

## Plots and Snares

**Nehemiah 6:1-4 HCSB** When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and that no gap was left in it--though at that time I had not installed the doors in the gates-- (2) Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message: "Come, let's meet together in the villages of the Ono Valley." But they were planning to harm me. (3) So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" (4) Four times they sent me the same proposal, and I gave them the same reply.

### Introduction

Under Nehemiah's leadership, the job of building the wall was accomplished. All that remained to do was to restore the gates and strengthen the community that lived INSIDE the walls.

Sanballat and his cronies had miserably failed to stop the great project so they switched their focus onto Nehemiah's leadership. Don't think that the devil and his henchmen will ever stop fighting the work of the Lord. They've been fighting for thousands of years; they're not likely to stop any time soon. When we accomplish the task the Lord has set before us, we need to briefly celebrate, then set our shoulders, heave a big breath, and start slugging away again. There will be plenty of time to rest when we're dead.

The average person will never fully appreciate the tremendous pressures that those in leadership experience day after day. Leaders are often blamed for things they had nothing to do with and they're criticized for the good they try to do. They are misquoted and misunderstood and rarely given the opportunity to set the record straight. If they act too quickly, they're "hasty" or "reckless". If they carefully bide their time, they're "cowardly" or "unconcerned."

That's just people in leadership in general! If you are in a position of spiritual leadership you not only have the pressures that face common leaders, you also have the daily struggle against an infernal enemy who never quits, never says die, and is a lying, thieving, conniving murderer!<sup>1</sup>

Leaders in the congregation, you'd better be alert and spiritually equipped to oppose your enemy. Those of you who follow them, it behooves you to not only pray for civil leadership<sup>2</sup> but even more for your spiritual leaders.<sup>3</sup> If Satan can manage to destroy a church's leadership, he can often bring the entire congregation to a grinding halt.

Adolph Hitler, one of Satan's most famous disciples once wrote, "Mental confusion, contradiction of feeling, indecisiveness, panic; these are our weapons."

He must have read the book of Nehemiah but focused on the dark side! He must have been a disciple of Sanballat! Sanballat and Tobiah (as well as others) tried to generate fear<sup>4</sup> and confusion but, fortunately for God's people, Nehemiah didn't listen. Nehemiah and the people finished the job in only 52 days, much to the chagrin of God's enemies.<sup>5</sup>

I would like to share with you four strategies that Satan used against Nehemiah and still uses to this day against spiritual leaders.

### 1. **Compromise** "We will help you work" (Nehemiah 6:1-4)

Up to this point, the bad guys had opposed everything that God's people had done but now they suddenly flipped and offered to cooperate and help! They asked to meet with

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<sup>1</sup> John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Peter 5:8

<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy 2:1-3

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25

<sup>4</sup> Nehemiah 6:9, 13-14, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Nehemiah 6:15-16

Nehemiah in a village halfway between Jerusalem and Samaria. They probably suggested “We’re willing to meet you half way. Don’t be unfriendly! Don’t be a hard-liner!”

The problem is that once you let that kind get inside your defenses, let them inside the leadership, they will split your people, diffuse your focus and set all kinds of monkey wrenches in the works!

Cooperation has an important place in God’s work, but it must be with the right people, at the right time, and for the right reason. Satan will often try to get his people into the congregation’s leadership so that he can slow things down and cool things down.

- **Acts 20:28-31 HCSB** Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. (29) I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. (30) And men from among yourselves will rise up with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them. (31) Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears.
- **2 Corinthians 11:13-14 HCSB** For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder! For Satan himself is disguised as an angel of light.

Loving compromise and cooperation are fine as long as there are no moral or spiritual issues involved.

How did Nehemiah avoid this attack? First, in verse 2 we see that he knew that they were lying and that their motives were murderous. Spiritual leaders need to possess extraordinary **discernment and perception**.

Second, he was absolutely convinced of the importance of his work and refused to be distracted from it. A leaderless project is an aimless project and will eventually fall apart. Spiritual leaders need to be people of **conviction and disciplined focus**.

Third, he knew that at the most basic level he and his people had nothing in common with Sanballat’s crowd.

- **Nehemiah 2:20 HCSB** I gave them this reply, “The God of heaven is the One who will grant us success. We, His servants, will start building, but you have no share, right, or historic claim in Jerusalem.”

God’s people must be different from the people of the world. We must not apologize for that. We must celebrate that. We must maintain that separation.<sup>6</sup> We should not be so separated that we are of no earthly good, but we must retain our distinctive status and culture, lest we become so inured to sin and adapted to the world’s culture that we grow deaf to the voice of our Good Shepherd.<sup>7</sup> Spiritual leaders need to be **counter cultural**.

## 2. Slander: “We’ll tell everybody about you” (Nehemiah 6:5-9)

The fifth time Nehemiah was approached by the enemy, it was with an open letter that accused him of sedition. We see in this that the disciple is not above his Master for the Lord too was falsely accused of sedition.<sup>8</sup>

The bad guys were hoping to undermine Nehemiah’s reputation and authority. Statements like “it’s been reported”, and “people are saying” have caused trouble in congregations for thousands of years. It’s a well-worn tool of the devil precisely because it is an effective one. In every group, even one as healthy as ours, there will rise gossipmongers who hover like vultures, just waiting for tidbits of slander that they can chew, swallow, and regurgitate. Gossip can be defined as “*news you have to hurry and tell somebody else before you find out it isn’t true!*” Listen to me well; when you receive such a wicked person and give them a

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

<sup>7</sup> John 10:27; Mark 4:9

<sup>8</sup> Luke 23:1-5

listening ear, you are metaphorically eating vulture vomit. I can assure you that it will have a consequence on your spiritual health!

