

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/20/10

Series: “Facing the Past, Moving Ahead for God’s Honor: Nehemiah”

Current study: Nehemiah 6:1-14 “Dealing with Distractions in God’s Work”

Distractions. If we’re going to do the will and work that God has for us, we must learn to deal with potential distractions. That’s certainly the case in our day when there are so many things, so many voices calling for our attention. And so, if we are to heed God’s purpose, we must maintain our singular focus and say no to whatever might derail us from God’s agenda.

That’s one of the things that made Nehemiah a tremendous leader, as we’ll see in our study this evening in Nehemiah 6.

The book of Nehemiah is about *building*. It’s the story of how God used one man to lead His people in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem in the fifth century B.C.

Discuss: Why did God want us to know about the rebuilding of this wall?

1. It teaches us something about God. He is faithful to His promises.
2. It teaches us about how to live for God. There’s no room for passivity in living for God. Dependence, yes. Laziness, no.

A Quick Review of the Book

*Ch 1—Nehemiah prayed about the problem.

*Ch 2—God answered Nehemiah’s prayer.

*Ch 3—God’s people started rebuilding the wall.

*Ch 4—God’s people faced opposition.

*Ch 5—God’s people faced an internal challenge.

So as chapter 6 begins, the task is underway, but it’s not finished yet. The people have overcome some obstacles, but they haven’t completed the task God gave them to do.

Then in chapter 6, further opposition developed. This opposition was targeted particularly towards, not the people, but the leader. One way to stop a job is to get the people discouraged or sidetracked. An equally effective way is to distract the leader.

In chapter 6, Nehemiah faced two forms of deception intended to get him to quit.

I. The first form of deception came from the enemy himself (1-9).

Q: Who was the enemy? See verse 1

Q: At what stage was the building project when the enemy took action this time? Verse 1

Remember, in ch 4 the same enemy tried to stop the project by using intimidation and threatened assault of the people. Since that didn’t work, they now try a different tactic.

A. The enemy tried to harm Nehemiah’s life (1-4).

How?

1. *The enemy’s offer seemed so innocent (1-2).*

Q: What did Sanballat and Geshem do? Verse 2—they just wanted to get together and meet with Nehemiah. A friendly gesture from the “Welcome Wagon,” right?

Q: What was their real intent, according to Nehemiah’s assessment at the end of verse 2?

2. *Nehemiah wasn't fooled (3.)*

Q: What was his response? Verse 3

Q: How did the enemy respond?

3. *The enemy was persistent (4a).*

They sent messengers four times.

Discuss: Why did they keep sending the same message? This is one of the enemy's most affective approaches—to wear down God's people by constantly hitting them over and over.

4. *Nehemiah was more persistent (4b)!*

READ verse 4, "...each time I gave them the same answer."

Victory today doesn't give me excuse to let down my guard tomorrow.

The enemy didn't give up...

B. The enemy tried to blackmail Nehemiah's reputation (5-9).

How? They sent the same message the fifth time, this time in the form of a letter.

Q: What detail are we given about this letter in verse 5?

1. *The enemy sent an unsealed letter (5).*

Q: Why did Sanballat send Nehemiah an *unsealed* letter? What did he want Nehemiah to know?

We're given the contents of the letter in verses 6-7. In short, the letter was full of lies...

2. *The letter was full of lies (6-7).*

Note the first words, "It is reported among the nations." Sanballat is trying to intimidate Nehemiah. How so? He tells him "the nations" know what he's doing! Talk about an exaggeration!

And I love the phrase, "And Geshem says it is true." Who is Geshem? Not the most objective person on the scene!

What was the report that Sanballat was circulating? It contained three lies...[read verses 6-7]

- "The Jews are planning to revolt."
- "You want to be king."
- You've hired prophets."

Q: What was Sanballat's intent for sending this letter? See the end of verse 7—he's trying to force Nehemiah to meet with him. Blackmail!

How did Nehemiah respond?

3. *Nehemiah refused to stop doing God's will (8-9).*

What a man of God! In response he did three things...

•He denied the lies (8).

Q: Where did he say the lies originated?

•He saw the attack for what it was (9a).

Q: Namely, what?

•He prayed for strength (9b).

Discuss: The book of Nehemiah is full of these "mini-prayers" by Nehemiah. What do we learn about prayer from Nehemiah's example?

II. The second form of deception came from a religious source (10-14).

Yes, a *religious* source. One of Satan's greatest tactics to hinder God's work is to use *religious* people.

A. A spokesman for God warned Nehemiah to take cover (10).

Q: When did it happen? "One day..."

Nehemiah went to see Shemaiah. We're not told why he went. Perhaps he was called for. Shemaiah was "shut in at his home."

It was a set-up, a trap. As we'll see in a moment, Shemaiah was a man with religious connections (he had access to the temple). What he said to Nehemiah sounded so pious...

1. *He invited him to go to God's house.*

Q: Why? READ verse 10

2. *He offered to go with him.*

On the surface, he sounds like a real friend, doesn't he? He thought enough of Nehemiah to warn him to take cover. But...

B. Nehemiah refused to do so (11-14).

Why?

1. *He knew it would tarnish his reputation.*

Q: Why did Nehemiah say he wouldn't take Shemaiah's advice?

2. *He knew this message wasn't from God (12-13).*

Q: Where was it from? From the enemy! This was a hired, hit man!

Q: What was the intent of this plot? See verse 13

Discuss: How did Nehemiah know this man was a fraud? We're not told.

Application: There are lots of voices out there telling us the "right" thing to do? How can we tell which voice to follow?

3. *He committed the problem-people in his life to God (14).*

This is key. What does Nehemiah pray in verse 14?

Life is full of problem people. If you're serious about doing God's will, there will be plenty of people—including *religious* people—who will try to stand in the way. We can learn from Nehemiah. He prayed. And then he...

4. *He kept doing the task God had given him to do.*

What happened according to the very next verse? Verse 15

Lessons: We learn some vital lessons about living for God...

1. *The enemy is subtle.*

2. *We need to live our lives to please God, not people.*

We all fail to do this at times. That's yet another of a thousand reasons why we need a Savior. Jesus Christ came and lived to please God all the time, and on the basis of His perfect life, death as a substitute, and resurrection, God accepts those who put their trust in Him.

3. *When the enemy attacks us, we're reminded how much we need God.*

Discuss: What are some reasons God allows His people to face opposition when they're trying to do His will?