

Building for God: Confrontations

Goldstone Church – 01-Nov-15 10:30am

Nehemiah 6:1-14

Introduction

We're into the second half of our series in book of Nehemiah. We're learning how God wants us to be involved in building His kingdom here at Goldstone church.

Nehemiah 6 describes yet more opposition that Nehemiah faced while rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem. But this time, the conflict is sneaky, hidden and secretive. The Opponents may be known, but they are using even more devious tactics.

Just as a quick reminder of the story so far:

Chapter 1 'Nehemiah's Foundations': how he prayerfully responds to the news that Jerusalem's walls were in ruins. And we saw how Nehemiah's prayer helps us in our prayer life.

Chapter 2 'Nehemiah's Preparations': how he was patient, how he planned, and how he responded to the opportunity of rebuilding. We too need to: (i) Wait on God, (ii) Work with People and (iii) Wrestle with Problems.

Chapter 3 'Nehemiah's Recreations': how he carefully organised and divided out the building project. And how the names of the 10 gates helps us to identify key areas of our spiritual lives that may need to be rebuilt.

Chapter 4 'Nehemiah's Oppositions': how he responded. This helped us to know how to respond to our daily trials and oppositions.

Chapter 5 'Nehemiah's Alleviations': how he addresses problems with the people he is working with. And Nehemiah confronts the Nobles & Officials calling: to Relent, to Restore and to Recommit.

Although we would like to give Nehemiah a break from all the problems, the Opposition Committee still have more tricks and traps up their sleeves. In Chapter 6, the 'Chairmen of the Opposition Committee' come up with yet more cunning plans. Gone are the days of screaming angrily, gone is the biting sarcasm, gone are the general threats of physical violence, now it's time for some dirty tricks.

A. COVERT ACTIONS

Sanballat, Tobiah & Geshem's first scheme is...

1. Intrigue (Neh 6:1-4)

v.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'*

After many aggressive attempts, suddenly these longstanding enemies seem to turn and try to become Nehemiah's friends; they invite him to a conference on the plain of Ono. Our modern-day equivalent would be 'peace-talks' in Geneva.

Some Bible commentators suggest that the 'plain of Ono' would have been considered as 'neutral territory', being on the furthest north-western part of where the returning Jews would have settled. Another suggestion is that Sanballat, Tobiah & Geshem are trying to trick Nehemiah into leaving Jerusalem and away from the armed escort (see Neh 2:9).

There's another Old Testament passage, where Intrigue and Deception leads to death and destruction. Absalom (see 2 Samuel 13) waits two years before inviting his step-brother, Amnon, to a feast. Then, when the spirits are high and the drink is flowing, Absalom murders his step-brother in revenge for raping his sister. Gruesome stuff!

Intrigue and Deception is also a contemporary military tactic. The largest deception in military history was 'Operation Bodyguard' in WWII. This was the Allies action in 1944 to mislead everyone about the time and place of the invasion. It was so successful that German High Command didn't actually believe their own Normandy look-out posts on the day of the invasion.

For Nehemiah, this Covert Action was a very real and effective scheme. The Opposition must have thought highly of this technique, v.4 says they tried it *four* times. Persistence...

2. Innuendo (Neh 6:5-9)

v.5b *"in [the assistants] hand was an unsealed letter 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,'"*

In Nehemiah's time, letters were usually written on papyrus or leather sheets, and rolled up and sealed to guarantee the letter's authenticity and confidentiality. But Sanballat wants everyone to know what this letter is saying. This is an open letter, open to the public.

Our modern-day equivalent would be the tabloid newspapers printing scandalous news, with very little concern as to whether the information was true or not.

This attack is all about Innuendo, & Insinuation & Implication. This is underhanded and foul-tasting; trying to tarnish and smear the reputation and work.

'Scandal' is the opposite of 'Gospel'; the bad news that sneaks in and strangles the good, and it often comes when at your weakest.

