

## Notes on Nehemiah chap. 6

© Copyright David E. Pratte, January 7, 2006, [www.gospelway.com](http://www.gospelway.com)

### VI. Opposition Continues Yet the Wall Is Completed – Chap. 6

#### C. Third Method of Opposition: Discussion to Achieve Compromise or to Hinder the Work

Chapter 4 had described the first two major efforts of the Jews' opponents to defeat the efforts to build the walls. They had attempted ridicule and plotted violence, but God had blessed Nehemiah and the people to continue the work despite the opposition. Chapter 5 had described internal strife among the Jews that hindered the work, but that had been overcome by urging people to follow God's law.

This chapter describes continued efforts of the enemies to hinder the work. The first of these efforts involved an attempt to get Nehemiah to meet with the enemies.

Verses 1,2

1. What did the enemies propose next? What was their real intent?

#### *The proposal of the enemies*

These verses tell us that the work on the wall was progressing well, to the point that the wall no longer had any breaks in it. All the wall was joined together; however, the doors had not yet been hung at the gates. The people were accomplishing the work despite the problems and hindrances.

This success was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. These men had opposed Nehemiah's work for God since the beginning. Note that v1 expressly calls them enemies. They had ridiculed the work, accused the Jews of violating the king's commands, and threatened to stop the work by violence (2:10,19; 4:1-9; cf. 6:5-14). They had been shown their error but continued opposing the work (2:20).

Here they continued their opposition, but using a different tactic. They demanded that Nehemiah meet with them in one of the villages on the plain of Ono to discuss. But their intent was to harm him (v2). They did not really want to repent, admit their error, or even discuss to consider the possibility that they might be wrong. Presumably they sought to take Nehemiah captive or even kill him, so the work would be forced to end.

Verses 3,4

2. How did Nehemiah respond? What reasons did he give? (Think: Were these men deserving of further discussion with Nehemiah? How do you know?)
3. How can Nehemiah's conduct be harmonized with passages that say we should teach and save the lost? Under what circumstances may we refuse to discuss certain topics with certain people? Give **b/c/v**.

#### *Nehemiah refuses to meet*

Nehemiah sent messengers saying that he was doing an important work and would not leave it to talk with them.

Note that Nehemiah refused because:

- 1) These men had consistently shown they were opposed to the work which God wanted done.
- 2) They had been rebuked, but continued in error.
- 3) They had previously tried to harm Nehemiah, and they called for this discussion for the purpose of harming him. We are not told how Nehemiah knew this, but their past conduct proved it. Perhaps he had other sources of information besides.

4) To meet with them would accomplish no good but would hinder Nehemiah from doing the work God wanted done.

These men sent similar messages to Nehemiah four separate times, but Nehemiah consistently refused to meet. He always answered them in the same way. Note that people who oppose God's work are often persistent. They continue to try to prevent the work. Sometimes they think they can badger God's people into giving in. But Nehemiah was also persistent. He refused to give in.

### *Lessons for us to learn*

Many Scriptures teach that we should be willing to meet with people in error to try to help them learn the truth and change their lives. See Jude 3,4; 1 Peter 3:15; Mark 12:28; Acts 17:2,3,17; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Luke 17:3; etc.

However, from passages like this one in Nehemiah we also learn that our obligation in such matters is limited. There are times when it is unprofitable, dangerous, or even wrong to meet with some people under some circumstances. See also Nehemiah 6:1-9; Matthew 7:6; 21:23-32; 26:59-63; 27:12-14; John 19:9; Luke 23:7-10; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:14-18; Titus 3:9-11.

Based on the above Scriptures, we can learn there are two cases in which we should refuse to discuss with people or answer their questions:

#### **1) Some questions should not be allowed to become a cause for strife regardless of who asks them.**

Some subjects have no practical value or profit in helping anyone be saved eternally, but will only lead to strife, argument, conflict, and division.

Examples may include:

- \* Arguments over technicalities of genealogies. A person's ancestry has nothing to do with salvation under the gospel.

