

DECEPTION, INTIMIDATION, AND GOD'S WILL

Nehemiah 6:1-14

Today in the Word: After **American colonists'** victory over British in Revolutionary War, times were hard.

Rampant inflation and other problems led one officer to write Washington, urging him to proclaim himself king, to establish stable government.

Washington refused. That was inconsistent with goals established for the development of our country.

He responded: "I'm at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to this idea which seems big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my Country."

Washington faced same personal obstacles **Nehemiah** has to deal with in rebuilding Jerusalem and leading God's people.

Israel is busy doing God's will for them.

Their mission: Attract others to the Lord.

—by their love for Him —by their distinctive lifestyle.

While their purpose is not to build a city as such, the reconstruction of Jerusalem is part of the plan.

There'll be no observable entity to watch, unless they exist as a nation; as a visible people.

When Israel begins to do what God called them to do, the opposition assails them — Neh. 4-6

Whenever God's people unite to do God's will, opposition will never be far behind!

Nehemiah encounters every form of opposition imaginable to keep him from accomplishing what God called him to do.

Satan throws his whole bag of tricks at him

—like he does when WE follow God faithfully!

EXTERNAL OBSTACLES 4 FOCUS ON THE ENEMY

Enemy threatens to destroy them. *DESTRUCTION*

Fear of attack from those around them.

INTERNAL OBSTACLES 5 FOCUS ON EACH OTHER

Economic conditions inside the camp cause another obstacle:

DIVISION– Self-centeredness– Lack of love (1 Cor.)

PERSONAL OBSTACLES 6 FOCUS ON OURSELVES

Walls are complete but the doors and gates aren't hung. **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”

Enemies hear about success and again seek to stop him.

Enemies seek to cause his fall by **personal obstacles**.

If they can eliminate him or wipe out his credibility,
they can still discourage the people and stop work.

THREE ATTEMPTS TO STOP HIM

THROUGH PERSONAL OBSTACLES

* Each involves deception

* Each responded to by truth

When deception alone doesn't work, they add intimidation.

* Two attempts involve intimidation

INVITATION TO JOIN THEM FOR A CONFERENCE

TEMPTATION THROUGH DISTRACTION 6:1-4

They invent pretexts to lure him away from work to meet them.

Persistent attempts to come for a conference (**4 TIMES!**)

They admit defeat: ask for peace conference—to talk things over

DECEPTION: DISTRACTION 6:2a

“Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: ‘Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.’”

They try to get him involved in what looks like good thing.

It will distract him from work God called him to do.

We’re frequently invited to meet with the enemy

–people who don’t stand for the same things we stand for.

Some leaders believe we ought to do that.

Such meetings usually just distract us

from doing what God has called US to do.

Getting together to talk things over with the opposition

seldom produces good fruit.

We should invest energy doing what God called us to do.

THEIR REAL PURPOSE: TO HARM HIM 6:2b

“... they were scheming to harm me;”

They’re planning to harm him at meeting on plains of Ono (19 mi. from Jerusalem)

In reality they’re out to destroy him.

–like religious leaders who kept trying to dialogue with Jesus!

HIS RESPONSE: O NO! VISION 6:3 *“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 has vision of what God wants to do!

He’s committed to carrying out what God called him to do.

He refuses to go because of his **dedication to the task.**

No one can impugn that motive.

They tip their hand by refusing to come to him.

4 times they try to get him to go out to them. **6:4** *“Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.”*

Rather than accuse them, he waits them out
until they reveal their mischievous designs in the next threat.

A godly leader must know how to say no.

When faced with **temptation**, ...

When asked to **compromise the truth** or morality, ...

When **lesser good** threatens to undermine a higher one, ...

A godly leader needs practical wisdom.

Barber: "His ability to see issues clearly and stand firm under pressure safeguards him from succumbing to the wiles of his adversaries.

He doesn't let something that may be good
get in the way of something better;

thereby he also avoids their attempt to harm him.

TEMPTATION THROUGH ACCUSATION 6:5-9 *“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!’*

This is a fifth attempt to get him to come meet them.

They change the deception AND add INTIMIDATION.

DECEPTION: FALSE ACCUSATION; RUMOR;

They publicly question his motives 6:5-7a

"You're not really in this for the good of the city.

You're trying to set yourself up as KING!"

They accuse him of trying to rebel against the King.

When people can't stop God's work any other way,
they start rumors about the leader.

It's gossip—they don't identify the source of information!

It distracts people from goal; it keeps it from happening!

