

Friction expected

There is a biblical subplot of spiritual and physical opposition to the rule of God on earth which spans the whole Bible, from Gen. 3 to Rev. 20.

Matthew 10:16 “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

Friction

Who they were

Sanballat represented Samaria to the North, Tobiah was a diplomat of the Ammonites, located to the East, and Geshem was a ruler, located in the South.

Their interests were territorial, and in the case of Sanballat and Tobiah, historical/theological.

Deuteronomy 23:2-4

“No one born of a forbidden union may enter the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord.”

“No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever, ⁴ because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.”

How they opposed Nehemiah

“Are you rebelling against the king?” → Three components, all from the pit of hell. We should be on guard against all of these, with which the enemy seeks to attack us “at an opportune time.”

Accusation

*Revelation 12:10 “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, **who accuses them day and night before our God.**”*

Narrative Creation

Mark 14:57-58 And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’”

Projection

Titus 1:15 “To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

Faithfulness

Be faithful through invisible preparation

Nehemiah’s preparation for this conflict began years prior to this moment. The cultivation of character in secret, unseen places is necessary and is revealed by the test of conflict.

Winston Churchill: I felt as if I were walking with Destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial.

Be faithful while counting the cost

Nehemiah’s night ride: (About a half mile mounted, about three fourths a mile walking around the South and Eastern sides of the city). Nehemiah scopes the work.

Luke 10:28-31 “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?”

Be faithful by standing strong

Nehemiah doesn’t back down. He answers their jeers with facts.

You have no portion → “This is not your inheritance, it is ours.”

You have no right → “There is no legal argument you can make for your cause.”

You have no claim (or memorial) → “This is where our people worship, not you.”

Be faithful by trusting the power of God

“The God of heaven will make us prosper.”

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.

Questions for Further Study and Application

1. What does Jesus say about expecting opposition to his kingdom in this world?
2. What were the similarities and differences between Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem? Why did they oppose Nehemiah?
3. Who are you when no one is looking? Why is private faithfulness necessary for public fruitfulness?
4. How does God’s help give you confidence in the work he has called you to do, even when it is more than you can carry on your own?