

Bible Study April 23, 2025

NEHEMIAH 6 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

Conspiracy Against Nehemiah

¹ Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), ² Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm.

The plain of Ono was about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem. If Sanballat and Geshem could get Nehemiah to agree to meet them there, they could ambush him on the way.

³ And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” ⁴ And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. ⁵ In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. ⁶ In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. ⁷ And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together.”

During these days, prophets such as Malachi proclaimed the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 3:1-3). Sanballat, with his usual flair for stirring up trouble, tried to turn Nehemiah's people against him by saying that Nehemiah was trying to set himself up as the king. Sanballat also tried to turn the local officials against Nehemiah by threatening to report to the king of Persia that Nehemiah was starting a revolt. The fact that Sanballat had an open (unsealed) letter delivered to Nehemiah shows that he wanted to make sure the letter's contents were made public. But Sanballat's accusations were all lies and did not divert Nehemiah from his task.

⁸ Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.” ⁹ For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

Psalm 23:4 (ESV)

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

Psalm 118:6 (ESV)

⁶ The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

When opposition builds up against us as we do God's work, we can be tempted to pray, “God, get us out of this situation.” But Nehemiah prayed for strength. He showed tremendous

determination and character to remain steadfast in his responsibility. When we pray for strength, God always answers. Nehemiah may have felt very alone, but God was with him as he is with us.

¹⁰ Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night.” ¹¹ But I said, “Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in.” ¹² And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.

Nehemiah did not have the full support of the people. Shemaiah (6:10), Noadiah (6:14), and many of the nobles (6:17) were working against him. When Nehemiah was attacked personally, he refused to give in to fear and flee to the Temple. According to God’s law, it would have been wrong for Nehemiah to go into the Temple to hide because he wasn’t a priest (Numbers 18:22). If he had run for his life, he would have undermined the courage he was trying to instill in the people. Leaders are targets for attacks. Make it a practice to pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and humbly ask for prayer from others when you are in a position of leadership. Ask God to give strength to stand against personal attacks and temptation. Leaders need God-given courage to overcome fear.

¹⁴ Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

The Wall Is Finished

¹⁵ So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.

Daniel, who was among the first group of captives taken from Jerusalem to Babylon (605 BC), predicted the rebuilding of the city (Daniel 9:25). Here his prophecy comes true. He, like Nehemiah, was a Jew who held a prominent position in the kingdom where he had been exiled (Daniel 5:29–6:3).

They said it couldn’t be done. The job was too big and the problems were too great. But God’s men and women, joined together for special tasks, can solve huge problems and accomplish great goals. The vision that Nehemiah saw through humble tears in Persia became a reality with God’s help every step of the way. Don’t let the size of a task or the length of time needed to accomplish it keep you from doing it. With God’s help, it can be done.

¹⁶ And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. ¹⁷ Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah’s letters came to them. ¹⁸ For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife. ¹⁹ Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.

Romans 8:38 (ESV)

³⁸ *If God for us, who can be against us*

Isaiah 43:13 (ESV)

¹³ *When I act, who can reverse it?"*

Sanballat and Tobiah were desperate. The wall was almost complete, and their efforts to stop its construction were failing. So they tried a new approach, centering their attacks on Nehemiah's character. They attacked him personally with rumors (6:6), deceit (6:10-13), and false reports (6:17). Personal attacks hurt, and when the criticism is unjustified, it is easy to despair. When you are doing God's work, you may receive attacks on your character. Follow Nehemiah's example by trusting God to accomplish the task and by overlooking unjustified insults. God is our ultimate Judge. What he thinks really matters.