

VII. Nehemiah in Biblical Perspective
The Memoirs of Nehemiah - Arise and Build
“Even More Adversity by the Adversary”
Nehemiah 6
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October 2, 2011 – Morning Sermon

We are in the seventh study and the sixth chapter of Nehemiah. We will cover the entire chapter but I will only start with the first few verses. I look forward to how the Lord will open up His Word for us in this study. We are unalterably committed to this coming generation and providing what needs to be met for our student, children and youth ministries. That coming generation has captured us as well as the desire for twelve years we've been able to serve the Lord and expand the ministry of Briarwood debt free and we'd like to continue that as we move forward with how the hand of God has shown Himself in this process.

Nehemiah 6:1-4 says *1 Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), 2 Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm. 3 And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” 4 And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever by His grace and mercy by this His Word be preached for you

We have pretty much come to the end of the first section of Nehemiah's memoir, the section on rebuilding the wall. Now we'll start in Nehemiah 7 on rebuilding the people. Back in Nehemiah 1 he asked two questions – how are the people and how is the city? The answer came back, the people are broken down and the city is broken down. So he took on the walls first knowing that working on the city he'd be able to work on the people. So the first part of the book is working on the walls and the next part of the book is working on the people.

When he heard of the condition of the people and the walls he immediately went to prayer. Then God gave him a plan. He moved upon the king to send him and he came to rebuild the walls which the summation of this is in Nehemiah 3. That's where we found out it is not equal gifts but equal sacrifice. If someone had a small house they built a small part of the wall sacrificially and if somebody had a larger house built a larger part. Some people heroically went beyond that but everybody built what was in front of their own house. Twelve to fifteen hundred meters of wall were built in 52 days and it's this great story of everybody coming together to accomplish it. That was the narrative of what occurred in 52 days.

In Nehemiah 4 through 6 tells you what else was happening all the while the wall was being built. That is what we have been covering now for the last three studies, on adversity. You have also heard the word inevitable. So since I'm using that word I want to make sure I'm using it right so I went and consulted “Mr. Webster” (the dictionary). Mr. Webster defines inevitable as that which cannot be evaded, that which cannot be

avoided, that which is certain to come. So adversity is inevitable. If you go to Christ, get on the wall, go to the mission, on message, on ministry, adversity is inevitable. You can't avoid it, evade it, it's certain.

You have an Adversary and that's why he is even named Satan which means adversary. He'll always have Sanballets, Tobiahs and Geshams, people like that but he is the one that will come against you. Those of you who have put your trust in Christ, if you decide you don't really want to engage in Christ's mission and ministry then that may be the evidence you have never put your trust in Christ but if you don't want adversity just go to the sidelines for he'll leave you alone. Go watch, be the critic and see how everybody else is doing it but if you engage you can be sure there will be adversity. Satan is not a creator, he is a destroyer. He is not a truth giver, he is a liar. He is not a life giver, he is a murderer but he sure can, dare I say, get creative in his adversity. We're going to see three more ways that he comes up with adversity.

We have already seen four ways back in Nehemiah 4. Sanballet, Tobiah and Gesham have already shown us four tactics. The first is what I call the 'cold war' tactic of mockery and ridicule. When Nehemiah said "Here's the hand of God that is upon me" and the people strengthened their hands and said "We will arise and build. Sacrificially we're going to go to the wall to repair the breaches, hang the gates and we'll get the job done." Immediately Sanballet and Tobiah came and attacked with mockery and ridicule saying 'God's people won't sacrifice. These walls have been down for 200 years. They'll live with it. God's honor won't be that important. God's call won't be that important. If they do sacrifice a fox could knock their wall down. They won't do it well.' The people rose up and built.

