

# Finishing Well

Lesson #38 Fish Gate: ENEMY IN THE TEMPLE

October 13, 2021

- The Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem and eventually destroyed and burned it.
- Most of the Jews were exiled to Babylon for 70 years.
- At the end of 70 years, the Jews returned to Jerusalem in 3 different groups.
- Nehemiah led the 3<sup>rd</sup> group of exiles 94 years after the first group had returned.
- Under his leadership the walls and gates of Jerusalem were rebuilt, repaired and restored.

The Fish Gate was located on the north wall just northwest of the Temple.

- North side was the best way to enter Jerusalem. The northern side was mostly on a plain while the other sides of the city overlooked steep ravines.
- Many merchants would locate closer to the northern gates than any other gates because they would get most of their business from the northern gates.
- Led out of the city to the northwest = one of the routes to the coastal plain.
- Main entrance for fish mongers from the Mediterranean Sea, Tyre & Sea of Galilee

Nehemiah 3:3-5 The Fish Gate was built by the sons of Hassenaah.

They laid its beams and put its doors and locks and bars in place.

And next to them Meremoth the son of Urijah the son of Koz made repairs.

Next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel made repairs.

Next to them Zadok the son of Baana made repairs. Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders [necks] to the work of their Lord."

Message from the Fish Gate: You Are My Witnesses! My Ambassadors!

Transform the Marketplace! Protect the Marketplace!

Corruption At The Fish Gate: Almost every Biblical mention of the Fish Gate involved either corruption of the people of Israel, or the aftermath of it. When a society becomes corrupt, the two most public manifestations of that degeneracy involve:

1. Places of religion: Jer.32:34 "they set their abominations in the House, which is called by My Name, to defile it"
2. Places of Business: Neh. 13:16-18 Corrupting the Sabbath

Neh. 13:1,4 On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God forever; <sup>4</sup>And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was ALLIED UNTO TOBIAH: [Ammonite enemy!]

Nehemiah 6: The walls are built. The gates need to be restored. Strengthen the people.

- Sanballat [Satan], Tobiah [World] and Geshem [flesh] had failed in their attempts to stop the work.
- They decided to concentrate their attacks on Nehemiah to eliminate or discredit him.
- Then they could mobilize their allies living in Jerusalem [Wow] and take over the city.
- Enemy's main purpose: Generate fear in the heart of Nehemiah and his workers. Fear destroys faith and paralyzes life. [Neh. 6:9, 13-14, 19]

Neh. 6:1-4 Compromise      Enemy approaches> We will help you work.

Nehemiah rejected because:

- Neh. 6:2      He knew they were lying and wanted to kill him.
- Neh. 6:3      He was convinced of the greatness of the work God had given him to do.
- Neh. 2:20     He & the Jews had nothing in common with Sanballat and his crowd. No basis for cooperation.

So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will make us successful; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no part, right, or memorial in Jerusalem."

God's people are different from the people of the world and must maintain their separated position [II Cor. 6:14-7:1). If Nehemiah had cooperated with Sanballat and his allies, how could he have led the nation to separate itself from the foreigners in the land? [Neh. 9:2; 10:28; 13:3] He would have been inconsistent.

Neh. 6:5-9 Slander      We will tell everybody about you.

The enemy wrote an open letter accusing him of sedition. An "open letter" to a royal governor would be both intimidating and insulting. Any hint of rebellion under the Persian kings would be quickly and ruthlessly put down. If some of the Jewish workers believed what was in the letter, Sanballat could organize them and create division within the ranks.

It was a splendid opportunity for the enemy to divide and conquer.

In every organization, there are gossip-mongers, hovering like vultures, just waiting for tidbits of slander that they can chew, swallow, and then regurgitate.

Neh. 6:10-14      Threats      We will protect you.

Shemaiah, a hireling prophet, devised a clever plan for trapping Nehemiah. He knew Shemaiah was a false prophet because the message he delivered was contradictory to the Word of God [Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22].

Rom. 4:3 "What saith the Scripture?" must be the test of any message, even if that message comes from somebody who claims to be one of God's servants. "

Neh. 6:15-16      Intrigue      We will not give up.

