

Perceiving Deception

Nehemiah 6:10-14

Nehemiah 6:10-14 - *“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.”*

11 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!” 12 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. 13 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. 14 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.”

Background Notes

In that day, a city without a wall could not defend itself. It was not a strong city. Ever since the Babylonians conquered Judah in 586BC, Jerusalem had no wall. It was weak and defenseless. So rebuilding the wall around the ancient city of Jerusalem was vital for the city's security, and God raised up Nehemiah to direct the project. The Lord wanted Jerusalem, the city of His holy Temple, to be a strong city.

Nehemiah was a great and godly leader, and he was able to rally the people to work together. But rebuilding a huge city wall is not easy. It's hard work, and there was plenty of opposition from the enemies of the Jews. In the same way, the work of the Lord is never easy. It's hard labor, and there will always be opposition from the enemy.

In our studies of Nehemiah we've seen all kinds of opposition to the building of the wall. All these forms of opposition illustrate forms of opposition that our enemy, Satan, will use against us. We've seen scorn and ridicule, threat, conspiracy, and internal strife. Here in chapter 6 the enemies' attacks were directed at Nehemiah himself. They tried to get Nehemiah to compromise and make peace with the enemy. Then they tried slander – false rumors about Nehemiah's real motives.

Nehemiah 6:10-14 is the record of a very subtle attack. It was attempted deception at the level of spiritual discernment. Sanballat and Tobiah hired a man named Shemaiah to become a secret informer. He was somehow tied in with the priests and the school of the prophets of that day, and most likely Nehemiah knew him. Shemaiah may have thought that making peace with the enemy was the best way to go, and perhaps that's why he was vulnerable to be hired by Sanballat and Tobiah.

Shemaiah claimed he was confined at home, so he asked Nehemiah to come to him. He informed Nehemiah that there was a threat on Nehemiah's life, and that he should protect himself by going into the house of God - the Temple. That sounds reasonable, doesn't it? But Nehemiah perceived that Shemaiah was really a false prophet who had been hired by the enemy (v12). He perceived that this was a deception of the enemies of God. How was Nehemiah able to perceive that?

Doctrinal Points

1. A thorough working knowledge of God's word is necessary in spiritual warfare.

Nehemiah perceived that Shemaiah was a false prophet who was hired by the enemy, because Nehemiah knew the Word of God! God's Law declared that only priests were allowed to enter the Temple. Numbers 18:7 says that only the priests were allowed into the Temple, and only the high priest could enter the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies. And Nehemiah was not a priest!

Nehemiah knew God's Law. He easily perceived the deception because he had a good working knowledge of Scripture. God's Word was part of his everyday life. If Nehemiah hadn't known the Word, he might have been taken in by the enemy's ruse.

Our enemy, Satan, is a master deceiver. 2 Corinthians 11:14 indicates that he may even appear to be a good angel - "*an angel of light*." Satan knows the Word very well, and he will try to trip us up at the level of spiritual discernment if we don't know the Word. He'll misuse, twist, and distort the meaning of Scripture. We must know the Bible thoroughly so that we can't be taken in by his schemes and deceptions. This is particularly important at the level of spiritual discernment.

Many years ago our family moved because of a job change. We were praying for the Lord's direction about buying a house, and we found one that was just right for hosting youth gatherings. Everything looked good - except the taxes! The price was high because the house had a brand new addition, and the already-high taxes would go higher because the new taxes would be based on the selling price of the house. We decided not to buy - but the realtor called the next day and said he had figured everything out! Because we had a good down payment, the owner had agreed to sell the house "on paper" for the down payment, and the taxes would be based on the lower price. Then we would give the owner the rest of the selling price "under the table." He claimed this strategy was often used to reduce a buyer's taxes.

Wow! An answer to prayer? No way!! James 3:17 says, "*The wisdom of God is first of all pure*." There was nothing pure about this deal! This was a trick of the enemy, aimed at our spiritual discernment. Obviously we turned down that unsavory deal, and decided to rent while we looked for another house. Soon after that, the Lord opened the door for us to move into full time ministry in another city.

Suppose we had been deceived, and we had bought that “perfect house” using the owner’s deceptive strategy? Would the Lord have wanted to use us in His service?

We all need to have a thorough working knowledge of God’s Word. It’s vitally important for spiritual warfare. If we don’t have a working knowledge of God’s Word, we can be deceived - particularly at the level of spiritual discernment.

2. The world will find fault with disobedient Christians.

Verses 12-13: *“Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all... 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.”* The enemies wanted to trap Nehemiah into disobeying the Word so that they could discredit him, smear his reputation, and destroy his credibility. He would no longer be a godly leader.

The world has a different standard for the Christian. Unbelievers make excuses for themselves for lying, cheating, or having affairs - but when they discover a Christian who departs from the commands of Scripture, they’ll immediately find fault. It shows they know God’s moral standards - and they may have a guilty conscience about their own sin.

The world will always find fault with disobedient Christians. That’s why, like Nehemiah, it’s so critical for us to be very careful to obey God’s Word - in every detail of our lives.

Practical Applications

1. Watch out for “the Lord told me” friends.

Shemaiah, who claimed to be a friend, told Nehemiah that there was a threat on his life, and that God had sent him to warn Nehemiah to go into the Temple for protection. *“Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all...”* (v12).

Has anyone ever said that “the Lord told him” you should change something specific about your life? Like “the Lord told me that...” you should change your job, or your college major, or sell your house and move to a different area? Has anyone ever told you that “the Lord gave me a prophecy” relating to you, as Shemaiah told Nehemiah (v12)?

If that ever happens to you - watch out!

Occasionally one of my female college students will come to me for counsel, because a male student had said that the Lord told him that she’s to become his wife! I always tell these women, “No way! Tell that guy to get lost until the Lord confirms His will to you by a much more reliable method and source!”

Even your true friends can be deceived on occasion, and they can play into the hands of the enemy by giving you poor advice - especially about major life decisions.

So watch out for people who say “the Lord told me” – even if they’re friends!

2. Watch out for the enemy in the most unlikely places!

Verse 14 mentions, “...*the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.*” It appears that Shemaiah was not the only prophet who was taken in by the enemy’s deceptive practices. It seems that many prophets had become involved in the plot for Nehemiah to go to the proposed “peace conference.”

These prophets were not enemy prophets who were infiltrating into Judah from Samaria. No. They were prophets in Judah - probably from the “school of the prophets” of that day. They were not anti-God. They didn’t want the enemy to take over. They were deceived! They really thought the peace process was the right way to go.

But notice that the deception was emerging from prophets. The “school of the prophets” was the “seminary” of that day. Wouldn’t we assume that the school of the prophets was a most unlikely place for deception to emerge?

Is it possible for deception to originate in seminaries in our day? It sure is! Where do you think the idea that the Bible is errant is being promoted today? It’s hard to believe that many seminaries push the false concept that there are errors in the Bible, and teach that many of its historical records are unreliable – or that they are only Jewish myths and legends!

Watch out for the enemy’s deceptions to come from the most unlikely places!