



# NEHEMIAH

*pray plan build*

## **Daily Worship Booklet**

Week 8

God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,  
day after day and the people of God were filled with joy!

## Friday – Nehemiah 6:15-19 – The wall was finished in 52 days!

It's quite a thought to think that all the events of chapters 2-6 took place in just 52 days, especially against the backdrop of the constant, concerted, combined efforts to stop the work. Efforts that Nehemiah tells us more about here. What is astonishing in these verses is that not only were the priests operating against him, but so were many of the nobles in Judah. If any tribe had a stake in the future of the city of David surely it was the tribe of Judah; for God had promised that a Saviour and King would come from their tribe (Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7). So, when these nobles willingly co-operated with Tobiah, they were facing off not just against Nehemiah, but against the eternal plans of the Living God. But why did they do it? Was this their kickback because of Nehemiah's calling them out over their abusive, interest-exacting, and slavery-inducing practices recorded in of the previous chapter? Were they jealous of the seemingly ever-increasing influence of Nehemiah over the community and wanted to see him brought down a 'peg or two'? What we do know is that many of them were bound into formal contractual agreements with Tobiah by marriage. As one writer says, "The bonds of human connection were stronger than the bonds of spiritual affection." Aligned by marriage when it came down to it, they were choosing to take the family side over what God was evidently doing.

Whatever the root cause, or maybe it was a combination of things, the correspondence was constantly flowing between these men and one of Nehemiah's arch enemies – "in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them." Note the duplicity and intrigue of all these communications. On the one hand, they were trying to convince Nehemiah that Tobiah was a good man, implying that he had a lot of positive things to offer; while at the same time feeding intelligence back to Tobiah about Nehemiah, which Tobiah was then using in his threatening letters to Nehemiah. A viral circle of serpent activity.

And what of parts of the visible church today? On the one hand, saying that she is a lover of God and on the other working with the enemy to throw out the use of God's Word and replace it with the ignorant spoutings of men. Are the words of Jeremiah not apt, "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?"

How shocking this all is, but given this and everything else that was going on, the one thing that it does show, besides the ruthless determination of Satan to get what he wants, is the keeping and protecting Hand of God upon Nehemiah and those working faithfully with him – for the wall was finished in 52 days!

Q1. What was the next angle of attack on Nehemiah?

Q2. Did it succeed? How long did it take to rebuild the walls?

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**The book of Nehemiah focuses on the work involved in labouring to see  
Christ build his church.**

#### Thursday – Nehemiah 6:10-14 – The constant threats to his life.

The devil now devises another approach, this time from within the city. He uses a man called Shemaiah, the son of Delaiah. He may have been related to the family of Delaiah mentioned in the list of exiles who returned from Babylon in the days of Zerubbabel in Ezra 2:60. Even if this is not the case, he's still a member of the community. His plan is a simple one – pretend to have an illness and not be able to go out, send a message asking Nehemiah to come to his house, and then tell him, in a way that seems to convey that he received this information by way of a prophesy from God, that his life is under threat and that both should seek refuge in the Temple. The key point that his life could have been under threat was that far-fetched. Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and the Ashdodites had shown themselves to be men capable of many things, and assassination was well within their capability.

Nehemiah, again possessing spiritual discernment, pushes back and refuses to comply with Shemaiah's so-called prophesy citing three reasons:

- *He wasn't going to run away.* In Northern Ireland, in the late 1960's when Roman Catholics were being burnt out of their homes in Belfast by so-called protestants, the words 'I Ran Away', referring to the terrorist organization the IRA (Irish Republican Army), was dubbed on walls in the Catholic areas of Belfast because of their 'no show'. (Subsequently, the IRA and other murderous gangs were responsible for the deaths of thousands of people). My point is a simple one – Nehemiah stood his ground, even when threatened with death.