- \* Arguments about technicalities of Old Testament law. That law is no longer in effect. Studying it can benefit our understanding of the nature of God and His will for today. But unless a discussion has some value for our lives today, we should avoid becoming embroiled in disputes.

- \* Arguments about technicalities of the nature of angels and other spirit beings: How many angels can sit on the head of a pin?

- \* Speculations about hypothetical issues that have no practical value in our lives and in no way affect our eternal destiny. Can God create a mountain so huge He cannot move it? Could God create people on another solar system, and if so must they obey the same commands we do to be saved?

Many other examples could be cited, many of them not as obvious as these. Judgment is involved in individual cases, and we may differ regarding how far to go in a discussion before we realize it is unworthy of discussion. Nevertheless, the principles are valid and should be remembered. Such topics should not be discussed to the point of strife no matter how sincere the people may be who want to discuss them. Rather, we should point out that the topics have no value to saving anyone's soul but cause strife and division. Then we should turn the conversation to topics that are essential to salvation.

#### **2) Some people have proved themselves to be unworthy of further teaching even on valuable topics.**

Even when topics do have practical value in serving God, we should refuse to discuss with some people. When they have had abundant opportunity to know the truth but reject it, teach false doctrine, and especially when they use whatever we say as an opportunity to attack and slander us, drop the discussion and move on.

Such people may try to intimidate and pressure us into answering their questions or discussing with them. They may accuse us of having something to hide or not being able to answer. But nothing good will come of such discussions except strife, anger, division, and pain.

**Often, but not always, these two cases occur together.**

People who reject the truth will often look for opportunities to ensnare or trap us. They will go to lengths to make up hypothetical speculative cases to argue about. We should refuse such discussions for both the reasons we have studied.

Some people and some questions do not deserve to be answered. The only thing that will come from it is prolonging of strife and division, and like swine people will use the opportunity to turn and rend you.

**D. Fourth Method of Opposition: Make Accusations that Impugn Motives and Attitudes.**

Verses 5-7

4. What accusation did Sanballat make the fifth time he wrote? What proof did he offer? (Think: Did Sanballat really care about the king's well-being? What was his real goal?)

***Sanballat writes another letter.***

When the four attempts to compel Nehemiah to meet failed, Sanballat did not give up. Like other enemies of the truth, he moved on to another tactic. He wrote still another letter to Nehemiah. This time, however, it was an open letter. That is, it was not confidential or personal for Nehemiah. Rather, it was written with the intent of circulating it to make other people aware of accusations against Nehemiah.

The letter claimed that the news was being spread, even among people of other nations, that Nehemiah and the Jews were planning to rebel against the government. No proof was offered; in fact the letter admits these were rumors. But Geshem was cited as the source of this accusation. Geshem, of course, was one of Sanballat's companions in opposing the work (cf. 2:19). He could hardly be classed as an unbiased witness. And no evidence is given as the basis for his accusations.

They claimed further that Nehemiah wanted to become king, and the real purpose of the wall was to begin a military buildup so he could succeed in a revolt. They further claimed that Nehemiah had appointed prophets for the express purpose of teaching the people that Nehemiah would be king in Judah.

The letter threatened that all this would be reported to the king of Persia, unless Nehemiah agreed to meet with them about this. This seems to be a threat that if he did not agree to meet, then they would pass on this report to the king. Perhaps they were also pretending that they could help avoid consequence for Nehemiah if he would consult with them, but either way the effect is that of a threat.

Note that, when enemies fail in their requests to meet with God's people (with the intent of using the results to hurt them), the next step is to threaten and accuse as a means of pressuring for a meeting. This includes making false accusations to discredit the reputation of the workers, so they will feel the need to meet to protect their reputation. And if they don't meet, then the accusations against them will be circulated and allowed to stand. However, all this was done on the basis of accusations that were mere rumors without a shred of evidence offered to support them. Anyone can make accusations. Geshem did so, but there was no proof.

Verses 8,9

5. How did Nehemiah deal with this accusation?

6. Application: What should God's people do when people make false accusations against us today?

Note how Nehemiah dealt with the false accusation:

***Nehemiah denied the accusation and said the enemies had made it up without proof.***

Nehemiah dealt with the false accusation simply by issuing a statement that the accusations were false. The things he was accused of were not being done. Then he said where the ideas came from: the enemies had invented them in their own hearts.