When that didn't work the people woke up and there is a whole army around the city. This was tactic number two of intimidation and fear. They said "We're going to invade at night and we're going to sneak in and kill you." Nehemiah told the people that half would be in the marines. The other half will be in the CBs. So half would put on a sword and guard and the other half would put on a sword and a trowel. Have you heard of WW II and the CBs? They had a gun strapped to them and then got on a bulldozer and created airfields and all kinds of things. So God's people went to the wall to work with some guarding it, some working and guarding at the same time 24/7 for 52 days.

When that didn't work it brought tactic number three. If Satan can't stop from the outside he'll go inside. Inside as people are going 24/7 and the sacrifice is being done. Sacrifice by definition impinges upon your life style. So when some see people out there threatening and the amount of work ten times they sent work to try to get those working on the wall to come home but the people stayed the course. This tactic was trying to demoralize and discourage the people.

If that didn't work they'd say "look at all the rubbish and all the wall that you have to build." Maybe the scope and reality of it all will stop them which was tactic number four, but they didn't. They just continued to work and Nehemiah stood to the wall. He got the trumpet and said "When you hear the trumpet sound, rally to the wall, you'll find us there" and they continued on.

That led us the Nehemiah 5. All of that pressure and sacrifice began to show the cracks not only in the wall but in the lives of the people. So there was one group of people who then came and said "Nehemiah you are asking too much. Forget this sacrifice stuff. 24/7, 52 days, sword and trowel, this is just too much. How about just

giving us some time off? The sacrifice is too much.” Again, the life style was impinged upon and they did not want it. Interestingly, because the people were making sacrifice and the times were tough economically there were some people who were rich, nobles and leaders, who began to make money off of people by usury and exacting interest. Nehemiah says “What you are doing is wrong” and he reinstated the Sabbath year where people forgave the debts, gave the land back, restored relationships and they promised they would no longer do that to God’s people. What about the people who didn’t want to sacrifice anymore? Nehemiah wasn’t going to put a guilt trip on them so he just set an example of himself by feeding 700 people every day, didn’t take his allowance, didn’t take the governor’s salary or any of that for 12 years just to set an example so that God’s people would embrace the mission and the vision with leadership setting the pace. They would not be behind the herd driving it but in front of the sheep leading them.

Now we come to Nehemiah 6. They are still building on the wall but in Nehemiah 6 the wall is almost done. The gates have been hung and the only thing left is the door. Each gate has a door that people can go in and out of because the gates are these gigantic things but they needed these doors. The whole wall is done, the gates have been hung but the doors haven’t been set yet. Sanballet, Tobiah and Gesham say this is their last chance so they come back one more time.

By the way, who are these three guys – Sanballet, Tobiah and Gesham? Sanballet is very likely Jewish. I know his name is not Jewish but Medo-Persian but I think he’s Jewish because later on we find out the names of his sons and they all bear the name of Yahweh. So they have Jewish names bearing God’s name so very likely Sanballet is Jewish. We have extra Biblical literature that gives information about these three men. Sanballet was the governor of Samaria. The ten northern tribes that Assyria had captured, he now is governing that section. He very likely is Jewish taking his money from the Medo-Persians and now exacting interest and doesn’t want Jerusalem to get rebuilt because for now with the walls down it’s easy pickings to do what he wants. The last thing he wants is for Nehemiah to be successful.

What about Tobiah? God’s name is in his name. He is Jewish. Tobiah actually means the Lord is good. The Lord maybe good but Tobiah is not. Tobiah is now the governor of Ammon.

Then there is Gesham the Arab. Obviously he is not Jewish. He probably had a confederacy like Bedouin tribes, Arab tribes and he was in on the fact that he wanted Jerusalem to be easy pickings for him too.

So them along with some other enemies put together an alliance and now comes adversity tactic number five. They come around God’s people and as they do that they send a message in. They want Nehemiah to come out to the plain in the valley of Ono and meet with them, the leaders. “We’ll give you a place at the table.” So here comes the strategy of entrapment and treachery. They did so to kill him. Ono is about a 2 to 3 day journey outside of Jerusalem which would be far enough if they decide to kill him he wouldn’t be able to get the marines and CBs in place to rescue him. I don’t whether Nehemiah had an informant or just discernment but he realized that this was a seduction of power designed to get him out there to kill him. So they said “Meet us out at the valley of Ono” and Nehemiah said “Oh no, I’m not coming.”