This attack had a second prong that can be seen in verse 7. While on one hand accusing Nehemiah of sedition, on the other they claimed that his motive was so that he could set himself up as king.

Spiritual leaders need to be able to handle false accusations, vicious letters, unfounded reports, and gossip. If they do not, they will lose their perspective and end up spending so much time trying to defend themselves and stamp these little fires out that they will cease performing their God-given function in the church.

Nehemiah did not fall for this. He simply denied the reports, prayed to God for strength, and kept on working! Righteousness is a shield!

- **Proverbs 2:7 HCSB** He stores up success for the upright; He is a shield for those who live with integrity

Leaders, listen to me. Take care of your character and God will take care of your reputation.

### **3. Threats:** “we will protect your life” (Nehemiah 6:10-14)

In verse 12, we see that Shemaiah, a “hireling prophet” (which is a revealing title by the way), devised a plan to trap Nehemiah. He pretended to be afraid for his life and gave the impression that he and Nehemiah were in the same boat. He suggested to Nehemiah that they both hide in the temple where the enemy would not be able to reach them.

It’s possible that Shemaiah was of priestly descent since he felt he had access to the temple, but Nehemiah did not let that influence him.

“*Should a man such as I flee*” he asked in verse 11. Where before he had said “*I cannot come down*” (v. 3) now he says “*I will not go in.*” (v.11) Unlike the hireling, Nehemiah was a true shepherd of God’s flock and knew his limits. He was not a priest. He was not qualified to enter into the Temple. Nehemiah rejected this plan because it was against the Law of Moses. It was forbidden for laymen to go beyond the altar of burnt offerings.

- **Numbers 18:7 HCSB** ...an unauthorized person who comes near *the sanctuary* will be put to death."

When king Uzziah tried this he was stricken with leprosy!<sup>9</sup> To have entered the Temple would not only have made him look like a coward in front of the people; it would not have only proved him to be faithless; it might have also angered the Lord against him and that would have been that!

Nehemiah knew that Shemaiah was a false prophet because Shemaiah was encouraging him to do something contrary to the Word of God. This ALWAYS identifies a false prophet. The Holy Spirit inspired the Word of God and will not contradict it. Not only all disciples, but their spiritual leaders above all, must know the Scriptures backwards and forwards so that when someone asks them to do something against God’s will it can be immediately identified and rejected!

### **4. Intrigue:** “we will not give up” (Nehemiah 6:15-19)

That they had fulfilled the prophet Daniel’s prophecy by rebuilding the walls “in difficult times”<sup>10</sup> was an embarrassment to the enemy but the enemy refused to give up. Satan is no quitter and he will keep on fighting long after all the humans have declared his defeat. Many careless Christians have won the battle but lost the war because of this trait of his.

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<sup>9</sup> 2 Chronicles 26:16-21

<sup>10</sup> Daniel 9:25

Satan and his followers never stop looking for an opportune time to attack.<sup>11</sup> Trust me, when you can't see Satan attacking it is because he has gone underground. He is probably trying to tunnel under your defenses.

As often as not, open opposition works well for God's work and God's people. Throughout time it has been when we have been the most persecuted that the church has flourished the most. Yet, intrigue can snuff the life right out of a congregation before the people are even aware there's a plot afoot.

Don't believe everything you hear or read about spiritual leaders. Carefully consider the source and firmly refuse to listen to anything for which there is not corroborating evidence. Lashon hara has become such an engrained part of our culture that I sometimes wonder if we have not come to the place of which Jeremiah spoke:

- **Jeremiah 9:4 HCSB** Everyone has to be on guard against his friend. Don't trust any brother, for every brother will certainly deceive, and every friend spread slander.

As hard as it is to believe, the other leaders, even the ones from the tribe of Judah, the ones who had the most at stake here, ended up compromising with Sanballat's crowd. Why? They began listening to the gossip.

They began getting emotionally bound to the wicked ones.

They became tied to them through marriage and alliance.

Lest we begin judging them too harshly, let us ask ourselves, "Are we totally yielded to the Lord and fully obedient to Him? Do we ever permit human relationships to influence our decisions so much that we deliberately disobey the Word of God?"

Jesus said,

- **Matthew 10:37 HCSB** The person who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; the person who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

These traitors not only listened to Tobiah and passed Tobiah's messages on, but they also told Tobiah everything Nehemiah was trying to do. In fact, they kept repeating to Nehemiah what a fine man Tobiah was! The Teacher was absolutely correct when he said,

- **Proverbs 28:4 HCSB** Those who reject the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law battle against them.

Which one are you going to be? The one who praises the wicked or the one who battles against them? Are you going to be one of those who cannot help but talk about the false prophets like charismatic Benny Hinn, or the prophets of the prosperity gospel like Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, TD Jakes, and Kenneth Copeland?

It is alarming how often God's people succumb to this type of false teaching, compromising with the world, taking its philosophies and values and grafting them onto the Gospel!

## Conclusion

I would like to leave you with the same challenge that Jeremiah threw out.

- **Jeremiah 5:30-31 HCSB** A horrible, terrible thing has taken place in the land. (31) The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own authority. My people love it like this. But what will you do at the end of it?

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 26:4; Mark 14:1; John 5:18; 7:1; 11:53; Acts 9:23; 25:3