

Nehemiah 6-7 – Chapter Study

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¹ 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)*, ² 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.

Under Nehemiah's gifted leadership, the people completed the rebuilding of the walls.

All that remained to be done was the hanging of the gates on their new jambs. Since Sanballat & his cronies failed in their attempts to stop the *people* from working, they shifted their attack to Nehemiah himself. He was after all the reason for the success of the venture.

Remembering that the story of Nehemiah has profound lessons about the spiritual real, what we find here instructs us about an oft used tactic of the devil.

He makes leaders a *special target* of attack.

Take out the leaders & the work stalls, sometimes fatally.

In fact, so well known is this principle of battle that there's a code of war that says you ought NOT take out ALL the enemy's officers; you need to leave some.

Take out enough leaders to *cripple* the enemy, but leave enough to *keep order*.

Men without command may end up running amuck across the countryside doing great damage.

Please understand I'm not whining when I say that leaders face pressures & stresses those who've *not* led will never know.

And leaders in the work of God face *special pressure* because they endure a *spiritual* onslaught.

Leaders are often blamed for things they *didn't* do & criticized for things they *tried* to do.

They're misquoted, misunderstood & rarely given the opportunity to set the

record straight.

If they act *quickly*, they're *reckless*. If they *wait*, they're *cowardly* or *uncaring*.

Believers must pray for their leaders; for elders, pastors, & those who've risen to places of public leadership in the Body of Christ nationally & globally.

Sanballat, Tobiah, & Geshem send a message that *seems* to say they are resigned to the completion of Jerusalem's wall.

It sounds like they're saying, "Okay, you've won Nehemiah. We admit it. Let's bury the hatchet & since we're neighbors, let's pow-wow on the border between our realms."

But Nehemiah knew this was a *ruse*.

Their seeming resignation to the situation was feigned, faked.

And done just to his trust so they could destroy him.

As we'll see, what they were doing was asking Nehemiah to sit down with them to hammer out a compromise.

Now - a compromise can be a good thing if both sides care for one another & are going in the same direction.

Compromise in a marriage is essential if 2 are to become 1 as God intends.

Friends will often compromise for the sake of the friendship.

But any compromise between sworn enemies, whose aims are in opposite directions is disastrous.

Consider the compromise Nehemiah was asked to consider here.

He knew he had been called & blessed by God to rebuild Jerusalem's walls.

He knew it was a task for the people of Judah alone, as they looked to the Lord to accomplish through them.

Sanballat & his pals had already shown their stripes; they were not the friends of Jerusalem and did NOT want its walls built nor gates hung.

What common ground could Nehemiah possibly find with them? NONE!

Let's bring all of this up now to our time.

Do Hamas, Hezbollah, & Iran want the best for Israel?

Since they've already shown their true colors and taken steps to destroy the Jewish State, without any retraction of their deadly intent, is it a smart move for Israel's leadership to sit down with them at some modern table to negotiate a compromise?

What "compromise" exactly could they make since what these groups want is the end of Israel?

³ 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?" ⁴ But they sent me this message 4 times, and I answered them in the same manner.

Nehemiah knew that while the enemy's tactics had changed, their goal was the same – to stop the work of rebuilding.

He'd have none of it, nor even waste a moment of his time or effort to see what they had to say.

He already knew whatever they might say, their motive was to harm the people & work of God.

Christian – wake up & smell the proverbial coffee – the devil does *not* want you to prosper.

He's been, is now, & will always be dedicated to stealing from & destroying YOU!

No matter how appealing the offer to compromise with sin or the world is – its end is your utter ruin.

Nehemiah shows us the kind of posture we need to adopt toward *our* spiritual adversary; a resolute refusal to even *think* about compromise.

5 Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the 5th time, with an open letter in his hand.

Oh, this is clever!

The first 4 offers to compromise were sent to Nehemiah in *private*, just as Satan will come to the growing believer & suggest some *private little, secret* area of compromise.

“Hey, you’re doing well. Your wall’s just about complete & most of your gates are now hung. -

“Why not leave this one little gate open over here on your far side; this one website, this one guy /gal to flirt with, this one habit, this *little* temptation?”

