

Hostile Intentions

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[0:00] In the previous two chapters of Nehemiah, we've seen three forms of opposition.

Each of those threatened to defeat Nehemiah's plan to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. The first two were external, and they came from Nehemiah's pagan enemies, including Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem.

They tried opposition by ridicule and opposition by the threat of violence. Nehemiah overcame those things by his faith in God, courage, and practical wisdom.

The third form of opposition we saw was internal, and it was caused by the greed of the Israelites themselves. It resulted in oppression of the poor by Israel's wealthy class.

And Nehemiah overcame this problem by a procedure similar to the one outlined in Matthew 18 for church discipline. He confronted the wrongdoers first privately and then publicly when they refused to listen the first time.

[1:05] So now that he's gotten through that opposition, the people are working on the wall again, so progress resumes. And that progress causes the familiar external enemies to return with hostile intentions.

So let's read Nehemiah 6, 1 through 14. That will be our focus tonight. So here are Nehemiah 6, 1 through 14. Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, and 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, 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. 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?

But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same matter. Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand.

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.

[2:24] 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. Then I sent to him, saying, No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart.

For they were all 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.

Afterward, I came to the house of Shemiah, the son of Deliah, the son of Methabel, 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. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go in the temple to save his life? I will not go in.

[3:25] 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. For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way in sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

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. Even before we look at the verses in detail, you may have noticed something different about this particular opposition to Nehemiah.

In tonight's verses, each attack is aimed at Nehemiah personally. This has not been true before. The first two hindrances were to ridicule the Jews and try to make them afraid. The internal problems were between the poor and the rich, who were exploiting them. That's changed now. In the final phase of Sanballat and Tobiah's opposition, the attacks are aimed at Nehemiah himself.

When Nehemiah's success gets reported to Sanballat and Tobiah, and also to Geshem the Arab, and all the other enemies of the Jews, they realize that their strategies have failed, and they've underestimated Nehemiah.

[4 : 43] They've made the mistake of thinking that their numerical strength, along with their location, and their persistent harassment would be enough to stop the progress on the wall. They failed to take into account, though, that Nehemiah had spiritual resources, and that spiritual resource, being God, helped him with his own personal resourcefulness.

Under ordinary circumstances, their strategies probably would have succeeded, because we know that the Jews were easily intimidated. We've seen before that they had decided to quit the work when they tried to rebuild the wall before Nehemiah came along.

But the key to the completion of this entire project was Nehemiah himself. He encouraged the people to persevere, and he helped them work through all of their problems.

When Sanballat and his co-conspirators realize that they've been outmaneuvered and outwitted by Nehemiah, they decide to attack him personally. They have a vendetta to settle.

Their wounded pride will not be appeased until Nehemiah has been humiliated, and that's what they set out to do in the passage tonight. So each of the attacks that we see in these verses was subtle on the surface.

[5 : 54] Nehemiah's enemies had to disguise their intentions to have any chance that Nehemiah would fall for their traps. Fending off these challenges required Nehemiah to recognize each threat for what it really was.

We'll break tonight's passage into three sections. The first section covers verses 1 through 9, and in that section we see the sinister invitations. Sinister invitations is what goes into your first set of links. We'll take the verses in pieces. Look at verses 1 and 2 again. 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 the time I had not hung the doors and the gates, that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono, that they thought to do me harm.

In 6.1, Nehemiah wrote that the doors of the gates had not yet been hung. If you remember, when we looked at chapter 3 several weeks ago, Nehemiah listed the people who hung the doors in the gates.

And the reason is because chapters 4 through 6 run parallel to chapter 3. Chapter 3 has a record of the entire wall project, and in chapters 4 through 6, we have a record of some of the events that took place during that time.

[7 : 21] That explains why in the text for this study, the gates have not been hung yet, when in chapter 3, the hanging of the gates was recorded. But looking at verse 2, verse 2 sounds like a nice friendly invitation, doesn't it?

After all, they just want to meet together and discuss some things. The reason this communication was subtle and therefore dangerous was that on the surface it sounded quite plausible.

