

DEEP WATERS MEN'S DISCIPLESHIP-LEADERSHIP TRAINING
Lesson Six: The Opposition Gets Ugly
Nehemiah 6:1-7:73

Question: What was the most satisfying project you have ever completed? What was so special about finishing it?

Question: What really frightens you? How do you handle it?

President Calvin Coolidge was asked how he managed to remain so calm when surrounded by the troubles of the presidency. He replied, "Oh I never let trouble bother me, for I have discovered that if you see ten troubles coming down the road toward you, you need not be frightened, because before they get to you, nine of them will go into the ditch, and the other one will probably be so weak by the time it reached you that you can handle it easily." (Campbell, p. 53)

All the work is nearly completed. All that remains is putting the gates in place.

The focus of the attack in chapter 6 is now upon Nehemiah himself; remove him and the work would totally stop.

Nehemiah 6:1-4 – The attack of Intrigue

From outward appearance, Sanballat and company wanted a peace conference.

Ono is seven miles SE of Joppa, near the city of Lydda or Lod. This would be an "out of town" conference; a day's ride from Jerusalem. Ono lay on the border of Ashdod and Samaria which were both enemies of Nehemiah and Jerusalem.

The invitation did not "smell right" to Nehemiah, but he could not prove their intentions. What would he do? **What would you do if you were in Nehemiah's situation?**

Verse 3 – his response – he did not get sidetracked from his real purpose; what he was doing had a higher priority than a "peace conference"

Men, there is a lesson here: we need to know our priorities and stick with them. We cannot waver from them even for something that might appear to be better.

Four times the invitation came: These guys were slow learners. Each response Nehemiah gave was the same.

Nehemiah 6:5-9 – The Attack of Slander

A fifth invitation to a "peace conference" was sent, but this time it was sent unsealed. This was an important fact: An unsealed document meant that it could be read in public; the purpose was to get the crowd to support the intentions of Sanballat and company, thus creating pressure upon Nehemiah to explain himself – Nehemiah would need to justify his actions before those he labored with. (Notice: they couched the letter as if they were addressing

rumors; they certainly would not want the King to hear these rumors; only Nehemiah could stop them)

Three accusations in the letter:

1. Nehemiah and the Jews were plotting treason
2. Nehemiah secretly desired to be king
3. Nehemiah had bribed some prophets to support his quest to be king.

Nehemiah's response:

1. He denied the accusations – they were totally absurd
2. He responded publicly – he had nothing to hide
3. He prayed – why? Because he saw the gravity of the situation; if the

King agreed with

these slanderous accusations, then there would be trouble. Thus his prayer.

I think Nehemiah was hoping that he knew the King better than did Sanballat and company, but he still remembered that it was this King who had once before stopped work on the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Verse 9 “hands will get too weak for the work” – a Hebrew idiom for discouragement

(used also in Ezra 4:4 and Jeremiah 38:4)

Nehemiah knew the urgency of the need and the danger the slander would do.

How should we respond to slander?

1. When criticized we must not question the other person's motives; instead we must wait and the motives will be eventually revealed.
2. When we respond to criticism, let's be biblical:
 - 1 Peter 2:12 – Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
 - 1 Peter 2:15 – For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.
 - 1 Peter 3:15–16 – But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reasons for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Nehemiah 6:10-14 – Attack of Treachery; intent is to destroy Nehemiah’s credibility

Shemaiah was probably a priest; confined at home because of some ritual defilement – he might have touched a dead person’s body

Two flaws in this plan:

1. It did not make sense for Nehemiah to leave now this close to the end of the project.
2. It violated God’s laws regarding the temple and who could enter into it.

Lesson: It is imperative that we know what God’s Word has to say; it behooves us to study it diligently so that we do not add or subtract from it.

Verse 14 – mention of prophetess Noadiah

1. There are some good prophetesses mentioned in the Old Testament:
Miriam, sister of Moses
Deborah, a great judge and leader
Huldah, one that Josiah consulted after the Book of the Law was found
Wife of Isaiah, mother of his children

2. There were some evil prophetesses, like Noadiah
Those mentioned in Ezekiel 13:17-23, who worshiped Tammuz

Nehemiah 6:15-19 – Attack of Subversion

Verse 15 – Month Elul is the sixth month of the year; work began on Nisan, the first month

(Nehemiah 2-6 is crowded into a six month period of time)

Verse 16 – Response of all the enemies; this was of God – what a testimony of God’s faithfulness and power.

Nehemiah 7 is a pivotal chapter in the book:

Chapters 1-6 focus on the walls and their restoration

Chapter 8-13 focus on the people and their restoration to God

Verses 1-2 – Notice the character of Hananiah – a man of integrity and feared God

Men, I believe that is the most important character trait we can have in our world today. The world is lacking in men with integrity, and there certainly is chronic need for men who fear God.

If nothing else is accomplished this year through Deep Waters, it is my desire that we cultivate men who can stand before our community with integrity and the fear of God.

Verses 3–4 – Gates to be opened late and closed early; people were to guard their own

residences

Why the unusual times for the gates to be opened and closed? Nehemiah wanted the people to be fully awake and alert before the gates were opened

Verse 5 – Nehemiah is being guided by God’s Spirit – he is led to check the registrations of those

who have returned from Babylon.

Verses 6–73 – a copy of Ezra 2, with some minor changes.

Verse 65 – Urim and Thummim

- Not exactly certain what these were
- But they were used to determine God’s will

Exodus 28:29–30 – Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, eh will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the LORD. Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron’s heart whenever he enters the presence of the LORD. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the LORD.

Numbers 27:21 – He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.

Deuteronomy 33:8 – About Levi he said: “Your Thummim and Urim belong to a man you favored. You tested him at Massah; you contended with him at the waters of Meribah.

Homework Assignment:

1. How does a Christian distinguish between what is God’s will and the words of a misguided, although well-intentioned person? How does a Christian distinguish between what is good and what is best?

2. Name three important people in your spiritual journey who greatly influenced you walk with the Lord.

3. What one spiritual trait are you now developing that you want to pass on to your children or grandchildren?