So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.

Wiersbe: Satan is not a quitter but stays on the field even after it looks as if he has lost the battle. Many a careless Christian has won the war but afterward lost the victory. Satan is always looking for "an opportune time" to attack the victors and turn them into victims. Andrew A. Bonar: "Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle."

Neh. 6:17 Moreover in those days the Nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them.

- Tobiah wrote them letters and influenced their thinking. Instead of seeking the truth, the nobles believed the enemy's lies and became traitors to their own people & their God.
- He no doubt flattered them and made promises to them, and they foolishly believed him.
- Change your allegiance before Jerusalem is taken by the Gentiles.
- The nobles secretly shared the letters with others, and thus the conspiracy grew.

Wiersbe: They were blinded by lies and flattery and completely out of touch with reality.

- Had the nobles of Judah been studying and meditating on the Word of God, they would have had discernment and not been walking "in the counsel of the ungodly." [Ps. 1:1]

What about today? Professed Christians, who claim to be "Bible taught," give their endorsement and support to people whose words and actions are totally against God's Word.

Jer. 5:30-31 An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land:

- <sup>31</sup> The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it this way! But what will you do when the end comes?

Consider: We are facing a day of reckoning.

Each of us will give an account of our lives and obedience at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Isa. 8:20 To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.

Neh. 6:18 For there were many in Judah Sworn Unto Him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

- Tobiah was the son-in-law of Shechaniah
- Tobiah's son Jehohanan had married a daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

Both Shechaniah and Meshullam [worked on Fish Gate] are names mentioned in Neh. 3:4, 20, 30.

It is natural to derive Tobiah's alliance to Eliashib from his connection with one or both families. It seems incredible that any Jew would secretly cooperate with the enemy.

These were the nobles from the royal tribe of Judah!

If any tribe had a stake in the future of "the city of David," it was the tribe of Judah, for God promised that a Savior and King would come from their tribe [Gen. 49:10; II Sam. 7].

Note: Firmly refuse to accept anything as truth that cannot be documented. How could these Jews turn their backs on their own heritage, their own brothers and sisters, and their own God?

Key Point: Cooperation with Tobiah = Resisting the Lord, disobeying the Word, and jeopardizing their own future. Why would they do such a treacherous thing?

- The bonds of human connection were stronger than the bonds of spiritual affection.
- Tobiah was tied to the tribe of Judah through marriage.
- The nobles of Judah gave the loyalty to him that they should have given to God
- The men of Judah forgot that they were "married" to Jehovah God and owed Him their love and loyalty.

Matt. 10:37 But Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

Key: The "blood bond" that unites us to Christ is the strongest bond of all, and our loyalty to Him must come first.

Am I totally yielded to the Lord and fully obedient to Him? Do I ever permit human relationships to influence my decisions so much that I deliberately disobey the Word of God?

Neh. 6:19 Also they reported his good deeds before me and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me [Nehemiah] in fear.

- No doubt they were hoping to win Tobiah's favor and thus earn a greater reward when Tobiah and his friends took over Jerusalem.
- They were traitors to the nation and to the Lord.

Prov. 28:4 "They that forsake the law praise the wicked; but such as keep the law contend with them." [If you desert God's law, you are free to embrace depravity.

If you love God's law, you fight for it tooth and nail.]

Neh. 6:15-16 "So the wall was finished."

- Now Nehemiah must protect what he has accomplished.

The walls were completed, the gates were restored, and the enemy was chagrined, but Nehemiah's work was not finished by any means.

Eph. 6:13, "And having done all, to stand." Nehemiah had been steadfast in building the walls and in resisting the enemy, and now he had to be steadfast in consolidating and conserving the gains.

Nehemiah was godly leader who was zealous to turn the people and individuals back to God.

Nehemiah immediately began to act decisively to change the situation.

Nehemiah 7: Enlisting leadership

Assistants: Hanani = God has gratified me

Hananiah = God is gracious

In charge of the citadel

The citadel was a fortress in the temple area, guarding the north wall of the city, which was especially vulnerable to attack.