It was really attractive. If the invitation for a conference had come earlier, surely Nehemiah would have been even more suspicious. It would have been an obvious ploy to get him to stop working. But now the wall was rebuilt. Only the gates remained to be set in place. So the project was finished, almost. Almost. And we'll see that almost is the key word there.

The invitation on the surface seemed to be a concession of defeat. It was as if they were saying, Nehemiah, you've succeeded in spite of us, and there's now no use for us to carry on our opposition.

[8 : 22] We need to figure out a way to live together, because you'll be governor of Jerusalem, and we'll be governors of our own provinces. So in other words, they're trying to make it look like they just want to be friends.

And what they ask for is a summit conference. So they want to meet in the plain of Ono, and that was a neutral site about equidistant from each of their three provinces.

So they tell him, You pick the place you want to meet in Ono, and we'll meet you there. So all of that sounds very magnanimous, because the invitation promises an amicable settlement to their longstanding differences.

It was made even more reasonable, because the Jews were known to be hard-pressed, weary, and famine-stricken at this time. So the conference held out hope for them of a truce, and certainly they would have liked Nehemiah to find a way to reach a truce with these people.

They didn't want the continued harassment. So what leader, with the social problems of the citizens on his shoulders, as well as military responsibility, wouldn't want his people to reach a settlement with their enemies.

[9:26] It was rather appropriate, though, that they wanted to meet Nehemiah in a region called Ono, because Nehemiah wisely saw through their ploy and thought, Oh no, I'm not going to go. It may not be that Ono means quite the same thing in Hebrew that it does in English, but we'll pretend that it does anyway.

Nehemiah really was wise to avoid trusting the enemy when the enemy suddenly appeared with an olive branch, because check out verse 3. It says, 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? Nehemiah omits a lot of detail about how he knew to decline the invitation, but as we just mentioned, distrust of the recent past certainly had to factor into his decision.

These people had never been friendly to him before, and all of a sudden, they wanted to kiss and make up. But verse 3 points to another reason why Nehemiah declined the invitation, even though the wall was almost finished, and that was the problem.

The job was not quite done yet. It was just almost done. The walls were completed to their full height, and only the gates remained, but the gates did remain, and until the gates were completed, the entire project would still be in great jeopardy.

[10:49] Nehemiah knew that, and for that reason, for at least that one reason, and maybe more, he declined the invitation to go. We talked last week about how Nehemiah had a single-minded focus on the goal of rebuilding the wall, and that single-minded focus again serves Nehemiah well here.

He knew that without adequate leadership in Jerusalem, the people would lapse back to their old ways, we've already seen that the priesthood was corrupt, and the rulers besides Nehemiah were greedy.

If Nehemiah left Jerusalem to go meet with the others, exploitation would likely return, and that would cause the morale to collapse, and dissension would prevail. So Nehemiah knew that his place was in Jerusalem, and the whole matter became one of priorities for him.

His first priority, and really his only priority at that time, was to get the wall finished. Nehemiah also realized the danger of accepting Sanballat's invitation.

By allowing himself to be drawn away from the security of the city, he would be exposing himself to the constant threat of assassination. Sanballat and his friend refused to take no for an answer, though.

[12:03] Look at verse 4. Verse 4 says, But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same matter. If Sanballat and company only had pure intentions toward Nehemiah, would they have been so insistent that Nehemiah come and meet with them?

You can tell they're up to something, and their obvious frustration gives Nehemiah's refusal another reason for validity. It gives him a clue that they're definitely up to something.

Nehemiah knew one key thing, and that is that a leader must know how to say no. Some people can't quite seem to do that, whether because of their own insecurity or an unbalanced desire to please other people.

Some people break down and give in, particularly if the request is repeated over and over. And we see Nehemiah had to say no four times. So Nehemiah's example shows us the importance of practical wisdom.

He knew what his priorities were, and he wouldn't allow himself to be sidetracked from those priorities. When people view God's work as something that's very important, they won't forsake God's work to be at other meetings and events when they need to be doing God's work, and God's people everywhere need to learn that from what we see in Nehemiah.

