

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)

- 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 emphasized this to his readers: *“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)

- Whenever we are living for God, committed to His purposes, and endeavoring to move His work forward, we will experience spiritual warfare. When the Jews returned from exile 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 attempt to move the work of rebuilding forward and incur conflict.

- Spiritual conflict has existed 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, want to see His work move forward and succeed, we become part of that conflict –

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to 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)

- Compromised Christians will never experience satanic opposition; it is committed Christians who find themselves confronting satanic attacks. Eliashib, the high priest, had compromised with Tobiah the Ammonite, and as long as he chose the status-quo of broken walls and spiritual disgrace, there was no conflict. But when Nehemiah determined not to settle for a broken representation of the purposes of God, conflict was inevitable.

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.” Nehemiah was confronted with this strategy and through his experiences we gain understanding.

- Nehemiah's account gives us valuable insight into the tactics of our spiritual adversary. His goal is always to thwart the purposes of God and retain his dominion over hearts and minds.
 - ▶ He uses ridicule and contempt to demean and intimidate (2-3).
 - ▶ He seeks to induce fear and confusion (8).
 - ▶ He tries to make us feel that we will never succeed for God (10).
 - ▶ He uses both enemies and those close to us to intimidate and discourage us from moving forward (11-12).

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)

- While conflict is inevitable and our adversary is a masterful strategist with a full arsenal of weapons, defeat is not inevitable! God has given us better weapons and has a better strategy. Nehemiah's response gives us valuable insight for our spiritual conflicts.

So I placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas. (v. 13)

- It is critical that we recognize our own vulnerabilities and where we are susceptible to attack. Whether pride, lust, fear, timidity, or self-denigration, 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. (vss. 16-18)

- Secondly, we need to be intentional about arming ourselves with the whole armor of God as the Apostle Paul described. We need to build up our faith and pursue righteousness (a set-apart life); we need to spend time in prayer and pray in the Spirit; we need 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!” (vss. 19-20)

- Thirdly, we need the support of others. 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 and fight for each other.