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"Things were going so well, what a time for this to happen!" Did you ever hear that before? In his goal of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to stand up to the progressively violent threats of the enemy which were aimed at disheartening an aggressive, purposeful work force (chapter 4). He had to deal with internal conflict between the wealthy and poor Jews which served to discourage the body of the people as a whole (chapter 5) He and his people had successfully overcome these various oppositions they had faced thus far. ***there is a shift end of chapter 5 as Nehemiah speaks about himself as an example of how to walk in integrity... honoring God and honoring people..this is important for it demonstrates his character!***

Neh 5:14 Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. ¹⁵ But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels^[a] of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. ¹⁶ Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we^[b] did not acquire any land.

¹⁷ Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. ¹⁸ Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

¹⁹ Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.

A. He denied himself his deserved wage. (14)

B. He feared God; God gave him the job, He would provide. (15)

C. He continued in the work. (16)

D. He relinquished some of his rights. (16)

E. He didn't want to overburden an already burdened people. (18)

F. He asked God to bless him for his work. (19) and knew that God doesn't hand his paychecks out on Friday afternoon. He asked but one thing, "Think upon me, my God, for good."

The people the governor ruled would have provided his food allowance (v. 14). Rather than taking advantage of his opportunity to acquire real estate, Nehemiah gave his attention to rebuilding the wall (v. 16). He also provided for the needs of over 150 Jews who worked on the wall out of his own pocket (vv. 17-18)

Nehemiah took care of his character and trusted God to take care of his reputation. Because that is what is going to be attacked next!...His Character! the enemy....he tries to destroy Nehemiah's reputation by attacking his character...

Satan has a talent for making an offensive move against the Christian just at the right momentThe work was pressing forward, spirits were high as The breaches in the wall have been repaired, and the wall is complete except for the doors in the gates. But the enemy has not given up.....Satan has a talent for making an offensive move against the Christian just at the right moment.

Nehemiah took care of his character and trusted God to take care of his reputation. For in chapter 6 we once again are confronted with the ways of the enemy....he tries to destroy Nehemiah's reputation by attacking his character...

He launches an all out attack on the leader himself. It's when the leader is under verbal attack of the intimidating public that he shows his true colors. **The heavyweight boxing champion of the world, not only must be able to deliver a devastating knockout punch, but he must be able to take the same punch and go another round. These principles undoubtedly spill over into the realm of our Christian service.**

In chapter six Nehemiah faces three personal attacks: in (6:1-4) **he faces guile, deceit and conspiracy; in (6:5-9) his motives are questioned by innuendo; and in (6:10-14) the enemy continues its' attack by intimidation.**

Since Sanballat and his sinister buddies failed in their attempts to stop the wall builders, *they decide now to concentrate their attacks on Nehemiah himself by changing their tactics and resorting to subtle persuasion. Let's try to entice him with something that he might like.*

we pick up the narrative.....the Enticement...Flattery... the I have your best interest in mind approach... to Entice...is to paint a picture of something pleasing to capture your focus on something other than what you are doing right now.

Nehemiah 6: *1 When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab 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—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; 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?" ⁴ Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

- These enemies suddenly become "Nehemiah's friends" and invite him to a conference down on the plain of Ono.
- Ono was located near the seacoast. It was a beautiful resort area. that would sound refreshing...my enemies now want to hang out and resolve our issues....that is great I am so tired of trouble...and could sure use a vacation...
- after all we have been working tirelessly for the Lord and have been fighting both external enemies and even internal drama...they are tired, and then all of a sudden they get an offer for a "Vacation in Ono"! Seacoast living instead of in the heat and rubble of Jerusalem.
- Sounds pretty enticing to me...Sounds pretty Intriguing to me! And that's where the enemy begins...with Intrigue. "Come, let's meet together. We should try to iron out our differences. You're in favor of peace, aren't you? Don't you want good relationships with your neighbors? We just want to foster mutual understanding." It all sounded so good, but Nehemiah rightly perceived that their intent was to ambush him if he went.
- **Satan still uses all sorts of innocent-pleasurable sounding appeals to lure believers into a trap.**