[13:21] Nehemiah's example also illustrates the need for adequate discernment and the importance of tact. Notice in his refusal, he didn't antagonize Sanballat.

He just instead insisted on exercising his own autonomy. He saw the issues clearly, and his ability to do that and stand firm under pressure safeguarded him from succumbing to the sinister invitations of those people.

He also shows us how to defeat the persistency of the enemy. We have to be just as persistent and even more so than the enemy is. Each time the enemy invited Nehemiah to the meeting, he refused, and when Nehemiah received the same invitation repeatedly, Nehemiah answered them in the same manner.

So, defeating the enemy requires much resolve. You have to be as resolved in your effort to defeat the enemy as the enemy is resolved to defeat you. Despite Nehemiah's persistent rejections, though, Sanballat refuses to fade quietly into the distance, he tries a different approach instead. Look at verses 5-7. These verses have yet another sinister invitation. They say, then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, so Nehemiah is keeping track.

[14:40] This time he comes with an open letter in his hand. 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.

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. And of course, the king there is King Artaxerxes.

And they close verse 7 by saying, so come, therefore, and let us consult together. The letter sent to Nehemiah was an open letter, according to verse 5.

That really spoke volumes regarding the intentions of the sender. Letters in the east in those days were usually placed in silken bags which were tied up carefully and then sealed.

An open letter invited others to read it. It would be like a postcard in our day. The sender of the open letter wanted people to read the letter. He wanted people to read the letter and spread the rumor about Nehemiah wanting to be king and about his alleged rebellion against King Artaxerxes of Persia.

[15:52] Letter carriers in those days often snooped in the open letters when they were on their long and boring trips to deliver them. Sanballat's letter tipped his intentions in another way, too.

If Sanballat had been interested in reconciliation, he could have just gone to Jerusalem and met Nehemiah there. Instead, he and Geshem now dropped their pretense of friendliness and tried to spread rumors that would damage Nehemiah and his work.

The strategy was again very subtle. On the one hand, it could have diverted Nehemiah from his purpose. On the other hand, the rumors, if left unchecked, could erode public support for Nehemiah and even bring down the wrath of the Persian king on Nehemiah.

The evidence that was accused to or was used to accuse Nehemiah of rebellion was the assertion that prophets were proclaiming Nehemiah to be king. Zechariah had prophesied that a king was coming in Zechariah 9.9 and with all the activity of rebuilding the wall, people were probably talking about what Zechariah said and wondering if maybe Nehemiah really was that king.

So they took something and just distorted it a little bit to try to fit their own purposes. So they used this threat as leverage to force Nehemiah to attend their proposed meeting.

[17:13] At least they thought it would force Nehemiah to attend the meeting. They had no real intention of going to the king, but they hoped their threats would ruin Nehemiah's reputation so that the workers would lose their resolve and stop the work.

So really the letter was insidious in several ways. First, the letter made it seem like they had Nehemiah's welfare at heart. The letter implied that their reason for conferring with him was to protect him.

Second, and more basic to their motive, they were attempting to get Nehemiah to respond out of fear. And third, the letter, like we said, may have contained an element of truth, possibly some well-meaning religious leader in Judah had interpreted Nehemiah's presence as a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah.

So this attack on Nehemiah takes advantage of an important psychological principle. We still see it today, too. People are always quick to believe the worst about others.

Just think how quickly rumors of a scandal spread through an office or a church. If you have even the faintest hint at indiscreet behavior and the person concerned is pronounced guilty, even though that libel may be totally false, it's still impossible for that person to refute every one of the accusations.

[18:32] So the implication of Nehemiah's supposed treasonous activities is nothing less than attempted blackmail. They really want him to get sidetracked and take his mind off the work, and the strength of their scheme lies in man's innate fear of reprisal.

Knowing the allegations and accusations to be lies, though, Nehemiah simply was able to deny them and continue the work. We see that from verse 8. Verse 8 says, Then I sent to him, saying, No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart.

