

They Said It Couldn't Be Done

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
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Let's Begin

The devil never gives up trying to defeat the work of the Lord and to destroy the testimonies of believers. Even after he tempted the Lord Jesus in the wilderness and failed, the Bible says, "... the devil departed from him (Jesus) for a season" (Luke 4:13). This was not the only time the devil tried to defeat Jesus Christ. If he would do this to our Lord, we can be sure he will do the same in our lives. We see this reality in Nehemiah's life in our lesson today.

Nehemiah and the children of Israel were so close to finishing the wall of Jerusalem. The devil had tried attacks from without and within. Each time he had been unsuccessful, and the work on the wall continued. Knowing

the Jews were making good progress on the wall, the devil did not give up. He only increased the intensity and viciousness of his assault in chapter 6. Using the outline below, let's see what the Jews' enemies did next as they tried to keep Nehemiah and the Jews from realizing the great victory of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.

I. The Invitation (vv. 1-4)

II. The Insinuation (vv. 5-9)

III. The Intimidation (vv. 10-14)

IV. The Infiltration (vv. 17-19)

I. The Invitation (vv. 1-4)

Because their other attacks had failed, the Jews' enemies began to focus on Nehemiah personally. Their plan was to discredit him. They realized they had to work fast because they had heard the work on the wall was almost done. As Nehemiah recounts what happens, we see how close the Jews were to having the wall completed. He shares that there were no breaches or gaps in the wall; only the doors were left to set up (v. 1). The end of a project can be a very crucial time for any project, especially when

it is being done for the Lord. It is the same as we live for the Lord Jesus. In both situations, if we are not careful, we can think we are "home free" as we near the end of a project or our lives. When we start thinking like that, we will not be as vigilant to the attacks of the devil as we should be. As we live our Christian lives, we need to realize it is so important for us to finish well. Some people faithfully serve Jesus Christ all their lives, but then they lose their testimony right before the end. That becomes the only

thing people remember about them. So, it's very important to be careful and watching out for attacks from the devil all the way to the end, not only in our projects but also in our lives.

Nehemiah's enemies' strategy to foil him and the work this time is a peace conference. In verse 2 they send a message to him saying, "... Come let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono ..." Ono was a plain about halfway between Jerusalem and Samaria. The enemies wanted Nehemiah to sit down with them and talk things over. They wanted to negotiate a compromise with Nehemiah.



Any time an enemy of Jesus Christ wants to sit down to talk things over, believers need to beware. This invitation to Nehemiah is a temptation to compromise. It's one thing to compromise in personal preferences and certain non-essentials. But there are certain principles such as moral and spiritual ones that should never be compromised. Sanballat's and the others' invitation may have looked harmless, but their purpose is given in the last part of verse 2, "... But they thought to do me mischief." So much damage has been done to the cause of Christ because of Christians and churches that have been willing to compromise. Nehemiah realized this danger.

Notice Nehemiah's magnificent response, "... I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down ..." (v. 3). Why was Nehemiah so forceful in his reply? He understood that he was involved in something very

great. He was involved in a work for his Lord God. Anytime we are doing something for God, no matter how insignificant we think it is, we need to understand it is important. We should never minimize anything we do for God.

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Nehemiah also understood that if he came down off the wall and went to the meeting in Ono, there would be one less person working on the wall. One of the most effective methods of

the devil in hurting the work of the Lord is to get believers sidetracked. Many times believers are asked to get involved in different projects and activities, and some of them are for good causes. But these projects and activities distract the believers from faithfulness to the Lord. We can spend our time being involved in so many special causes that we no longer do the real work of God. When that happens, we might say one less person is involved in "working on the wall."

Sanballat and the others were very persistent about the invitation. They send their message four times, and each time Nehemiah gives them the same reply (v. 4).

Reflection Connection

According to Matthew 28:18-20, what should be the main work of believers?

II. The Insinuation (vv. 5-9)

Since the invitation to come down and meet with them doesn't work, Nehemiah's enemies become more serious. Sanballat sends his servant to Nehemiah for the fifth time, but this time he comes with an open letter in his hand (v. 5). In those days letters would normally be folded and sealed. An open letter was a sign of disrespect. It is even possible that this letter was

read or posted in villages on its way to Nehemiah.

Verses 6 and 7 tell us about the letter's content. Sanballat attacks Nehemiah's motives in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. He says that Geshem, who was another enemy of the Jews (cp. 2:19), had heard rumors everywhere he went. The rumors all said the same thing—Nehemiah was

planning to rebel against the Persian king and make himself king of Jerusalem instead. That is why he had come to Jerusalem and was so determined to rebuild its wall, so said the rumors. The letter even accused Nehemiah of having prophets to prepare the people for his kingship. Sanballat really believes his insinuation is going to intimidate Nehemiah, so he concludes the letter with,



“Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together” (v. 7c).

Almost all rumors have the same characteristics, and Sanballat’s rumor was no different. The first characteristic is that the source is normally anonymous. Did you note how the letter said, “... It is reported ...” (v. 6)? Another thing about rumors is that they are usually never completely true. They only contain partial truth. It is true Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild its wall, but that is where the facts stopped. Everything else Sanballat said was a lot of innuendo.

Unfortunately, churches can be the breeding ground for rumors. It is easy to laugh at some rumors because they can be so ridiculous. But we need to realize that some rumors can be very damaging. They bring heartache and hinder the work of God. Before repeating rumors, we should consider the source and the rumor’s accuracy. Then, we need to consider the value or need in even sharing the news. More times than not, we will be wiser to not listen to the rumor

and to refuse to pass it on to others.

