

Hindered From Within

Lesson Scope: [Nehemiah Chapters 4 to 6](#)

Lesson Focus

The scope and setting of this lesson are the same as those of the previous lesson. However, this lesson focuses on different aspects of the work of the enemy. Although Nehemiah had outlined the strategy for self-defense toward enemies from without, Satan was also actively seeking to hinder and destroy the work from within.

Our enemy today is just as active as the enemies in Nehemiah's time. Ungodly men and their influences test and oppose the church from without. Satan also stirs doubt, distrust, and discouragement among brethren to hinder and destroy from within.

The enemy may attack God's people from within as well as from without. Discouragement, discord, and disloyalty among brethren tragically hinder the work.

It is significant that external opposition was at work against Nehemiah's work from beginning to end. The internal pressures, however, seem to have surfaced as the work progressed (Nehemiah 4:7, 10) and neared completion. This illustrates the human tendency to become weary in well doing after the first enthusiasm for a new project wears off. Internal threats, such as defeatism and covetousness, are more damaging and harder to overcome than external opposition.

Lesson Aim: To describe the efforts of the enemy to disrupt God's work from within.

Theme Verses: [Acts 20:29-30](#). For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Lesson Text

Discouragement

Nehemiah 4:10-12 ¹⁰ And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and *there is* much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. ¹¹ And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. ¹² And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us *they will be upon you*.

Discord

Nehemiah 5:1-12 ¹ And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews. ² For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, *are* many: therefore we take up corn *for them*, that we may eat, and live. ³ *Some* also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. ⁴ There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, *and that upon* our lands and vineyards. ⁵ Yet now our flesh *is* as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and *some* of our daughters are brought unto bondage *already*: neither *is it* in our power to *redeem them*; for other men have our lands and vineyards. ⁶ And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. ⁷ Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. ⁸ And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing *to answer*. ⁹ Also I said, It *is* not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? ¹⁰ I likewise, *and my brethren*, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury. ¹¹ Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive yards, and their houses, also the hundredth *part* of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them. ¹² Then said they, We will restore *them*, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that

they should do according to this promise.

Disloyalty

Nehemiah 6:17-19 ¹⁷ Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and *the letters* of Tobiah came unto them. ¹⁸ For *there were* many in Judah sworn unto him, because he *was* the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. ¹⁹ Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. *And* Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

Questions for Study

Discouragement

1. List three different hindrances mentioned in Nehemiah 4:10-12.

2. What similar hindrances do we face?

Discord

3. What series of distressing circumstances did these returned captives experience?

4. On what grounds did Nehemiah appeal to the oppressors?

5. Why are good brotherly relationships essential?

Disloyalty

6. In what ways was Tobiah a threat to Nehemiah's work?

7. How does gossip feed unrest?

8. Through what channels are worldly influences most likely to affect us?

Analyzing the Passage

The work was progressing well, but the initial zeal for it was waning. Decayed (Nehemiah 4:10) means "made feeble or weak." The rubbish probably was the result of the destruction of Jerusalem more than one hundred forty years earlier. The workers needed to recover the stones out of the heaps of ruins. The Jews "which dwelt by them" (Nehemiah 4:12) were close to their heathen neighbors more than just geographically. They had a relationship with Tobiah (Nehemiah 6:18-19), a servant of Sanballat, who, through marriage, had worked himself into favorable standing with some of the Jews.

Because of a famine, some of the Jews who were already poor were forced to mortgage their properties to buy food and pay their taxes.

Their well-to-do brethren were charging them usury (interest), which further forced them to sell possessions and even their children to repay loans. The Law forbade such oppression (Leviticus 25).

Nehemiah consulted with himself (Nehemiah 5:7) or meditated and then exerted himself as a reigning ruler.

Principles and Applications

Discouragement

1. Becoming weary in well doing disrupts God's work (Nehemiah 4:10). The rubbish was a reminder of past defeat. The Jews needed to clean it up and remove it instead of trying to build around the clutter. It is only natural to grow weary of hard work; this is especially so when we encounter unpleasant obstacles. When this happens, we must clear out the rubbish of past failures by true repentance and restitution. We can then build anew on the true foundation.

2. Focusing on discouraging situations causes God's work to suffer (Nehemiah 4:10). Our focus should rather be on reaching the goal. Every effort should be a step toward that goal. In this way progress can be measured even when it seems slow. Progress is also rewarding.

3. Losing touch with the enabling power of God causes the work to cease (Nehemiah 4:10). When our faith is weak, fear dominates our lives. Fear magnifies the power of the enemy and takes our eyes off our all-powerful Helper. Anyone in this frame of mind loses the strength to continue in the work and becomes a hindrance to others. Faith lifts the laborer above fear and gives him spiritual vision for the work.