You invent them in your own heart is another fancy way of saying what? You made it up, so he just called him an outright liar, which, of course, he was.

So Nehemiah's response to this attack was an open denial. His reply is very revealing. It shows that he's inwardly secure. He knows in the final analysis that what God thinks of him is what really matters.

So this places the attack on a whole different level. because if you're concerned about what God thinks about you, you're going to stay focused on God's priorities first and you're not really going to care what the human opposition says about you.

[19:53] So it brings God into the picture and links Nehemiah with a different world of reality. So this new dimension enables him to endure the slander that he's facing. Still though, Nehemiah's influence probably has been undermined and his popularity poll's probably fallen a little bit.

You know, there were some people that likely believed that and they probably weren't there to hear Nehemiah's denial. All along, the rulers of the people have been looking for some weakness in his administration so that they could reassert their authority.

You can bet they're probably not happy that Nehemiah came and chastised them for their blackmail that they were doing and for the way they were oppressing the poor. So they probably liked the idea that maybe they'd found a chink in Nehemiah's armor.

So now with the possible alienation of the people and everyone aware of the fact that Nehemiah was under attack, his task will become even more difficult even though he's continuing on.

Nehemiah recognized it for what it was though. Look at verse 9. He wrote in verse 9, Notice how Nehemiah responds though.

[21:05] He says, Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. The enemy often uses fear as a tactic to hinder the work of the Lord.

When force is not possible, it's still possible to try fear. The Jews' enemies found that the use of force had been thwarted by the Jews, but they still could create fear in the hearts of the Jews, so they bluffed the Jews by creating the false accusation of rebellion against Nehemiah and by other actions calculated to create even more fear.

We've seen before just in our own lives how fear stops the work of God because fear can weaken us and make us unable to do our work. Faith, on the other hand, though, makes us strong.

So, when fear makes us weak, we need to rely on that faith. The enemies of the Jews knew that they could cause a work stoppage if they could create enough fear and even if they didn't stop the work completely, they would at least slow it down and that would give them a chance to come up with another alternative, perhaps.

In facing this new form of opposition, we see Nehemiah turn to prayer. We've seen that several times throughout Nehemiah already. When you think about it, prayer is the best way to deal with fear, the end of verse 9 reminds us that short prayers can be just as effective as long prayers, and Nehemiah asked God to strengthen his hands.

[22:33] He was asking God to strengthen his hands because fear had weakened his hands, and so that's the way to conquer the fear. That's to take it to the Lord in prayer. We can learn something about how Nehemiah responded in verses 8 and 9 to Sanballat's threat.

You know that there are times in our lives where we too find those that want to malign us and question our motives and try to undermine our resolve.

But when this happens, an open denial of what is plainly false and prayer are really the only recourse. Fortunately, for the true believer, the only recourse is also the best recourse.

Prayer is the best thing that we can do. We already know that Sanballat refuses to give up easily. He tries a third hostile tactic in verses 10 through 13.

We've seen the sinister invitations. Now we'll read about the suspicious information. The suspicious information. So here is verse 10.

[23 : 42] It says, Afterward, I came to the house of Shemaiah, the son of Deliah, the son of Methabel, 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. What a nice guy, right? He was letting Nehemiah know that people were coming to try to kill him. He wants to give him a chance to hide and take care of himself.

If we were to stop right there, this sounds like great information for Nehemiah to know. It sounds like Shemaiah has Nehemiah's best interest at heart. The name Shemaiah shows up ten times in the book of Nehemiah, and at least four different Shemaiahs are involved, because where the father is mentioned, four different fathers are listed.

This Shemaiah had access to the temple, so obviously he was a priest. Verse 12, as we'll see in a minute, indicates that he was considered a prophet, too. There could be a lot of legitimate reasons why a priest would want to see Nehemiah.

After all, Nehemiah was in charge of building the walls. Nehemiah had much business with the priest because of their importance and influence in Jerusalem. Nehemiah quickly sees through the priest's suggestion, though.

