

Introduction: All people are walking contradictions, both individually and in community. No one is totally consistent in all he or she does and says. *** There is an intense and eternal spiritual battle going on in every nation on earth. It does not respect any demographic but affects every ethnicity, language, culture, gender, age ... And, everyone is born on the wrong side of this battle. The apostle John concluded, 'the whole world is in the power of the evil one' (1 John 5:19, RSV). For all these reasons, Jesus called out hypocrites in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-18). Just before going to the Cross, He pronounced six woes on the religious leaders, calling them hypocrites each time (Matthew 23:13-32). *** The greatest spiritual battles always involve God's chosen people because the evil one hates God and His people. This one also knows which of God's people are most likely to be tempted to pursue political power. *** As the project to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem under the direction of Nehemiah progressed to completion many Jews organized opposition to the work. They tried intimidation and deceit, attempting to intimidate Nehemiah and make him fear men. But, Nehemiah recognized the spiritual battle and continued to fear God so he persevered in the faith. *** When the wall was completed with God's help, the same people tried to gain political power; but, again with God's help, Nehemiah set up godly leaders. *** Over time, step-by-step God brings wholeness to His people. Jesus illustrated this with a two-stage healing of a blind man. God always finishes what He starts. *** Let's examine our passages to discover more of how God gives His people victory over spiritual opposition.

I. God assured that Nehemiah's work on the wall succeeded; but, political opposition causes Nehemiah to provide for Jerusalem's security. (*Nehemiah 6:15-19; 7:1-4*)

A. With God's help the wall is quickly completed, but Tobiah subtly plots against Nehemiah. (*Nehemiah 6:15-19*)

Context: Tobiah (my good – Yah) and Sanballat (strength) along with the prophetess Noadiah (meet with Yah) try to deceive Nehemiah into the sin of 'fear of man'. He remains faithful and prays an imprecatory prayer of spiritual warfare against them (*Nehemiah 6:10-14*). This sets the stage for even more spiritual warfare after the God-given victory of completing the wall.

1. Then the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth of Elul in fifty-two days. (*Verse 15*)

Date: On our calendar this is October 2, 445 BC.

Time: One hundred forty one years after the wall was rendered useless by the Babylonians, Nehemiah oversaw its restitution so Jerusalem became secure in just fifty-two days, less than two months!

2. And it was, as they heard, all our enemies were afraid, all the nations roundabout us; then they fell greatly in their eyes, and they knew that because of our God had been done this work. (*Verse 16*)

Nations fear: Against their will, the nations who were enemies of the Jews became fearful.

God's work: They now realize God had overpowered their plans and empowered His people to complete the work He put on Nehemiah's heart back in Susa (*Nehemiah 1*).

God completes the work He assigns His people

3. Also in those days (were) sending many nobles of Judah their letters to Tobiah, and his coming to them; because many in Judah under oath to him, because he was son-in-law to Shechaniah (dwell with Yah) son of Arah (traveler), and his son Jehohanan (Yah has graced) took as wife the daughter of Meshullam (friend) the son of Berechiah (blessed of Yah). (*Verses 17-18*)

Tobiah: Tobiah was a Jew, but he craved political power. He was a deceptive traitor to the faith.

Worldly in-laws: His in-laws all had Jewish names. However, there are always a certain number of those 'professing' faith in God who desire worldly power more than God.

Intrigue: The exchange of letters was to plan a way to overthrow Nehemiah.

4. Also, his good deeds they were speaking in my presence, and my words were delivered to him;

Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid. (*Verse 19*)

Disrespect of Nehemiah: By constantly talking up Tobiah to Nehemiah, the conspirators were disrespecting Nehemiah.

Intent: They wanted Nehemiah to fear them and their political power, which would be a sin against God by Nehemiah,

B. Nehemiah arranges for the political stability of Jerusalem in accordance with God's Word. (*Nehemiah 7:1-4*)

1. And it was, as the wall had been built, then I set up the doors (gates); then were appointed the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites. (*Verse 1*)

Wall and doors: After God had completed building the wall, Nehemiah fully secured the city by supervising the installation of gates.

Appointments: Levites to guard the gates and to sing in the Temple were appointed (by God), in accordance with the instructions given to David (by Yahweh, 1 Chronicles 22, 25, 26).

