

Leave It With the Lord

Nehemiah 6:5-9

Nehemiah 6:5-9 - *“Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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.”*

⁸ Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart.” ⁹ 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.”

Background Notes

The wall around Jerusalem was almost completed. The city’s defensive wall, that had been nothing but a pile of rubble ever since Jerusalem was conquered and burned in 586BC by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, was finally being rebuilt under the direction of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah’s dedicated and dynamic leadership had worked wonders, but the bottom line for the success of this great project was that Nehemiah looked to the Lord for strength and encouragement. The job was not easy and the surrounding enemy provinces didn’t want a strong Jerusalem. They did not want Jewish supremacy in the area. So they did everything they could to try to stop the city wall from being rebuilt.

Their final attempts to stop the wall building are recorded in Nehemiah 6. They focused their attacks on Nehemiah, personally. In verses 1-4 they tried to get him away from the wall by proposing to meet for a peace summit a day’s travel from Jerusalem – right next to enemy territory! But Nehemiah saw through their scheme. He replied that he couldn’t go because he was too busy. He had important work to do! The enemies sent diplomatic correspondence four times, but each time Nehemiah said no.

So finally they came up with the idea of falsely accusing Nehemiah of treason. They sent a fifth message - an open letter containing the rumor that Nehemiah wanted to make a name for himself and become a king (v5). They insinuated that Nehemiah and the Jews planned to rebel against the rule of King Artaxerxes I, the Persian emperor – even though Nehemiah had been cupbearer to Artaxerxes, and the king had personally appointed him as governor of the province of Judah. But former employees and governors can become traitors and guilty of treason - and that was exactly the enemies’ accusation. Nehemiah was being slandered.

Sanballat the Samaritan pretended that he wanted to help Nehemiah resolve this rumor, so he sent his servant to Nehemiah with an open letter. The letter wasn't closed with an official seal, so it was open in the sense that the public would know about it. It was similar to a post on social media or a letter to a newspaper editor today.

Sanballat's letter looked reasonable enough. He said a report was going around that Nehemiah was trying to be more than a governor - that he wanted to be king. That would have threatened Artaxerxes. So, he said, Nehemiah should go to the peace conference to straighten things out before everyone started believing the rumor.

What would you do in a situation like this? Nehemiah didn't fall for the trap. He simply denied the slanderous charge. He linked Sanballat to the rumor: *"But you invent them in your own heart"* (v8). Nehemiah denied the charge. He prayed about it: *"O God, strengthen my hands"* (v9). And he continued to build! If we are slandered, we should do the same.

Doctrinal Points

1. Slander is one of Satan's most devastating attacks.

Slander is an attack on one's personal character. Slander defames and damages personal reputation. It's a deadly and devastating sin. People who run for political office know how devastating slander can be. All the opposition has to do is start a rumor about the candidate, and it spreads like wildfire. There may not be an ounce of truth to the rumor, but the damage is done. Even when an investigation is made and a person is shown to be completely innocent, their reputation may be ruined for life. (Unfortunately, in the case of some politicians or well-known personalities, there may be some truth to the rumor.)

But what should Christians do when we are slandered? What if people want to discredit you, so they tell lies about you? Not the kind of lie that no one would believe, but something more subtle – maybe something in connection with your motives. For example, what if someone spreads the idea that you're only involved in Christian service because you're on an ego trip, and you want to make a name for yourself? You know that's a lie, but it defames your character. What do you do in a case like that?

Notice in Nehemiah's case that the slander was very subtle, because it was believable. Verse 7: *"...you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, "There is a king in Judah!"* Some people in Judah may actually have thought that Nehemiah might be the Messiah. After all, there are many Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures. Not too many years before this time Zechariah 9:9 had prophesied that the Messiah would ride into Jerusalem, So some people in Judah may have thought Nehemiah could possibly be the promised Messiah.

In any case, Sanballat took this idea and made it appear that Nehemiah was pushing himself off as the king of Judah. If you were Nehemiah, you would certainly want to set the record straight. Maybe you would even be tempted to go to the peace conference to defend yourself! And that brings us to our second Doctrinal Point.

2. Strength against slander is found in God, not in self defense.

Notice verse 9: *“For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, “Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done.”* This was followed by Nehemiah’s prayer: *“Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.”*

Notice that Nehemiah didn’t spend a lot of time defending himself. He denied the charge (v8), committed the matter to God (v9) - and continued to build the wall!

The Bible is teaching us how to react if we are ever slandered. Notice - Nehemiah didn’t waste a lot of time justifying himself. So- present a defense - but don’t be defensive. Set the record straight by telling the simple truth, but don’t divert your energies to fight for your own reputation. Leave that in the hands of God. Trust Him.

Prayer may be your only recourse. In fact, it’s your best recourse! Presenting the situation to God certainly relieves stress, as you find your strength in Him. This is what David did: *“For I hear the slander of many. Fear is on every side. While they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life. But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord! I say, “You are my God!” (Psalm 31:13-14).*

Romans 12:19 says, *“Never take your own revenge.”* Don’t lash out or take revenge on someone who slanders you. If you’re slandered for the sake of the kingdom of God, don’t worry about protecting your image. Leave it in God’s hands!

Remember that there is reward in heaven for those who are slandered unjustly. Listen to the words of our Lord in Matthew 5:11-12: *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Strength against slander is found in God, not in self defense.

Practical Applications

1. Don’t give the enemy a chance for slander.

We’ve been saying that when you’re slandered for the sake of the kingdom of God, you don’t have to worry. You can leave the situation in God’s hands. But your life has got to be clean! How tragic, if there is actually some substance to the rumors that are spread about us, and the slander is not unjust.

Don't give the enemy a chance for slander. 1 Thessalonians 5:22 warns us that that we must avoid even the **appearance of wrongdoing**, or anything that might be thought sinful! And 1 Peter 2:12 teaches: "*having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles [unbelievers], that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*"

Don't give the enemy a chance for slander.

2. Don't do something foolish because of fear.

Notice verse 9: "*For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done."* If you do something foolish because of fear, your strength will be lost.

When people are afraid, they do foolish things - even irrational things. For example, someone who is trapped in a burning building may jump out of a high window with no safety net below, because they are afraid. Or on the other hand, even when there is a safety net, some people won't jump to safety because they're afraid. People do all kinds of irrational things in life-threatening situations.

When Christians are intimidated or afraid, they may do foolish things. When unbelievers make nasty comments because they don't want to hear our message, we may be intimidated. We may be tempted to water down the gospel – and thus our testimony is weakened. For example, suppose a rumor went out that your church or ministry was a cult, and was brainwashing people. There would a tendency to be intimidated, and back off on the gospel message.

If that should ever happen, don't do something irrational! Don't close down the ministry, or move the church, or water down the gospel. Don't lash out angrily against the people who started the rumor. Don't try to take revenge – leave that to the Lord!

Do what Nehemiah did. Pray. Bring the problem to the Lord. "*O God, strengthen my hands.*" State the truth openly and plainly, as Nehemiah did. Continue to preach the gospel. And be sure to live out the gospel! Your Christ-like lifestyle will make it obvious that you're not a cult. And - leave the situation in God's hands!

Don't do something foolish because of fear.