

OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL OPPOSITION

Equipping ourselves to frustrate satanic schemes

Conflict is inevitable!

But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the work was going ahead and that the gaps in the wall of Jerusalem were being repaired, they were furious. They all made plans to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw us into confusion. (4.7-8)

- Spiritual conflict began in heaven itself when Lucifer rebelled against God and one-third of the angels allied themselves with him. Whenever we are living for God, committed to His purposes, and endeavoring to move His work forward, we become part of that conflict and experience spiritual warfare.

- Détente: a policy promoting the relaxation of strained relations or tensions (as between nations)
- Many Jews had relationships with those who opposed God's work, and as long as they chose the status-quo of broken walls and spiritual disgrace, there was no conflict.
- If Satan leaves you alone, if you do not experience conflict in serving Christ, intentionally or unintentionally, you have chosen détente with God's arch enemy– and that is compromise.

Overload and overwhelm—

The Jews who lived near the enemy came and told us again and again, “They will come from all directions and attack us!” (4.12)

- In the Gulf War, Desert Storm, the military doctrine of General Colin Powell was to project overwhelming military superiority. The campaign began with a massive military build-up followed by a bombing campaign intended to effect “shock and awe.” This was the spiritual strategy that Nehemiah faced in endeavoring to pursue God’s mission and glory.

- ▶ He uses ridicule and contempt to demean and intimidate.
- ▶ He brings confusion, distractions, and overwhelms with fear.
- ▶ He relentlessly harasses, bombarding us with lies.
- ▶ He tries to wear us out and make us feel that we will never succeed for God.
- ▶ He uses those who are close to us to discourage us.

Superior tactics—

When our enemies heard that we knew of their plans and that God had frustrated them, we all returned to our work on the wall. (4.15)

- Conflict is inevitable and our adversary is a masterful strategist with a full arsenal of weapons, but God has given us better weapons and has a better strategy. Nehemiah's response gives us valuable insight for our spiritual conflicts— both personally, and as a congregation endeavoring to move the work of God forward.

Then I prayed, “Hear us, our God, for we are being mocked. May their scoffing fall back on their own heads, and may they themselves become captives in a foreign land! Do not ignore their guilt. Do not blot out their sins, for they have provoked you to anger here in front of the builders.” (4.4-5)

- **Pray, pray, pray.** Prayer is our most effective battle component. Satan knows the power of prayer and does everything he can to diminish and minimize our prayer investment.

So I placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas. (4.13)

- **Recognize your areas of personal vulnerability.** Whether pride, lust, fear, anxiety, timidity, self-denigration, or depression, everyone has vulnerabilities that the adversary seeks to exploit. Like Nehemiah, we need to recognize what they are and take steps to guard those areas from inevitable attack.

But from then on, only half my men worked while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. . . . The laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon. All the builders had a sword belted to their side. (4.16-18)

- **Be intentional about arming yourself with the whole armor of God.** Faith overcomes, so we need to build up our faith; sin weakens, so we need to pursue righteousness (a set-apart life); Satan's primary battle is against our minds and our perspective, so we need to face every scheme with God's truth.

Then I explained to the nobles and officials and all the people, “The work is very spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. When you hear the blast of the trumpet, rush to wherever it is sounding. Then our God will fight for us!” (4.19-20)

- **Fight together, never alone.** Many Christians are too proud to admit their weaknesses and solicit the support of others. Satan strives to isolate and surround. God’s strategy is that we stand with one another, fight for each other and for the work of God.

But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer. (6.3-4)

- **Determine to be an overcomer (6.3-4, 15).** Overwhelmed, worn out, or compromised, most Christians drop out of the battle before the final victory. Often, Satan’s main strategy is simply to extend the battle, to out-last you. To overcome, we must out-last him; and we absolutely can, because, “greater is He who is in us, than he who is in the world” (1John 4.4).