

GAME ON | WEEK 4 |

CRUNCH TIME

INTRO:

CRUNCH TIME:

- **In football when teams are down, especially late in the game, they resort to trick plays**
 - Often times the plays carry some risk, which is why they don't run them all the time
 - But the plays usually rely on some sort of deception.
 - A reverse leads the defense one way, but the play ends going the other direction.
 - A halfback pass, makes it look like a run, until he passes the ball to a wide open receiver.
 - Similarly the flea flicker is when the QB hands the ball off to the RB who starts to run but then pitches it back to the QB who then throws the ball downfield to a receiver.
 - All of these require the defense to stay disciplined
 - Each player must do their assignment
 - They must not let down their guard or get out of position.
 - Each of them must stay on THEIR task.
 - IF they get fooled, these are usually big plays for the offense.
 - NOTE: trick plays often work against a team that thinks the game is already won and loses focus.
- **For the team that's winning, especially late in the game, the temptation is to back off.**
 - Just milk the clock, play extra conservative, don't take unnecessary risks.
 - But what can happen when you take your foot off the gas, is that you let the other team right back into the game.
 - The lack of disciplined focus can bring about your undoing.
- **Nehemiah is nearing completion of the wall.**
 - The wall has been repaired and restored.
 - No gaps are remaining.
 - All of the gates have been rebuilt. (ch3 mentions 10, but 2 more are mentioned later, totaling 12)
 - Just the doors to complete and set in their places are all that remain.
 - **Note:**
 - An open gate (without doors) is just as dangerous as a broken wall (with gaps and breaches)
 - What good is the wall if there's ten fancy looking holes in it?

NEHEMIAH'S OPPONENTS REALIZE THAT THE PROJECT IS NEAR COMPLETION AND THEY START GETTING DESPERATE.

- **They resort to TRICK PLAYS**
 - Cleverly disguised assassination attempt: FAKE FRIENDSHIP

- Open letter to slander Nehemiah and his purpose: FALSE ACCUSATION
- Another disguised attempt to take him out, this time to trick him into sin and ruin his leadership: PHONY PROPHECY
- **All of these trick plays were desperate distractions**
 - Purpose was to get Nehemiah off task so that the project would fail.
 - But Nehemiah finishes the job — the assignment the Lord had given him

SCRIPTURE:

Nehemiah 6:1–16 NIV

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. ⁵ Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter ⁶ 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 king ⁷ 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.” 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.” 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.” ¹¹ But I said, “Should a man like me run away? Or should someone 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, my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophet Noadiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me. 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.

1: FAKE FRIENDSHIP: THEY CAME FOR HIS LIFE (V2-4)

SANBALLAT HAD PREVIOUSLY ATTEMPTED TO SHUT DOWN NEHEMIAH

- He tried mockery

- He tried intimidation and threats
- He tried to discourage

NOW SANBALLAT AND GESHEM SEEMINGLY TRY TO FLATTER NEHEMIAH

- “Come, let us meet together...”
 - An invitation to sit down with the region’s most powerful people would have felt like validation and recognition (flattery)
- Flattery often works because it appeals to our pride and ego
- Their goal hasn’t changed, just their strategy
 - Remember: they are trying to kill Nehemiah
 - Their strategy is to appeal to his ego and pride
 - Q: What does this reveal about the enemy's tactics today? He doesn't always attack us. Sometimes he invites us (by appealing to our pride and ego).
 - Not every invitation is a compliment, some are a trap.

NEHEMIAH HAS THE DISCERNMENT TO SEE THROUGH THEIR SCHEME

- He’s not duped nor taken by their flattery, he understood that they were seeking to harm him.
- I believe he has discernment from God
- But he also has vision—he knows his assignment—and that keeps him on track.
 - If you lose sight of the goal, you can get pulled away through trick plays—sneaky temptations that appeal to your pride and ego.

SANBALLAT AND GESHEM REPEAT THE INVITATION

- The enemy likewise doesn’t just tempt us once and leave us alone
- They persist in their plan—their offer of friendship and flattery
- Nehemiah has to and did resist each offer the same way: EYES ON THE PRIZE (finish the job)

2: FALSE ACCUSATION: THEY CAME FOR HIS NAME (V5-9)

SANBALLAT SENDS AN AIDE TO NEHEMIAH WITH AN OPEN/UNSEALED LETTER

- The letter contains accusations, purportedly from the peoples around Jerusalem, and confirmed by Geshem (convenient right?) THAT Nehemiah is plotting to rebel against the Persian King and make himself King of the Jews.
- It again ends with an invitation to ‘come let us meet together.’ — Let’s sort this out as friends.
- OBSERVE:
 - An unsealed letter would have allowed anyone and everyone to read this slander.
 - Part of the tactic was to run Nehemiah’s name through the mud among the people.
- FURTHER: the lie doesn’t have to be true to do its work.