2 Corinthians 11:14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an *angel of light*.

- **But He isn't playing games: he wants to devour you**

1 Pet. 5: ⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

- ***But Nehemiah senses danger: "they were scheming to harm me."*** So Nehemiah said, "Oh, no!" to Ono.
- More than likely, ***Nehemiah's enemies wanted to lure him out of Jerusalem and away from the support and armed defense that he had there...so they could ambush him.***
- But the enticement comes from a very strategic scheme: ***How can I lure them away from their fortified encampment...how can I get them away from the place where they get their support and strength from and distract them from what matters most???***

Personal Attack Principle #1: Beware of Enticements... The Enemies Purpose For The Enticement Is To Get You To Separate Yourself From Your Source of Support and Strength

- The devil believes that if he can just entice you and continue it long enough you will cave...you'll stop what you are doing and walk toward the distraction... four times he enticed Nehemiah
- But Nehemiah was a man of prayer and action and wasn't easily enticed...that prayer life led to a life that could hear the Spirit of God and was wise...it says that he responded decisively four times.

But the enemy wasn't done...*they realized that their tactics of Enticement wouldn't budge Nehemiah so they turned to their next strategy: He insinuated* evil motive, and everyone know this!...attacked his credibility...

Nehemiah 6:⁵ *Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter⁶ 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 king⁷ 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."*

- *When the enemy cannot accomplish his purpose by offering peace and pleasure, he switches back to his original scheme of sinister threats. He moves from political softball to political hardball.*
- *When I can't sway you with flattery I will tear you down by Slander...I know your motives and so does everyone else!*

He moves to **Insinuation**....***Insinuation: an unpleasant hint or suggestion of something bad.**

- Note that it was an "unsealed letter...a total sign of disrespect...Persian practice in letters of official business...roll up.. wrap around with string and seal with official signet ring and wax...
- but sending it unsealed was also designed for everyone to read, so that the lie would be spread around as official that Nehemiah was trying to make himself king.

Personal Attack Principle #2: When The Enemies Enticement Doesn't Work He Will Insinuate Evil Motives

But look at Nehemiah's matter of fact Godly response...

Nehemiah 6:⁸ *I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.”* 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.”*

- When distinct, definite, public charges are made against a man he is bound to answer them, and answer them in the clearest and most open manner. To decline all investigation is in such a case practically to plead guilty, and ... the general public ordinarily regard a refusal to reply as a proof of guilt.
- Since this open letter was serious a public accusation against Nehemiah, he did not remain silent. First, he sent a message back to Sanballat stating the truth and firmly denying the charges:

Nehemiah responded three different ways: 1)he denied the rumor, 2)he prayed to God for strength, and 3)he went back to work.

- Nehemiah and the people were on the last lap of the race and the finish line was in sight.
- **And here’s what you and I are to do when we are busy about God’s business and trying to win the race set out for us:**

Nehemiah took care of his character and trusted God to take care of his reputation.

So the enemies’ method's of attack involve *Enticement*, it involves *Insinuation*, and when all that fails, once again the enemy switches his game plan...this time to *Intimidation* ... **In other words when you have a legitimate fear...compromise is acceptable!!**

Nehemiah 6:¹⁰ *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.”*

- **This man Shemaiah was said to be a prophet (he pronounced this prophecy), but he was not he was a secret informer to .**
- **Shemaiah offered Nehemiah a safe haven in the temple. Some people are out to get you. They are going to kill you.” *Nehemiah certainly believes that!***
- **It sure sounds reasonable – your life is being threatened....run to the temple for protection...**
- **But Only priests were allowed in the scanturary of the temple, and Nehemiah was not a priest. He would have been disobeying God if he had done what Shemaiah suggested. In 2 Chronicles 26, King Uzziah – who was not a priest – went into the temple, and God instantly struck him with leprosy.**

- Let us meet together in the house of God: Shemaiah knew how to use religious talk, but it was still a trap. **If Nehemiah believed Shemaiah's religious talk, he would sin and gives others something to find fault with and discredit him with.**

Nehemiah detects that something is wrong.

