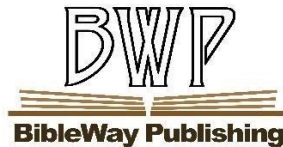


God's
Rebuilding Process
Repent, Return and Rebuild

OPERATION INTIMIDATION

Steve Flatt



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Rebuilding OPERATION INTIMIDATION

Back in 1975, one of the scariest movies I ever saw came out called "Jaws", a great white killer shark. The newspapers recorded that beach tourism went way down during the popular run of the movie. The next year everybody went back to the beach, and everybody was fine. But three years later, they came out with "Jaws II", the sequel. The advertisement for that movie said, "Just when you thought it was safe, terror returns to the beach."

It seems like in our lives sometimes, just when everything seems to be going well, disaster hits. Someone or something threatens you.

Jerusalem is the city where God chose to dwell. God's temple was there. God's people were there. Nehemiah had come from Babylon intent on rebuilding the wall because God had called him to do so. The wall around the city not only fortified the city and protected it from enemy attacks, but it symbolically stood for something. It stood for strength and it stood for the honor of the people there—in fact, the honor of God. So, for the wall of Jerusalem to lie in ruins was an insult to God's people and as far as they were concerned, that was an insult to God Himself.

Nehemiah wept and prayed that God would use him to go and rebuild the wall. God answered that prayer and Nehemiah rallied the people, he motivated them, he organized them, and got to work about 450 B.C. or so. Everybody was working well together and getting along good, enthusiastically doing the work of the Lord. Everything was going along great until Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem came and tried to undo Nehemiah's plan.

These guys ridiculed the workers, made fun of them, and dampened their spirits. In fact, they threatened to storm the city and attack them, and kill them. They tried to scare them to death. So, Nehemiah prayed to the Lord for strength and he prepared the people for battle. He prepared them to defend themselves. When those enemies saw how strong an army God's people made, they backed off. They said that they'll not attack those people. So, everybody got back to work and everybody was fine and all was well. Right?

The wall is almost finished. In fact, the only thing left to do is to hang the doors and the gates. But guess who comes back for the sequel? That's right! Those same three guys. Just when it appears to be safe, here come these enemies again ready to attack again and to try to undo God's plan. Our world today has enemies of God. God still has his enemies and always will until Christ comes back to judge the world. Everybody who's an enemy of God is an ally of Satan. That's right! They are an agent of Satan. Satan has influence in our world today. Don't mistake that fact. And he uses that influence against us.

"Put on the full armor of God". In other words, prepare to defend yourself. Why Paul? Take your stand against the devil's schemes, as "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. Our struggle is against the rulers and authorities and powers of the dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12) The pages of the New Testament are filled with the reality of spiritual warfare. God says to prepare yourself for that kind of battle.

But what are the motives of Satan? a) He wants to deny God the glory that is due his name. Our purpose on this earth, as Christians, is to bring glory to God. But the devil wants to stop that. One thing you know from studying the origin of Satan is that he is very egotistical, and he wants all of the glory to himself. So, anything he can do to take glory away from God, he is going to do it even if he has to use you to do it. That's kind of a scary thought, isn't it? b) His motive is to frustrate God's will in the world. Anything that God wants to be done, Satan wants undone. c) To win converts. That's right! Satan wants to win converts. Satan is evangelistic, did you know that? He wants a bigger army all the time. He wants to enlist you.

The previous time Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem were in Jerusalem they attacked the people. This time they focused their attack on Nehemiah. This time it's personal, and they've got three more tricks up their sleeve. But God wants us to keep working for Him in spite of personal attacks.

God wants you to keep working in spite of distractions.

Nehemiah 6:1 states that word got to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and the rest of the enemies that Nehemiah had rebuilt the wall, and not a gap was left in it except for the doors and the gates. They sent this message, "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono. They are scheming to harm me. So I sent messengers to them with this reply, 'I am

carrying on a great project here, and I cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:2) Now at first thought, their invitation to meet with Nehemiah might not seem so suspicious. What's wrong with that? Sounds like they want to have a little peace talk, you know. But Nehemiah knew these guys. He knew how dangerous they could be. In fact, they didn't offer to come to Jerusalem. They wanted Nehemiah to leave Jerusalem and go some twenty miles away to a place or region where Nehemiah's enemies were known to be where they could either kidnap him or assassinate him. He knew how dangerous it would be. But a two-day journey would take him off that wall, away from the work that God gave him to do. They tried to lure Nehemiah away four times. He resisted and stayed at his task. He was going to do what God wanted done not what God's enemies wanted done. He was able to do this by continuing to:

