

Nehemiah 6 - Finishing Well

1-4 Deceptive Distraction

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10-14 Discerning False Prophecy

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Introduction

- Illustration: On Oct. 30, 1938 listeners to CBS radio's Mercury Theatre on the Air heard an interesting broadcast. In the show the normal programming of live studio music was interrupted with breaking news segments detailing an apparent Martian invasion of earth. Starting with seeing explosions on Mars then an object landing in a New Jersey farm, next Martians emerge and start attacking with a heat ray. Soon there are reports of attacks all across the country, ending with a report of a machine attacking Manhattan with poisonous gas, the reporter mentioning that people are dropping like flies and that they are getting reports of attacks all over the world before coughing and falling silent. All of this was of course not real but part of the show, a modernized retelling of H.G. Wells' 'The War of the Worlds' staged by future actor and producer Orson Welles. However because it was presented as live breaking news, apparently listeners began panicking believing an actual Martian attack of Earth was happening in real time. Though some now debate the true scope of the public hysteria, saying it was mostly played up for publicity sake. Either way it demonstrates the power of media to influence our perception of what is real or not.
- other examples since then, recent years, through social media, familiar term 'fake news'
- now with digital editing technology, create 'deepfake' images & videos, blurring line
- these fake stories, images & videos, meant to elicit emotional response, fear, anger
- part of today's passage, see these techniques are not new, been around from beginning
- first, go back, recap, Nehemiah lamented the broken state of Jerusalem's walls & people
- prays, given burden, calling by God, approval by Persian king, rebuild Jerusalem's walls

- arrives, his vision & leadership inspire the people, eagerly begin the work
- however, face opposition from local neighboring chieftains, they don't want wall rebuilt
- want Jerusalem in weakened & defenceless state, profiting off oppression of people
- in addition external threats, face internal problems as well, saw in last chapter
- people under financial oppression from own people, crushing debt, interest, slavery
- Nehemiah hears outcry, sees injustice, stops usury, orders repayment
- leads by personal example, doesn't take food allowance, generously gives to people
- this chapter back to external attacks again, enemies specifically target Nehemiah
- try various ways to get to Nehemiah, to hinder & ultimately stop building of wall
- use 3 deceptive tactics against Nehemiah, distraction, fake news, false prophecy
- as we read and study this chapter observe how Nehemiah handled these attacks
- we might not face opposition to the same level as Nehemiah
- devil still uses same schemes today, try to get us off mission, hinder our faith, gospel
- hopefully we can gain some wisdom & insight to help us when we face these things
- let's not kid ourselves, we're in a spiritual battle & we need to be aware of what we face
- as it says in 2 Corinthians 2:11 (NIV), *'so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes.'*

1-4 Deceptive Distraction

Nehemiah 6:1-4, *1 Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), 2 Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm. 3 And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" 4 And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.*

- enemies of Nehemiah hear he's close to finishing the wall, don't like it, try to stop him
- first try to get him out of the safety of the nearly completed city walls
- invite him to a meeting in a village on the plain of Ono, about 30 miles NW of Jerusalem
- don't know what kind of meeting, possibly offered as some sort of peace negotiations

- maybe hoping to tempt Nehemiah to see it as a way to get them off his back
- not true intent, Nehemiah discerns, from Lord or spies, really to do him harm somehow
- responded by saying the work is too important, why should it stop to meet with them
- he wasn't going to be distracted, kept his focus on his mission, building the wall
- especially when the meeting was proposed under false pretenses
- wasn't so monomaniacal or Pharisaical to not care about anything else
- last chapter took time to care for the people of Jerusalem, knew what was important
- caring for people is never a distraction from doing the work of God, it is the work
- not go around aimlessly, purposefully seek to meet many needs, example of Jesus
- didn't heal everyone in Judea & Galilee, healed all came to him, always still on mission
- really comes down to priorities and focus, relying on God for vision and direction
- both intimately connected to God through deep prayer life, in tune with Spirit's leading
- Nehemiah kept his eye on the prize, didn't allow himself to be distracted off his mission
- understood the seriousness of the great work he was doing, ultimately God was doing
- God's work, he was given a charge & responsibility, hadn't been released from it
- bring it home these are some questions we are asking ourselves now as a church
- what is the vision from God of our mission as a church?, what is our personal mission?
- how are we doing with that, are we on mission for God in our lives, as a church body?
- as part of that, are we also meeting needs & caring for people both in & out of the body?
- do a lot, can do more, part of the wonderful thing of being part of God's family, the body
- needs are many & various, each of us variously called & equipped to meet those needs
- God loves us so much and has blessed us so much, has great plans & purposes for us
- let us seek to follow & obey him & be on mission for him, each other & our community