For Nehemiah, this Covert Action goes to the very root of his loyalty to king Artaxerxes, of his identity and integrity with his fellow Israelites, and attacks his wholeheartedness to God. This is a very nasty and personal attack.

3. Intimidation (Neh 6:10-14)

v.10b *"men are coming to kill you – by night they are coming to kill you."*

Notice the similarities between this verse and Neh 4:8 *“They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem”*, and Neh 4:11, *“Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to this work.”*

In Chapter 6, the difference is that this is one man, Shemaiah, facing one man, Nehemiah; the threat and intimidation is face-to-face. This is a more aggressive level of intimidation.

Worse still, this threat of physical aggression is being reported by someone who could be considered a reputable source (with access to the Temple, Shemaiah may have been a priest). But he was a hired associate (v.12), i.e. a mercenary of Tobiah & Sanballat, and therefore Nehemiah’s Opponent.

Furthermore, what Shemaiah is suggesting (that Nehemiah hides inside the Temple) is a cleverly phrased half-truth. Exodus 21:13-14 says that anyone who killed accidentally, say in self-defence, were allowed to take refuge in the temple area - but not actually inside the “house of God”. As a non-priest, Nehemiah was not allowed to enter the Temple sanctuary. What Shemaiah is suggesting was actually against God’s law.

For Nehemiah, this Covert Action is a face-to-face intimidation, cloaked in the sweet-talking shadows of half-truths, from someone who should know better.

As we study these schemes, it is clear that the Unseen Enemy will always try to: Distract, Discourage and Discredit.

But we mustn’t dwell on just the problems. Nehemiah responds to all of these challenges, and it is important that we look at these as well.

Unlike the Oppositions Covert Actions, Nehemiah responds with ...

B. OVERT ANSWERS

Nehemiah’s responses are not cloaked in secrecy, but are open and unambiguous.

1. Intrigue → Clear & polite; invitation declined

v.3 *‘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?’*

This response may sound a little abrupt and blunt. But Nehemiah has seen through their scheme and refuses to go, even though they pressure him four different times.

This raises the question: how many times do we have to be asked to do something wrong before we bend to the pressure?

Nehemiah persists in his refusal; his reason is that he is doing a great work that God has called him to do. It’s a refusal placed in the context of God’s agenda.

One of the things that we can do to resist temptation is to remember that God has called us to a great task. We are called to build God’s kingdom.

2. Innuendo → Clear & polite; accusation denied/rebuffed

v.8 *“I sent him this reply: ‘Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.’”*

Nehemiah’s response is not to argue or disprove their claim; he doesn’t get into a dialogue or argument with the Opposition. Instead it’s a straight denial – followed by yet another prayer (end v.9)

One of the things that we can do to resist temptation, is to give a straight ‘no’ and pray!

3. Intimidation → Clear & polite, confident refusal+prayer!

v.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!’”*

Shemaiah recommends doing something which is against God’s law. And by saying this, he reveals his true colours. Shemaiah is a false prophet.

Because Nehemiah knows God’s word, he can see through the lies.

One of things that we can do to resist temptation, is to know God’s Word and to pray.

CONCLUSION

As Christians, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are being called to build God’s kingdom. This may mean building God’s kingdom in the face of Opposition.

So, if you are encountering:

- a) **Intrigue & Scheming & Deception**, follow Nehemiah’s example and be Open and Honest in your answers. Remember: God has called you to His great work – to be a builder of God’s kingdom.
- b) **Innuendo & Insinuation & Implication**, follow Nehemiah’s example and be Open and Honest in your answers. Give a straight denial, and pray for God’s strength to be a builder of God’s kingdom.
- c) **Intimidation & Coercion & Threats**, follow Nehemiah’s example and be Open and Honest in your answers. Know God’s Word and instruction on how to be a builder of God’s kingdom.

Nehemiah relies on God and His power.

This is our challenge and our comfort – to rely on God and His power.

s Apostle Paul declares in Romans 8:

[For] I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39

AMEN