

Nehemiah Chapter 6

Verses 1-4: God's people are often tempted to leave the "great work" He has called them to do for some lesser thing. "Four times" Nehemiah's "enemies" asked to meet with him, attempting to distract him from the work. Four times Nehemiah said no. The enemy does not stop with one confrontation; he keeps returning to try to lure God's people away. Nehemiah withstood these tests because of his discernment (he knew they intended to "do" him "mischief"), and his dedication.

Nehemiah 6:1 "Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and [that] there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;)"

"Sanballat, Tobiah ... Geshem" (see notes on (2:10, 19).

"I had builded the wall": Finished it.

"And that there was no breach left therein": But all was made up firm and strong.

"Though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates": Not upon all of them, though some might by the particular builders of them. And they all of them might be ready made, though not as yet put upon the hinges.

This chapter happened at the same time as the building of the wall. It is not chronologically located. It is parallel with the earlier chapters. This was speaking of the hanging of the doors in the opening of the gates as being the last thing that was done.

Verses 2-4: See the notes at (Nehemiah 2:10, 19). Since the wall's progress had lessened the danger of attack, Nehemiah's enemies tried to lure him into one of the "villages in the plain of Ono". This valley was about 27 miles northwest of Jerusalem. This bordered the districts of Samaria and Ashdod, both hostile territories (compare 4:2, 7).

Nehemiah 6:2 "That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in [some one of] the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief."

"Sent unto me, saying": This suggests either a letter or an oral message delivered by messenger to Nehemiah. Satisfied that they could not prevent Nehemiah's project from succeeding by open military engagement (see note on 4:13-15), they decided to overcome him by deception.

"Plain of Ono": Located south of Joppa on the western extremity of Judah along the seacoast.

Ono was very near Philistia. They felt they could not get to Nehemiah while he was in Jerusalem with so many people around him, but they wanted to kill him. The only way to accomplish this was to get him off to himself.

Nehemiah 6:3 "And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I [am] doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"

“And I sent messengers”: Because he knew they were luring him into a trap, he sent representatives, who themselves might have been killed or imprisoned for ransom.

Nehemiah knew what they were trying to do, and he sent word to them that there was absolutely no way he could break away from the work on the wall to come out to meet them. They were not honorable men, and it would not have bothered them at all to lie to Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 6:4 "Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner."

Being very desirous of getting him into their hands, and therefore were very pressing and persistent.

"And I answered them after the same manner": Every time as before, he being as much bent on finishing the work as they were to divert him from it.

This shows how determined they were to get rid of Nehemiah.

Verses 5-9: Sanballat sent “an open letter” against Nehemiah, which was made public. He accused Nehemiah of claiming kingship (verse 6), and of hiring prophets to support his claims (verse 7).

Nehemiah 6:5 "Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand;"

“Open letter”: Official letters were typically rolled up and sealed with an official signet by the letter’s sender or one of his assisting officials. An open or unsealed letter was not only a sign of disrespect and open criticism, but also suggested the information therein was public knowledge. The goal of this document was to intimidate Nehemiah into stopping the work.

Verses 6-7: In their attempts to defame Nehemiah, his enemies labeled him a subversive who was seeking to become Jerusalem’s new “king”. Satan’s concern is not whether anyone believes the rumors but whether he can use them to divert his targets from their divinely appointed task.

Nehemiah 6:6 "Wherein [was] written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith [it, that] thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words."

“It is reported among the heathen”: The letter suggested that Nehemiah’s intent to revolt was common knowledge which would get back to the king of Persia if he didn’t come to the requested conference.

“Thou and the Jews think to rebel”: This information would have brought Persian troops against the Jews had it been true. Even though Judah had a reputation for breaking its allegiances with its overlord kings, on this occasion that was not the case.

“Buildest the wall ... be their king”: Artaxerxes had commissioned the rebuilding of the wall based on his relationship of trust with Nehemiah. Once the project was accomplished, the king expected Nehemiah to return to Susa. Allegations that Nehemiah was fortifying the city so that he might be made king would seriously violate the Persian king’s trust, if not create a war. The plot was an attempt to intimidate Nehemiah with the idea that a wedge was to be driven between Nehemiah and Artaxerxes so that Nehemiah would come to the meeting with those enemies, a meeting that would have featured his death.

