




THE COMMUNITY

The Leader and Obstacles | LEADERSHIP

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Nehemiah 4-6

It is in chapter two (v. 10), that we are first introduced to Sanballet the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite. Sanballet might well have been the neighboring governor of Samaria, while there's reason to believe Tobiah was the Persian governor of the territory. The point is they're not just two random guys who happen to hate Nehemiah. They had a vested interest in seeing the project fail. In chapters 4-6, Sanballet and Tobiah become central characters as they conspire against the rebuilding efforts. No significant work of God goes unchallenged by Satan, and Sanballet and Tobiah are nothing more than his puppets in this drama. While all leaders face obstacles and challenges, a spiritual leader needs to see "that our fight is not against flesh and blood" (Eph 6:12) but against the unseen forces of evil. While these chapters teach principles of leadership they also expose the common principles of spiritual attack endemic to spiritual leadership.

Nehemiah 4:1-6

Satan, I mean Sanballet and Tobiah, begin with ridicule in hopes that humiliation will grind things to a halt. But it's more than just ridicule; they're rehearsing in the minds of the Jews the sheer impossibility of the task. Notice the exaggeration in Sanballet's words, "Will they finish it in a day?" And from Tobiah, "If even a fox climbed on it, he would break down their stones." It's like having someone shove your nose in a cake on the first day of a diet – you can't do this! The timing of discouragement and spiritual attack is fairly predictable. It's at the outset of any major project that one needs the greatest motivation to gain inertia, and so it's no accident that Sanballet and Tobiah, I mean Satan, choose now to attack. Make a note of this in your spiritual leadership. In response, Nehemiah does nothing. Or rather he doesn't respond, but instead brings the Jews together in prayer. He doesn't get embroiled in meaningless word battles, but engages in the struggle at the spiritual level through prayer.

Nehemiah 4:6-23

By 4:6 the Jews had "rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height." They were at the halfway point, which is another motivational "red zone" – when you've labored long and hard, and you have just as far to go, as you've already come. So at the mid-point, Sanballet and Tobiah fall back on one of Satan's favorite tactics – fear and intimidation. They threaten to come and fight against Jerusalem and as a result "the strength of the laborers [was] giving out." In 1 Peter 5:8, it refers to Satan as a

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What's the Big Idea?

This study looks at spiritual leadership in the midst of spiritual battle, assessing two principles of spiritual warfare as well as principles of leadership.

What's the Problem?

Our fallenness makes us susceptible and vulnerable to spiritual attack from Satan.

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prowling line. Lions rule by intimidation. The lion's "roar" can be heard up to six miles away, and causes their prey to freeze in the headlights of fear. That's what's happening here. If ridicule and determinism won't work, fear and intimidation will usually get the job done – bring in the Mafia.

Nehemiah responds predictably. Predictably for Nehemiah is to respond with prayer. But, again, we see the marriage of faith and diligence: Nehemiah girds the most vulnerable sections of the wall with armed guards and then "encourages" or more literally "puts courage into" his fear-ridden laborers. He tells them to fight for their families and to "remember the Lord, who is great and awesome." He also institutes an early warning system, so if any area of the wall should be attacked, reinforcements can be quickly summoned. Far from immobilized, the threat launches Nehemiah into a whirl of activity and preparedness. Application can be subjective due to the unique nature of this situation, but three lessons of spiritual leadership seem clear: Nehemiah made prayer his primary defense; he encouraged and motivated from the word of God; and he gave great thought to keeping the people motivated and protected in the midst of the battle.

Nehemiah 6:1-14

As they near completion of the wall, Sanballet and Tobiah try one last time to derail the project. You have to hand it to them, if nothing else, they're persistent. Nehemiah is summoned away to meet with Sanballet for some kind of a peace talk, but it's really nothing more than an attempt to isolate him and pull him away from the task at hand. Leaders must beware of isolation. If you want to bring down a leader it's simple – lock them away without fellowship or accountability. Leaders must also avoid distractions that pull them from the work God's called them to. Emergencies will arise, fires must be tamped out, but a good leader will not lose sight of the forest for the trees. Last, Sanballet and Tobiah bribe a Jew, named Shemaiah (someone on the "inside" close to Nehemiah), to betray him and lure him into hiding in the temple. As the temple was forbidden to laymen (non-Levites), they were hoping to ensnare Nehemiah in sin – to rupture his walk with God and discredit his spiritual leadership in the eyes of the people. The Satanic paparazzi would just love to get their hands on some juicy picks of Nehemiah basking in the inner courts of the temple. Leaders must be on guard against moral compromise. Being in leadership means there's a great deal more at stake when we chose to sin. Nehemiah's leadership and ministry would have been seriously impaired, not to mention his credibility had he given in. And when leaders sin, it injures all those following in their steps.

