

# WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

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## STUDY NOTES ON NEHEMIAH Chapter 6: Schemes and Opposition

### Review

In Nehemiah chapter 5, we saw him have to confront the sin of some Jews taking advantage of the famine and bad economy by loaning their fellow Jews money and charging ridiculous interest, and where the people were unable to pay, the loan sharks were too willing to take their children into slavery in lieu. This attitude created a great anguish among the people that they cried out and the work had to be stopped. The opposition to the work was clearly from within and Nehemiah had to prayerfully and boldly confront the attack.

### Opening

You probably remember our terrible trio of Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs. They, along with the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, had opposed the repair work that was happening to the broken-down wall around Jerusalem. It was much easier to intimidate and take advantage of the Jews when they were in a weak and undefended position. Rebuilding the wall would provide them protection, which their enemies did not want to see happen. When the wall was rebuilt, and only the doors in the gates remained unhung, they felt that there was one last chance, that they still had an opening.

Whether enemies are school classmates, nations in conflict, or demonic beings, the fact is that they look for weaknesses, an Achilles' heel, an opening in the defences. It can be the slightest compromise, the smallest sin that could give the devil a foothold. And sometimes the opening is not obvious. So before the doors were hung in the gates, the enemies of the Jews were going to try their best to prevent the job from being completed.

So, as we open up to chapter six, the opposition is just as determined as before, and has gotten more intelligent and crafty in their attack. We must bear in mind the counsel in Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

### The attacks against Nehemiah

Nehemiah recorded three separate plots the Jews' enemies instigated to frustrate his effective leadership.

**The plot to distract Nehemiah (6:1-4).** If Nehemiah had accepted this invitation he would have been many miles from Jerusalem for at least two days. This would have given the people

of the land an opportunity to attack the Jewish workmen. Nehemiah turned down four invitations to this meeting (v.4). In 1 Peter 5:8 we are admonished: “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” The enemy will often use his agents to pull us from the place God has us working in. The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:30 “Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.” Drawn away from the work and into the mouth of lions - Nehemiah wasn't going to allow it in his life. Even when three more messages came, he stood his ground.

**Contending with lies from the enemy (6:5-7).** The fifth letter to come to Nehemiah was open. Although official communication was always sealed and secured, Sanballat sent his message unsealed, knowing that it would be “accidentally” read by many during its delivery. What did the letter say? It accused him of rebellion and insurrection against the king who'd appointed him as governor. It was actually a brilliant plan, for as the content of the letter circulated, there would be two opposite but equally destructive conclusions: Those who believed the things written in the letter were true would turn against Nehemiah, and those who didn't believe would become frightened at the possibility of these false accusations bringing a military response and would stop working on the wall immediately. Sanballat was probably looking at history for his source of inspiration. As you recall, this was the tactic of those who had been successful at stopping the rebuilding of the temple in Ezra 4.

Nehemiah did not let this threat intimidate him and flatly denied the charge (v.8). He sent a message in response to the accusation. Again, I think there are four things we can learn from his response:

- 1. Recognized the reason for the attack.** Nehemiah knew that the reports written about were lies, but he also discerned that the intention of the lies was to frighten and discourage the workers. Often, we recognize that bad things are happening, but we fail to discern their source and the intention behind them. Jesus said that our enemy the devil is (John 8:44) “...a murderer... he is a liar, and the father of lies”, and John 10:10, “...comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy...” We know his schemes, and we know his motivation. That gives us great power over the attack. Next time you're in a conflict, ask, “Is this robbing me of my joy?” That's the devil. “Is this destroying my marriage?” That's the devil. “Is this killing my confidence in the Lord?” That's the devil. Learn to recognize not only the conflict, but that it is an attack, and the reason behind it.
- 2. Respond in truth.** Nehemiah, having identified the problem, said, “These things are not true.” (v.8) He stated the truth to their lie. He shined light on their darkness. And so we see that when truth is brought into a situation, it reveals the lie. As Jesus taught, John 8:32: “...you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”
- 3. Be brief in your response.** Nehemiah didn't say, “Alright, enough is enough. I've got documentation, tapes of conversation, and a PowerPoint presentation. I'm going to bring an overwhelming amount of information to prove myself innocent.” No, he responded briefly. Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Christian leaders must know how to handle false accusations, vicious letters, unfounded press reports, and gossip. Otherwise, these devilish weapons will so upset them that they will lose their perspective and spend so much time defending themselves that they will neglect their work. Nehemiah didn't make that mistake. He simply denied the reports, prayed to God for strength, and went back to work. He knew that his character was such that no honest person would believe the false reports. If we take care of our character, we can trust God to take care of our reputation.” Remember also that there may be times when you need not answer at all.

**4. Pray For Strength.** Fourthly, Nehemiah prayed for strength. Opposition and conflict will drain you of your strength, no matter how godly your responses are. We must pray for strength to fuel us for the fight ahead.

**The plot to deceive Nehemiah (6:10-14).** Shemaiah claimed to have received a prophecy from God (v.12). He tried to scare Nehemiah into thinking that assassins were after him so he would seek sanctuary inside the temple. The Mosaic Law prohibited anyone but the Lord's anointed servants from entering the Holy and the Most Holy places in the temple (Numbers 1:51; 3:10; 18:7).

Nehemiah was not the kind of man his enemies could terrify with a death threat. Nehemiah saw through this 'prophecy'. It could not have been from God since it counselled disobedience to the Mosaic Law. The motive of Nehemiah's enemies was to show the Jews that their leader had no real concern about the Law, but was rebuilding the walls for personal reasons (v.13). This incident was only one of several in which false prophets tried to deceive Nehemiah.

**Noadiah The Prophetess (6:14).** Nehemiah's opposition among the "clergy" wasn't limited to Shemaiah, for the opposition included Noadiah the prophetess and a handful of others. This is so discouraging, when people who are supposed to be presenting the message of God are bringing the devil's message instead. People like this are certainly in no short supply today.

#### **The completion of the work (6:15 - 7:4).**

The builders finished the walls only 52 days after construction had begun (v.15). "Elul" is late August and early September. Israel's enemies viewed their rapid progress as evidence that God had helped the workers (v.16). "The best answer to opposition is to keep working and fulfill God's will; thus others will see God's power."

The writer mentioned another detracting ploy the enemy instigated. By doing so, he suggested that this additional problem may have plagued Nehemiah throughout the whole process of rebuilding the wall. As mentioned before, Tobiah's name implies that he was a Jew. He had intermarried with Jews who had returned to the land and evidently participated in the restoration projects, though he himself did not approve of the restoration. His marital and social ties with the princes of the restoration community resulted in their commending him to Nehemiah. In short, Nehemiah suffered from pressure that Tobiah and Nehemiah's colleagues brought on him. This powerful Jew, who did not share God's desires for His people, had considerable influence with many of the restoration leaders.

There are few things more frustrating than knowing that the people around me are talking about me to their family members, painting skewed pictures that I cannot control. Nehemiah had the 'double-whammy', because while they were gossiping to Tobiah, they were saying to Nehemiah what a great guy Tobiah was! But actions speak louder than words, and Matthew 7:20 says "...you will know them by their fruits."

Nehemiah wasn't fooled, and he stayed true to the Lord. May we do the same in the face of adversity from the enemy! Amen.