INTIMIDATION: EXPOSURE 6:7b *"Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us confer together."*

THEIR PURPOSE: FRIGHTEN AND DISCOURAGE THEM (Also, still to harm him!) **6:9a** *"They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, 'Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.'"*

How does he handle the questioning of his motives?

HIS RESPONSE: PERSONAL INTEGRITY

1) PURE MOTIVES! 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.'"*

2) SIMPLE STATEMENT OF TRUTH

When confronted by false accusations and rumors,
the best response is to simply tell the truth.

McGee: "I appreciate **my doctor's honesty**. When he suspected I had cancer, first thing he said was: 'I'm going to tell you the truth because, if I don't, you won't have confidence in me.' He has always laid it on the line. When there didn't seem to be any hope, he told me the plain facts. He didn't attempt to paint a rosy picture. He didn't attempt to cover up. He told it like it was."

That's what Nehemiah does. He simply states the truth.

WE ought to be known as people who tell the truth.

3) LETS GOD HANDLE IT! 6:9b

“But I prayed, ‘Now strengthen my hands.’”

He doesn't have to fight this battle in his own strength.

He turns to God for help.

Nehemiah denies the charge; but still won't meet them.

He deals with it decisively, rather than remain silent.

He has a clear conscience, so he meets the challenge head on.

He has no intention of rebelling.

He has no intention of becoming king.

He seeks divine help 6:9

When scheme doesn't work they try fear, to get him to flee.

TEMPTATION THROUGH DISTRACTION 6:10-14 *“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.’¹¹ But I said, ‘Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!’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.¹⁴ Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me.”*

They use Shemaiah who presents himself as prophet of God;
he's really working for Sanballat and Tobiah.

He's known and trusted by Nehemiah but sells himself out.

DECEPTION: FALSE REVELATION

–appears to be word from God.

He's acting like a prophet speaking for God. "God sent me"

How would he know? God reveals it to a prophet.

He's revealing plot to destroy Nehemiah.

I'm glad he reveals what's going on! Otherwise we'd wonder!

INTIMIDATION: PERSONAL Safety; Security

"They're out to get you, Nehemiah!"

"They're going to come at night and kill you!"

**THEIR PURPOSE: FEAR WOULD PRODUCE SIN
TO DISCREDIT HIM!**

Nehemiah smells a rat for two reasons:

**He comes in God's name, to distract Nehemiah
from doing what God called him to do.**

That doesn't add up.

God has revealed His plan for them.

God has demonstrated that He can handle the enemy.

Why would God now tell him to run?

**He comes in God's name, to motivate Nehemiah
to disobey God's revealed will.**

He's a layman, not a priest.

He has no business in the temple (= "Holy Place").

Num. 18:7 *"Only you and your sons may serve as priests in connection with everything at the altar and inside the curtain. ... Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary must be put to death."*

That's cause of King Uzziah's fall. **2 Chron. 26:16-21**

He enters God's house—he doesn't belong there.

Neither does Nehemiah!

That doesn't add up either.

Hiding in temple is pagan custom. Jews couldn't do that.

By hiding in fear, the people would lose confidence in him.

HIS RESPONSE: REFUSAL

He doesn't need to hide.

Nor will he sin by going into the temple.

As to God's will:

He has a vision of what God wants to do.

He knows God's Word and how it relates to this situation.

As to the intimidation:

He knows where he fits in God's plan

He's busy doing it.

He trusts God to care for him.

He refuses to let anything distract him.

He refuses to let opposition scare him off.

OBSTACLES TO DOING GOD'S WILL:

EXTERNAL => Focus on the enemy

Get your eyes off God and what He wants us to do.

Get your eyes on the opposition (on Satanic attack)

INTERNAL => Focus on one another

Division—mistreatment—lack of love

PERSONAL => Focus on ourselves

Deception => leads us astray from what God wants.

Intimidation => scares us out

No secret to Nehemiah's success in face of intense opposition:
He walks with God and trusts Him.

To turn to God in prayer is first response in facing trouble.
He knows what God wants to do;
He's committed to trust God
and carry out the plan God has given him.

ILLUSTRATION FROM MARRIAGE TRIANGLE

As husband & wife pursue God's will, they draw closer to God.

They also draw closer to one another.

That's the way it works for God's people.

As we pursue God's will, before anything else,...

we draw closer to Him ...

we also draw closer to one another.

and we carry out His plan in the world.

*Are we committed to following Him and fulfilling His plan for our
lives individually and for this church corporately?*

OUR EXPERIENCE TODAY:

What does God want us to do?

What does His Word say about it?

What things distract us from getting it done?

Are the obstacles getting to you?

How should you respond?