Nehemiah's response was a statement and a question. The question wasn't a question to be answered but a rhetorical question. His statement and his question was "Sorry, I'm all the wall working and why should I quit work on the wall to go meet with you? That's not a big deal to me. I'm on the wall. I'm on mission, on ministry and on message so why should I go meet with you?"

Sanballet decides to change tactics. Now we get adversity tactic number six which is fabrication and slander. Four times they invited Nehemiah and four times he said no. Now comes a fifth time and this wasn't a private invitation like the other four times. Nehemiah 6:5-9 says **5** *In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an **open letter** in his hand. **6** In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. **7** And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, 'There is a king in Judah.' And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together."* **8** *Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind."* **9** *For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands.*

Nehemiah is going to stay on the wall and stay the work. So Sanballet sends this open letter designed to intimidate him and it is full of fabrication and slander. Sanballet lies to the leader and slanders the leader trying to discredit him among the people that Nehemiah is really doing this for himself and not for God's glory or mission. Sanballet is trying to show the people that what Nehemiah is doing is all about Nehemiah and not God. Nehemiah realizing their intent then discredits their content. He says "You're inventing this stuff in your mind." It's wonderful to live your life, saying what you mean, knowing what you say, never being mean when you say it, and then you have the luxury of a short memory. If you're making stuff up you have to keep track of what you said to each person. Nehemiah is telling them they are telling lies and attempting to slander him to discredit him, pays no attention to them and merely goes to the Lord in prayer and says "Lord, strengthen my hands for the work for I don't want to be bothered by this."

Of course it doesn't stop there. Here comes adversity tactic number seven of false prophets and false teachings. Nehemiah 6:10-14 says **10** *Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night."* **11** *But I said, "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in."* **12** *And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. **13** For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. **14** Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.*

It's amazing with enough money there is no shortage of people to hire out to do Satan's work even in the midst of God's people. Hirelings are everywhere. This last strategy may be the most insidious of all. When you went to the house of the prophet to

get wisdom what you received was a false prophet and false teaching. Nehemiah makes two statements. He says “Should such a man as I run away and could such a man as I go into the temple and live.” What does he mean by that? First of all he is saying “To go in the temple who alone can go there? It’s the priest and I’m not a priest. If I go in there I profane the temple and what does God in His Word say about that? I would fall under God’s judgment and I’ll die. You may invite me to run in there to be safe from my enemies but I’ll run in there and then God will be my enemy and I’m dead.” So he understood the Word of God and he said it was false prophecy. It is not faithful to God’s Word.

Secondly, he said “Should such a man as I run away? I’m a leader. God has called me. He didn’t call me to run at the time of a threat. In fact, I’m supposed to run to the battle not from the battle. I’m not going to run and flee.” So he was informed Biblically and committed personally and so he responds. We will have three more tactics that come. It’s interesting how many times you see people make great presentations, they get elected to office, they sit at the seat of power but Nehemiah did not drink of the opium of power. He didn’t get addicted to the counsel of the powerful. He said “I’ve got work to do.” He stayed on the wall. Then there is fabrication, treachery and slander. Isn’t it glorious to God when a leader by God’s grace is above reproach and says “What you are saying is an invention of your mind, now Lord give me the strength to stay at the work. Don’t let me be discouraged and detoured.” Finally Satan can come like an angel of light as he works his way even into pulpits with hirelings, false prophets and prophetesses. They teach false things to tickle the ears of people instead of the truth in love.