5-9 Facing Fake News Fears

Nehemiah 6:5-9, *5 In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. 6 In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. 7 And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, 'There is a king in Judah.' And now the king will hear of these reports. So now*

come and let us take counsel together.” 8 Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.” 9 For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

- in the next round, Nehemiah’s enemies changed up their tactics a bit,
- Nehemiah didn’t take the bait for their fake meeting, up the ante, try fake news, not new
- come to him with ‘open letter’, not sealed, nobody claiming responsibility
- sound familiar, internet culture, say horrible things, cowardly hidden behind anonymity
- this letter they sent is just complete garbage, full of total untruths and false accusations
- not credible, starts ‘it is reported among the nations and Geshem says’
- oh really, the nations you say, which ones, know accuser, Geshem an enemy, biased
- accuse Nehemiah and the Jews, reason building the wall to rebel against Persia
- say Nehemiah wants to be king of Judah, hired prophets to proclaim it as such, ironic
- obviously baseless, don’t know Nehemiah, relationship to king, character in general
- often people with base character can only project their character & actions on others
- really wasn’t about the letter being true, about eliciting emotional reaction, anger, fear
- if ever been the subject baseless slander and gossip, want to respond in anger
- Nehemiah doesn’t respond that way, discerns purpose was to try & make them fearful
- hoping people get frightened by letter, worried go to king, too scared to continue work
- try to force Nehemiah to have meeting to deal with accusations, basically blackmail
- Nehemiah sees right through lies, says none of it true, just invention of their minds
- able to stand firm in the face of slanderous false accusations, not in own strength
- asks for God’s help to strengthen his hands for the work, knows can’t do it without God
- quiet time this week, Psalm 127:1, *Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.*
- prophecy to Nehemiah’s predecessor, Zechariah 4:10, *Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.*
- as we seek to be on mission for the Lord we desperately need the his strength
- anything we try to do in our own strength and power & wisdom is ultimately vain

- despite being attacked, Nehemiah stood firm, what are some ways we can do the same
- first, just living a godly life of integrity in our actions, sometimes speak louder than words
- when words won't be heard it is the proof of the truth of God lived out through us
- second, knowing our position with God our king, through Jesus we're adopted children
- we're rescued from the wages of sin by Jesus's blood, made new, given eternal life
- loves & cares for us, nothing we've done, all Jesus, rest in his finished work & grace
- third, putting on the armor of God, quenching the fiery darts aimed at our heart & mind
- not just a mental imagery exercise, but genuinely & obediently living out our faith
- belt of truth, knowing & being firmly anchored in God's word
- breastplate of righteousness, protecting our heart, knowing we are righteous in Christ
- shoes of the readiness of the gospel of peace, being on mission, knowing & sharing it
- shield of faith, deeply trusting in God & his word, blocking fiery arrows of Satan's lies
- helmet of salvation, knowing we are saved, protecting our mind from arrows of doubt
- sword of the Spirit, destroying thoughts & opinions raised against knowledge of God
- let us obediently grow in these things to defend when the fiery attacks come against us

10-14 Discerning False Prophecy

Nehemiah 6:10-14, *10 Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night." 11 But I said, "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in." 12 And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. 14 Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.*