[25 : 02] Look at verses 11 and 12. 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. Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me, because Sanballat and Tobiah had hired him.

For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way in sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me. At first glance, we easily can wonder how in the world Nehemiah saw through the priest's ploy so easily.

At least three things, though, point to the priest's suggestion as being a trap. First, notice the priest's words to Nehemiah in verse 10. Shemaiah asked that they meet together.

You know that Nehemiah has had a few invitations to meet recently, and most of those have not been good invitations, so I'm sure that choice of words set off some alarm bells for him.

[26 : 07] Meeting together is often a favorite plea, even today, for the world to the Christian. We already talked about some, how meeting together sounds so warm and friendly.

To refuse such an invitation makes the refuser look unfriendly and unloving. Those who are refused will go back to quickly proclaim that you were rude to them and that you weren't trying to be nice with them.

However, meeting together with the enemy, as in Nehemiah's case, must be avoided if we're going to live victoriously for the Lord and to serve him successfully and faithfully.

The second clue that the meeting request was a trap comes from the suggested place for the meeting. Shemaiah wanted to meet in the house of God within the temple.

When Shemaiah suggested that he and Nehemiah flee to the temple to save themselves, the term he used means the holy place and not just the temple enclosure. Only priests could legitimately enter that part of the temple.

[27 : 13] We know Nehemiah was a governor. He wasn't a priest. Shemaiah's request clearly contradicted the law of God. A true prophet of God would never contradict God's word.

And according to Deuteronomy 18.20 and Isaiah 19.20, if a word that claims to be a prophecy from God is in contradiction with what God has already revealed, we should be suspicious of it.

Notice how Nehemiah said, why should I go into the temple and sin? He obviously knew God's word. He knew that if he went into a place where he wasn't supposed to go, he would be sinning against God.

So our ability to perceive true from false will therefore be depend upon our knowledge of the word of God. If he wasn't so well versed in scripture and didn't realize that going into the temple would be a sin, how much more likely would he have been to do that?

Perception of true and false then is not some gift that comes without effort, it's an ability that comes to you by your attentiveness to scripture. And so that's a lesson we can take away from this.

[28:19] Quite likely, Nehemiah also remembered what happened to King Uzziah when he entered the temple. 2 Chronicles 26, 16 through the first half of verse 21 give us these details about King Uzziah.

They say, But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction. For he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. So Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the Lord, valiant men. And they withstood King Uzziah and said to them, It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed. You shall have no honor from the Lord God. Then Uzziah became furious, and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priest, leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priest in the house of the Lord beside the incense altar, and Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there on his forehead he was leprous, so they thrust him out of that place. [29:33] Indeed, he also hurried to get out because the Lord had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house because he was a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord.

You can bet that somebody who was as attentive to Israel's history as Nehemiah was remembered what happened with him too. So that's another reason why Nehemiah knew that going into the temple would be wrong.

The third reason why Nehemiah quickly was able to diagnose Shemaiah's false invitation was because the invitation contradicted the will of God. At the end of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2, we saw Nehemiah earnestly praying to God about what Nehemiah should do. God revealed to Nehemiah that Nehemiah should go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. From the very beginning to this point in the mission, Nehemiah had received many confirmations that he correctly interpreted God's will.

This close to being finished, God had no reason to change his mind now and tell Nehemiah to do something different. We can tell from these verses that Nehemiah clearly was intelligent.

[30:48] That's been obvious from the very start of this book. The smartest thing he did, though, was to apply himself to learning the word of God and the will of God. Armed with that knowledge, he was able to identify the suspicious information for what it was.

It was just another fancy attempt to trap him. If they couldn't get him to go meet with them, they were trying to get him to sin against his own God and then maybe God would take care of him, similar to what he did to King Uzziah.

Nehemiah's knowledge allowed him to quickly ask the questions that led him to identify Shemaiah as a false prophet. But think what would have happened if Nehemiah had followed Shemaiah's recommendation.

At best, if Nehemiah had entered the temple and shut himself in the holy place, it would have been a desecration of the house of God and it would have caused his people to question his reverence for God.