- *He knew that he had no right to go into the temple.* Nehemiah may have been the governor of Judah, he had undoubtedly shown phenomenal leadership qualities and achieved much in Jerusalem, but he wasn't a priest and therefore he had no right to go into the areas of the temple restricted to priests. To have done so would have made him liable to death (Numbers 1:51; 3:10). Shemaiah knew that, and this ruse was designed not to secure Nehemiah's safety, but to entrap him in the breaking of God's commands, in sin, and so expose him to allegations of wrongdoing. Remember what Nehemiah had done in dealing with the nobles and officials in the previous chapter. He was never going to allow himself to become the subject of allegations of sin.

- *He knew who Shemaiah was working for.* Nehemiah knew that, while Shemaiah may have been a priest, he wasn't working for God, but for Tobiah and Sanballat.

This chapter in the story doesn't end with Shemaiah though, for he was not alone in acting shamefully against this man of God – we read that in verse 14 – “the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted me to make me afraid”. The threat to Nehemiah was a concerted and constant one, and not always from men.

Q1. What was the threat in these verses to Nehemiah?

Q2. How did Nehemiah respond?

#### Monday – Nehemiah 6:1-9 – The walls are done, but the attacks continue.

So, they built the walls; and all that remained to be done was the restoration of the gates. However, that was only 'half the battle'. Nehemiah knew that the community residing within the walls would need to be restored to faithful submission to God if they were to reap the fullness of the potential rewards. The problem though was that he wasn't the only one to understand this. Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem, the Arab, also realized it and set about attacking Nehemiah personally. Their objective – to distract and ultimately disable him from making any further progress. They knew that if they could either discredit or take Nehemiah out of the situation, the door would open for them to mobilize their allies within the city and move against any potential long-term reconstruction of the community. Their approach – generate fear in the heart of Nehemiah and those working with him (6:9,13-14,19), understanding that fear paralyzes activity.

It is always the same – if the devil can't stop the work with ridicule and other means, he will invariably target the leader's. To quote one commentator, “The average person doesn't realize the tremendous pressures and testing that people experience day after day in places of leadership. Leaders are often blamed for things they didn't do and criticized for things they try to do. They are misquoted and misunderstood and rarely given the opportunity to set the record straight. If they act quickly, they are reckless; if they bide their time, they are cowardly or unconcerned... People in places of *spiritual* leadership not only have the pressures that all leaders face, but they must also battle an infernal enemy who is a master deceiver and a murderer. Satan comes either as a serpent who deceives or a lion who devours (2 Corinthians 11:3, 1 Peter 5:8) and Christian leaders must be alert and spiritually equipped to oppose him. It behooves God's people to pray earnestly, not only for those in *civil* authority (1 Timothy 2:1-3) but also for those in places of *spiritual* authority. If Satan can defeat a Christian leader, he can cripple a whole community and discredit the cause of Christ.”

The agents of Satan in this case came at their destructive plan in four ways, each building on the failure of the former. First, they seek compromise, then they engender slander, which in turn leads to personal threats, and finally, the ultimate intimidation, we're not going to give up. We will walk through each of these attempts this week and, as we do so, please be mindful of the attacks that can come upon the leaders in the church. This is neither merely an historical nor hypothetical issue – it is a very real one.

Q1. What was left to do in terms of the city reconstruction?

Q2. Where do Sanballat and his allies turn their attention to now?

## Tuesday – Nehemiah 6:1-9 – The Leader must know himself and his job!

Up to this point, Sanballat and his allies had been focused on stopping the restoration of Jerusalem; now they seemingly sued for peace through compromise. A letter is sent to Nehemiah asking him to meet them in the village of Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono, which is about halfway between Jerusalem and Samaria. It is a graphic gesture that they are willing to meet him halfway in terms of finding a solution to the problem, as they see it. In many ways, this could have been attractive, especially given that the walls had been completed. Who wants to spend their days pushing back against people with whom you don't see eye to eye, or, more importantly, who want to wage war against you and the people you love? Better to take the opportunity on offer to bring the issues of contention to an end, or at the very least, hear what they want. What is there to lose? So goes the argument when the world expresses a desire to seek a truce based on a compromise. Nehemiah wasn't buying it, for 3 reasons:

- *He knew what they were really thinking.* "They intended to do me harm". How did he know this? I think it was probably a matter of spiritual discernment. Those whom Christ calls to lead his Bride, if they seek wisdom from Him, can be blessed with such discernment. A sense of what is happening doesn't mean that a leader should build a vision of the church on it, but it certainly can be used to engender a measure of caution at times.

