

Betrayal from Within # 16

Nehemiah 6: 10-14

These had been turbulent times for Nehemiah as he sought to lead the reconstruction efforts in Jerusalem. As we began to study this chapter we discovered that Sanballat and the others tried to convince Nehemiah to abandon the work in order to meet with them. (Nehemiah knew their desire was founded in mischief.) Four times this request was made, and four times Nehemiah refused their request. Unrelenting, Sanballat sent his servant the fifth time with accusations of treason and the threat of exposing Nehemiah as one who sought the position of king. Through it all Nehemiah remained steadfast and undeterred.

As we have discovered many times before, the enemy possessed a great deal of commitment as well. Having realized their approach had not produced the intended result, Sanballat devised a more sinister scheme. This time he secured one of the Jews that Nehemiah would have trusted to help with their plans to overthrow the efforts at Jerusalem.

This passage reveals the hurt and disgrace felt when one is betrayed by someone of their own ranks. I am sure that most of us have experienced the hurt and frustration associated with the betrayal of a friend, particularly among the church. There is no greater illustration of such betrayal than that of Judas as he betrayed our Lord. [Luke 22:47-48 – And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. \[48\] But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? I want to look at the proposals involved as we consider: \[Betrayal from Within\]\(#\).](#)

I. The Recommendation Offered (10) – [Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. Let's consider:](#)

A. The Pretender – It appears that Nehemiah had received a request to meet with Shemaiah at his home in Jerusalem. The name Shemaiah is mentioned 10 times in the book of Nehemiah and refers to at least four different men. The name means “*heard of Jehovah*.” We find no specific mention that this Shemaiah was a priest, but it appears that he must have been, having access to the temple. We do know that he was recognized as a prophet among the people, [V.12](#).

- It is apparent that one who should have been trusted by Nehemiah and all Jerusalem had forsaken his holy calling by agreeing to work with Sanballat in an effort to defeat the work.

- This certainly is tragic, but it continues today. Many use their positions of influence and credibility for their own sinful lusts and prosperity. Our world is filled with pretenders, those who outwardly appear upright, but inwardly are filled with corruption and greed.

B. The Portrayal – Shemaiah presented the idea that he was genuinely concerned for the well being of Nehemiah. He proclaims that there had been a plot to take the life of Nehemiah and he sincerely desires to protect him from such harm. We find that he was “shut up” within his own house, supposedly in fear for his association with Nehemiah. By appearing to fear for his own life, he would be more likely to convince Nehemiah of his need for safety as well. As we will discover, this was all part of the plan, the elaborate scheme to hinder and defile Nehemiah, and possibly kill him.

- Just as Nehemiah, believers must always be on guard against the attack of the enemy. He never presents sin apart from the proper setting. He is a master of deception, seeking to establish the right atmosphere to lure one into sin and disgrace. Rarely will he present temptation without seeking to convince us that it is the “right thing to do.”

C. The Proposal (10b) – *Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee.* Keep in mind that Nehemiah had already endured five invitations already. To the average person, this would have been viewed as a great proposal. This actually refers to the inner sanctuary, the holy place located between the porch and the Holy of holies. It would have been secured with strong doors, separating it from the outer courts.

- Safety at the house of God sounds inviting, but Shemaiah wanted to lure Nehemiah to the temple in order to fulfill the desires of Sanballat. On the surface it appeared that he was only concerned with Nehemiah's safety, but this too was all part of the deceptive plan. Satan likes to use tactics that appear wholesome and good, but he always has an ulterior motive.

I. The Recommendation Offered (10)

II. The Response Given (11) – Here we discover the response of Nehemiah to the recommendation of Shemaiah. It reveals what we have come to expect from Nehemiah.

A. Nehemiah's Courage (11a) – [And I said, Should such a man as I flee?](#) By now you would think that Sanballat and the opposition would have learned something about the unwavering commitment and courage of Nehemiah. He immediately faced their opposition as he began a daunting task, and time after time, he had refused their request and pressed on in the face of their hindrances.

- This was not a political move by Nehemiah. He was committed to finishing the work he had begun. I am sure that he was aware of his presence among the people. Had he hidden in fear from Sanballat, he would have sent a message of fear and cowardice to the people. They didn't have the luxury of hiding behind strong doors, and he wasn't about to abandon them at this point in the journey.
- I am sure that Nehemiah dealt with the same emotions and fears that we do, but he had learned to depend upon the Lord. He was convinced that God had sent him to Jerusalem and he was depending upon the Lord to keep him while he was there.
- We serve the same Lord that Nehemiah did. He has not lost His power. He is still able to keep and provide for us. As we face the continued opposition of our day, we need the courage and commitment Nehemiah had.