Discord

4. Loss of compassion within the brotherhood disrupts God's work (Nehemiah 5:1-5). Loss of compassion is evident if we secretly delight in another's misfortune or downfall. True compassion desires to assist whenever we can, not exploiting our brother's idiosyncrasies and shortcomings.

5. Oppression within the brotherhood militates against the work of God (Nehemiah 5:1-5). It is a self-centered, short-term view that motivates one to take advantage of his brother, especially when he is in need. The enemy triumphs when brethren are moved against each other and the results are disastrous. Teaching and practicing brotherhood assistance fosters a spirit that prevents this from happening.

6. The enemy gains no ground when God's people bring a reproach to His Name (Nehemiah 5:9). God has called His people to represent Him to the world. Our attitudes toward and responses to our brethren in the church affect our witness for the Lord. This makes one's everyday walk of life and his communication a very serious matter.

Disloyalty

7. Friendship with the world destroys our usefulness in God's work (Nehemiah 6:17-18). Brethren with divided loyalties are a serious liability to the church. Their conflicting interests hinder them from making a positive contribution, and they are a stumbling block to others. Unequal yokes and unwholesome social relationships result in brethren being more influenced by worldly peers than by church associates.

8. God's purposes are hindered when His people hold the ungodly in high regard (Nehemiah 6:19). Like those in Nehemiah's company, we today can look admiringly at men of skill and educational attainments. We can be influenced to make decisions that "make good business sense" but totally overlook the pilgrim-and-stranger principle. Like them, we can become totally blind to who our true enemies are, or we can employ the spiritual discernment of Nehemiah and cause others to perceive "that this work [is] wrought of our God" (Nehemiah 6:16).

Important Teachings

1. Becoming weary in well doing disrupts God's work (Nehemiah 4:10).
2. Focusing on discouraging situations causes God's work to suffer (Nehemiah 4:10).
3. Losing touch with the enabling power of God causes the work to cease (Nehemiah 4:10).
4. Loss of compassion within the brotherhood disrupts God's work (Nehemiah 5:1-5).
5. Oppression within the brotherhood militates against the work of God (Nehemiah 5:1-5).
6. The enemy gains ground when God's people bring a reproach to His Name (Nehemiah 5:9).
7. Friendship with the world destroys our usefulness in God's work (Nehemiah 6:17-18).
8. God's purposes are hindered when His people hold the ungodly in high regard (Nehemiah 6:19).

Answers to Questions

1. List three different hindrances mentioned in Nehemiah 4:10-12.

The Jews faced the constant fear of attack while trying to focus on their work. The constant obstacle of rubbish slowed their progress. Their weariness led to defeatism and to thinking that building the wall was not possible or worth the effort.

2. What similar hindrances do we face?

Weariness in well doing can come as soon as initial enthusiasm wears off. There are many obstacles in the Lord's work, such as busy schedules, misunderstandings, and weaknesses and failures among us. These things need not be overwhelming.

3. What series of distressing circumstances did these returned captives experience?

In addition to the work of rebuilding their homes and city, they experienced dearth (drought), poverty, and the unmerciful practices of lenders who were their brethren.

4. On what grounds did Nehemiah appeal to the oppressors? Others had sacrificed to redeem their brethren from the bondage of captivity. Would they sell their brethren into bondage again?

5. Why are good brotherly relationships essential? Without good relationships, we will not sense the needs among us or be available to help. Conflict within the brotherhood makes us vulnerable to discouragement and spiritual defeat. Disharmony on this level is a blot on our testimony to the world.

6. In what ways was Tobiah a threat to Nehemiah's work?

Tobiah's friendship was two-sided. He was allied to the enemies of the Jews, and he also won the favour and support of Jewish brethren, with the intention of hindering God's work.

7. How does gossip feed unrest?

Gossip thrives on supposition, hearsay, and half-truth. Gossip always adds a biased slant to the information it shares. It feeds suspicion and stifles the open, honest sharing on which good relationships depend.

8. Through what channels are worldly influences most likely to affect us?

We are likely to be influenced by friends and relatives in liberal church settings. We are exposed to worldly influences in the abundantly available books and magazines as well as in the unsolicited material in our

mailboxes. People who have attained worldly success tend to draw more attention and to exert more influence than those who have a pilgrim-and-stranger outlook.

Summarizing the Lesson

In spite of all the opposition and internal, demoralizing influences, the wall of Jerusalem was finished in fifty-two days. Satan uses whatever tactic seems to gain a foothold inside the brotherhood. The secret of the success of Nehemiah's leadership is found in his prayer "Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands" (Nehemiah 6:9).

Research Guide

1. Study the plan for the wall of Jerusalem as illustrated in a Bible handbook.
2. Read Leviticus 25 on the laws of poverty, usury, and bondservants.