

ZEAL FOR THE LORD: NEHEMIAH 6:1-7:4

“...during the half-century that I have been a Christian [Nehemiah] has helped me enormously, more perhaps than any other Bible character apart from the Lord Jesus Christ...no one should wonder, therefore, that I now regard him as a particular friend.” – J.I. Packer, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, 29.

I. Review

- A. Nehemiah stirring calls the people to build the wall (“*The God of heaven will make us prosper...*”, Neh 2:20)
- B. The people of God have met opposition from without (“...they all plotted to come fight against Jerusalem...”, 4:8) and within (“...the Jews who lived near them...said to us ten times, ‘You must return to us...’, 4:12).
- C. Nehemiah’s instinct for prayer and strategic planning propels the work ahead (“*Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, you sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes*”, 4:14).

II. A Triad of Opposition: Nehemiah 6:1-14

Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates),² Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm.³ And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?”⁴ And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.⁵ In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.⁶ In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king.⁷ And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together.”⁸ Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.”⁹ For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

¹⁰ Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night.”¹¹ But I said, “Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in.”¹² And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.¹³ For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.¹⁴ Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

The Three Stooges

Sanballat – Babylonian name; governor of Samaria (N of Jerusalem); ambitious politician

Tobiah – Ammonite official; penchant for contemptuous sarcasm (Neh 4:3-5); in with Jewish nobility

Geshem – an Arab; governor of Edom and Moab (S and E of Jerusalem)

1. In ch. 7, what was the initial strategy of Nehemiah’s enemies to oppose his work (in their first four attempts)? Why was Nehemiah so dedicated to his work, given the wall was only about 1.5 miles long and fairly shoddy? How did Nehemiah respond?

“Since then Your majesty and your lordships desire a simply reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am persuaded by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other--my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”

- Martin Luther, Diet of Worms (April 1521)

2. What was the fifth attempt to impede Nehemiah’s progress? Was this a true accusation? What did Nehemiah do? Is this our first instinct when we are the victim of lies or misrepresentation?

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. (Jer 23:5)

Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he has mercy upon us. ³ Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt. ⁴ Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud. (Ps 123:2-4)

3. What was Shemaiah’s strategy? Why did Nehemiah know something was fishy? What trait did Nehemiah exhibit here?

*...make every effort to supplement your faith with **virtue**, and virtue with **knowledge**,⁶ and knowledge with **self-control**, and self-control with **steadfastness**, and steadfastness with **godliness**,⁷ and godliness with **brotherly affection**, and brotherly affection with **love**.⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:5-8)*

5. Where in your day to day life do you sense people trying to make you “afraid”? Where do you and other Christians need to exhibit Nehemiah-like courage?

“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the Word of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Him. Where the battle rages there the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battle front besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”

- Martin Luther? (apocryphal)

III. A Triad of Opposition: Nehemiah 6:15-7:4

¹⁵ So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. ¹⁷ Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. ¹⁸ For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah; and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife. ¹⁹ Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.

⁷ Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, ² I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many. ³ And I said to them, "Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes." ⁴ The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt. (Neh 6:15-7:4)

1. Are you surprised to see all the opposition in Nehemiah’s day (v. 15)? What should the church learn from this?