“I mean, look at you! You go to church now & own a big ole’ Bible. You even listen to talk radio & vote conservative. Wow, you’ve really changed. So it’s okay to *occasionally* give in to temptation. Make room for something. How about we leave this little gate open way over here where no one else will see?”

“Oh, and by the way, it’ll be our little secret. No one will ever know.”

History is filled with stories of huge cities that fell to the enemy because one little gate was left open.

Satan suggests secret sin today with the aim of making it tomorrow’s open scandal.

Sin is a trophy he loves to parade.

When Nehemiah refused the offer of secret compromise, Sanballat tried another tactic – Slander.

6 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. ⁷ 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.

Of course none of this was in any way true.

Nehemiah was a loyal subject to the Persians King Artaxerxes!

For goodness sake – he’d been the king’s cupbearer, akin in his task of protecting the king to modern day Secret Service agents assigned to protect the president.

So loyal was Nehemiah to Artaxerxes, that after overseeing the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s defenses, he *returned* to the Persian capital to serve another

stint there.

So any charge about him leading a rebellion against the Persians was absurd. If any rumors were circulating about this they'd been hatched & promulgated by Sanballat and his homeys.

These guys are trying to get Nehemiah into trouble by leveling false charges against him.

But again – they were baseless!

I want to emphasize this because of an unfortunate tendency I've seen over the years.

A handful of people have the idea that any **CHARGE** made against a leader is enough to discredit him/her.

There may be no evidence at all, but for them, that's beside the point.

The *accusation* of wrongdoing is enough to do the leader in.

These people have the idea that a real leader will never even be *accused* of anything.

They are so good, so solid, there's never anything negative *said* about them.

In 1 Timothy 3 where we find the qualifications for elders, the first one says the elder must be *without blame; blameless*.

The word doesn't mean w/o *charge* or *accusation*.

It means *if* a charge is made, there's nothing in the person's life that allows the charge to stick.

Look at what Sanballat wrote, "*It is reported . . .*" // Gesham was spreading *rumors*.

Statements like "it's been reported" & "they say" have destroyed countless people's lives.

It seems in nearly every group there are gossip-mongers who hover like vultures, just waiting for tidbits of slander to snap up & regurgitate.

Someone defined *gossip* as news you have to hurry & tell before you find out it isn't true.

Let's see how Nehemiah handled this new attack.

⁸ Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart." ⁹ 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.

Christian leaders should know how to handle false accusations, vicious letters, unfounded press reports, & gossip.

Otherwise these things will so distract them they'll lose perspective & spend so much time *defending* themselves they'll neglect their *work*.

Nehemiah didn't make that mistake.

He simply denied & dismissed the reports, prayed to God for strength, & *went back to work*.

He was confident that those who really knew him would reject as *absurd* the slander his enemies were leveling at him.

Listen, if we take care of our *character*, we can trust God to take care of our

reputation.

10 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.”

As we’ll see in a bit, Shemaiah was esteemed as a prophet.

Unknown to Nehemiah he was in league with Sanballat & his pals.

Nehemiah's business took him to Shemaiah's home one day.

In feigned concern for Nehemiah's safety & acting on a supposedly Word from the Lord, Shemaiah urged Nehemiah to flee for his life by taking refuge inside the temple.

He he'd even go *with* him. Wow, what a friend!

No. Shemaiah offered to go with him so he could claim to be a eye-witness to his cowardice & lack of faith in God.

Here was the danger in Shemaiah's appeal – Nehemiah was a man of amazing faith & trust in God.

Time & again Nehemiah had called the people of Jerusalem to trust the Lord.

That trust had resulted in the miracle of the rebuilt wall.

So far, Nehemiah hasn't *buckled* to the pressure of *compromise*.

Nor has he *knuckled* under the pressure of *slander*.

So now the enemy tries to stumble him with a charge of *hypocrisy*.

He talks all high & mighty to everyone else about trusting God & not being afraid but when it's *his* neck in danger, he goes running off in a panic to the safety of the temple. Hypocrite!

The problem is, the Law of Moses forbade non-priests from entering that part of the temple Shemaiah suggests here.

In Numbers 18:7 it says of the Holy Place, “The outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”

When King Uzziah invaded the holy precincts, he was smitten with leprosy.

[1]

Of course, Nehemiah knew all this & recognized in Shemaiah's hurried counsel the voice of deceit.

