." There are references to a number of men named Shemaiah in the O.T. This particular Shemaiah was the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel. He was a priest, and had access to the temple (Neh. 12:42). He must have been a close friend of Tobiah, the archenemy of Nehemiah.

"Was shut in" means "shut up or imprisoned". Three proposals have been suggested:

- a. That Shemaiah had an ecstatic seizure (cf. 1 Kings 22:10; Isa. 8:11; Ezekiel 3:14)
- b. That Shemaiah was shut up temporarily because of ritual impurity (cf. 1 Kings 14:10; Jer. 33:1)
- c. That Shemaiah had shut himself up as a symbolic action to indicate that his own life was in danger and to suggest that both must flee to the temple.³

³ Expositor's commentary P.714.

Shemaiah's suggestions were as follows:

- a. Let us meet in the house of God
- b. Inside the temple
- c. Close the temple doors
- d. Men are coming to kill you
- e. By night they are coming to kill you.

Shemaiah was a false prophet, hired by Tobiah. Shemaiah's recommendation to Nehemiah seems very legitimate, offering refuge in the temple building. Nehemiah refused to take refuge in "the house of God." He clearly recognized that this was a plot, and a sin, against which he replied sharply.

It was yet another trap designed to keep Nehemiah from finishing his work because of fear and intimidation. Remember, not all "prophets" are from God.

Verse 11 *But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!"*

Nehemiah was no coward. He knew he had been chosen by God for this task, and because of his obedience God gave him the strength to resist and the discernment to know the truth. Nehemiah's response took raw courage, real humility, rational perception and robust prayer. 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 tells the story of Uzziah, who was not a priest, but who entered the temple to burn incense to the Lord, and the consequences he suffered.

Verse 12 *I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.*

"I realized", means "understood or perceived" (NKJV). Shemaiah proposed a course of action which was contrary to God's Word, which revealed him as a false prophet (Matt. 24:3-10).

Tobiah and others could not rely on their own means or talents but had to hire others to do their dirty work. If Shemaiah had been a true prophet who would have inquired of the Lord, he would have known that Nehemiah was appointed by God, and that no one would be able to stop him.

We must be men and women who are led by the Holy Spirit and given discernment in every situation.

Verse 13 *He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.*

These adversaries were getting more desperate to find a way to stop Nehemiah from completing the wall. They still hadn't realized that this was God's plan, and no one could stop it. Nehemiah never wavered in the face of the threat, but acted courageously, seeking the face of God.

This is similar to the situation in which Daniel found himself. Ungodly leaders could find nothing wrong in Daniel's character, so they manufactured a way to tarnish his name and reputation. Tobiah and his friends tried to use a similar tactic here. If they could discredit Nehemiah's name, they would severely damage the work, possibly causing it to stop entirely. May our integrity be such that our enemies can find nothing against us.

Verse 14 *Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophet Noadiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me.*

We don't know for sure whether Nehemiah prayed for God to punish Tobiah, Sanballat, and Noadiah for their deeds or if he wanted God to change their hearts. Whatever the outcome, he did ask God, and did not take the matter into his own hands. Matthew 5:44 reads "But I tell you, love your enemies... and pray for those who persecute you."

Easton's Bible Dictionary says that Noadiah, whose name means "meeting with the Lord", was a false prophetess who assisted Tobiah and Sanballat against the Jews. Being bribed by them, she sought to stir up discontent among the inhabitants of Jerusalem in order to embarrass Nehemiah in his great work of rebuilding the ruined walls of the city.

In the O.T. only three other women are mentioned as being prophetesses. A. Miriam (Exod. 15:20), B. Deborah (Judg. 4:4), and C. Huldah (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22). The rabbinic traditions add another four: Sarah, Hannah, Abigail, and Esther.

IV. Nehemiah Resisted Intrusion by Completing the Wall (15-19)

Verse 15 *So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul [sixth Jewish month corresponding to modern August or September], in fifty-two days.*

Assuming a Nisan calendar, 25 Elul (the sixth month) would have been 27 October 445 BC. The walls had lain in ruins for more than 100 years. Amazingly, they were restored in a period of only 52 days!