1. Stay focused. Nehemiah was focused. He knew his priorities. He knew the commitment that he had made to the Lord. He kept his eyes on his goal. You can be assured that our enemy, Satan, wants to distract us from doing God's will. Satan has put all kinds of allurements and distractions in our culture today. Many of them wicked. Like Nehemiah, we have to evaluate them in the light of God's calling. Sometimes staying focused on God and what He wants me to do means saying "no". It's hard for us to say no. We like to do things, go places and be involved. But sometimes we just have to say "no" and be more focused and do the job that God gave us to do. What is taking your time away from doing God's will, from the really important things in life?

2. Work in spite of defamation. When you defame someone, you spread lies and rumors about them. "Then the fifth time Sanballat sent his aid to me with a message and in his hand was an unsealed letter which said, 'It is reported among the nations and Geshem says this is true, Nehemiah, that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt and therefore that's why you are building the wall. Moreover, according to the report, you are about to become their king, and you have sent prophets to make a proclamation about you being a king in Judah. This is going to get back to the king.'" (Nehemiah 6:5) In other words, Nehemiah, I'm going to tell the real king that you are trying to get his job. Well, it was a lie, wasn't it? You notice that the letter was unsealed. It was open. This would be like a letter to the editor and everybody who carried it on its way would be able to read it and I'm sure Sanballat made sure his servants and lots of eyes got to see this letter. He wanted to spread this vicious and false rumor and if Nehemiah's people found out about this and they thought their leader was just an opportunistic, self-centered person, why they wouldn't support him anymore. This could be a harming thing. Nehemiah sent this reply, "Nothing of what you are saying is true, and you're just making it up out of your own head. You're trying to frighten me." Then Nehemiah says, "I prayed to the Lord, now strengthen my hands." (Nehemiah 6:8) So true to Nehemiah's character, he simply dismissed the charges as false. He prayed to God like he always did and then he got back to work. He didn't waste time defending himself. Have you ever stopped working on something because someone was criticizing you and you had to take time to defend yourself? Well, Nehemiah said that I'm not going to fall for that. I'm not going to respond to rumors. I'm not going to respond to gossip and innuendos. The work of God is too important.

One of the toughest things that any leader has to do is to respond to false accusations about them, usually from a jealous source. You want to quit sometimes, but not Nehemiah. He just trusted in God and he trusted in the truth. He believed that the truth would prevail and that's important to remember when someone slanders you and spreads gossip about you. Truth will win out. Who was the most falsely accused man in the history of the world? My Lord, Jesus Christ. What did He say "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you falsely and say all kinds of evil against you because of me? Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophet who came before you." (Matthew 5:11) One of those prophets was Nehemiah and God will protect you against slander just like He protected Nehemiah.

3. Work in spite of danger. "One day I went to the house of Shemaiah, and he said, let's meet in the house of God, in fact inside the temple." He meant by that "in the Holy of Holies". "And let's close the doors because men are coming by night to kill you, Nehemiah." Nehemiah said, "Should a man like me run away? Should a man like me hide in the temple? I will not go." (Nehemiah 6:10) Well, what are they doing? They're trying to scare him. They say, "Nehemiah, there's a hit man out there and he's got a contract on your life, and the best place for you to hide is inside the Holy of Holies. The bad guys won't follow you in there. First of all, only the priests were allowed into the Holy of Holies, but these enemies of Nehemiah wanted him to break that law and he would be guilty of the death penalty.

But even more than that, Nehemiah knew that he was being set up to look like a coward. The people would be able to say, "What kind of a leader do we have? He's running and hiding." Nehemiah said "I realize that God did not send them, but Tobiah and Sanballat have hired them to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name and discredit me." (v. 12) Oh, I like that. Should a man like me run and hide. He's not being egotistical there.