“Gashmu” is a variant of Geshem (verse 1; see the note on 2:19), which is closer to the original Arabic name *Jasuma*.

The open letter was so that all of the Jews could see the letter. This was a lie that Sanballat told to get the people stirred up, so they would not continue the work on the wall. He was undoubtedly not aware that the king of Persia had given Nehemiah leave to build the wall. Nehemiah nor the Jews, had any intention of rebelling. The building of the wall would keep others from attacking them successfully.

Nehemiah 6:7 "And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, [There is] a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together."

“Appointed prophets to preach”: If there were such prophets, Sanballat actually hired them to feed incorrect information generating the false rumor (compare 6:10-14). By dispatching such prophets to make public proclamations that Nehemiah had made himself king, the Persian imperial rule would have appeared to be supplanted.

This shows how little he knew about the Hebrews and their God. Prophets are men of God that speak as an oracle of God. They are not under the control of a man upon the earth, unless they are false prophets. No such thing was planned. Nehemiah had one mission, and that was to build the wall.

Nehemiah 6:8 "Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart."

Whether a letter, or a messenger, is not said.

"Saying there are no such things done as thou sayest": That there was any scheme formed to rebel, and make him king. Or that prophets were appointed to declare him such.

"But thou feignest them out of thine own heart": In short, that they were no other than lies of his own inventing.

Nehemiah denied these accusations strongly. He knew that all of this had been made up by Sanballat. He made all of this up to pretend that Nehemiah was power hungry. These things were not true they were coming from the evil heart of Sanballat.

Nehemiah 6:9 "For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, [O God], strengthen my hands."

Or you all, as Aben Ezra interprets it. Or all the Heathen nations, as Jarchi. This was the design of all those scandalous reports, to intimidate them, and with this they pleased themselves, as follows.

"Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done": This they hoped would be the effect of those reports sent to them.

"Now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands": And let them not have what they will, and hope for. According to Aben Ezra, these words are directed to Sanballat, that if he was a friend, as he pretended, that instead of weakening, he would strengthen his hands by a sincere reconciliation. So Vatablus; but they are an address to God, such short ejaculations being usual with Nehemiah.

This was a request from Nehemiah to God for help to keep the desire strong to build the wall in all the people. Sanballat was doing all of this to turn Nehemiah's people against him. God can cause them not to listen to these lies.

Verses 10-14: Shemaiah claimed to have a special revelation about a plot against Nehemiah's life and suggested they meet in the temple, since it would provide the only place of refuge. This suggestion unmasked his evil intentions. Nehemiah knew that God could not have led him to break the Mosaic injunction against laymen entering the temple (Num. 1:51; 18:7). For Nehemiah to have done such a thing would have damaged his testimony.

Nehemiah 6:10 "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."

"Shemaiah": When the open letter failed to intimidate Nehemiah into stopping the work and coming to a meeting, his enemies decided to try intimidation from within. They hired a false

prophet (verse 12), Shemaiah, to lure Nehemiah into the Holy Place in the temple for refuge from a murder plot. To enter and shut himself in the Holy Place would have been a desecration of the house of God and would have caused people to question his reverence for God. Shemaiah was the son of a priest who was an intimate friend of Nehemiah. This plan would give them grounds to raise an evil report against Nehemiah, who was not a priest and had no right to go into the Holy Place (compare 6:13). It could also make the people question his courage (verse 11). Other disloyal Jews included:

- (1) The nobles (3:5; 6:17);
- (2) Jews who lived near Sanballat (4:12);
- (3) Noadiah (6:14);
- (4) Meshullam (6:17-19);
- (5) Eliashib (13:4, 7);
- (6) The High-Priest's grandson (13:28).

“The house of God”: This is a frequently used name for the temple (compare 8:16; 10:32-39; 11:11, 16, 22; 12:40; 13:4, 7, 9, 11, 14).

This Shemaiah was not concerned about the life of Nehemiah at all. He was paid by Sanballat to prophecy something that was not even truth to Nehemiah. This reminds me so much of the way the devil operates. When he is trying to destroy a person or a church, he first tries to destroy them from without. If that does not work, then he sends the enemy inside the church pretending to be of God. It is much more difficult to stop an attack from within. This Sanballat was trying everything he could think of to stop Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 6:11 "And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who [is there], that, [being] as I [am], would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in."