Nehemiah 6:¹¹ *But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me (not a priest) go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!"*

- *He knows that he is not permitted to go into the temple, for only priests could enter the holy place.... I will not go where I know not to go!*
- *I will not run away...I will be found building the wall...if you want to kill me meet me there!*

Attack Principle #3: When The Enticement and Insinuation Doesn't Work The Enemy Will Intimidate Instill Fear To Force You To Make A Compromised Decision

Nehemiah falls back on his clear understanding of who he is and what his priorities are. He is a believer in the Living God and as such doesn't need to resort to trickery or compromise to save his life.

He understood the importance of walking in the Spirit and being able to hear the voice of the Spirit and to listen to His promptings...He was in-tune:

Nehemiah 6:¹² *I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.* 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.*

***Key:** *Having right priorities gave Nehemiah the courage to do what was right.*

Courage isn't the absence of fear but ***instead it's the tenacity to do what is right no matter how much we're afraid.***

You see, it's not just a matter of saying 'no' to the wrong things. *It is about saying 'yes' to the right things, so that our priorities match up with God's priorities. keep the main thing the main thing!!*

Look at how this chapter and this part of the story ends...

Nehemiah 6:¹⁵ *So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.* 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.*

- This entire project was finished in just 52 days! listen **The path to accomplishment is sustained determined action toward a goal!**
- Why were the surrounding nations afraid? because this ragtag group of feeble people accomplished the impossible with limited abilities ...but unbelievable grit and determination...
- It had to be God with them...for it was a miracle!!!
- and if they can do this...What else can they accomplish...be afraid be very Afraid!

As we close this morning, let's ask God to apply this passage to our lives. I see at least two action steps:

1. **Practice saying, "yes" to God's priorities and what you say no to becomes easy!**

Like Jesus he knew where he was heading ...so the direction was easy!

Luke 9:51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

- The best way to not be moved off course is by being devoted to those things that are on the heart of God.
- Once we're aware of what those are, and are committed to them...Miracles happen

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What are you hearing today? What is it that's important to you? Are you locked into God's kingdom purposes or are you focused on a bunch of other things?

2. **Practice saying, "no" to the devil's distractions.**

I don't know what distractions you're faced with today but God does.

I read this week that the average American spends three hours and 46 minutes watching TV every day. That equals 52 days of nonstop TV watching per year. *By the age of 65, the average American will have spent nearly nine years glued to the tube.*

Let's take some time right now and ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify those things that are distracting you from God's priorities. Is it a friend? An activity? Your money? Your possessions? Your thought life? Your career?

When the Spirit makes it clear, decide how you can begin to say "no" to those things that are derailing you from what's most important. *Maybe you can practice saying, "no" like Nehemiah did – "I will not come down" and "I will not go in."*

Someone sent me this fictional report of a worldwide convention that Satan and his demons participated in. In the devil's opening address to his followers, he said,

"We can't keep Christians from going to church but we can steal their time. Let's keep them busy in the non-essentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds...keep them busy, busy, busy! And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotions. Let's crowd their lives with so many good things that they have no time to seek the best things."

Close

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¹⁷ Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. ¹⁸ For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shekariah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. ¹⁹ Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you are and your reputation is merely what others think of you

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Since Sanballat and his sinister buddies failed in their attempts to stop the wall builders, *they decide now to concentrate their attacks on Nehemiah himself by changing their tactics and resorting to subtle persuasion.*

* Nehemiah was not "out of the woods" yet. He and his people had successfully overcome the various oppositions they had faced thus far. **In chapter six we find pressure is brought to bear on the leader himself.** The selfish attitudes of chapter five served to discourage the body of the people as a whole. The earlier threats were aimed at disheartening an aggressive, purposeful work force. All the people, including Nehemiah, were affected to one degree or another.