2. Then I commanded Hanani (my grace) my brother, and Hananiah (grace of Yah) prince of the palace over Jerusalem, because he (is) man of truth and fearing God more (than) many. (*Verse 2*)

Grace filled leaders: Both men Nehemiah commands to be in roles in the city have names of grace.

Prince of palace: Hananiah is the governor because the only recognized king is Artaxerxes in Susa.

Character: The God-appointed governor is a God-fearing man of truth, more than most people.

Bottom line: God directed Nehemiah to establish leaders of the people in Jerusalem who were true to God and had the faith to fear Him and obey Him. Despite the plots and intrigue of worldly Jews, God directed Nehemiah to establish the right leaders for His people.

God completes the work He assigns His people

3. Then I said to them: Not being opened the gates of Jerusalem until the sun is hot; and, while they are standing they must shut the doors and they must bar (them); and, to station guards inhabiting Jerusalem, each to his watch, each opposite his house. (*Verse 3*)

Not opened: Jerusalem's gates were not to be opened until mid-morning.

To cause to stand: The guards were to stand at the gates that were nearest to their houses.

God: God directed His people in everything including the guards of His gates. He is over the physical realm, the political realm and the protection realm.

God completes the work He assigns His people

4. And the city (is) large and great, and the people (are) few in the midst of it, no houses had been built. (*Verse 4*)

Fill city: Nehemiah had one more task, to trust God to fill His city with people. This is why the next section is a long genealogy of those who returned from captivity. And we must pray to obey God to work with Jesus to fill the New Jerusalem with converts (Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 21:1-7).

Next week: We will see next week how God's people had great spiritual joy from God's Word.

II. Jesus heals a blind man in two stages. (Mark 8:22-26)

- A. Jesus is asked to heal a blind man, but he only sees partially. (*Verses 22-24*)

1. And He is coming into Bethsaida (house of fish) and they are bringing a blind (man); and they are entreating Him in order that He may touch him. (*Verse 22*)

Bring blind man: When Jesus comes into Bethsaida, at the northernmost tip of the Sea of Galilee, where the Jordan River enters it, people bring a blind man to Him.

Entreat Jesus: And they are entreating Jesus to touch the blind man. They advocated on his behalf.

2. And having taken the hand of the blind (man), He led him out of the town; and, having spit upon his eyes, having put His hands on him; He was asking him if anything he was seeing. (*Verse 23*)

Leads from town: Jesus leads the blind man away from the congestion and crowds of the city. (More on this later.)

Two healing actions: Saliva was believed to be the spiritual water of life, and it does heal the skin so we 'lick our wounds'; and, Jesus' healing power flowed through His hands on to people.

Question: Jesus then asks the man if he is now seeing anything. This may indicate He did not expect a full healing yet.

3. And, having looked up, he was saying, 'I am seeing the men that, as trees I am perceiving, walking. (*Verse 24*)

Blurry perception: The blind (man) reports that he has some vision, but everything is not clear.

Jesus sometimes heals over time

- B. But after Jesus lays hands on the blind man again, he sees clearly. (*Verses 25-26*)

1. Then again, He put on the hands (of Him) upon the eyes of him. (*Verse 25a*)

Put on hands: This time, Jesus only touched the eyes. He used no saliva.

2. And he saw clearly and he was restored, and he was directly seeing clearly all things. (*Verse 25b*)

Sees clearly and restored: This time, at once, Jesus fully restored his eyesight!

For God's Church: May we all be assured of healing IN Jesus, even IF it is only the 'final healing' after walking through the valley of death WITH The Good Shepherd Jesus.

Always looking 'directly': In the second clause, Mark says he was always able to look directly at everything and see it clearly. In other words, the final healing of his eyes was permanent.

Jesus sometimes heals over time

3. And He sent him to his house saying, 'Neither into the town thou may come'. (*Verse 26*)

Mark's 'secret' Jesus: Jesus gives this command because, until after He returned to heaven, people had the wrong idea about the Savior. He came first to save us from our sins so we can overcome them. But, God's people expected Him to overthrow Rome. So, Jesus did not want His people to have the wrong hope about 'this world'.

Conclusion: God helped Nehemiah and those he supervised to complete the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem in spite of internal opposition. The opposition turned political after physical security was established; but, with God's help, Nehemiah commanded leaders who feared God to guide God's people to live according to His Word. God completes His work in His people. Jesus illustrated this in a two-stage healing miracle.

God completes the work He assigns His people.