Notice how Nehemiah deals with the rumor. The first thing he does is to tell the truth (v. 8a). He accuses Sanballat of lying. There was no truth in what Sanballat had said.

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The second thing Nehemiah does is to put the blame right where it belongs. Nehemiah tells Sanballat that he (Sanballat) had “feigned them out of thine own heart” (v. 8b). He was saying the rumors

were figments of Sanballat’s imagination.

The last way Nehemiah deals with the rumor is by taking it to God in prayer. Notice the last part of verse 9, “Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.” He asks the Lord to give him the strength to finish the work on the wall.

Any time we want to do something for God and are serious about living for Him, we can be sure we are going face rumors. We may even be misrepresented. We need to follow Nehemiah’s example when that happens. We need to take the situation to the Lord in prayer. There are two reasons why we don’t need to try to explain or defend ourselves or our motives. Number one, our friends don’t need it. Number two, our enemies won’t believe it.

Reflection Connection

Based on Matthew 12:36, how wise is it for Christians to repeat rumors? Discuss.

III. The Intimidation (vv. 10-14)

Sanballat and the other enemies were still not ready to give up. They next recruit help from within the Jews themselves. In verse 10 Nehemiah relates how he goes to the house of Shemaiah, a fellow Jew. He no doubt thinks Shemaiah is a

friend until he hears his counsel. Shemaiah urges Nehemiah to take refuge in the temple because Nehemiah’s enemies are planning to kill him that very night. It is easy to think Shemaiah was genuinely concerned about Nehemiah’s welfare. But as

Nehemiah continues to tell what happens, we learn the truth.

Shemaiah was really a part of a conspiracy of prophets. Nehemiah was not a priest, and only the priests were allowed to go into the sacred confines of the



temple. If Nehemiah had gone into the temple as Shemaiah had suggested, Nehemiah's enemies would have had a legitimate attack and grievance against him. So, the truth of the matter is Shemaiah was trying to get Nehemiah to disobey the Word of God.

Nehemiah wisely answers Shemaiah in verse 11, "And I said, Should such a man as I flee? And who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." Nehemiah knew who he was, and he knew he was doing the Lord's work. When we realize who we are in Jesus Christ, we don't have to be intimidated by the devil either. The Bible says, "The wicked flee when none pursue it, but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1).

Nehemiah also realizes the truth about Shemaiah (vv. 12-13). God had given Nehemiah discernment, and he knew God had not

sent Shemaiah. Today we need to realize that just because a person says he is from God doesn't mean he really is. As believers, we have the Holy Spirit and the

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Word of God to give us discernment. A true preacher or teacher will never direct us to do anything that goes against God's Word. Shemaiah had actually been hired by Tobiah and Sanballat. Had Nehemiah followed Shemaiah's counsel, they would have been

able to ruin his reputation and position. If this had happened, the work on the wall would have stopped.

As Nehemiah comes to understand more about the conspiracy against him, he again goes to the Lord in prayer (v. 14). As he prays, we see the magnitude of the conspiracy. Tobiah and Sanballat had not only been able to hire Shemaiah, but they had also hired a prophetess by the name of Noadiah and other prophets. Nehemiah doesn't seek his own revenge against these people, but he asks the Lord to remember them.

Reflection Connection

According to Acts 17:11, what did the Berean believers do when they first heard the teachings of Paul? Discuss how their actions can be a good example for us when we hear new teachers or teachings.

IV. The Infiltration (vv. 15-19)

Verses 15 and 16 give us Nehemiah's great statement of victory. In only 52 days the wall of Jerusalem was completed. When the Jews' enemies realized the work was done, they were "much cast down in their own eyes" (v. 16b). Even with all their scheming and intimidation, they had not been able to stop Nehemiah and the workers in

rebuilding the wall. It was a definite embarrassment for them. They also understood the Jews' God was the reason behind the Jews' success.

Even as Nehemiah rejoices in the completion of the wall, he is aware of a serious infiltration. We read about it in verses 17 through 19. During the entire 52 days of working on the city

wall, the nobles of Judah were busy sending letters back and forth to Tobiah. These nobles were fellow Jews, but they were communicating and conspiring with an avowed enemy. This now explains their refusal to work when the work first began (3:5).

Verse 18 further explains the nobles' connection to Tobiah, "For there were many in Judah



sworn unto him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah ... and his son had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.” Tobiah was an Ammonite, but he and his son had married into respectable Jewish families. These were Jewish families that were leaders in the community. They should have known better. Instead of siding with and supporting Nehemiah, these families kept trying to convince him of what

a good person Tobiah was (v. 19). At the same time, Tobiah sent letters to try to intimidate Nehemiah.

Reflection Connection

Although it is not always the “rulers or nobles” who fall into the sin of compromise by conspiring with the world, discuss why they can be more susceptible than other believers to this sin.

Wrap Up

Even with the help from the traitorous Jews, the Jews' enemies were not able to prevent Nehemiah from finishing the wall. Why? Because his work was wrought of God! As believers, God's Word has an encouraging promise for us today to let us know we are also “wrought of God.” Philippians 1:6 tells us, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” We are not just living our Christian lives on our own. God is the One who is really working in our lives. We are His workmanship (Eph. 2:10). Each day we need to be surrendered to Him and let Him continue His good work in us until the day He takes us home to heaven!