The king's commissioner, who had the conducting and management of the whole affair of building the wall of Jerusalem, on whom it wholly depended. For, should he absent himself, the people would depart and leave their work, and the city and wall be left defenseless, which was what was hoped for from this scheme. And who had expressed such confidence in God, and had had such success.

"And who is there, that, being as I am": In such a post, and in such circumstances, and on whom so much depended.

"Would go into the temple to save his life?" Or where there was little reason to believe it would be preserved long, should he take such a step as that.

"I will not go in": As being neither lawful, nor honorable, nor safe.

If God sent Nehemiah to build the wall, God would protect him while he was doing it. He did not need to hide. God would build a hedge of protection around him. Nehemiah had received no such information from God.

Nehemiah 6:12 "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."

Because he advised to that which was against the cause of God and true religion.

"But that he pronounced the prophecy against me": For by fleeing, as he advised, it would seem that he was guilty of the crimes of rebellion and treason he was charged with. And leaving the people, as they would in course break up, he himself could not be long in safety, no, not in the temple.

"For Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him": This he found out afterwards, on purpose to intimidate him, and take such measures as that thereby he would lose his character and his influence.

This man was a false prophet. God opened Nehemiah's eyes, so that he understood. He did not believe this man, because he perceived he was not from God.

Nehemiah 6:13 "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."

By distrusting the power and providence of God to protect him, and by going into such a part of the temple, which he, being no priest, had no right to go into.

"And that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me": As a rebel and traitor against the king, which had been reported of him. And which would be strengthened by such a step.

Those who believe in the LORD have nothing to fear but God.

Psalms 118:6 "The LORD [is] on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"

In the case of Nehemiah, it would have been a sin to fear Sanballat. God had sent him to do this work, he could not allow Sanballat to stop him. It would be lack in faith of God on Nehemiah's part if he did. Nehemiah had set the example for all of the workers on the wall, and he must continue to do that.

Nehemiah 6:14 "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."

Their wicked counsels and schemes, and not only confound and disappoint them, but reward them as they deserve.

"And on the prophetess Noadiah": Whom Aben Ezra takes to be the same with Shemaiah, because he said, "let us meet", etc. (Neh. 6:10). But no doubt it is the name of a woman, a false prophetess, and was hired, and in the same scheme with Shemaiah.

"And the rest of the prophets that would have put me in fear": And so put him on leaving the people, and the work he was engaged in, and flee for his safety. It seems there were more than are by name mentioned, who sought to discourage and intimidate him.

All we know of Noadiah was that she was working against Nehemiah to cause him to fear.

Verses 15-19: When the project was completed, God was glorified, the people were unified, Nehemiah was justified ("the wall was finished"), and Israel's enemies were terrified at the prospect of a restored Jerusalem. Rather than bragging about his human achievement, that the work took only "fifty and two days" to complete, Nehemiah trumpeted "for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God". Disheartened enemies are a sign that God has been at work.

Nehemiah 6:15 "So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth [day] of [the month] Elul, in fifty and two days."

"Elul": (Aug. / Sept., 445 B.C.). Knowing that the project lasted 52 days, it commenced on the fourth of Ab (July / Aug.), 445 B.C.

The wall was approximately 4 miles in length. There were many groups who worked on the wall, so it would not have been impossible for it to have been finished in 52 days. Elul, on their calendar, is approximately the same as September on our calendar.

Verses 16-19: Nehemiah relates Tobiah's alliance with Jewish nobles through his marriage to a daughter of "Shechaniah the son of Arah" (Ezra 2:5). And the marriage of his son "Johanah" to "the daughter of Meshullam" (3:4, 30). Such links and loyalties were exploited by intrigues, leaks of information, and threatening letters.

Nehemiah 6:16 "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."

"They perceived that this work was wrought of our God": While modern readers might be tempted to exalt the leadership qualities which brought the work to completion, Nehemiah's conclusion was seen through the eyes of his enemies, i.e., God works through faithful people, but it is God who works. This is a change from the attitudes indicated (in 4:1 and 5:9).

The more trouble that came caused them to work harder, not slow down. These very same enemies who had done everything in their power to stop Nehemiah and the work on the wall, now realize that this was the work of God. They would have to have been totally unaware of reality, if they had not credited the supernatural hand of God in this.