- *He was convinced of the significance of the work God had called him to undertake.* "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down." It is not that Nehemiah sees himself as doing a great job, although who would say that he wasn't? The 'great' refers to the greatness of what will come from the rebuilding of the walls, the rehangings of the gates, and the subsequent well-being of the community. Nehemiah had an appreciation of what was at stake if he were to be distracted from the work God had given him. As Paul wrote to a young Timothy, "No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him." (2 Timothy 2:4). A leader in the church must understand the eternal significance of what he is doing. It is so easy to become distracted when there's little or no appreciation for the real worth of engaging say, in an apparently insignificant Bible study with one person or a family.

- *He understood the significance of his role in completing the work.* "Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" Again, it wasn't because he thought of himself as the 'be-all' of what was happening, but he did understand his role. Leaders must understand their role. One of the problems in the church is that men don't know themselves and don't understand specifically why God has them in the job. Such a lack of knowledge can have hugely detrimental effects on the church.

Q1. What did Sanballat and his allies want Nehemiah to do?

Q2. Why did Nehemiah not go and meet with them?

## Wednesday – Nehemiah 6:1-9 – The attacks are persistent.

Four times Sanballat and his cohorts sent a letter to Nehemiah asking him to meet with them to discuss a compromise. They certainly were persistent. So is the devil when he wants the people of God to stop serving God. And why would he not, what has he got to lose; and often his repeated attempts have proved successful, as he sees it, in the end. Each time Nehemiah turned them down. We must be girded by the same steely resolve when confronted by repeated attempts to get us to compromise on truth. Such resolve will only exist when we know what we believe and why we believe it. There is a huge difference between having an opinion and owning a conviction. One writer says, "Decisions based on opinion might be reconsidered, but decisions based on convictions must stand until those convictions are changed."

Undeterred, they now send a servant to Nehemiah with an 'open' letter. This is a new development and a sinister one. No longer are they communicating via sealed letters to Nehemiah, the Governor of Judah. It is now a case of 'We know what you are up to, and this letter will be leaked across the empire, so you'd better come to the table and talk or else.' The wording of the letter, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, ..." is nothing more than basic blackmail.

The church today is not free of such threats. It is a common tactic used by people facing pushback on something they want and expect to go their way. And it's not always the world that speaks this way to the church; sometimes it is an approach adopted by those within the church. Typically, it's framed in language such as, 'Well, I know people in the church who have said this,' the implication being 'it's not just me'. My advice, if someone comes to you and says, 'I have heard a few folks say this about such and such', ask them to tell you the names of the 'few folk' so that you can speak with them about it. I can guarantee you, nine times out of ten, the response will be, 'Oh, it's not that important'. And if you are a brother or sister who likes to invoke the 'well, a few others have said' line, please desist from doing so. It is wrong and won't aid your case. You are better just to argue it on its merits.

The accusation itself is that Nehemiah is leading the Jews to rebel and that he is enlisting prophets to be his propaganda spokesmen to proclaim that he is the king in Judah. This is serious. These men are not playing around. A threat of rebellion in an empire was never treated lightly, and the idea that someone would formulate and have the means to execute a plan to usurp the authority of the king was not a trifling matter. This could not go unchallenged. Nehemiah responds directly to the false allegations and importantly, as ever, and we must keep noting this, he prays that God will strengthen his hands.

Q1. Do the enemies of Christ give up after the first try? Why not?

Q2. How does Nehemiah respond?