- this last scheme against Nehemiah is similar to the last, fake news
- more subtle & insidious because it is seemingly comes as a prophecy from God

- Nehemiah visits Shemaiah in his home, maybe invited to hear his apparent prophesy
- the 'prophesy' is for Nehemiah to flee to the temple because men are going to kill him
- seems like logical advice, if threatened, temple likely largest, strongest building in city
- problem is according to the law Nehemiah not allowed in the temple, only priests
- Nehemiah knows the law, applies godly wisdom to assess the prophesy
- prophesy has to align with the whole counsel of God, should be tested with scripture
- if it goes against or doesn't line up with the rest of God's revealed word, red flag
- Nehemiah responds how can a man like I go into the temple, something seems fishy
- also this is a one off prophesy, not as reliable, what did other prophets & advisors say
- another test, same message coming through multiple independent sources, more weight
- discerns this isn't from God, Shemaiah paid by enemies to give false prophesy (Balaam)
- purpose was to get Nehemiah to give into fear, run & hide, not trust in God
- open himself to mocking & ridicule, being cowardly, ultimately discredit name of God
- 1 Tim. 2:7, *'for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.'*
- all struggle with fear at times, not to live in it, follow it, rather trust in God, walk in faith
- as we walk we need to practice discernment, holding things up to light of God's word
- 1 Thess. 5:16-22 says, *'16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.'*
- often depending on church, tend to go to one extreme or another, need to find a balance
- passage starts with rejoicing, praying & giving thanks to God, his will for us
- more we follow & obey God's revealed will to us, the more of his will he'll reveal to us
- finally see Nehemiah doesn't lash out at his enemies & their false prophets
- he turns them and the situation over to God for him to ultimately deal with

15-19 Contrasting Completion & Compromise

Nehemiah 6:15-19, *15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. 17 Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. 18 For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife. 19 Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.*

- finally despite much opposition, seemingly small odds, Nehemiah & people persevered
- completed the wall, only 52 days, ruined for over 100 years, finished under 2 months
- others saw the need, also saw the rubble, hard word & opposition, too much for them
- took a man with a heart broken for God's people and a vision of what could be
- the job was bigger than him, but he trusted in God's strength, followed God's calling
- stood strong against enemies seeking his failure, he helped the people at his own cost
- he was a godly man, but just an ordinary man, God used him for an extraordinary task
- in the end God gets all the glory, the enemies of God saw that it was done by God's help
- they who were once arrogant and mocking to Nehemiah, were now humbled & afraid
- still around though, Tobiah had connections with some Jews in the city through marriage
- these Jews compromised themselves in an alliance with the enemy
- because of family and business connections, blinded to fact he was an enemy
- did propaganda and spying for Tobiah, praising him to Nehemiah, reporting back
- this is what compromise and sin does, promises life, deadens us, blinds us
- final warning to us and hindrance to spiritual growth, compromise with sin
- probably the one we struggle with the most, maybe not you but I do
- so insidious and sneaky how it can slowly creep in and grow, need to be vigilant, severe
- give sin no quarter in our hearts, be humble, broken, repentant, confess turn from sin
- remember Jesus is Good Shepherd, promises full life, thief comes to steal, kill, destroy
- Jesus loves us, gave everything for us so we could be forgiven, let's give our all for him

Hebrews 12:1-4, *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*

- this is what Nehemiah did, persevered in the work and in the end he finished well
- it is always sad when we hear of someone falls close to the end, doesn't finish well
- let's follow Nehemiah's and Jesus' example to run the race, persevere & finish well
- not being distracted from God's vision & mission for us, including caring for others
- standing firm on God's love & promises for us, loving others despite facing opposition
- knowing God's word, practicing discernment, not quenching Spirit or despising prophesy
- not falling into compromise with sin, being humble & repentant, walking in the Spirit
- we can't do any of this in our own strength, Lord please strengthen our hands