

The Path to Restoration

Remaining Steadfast

Nehemiah 6

Introduction

"Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate, and doubt, to offer a solution everybody can understand." - Collin Powell

That is what Nehemiah does in Chapter 6. It is why his enemies try to damage his reputation and destroy his credibility, all to stop the work on Jerusalem's walls. Zechariah 13:7 says, "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."

That is the devil's strategy in Chapter 6. But Nehemiah is a great leader! He remains firm in his purpose and dedicated to his priorities. Chapter 6 emphasizes Nehemiah's relentless persistence.

I. Relentless Persistence

Verses 1-4 warn us to beware when your enemy wants to be your friend! In almost every case, friendship with the enemy proves to be a disaster.

"Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm. So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner." ([Neh 6: 1-4 NKJV](#))

The wall is almost finished, and the gaps have been closed. Only the gates needed to be hung for the project to be finished. Nehemiah's enemies realize time is running out for them to stop the work on the wall. If they don't do something soon, the walls will be completely restored, and Nehemiah will have finished his goal.

So three leaders who don't want Israel to be rebuilt meet together and propose a peace summit. Sanballat, Governor of Samaria, Tobiah, leader of the Ammonites, and Geshem, leader of the Arabs, invite Nehemiah, as governor of Judah, to attend.

Satan knows if he can distract or discredit the leader, he can sabotage the whole mission. He loves to use subtle deception and half-truths to distract us and draw us away from the goal.

Four times these governors said, "Come, let's meet together." But Nehemiah knew these guys were malicious and that their intent was evil. He realizes their reason for inviting him is to ambush him and halt the project. Satan uses subtle

deception, half-truths, and high sounding appeals to draw you out. But Nehemiah sees right through their offer. He tells us, "But they thought to do me harm." Thank God for spiritual discernment! He sends back the same answer four times, "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down."

Just because you resist the devil once, don't think he will give up and leave you alone! He will try again and again, hoping to wear you down. But Nehemiah remained firm. He knew that he had not finished the important task God had given him. Walls without gates are about as effective as no walls at all. The priority was to finish the wall. Nehemiah wouldn't allow an unnecessary meeting with the enemy to distract him from actually building the wall.

Planning is essential, but once you have the plan, it's time to build! Nehemiah's response is, "Why should the work cease while I leave it to go down to you?" Four times the request to meet comes, and four times Nehemiah refuses to be drawn into their scheme.

It is the Spirit of God that gives you discernment. And it is this discernment that gives you spiritual focus. Nehemiah knew what God wanted him to do, so that's what he did. Every leader must contend with a hundred noble causes. But in the end, godly leaders must choose those causes that God puts upon your heart and remain focused. And it is discernment that gives us focus.

After four frustrating attempts to lure Nehemiah into an ambush, his enemies decide to change their tactics. So they send an open letter to Nehemiah that contains a rumor accusing him of plotting to rebel and become the new king of Jerusalem. The letter also contained a not-so-veiled threat that if Nehemiah doesn't want these nasty rumors to get back to King Artaxerxes, he needs to agree to meet with them (6:5-7).

But Nehemiah, again, ignores them despite their slander and accusations.

II. Resolute Perseverance

In verse 5, we see the subtlety of the enemy's slander. "Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. In it *was* written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, *that* you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, "*There is* a king in Judah!" Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together. Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart." For they all *were trying to* make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, *O God*, strengthen my hands." (Neh 6:5-9 NKJV)

Sanballat's slander begins the way most verbal attacks do, as a report of what others have reportedly said. Vague accusations give the appearance that

"Everyone is talking about" or, "A lot of people are saying." These generalizations cannot be documented or verified. They are intentionally vague to bolster support. A lie is a lie, even if a thousand people repeat it. No amount of repeating it will ever make it true. However, if you tell a lie long enough, people start to believe it.

Sanballat lies to damage Nehemiah's integrity and challenge his motives. But everything Nehemiah did had the blessing of the king. He had gone above and beyond the call of duty and even made great sacrifices to demonstrate that he had no personal agenda.

The devil loves to push your hot buttons. He knows those lies and accusations that really get to you. Satan loves to spread slanderous and false rumors about you, especially if you're dedicated to doing a good job in order to honor God.

Usually, letters between officials were sealed and private. But Sanballat knew that if the letter was not sealed, others would read it. The thing about a rumor is you only have to launch it with one gossip, and it will spread like a virus from person to person, growing more malicious with each telling. Invariably, rumors attack the character and motives of a person. Those who spread rumors are not really interested in the truth.

How does Nehemiah respond to all of this? - with truth and prayer. Sanballat made a direct threat, and since this was an open letter making serious public accusations, Nehemiah couldn't remain silent. Nehemiah sends a message back to Sanballat, stating the truth and firmly denying the charges: "Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind" (6:8).

Then, he prays, "But now, O God, strengthen my hands." The power of deliverance is in the hands of God. And that is why we pray! Nehemiah stands firm in his priorities and resists his enemies with truth and prayer. Nehemiah remains calm but tells Sanballat that he is a liar, and his efforts will not halt the work on the wall.

You can't satisfy people like Sanballat with facts, explanations, and evidence. People like Sanballat and Tobiah will only be satisfied if you give in to their demands, and Nehemiah refused to do that! Sanballat didn't care if the whole world thought he was a liar so long as he could somehow stop the work on the wall.

Nehemiah saw through the slander and evil strategy and didn't buy into the scare tactics. He and the workers remained steadfast at work on the wall. If you attempt to do anything out of the ordinary, people will talk about it, and they'll talk about you, and there's little you can do about it.

