

8. OPERATION INTIMIDATION

One of my favorite Saturday morning cartoons was “Roadrunner”. Even though it was very funny cartoon, I sometimes felt sorry for Mr. Wily Coyote who is so persistent and diligent in his everlasting hunting for that fast moving Roadrunner. Wily is a genius with his elaborate “ACME” rockets, explosives or some special gadgets. But his speedy opponent always get to do his “BEEP, BEEP” and goes away. Meanwhile Wily looks at you and waves his hands right before he goes all the way down to the bottom of Grand Canyon.

In real life, Israel’s everlasting enemies-Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem come close to their cartoon character with their failed attempts to stop Nehemiah from building the wall.

But this time, Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem changes their tactics which is using the entire Israelites against Nehemiah alone by singling him out. In other words, they are going for a head shot.

A. WHEN DID THE ATTACKS OCCUR?

Nehemiah 6:1 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 that time I had not hung the doors in the gates),

The different style of attack occurred at the time when the wall is completely rebuilt except hanging the gates, right before the celebrations can begin. The feeling of euphoria over the accomplishment, and that’s when the enemy decides to focus its attacks on Nehemiah.

Why then? Because that’s when it would be least expected. During the time of mountain top experience, people feel that they are so close to God, they tend to let their guards down. That is when the enemy attacks. In the military, the first thing they do after they win a battle, is setting a perimeter against the enemy’s counter attack.

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

From Nehemiah 6:2 through the end of chapter 6, Nehemiah describes the four different kinds of attacks by his enemies to discourage, frighten, and deter him from finishing the wall.

B. ATTACK #1 - COMPLACENCY

Nehemiah 6:2 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.

It seems that it was an innocent looking message. The verdant valley of Ono, only 20 miles away, would be a welcome relief from the rugged and ever demanding Wall project. But behind the scene, there was a death trap waiting for Nehemiah.

So what was Nehemiah’s answer to the invitation to the plain of Ono? “Oh, No!”.

Nehemiah 6:3 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 possesses the crucial leadership skill of discernment. Without it, a leader would have many hard times to see behind the scene pictures. One of the most important work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is "giving us discernment".

Discernment is the ability to judge matters according to God's view of them, and not according to their outward appearance. We are often deceived by outward appearances.

1 Samuel 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Chuck Swindoll says, "Discernment gives us a proper frame of reference, a definite line separating good and evil. It acts as an umpire in life and blows the whistle on the potential evil. It's as particular as a pathologist peering into a microscope. Discernment picks and chooses its dates with great care. It doesn't fall for fakes, or flirt with phonies, or dance with deceivers, or kiss counterfeit goodnight."

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

If Nehemiah didn't have discernment, he could have said to himself, "A little relaxation wouldn't hurt?" I agree, but not with his enemies. There is time and place for relaxation.

Christians today suffer a great deal because they lack discernment. They follow leaders and teachers who give a good appearance, but don't walk in the nature of Jesus. They accept things blindly because it looks good or sounds good, without carefully judging it against the whole counsel of God's Word.

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

How can we develop discernment?

1) If we want to see things as God sees them, get to know His Word!

2) Discernment comes through spiritual maturity.

Hebrews 5:12-14 says that discernment is something spiritual babies don't have. As you know, a baby will stick anything in his mouth!

Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

3) Discernment can be given as a gift from the Holy Spirit. Let's seek Him for it!

1 Corinthians 12:10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

Nehemiah 6:4 But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.

Nehemiah was persistent and focus on his work.

C. ATTACK #2 - RUMORS & SLANDERS

Nehemiah 6:5-7 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. 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.

Sanballat sent an opened letter to Nehemiah for anyone to read between him and Nehemiah. Filled with false accusations and deceits, it was Sanballat to intimate Nehemiah with public gossip and pressure.

People think that gossip is harmless and never hurt anyone. But if they can just realize the power of vicious tongue against someone, they wouldn't be so confident. Gossiping about somebody can be as deadly as or maybe worse than physical harm.

Notice how the letter was composed and how much identical as gossip. First, the source is often unknown. "It is reported". Second, it is filled with exaggeration and inaccuracy. Third, rumors lead to personal hurt and misunderstanding. Last, rumors are employed by those whose motives are evil.

Nehemiah 6:8-9 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 all were 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.

When someone spills nothing but vicious and poisonous rumor against you, what would you do? Run him over the road and tell God he died? Nehemiah went to the Lord and asked Him to take care of the enemies.

Hebr. 10:30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people."

D. ATTACK #3 - SCARE TACTIC

Nehemiah 6:10 Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, 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."

This third try is the most ingenious. It came in a saintly look with pious words. They wanted Nehemiah to hide inside of the temple. According to Leviticus, temple (tabernacle during the time of Wilderness) was only allowed Levites to be inside, otherwise it is unclean. Nehemiah was not one of Levites. So if he enters into it without any proper cause, he would be in sin. Not only that, but also Nehemiah knew that it is sin to worry.

Nehemiah 6:11-14 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 Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and 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.

With discernment from the Holy Spirit, Nehemiah knew that it was a setup by the enemy.

E. ATTACK #4 - BETRAYAL

It is such a let down to find out that the people whom you are supposedly working with are against you and as a matter of fact working for your enemy. This is the case in point.

Nehemiah 6:15-19 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God. Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came to them. For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

It is impossible to be in God's will all the time. Because we have this sinful nature that still lives in us, we do sin against God. On top of it, the enemy does everything within his power to stop us from doing godly things that glorify our God's name. The enemy's attacks come in many forms and shapes: peer pressure to do something unrighteous, subtle suggestions to compromise, sleazy movies and list goes on. Remember this, if my God is for me, who can be against me. Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world. God says that vengeance is His. We need to sit back and let Him take care of it. He does it very well according to His time.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) The devil knows our hot buttons.

He knows how to lie, how to accuse falsely, how to really get to you. And he knows how to throw them in your face. We can't stop it, so we have to learn how to deal with it.

2) No man can lead a work of God if he allows himself to be governed by what other people think.

Many people live paralyzed by the fear of what others are saying about them, or what they might say about them. Forget it! They're saying it about you already, so what difference does it make? Don't let it make you afraid.

3) Gossip is not from God.

When we gossip, please realize that we are being used by satanic force to hurt one of our own. Let's not do that. Instead let's build up and encourage one another with kind words and pray for one another so that we may be healed.

If we are the receiving end of gossips, we need to react according to God's way, not ours. The best way to handle any gossip is ignoring it. Let God handle it.