Jesus and Temptation

As we look at the example of Nehemiah it's important to plot ourselves and our struggles on the other side of the cross. It really does matter that Christ is in us and that He forgives us immediately when we confess our sin and failure. It matters that Christ, through the indwelling Spirit, can empower and enable us in times of great struggle. Nehemiah reflects faith and reliance in Christ but he does so from a distance, and there should be a "how much more so" sense for us as we come this text.

Emotional Well-Being

In reviewing some traits of leadership, we looked at "dynamic determination" and "intellectual flexibility." Here we want to consider a leader's "emotional well-being." Emotional well-being is healthy self-awareness and self esteem. A leader needs to be well acquainted with themselves (who they are, what they are good at, and what they aren't), and be comfortable with themselves. The opposite would be a leader burdened down with insecurities, and therefore unable to accept correction or critique. A leader who is always in need of validation is not free to lead people for their own good and well being.

What's Our Response?

Leaders will always face opposition and obstacles. Such is the nature of leadership. A spiritual leader, however, needs to see the spiritual dimension of the battle and act accordingly, which among other things, includes:

1. A rigorous commitment to prayer.
2. An acute awareness of personal weaknesses and vulnerabilities.
3. A dynamic faith to cling to God and rely upon Him throughout the struggle.
4. An awareness, not ignorance, of Satan's strategies.

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What Are the Questions?

Nehemiah 4-6

Launch

When have you experienced being in a spiritual battle? How do you sense when you're in a spiritual battle?

Explore

Read Nehemiah 4:1-6.

1. Who are Sanballat and Tobiah? And why don't they want the walls of Jerusalem to be rebuilt?
2. To stop the rebuilding, Sanballat uses ridicule to make the Jews feel the project is determined to fail: How has Satan used this sense of determinism to immobilize you?
3. Notice the timing of this attack. It comes just as they are getting started. Why is this an opportune time?
4. How does Nehemiah exercise spiritual leadership?

Read Nehemiah 4:6-23.

5. What is significant about the time of this attack? Why chose now?
 6. Why do you think the laborers were unable to keep their perspective? Was there a time recently where you lost all objectivity? Why?
- In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter refers to Satan as a prowling lion. Lions rule by intimidation – their “roar” can be heard up to six miles away, immobilizing their prey with fear.
7. In what ways have you experienced fear as a barrier to doing what God has called you to?

8. What kind of spiritual or ministry applications could we make from Nehemiah's solutions?

9. Why do you think God allows everything to “hit the fan” at the same time?

Read Nehemiah 6: 1-14.

10. Now desperate, what are Sanballat's strategies here?
11. In what ways have you experienced Satan's use of distraction or isolation to keep you from obedience?
12. In what ways has Satan sought to discredit you? In what ways has he lured you to compromise?
13. How have you sought to guard and protect yourself from these kinds of attack?
read Nehemiah 6: 15,16.
14. Should we have expectations of success if we have done God's plan in reliance upon Him? Or are results not an accurate gauge?
15. Seeing Nehemiah's spiritual leadership in the midst of spiritual battle, what would you most want to apply?

Apply

16. What would you say are the two largest spiritual obstacles in your life and ministry right now? How have you or are you confronting them?
17. If failure in spiritual battle lies in believing the enemy, what are the things we must choose to believe about God? What lies and what truths are the greatest challenges to your faith?

18. read Hebrews 4:15. How does Jesus' perfect obedience under spiritual attack change the way we view our struggles? change the way we handle our struggles? change the way we handle our failures? change the way we view our success?

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. See “What Do I Need to Know about the Passage?”.
2. Allow the group to discuss.
3. The start of any project is a critical time of motivation. Momentum and inertia need to be established.
4. He calls them to prayer.
5. It occurs at another critical motivational juncture – the halfway point. You’re tired and you have as far to go as you’ve already come.
6. Most likely physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. Exhaustion makes us vulnerable to spiritual attack.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. Discuss. This is somewhat subjective, but clearly prayer and motivation from the Scripture are application points.
9. Among other reasons that we might rely upon Him. Also to stretch our faith.
10. He tries to isolate Nehemiah, distract him, cause him to sin and discredit him.
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. Discuss. Share from your own life and experience.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. results are not an accurate gauge. Faithfulness is the most important thing. But God’s plans, done in His ways, will always bear fruit in some form.
15. Allow the group to discuss.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. Here you really want the group to see the importance of what we choose to believe about God, and what lies we choose to believe from Satan. Faith is our shield in spiritual battle.
18. Unlike Nehemiah we stand on the other side of the cross. It matters that Christ is in us and that He forgives us immediately when we confess our sin and failure. It matters that Christ, through the indwelling Spirit can empower and enable us in times of great struggle. That’s what you’re getting at here.

Memorize

Instead of memorizing a verse you may want to read the group the paragraph in “What Do I Need to Know about the Passage,” under ‘Emotional Well-Being’ as there is little opportunity to get into it during the study.



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