In short he pointed out that there was no proof. Anybody can make accusations. Faithful servants of God have throughout history been accused of all kinds of things that they had never done. But accusations do not constitute proof.

Accusations are likewise made against God's true servants today. We are accused of being motivated by a desire for money, power, or influence. We are said to be jealous or self-righteous, and want to exalt ourselves. We are said to be negative, critical people, condemning and judging others in violation of Scripture, "antis," etc. Or we are said to be motivated by "hate" – we just have something personal against people or want to get rid of them.

Nehemiah simply denied the charges and affirmed the people had made them up without proof. Then since no proof had been offered, he continued with the work. Note that he did not go to meet with the enemies, nor did he stop the work. He did not allow unproved accusations to intimidate him into meeting with the false accusers or into hindering the work God had given him.

***He kept his focus on the real root cause of the conflict.***

He realized that the real motive behind all these accusations and the efforts to get meetings was to make him afraid so he would stop the work. The enemies were using a psychological ploy. The goal was to get the Jews to think that, if they kept working, these charges would be reported to the king and the people might get in trouble even if the charges could not be proved. But if they would stop the work, then the enemies would stop the accusations, would not report them to the king, etc. So the temptation is to stop simply because of the intimidation and fear of reprisals, not because there was any truth to the charges.

Note that Nehemiah not only did not take the bait to meet with the enemies, but he kept his focus on the real issues involved. The enemies could not prove their accusations against him. But even more important, they did not really care about those accusations. The real concern on their part was not whether or not Nehemiah would rebel against the king. Their real concern was that the wall was being built, and they wanted to stop it.

This shows another important principle of dealing with false accusation: Keep the focus on the real root cause of the conflict. Do not be distracted into discussions of secondary issues. If false accusations are made, just deny them. But keep your focus on the real root issue. Doing this helps us overcome the temptation to be intimidated and back off from the really important issue.

***He prayed to God for strength.***

Not only did he keep working, but he prayed to God to give him strength to endure the hardship and to keep on with the work. This is exactly what we need to do when we face such false accusations.

Remember that God is the one we ultimately seek to please. If we cease doing His will in order to have peace with men, then we have displeased the One whom we really ought to please. He is the one who gave us orders, and He is the one who can give us strength to prevail. Trust Him and keep His will foremost.

## E. Fifth Method of Opposition: Tempt Leaders to Sin or Fear so as to Discredit Them.

Verses 10,11

7. Who then tried to influence Nehemiah? What did he say?

8. How did Nehemiah respond?

### *Nehemiah is tempted to hide in the temple.*

The next effort to hinder and discredit Nehemiah's work came from a man named Shemaiah. This man was a secret informer. The ASV says he was "shut up." The two translations are hard to reconcile. Nehemiah went to his house. Perhaps Shemaiah had to some extent barricaded himself as a way of showing fear and thereby motivating Nehemiah to do likewise. In any case, "secret informer" seems to express the context best in that he attempted to give Nehemiah secret advice.

He said the two of them should meet and hide in the temple. They should close the doors and barricade themselves in (perhaps like Shemaiah was in his home) for safety from enemies. He secretly informed Nehemiah that the enemies had plotted to kill him. They would come at night to kill him, so the thing to do was to hide for protection in the temple.

### *Nehemiah refused to show fear or to hide in the temple.*

Nehemiah argued that one in his position should not show such fear. He should not flee and he should not go into the temple to save his own life. So he refused to go in.

V13 will show that such an act would be a perversion of the purpose of the temple and a violation of its sanctity. Only priests should enter there. Perhaps there were porches where other people could go, but remember that Jesus later cast people out of the temple for using it for purposes other than worship and prayer. To use it for personal protection would be disrespectful to its purpose.

Also showing cowardice to flee and hide would be a hindrance to the work. Nehemiah could not effectively work from a place of hiding. And if the people saw him being so cowardly, they too might become fearful and hide to protect themselves, instead of working. In short, this was another attempt to hinder the work and get Nehemiah to stop working.