So this plan would give the people a chance to raise an evil report against Nehemiah. After all, we've already talked about how he wasn't a priest and so he had no right to go into the holy place.

[31:52] It could also make the people question his courage. And at worst, like we mentioned, God could have chosen to punish Nehemiah for the mistake. He'd already established a precedent with Uzziah, so it was very possible that he might do the same with Nehemiah, too.

We have one more verse to cover tonight, and that verse is the third section of the lesson. In verse 14, we see the successful invocation.

The successful invocation is what we see there. Verse 14 is where Nehemiah wrote, 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.

prayed. This prayer is similar to a prayer that we saw from Nehemiah in chapter 4, verses 4 and 5. When we covered those verses, we discussed at length how some people through the years have criticized Nehemiah for praying such a prayer.

The same holds true about the prayer here. Even some conservative critics are quick to line up against Nehemiah for what he said in verse 14. Because we spent so much time discussing the same issue in chapter 4, we'll skip a lot of detail here, but here's a quick recap of some of the

reasons why Nehemiah's prayers in chapter 4 for judgment were justified.

[33 : 15] The same reasons also apply to Nehemiah's prayer for judgment here in chapter 6. The first is that Nehemiah's requests, like the implications elsewhere, were for divine judgment against sin.

And divine judgment against sin is a clear teaching in scripture. The prayer was for God not to cover their enemy's guilt. Nehemiah didn't pray that they would never be saved.

He just prayed that they be judged for their actions if they didn't turn to God. So it was a prayer for divine justice. Second, Nehemiah's prayer was a prayer for God to act, not for permission for him to take personal vengeance on them.

Third, Nehemiah's prayer expressed zeal for God's work and God's honor. Nehemiah had no doubt that the building of the wall was God's doing, so opposition to rebuilding the wall was really opposition to God himself.

Fourth, Nehemiah trusted himself and his workers to God's plan. Centuries later, Jesus did the same thing. Listen to how 2 Peter 2.23 describes Jesus' conduct when he was reviled.

[34 : 25] 2 Peter 2.23 says, Who, when he was reviled, did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to him who judges righteously.

Nehemiah's prayer here in 6.14 does give us some new information, though. Look at verse 14 again that says, Nehemiah's prayer reveals that there were more evil prophesying going on than the evil prophesying done by Shemaiah.

So we know that there were several prophetess and prophets involved in trying to get Nehemiah to do something wrong. He says the prophetess Noah, Diah, and the rest of the prophets were working together to make evil prophecies that would cause Nehemiah to go into fear and might cause him to enter the temple for safety.

So Shemaiah was not the only culprit who was sending out a false message. He was just the leader in it. Unless they repented and trusted God for their salvation, these false prophets will be judged according to their works.

And they and the other enemies of the Jews were adding to an already long list of evil works by their opposition to Nehemiah and the work of God in Jerusalem. We know that God's judgment is sure.

[35 : 51] Men often appear to be getting away with evil and we bemoan the outward success of men who are extremely vile, immoral, brutal, and greedy. But the day is coming when they'll all be judged according to their works by a holy God and it won't be a good day to be one of those people when that day gets here.

We have many false prophets in our day too. They try to tell us that our land is doing wonderfully well even when sins abound around us.

These prophets proclaim a strange message that's contrary to the word of God. Some false prophets, as an example, tell people that everybody is going to heaven and that there's no such place as hell.

Those prophets, of course, are very popular but they're also very polluted and they will all do the same thing to one who heeds their message and that is that they will defile and destroy everybody who heeds their message instead of heeding the true word of God.

In tonight's passage we saw Nehemiah successfully resist his enemy's hostile intentions and his successful resistance largely came from his own personal security.

[37 : 02] In a commentary on the book of Nehemiah, Cyril Barber cited a man named Maurice Wagner concerning the source of personal security and it's something that applies to us too.

He wrote, personal security comes from our relationship to the three persons of the Godhead. Our relationship to God the Father gives us a sense of belonging. We are members of his family and are secure in our father-child relationship.