He launches an all out attack on the leader himself. It's when the leader is under verbal attack of the intimidating public that he shows his true colors. **The heavyweight boxing champion of the world, not only must be able to deliver a devastating knockout punch, but he must be able to take the same punch and go another round. These principles undoubtedly spill over into the realm of our Christian service.**

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OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTER:

- I. A Well Timed Attack (6:1,3)
- II. The Strategy - An Ecumenical Council (6:2)
- III. The Rumor Mill (6:6,7)
- IV. Mission Accomplished (6:15,16)
- V. Bad Losers (6:17-19)

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I. A WELL TIMED ATTACK -

"Things were going so well, what a time for this to happen!" Did you ever hear that before? The work was pressing forward, spirits were high and then someone threw a monkey wrench into the gear box! Satan has a talent for making an offensive move against the Christian just at the right moment. I'm sure that more often than not, Satan isn't within 500 miles of the catastrophe. The world calls this situation "Murphy's Law" the Bible calls it (Rom. 8:28)!

Nonetheless the work was just about complete, Nehemiah and his cohorts were about to put the finishing touches on the wall (vs. 1). Then came word that the opposition was interested in sitting down at the conference table to discuss "détente". How often I have seen a Christian just get back on his spiritual feet when another test or trial confronts him head on. The enemy had conspired to eliminate the man of God.

II. THE STRATEGY (AN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL) -

Attack can come in such subtle form. Sanballat first wanted to get Nehemiah's mind off the work then physically remove him from the job site. This would bring the work to a stand still. Even if Sanballat and Tobiah had something constructive to contribute, these "conferences" accomplish so little. There certainly are times to communicate and get organized but some people spend more time talking about what should or could be done, than doing it!

Sanballat and Tobiah wanted to sign a "peace treaty" with Nehemiah. This was most probably their pretense. Did you ever think of this? Treaties are never signed because of the mutual trust between two parties, they are drawn up because of mutual distrust!

The enemy persisted... "four times" (vs. 4) ... but Nehemiah wouldn't take the bait.

III. THE RUMOR MILL -

Lying, slander and gossip are some of the enemy's favorite tools. There will always be those who are so small that know they can find someone just as small as they are to listen to the trash they generate.

We've already discussed criticism and the grace that is required to handle the armchair quarterbacks ... but slander ... that's another ball game. The urge to defend oneself can consume you and cause you to act irrationally. It is a fact, that either here or in heaven, God will vindicate the righteous. Oftentimes over reacting to slander only draws needless attention to an already unhealthy situation.

Nehemiah recognized that the lies of (verse 6) were not only directed against himself, but against God's work. His response, "O God, strengthen my hands."

Note the man of God's discernment ... (vs. 11) "should such a man as I flee ... ?"; (vs. 12) "I perceived that God had not sent him..."; (vs. 13) "...I should be afraid ... and sin." Nehemiah knew that his enemies would use his fear to discourage the troops.

IV. MISSION ACCOMPLISHED -

"So the wall was finished..." Five Chapters and fifteen verses later. What had been a burden in the heart of the man of God and a purpose in the mind of an almighty God, had become reality.

Results ... the enemy was "cast down in their own eyes" and "they perceived that this work was wrought of our God." The results were undeniable. If the work had not been finished there would have been every reason for one to believe the work was not of God in the first place.

V. BAD LOSERS -

The enemy had to face the reality of defeat, of course they didn't have the courage to admit it to themselves. So onward!, forward!, upward! etc... they went. They couldn't stop now they had committed themselves. Tobiah continued his anti-Nehemiah campaign to save face. The continued correspondence only served as a smokescreen to obscure the fact that their plans had been "boondoggled".

NE 6:1 When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab 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--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;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?"⁴ Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

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Nehemiah 6 – The Walls Completed

A. Nehemiah is attacked in three phases.

1. (1-4) The snare of the enemy's friendship.