B. Nehemiah's Concern (11b) – [and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.](#) There was something at stake here far greater than the threat of Sanballat. Nehemiah wanted to provide the leadership needed for the work to continue. Had he fled in fear, it is very likely that the people would have lost confidence in him and no longer been willing to follow him in the reconstruction efforts.

- No doubt Nehemiah was mindful of that, but there was an even greater issue at stake. Nehemiah had been called of God to oversee the reconstruction efforts, but he was not a priest unto the Lord. He had no right or authority to enter the holy place of the temple. It would have been a serious sin before the Lord, punishable by death if the Lord so chose. [Num.18:7 – Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.](#) Nehemiah feared the holiness of God more than he feared the wickedness of men. He depended upon the Lord for his safety and he wasn't going to allow fear to defile him before the Lord.
- We need a reverent fear of the Lord in our day. We need those who fear the holiness of God more than the wickedness of men. [Mat.10:28 – And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.](#)

I. The Recommendation Offered (10)

II. The Response Given (11)

III. The Reality Perceived (12-14) – Nehemiah was not deceived by the invitation of Shemaiah. He knew what his motivation was and he was aware of Sanballat's involvement as well. Notice:

A. The Perception (12-13) – Nehemiah was wise to all of this. He could see past the veil of deception to the reality of the situation. He was aware of:

1. Their Association (12) – *And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.* Keep in mind that Shemaiah was one of the Jews. He was a priest and prophet among them. One would have expected to have been able to trust in Shemaiah and believe that he had the interest of the Lord and His people at heart. Nehemiah perceived that he was working with the enemy.

- I am sure that Nehemiah was a wise man, but what revealed the deception of Shemaiah so quickly? Really it is quite simple: Shemaiah wanted Nehemiah to act contrary to God's Word. Nehemiah quickly perceived he must be working with the enemy if he encouraged activity that was contrary to God's Word.
- There is no middle ground when it comes to the work of the Lord. People are either with us or against us. If they seek to operate contrary to God's Word, they cannot be trusted. We ought to immediately question their motives.

2. Their Agenda (13) – *Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.* The people had been in captivity, but they knew God's Word. Apparently Sanballat did as well. They knew that if Nehemiah would follow the invitation of Shemaiah, entering the temple, he would've have defiled himself before the Lord and become a reproach to the people. They were seeking to destroy his character and influence among the people of Jerusalem.

- Our testimony is one of the most prized possessions we have. A good testimony affords us the opportunity to influence others for Christ. When a believer's testimony is tainted, he loses his ability to be an effective witness for Christ. Rest assured that the enemy is seeking to destroy your testimony and influence. He is seeking whatever means necessary to accomplish that goal. Be aware of what you say, where you go, and what you do. Guard your testimony for the glory of God and the good of others.

B. The Prayer (14) – *My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.* As is usual with Nehemiah he seeks the Lord in prayer as he faces the opposition of the enemy. I want to mention a couple of things concerning his prayer. He prayed for:

1. Deliverance – Even though he doesn't specifically mention it, we know that Nehemiah is seeking deliverance from his enemies. They have been a thorn in his side since his arrival in Jerusalem, and rather than giving in to their demands, he seeks the Lord to deliver him from their evil influence.

- We too continue to face a determined opposition, but we must not succumb to their demands. We need to seek the Lord and trust Him to deliver us and provide the strength we need to continue.

2. Disclosure – In this prayer Nehemiah mentions Tobiah and Sanballat by name. He doesn't mention Shemaiah; although I am convinced he had him in mind. He does mention Noadiah, the prophetess, and other unnamed prophets. Apparently this was a concerted effort among many. Shemaiah was not the only one working with the enemy. He wanted God to deal with them according to their deeds and expose them for what they truly were.

- Truth will always prevail, no matter how desperately the enemy seeks to hide it. As God's people, we ought to pray that our Lord would remove the veil of the wicked and expose their ways for what they truly are. When error and sin is revealed, truth is exposed as well.

We have considered a tragic portion of Scripture this evening. Shemaiah was a man who undoubtedly possessed great spiritual gifts. He could have been a great blessing to Nehemiah, the rebuilding efforts, and the people of Jerusalem. Instead, he chose to use his gifts in support of the enemy.

I am not suggesting that any of us have done so with the gifts we possess, but it does present a challenge to ensure that we use our gifts for the Lord. Satan would like for each of us to hide our gifts or simply refuse to use them for the glory of our Lord. May we do all we can to be a blessing and help in the work of the Lord. May we seek to honor Him in all we do.

There are those among us who seek to defeat us in any way they can. We need the wisdom of God to overcome. Remember that God's Word is our sole authority. If their motives don't line up with God's Word, we ought to question their intentions.