



# Finer Grounds

## Nehemiah

### Lesson 6: Nehemiah 6

As you read through Nehemiah this week, pay attention to how often Nehemiah interrupts his historical account with his personal prayers and mindfulness toward God. This is something Nehemiah will do often in our chapter for this lesson. The construction of the wall is approaching completion, and now more than ever Nehemiah and the Jews are facing persecution from the surrounding nation.

**Read Nehemiah 6:1-14.**

**According to this passage, what three deceptions did the enemies of God’s people use to try and stop the construction of the wall?**

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Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem are very threatened at this point, hearing a misleading report about the completion of the wall. For their first deception, Sanballat and Geshem decide that in order to stop the construction they need stop the person organizing it. If they can get Nehemiah out of the picture, they can stop the progress of the Jews. They request a private meeting with Nehemiah, but he knows it is a trap. Instead of placating Sanballat and Geshem, he sends a response to tell them that the construction of the wall is too important and they have no good reason for him to leave this work (v. 3). Once again, Nehemiah’s skills as a leader are very evident here. Nehemiah will not be intimidated by

people who oppose God’s will. Completing God’s work is his top priority, not succumbing to the pressure.

**What are some ways that we might be tempted to give in to pressure or intimidation instead of putting God’s will first?**

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We may not have to deal with physical threats on our lives but we certainly receive pressure from the world to stop our work for God. It could be on a grand scale like community or political pressure to stop teaching or living out what the Bible commands. It may even come as pressure to put our earthly career first instead of worshipping God on the first day of every week. We may even receive pressure from our family at home to neglect what we know God wants from us in order to give into fleshly desires. How we respond to that pressure is what matters. Nehemiah responded respectfully, but directly. His intentions were made clear. Let’s strive to be like Nehemiah when we are faced with pressure and intimidation from this world.

The second deception Sanballat uses to try and stop construction can be seen in verses 5-9. Sanballat claimed to hear rumors and asked for Nehemiah to verify them. He claims he has heard the Jews are starting a political rebellion against the king, and that Nehemiah has appointed false prophets to bolster his own cause.



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**In this selection of text, what suggests that Sanballat is not only spreading these rumors but starting them?**

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Sanballat was a sneaky guy. His initial attempts to lure Nehemiah out did not work, so in his fifth attempt he writes about rumors he heard and asks for Nehemiah to meet and clarify them (v. 5). These questions may seem well intended on the surface, however we see in verse 8 that Nehemiah knows Sanballat is lying. In verses 2 and 8 Nehemiah describes how he knows the intentions of Sanballat and his comrades were malevolent. There doesn't seem to be any explicit explanation for how Nehemiah knew these were lies. We must infer that he obviously had some way of knowing. Did God reveal it to Nehemiah supernaturally, or is this another example of God using natural means to providentially help Nehemiah?

**Go back and read Nehemiah 4:7-13. How might this passage help us in determining how Nehemiah knew Sanballat was inventing these rumors?**

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Whether it came as reports from Jews who lived in the surrounding areas, or even potential spies, Nehemiah had a way to verify truth from a lie. He wasn't going to be distracted by these tricks. Finishing God's work was too important. Nehemiah could have reacted with anger and chosen to meet with Sanballat just to give him a piece of his mind and correct the false allegations.

However, a simple denial of the ridiculous claims was sufficient. When people make outlandish accusations against us, we may be tempted to get sucked into a debate. However the burden of proof is always on the person making a claim, not the other way around. Nehemiah knew this was just another attempt to intimidate the Jews (v. 9).

**Underline in your Bible "For all of them were trying to frighten us" in verse 9. Now, underline every other time a similar phrase is found in this chapter.**

We see a consistent pattern (both in chapters 4 and 6) in Nehemiah where enemies continually try to frighten Nehemiah and God's people. However, when these attempts are thwarted God's people always end up emboldened and their enemies' confidence is deflated. Identifying and marking patterns like this in your Bible will help you see their significance.

**In the second part of verse 9, Nehemiah interrupts his historical account with a prayer. Why does he pray at this particular moment? What is this prayer for?**

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All throughout the book, we see Nehemiah consistently reach out to God in times of distress, difficulty and trial. So far we have seen him remorsefully reach out to God through prayer in 1:5-11. He quickly prays for success and guidance when he asked King Artaxerxes for help in 2:4. He recognizes and retells of God's providence in his life in 2:18. He reaches out to God in prayer when the Jews are being persecuted in 4:4, 9. Nehemiah acknowledges that God will protect



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them as they finish building the wall in 4:20. He also appeals to God’s laws to solve financial oppression between the different classes in 5:9-10. Nehemiah constantly reaches out to God and gives Him all the credit for the accomplishments and success of the people. Nehemiah knows that it is only because of God’s providence that he has been able to carry out this great work.

**Throughout this study keep a list, or mark in your Bible, of all the places where Nehemiah reaches out to God through prayer or some other direct acknowledgment.**

The third deception used to stop the construction came in the form of a bribe (vv. 10-14). Nehemiah goes to the shut-in prophet Shemaiah. Shemaiah prophesies to Nehemiah that he will be killed at night, so he urges Nehemiah to flee to the temple. Let’s pause for a moment. Why might Sanballat bribe Shemaiah to try to convince Nehemiah to hide out in the temple? Certainly the temple was the most heavily fortified building in Jerusalem, and he could easily barricade himself inside. Most of the buildings in Jerusalem were probably made by mixing weak materials like straw and mud, but the temple was professionally built with carved stones and heavy timbers. In Verse 11, Nehemiah responds by “Could one such as I go into the temple to save his life?” Is there perhaps another reason why Sanballat would want Nehemiah to hide out in the temple?

