

## Nehemiah 6

The wall was finished - the gaps in the wall were closed, but the gates were not in place yet. For the enemies of Nehemiah, this was “now-or-never/crunch time.” If they didn’t do something immediately to stop the work, the wall would be completely finished, the Jews would be protected and their enemies would no longer have access and influence to them. So they devised a 3-pronged attack and their sole object of attack was Nehemiah himself. Each of their three attacks on him was different, but each was designed to take his life or discredit his effectiveness as a leader.<sup>1</sup>

The First Scheme: Assassination Plot (6:1-4) **When the enemies of Nehemiah heard that the wall had successfully been rebuilt – but the gates were yet to be installed – what did they do (v. 2a)?** This time they were more subtle in their confrontation. They called for a meeting with Nehemiah. Sanballat and Geshem invited Nehemiah to meet with them in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.<sup>2</sup>

**What was their motive (v. 2b)?** On the surface it appeared that Sanballat and his cronies wanted to have a peace conference, but their hidden motive was to harm or even assassinate Nehemiah.<sup>3</sup>

**How did Nehemiah reply to their message (v. 3)?** Nehemiah suspected foul play. Why would they want him a day’s journey away from Jerusalem? Then he could not oversee the work, and by outnumbering him, they might do him harm.<sup>4</sup>

Though he could not prove his enemies’ motives at the moment, he chose a method that would eventually demonstrate whether they were sincere. He simply sent messengers to tell them he was involved in a great (important) project and could not leave it unsupervised. By responding in this way Nehemiah was not openly questioning their motives. In fact he was giving them an opportunity to prove their motives were sincere, if they had really wanted to make peace.<sup>5</sup>

**How did his enemies respond (v. 4)?** Sanballat and Geshem’s response tipped their hand. Rather than countering with an offer to meet with Nehemiah in Jerusalem, four times they sent ... the same message and Nehemiah responded four times with his same refusal. Nehemiah could have impatiently attacked their motives on their third or fourth request. But he patiently waited it out till *they* revealed their motives. And this they did with their fifth response, which involved their second scheme.<sup>6</sup>

The Second Scheme: Slander (6:5-9) **What was unique about the 5<sup>th</sup> message (v. 5)?** It was an unsealed or open letter to all the Jews, not just to Nehemiah. The intent was to create division and thus undermine Nehemiah’s authority. Sanballat’s slander began the way many verbal attacks do, as a report of what “others” have reportedly said. Vague accusations often sound like “Everyone is talking about” or “A number of people think or “They are saying.” Such vague words can very easily give the wrong impression.

**What message did the letter convey to Nehemiah (vv. 6-7)?** Still pretending to be his ally, Sanballat accused Nehemiah in a letter of planning to make himself king of Judah in rebellion against Artaxerxes, the king of Persia. Sanballat said he wanted to help Nehemiah avoid trouble with the king and suggested that they get together to discuss the matter.<sup>7</sup>

**How did Nehemiah respond to the slander (vv. 8-9)?** Nehemiah replied by calmly and straightforwardly telling Sanballat that he was a liar, and by carrying on with the work. He told his fellow workers that the letter was designed to frighten them into thinking their wall-building would bring Artaxerxes’ wrath down on them. The

slander strategy was all about creating fear, and he wouldn't give into it. Then, as Nehemiah regularly did, he prayed, this time asking God for strength.

**The Third Scheme: Treachery (6:10–14)** **What happened when Nehemiah went to the house of Shemaiah (v. 10)?** Shemaiah, who was a secret informer for the enemy and a false prophet, tried to scare Nehemiah into thinking that assassins were after him so he would seek sanctuary inside the temple.

**How did Nehemiah respond to the threat voiced by Shemaiah (v. 11)?** Nehemiah discerned two flaws in Shemaiah's so-called prophecy. First, God would hardly ask Nehemiah to run when the project on the walls was nearing completion. Second, no true prophet would ask someone to violate God's Law. Only priests were allowed in the sanctuary (**Numbers 3:10; 18:7**). If Nehemiah, not being a priest, entered the temple, he would have desecrated it and brought himself under God's judgment. He would not disobey God to try to gain safety from his enemies. Nehemiah was convinced that Shemaiah was a false prophet, employed by Tobiah and Sanballat to trick him. If the governor had entered the temple and lived, his people would know he disregarded God's commands.<sup>8</sup>

**What did Nehemiah pray for (v. 14)?** Once again Nehemiah prayed, this time that God would remember his enemies and judge them for their evil scheming. In this imprecatory prayer, he also included the Prophetess Noadiah, who with other false prophets was seeking to intimidate him.<sup>9</sup>

**What was the major announcement of v. 15?** Despite continued opposition, the wall was completed in fifty-two days, a remarkable feat. This evidence of divine blessing demoralized Judah's enemies.

**What happened when all the enemies heard the news (v. 16)?** The enemies were afraid and their self-confidence dissipated as they saw that the work was done with God's help. Opposing Him, they knew they were fighting a losing battle! A strong, secure people of Jerusalem were a witness to surrounding nations.

**What was going on behind the scenes with Tobiah (vv. 17-19)?** One reason Tobiah, the Ammonite official (2:10, 19) was able to make some inroads into Judah was that many of the nobles in Jerusalem stayed on friendly terms with the wicked Tobiah because they were related to him by marriage. His father-in-law was Shecaniah son of Arah, and his daughter-in-law was the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah, who worked on two sections of the wall (3:4, 30). Many Jews were therefore loyalists to Tobiah, perhaps having trading contracts with him, and they kept telling Nehemiah good things about Tobiah. Yet Tobiah tried to intimidate the governor-builder with threatening letters.<sup>10</sup>

**Application:** We have such small ideas of how God can use us. God used an ordinary man named Nehemiah to set right a 100-year-old problem in less than two months - and the same God sits on a throne in heaven and works through you and me today. He is not a small God. He can do great things through us just like he did with Nehemiah.

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<sup>1</sup> Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 685.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 486–487.

<sup>8</sup> Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 686.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.