I have one final reminder where the chapter comes to a conclusion. We get back to the end of the 52 days where Nehemiah 3 took us. We finally get to those strategies and tactics that were withstood by Nehemiah so what is the result? Nehemiah 6:15-19 says **15** *So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.* **16** *And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us **were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem*** (here all the adversaries had tried tactic after tactic after tactic, the wall was built in 52 days and they fell in their own self esteem and it’s ‘we need a counselor, we need self esteem therapy, it’s just not working.’), *for they perceived that this work had been accomplished **with the help of our God.*** (That’s how these people were able to stay at the wall.) **17** *Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.* **18** *For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife.* **19** *Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.*

Here is the good news. The wall is finished. God gets the glory. The adversaries fell in their own self esteem. Here’s the bad news. Adversity didn’t quit. Tobiah just went underground. He will pop back up in Nehemiah 13 in the temple of God. The adversity didn’t cease but the victory was accomplished.

In conclusion, I want to share with you a couple of takeaways. Here’s the first one. Men you have been particularly on my heart this morning because by God’s grace I believe you’re at a crucial place. If you say as a man “I’m going to love my wife” and you say with your wife “We’re going to raise these children with the Lord” and we say as

a church “God, we’re going to inspect the walls and where they are down we want them rebuilt. We want You to do a work through us” then you can expect the inevitability of adversity. If God’s people say “we’re not playing church, this isn’t just a social gathering on Sunday” and we’re the army of God, the family of the Lord, we seek to be faithful to the Lord, then adversity from the Adversary through all of his Sanballets, Tobiahs and Geshams that is inevitable. So that’s the first takeaway. Adversity is not only inevitable but multi-faceted, incessant and will escalate.

That is the lesson in Nehemiah 4 through 6. Adversity is inevitable. It will come. It will attack to discourage, to dismay, to discredit you, to intimidate you and to cause you fear. The Adversary comes around like a roaring lion. He comes incessantly, wave after wave after wave. The wall gets built but adversity just keeps on. He just goes underground but he’s going to pop back up. Adversity is incessant on this side of eternity. It’s multi-faceted. He comes from the outside, the inside, around the side, around, down and up. He comes in many, many different ways through many, many different instruments and he escalates from mockery and ridicule to threats, entrapments, slander and all of those.

The second takeaway is leaders will always be the primary targets of adversity by the Adversary. He wants to take down a husband so he won’t love and lead his wife. He wants to take down a father and a mother so they won’t raise up their children. He wants to take down elders, deacons and pastors. Satan knows if he strikes down the shepherds then the sheep will scatter. Here is the language I have used in the past. Satan prays against leaders. Satan preys on leaders. If you’re a leader he is praying against you and he’s got you in his crosshairs. That is for sure.

About eleven years ago we did something in this church that I know has been going on for about 50 years and that is praying for the leadership in general and the pastor in particular. We asked that everyone who was a part of this church would pray for the pastors of this church during at least one meal every day. I hope and pray you are still doing that because I know my own inadequacies and many weaknesses. I feel the lock-in from the laser target time and time again. I know others do as well. Do you remember when Jesus started His ministry? Satan attacked. Do you remember when Jesus went to the cross? When He went to the cross He told His disciples they were all going to leave Him and forsake Him. The disciples said “What do you mean we’re going to leave You?”

Peter said “Not me Lord, I’m Your friend, thick and thin to the end. You can count on me.” Jesus said, “Simon, Simon, Satan has requested permission to sift you like wheat.” Who would Satan have been requesting permission from? He was requesting from The Almighty. Satan is a fallen angel and he can’t do anything that God doesn’t allow him to do so he comes requesting permission to sift ya’ll (leaders) and that’s the way it is in the original translation. We need a better translation. Then Jesus says to Peter “But I have prayed for you and when you return care for your brethren.” Satan has always put leaders in the crosshairs.

The third takeaway is the best defense in the Christian life is an insistent offense. This is not the only defense. I have brothers and sisters that pray for me. I have friends, I have an accountability group and I’ve got great elders and deacons. There are all kinds of things that God has put in place to help you and me stand firm. The best thing is if I can stay on mission, on message, in ministry, flee sin and temptation and fill up my life

with my wife I don't have room for anyone else. If I can fill up my life with what the Lord has called me to then I don't have room for anything else to take me away from it.