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.

a. **Our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall:** The wall was almost finished – the gaps were closed, but the gates were not yet finished. For the enemies of Nehemiah and the work of God, this was a "now-or-never" time. If they didn't do something immediately to stop the work, the walls will be completely finished.

b. **Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono:** At this time, Sanballat and Geshem tried to arrange a meeting with Nehemiah – by appearances, a friendly meeting, perhaps even a reconciliation or a vacation. Their invitation may have had the sense of a break for a few days of rest and relaxation out on the plain of Ono.

c. **But they thought to do me harm:** Nehemiah was equipped to see through the outward appearance, and to understand what Sanballat's friendly offer was all about.

i. "Whether you be a pastor or a teacher or evangelist or Sunday school leader, or whatever your position may be in Christian leadership, let me say that there will always be those who are friendly to your face, but plan your downfall behind your back. Beware of the fawning, flattering Christian who is always fluttering around you, and who behind your back will be the first to rejoice when you go down." (Redpath)

d. **But they thought to do me harm:** Nehemiah was equipped with *discernment*.

i. Discernment is the ability to judge matters according to God's view of them, and not according to their outward appearance. We are often deceived by outward appearances; *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).

ii. Many people confuse being discerning with being negative or cynical; but discernment is just as able to see the good where others might miss it as it is at seeing bad where others might see good according to the outward appearance.

iii. Christians today suffer a great deal because they lack discernment. They follow leaders and teachers who give a good appearance, but don't walk in the nature of Jesus. They accept things blindly because it looks good or sounds good, without carefully judging it against the whole counsel of God's Word. We might even picture Nehemiah going to the Word of God and equipping himself with discernment. Perhaps he read [Proverbs 27:6](#): *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.* That passage alone would remind him to not look to outward appearances, but to judge soberly.

iv. How can we develop discernment? First, if you want to see things as God sees them, get to know His Word. Second, discernment comes through spiritual maturity; [Hebrews 5:12-14](#) says that discernment is something spiritual babies don't have (a baby will stick *anything* in his mouth). Third, discernment can be given as a gift from the Holy Spirit ([1 Corinthians 12:10](#)). Seek Him for it.

v. Without discernment, we can think a dangerous invitation from an enemy is really an offer of reconciliation. We can think presumption is faith. We can think our own noble desires are God's promises. We can think God is saying "now" or "later" when He is really saying "later" or "now." We can think someone is a great guy or a spiritual leader when they are really doing damage to God's people.

e. **Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you:** Nehemiah, using discernment will not only escape their trap; he won't even be distracted from his work.

i. If the enemy can *distract* God's people, then he has won; if we can start majoring on minors, and minoring on majors, we've lost our effectiveness for the work of the LORD.

ii. Nehemiah was *persistent* in his discernment; the request came four times, and each time Nehemiah stood fast and didn't fall for it.

f. **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:** Discernment gave Nehemiah *focus*; he knew what God wanted him to be doing and he did it. He wouldn't be sidetracked by things that sounded good but weren't of the LORD for him.

i. Anyone doing a work for God must contend with a hundred different noble causes, and a hundred things that might look good – and be good – but they are not what they are called to do at that time. Discernment gives us focus.

2. (5-9) 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.*

a. **It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says:** Sanballat's slander began the way many verbal attacks do, as a report of what others have reportedly said.

i. Vague accusations often sound like "Everyone is talking about" or, "A number of people are saying." Such vague words can very easily give the wrong impression.

ii. What Sanballat accused Nehemiah of was *false*. If a thousand nations reported it, it would not make it true. A popular lie may be more dangerous, but it is not truer because it is popular.

b. **The Jews plan to rebel... that you may be their king... you have also appointed prophets to proclaim:** These lies probably outraged Nehemiah. He had worked hard and trusted God greatly, so this work would be done with the blessing of the king; and he had embraced great personal sacrifice to demonstrate that he was not in this for himself. And Nehemiah would never dream of going to "rent a prophet"! Now he is accused of the very things he has worked so hard to not fall into!

i. We may as well accept it: the devil knows our hot buttons. He knows those lies, those accusations, which really get to you – and he knows how to throw them in your face. We can't stop it, so we have to learn how to deal with it!

c. **These matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together.** Now Sanballat made a plain threat. Nehemiah wouldn't be deceived into coming to this meeting (he had too much discernment for that); so now he tried slander against Nehemiah.

d. **You invent them in your own heart:** Nehemiah replied by calmly and straightforwardly telling Sanballat that he was a liar, and by carrying on with the work.