We need to remember that sin is wrong in and of itself, even when done for personal protection from persecution. And when we try to do right but allow people to intimidate us to sin or to be disrespectful or cowardly, then we allow them to discredit our work and defeat our efforts for good.

Note that fleeing in and of itself is not sinful. New Testament apostles, preachers, and Christians often fled for safety. But they did not stop their work of preaching the gospel. To allow fear to lead us to stop working for God is the problem.

Verses 12-14

9. Why had this man given this warning? What did Nehemiah's enemies hope to accomplish?

### *Nehemiah realized the source of the temptation.*

Nehemiah then realized that the man had not been giving him advice from God or in harmony with God's will. Rather, he pronounced this as a prophecy, but he had been hired by Tobiah and Sanballat, the enemies of God's work.

This implies that Shemaiah had presented this as something God would have Nehemiah do, or perhaps even something that God had revealed by prophecy (cf. v14). This shows the danger of following messages that claim to be from God, if those messages actually contradict God's will.

It also shows that many false teachers are teaching for hire. They have been paid by people to teach as they do.

***Had Nehemiah taken the advice, he would have sinned and subjected himself and his work to reproach.***

Nehemiah realized that Shemaiah had been hired to tempt Nehemiah to be afraid, hide in the temple, and sin. Then the enemies would have cause to send out an evil report, that they might reproach him. That is, they could discredit him for his sin and cowardice.

As discussed on vv 10,11, had Nehemiah listened to this advice, he would have shown cowardice, neglected the work, and misused the purpose of the temple. This would have been sin (though it does not directly say which part of this was sin or whether it was all sin).

When people cannot intimidate God's people to stop working for God, they often try to discredit us so other people will not listen to us or follow the teaching. They may try to do this by false accusation (as in the previous verses). If that does not work, then they try to get us to actually sin, so they can have grounds to accuse and discredit us. Compare the story of Balaam and Balak (see Revelation 2:14).

This shows the need for courage and a pure life on the part of God's people, especially the leaders. We need to avoid sin, even in the face of false teaching, temptation, threats, and intimidation. We can be sure that people in sin will use everything they can think of against us, so we must give them no ammunition. To fail to live pure lives will discredit our work and hinder God's purpose.

***Again Nehemiah prayed to God to deal with his enemies.***

Nehemiah was clearly a man of prayer, and he saw the value of prayer in times of temptation and opposition. He repeatedly turned to God in prayer for strength to deal with the enemies.

He asked God to remember the sinful acts of Tobiah and Sanballat. Also he said a prophetess named Noadiah and other prophets were involved in the attempt to make him afraid. This clearly indicates that more than just one man was involved in the temptation of Nehemiah, and that the attempt did involve the use of prophecy to try to frighten him.

And note too that it is not wrong to call upon God to bring justice and punishment on evil-doers. We may not take personal vengeance, but we should leave vengeance to God. It is appropriate for us to remind God that such people do deserve His punishment.

Verses 15,16

10. What was the end result of the people's work (v15)?

***The completion of the wall***

Despite the best efforts of the enemies, the work continued till the wall was finished. It was completed on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month Elul. It took a total of 52 days. To complete the wall at all was amazing. To complete it under conditions of such opposition is doubly amazing. To do it in 52 days is almost incredible. Yet that is what happened.

God has not promised that serving Him will be easy. On the contrary, He has promised there will be opposition and persecution. But He has also promised that we can be successful if we remain faithful despite the opposition and persecution.

***The enemies were discouraged by this result.***

When the enemies and surrounding nations heard that the wall was completed, they were discouraged. Note that this shows the real motivation for the opposition. Sanballat and his cronies were leaders of opposition by the nations in general. They did not act alone; many people did not want the wall built, because they belonged to enemy nations. They did not want the Jews to be established or become strong. This was the real issue.

When the Jews succeeded, this caused great discouragement to the enemies. They were disheartened. And they realized that the work had been the result of God's own blessing.

