

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Nehemiah: Pattern For Solutions In Spiritually Hard Times
B. Preplanning For Conflicts From The Ungodly
(Nehemiah 2:9-18)

Introduction (To show the need . . .)

In viewing recent events, we face a variety of potential future conflicts from ungodly parties:

(1) We may face it in the financial realm: a letter by Dorothy Detlefsen of Bethlehem in the Republican-American, March 18, 2021, p. 10A, noted: “On Biden’s watch, fuel prices are skyrocketing, causing other necessities to go up . . . The borders are out of control, with thousands of immigrants arriving daily, for whom we will be responsible for providing housing, food, education and health care . . . The” \$9.1 trillion “COVID-19 ‘relief package’ brings us . . . ‘free’ money,” but it “will need to be paid back . . .”

(2) We may face it in the realm of religious liberty: George Will’s column, “Is a little religion OK?” (Ibid.) reported that the “U. S. Supreme Court . . . will . . . consider whether to hear a case from Maine that poses this question: Is it constitutional for that state to say that parents can use state aid to pay tuition at religious schools *if* . . . they are not *excessively* serious about religion, with excess to be determined by government officials . . .” Maine currently “says the school must not promote ‘the faith or belief system with which it is associated’ and must not present the material it teaches ‘through the lens of this faith.’” (Ibid.)

(3) We may face it in the realm of social welfare: the editorial, “One addiction feeds another” (Ibid., March 20, 2021, p. 8A) told of Governor Ned Lamont’s “deal . . . to expand gaming . . . a problematic situation,” for the “Mayo Clinic relates that compulsive gambling can lead to interpersonal, financial and legal problems; poor on-the-job performance; and physical and mental-health problems. That” our state “government would depend for revenue on activities so potentially harmful to people should appall all Nutmeggers.”

(4) We may face it in the realm of free speech: George Leef’s March 17, 2021 National Review Online/The Corner piece, “The Ongoing Assault on Academic Freedom” (Ibid., “Quotable”) reported, “The faculty senate at Portland (Ore.) State (University) has passed a resolution banning criticism of faculty, departments and programs,” claiming that “academic freedom is merely ‘a smokescreen for settler-genocidal institutions of oppression.’” So, freedom to criticize Oregon State University’s progressive leaders and programs is being banned allegedly because it comes from white settlers who practice destruction of minorities!

(5) We may face it in the realm of spiritual conflict in our pulpit: in recent years, several people in the congregation have expressed concern that our handling of sensitive issues in our pulpit may incite opposition from the outside world. The concern is certainly valid: (a) if a pastor can be bullied into yielding to the will of others, the intimidating parties can then control the information that is given to the congregation, leading to spiritual deception, distrust and harming the Church’s ministry. (b) Also, even some professing Christians in recent years have tried to tell me what I should or should not preach, complicating this entire issue!

Need: So we ask, “In view of various future potential conflicts from the ungodly, what should we do?!”

- I. When Nehemiah arrived in Judah, he learned that area governors Sanballat and Tobiah viewed his presence as a threat to their control of Judea, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Nehemiah 2:10.**
- II. Nehemiah was no stranger to such conflict: as the Persian king’s cupbearer, he was responsible to taste the wine before he served it to the king to make sure it was not poisoned, B. K. C., O. T., p. 675. He had thus learned to be vigilant in dealing with potential intrigue among officials of all sorts in preserving first his OWN life as well as the life of the king!**
- III. Accordingly, Nehemiah planned ahead how to function in view of potential conflict with these men:**
 - A. First, he interacted with the people of Jerusalem for three days to discern the capability of the Hebrews toward helping him achieve his objective of rebuilding the city walls, Nehemiah 2:11 with 2:5-8.
 - B. Second, Nehemiah made a secret survey of the wall situation so he could plan without Sanballat and Tobiah knowing of his intent lest they successfully block him from starting the work, Neh. 2:12-16:
 1. Nehemiah’s night journey began at the Valley Gate at the southwest wall and went south along the debris of the fallen wall with the intent of swinging around north and returning to the city’s Water Gate on the southeast wall area, Neh. 2:13; Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to Nehemiah 2:13-15. Nehemiah had no need to survey the northern walls as they had been leveled by attackers who had the advantage of high ground there contrary to the steep grades surrounding the southern part of the city.