That's exactly where Nehemiah is. Nehemiah would you like to come out to the council where we have this nice little meeting at Ono. We have all these nice things so come on out here. Nehemiah said "I've got work to do. I'm on the wall. He is on the mission. He is on an insistent offense. He doesn't have room to be taken away. We should be filling up our life with what God calls us to be and do so that there is no room to be taken away from it. My calendar is already filled up with what You have called me to. Let my mind dwell on those things that are right and pure. This is what I am called to do, serving God's purpose. God, just fill up the calendar of my life so that I don't have time to give Satan an appointment.

The fourth takeaway is prayer and the Word are absolutely essential for the conflict and victory. We are only in Nehemiah 6 and twelve times it says Nehemiah prayed. Here is this false prophet that says to him to come into the temple for they're going to come by night and kill you. Here is a safe place for you. Nehemiah knows his Bible and his theology. He says "What you are saying is false because God's Word says if I do what you say I die. That's not where I'm supposed to be." So he is not only filled up with what he ought to do but he also knows that such a man as him is not allowed there because God's Word told him he wasn't allowed there. So he knows the Word of God and therefore he knows the false teaching. The best way to know the counterfeit is to know the real deal. So if we know the Word of God we know the false teaching when it comes and shows itself.

The fifth takeaway is adversity will seldom be eradicated (on this side of glory) but the adversaries can be defeated and discouraged because the glory and the fame of the Lord is unstoppable. Their self esteemed failed because God's hand had been seen. The glory and the fame of the Lord is unstoppable therefore the adversaries can be dismayed. Why does adversity continue? I can give you multiple reasons. Number one adversity is a great gift from God to remind us that this is not our home. Adversity is here just to kind of keep us recalibrated. Count it all joy my brethren when you encounter various trial, don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal because the Lord is molding you (the Potter), refining you (the Smelter) so you fix your eyes on Jesus.

When Jesus came on mission over 2000 years ago did the Adversary go after Him? Absolutely. As soon as He was baptized to start His public ministry here comes Satan. What did Jesus do? He was in prayer and the Word. It is written... It is written... and as Satan came against Him with adversity seeking to strike down the Chief Shepherd, Jesus went to the wall all the way to the cross, won the victory over the Adversary. Christ was exalted in glory. The fame and the glory of the Lord is unstoppable. So when I fix my eyes on Him now I can go through the adversity because the glory of the Lord is at work.

So why does He let this adversity in my life? This last thought is He is at work in your life and my life because He is refining us. Don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal, why? You are in the Refiner's fire. Recently I was reading something trying to understand this about a smelter. He was asked "Why do you put the fire in the heat to it? Do they still do it this way?" He replied "If you put the fire to the heat to the gold or silver it causes the impurities to bubble up to the top and then we can scrape them off. The greater the heat and the longer the heat, the purer what you get in the outcome."

Then comes the question, Lord why does the adversity still continue on this side of the cross? Take courage I've already defeated him and you put your confidence in Me for now I'm using him in your life. The heat gets turned up. The impurities come up and they get brushed away.

When will The Smelter quit doing that? He is what the guy who was interviewed said and wrote down; "We keep putting the heat and increasing the heat to get rid of the impurities and we know exactly when to quit. When you look into the liquid metal and you see your face, now you know it's been refined." One day as Jesus brings us through adversity after adversity, prayer and the Word, for His glory in the victory of Christ, the adversity will cease when He looks at us and sees His face in us. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the glory and majesty of Christ our Savior. Thank You for privilege to serve, know, love Him and follow Him. Lord, we recognize that in the days of difficulty You trying us, perfecting us, growing us and You are doing this so that on the other side people will have to say 'the hand of the Lord was with His people and Your glory and fame are unstoppable.' That is our great joy that Your honor, Your majesty will be proclaimed from us, even as You look into us and see Christ through us, I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.