11 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!” **12** 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. **13** 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.

Nehemiah knew Shemaiah was a *false* prophet because his message contradicted the Word of God. [2]

14 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.

While Nehemiah recounts the story of Shemaiah's attempt to discredit him with a charge of hypocrisy, here we learn there was a whole spate of these kinds of attacks!

It didn't happen just once; it happened again & again.

Sanballat & Tobiah had several allies in Jerusalem.

In yet another prayer we see Nehemiah's *complete dependence* on God.

In never launched a counterattack.

He didn't hire an image consultant to launch a campaign to boost his public stock.

All of that would have taken him down the very path his enemies wanted him to take – anything to get him away from leading the rebuilding.

Christian – understand just how frantic the devil is about keeping you from growing in grace.

Don't get distracted by defending yourself.

Seek God and stay focused and let the fruit of a changed life answer your critics.

f. the work completed Ch. 6:15-7:3

¹⁵ So the wall was finished on the 25th day of Elul, in 52 days.

WHAT?!?!?!? → 52 days

This is nothing less than a miracle!

It's a miracle that came about through the participation of the people of God. Some miracles are sovereign acts of divine fiat. God does them *apart* from human agency.

But many miracles God does in partnership with His people.

[Miracle of the water to wine – Cana, John 2]

The rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall was a miracle God accomplished through the efforts of His people working together.

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came to them. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

The completion of the walls was an massive setback & embarrassment to the enemy, *but they did not give up*.

They didn't give up because a rebuilt wall wasn't enough.

Nehemiah would also need to place watchmen on the walls to ensure their preservation.

The point is this - Satan is no quitter!

He's lost billions of battles over the millennia but still fights on because he

knows from vast experience that many believers have a short attention span.

He knows if he waits long enough, then tries a different route, he may very well find it unguarded.

In Luke 4:13 we read how after the temptation in the wilderness, the devil left Christ—"till a more opportune time."

It came with Peter's careless words rebuking Jesus when He told the disciples about His approaching death, then a bit later when Judas' greed opened the door.

Friend, if the enemy isn't coming against you in some obvious frontal assault, it's because he's gone underground and is sneaking up on some other front.

We're probably safer when we can see where he's at work than when he's concealed.

This is why we find the oft repeated warning to "Watch & pray."

In v. 17 it says some of Tobiah's allies were *leaders from the royal tribe of Judah!* This is disturbing because if anyone had a stake in the future of "the city of David," it was the leaders of the tribe of Judah.

God promised the Messiah would come from them & rule over Jerusalem. ^[3]

In collaborating with the enemy these nobles were resisting God, disobeying His Word, & jeopardizing their future. Why would they do such a *treacherous* thing?

For one thing, Tobiah wrote them persuasive & flattering letters that influenced their thinking.

Instead of seeking & clinging to the truth, they believed the enemy's lies & became traitors to their own people.

Proverbs 28:4 says, "They that forsake the law praise the wicked; but such as keep the law contend with them."

Had these nobles been studying the Word of God, they wouldn't have been walking "in the counsel of the ungodly" (Ps. 1:1).

In the same way that these leaders tried to undermine Nehemiah, some *church-goers* undermine the work of God because they give more attention to the enemy's lying propaganda than the Scriptures.

They want to integrate the world's wisdom into the ministry of the church, as though the work of God could be done by the power or wisdom of man.

These traitors went further: They repeatedly told Nehemiah what a great guy Tobiah was!

Now, this tactic is so subtle & minor after the massive assaults the enemy has launched so far we wonder why they even bothered.

What we may not realize is that it's part of a brilliant strategy.

Keep winding up & throwing major punches at your opponent.

Get him used to defending against a knock out to the head, then throw in a quick jab to the ribs.

He won't even defend against it because it seems like such a little thing.

But that little jab breaks a rib, the punctures the lungs.

Alexander the Great conquered the known world and fought personally in many battles.

He faced down death from countless spears, swords, & arrows.

He died at the age of 30-something of pneumonia caught because he stayed outside in the rain because he was drunk.

Many men & women of God have stood resolutely against all hell breaking loose, only to fall to some little thing.

They came to believe in their own invincibility.

Nehemiah was able to avoid that trap because he cultivated a total dependence on God.