i. Nehemiah did not mount an elaborate defense, trying to prove Sanballat wrong point by point. He wasn't going to waste his time. You don't satisfy men like Sanballat with facts, explanations, and evidence. You satisfy them by giving in to their demands, and Nehemiah would not!

ii. Sanballat would not be defeated by being told he was a liar. He didn't care if the whole world thought he was a liar if *he could only cause the work to stop*. But Nehemiah was steadfast!

e. **They are trying to make us afraid:** Nehemiah had the discernment to see the slander strategy was all about fear, and he wouldn't give into it. No enemy can make us afraid; all they can do is try to make us choose fear – but it is up to us to choose it.

i. Many people live paralyzed by the fear of what others are saying about them, or what they might say about them. Instead, we should forget about it in these situations. People will talk anyway and there is little you can do about it, other than be determined that you will *not* make you afraid.

ii. 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?"

iii. "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)

f. **Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands:** We must do what Nehemiah did – pray for God's strength, His power in our lives. We can overcome the slander and fear of our enemies in our own strength. It will be said, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God.

3. (10-14) The scandal of the enemy's religion.

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.

a. **Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah:** This man **Shemaiah** was said to be a prophet (**he pronounced this prophecy**), but he was not. Shemaiah offered Nehemiah a safe haven in the temple. The idea was that though Nehemiah was said to be threatened, he could find refuge in the temple.

i. It sure sounds reasonable – and one might even take some Scripture to support it: [Psalm 61:4](#) says, *I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings*. Nehemiah needed discernment now more than ever.

b. **Should a man such as I flee:** Nehemiah, knowing the heart of God as it is revealed in the whole counsel of God's Word, had discernment. Shemaiah tried to create fear in Nehemiah and tried to get him to disobey God based on this fear.

i. Only priests were allowed in the temple, and Nehemiah was not a priest. He would have been disobeying God if he had done what Shemaiah suggested. In 2 Chronicles 26, King Uzziah – who was not a priest – went into the temple, and God instantly struck him with leprosy.

ii. "He seeks to persuade Nehemiah into an easy-going, compromising religion that will shirk persecution, that will carry no cross, and that is governed by fear of the opinions of other people."

(Redpath)

c. **Let us meet together in the house of God:** Shemaiah knew how to use religious talk, but it was still a trap. If Nehemiah believed Shemaiah's religious talk, he would sin and give others something to find fault with and discredit him with.

d. **And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in:** Nehemiah stood brave against this religious deception. In his commitment to obedience, God revealed to him the heart of Shemaiah – who was no true prophet. Instead, he was on Sanballat's payroll.

e. **My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat:** Best of all, instead of lashing out against Shemaiah and his fellow false-religionists, he simply committed these wicked men – and the situation – to God. If God could take good care of Nehemiah, then He could also take care of Shemaiah according to divine wisdom.

i. Nehemiah's response to the three-fold attack of pretended friendship, slander, and false religion makes us admire him as a leader. But we can love and admire Jesus far more.

ii. "Come down to the plain of Ono," they said to Nehemiah. But they said to Jesus, "come down from the cross." But Jesus was doing a great work – the greatest work – on the cross and would not be stopped.

ii. They slandered Nehemiah, but he didn't defend Himself. He spoke the truth and trusted in God. Jesus was also slandered and did not debate His critics – He spoke the truth and trusted in His Father in heaven.

iii. A false prophet offered Nehemiah an easy way out – but it was a way of fear and disobedience. Nehemiah would have none of it. Jesus was also offered a way out of the cross from Satan – just worship Satan, and all the kingdoms of the world would be delivered to Him. But Jesus would have none of it.

B. Completion of the wall.

1. (15-16) The wall is completed in 52 days.