Verses 17-19: “the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah”: Nehemiah added a footnote that in the days of building the wall, the nobles of Judah who refused to work (3:5), were in alliance and correspondence with Tobiah because, although his ancestors were Ammonites (2:19), he had married into a respectable Jewish family. Shemaiah was from the family of Arah (Ezra 2:5), his son, Jehohanan was the son-in-law of Meshullam who shared in the work of building (3:4, 30). According to 13:4, the High-Priest Eliashib, was related to Tobiah (which is a Jewish name). The meddling of these nobles, by trying to play both sides through reports to Tobiah and to Nehemiah (verse 19), only widened the breach as Tobiah escalated efforts to frighten the governor.

Nehemiah offers additional insight about the forces that had opposed the reconstruction: both family ties and political alliances had motivated the “nobles” in Jerusalem and “Tobiah”.

Nehemiah 6:17 "Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and [the letters] of Tobiah came unto them."

While the wall was being built.

"The nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them": Letters passed between them frequently, they informing him how things went on at Jerusalem. And he advising them to what was detrimental to the true interest of their nation. Such false friends had Nehemiah about him, and yet the work succeeded under him. Which showed it the more to be of God.

This was to stir up the people within the wall of Jerusalem. There seemed to be traitors inside of Jerusalem, who listened more to Tobiah than they did to Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 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."

To Tobiah, who not only in a private manner corresponded with him by letters, but bound themselves by an oath to him to be true to his interest, and do as he should advise them.

"Because he was the son in law of Shechaniah, the son of Arah": Of a family that came up with Zerubbabel from the captivity (Ezra 2:5). And very probably of considerable note.

"And his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah": A very eminent person, concerned in building the wall (Neh. 3:4).

It appears that Tobiah's family were unable to prove their kinship with Israel. They came back with Zerubbabel from captivity however. Shechaniah was the son of Arah. Tobiah's connection to these Hebrews was through marriage.

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

Recommended him as a very worthy man, deserving of respect and notice by Nehemiah. And to be taken into his friendship, and admitted to conversation with him, whose counsel and advice might be of service.

"And uttered my words to him": Reported both what he said and did. For the word used signifies both words and actions.

"And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear": Perceiving, by the intelligence of his friends, that Nehemiah would have nothing to say to him, nor to do with him, he threatened him.

This was sad, because it spoke of traitors to Judah. They were living in Jerusalem enjoying all of the benefits, but reporting everything that Nehemiah did to Tobiah. All the time they were telling Nehemiah of the greatness of Tobiah, they were not faithful to Judah, Nehemiah, or the building of the wall. Their loyalty was bought by Tobiah.

Nehemiah Chapter 6 Questions

1. Verse 1, speaks of one thing yet to do, what was it?
2. Who sent word to Nehemiah to get him to come away from Jerusalem and meet with them?
3. Why did they want him to come out of Jerusalem?
4. What was Nehemiah's answer to them?
5. What did Nehemiah tell them he was doing?
6. Why did it not bother them to lie to Nehemiah?
7. What showed their determination?
8. Why did they send an open letter?
9. They were not aware of what?
10. What lie were they telling about Nehemiah wanting power?
11. Prophets should be men that speak as an _____ of God.
12. If they are under the control of men on the earth, they are _____ prophets.
13. Where did Nehemiah say these evil sayings came from?
14. Why had Sanballat made up these lies?
15. What did Nehemiah ask God to strengthen?

16. What terrible message did Shemaiah give Nehemiah?
17. How does the author relate the actions of Shemaiah, here, to the devil?
18. What questions did Nehemiah send to him as an answer?
19. What did Nehemiah perceive about him?
20. Who had hired Shemaiah to say these things?
21. Had Nehemiah feared Sanballat, it would have been a _____.
22. Who did Nehemiah ask God to think on for trying to make him fear?
23. When was the wall finished?
24. How long did it take to build it?
25. How long was the wall approximately?
26. What did the enemies of Nehemiah finally realize after the wall was finished?
27. Who sent letters to Tobiah?
28. Why were some of the people in Judah sworn to him?
29. What was sad about the people reporting Nehemiah's actions to Tobiah?