2. However, the debris of fallen stones around the south part of the city was so profuse that Nehemiah's mount could not proceed, so he likely turned around and reentered the Valley Gate, Ibid., Ryrie.
- C. Third, once he knew all the facts about the people and the wall, Nehemiah privately made his plans.
- D. Fourth, Nehemiah urged the Hebrews of Jerusalem to help him rebuild the wall, encouraging them to do so in view of his testimony of the Persian king's encouragement that they do so, Nehemiah 2:17-18.

Lesson: *Knowing he faced future potential conflicts from ungodly officials, Nehemiah carefully preplanned how to proceed with his rebuilding effort that he could successfully focus on the work once he faced conflict.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) In facing potential conflict from ungodly parties, may we make careful, Biblical plans as how to proceed that when we face the conflict, we can focus on the job at hand and fulfill God's calling for us.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We apply the lesson of this sermon to the issues mentioned in our sermon introduction (as follows):

(1) On financial challenges created by government actions, (a) Hebrews 13:5-6 promises God will not forsake us, but help us regardless what man can do unto us, that we should then not be covetous, but be content with what we have. (b) Also, 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 directs that to avoid needless poverty and to have a good reputation with unbelievers, we should make it our ambition to live a quiet life and to work with our own hands, seeking to earn a living as independently as possible. (c) Since increasing government debt arguably increases the chance for inflation, and investing in stocks is one good way to handle the eroding value of the dollar by inflation, we can heed the guidelines of Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 to invest in stocks or stock funds (a) aggressively (v. 1a), (b) for the long-term (v. 1b), with (c) proper diversification among different companies (v. 2a), (d) without trying to time the market's moves (v. 2b-5) and (e) consistently adding to our initial investments.

(2) On the threat of governmental control of teaching content in government-subsidized ministries, we need to obey 3 John 7 and not receive any moneys from the government to run Christian ministries so that we avoid this problem! God's work financed with money from God's people is the way to go, cf. 3 John 5, 8.

(3) On the problem of gambling, Proverbs 28:22 literally translated from the Hebrew text asserts: "A man who has an evil eye (selfish motives, Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to Proverbs 28:22) hastens after riches, and he does not recognize that poverty will come to him." Since gambling addiction is a problem of selfish, greedy motives, it inevitably leads to poverty even were one to gain a jackpot, as what happens in many cases. Rather, the way to gain wealth is to gather it bit by bit according to Proverbs 13:11b.

(4) On the issue of academic freedom and free speech, Colossians 4:5-6 directs that we should walk in wisdom toward unbelievers, taking advantage of opportunities to be gracious but pure and penetrating in our speech to impact them for Christ. This kind of approach will tend to diminish conflicts with ungodly parties who are all set to be defensive and curtail free speech.

(5) On the issue of spiritual conflict in our pulpit ministry, be it from outside sources or even from within the Church, ***for the spiritual protection of the Church body***, (a) Scripture provides several directives for us (as follows): (i) Titus 2:15 NIV commands pastors to "(e)ncourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you." (ii) 2 Timothy 2:24-26 directs pastors not to argue but meekly to instruct those who oppose them that such opponents might recover themselves from the snare of Satan who has taken them captive to do his will in trying to defeat the pastor in his ministry. (iii) 1 Peter 5:9 in the context of Church leaders then calls pastors to resist Satan by being steadfast in the faith, and James 4:7b directs that such resistance will cause the Evil One to flee from the pastor. (b) Accordingly, a pastor should plan that whether unbiblical opposition comes from sources outside the Church or from those within it, he should view all such opposition as angelic conflict issues with Satan fueling it all, and thus keep a firm hold on Scripture, teaching and preaching it with all authority in reliance on the Holy Spirit's power for ministry (2 Timothy 1:13-14, 6-7).

For your information, this has long been my practice as your pastor, and it will continue to be so.

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. Then, in realizing we may face potential conflict from ungodly sources, may we plan to follow God's Biblical directives, making practical plans on how to do so that when the conflicts arise, we might better focus on the objective at hand to complete God's assignments.