Our union with Christ the Son gives us a sense of worth. God loved us so much that he sent his Son to die for our sins. With our redemption accomplished, God has made us joint heirs with Christ. This shows our value. Finally, the Holy Spirit's indwelling empowers us. We are made equal to every task. In other words, we are competent. So these three things form the foundation of our inner security.

This security helps us withstand the subtle innuendos of those who impugn our motives and try to hinder the work that we are doing. We are approximately halfway through the book of Nehemiah

now.

[38:11] Consider what we have learned so far. We have learned five secrets of Nehemiah's success as a leader and as a man of God. Those really aren't secrets at all.

They are pretty obvious when you look at the text. The first is Nehemiah's closeness to God and his prayerfulness. Nothing is more characteristic of Nehemiah than his closeness to God.

We see that expressed most often by his praying to God on just about every occasion. We have seen him do it before in the earlier chapters. We saw him do it two more times in the passage tonight in verses 9 and 14.

First he prayed for God to strengthen his hands and then he prayed for God to judge the false prophets. We see that Nehemiah sees everything that happened to him within a spiritual framework.

The second thing we've learned so far is Nehemiah's sense of calling to a task. In secular terms it's a matter of objectives.

[39:11] Nehemiah had a strong sense of one great objective which was to rebuild the wall but he went beyond that. Above all he knew himself to be God's man and to have a call for God's service.

Rebuilding the wall was simply what God had called him to do and he was really focused on being that man of God. Third we see Nehemiah's self-awareness and knowledge of his own worth.

The gifts Nehemiah had were from God. He would not have had them otherwise but he knew he had those gifts and he wasn't intimidated by the task he was given nor was he intimidated by the people who tried to stop him from doing that task.

We should have an equally strong sense of personal value. We should know that we're always equipped by God for whatever task God chooses for us. Fourth, Nehemiah had extraordinary discernment.

He also showed great discernment in everything he did and he was able to detect in every ploy of the enemy exactly what was going on beneath the surface. We talked a little bit about where he got that discernment.

[40:20] Some of it may have been a natural gift but a large part of it must have come from his spiritual experience and understanding. Nehemiah knew what was in man therefore he wasn't beguiled by even the most subtle devices of his enemies.

Instead he was able to focus on the real issues and priorities. Fifth, we see Nehemiah's great courage. Many people have had other important gifts and yet have failed in times of testing because of a lack of courage.

Remember what Nehemiah said in 6:11 though. He said, should such a man as I flee? So those words really echo across the centuries to us.

Like Nehemiah, we live in days when we must let our courage be seen by the way that we act and speak. It will help us perhaps to realize that true courage doesn't mean the absence of fear, but instead true courage means doing what God wants us to do even when we are afraid, disturbed, and hurt.

We know that we're all afraid, disturbed, and hurt at times, but it's precisely when we yield to those fears and give in that we make a mistake. Instead, we should resist those fears and give those fears to God and press on, and that shows true leadership.

[41:38] As Christians, we live in two worlds. As with Nehemiah, we're surrounded by a pagan environment. We, however, need to remember we have the same resources available to us that Nehemiah had.

We can follow the teaching of scripture just like Nehemiah did and allow God's word to produce in us the right kind of character, commitment, and adherence to right conduct that is essential if we're going to be successful for God.

The thing to remember is that the very suddenness with which we sometimes find ourselves in a delicate, trying situation often prevents us from planning ahead, so we have nothing to guide us apart from our integrity and what we've already internalized.

That's why it becomes even more important to study God's word. So Nehemiah was a living example of Psalm 119 verses 105 through 112.

So let's close tonight and think about striving to make the psalmist's words our own testimony. Psalm 119 105 through 112 say this, Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

[42:47] I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep your righteous judgments. I am afflicted very much. Revive me, O Lord, according to your word. Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me your judgments.

My life is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget your law. The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not strayed from your precepts. How much does that apply to Nehemiah?

Then verse 111 says, Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform your statutes forever to the very end.

Thank you.