- These guys are out to destroy Nehemiah
- By killing him OR discrediting him
- LASTLY:
 - This letter carries an open threat: What if the king himself hears about this.
 - They are trying to intimidate Nehemiah into meeting with them.
 - If flattery doesn't work, maybe a threat will.

NEHEMIAH RESPONDS

- Previously (as in ch4 when he was being mocked and threatened), Nehemiah ignored their words—didn't give them a response. This time, however he sends back a response: 'You're lying. You made that up.'
 - There is wisdom and discernment needed in knowing when to ignore and when to respond.
 - [Proverbs 26:4-5](#) "4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him. 5 Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes."
- Nehemiah once again exercised discernment: he saw through this new scheme of theirs
 - He knew they were trying to frighten him AND the people
 - His response was likely given to also encourage the people by reminding them of the truth — there's nothing truthful in this slander.
- Nehemiah prayed
 - The letter's goal was that their hands would grow too weak to work (by fear or discouragement).
 - Nehemiah prays: 'Now strengthen my hands'
 - Help me (us) finish the job
- By implication, Nehemiah and his people KEPT WORKING
 - Just keep on, keeping on.
 - Stay on assignment

3: PHONY PROPHECY: THEY CAME FOR HIS INTEGRITY (V10-14)

THE NEXT STRATEGY WAS TO PAY OFF A PROPHET IN ORDER TO INFLUENCE NEHEMIAH TO SIN

- Shemaiah informed Nehemiah of an urgent plot to kill him (possibly both of them)
- He's hiding out, shut in to reinforce the idea that he also is being hunted OR as a prophetic act of what Nehemiah is supposed to do.
- The problems with this fake prophecy
 - It wasn't from the Lord
 - It required him to go into the holy place of the temple—where Nehemiah CANNOT go. He doesn't have the credentials/authorization ([Numbers 18:7](#))
 - This would be a sin before God
 - Uzziah was plagued with leprosy when he went in unauthorized
 - Others (like Nadab & Abihu) died for this sin, struck by the Lord

- It also would send a message to the people: Nehemiah's afraid, Nehemiah is running from the work
 - How could he lead the project IF he was hiding in fear?
 - How could he tell the people to work and fight IF he himself was locked away?
 - How could he lead the people before the Lord IF he was violating God's law?
- All of these components were working to undermine his integrity and influence
 - If he could be exposed as a lawbreaker or coward... game over.
- The sneaky thing about this 'trick play' is that it was dressed up as religious/spiritual
 - It was from a prophet
 - Apparently someone Nehemiah knew and possibly trusted — at least someone he respected
 - It had the form, but not the substance — and yet again Nehemiah needed discernment

NEHEMIAH'S RESPONSE: 'SHOULD A MAN LIKE ME RUN AWAY?'

- Nehemiah's discernment:
 - He knew his place. It wasn't in the temple—It was on the wall with the people.
 - He knew what was at stake: if he fell, so would the wall
 - He knew THE WORD OF GOD:
 - God's word said who could enter the holy place (not him)
 - God's word is loaded with wisdom and leadership principles (boldly lead the people)
- Nehemiah's prayer:
 - God, remember what Tobiah and Sanballat have done
 - Remember what these false prophets have done (notice there's more than one — it was a coordinated movement)
 - Lord, be the judge.

4: VICTORY: COMPLETION OF THE WALL (V15-16)

THE WALL WAS COMPLETED IN 52 DAYS

- What a remarkable testimony of what God's people can accomplish when they catch the vision, put in the work, and stay on task.
- Nehemiah clearly is the leader God appointed for the hour, but he didn't do it alone. The people fulfilled God's plan.

GOD IS RECOGNIZED—HIS GLORY AND PRESENCE ARE ACKNOWLEDGED

- The nations are the ones to take notice
- It is said that their confidence fell because they realized that God helped the work.
- NOTE: Some people oppose God's work so strongly because as long as it fails, they feel justified in their rebellion. When God's work succeeds against impossible odds, they have no explanation except God, and their confidence falls apart.

- Q: Why does God give His people difficult tasks... even impossible ones?
 - One possible reason is that He will get the glory, His testimonies declared, and peoples brought to a point of decision.
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BRING IT HOME | RESPONSE:

What does God want to do in your life?

What has God called you to do?

How impossible does it seem?

What distractions (trick plays) are being run against you?

How do you gain discernment?

How do you overcome?

1: KNOW YOUR ASSIGNMENT

- Seek God
- Spend time in prayer and the word
- Allow Him to direct your steps
- Recognize where and how He has already been positioning you

2: GET DISCERNMENT & WISDOM

- God's word has everything you need for a life of faith and virtue
- The Holy Spirit still speaks today—lean into His voice
- Recognize when your ego is being flattered OR self is protected above obedience

3: STAY ON TASK—FINISH THE JOB

- Remember God who called you
- Remember God who empowers you — strengthens your hands
- Remember the vision — God's plan

GIVE HIM GLORY WHEN THE JOB IS DONE