7:1 Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, ² that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

Nehemiah's knew he was gifted to accomplish certain things but couldn't do *everything*.

So he appointed *other leaders* to assist in the governing of the city.

The first 2 he appointed he knew by experience were capable men - his own brother Hanani and Hananiah, who'd already demonstrated skill in leading others & overseeing the fortress that guarded the north wall of the city, which was the most vulnerable to attack.

Hananiah was a faithful man who *feared God*

Nehemiah appointed him because he had some of the same traits that made Nehemiah such a great leader.

He knew that the one who fears God is free of the paralyzing fear of man.

Prov 29:25 says . . .

The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.

³ And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

Instructions for the gatekeepers.

What good are new gates if nobody guards them or controls who enters & leaves the city?

What good are walls if the gates are open to every foe who wants access?

The Great Wall of China was penetrated by the enemy at least 4 times Each time the guards were bribed.

Gates & walls are only as good as the people who guard them.

In the ancient world, city gates were opened at sunrise & closed at sunset

Nehemiah commanded the gatekeepers to keep the gates *barred* until the entire city was wide awake.

To open the gates early in the morning would only invite the enemy to come in while people were asleep & unprepared.

Such an unusual instruction tips us off to the spiritual application of this passage.

The rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls pictures the Holy Spirit rebuilding of the walls of our character as we're conformed to the image of Christ.

The walls represent our *personality*, our *souls*, if you will.

The gates are a picture of our senses.

In fact, we often refer to the *eye-gate*, the *ear-gate*, & the gateway of the mouth.

Gates were places of *access & egress* & represent what comes in to & goes out of us.

The ancient city gate was also a *point of authority*; it's where the city elders sat and render judicial decisions.

A destroyed gate meant a loss of authority.

A rebuilt gate meant restored authority.

As the Holy Spirit rebuilds the wall of our character & builds a new identity in us as the sons & daughters of God, he also brings us into an understanding of the authority that is ours as the people of God.

In Nehemiah's instructions about when to open & close Jerusalem's gates, we see a picture of our need to exercise control over what we allow to enter or leave our lives through our eyes, ears, and mouth.

The enemy stands outside & wants in.

But we set a guard to make sure his influence & lies find no place *within*.

Nehemiah directed the gates to be kept closed till the city was awake.

We must be wary of the danger of spiritual *apathy* & slumber.

Where may be *physically* awake but *spiritually* zoned out.

It's easy to let our walk with God go on autopilot.

Have you ever missed an off-ramp on the Freeway because your mind was elsewhere?

Hey, if we can do that while driving – we can do it in our spiritual lives as well.

In Ephesians 5:14 Paul writes,

Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.

g. repopulating Jerusalem Ch. 7:4-73

⁴ Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt.

While many people had come in from the countryside of Judah to rebuild the wall, once it was done, they returned to their homes.

The population that lived inside the walls dropped to a tiny portion of what it could potentially hold.

This presented a problem because without sufficient numbers, the city couldn't function.

While we might like for traffic sake it if the population of VC dropped in half, the fact is, there'd be a lot of services that would be lost.

Things would begin to decay and fall apart.

Cut that half in half again and the problems and decay accelerate.

That was the problem in Jerusalem at this time. [Crusades]

⁵ Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I

found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first *return*, and found written in it: ⁶ **These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city.**

Nehemiah came up with a plan for repopulating the city. The first step was to take a census.

Vs. 6-73 are a repeat of Ezra 2.

It's a list of those who made the 1st return under Zerubbabel years before. It turns out that *most* of those who returned didn't settle in Jerusalem; they'd gone to other cities in Judah.

Chapter 7 ends with these words . . .

7³ So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. When the 7th month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.

The 7th month on the Hebrew calendar is our Oct.—Nov..

It's the month in which 3 of the most important Jewish holidays are held; the

Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, & the Feast of Tabernacles. ^[4]
Since the people would be coming to Jerusalem to observe these special days, Nehemiah decided to take advantage of them to communicate the *need* to populate the city of Jerusalem.

He'd do so by a special message – one that' we'll take a look at this Sunday.

^[1] 2 Chron. 26:16-21

^[2] Deut. 13:1-5 and 18:20-22

^[3] Gen. 49:10; 2 Sam. 7

^[4] Lev. 23:23-44