## F. Sixth Method of Opposition: Influence God's People to Justify Those who Are in Sin.

Verses 17-19

11. What relationships did some Jews have with Tobiah? What problems resulted? What can we learn?
12. Summarize lessons we can learn from this chapter about how to deal with those who oppose God's work?

### *Nobles among the Jews were in communication with the enemies.*

Tobiah was one of those in league with Sanballat (2:10; 4:3; 6:19; etc.). But Nehemiah reveals that he was communicating regularly with many influential people among the Jews. Many letters were being passed back and forth. The Jews should have been helping in the work on the wall and encouraging those who were working. But meanwhile they were communicating with the enemy, and we will see that they became an influence against the work.

It turns out that Tobiah was married to a daughter of an influential Jew named Shechaniah, whose genealogy is given in the verse (cf. 13:4). And also Tobiah's son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of another influential Jew named Meshullam. This Meshullam is listed in Nehemiah 3:4 as being one of those who ought to be working on the wall (cf. 8:4). Yet they were allied by marriage to one of the enemies and were as a result "pledged" to him. This surely means they were in league with him. They were trying to help his cause, as shown in v19.

This shows the danger of intermarriage and the power of having a close relationship with those who are in sin. Interestingly, Ezra 10:15 lists a Meshullam as being among those who opposed Ezra's efforts to bring repentance and correction among the Jews who had intermarried with people of the land. This might be another man with the same name, but the similarity of circumstances might be more than mere coincidence. If both passages refer to the same individual, this helps explain all the more the problem caused by intermarriage to people in sin.

### *Agents among God's people fraternizing and working for the enemy*

Specifically, these people became Tobiah's agents working from within God's people. They were numbered among God's people, but they spoke well of Tobiah to Nehemiah, trying to convince him that Tobiah was doing good.

Meanwhile, they also served as a source of information to Tobiah to tell him what Nehemiah was doing. This amounted to being spies or a source of intelligence within the Jews' camp to inform the enemy what was going on.

Meanwhile, Tobiah himself wrote letters to Nehemiah to try to frighten him. What these letters said we are not specifically told. Perhaps they go along with the threats recorded earlier in this chapter and in chap. 4. Presumably they made use of the information Tobiah had obtained from among the Jews.

In any case, while we are not told exactly what Nehemiah tried to do about these Jews in league with Tobiah, still it was clearly a problem. It shows the danger of those who try to be among God's people but are compromisers.

Today, in virtually every case in which God's people have conflict with those in error, there will be some who seek to hold a middle-ground position. They want to speak well of people on both sides. But especially they try to convince those who are taking a firm stand against sin that the people in sin are really not so bad. They speak well of them, talk about their sincerity and good works, and try to say we should not oppose them. They try to bring about compromise and discourage a firm stand against sin.

In many cases such people are a problem as big or bigger than the enemy. We must teach them the truth and give them time to see the truth. But if they continue to sympathize with the enemy, then they become like the enemy and must be dealt with accordingly. See Scriptures on

fellowship with sin: 2 John 9-11; Ephesians 5:11; Proverbs 17:15; 2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1; 1 Timothy 5:22; Psalms 1:1,2; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Romans 1:32; Acts 7:58; 8:1; 22:20.

© Copyright David E. Pratte, January 7, 2006

These study notes are copyrighted but are made available free to individuals for personal study. They must not be reproduced for distribution (other individuals may download their own copy from our web site). In no case may these commentaries be reproduced in any form for sale or a financial fee. All rights reserved. To see our copyright guidelines for more details go to [www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm)

**For other free Bible commentary study notes, please visit**  
[www.gospelway.com/commentary/](http://www.gospelway.com/commentary/).

**To find topical study notes or online Bible courses about Bible topics, Christianity, and Christian doctrine, see the following links:**

**Free online Bible Study Courses & Lessons – [www.biblestudylessons.com](http://www.biblestudylessons.com)**

**Study our Online Bible Study Guides (the Gospel Way) – [www.gospelway.com](http://www.gospelway.com)**

**Free e-mail Bible study newsletter - [www.gospelway.com/update\\_subscribe.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/update_subscribe.htm)**

Information about copyright permission or restrictions - [www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm)