

## **Rise And Build Part 7**

Turn to Nehemiah 6 as we continue our study of Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild from the rubble the walls of Jerusalem. As you are turning to this Old Testament passage, let me share a couple of verses from the New Testament that relate to our theme this morning. These passages refer to enduring, remaining steadfast in the face of crisis or temptation or trial which is what Nehemiah is doing. The apostle Paul writes in Galatians, **"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."** Galatians 6:9 In 1 Corinthians he writes, **"Therefore my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."** 1 Corinthians 15:58

Nehemiah could have been saying these very things to himself and to his workers as they approached the completion of the rebuilding of the walls. They had to refuse to give up in spite of difficulties because their enemy refused to give up. When Sanballat and the other enemies of Nehemiah saw they couldn't stop the rebuilding of the walls, they decided to slander and discredit Nehemiah. They thought if they could destroy the leader they could defeat the whole project. It is still a popular strategy with our enemy, the devil. One commentary said Nehemiah's enemies tried intrigue, then innuendo, then intimidation. Look what happened.

**Intrigue. "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 – 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..." Nehemiah 6:1-3**

Their overt threats and efforts to kill Nehemiah and the workers failed, so now instead of open warfare they decide to use intrigue. "Let's take the subtle approach. We'll make nice and lure him away from his work." They invite him to a village in a beautiful, fertile valley in the westernmost area being settled by the Jews returning from exile. It must have sounded inviting to Nehemiah. "Maybe they see we aren't going to stop and they really do want to call a truce. And it would be nice to take a little break from all the rubble and the work in the city. A little time away in the country would be nice. After all, I deserve a break from all this." It sounded inviting, attractive, a change of pace.

The enemy knows how to lure us away doesn't he? "Come on, you've been working hard for God, for the church. You've been good. A little break won't hurt anything. Come on, it's just one evening, just one Sunday, just one drink, just one time." Watch out when the enemy tries to lure you away from the work God has called you to do. Nehemiah knew they were scheming to harm him. Don't trust the devil. Compromise will kill you. Remember the devil never has your best interests in mind.

**Innuendo.** After trying to lure Nehemiah away from the work, Sanballat sent an aide with an unsealed letter. Letters at this time were usually written on a papyrus or leather sheet, rolled up, tied and then sealed with a clay seal. This guaranteed the authenticity of the letter and kept it private. Nehemiah points out this was an unsealed letter, indicating its' contents had been "leaked." They wanted to start a rumor about Nehemiah. The letter accused him of wicked motives. **"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 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 confer together."** Nehemiah 6:6-7

Sanballat accuses Nehemiah of conspiring to make himself king and plotting a revolt against Artaxerxes, the Persian King who had allowed Nehemiah to come here to rebuild the walls. I love that phrase "It is reported among the nations and-- Geshem says it is true..." "Unnamed sources report..." This was fake news long before the internet. It was all rumors and falsehood but rumor is a great way to defeat God's people and destroy a leader. I've seen churches torn apart and pastors removed because of rumors and innuendo. False accusations, motives questioned, an evil report chips away at a leader until they are demoralized and defeated.

"It is reported.." the enemy says. Who says so? "Well, I wouldn't feel right divulging my source but I got it from someone who knows." In case you didn't know, **Gossip is a sin!** In Roman 1 Paul refers to those deserving of God's wrath and among those listed are "gossips and slanderers." I think that includes the posting of salacious nonsense on Facebook and social media. Slandering leaders, spreading false and evil reports. It's gossip, plain and simple. It was wrong when it was aimed at President Obama and its wrong when its aimed at President Trump. Be careful questioning the motives of others and don't be a part of gossip!

Look what Nehemiah said, **“I sent him this reply: ‘Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.’”** Nehemiah 6:8 You are just making this stuff up out of the perversity of your own mind. Intrigue. Innuendo and now...

**Intimidation.** In verse 9 Nehemiah says **“They were all trying to frighten us.”** He then meets a man named Shemaiah. Some think he may have been a priest. This guy has information that “men are coming to kill you” and suggests Nehemiah run and hide in the temple, perhaps suggesting he hide inside the holy of holies. Nehemiah realizes this man, even if he is a priest, is not sent from God to warn him but was hired by Tobiah and Sanballat to trap him. He says, **“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.”** Nehemiah 6:13

The whole point was to either get him to run and thereby look guilty, or weak, or both. Or they were trying to get him to actually run into the temple and hide in the holy of holies, thus making him guilty of desecrating the temple. They were trying to get him to sin in order to discredit him. Nehemiah understood that sin for him would not just be running and hiding in the temple. **Sin would be to stop doing what God called him to do in the first place.** That was rebuild the walls and gates of Jerusalem. To let anyone stop him from obeying God would be tantamount to sin and disobedience. Don't let anyone stop you from obeying God!

