

OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL OPPOSITION

Equipping ourselves to frustrate satanic schemes.

Nehemiah 4 & 6

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. But we prayed to our God and guarded the city day and night to protect ourselves.

Nehemiah 4.7-9

Conflict is inevitable!

It has been said that the only thing about spiritual warfare that should surprise us is if we are *not* experiencing it. The Apostle Peter wrote: *"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you."* (1 Peter 4.12)

Spiritual conflict has existed since before the beginning of time—

Then there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. And the dragon lost the battle, and he and his angels were forced out of heaven. This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels. (Revelation 12.7-9)

When we commit ourselves to being part of God's redemptive mission, endeavor to live for His honor, and want to see His work move forward, we become part of that conflict.

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. . . . stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6.10-12)

When the Jews returned and endeavored to rebuild the Temple, they encountered opposition. Zerubbabel and Jeshua faced down the intimidation and completed the project. The following generation, however, chose détente with their enemies rather than incur conflict in attempting to move forward in the work of rebuilding. 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. But when Nehemiah arrived, determined not to settle for a broken representation of the purposes of God, conflict was inevitable. It is committed Christians, not compromised Christians, who find themselves confronting satanic attacks.

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)

Nehemiah was confronted, overtly and covertly, with a strategy of "overload and overwhelm." His account gives us enormous and invaluable insight into the tactics of our spiritual adversary. Remember, Satan's goal in every conflict, whether personal or corporate, is to thwart the purposes of God and retain his dominion over hearts and minds.

- He uses _____ (4.2-3).
- He brings _____ (4.8), _____ (6.2), and overwhelms with _____ (4.11-12).
- He relentlessly _____, bombarding us with _____ (6.4-7).
- He tries to _____ and make us feel that we will never _____ for God (4.10; 6.9).
- He uses those who are _____ to discourage us (4.11-12; 6.14, 17-19).

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 a better strategy. We can be victorious!

- _____ (4.4-5, 9; 6.9). 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.
- _____ (4.13). 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.
- _____ (4.16-18). 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. (see Ephesians 6.13-18)
- _____ (4.19-20). 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.
- _____ (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" (1 John 4.4).