Archaeological reports speak of “small, rough irregular and unequal stones” being used, as if they were using any kind of material they could find. It was Nehemiah who grieved, ached, prayed for four months, planned, asked boldly, went, fought, encouraged, was steadfast, persevered to completion, and led those around him to have the same kind of heart.

Has God called you to a plan? Are you praying about His plan? Will your conviction to finish the task God has set before you bring it to fruition through prayer and determination?

Verse 16 *When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.*

“Lost their self-confidence” is translated by the NKJV as “they were very disheartened in their own eyes.” In other words, it means “much cast down in their own eyes.” The reason they lost the self-confidence was that they saw the wall completed rapidly with God’s help. This knowledge discomfited Nehemiah’s enemies.

We know the truth that “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.” Thus we must continue to trust God in the midst of constant challenges which come against our spiritual life and ministry. As we do, those who oppose us will see the greatness and faithfulness of our God through our experiences.

Verses 17-18 *also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shekaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam.*

Tobiah was related to influential families in Judah. He was married to the daughter of Shecaniah, and his son Jehoanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam, who had helped repair the wall of Jerusalem (3:4, 30).

While no one would outrightly rebel against the king who had given Nehemiah his permission and support to rebuild the wall, the enemies

were trying on their own to rally support to bring him down. Even when it seemed that everyone of any importance was against Nehemiah and his followers, turning up the fires against his leadership, God prevailed and empowered him and his workers to finish the task.

Family ties can be tight, and sometimes we don't see the evil that someone we care about can do, or we turn a blind eye out of perceived loyalty. Nehemiah couldn't argue with any of their assertions, so he let God handle the opposition while he concentrated on building the wall and caring for his people. These enemies were all people whom God had allowed to hold these positions of importance, but they still did not have power over the King, and especially not over God.

Verse 19 *Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.*

Tobiah's friends and relatives acted as a Fifth Column.⁴ They attempted both to serve as publicity agents on behalf of Tobiah and to act as a spy for him. Tobiah himself kept on trying to frighten Nehemiah.

But Nehemiah was not intimidated. He had a job to do, and he did it. All the while God protected and strengthened him so he could complete the task, despite constant interference. When we keep our eyes on Jesus and the task that God places in front of us, no matter what or who tries to stand in our way, we will be empowered to do the next thing, come what may, knowing that God's will surely will be done.

Conclusion and Application

Each of us is aware of the fact that we will face opposition in our lives and ministries because of Satan's schemes. Our leadership, like Nehemiah's, will undoubtedly come under fire. The attack may come from within our own family, workplace, church, or community. Our enemies may attack us for various reasons, such as jealousy, greed, a desire for power and position, or lack of a 'kingdom of God' mindset. These are the works of the flesh, inspired by the devil.

People will make false accusations against you and your ministry. What will you do under these circumstances? Like Nehemiah, you must have a proper balance between humility and boldness. If we are timid and fearful, we will not be able to do great things for God. All those who have served God sincerely have suffered immensely because of the schemes of Satan.

⁴ Ibid P. 714

When you face attack, always pray to God, seeking His wisdom and guidance. Be sincere in your heart. Mobilize your team for the mission to which God has called you when you face opposition. Surely, you will have victory, because He is with you in the battle (2 Corinthians 2:14). We do not need to fight; instead, God will fight for us if we recognize the greatness of our Almighty God. What we need to do is stand up, take our position, and be courageous to do what God commands.



***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.
Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your
stand against the devil's schemes***

(Ephesians 6:10-11)



Discussion Questions

1. How had Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs opposed the work of Nehemiah and the Jews? (6:1-4) How were they now offering to cooperate with Nehemiah? Did Nehemiah compromise with them? When is compromise good, and when is it dangerous?
2. How did the enemy slander Nehemiah in these verses? (6:5-9) How could this gossip tempt Nehemiah to become fearful? How did Nehemiah handle false accusations?
3. How did Shemaiah's words threaten Nehemiah and tempt him to act selfishly? (6:10-14) How did Nehemiah respond? How can we recognize a false prophet? (Isaiah 8:20)
4. What was the response of Nehemiah's enemies and the surrounding nations when they heard about the completion of the wall in 52 days? (6:16) What experiences have you had in life that surprised your enemies?