

Compromise? Oh No!

Nehemiah 6:1-4

Nehemiah 6:1-4 - *“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),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.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?”⁴ But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.”*

Background Notes

When we come to Nehemiah 6, the rebuilt wall around Jerusalem was almost complete (v1). Only the gates had to be finished. The Babylonians had destroyed the city walls when they conquered Jerusalem in 586 BC. Now, about 140 years later, Nehemiah and the Jewish workers had just about completed rebuilding the wall. It hadn't been easy, because in addition to the hard work of cleaning away all the rubble and building the wall, there was enemy opposition. But under Nehemiah's godly and dynamic leadership the wall continued to go up - and now it was almost complete.

In this chapter the enemies made one last attempt to prevent the completion of the wall. In previous Talks, we've seen that the enemy's tactics of scorn and ridicule had failed to stop Nehemiah. Threats of conspiracy and attack had also failed to stop the walls from going up.

The enemies were becoming desperate. They realized that Nehemiah's personal presence was the key. If Nehemiah were removed, the morale of the people would go down and the work would stop. So before the gates were hung, they tried to get Nehemiah away from Jerusalem by asking him to attend an alleged “peace conference” on so-called “neutral ground.”

The enemies went after Nehemiah personally. This was more than general opposition - the attack was directed specifically at Nehemiah. In fact, they planned to harm him (v2). This was the strategy: Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem proposed a “Big Four Peace Summit.” Nehemiah would be the fourth. The idea was “compromise.” Get Nehemiah away from the wall and get him to compromise.

What about the Ashdodites, another enemy that was listed in chapter 4? They were probably involved too, because the proposed site for the conference was the plain of Ono. If you check your Bible maps you'll find that Ono was located not far from where Tel Aviv is today – right where the Ben Gurion airport is today. If you come with us on a Holy Land study

tour, when we fly into Israel we'll be touching down near the plain of Ono! In any case, in reference to the Persian boundaries at that time, the border with Samaria was only a few miles north of Ono, and the border with the border of Ashdod was only a few miles south of Ono.

Talk about walking into a trap! This was not exactly "neutral" ground! It was about a day's journey from Jerusalem, and right on a strip of no man's land between Ashdod and Samaria, two enemy provinces.

Nehemiah suspected foul play, so he refused to go to this proposed peace conference. The enemies sent messages about this peace conference four times! The messages probably included all kinds of sweet talk and praise for Nehemiah, like: "We can all be involved in free and friendly trade from now on." Or, "You should redirect your energy and efforts and finish your wall later." Or, "Let's get the peace process going right now. The time is critical."

But Nehemiah would not leave the great work of building the wall. He knew any peace talks would involve concessions to the enemies of God's people, and he refused to compromise.

Doctrinal Points

1. Dealing with compromise is no problem when our priorities are in order.

Nehemiah would not compromise. We know that compromise is one of Satan's tactics, because the Bible certainly teaches that. If Satan can't destroy your testimony by some kind of major moral fall, he'll try to get you to compromise - try to get you to taper off in some way from your Christian testimony.

I worked with a particular youth ministry for a few years. Some of the parents who were not Christians would tell me they liked the work I was doing with the kids, but maybe I was coming on too strong with the "Jesus is the only way" thing. They liked the positive influence the ministry had on their kids, but they wanted me to lay off the heavy emphasis on religious doctrine. Forget the preaching of the gospel. Compromise!

What was Nehemiah's key to overcoming the temptation to compromise? His **priorities!** That was the key! He knew that completing the wall was his Number One Priority. He knew that rebuilding the wall was "a great work," and he would not leave it (v3).

In the same way, we've got to keep our priorities straight. Remember, dealing with compromise is no problem when we have our priorities in the proper order. We talk a lot about the Lord being "Number One" in our lives - but we need to understand what that concept really means.

When we really believe that only the things and activities that have eternal value are the only things and activities that really matter, then our priorities will automatically get in order. Then we will have no problem dealing with the temptation to compromise.

That's what I found with the youth ministry where I was working. I had to constantly think through priorities, so I wouldn't just get caught up in the excitement of the program and fun of the extra events. I didn't want to compromise the message and my responsibility to build spiritual walls!

It's valuable to constantly evaluate our list of priorities. Dealing with compromise is no problem when priorities are in order.

2. The enemy is very persistent.

Notice verse 4: *"They sent this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner."* Each time the enemies sent the invitation, the message probably had a slightly different twist – always subtle, always urgent, so important and so valuable! Each time the request would sound reasonable and logical.

Notice that Nehemiah didn't assume it was God's will for him to go to the peace conference just because the request came more than once – in fact, four times! Some Christians operate that way. If a subtle temptation comes to them several times, they think that maybe God is speaking to them. No! Remember - Satan is very persistent! The enemy will come many times with an olive branch in his hands. Don't be deceived by appearances!

Remember in the temptations of our Lord Jesus? Satan came three times - but the Lord's time of testing in the wilderness was not Satan's one-and-only attempt to deflect Him from His mission. After the temptation in the wilderness was over, Luke 4:13 says: *"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time."*

Satan never departed from his opposition to the Lord – he simply waited until another opportunity came along. Remember! **The enemy is very persistent.**

Practical Applications

1. Let's be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

That's what our Lord said when He was commissioning His disciples in Matthew 10:16. He said to them: *"I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."*

And that was the tactic Nehemiah used. He didn't say that he was against peace conferences. He didn't get angry, or accuse the enemies of being a bunch of wolves in sheep's clothing. But he did send an answer! He knew that they were wolves in sheep's clothing, but his response was simple and positive: *"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."*

Nehemiah was "wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove" - and we need to operate that way as well. Unbelievers may try to trap you. For example, they may say that "all Christians are 'gay bashers.'" Rather than respond by calling them names in return, you can respectfully explain that Jesus taught that homosexuality is wrong, but that Jesus reached out to all people. Like our Lord, we should reach out to all people, too. Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

2. Stay busy.

Nehemiah was preserved from a lot of enemy pitfalls because he stayed busy. He was too busy to be distracted.

We need to stay busy too. It's best to stay busy in the work of the Lord, building spiritual walls, but even staying busy in wholesome activities and hobbies is better than doing nothing at all. I remember my dad repeating the old saying: "Dave, the devil always has things for idle hands to do!"

That's always been true. King David got into trouble with Bathsheba because he wasn't busy. Normally he would have led his army into battle, but on this occasion he stayed home, and he had too much time on his hands. One night when he was roaming around on the roof of his palace, he saw the beautiful Bathsheba. If he had stayed busy by going out to battle the enemy with his army, the devastating tragedy of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband would not have come into his life.

Many Christian leaders who are in the limelight, and whose ministries have become prominent, have gotten themselves into problems because they haven't stayed busy in the work of the Lord. The ministry's income has allowed them to hire many employees to do the day-to-day work, or they have been tempted to greatly enlarge their personal possessions. They have too much time on their hands. We can be preserved from a lot of pitfalls if we stay busy.

Nehemiah was preserved from a lot of enemy pitfalls because he stayed busy. His priorities were in proper order. He knew that the Lord had called him to build a wall, and so the wall came first! As a result, he was too busy to be distracted by so-called peace conferences.

We, too, need to stay busy.