He's saying, "Look, I'm a leader and God has chosen me. God has commissioned me. I'm responsible for all these people. I can't just run and hide in the face of danger." Nehemiah remembered who he was. He knew his own God-given character. Because of that, he could remain strong. The Bible says that our enemy, Satan, prowls around like a roaring lion just looking for someone to devour, looking for you and looking for me. You will be able to withstand the devil if you know who you are and if you remember that you are God's child. If you are a Christian, you wear the name of Christ. You have put Him on in baptism and you wear His name. Christ died for you. That is your identity. He also equips you. **God helps you withstand the Devil.**

1. He gives you a compelling purpose in life. You know the game Trivial Pursuit; it's kind of a fun thing. You sit around and answer questions about meaningless things. It does describe a lot of people's lives. They are just in a trivial pursuit. The Bible clearly says that the Christian life is not to be that way. "Great lives are produced by a commitment to a great cause." They said, "Nehemiah, stop what you are doing and come down off that wall and come meet with us." What did he say? "Look, I'm doing a great project. Why should I come down? I'm involved with something great." Do you have a great project in your life? Do you have a compelling purpose that motivates you every day? Again, great people are ordinary people who are committed to a great cause. That cause draws them out of themselves and makes them better than they could be on their own. Jesus gives us our purpose. Several times, Jesus was asked what is the most important thing. "An expert in the law tested Him with the question, 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in all the law?'" Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.' That's the first and greatest commandment. 'And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commands.'" (Matthew 22) Jesus said. That is called the great commandment.

A few chapters later, Jesus is about to ascend to the Father, but He tells His disciples, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28) There is nothing better that you can devote your life to than the great commandment and the great commission. These things last forever! They are our compelling purposes— love God, love people, tell people the gospel, and disciple them. I challenge you not to be on the sidelines of the Christian life watching others. Take ownership of this purpose for your own life.

2. God gives you a clear perspective. Did you notice that every time Nehemiah's enemies tried to trap him, he sensed it? He could smell a trap a mile away. He had incredible perception, discernment and wisdom. Nehemiah had a spiritual radar that enabled him to withstand his enemies. Now, how do you get that? God gives it to you. But you do have to ask Him for it. James talked about how our faith is tested sometimes and how we're going to go through trials. "If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously without showing favoritism and it will be given to him." (James 1:5) Do you have that relationship? How is your spiritual sensitivity? Do you know God's word well enough to know a trap when it comes along?

3. God calls us to continual prayer. That's right: continual prayer. The Bible says, "Pray without ceasing." Nehemiah prayed at every turn. Anything that came up, Nehemiah's first response to that situation was to pray, to ask God for the strength. Jesus was the same way and He told His disciples to be the same way. In Luke 18:1, Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. So how is your prayer life?

4. God calls us to a courageous persistence. Nehemiah kept on hanging in there no matter what came. He said, "I'm not going to run away because God is with me. Satan is the one who tries to tempt people to run away when the going gets tough. He tempts people to run away from God. He tempts people to run away from their marriages when the going gets tough. He tempts people to run out of ministry, to run away from reality and into some addiction or some sin. The devil wants you to run, but God's will for Christians is persistence even in the face of defamation, danger, or distractions.

Paul said, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9) So the question is: how persistent are you in doing God's will? Do you just obey the Lord when it's

convenient? Or have you so committed your life to Him that even in times of danger you will do what He wants you to do. Even in times of hardship, you are there for Him. Nehemiah had that commitment and he spread it to all of the people for they finished the wall.

"When our enemies heard about this (the fact that the wall was done), all the surrounding nations were afraid and disheartened." (Nehemiah 6:16) Beforehand they were trying to make God's people afraid, but now that the wall is finished and Jerusalem is once more a fortified city, then they are afraid. Nehemiah said, "They are afraid because they realize that this work had been done by our God." Isn't that great? They knew that God had done that work. Now there was another building project in the Old Testament that God didn't bless. In fact, God stirred it up. Do you remember following the flood the people attempted to build the Tower of Babel? God did not let that building project go forward. Why? Because the people said, "Look how great we are. Look how much we can do. We can build the tower to Heaven." God didn't like that conceit so He crushed their effort. But, God did the work through Nehemiah and through the people because they focused on Him. I wonder if those around us can look at us and say, "All that they are doing, and they are doing because God is there.

God is with them." Is that obvious? Oh, I hope so! I hope others can say, "God dwells there and works through them." Do we have that faith? Are we attempting anything that requires utter dependence on God? Do we have that kind of faith? If we do, then the world will know that God is here in this place. People can see if you are focused on God. If we are then our testimony about our God will be great. I hope that your life is characterized by a great faith in God. AG Lesson #1331
September 14, 1997

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