All of these things: the intrigue, the temptation to quit, to meet up with them at Ono, to compromise, the innuendo, the rumors, the intimidation, trying to get him to run, to sin, all of these things that happened to Nehemiah happen to us at times. The devil, the enemy of our soul, tries his own schemes against us, his own intrigue, innuendo and intimidation. We make progress in our spiritual life, building the walls, serving God, serving others and then the enemy begins to wear us down. “What's the point in serving God, in going to church, helping in the Ark Park or with Team Carbondale? What's the point in singing in the choir or giving to a building fund? No one cares. It doesn't make any difference. Pastor doesn't even recognize you.” You do your best and try to live right and then somebody starts a rumor about you or about your teenager and the devil says, “See. What's the point? What good does serving God do you? Just take a break and do your own thing. Run and hide! What could it hurt?”

We face those same temptations as Nehemiah so let's look at his response to the schemes of the enemy. Look back at verse 3. When Sanballat says, “why not take a little break from that hard work you've been doing. You need a rest from working on the wall. Come meet me.”

Nehemiah responds, **“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 6:3**

**It’s about eternity and it’s too important!** Nehemiah understood the value, the importance of what he was doing. It wasn’t just about bricks and mortar and a physical wall, it was about God’s people and God’s city and honoring God among the nations. It was about obedience to God and his command, plain and simple. Nehemiah said, “I can’t quit. There is something of eternal importance and significance going on here. It’s eternal vs. temporal, spiritual vs. natural, life vs. death. It’s about eternity and it’s too important. I can’t quit.”

Hear what I’m telling you today, it’s too important. Your relationship with God is too important. Your salvation and your eternal soul are too important. You are involved in something eternal and it’s too important. You can’t quit. Your children being raised in a godly home, to know God and serve him, that’s too important. Their eternal destiny is at stake. You can’t walk away. You teaching that class of four year olds, it’s too important. Like Nehemiah, you’re carrying on a great project and can’t come down. You can’t stop. “Come on, Nehemiah, you’re just laying bricks on a wall.” “Come on, you’re just babysitting some little kids in a pre-school nursery class. You’re just singing in the choir, you’re just greeting people on Sunday as they come through the door.” No, I’m carrying on a great project. I’m making an impact. I’m telling people about Jesus. What you are doing matters. It’s about eternity and it’s too important. You can’t quit!

Verse 4 says four times they sent him the same message and four times he gave them the same answer. The enemy is persistent with his temptation. There will be plenty of opportunity to walk away, to come down from the wall and call it quits. Fatigue and pain and disappointment wears you down but four times Nehemiah said “I can’t disobey God. I can’t quit working for him. I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t. It’s about obedience. It’s about eternity. It’s too important. You can’t quit.

**I won’t run and I won’t hide!** Look at verse 10 and 11 again. Notice Shemaiah warned Nehemiah men were coming by night to kill him. The suggestion was they could run in the darkness to the temple and hide. No one would see them. How many times has the devil tempted you in the dark, in the night. “Run and hide in the darkness. No one will know. No one will see you. Hide and do as you please.” The devil wants us to compromise, to hide, to run from God and run toward sin. Nehemiah said, “I can’t stop doing what is right and I won’t start

doing what is wrong. I won't run from God. I won't run toward sin." Look at verse 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!" Nehemiah 6:11** Here is the resolve we need. Like Nehemiah. "I will not go!" I won't give into the devil. I won't live or act in such a way that it will bring reproach on myself or on the Lord, on my family or my church family. The cost is too high. Don't give in to the enemy. Don't run. Don't hide. Take a stand like Nehemiah. "I will not go!"

Finally, look what Nehemiah says: **They're trying to frighten us. Lord, strengthen our hands.** How many times have you felt overwhelmed, frightened, like you just couldn't go on? Mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically spent, burned out, discouraged, depressed. I've written my resignation letter a few times, rehearsed my speech, you probably have too. What's the point? I can't go on. Discouraged. Ready to quit. "O Lord, strengthen my hands!"

O Lord, strengthen my hands to keep doing the work you've called me to. Strengthen my hands to stay at my assignment, that great project, that task that has eternal value and significance, strengthen my hands to finish. O Lord, strengthen my resolve, my commitment. I've come too far. We are too close to finishing the wall. We are too close to the answer, too close to resolution, too close to victory. Don't surrender. Don't quit. O Lord, strengthen our hands to keep working, to fight on, to push on through, to keep trusting, to finish strong.

Intrigue. Innuendo. Intimidation. In-fighting we didn't even talk about in chapter 5. Impossible odds. Opposition and enemies on every hand, but here is the final report. **"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. 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." Nehemiah 6:15-16.**

Be encouraged! With the help of our God the walls you are rebuilding are going to be completed. With the help of our God, you are going to win this battle. Tell your enemies to get out of the way. You aren't going to quit. What you are doing is of eternal value and importance. God is going to get glory out of this and the ones who have opposed you will see that God did this! Don't lose your grip. Ask God to strengthen your hands and press on!