They would work with Rephaiah [3:9] and Shallum [3:12], rulers of districts in the city.

- Rephaiah = God has healed; refreshment of the Lord
- Shallum = Make whole or complete

God is looking for faithful, God-fearing men and women who will have the courage and conviction to serve Him, come what may.

Gatekeepers: What good are strong new gates if nobody is guarding them and controlling who enters and leaves the city? What good are walls if the gates are open to every foe who wants to enter the city? Gates and walls are only as good as the people who guard them. The gatekeepers ["porters"] were given specific instructions as to when to open and close the gates  
Neh. 7:3a "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot, and while they are standing guard, the gatekeepers are to keep the doors shut and bolted.

Guards. Nehemiah appointed two kinds of guards ("watches" v. 3b):

- Those to patrol the walls at specific stations and
- those to keep watch near their own houses.

Nehemiah now challenged them to guard the areas they had built. With guards at the gates, watchmen on the walls, and a solid "neighborhood watch," the city was safe from outside attack. If God's people don't protect what they have accomplished for the Lord, the enemy will come in and take it over.

II John 1:8 "Look to yourselves," warned the apostle John, "that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."

The people in Jerusalem:

- Neh. 8: Had experienced a major revival at the Water Gate with Nehemiah and Ezra
- Neh. 10: Submitted themselves, vowed to be a separate people unto the Lord, vowed to keep the Sabbath, promised to support the house of God and renewed their vows.
- Neh. 11-12: Celebration and dedication of the rebuilt walls and gates to the LORD.
- Neh. 13: Corruption set in; Broken vows and broken promises

What Happened?

Nehemiah's first term as governor lasted 12 years. He returned to the palace in Persia to report to the king. [Neh. 13:6] During his absence, the people fell back into sin and compromise. When he returned to Jerusalem, he discovered:

- The fires of devotion had gone out in Jerusalem.

Lev. 6:12 The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it. It shall not go out,...

Gen. William Booth, of the Salvation Army: "I want you young men always to bear in mind that it is the nature of a fire to go out; you must keep it stirred and fed and the ashes removed."

Swindoll: The fervor of those early returning Israelites gave way to a thorough apathy for the things of God. This led to rampant corruption among the priesthood and a spiritual lethargy among the people.

- The situation had deteriorated dramatically.
- The people were not living up to the vows they had made [Neh. 10].
- The people were defiled by compromise and in a state of spiritual decay.

Malachi, the prophet sent to the people in Jerusalem, wrote about the corruption of the temple sacrifices and other issues that Nehemiah addressed. It is believed Malachi prophesied to the people while Nehemiah was gone to Persia.

Swindoll: "Malachi came along at a time when the people were struggling to believe that God loved them [Mal. 1:2]. The people focused on their unfortunate circumstances and refused to account for their own sinful deeds. So God pointed the finger back at them, and through Malachi, God told the people where they had fallen short of their covenant with Him. If they hoped to see changes, they needed to take responsibility for their own actions and serve God faithfully according to the promise their fathers had made to God on Mount Sinai.

This may seem like a surprise after all God had done for them and their seemingly genuine repentance. However, this commonly happens to us individually and corporately.

Some have compared the spiritual life to "walking upstream; if you are not fighting to move forward, then you are, by default, going backward."

We must be tenacious in seeking to practice a holy life and fighting for holiness in our churches. "There is a continual inertia drawing us and others towards spiritual decay."

- Statistics say ~75% of youth fall away from the faith in college and never return.
- ~1700 pastors leave the ministry every month.
- Churches and individuals make various moral compromises and disregard Scripture.
- Rapid spiritual decay is happening in the church and in individuals.

#### *The Separation Promise Neh. 13:1-9, 23-31*

Lev. 20:26 And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.

#### A. The mixed multitude

Neh. 13:1-2 On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God forever; <sup>2</sup> Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.

- Deut. 23:3-5 contrary to the law of Moses; never allowed in the Temple
- Gen. 19:30-38 Ammon and Moab were born from the incestuous union of Lot and 2 of his daughters. Descendants were bitter enemies of the Jews.