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.

a. **So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days:** The amount of time it took to finish the job was remarkably short. The walls were in ruins for more than 100 years, and then they were set right in a period of only 52 days.

i. Why wasn't the job done in the more than 100 years before? It wasn't that no one saw the problem; it wasn't that walls were not wanted. Many people saw broken walls, knew how they ruined the lives of the people of Jerusalem, but no one got past the place of just *wishing* there were walls.

ii. Finally, there came a man who did more than wish Jerusalem had walls; he grieved, he ached, he prayed, he planned, he asked boldly, he went, he fought, he encouraged, he stood strong, he saw the job through to completion. But he also had people around him with the same kind of heart.

iii. We have such small ideas of how God can use us. God used a man named Nehemiah to set right a 100-year-old problem in less than two months – and the same God sits on a throne in heaven and works through you today.

b. **In fifty-two days:** At the beginning, when he saw the need, Nehemiah prayed for four months (the difference in time between [Nehemiah 1:1](#) and [2:1](#)). But the work itself took less than two months. Nehemiah worked longer in prayer than they needed to work to do the job.

i. This shows the spiritual battle was actually greater than the material battle. We are often told this, but it can be hard to believe!

c. **And all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes:** When the wall was finished, their enemies **were very disheartened**. It is a glorious thing to dishearten the enemies of God's people and to let them be discouraged for a while.

i. The battles were hard; the work was big; there were challenges from within and without. But the job was now finished, and victory was sweet.

d. **They perceived that this work was done by our God:** Their enemies were disheartened not just because the wall was finished, but especially because it was evident that God did the work. When something has the fingerprints of God on it, all our enemies notice it also.

i. The enemy is *only* disheartened when God does the work. If it is the product of man's efforts, they just laugh. Men might be fooled, and see a work of man and be impressed, but angels in heaven and every demon in hell know what has been done by man and what has been done by God.

ii. A strong, secure people of Jerusalem were a witness to surrounding nations. Many of us live Christian lives that no one takes notice of, because our walls are broken down. Let the LORD do a building work, and others will notice.

2. (17-19) The work is finished despite some who were friends with the enemy Tobiah.

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.

a. **Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah:** Tobiah was the man who had opposed the rebuilding work with Sanballat. In [Nehemiah 2:10](#) he was disturbed that Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls. In [Nehemiah 2:19](#) and [4:3](#) he mocked Nehemiah's work. In [Nehemiah 4:7](#) he was angry that the work was being done. In [Nehemiah 6:1](#) he was one of the men who tried to get Nehemiah to stop the work and come to the plain of Ono where he could be attacked.

b. **For many in Judah were pledged to him:** Yet, the nobles of Judah had no trouble being friends to such a man – because he had family ties to many in the tribe of Judah. In fact, they tried to recommend him to Nehemiah (**they reported his good deeds before me**).

i. These Jewish brothers of Nehemiah could not see what was so plain to Nehemiah. Perhaps they did not see much of the evil work of Tobiah first-hand, so they had a hard time believing it. We imagine them saying, "He's always been nice to us; look at all the good he has done."

ii. It is also possible they just didn't have the shepherd's heart, and shepherd's eyes Nehemiah had. Nehemiah was called of God to protect God's people and God's work; he was watching and on guard in a way that others were not.

iii. Also, in the case of these nobles, there was self-interest at work. They had financial dealings with Tobiah they wanted to protect. "His numerous binding agreements (**pledged to him**) within the Jewish community were probably trading contracts, facilitated by marriage connections." (Kidner)

c. **They reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him:** Undoubtedly, they saw Nehemiah as the bad guy. They figured Tobiah's deeds were good, and Nehemiah spoke some strong words against Tobiah (in [Nehemiah 4:4](#), Nehemiah prays the evil Tobiah planned be turned back upon him, and that he be captured and carried away).

i. Nehemiah had to be willing to be seen as the bad guy in order to do what is right by the people of God. He could see what the nobles of Judah could not. He knew that Tobiah's **good deeds** were not the whole story – all the while, Tobiah was sending frightening letters to Nehemiah. Those letter were not one of Tobiah's good deeds.

ii. "Tobiah's friends acted as a Fifth Column. They attempted both to propagandize on behalf of Tobiah and to act as an intelligence system for him. Tobiah himself kept on trying to frighten Nehemiah." (Yamauchi)

d. **Tobiah sent letters to frighten me:** Nehemiah wrote no more about this situation. He wasn't going to demand the nobles change their minds about Tobiah; but he wasn't going to deny what he knew to be true about Tobiah either. He seems willing to let it go and let God take care of it.

i. Nehemiah had a work to do, and that work was not really going out to attack people like Tobiah. He could leave the Tobiahs alone, as long as they weren't attacking the work of God.