**Read Nehemiah 13:4-9. What was that offense to God’s temple all about? How would that incident be similar to Nehemiah using God’s temple as a safe-haven?**

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Throughout this book, Nehemiah consistently reminds the people that the temple of God will not be neglected or misused. Remember, the theme of Nehemiah is “restoration.” God’s temple was never intended to be a hideout for people Nehemiah. The temple was strictly used for offerings and other aspects of Levitical worship, and Nehemiah wasn’t going to misuse God’s house for selfish reasons. Since he knew that the temple wasn’t supposed to be used a hideout he recognized that Shemaiah’s prophecy was false and he was bribed by Tobiah and Sanballat (v. 12). In verse 13 Nehemiah realizes this too was all part of a plot to “frighten” him (hint: you should underline that) and make him sin.

**In verse 13, what sin would Nehemiah have committed if he had acted upon Shemaiah the prophets words? How would that give Tobiah and Sanballat an evil report to reproach him with?**

Tobiah and Sanballat wanted to do more than just make Nehemiah hide in the temple. They intended to destroy his reputation before all of the Jews. Using their bribed prophet, and scare tactics, they would convince Nehemiah to desecrate the temple for his own selfish use, and then air this cowardly sin to all the people of Judah so that they would turn against him. This was a new low for Tobiah and Sanballat. However, instead of taking revenge or personal action against his enemies, Nehemiah takes his problem to God once again (v. 14). In addition to enemies outside Jerusalem, it seems as though there were prophets and a prophetess within Jerusalem that were also “trying to frighten” Nehemiah. True to form, Nehemiah asks God to



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take care of his enemies. He doesn't have time to deal with them, he is concerned with God's will and the wall of Jerusalem that will help restore God's people to their rightful calling.

Nehemiah has faced a lot of opposition to restoring God's wall and law. Like Nehemiah, we can face opposition as a group or even toward our personal character.

**Think back to a time when your character as a child of God was attacked. What was your response? How might Nehemiah have handled it differently?**

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Nehemiah is a wonderful role model in this situation. Nehemiah didn't retaliate; he simply reached out to God. He never aggravated or insulted his enemies. Actually, he barely gave them the time of day. We must strive to react to persecution and attacks the way Nehemiah did; looking forward, and focused on God.

Even through all the threats and deceptions, Nehemiah and the builders are able to finish the wall. It seems as though the persecution only fueled a response to work faster because they finished the wall in only fifty-two days (v. 15). The irony of this entire ordeal is that now the enemies of God's people had "lost their confidence" (hint: you should underline that). It's ironic because it had been they who were the ones trying to demoralize God's people the entire time. The construction of the wall in a mere fifty-two days was quite a feat, and the enemies knew that God must be behind this work.

In the last few verses we discover there is one more deception to discourage Nehemiah and create dissension (vv. 17-19). Most likely, this deceitful ploy occurred after the completion of the wall. In addition to a few corrupt prophets in the city of Jerusalem, there were some prominent Jews who had loyalties to Tobiah because of marriage arrangements. Tobiah's father-in-law was a Jew named Shecaniah. This may, or may not be, the priest mentioned in 12:3. In addition to that, Tobiah's son married the daughter of a prominent Jewish man, Meshullam.

**Read Deuteronomy 7:1-3. Why is it significant that these Jewish women were given to Tobiah's household in marriage?**

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**What kind of problems did this create for God's people?**

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Throughout all Nehemiah's efforts to restore God's people, there are still many Jews clinging to sinful practices who will continue to cause problems. Some of the Jewish nobility has been bound by an oath of marriage to serve, or at least show loyalty, toward Tobiah the Ammonite. These nobles were then going to Tobiah and reporting everything that Nehemiah was saying and using it to his advantage to again "frighten" him (do you see the pattern?). Nearly 1,000 years earlier, when God commanded the Jews not to intermarry with other nations, it may have seemed like a silly law. However, God always has good reasons for His commandments. Intermarrying



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with unbelievers weakened the Jews in their faith and slowly took the people farther away from God. The same thing can happen in our relationships today. Marriage is hard enough as it is, but when your faith (the foundation for your purpose, morality and behavior) is not the same as your spouse's, it almost always makes your relationship with God, and your spouse, so much more difficult. Not to mention throwing in some non-Christian in-laws. Then the loyalties for your spouse are even more divided. God has a reason for His commands. Even though today in God's New Covenant we are not commanded to marry only Christians, it is certainly the wisest decision we could make.

Throughout this chapter, we see Nehemiah face deceptive actions intended to cause him harm, frighten him into sin, and plots to destroy his public reputation in the eyes of God's people. Despite everyone who was against him, Nehemiah never lost focus of the God he served and his mission from the Lord. That singleness of purpose was all that was necessary to carry out God's will. We will do well to learn from Nehemiah's example.