The path forward is to remain determined and refuse to give in to fear. Then do what Nehemiah did; pray for God's strength and power. In verses 10-14, a false prophet tries to get Nehemiah to hide in the temple. But again, Nehemiah refuses and continues with renewed purpose.

III. Renewed Purpose

Verse 10 says, "Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who *was* a secret informer; and 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; indeed, at night they will come to kill you." And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who *is there* such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced *this* prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this reason he *was* hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so *that* they might have *cause* for an evil report, that they might reproach me. My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid." (Neh 6:10-14 NKJV)

When fear and innuendo don't work, the enemy combines deception with intimidation. They try to scare Nehemiah into taking action that would cause fear in the workers and halt the progress on the wall. The false prophet, Shemaiah, sends word to Nehemiah that there's a plot to kill him and urges him to take refuge in the temple. Nehemiah would later find out that Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him (6:12).

Shemaiah claims to have a word from God that could save Nehemiah's life! If Nehemiah had followed this counsel, he would have sinned and maybe even have been killed. Nehemiah was not a priest, so to hide in the temple would be a violation of God's law in Numbers 18:7. Non-priests could flee for protection to the "horns of the altar" in the temple courtyard (1 Kings 1:50; 2:28; Exod. 21:14), but they could not enter the temple itself.

What did Nehemiah do? He resists Satan's intimidation with prayer and fearlessness. In verse 11, he says, "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" (6:11).

Nehemiah knew only priests were allowed in the temple. In 2 Chronicles 26, King Uzziah - who was not a priest - went into the temple, and God instantly struck him with leprosy. Nehemiah also knew that a true prophet would never counsel someone to do something against God's Word.

It is better to lose your life in the path of obedience to God than to try and save your life through disobedience. When Satan sends people to intimidate you, respond with fearless obedience and prayer. Instead of lashing out against Shemaiah, Nehemiah commits all these wicked men, and the situation, to God.

In verse 15, the workers complete the wall, and we see Nehemiah's remarkable poise in the events that follow!

IV. Remarkable Poise

Verse 15, "So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth *day* of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard *of it*, and all the nations around us

saw *these things*, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God." (Neh 6:15-16 NKJV)

Did you hear that? They finished the wall! The walls were in ruin for more than 100 years, yet rebuilt in only 52 days. So why wasn't the job done in the more than 100 years before? It wasn't that no one saw the problem. It was obvious the wall needed to be rebuilt.

The problem was there was no leader to step forward and take charge of the project. Wishing there was a wall will never produce a wall! It took someone at the right time with the right plan to inspire the people to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah was such a man. His heart ached because of the devastation and destruction of Jerusalem. It was Nehemiah who prayed and planned, and boldly asked for permission to rebuild the city walls. It was Nehemiah who went and fought and encouraged the workers until the job was complete.

God used Nehemiah to set right a 100-year-old problem in less and two months - and that same God sits on His throne in heaven and still works these same kinds of miracles today. God can work through anyone who has a heart like Nehemiah's. God can work through you to bring about his miracle for you and your family, this church, and even this city.

But remember, it all began with four months of prayer. The work itself took less than two months, but Nehemiah worked longer than that in prayer before completing the job. The battles were hard; the work was demanding, and there were challenges from within and without. But they finally finished the project, and now they could enjoy their victory.

Their enemies lost heart because it was evident that God was with the people who did the work. The people of Jerusalem became a witness to all the surrounding nations. Many Christians go unnoticed because their faith is too weak, and their confidence is so low they can't believe God can do a restoring work in them.

Through prayer is how you find the faith to believe that the Lord will do a miracle work. When the enemies and surrounding nations saw that the wall was completed, they knew the battle was over. They knew that this victory was from God! That should be a model for us. Our success requires hard work but depends on God.

Unless God builds the house and guards the city, we labor in vain (Ps. 127:1). We want even God's enemies to glorify Him (1 Pet. 2:12).

Conclusion

Satan may have lost the battle, but he didn't give up. He just moved in and infiltrated the ranks. Tobiah, the governor of the Ammonites, was half-Jewish. He was related by marriage to at least two influential Jews, and he had business contracts with them. They were the ones who told Nehemiah about Tobiah's "good deeds" and then reported to Tobiah the things Nehemiah said in their presence.

Satan often infiltrates the ranks of a church devoted to the cause of Jesus Christ with people that profess to be believers. But their hearts are in the world, and they oppose godly men like Nehemiah, who expose their spiritual indifference and sin. Verse 17 says, "Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and *the letters of Tobiah* came to them. For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me." (Neh 6: 17-19 NKJV)

Tobiah opposed the rebuilding of the walls along with Sanballat. He was disturbed that Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls, and he mocked Nehemiah's work. Tobiah was angry about the work being done, and he tried many times to get Nehemiah to stop the work. But some in Judah had no trouble being friends with such a person. They even tried to recommend him to Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was watching and on guard in a way that others were not. These nobles also had a self-interest at work. They had financial dealings with Tobiah they wanted to protect. Nehemiah spoke some strong words against Tobiah and prayed the evil Tobiah planned against him be turned back upon him. Nehemiah puts these evil people in God's hands and says nothing more about them. He lets go of it and lets God take care of it.

Nehemiah had a work to do, and that work did not include getting involved with people like Tobiah. When you're on a mission for God, you must remember the battle belongs to the Lord. We may have to work together to resist opposition, but the victory will be ours if we remain strong and courageous and steadfast in faith.