

Study Notes: Nehemiah 6:1-19
September 17, 2023: “Strengthen Us to Complete the Work”
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When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it — though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates — Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.” But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

- As the work on the wall neared completion, the enemies of Nehemiah heard about this and invited Nehemiah to a meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to harm (or perhaps even kill) Nehemiah, thereby stopping the work.
- Nehemiah answered the request telling them he couldn't stop the work on the wall, and refused to meet with them. This same exchange happened four times, indicating how desperate Sanballat and the others were to thwart the work and bring harm to Nehemiah.
- The New American Commentary explains why the enemies took aim at Nehemiah as the leader of the people, “In any great work of God the leaders are strategic; the enemy, whether human or satanic, will try to cause the leader to fall, lose credibility, or disappear altogether. Leadership always involves stress. Here Nehemiah's personal danger added to his stress, but he was able to confront it, trusting the Lord and continuing to work toward the God-given goal.”

Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter in which was written: “It is reported among the nations — and Geshem says it is true — that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together.”

- After Nehemiah refused the request four times, on the fifth time, the messenger also brought an unsealed letter. The fact that the letter was unsealed was somewhat unusual, as letters were typically sealed so that only the intended recipient would read them. This indicates that this message was intended to be public, and was an attempt to frighten and intimidate the people.
- The unsealed letter contained a false accusation, but a serious accusation that the Jews were plotting to revolt after completion of the wall. It also accused Nehemiah of wanting to make himself king of the people.
 - This report would have been read by the people, and it would serve to cause them to fear two things: retaliation of the king and that Nehemiah was planning to reign over them as a king himself!

I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.” They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.” But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.”

- Nehemiah replied to this letter by stating these accusations were false. He realized that this was a scare tactic. The phrase “hands will get too weak for work” is an idiom that indicates discouragement which leads to inaction.
- In light of what was happening, Nehemiah prayed for strength. This was a prayer for God to thwart the plans of his enemies and allow him to carry on with the work.

One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, “Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you — by night they are coming to kill you.” But I said, “Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!” I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.

- Along with these letters, Tobiah and Sanballat also tried to bring ruin to Nehemiah, by hiring a false prophet. Nehemiah was told to go to the temple to protect his life. But Nehemiah recognized that if he did this, he (as a layperson) would commit a sin (Numbers 18:7).
 - The New American Commentary notes, “If Shemaiah’s father, Delaiah, is the same one mentioned in 1 Chr 24:18, then Shemaiah was a priest and had special access into the temple. Nehemiah could not enter legitimately. Many years before, Uzziah went into the temple and was stricken with leprosy.”
- Nehemiah recognized that Shemiah was a false prophet because his call went against the clear teaching of God’s word. The New American Commentary explains, “According to Deut 18:20 and Isa 8:19–20, if a word that claims to be a prophecy from God is in contradiction with what God has already revealed, we should be suspicious of it.”

Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophet Noadiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me.

- Nehemiah asked for God to remember those who stood against him and the work. This prayer was a call for God to bring judgment on these enemies for their sins.

So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

- Even amidst the threats from without and within, and this last-ditch effort by his enemies, the wall was completed. It took only 52 days! The New American Commentary sees this as a note of victory and the answer to opposition, “The best answer to opposition is to keep working and fulfill God’s will; thus others will see God’s power.”
- When the enemies heard that the wall was done, they were afraid and lost the courage to do anything else. They realized that God aided the people in their work, and knew they couldn’t stand against him or the people.

Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shekariah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

- Nehemiah noted one last tactic of Tobiah, who evidently had a reputation in Judah and connections. Tobiah kept trying to influence the people against Nehemiah and make himself look better. Although Tobiah wanted to intimidate Nehemiah, the plot ultimately failed.