Prov. 24:1 Warns believers to stay away from those bent on evil

Num. 22-25 Balaam was a hireling prophet who devised a scheme to defeat Israel.

He encouraged the Moabites to be "neighborly" and invite the Jews to share in their religious feasts, which involved immorality and idolatry. Balaam knew that human nature would respond to the opportunity for sin and the Jews would disobey God.

- As a result of their sin, Israel was disciplined by God, and 24,000 people died.

Recall: Relationships between Jews and pagans had caused their captivity in the first place.

Neh. 13:3 Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

According to Neh. 10:28-30 the Jews had willingly separated themselves from the people of the land and united with their Jewish brothers and sisters to obey the law and walk in the way of the Lord. And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters,

➤ Everyone Having Knowledge, And Having Understanding;

<sup>29</sup> They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and

➤ entered into a curse, and into an oath,

➤ to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His judgments and His statutes;

<sup>30</sup> And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, not take their daughters for our sons:

But apparently their separation was incomplete, or some of the people formed new alliances, for they discovered there were Ammonites & Moabites in their congregation.

#### An Enemy Intruder

Neh. 13:4-5 And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was ALLIED UNTO TOBIAH: [Ammonite enemy!] And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests.

How did this happen?

Vance Havner "Today the world has so infiltrated the church, that we are more beset by traitors within than by foes without. Satan is not fighting churches—he is joining them."

Jude 1:3-4 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. <sup>4</sup> For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Neh. 13:6 But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the 32<sup>nd</sup> year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king:

Israel breaks 4 of the covenant pledges they had made in the Water Gate Revival [Neh. 8-10].

➤ Neh. 13:1-15 They are neglecting the house of God

➤ Neh. 13:5, 12 Mismanaging the tithes

➤ Neh. 13:15-22 Profaning the Sabbath

➤ Neh. 13:23-29 Marrying foreigners - again!

They're not only neglecting God's house. They've also defiled it.

Neh. 13:7 And I came to Jerusalem and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

It is not a coincidence that his promotion to prominence coincides with the wholesale dispersion of the Levites and the disruption of worship in the temple [Neh. 13:10-11].

- These storerooms had been intended for the Israelites' grain offerings, incense, temple articles, and the tithes of grain, new wine and oil meant for the work of the temple and the temple workers themselves.

"Red Alert!" There are cracks in the wall. Eliashib's compromise threatens Israel's survival. Neh. 13:8-9 And it grieved me sore: therefore, I cast forth all the household stuff to Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.

What was said of Jesus when He cleansed the temple also expresses the heart of Nehemiah: "Zeal for Your house has consumed me." [Psalm 69:9; John 2:17]  
What consumes me? May it be zeal for God, His name, and His house:

Holiness is not negotiable! Either Tobiah must go or God will go - again.  
Pursue Holiness: The greatest threats are internal, not external.

- God is faithful. We are fickle. God is a promise-keeper. We are promise-breakers.

The Pursuit of Holiness by Jerry Bridges:

We could not take one step in the pursuit of holiness if God in His grace had not first delivered us from the dominion of sin and brought us into union with His risen Son.

Salvation is by grace through faith. Sanctification is by grace through faith.

Jerry Bridges: Too often, we say we are defeated by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated. We are simply disobedient. It might be good if we stop using the terms victory and defeat to describe our progress in holiness. Rather, we should use the terms obedience and disobedience. When I say I am defeated by some sin, I am unconsciously slipping out from under my responsibility. I am saying something outside of me has defeated me. But when I say I am disobedient, that places the responsibility for my sin squarely on me. We may in fact be defeated, but the reason we are defeated is because we have chosen to disobey.

William Wilberforce Holiness is not negotiable.

And there is no shortcut to holiness. It must be the business of our whole lives.

Jerry Bridges As we grow in holiness, we grow in hatred of sin; and God, being infinitely holy, has an infinite hatred of sin.

II Tim. 2:19 Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity

I Pet. 4:17 For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household

Does my Christian walk bear witness to the message of the Fish Gate?

You are my witness! You are my ambassador!

Transform the marketplace! Protect the marketplace!