1. There is a direct correlation between the effectiveness of our mission and how we treat each other.

We must be the church before we can build the church. We must care for one another before we can hope to reach this community and county for Christ.

2. Relational problems are inevitable and we can't ignore them.

Even though it's painful and it may seem easier to avoid or deny relational ruptures, we must face conflict head-on. If we don't, we'll pay because it will go underground, grow deep roots, and bear bitter fruits.

3. We must take the initiative to restore relationships whether we want to or not.

Don't wait for the other person to come to you. You need to go to them. Be tenacious about this one. If you've been hurt, go and talk it out as Jesus commanded in Matthew 18. If you've hurt someone else, go and confess what you did according to what Jesus said in Matthew 5. We're covered either way.

4. God's reputation is at stake when we have conflict.

Let's be like Nehemiah and walk in the fear of God to not only avoid the reproach of unbelievers but to also make God attractive to those who need Him – and we can do that by living in loving community with each other.

*God is in the business of turning our hurts into hallelujahs!!!

So the internal conflict was remedied....Another crisis had been "handled." *Then he talks about himself as an example of how to walk in integrity... honoring God and honoring people..this is important for it demonstrates his character!*

Neh 5:14 Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I

nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. ¹⁵ But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels^[a] of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. ¹⁶ Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we^[b] did not acquire any land.

¹⁷ Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. ¹⁸ Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

¹⁹ Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.

A. He denied himself his deserved wage. (14)

B. He feared God; God gave him the job, He would provide. (15)

C. He continued in the work. (16)

D. He relinquished some of his rights. (16)

E. He didn't want to overburden an already burdened people. (18)

F. He asked God to bless him for his work. (19) and knew that God doesn't hand his paychecks out on Friday afternoon. He asked but one thing, "Think upon me, my God, for good."

The people the governor ruled would have provided his food allowance (v. 14). Rather than taking advantage of his opportunity to acquire real estate, Nehemiah gave his attention to rebuilding the wall (v. 16). He also provided for the needs of over 150 Jews who worked on the wall out of his own pocket (vv. 17-18)

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Today, we look at Nehemiah 6 and we begin to see something that affects every person that is trying to walk out their faith...It's a thing called *Distraction!*

Today we are going to talk about: **Dealing with Distraction**. And here's the thing...Distraction can be Deadly!

I believe that Distraction is one of the primary reasons for people crowding God out of their life and finding themselves in a world of hurt because God has been ignored and pushed away for "Other" things.

I think many times those Distractions are simply man-made and self-inflicted. But *today as we look at Nehemiah 6, we are going to see how the enemy of our soul, the devil, operates in such a way to distract us from the plan and purposes of God.*

One thing that clearly emerges from our look at the Book of Nehemiah is that *life is a battle from beginning to end.* In Ephesians 6:12 the Apostle Paul warns:

Ephesians 6:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

We meet these powers of darkness in our text today.

Here in Nehemiah 6, as in many other places in Scripture, we learn that the devil has two main ways of working. *The first tactic is fear.* Satan is prowling around, as Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8, "like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

But he has another battle plan as well. He not only uses fear, *he also utilizes flattery.* 2 Corinthians 11:14 reveals that Satan "masquerades as an angel of light." *He comes with enticing promises and flattering words, assuring us that what he proposes will cost us nothing.*

Whatever method the evil one employs, whether it be fear or flattery, *Satan's aim is to distract and destroy us.*

We need to be on guard against each of these approaches. That is why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:11 that "We are not unaware of his schemes." *We need to be on guard because Satan is both a lion that devours and a serpent that deceives.*

Let me give you a simple outline of chapter 6 that will help us get a better handle today on how to deal with distractions:

- The Intrigue (Neh 6:1-4)
- The Insinuation (Neh 6:5-9)
- The Intimidation (Neh 6:10-19)

Let's take a look at the Intrigue.